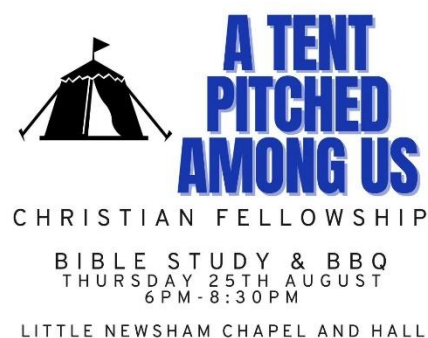


11th Week after Trinity: 28th August – 3rd September 2022

Greetings from Eileen

Dear friends,



What an uplifting time it was for those who came to **A Tent Pitched Amongst Us**. Little Newsham Chapel hosted the perfect 'Tent of Meeting' with 25 gathered to study Psalm 1 with Revd Dr Richard Briggs, Prior of St Cuthbert's Community – Durham Diocese's new discipleship enabling ministry. (More about *The Tent* later in this newsletter). 35, including friends from Ukraine, enjoyed the fellowship and BBQ, thanks to generous hosts Mark and Claire Samuelson and the efforts of Tom Deakin and Paula Kirkup.



September arrives mid-week and signals the start of a new school year. In the past week, GCSE A and O Level results have been announced. As we congratulate our young people who have secured results hoped for entrance to schools, colleges, and universities of their choice, we also encourage those disappointed to look ahead positively. Many of us may recall diffident or even trying experiences of school and exam results, and know that they do not necessarily define nor limit our occupational life and careers.

Seasons bring surprises every year, so farmers have gathered their crops early and there is a strong harvest of apples and plums this year. Our **Harvest celebrations** consider this year's context. Come along to our **first Messy Harvest in St Mary's, Gainford Sunday 18th September 3.30pm** – please see Claire or Sheila at church or contact them by email: info@gainfordwinston.church **St Andrew's Church Harvest celebrations with a difference** involves fruit picking, giving to those in need, and Songs of Praise at our **9.30am Sunday service on 2nd October** – please contact Chrissie on 01325 730112.

The Teesdale Riverside Pilgrimage will also soon be upon us. Do consider participating in this Deanery-wide event on **Saturday 10th September and Sunday 11th September**. Pilgrims will enjoy walking this beautiful route connecting existing pathways along the Tees from Barnard Castle to Whorlton, Winston, and Gainford. **Everyone can now also participate without walking the route physically by joining the Virtual Pilgrimage** on Saturday in St Mary's, Barnard Castle, and Sunday in St Mary's, Gainford. We are thrilled to offer this mode of pilgrimage in film – moving and still visuals, voiced over highlights of the route, natural sounds, pauses for facilitated reflections and prayers, and music for contemplation. Schools in the 4 parishes enroute will be preparing **Burning Bush Prayer Trees** and invite everyone to place prayers on them. Do look at our website for more information <https://gainfordwinston.church/trp-pilgrimage-launches-sept-2022/> and sign up on info@gainfordwinston.church

This Sunday 11th Sunday after Trinity, 28th August 2022, do join me at
9.30am, St Andrew's, Winston, Holy Communion
10.45am St Mary's, Gainford, Holy Communion

God, the most holy and glorious Trinity is with us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

NOTICES

Congratulations to Michael Pearson and Anna Maughan who were married in St Mary's Church, Gainford on Saturday 27th August 2022. May they know the loving companionship and help of our faithful God in their new life together. We also congratulate Anna's parents Christine and Kenneth Maughan who were married in this church 50 years ago.

JAZZ ON THE GREEN! Come along to support St Mary's, Gainford in our fundraising event on **Sunday 4th September 1pm.** We are thankful for the return of this much enjoyed New Orleans Jazz Band. Bring a picnic lunch, portable seats or a rug to sit anywhere on the beautiful green.

The Lindisfarne Gospel Pilgrimage also begins in St Mary's, Gainford. On Sunday 11th September, the replica of St Cuthbert's coffin, facsimile of the Lindisfarne Gospels, a replica of the pouch in which St Cuthbert's bore his copy of St John's Gospel, will be on display in the chancel. Pilgrims will be joining our Deanery Pilgrimage and Patronal Service on Sunday 11th September, and 4 pilgrims, who will be carrying the coffin on the 130 mile route, will be staying the night in St Mary's Church. **Can you help? We would like to borrow 4 camping mats and/or portable camp beds just for the one night.** Please contact me on 01325 733154 or ekgharrop@gmail.com if you are happy to help. Thanks so much.

Funeral of Colin Davison (of Neville's Close, Gainford): Please pray for Mrs Davison and the family. There will be a funeral service at St Mary's Church, Gainford, 2pm, 16th September 2022 followed by a private Committal at Darlington Crematorium.

Collect for 11th Sunday after TRINITY

God of glory,
the end of our searching,
help us to lay aside
all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,
and to give all that we have
to gain the pearl beyond all price,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

Post-Communion Prayer

Lord of all mercy,
we your faithful people have celebrated that one
true sacrifice
which takes away our sins and brings pardon and
peace:
by our communion
keep us firm on the foundation of the gospel
and preserve us from all sin;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

The First Reading: Hebrews 13.1-8,15,16

¹ Let mutual affection continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. ⁴ Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶ So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. ⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

¹⁵ Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

The Gospel: Luke 14.1, 7-14

¹ On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. ⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

¹² He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

About ‘The Tent of Meeting’

On the evening of Thursday 25th August, the gathering at Little Newsham Chapel was called ‘a Tent of Meeting’ and everyone was invited to the ‘*Tent is pitched amongst us*’. This is why.

The phrase ‘*tent of meeting*’ is used in the Old Testament, specifically in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, as the name of a place where God would meet with His people. This ‘*tent of meeting*’ could be taken up and moved each time they changed locations.

In the New Testament, Paul and the writer of Hebrews make a distinction between a heavenly tent and an earthly tent, between what was “built by human hands” and what is “not part of this creation”. Here are 2 passages from the Old and New Testaments referring to the Tent:

Exodus 33:7-11 (NIV): ⁷ Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. ⁸ And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹ As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. ¹⁰ Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. ¹¹ The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV): For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Now about our Tent of Meeting in Little Newsham:

A priest Fr Nick King, gave us this contemporary translation of John 1: ‘**And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us**’. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, was and is on the move: incarnate from God the Father to earth, then risen and ascended into heaven, and is today here among us.

Sermon at St Mary's, Gainford on Sunday 21st August 2022 preached by Dr Chloe Starr (Luke 13)

We live in an age, unfortunately, when politicians play to crowds. Whatever you might think of certain current leaders or the value they place on truth, you'll be hard put to deny that popular appeal and populist policies have come to play a much more significant role in our public life.

Jesus had a complex relationship with crowds. He is often depicted as having compassion on crowds, and especially the marginalized and the landless poor who follow him in large numbers, the *ochlos* that St Mark's gospel highlights. But Jesus' relationship with the crowds goes beyond solidarity. Sometimes he challenges them, sometimes he encourages them. Jesus is also fully aware how crowds can turn – at the start of his ministry a crowd nearly threw him off a cliff, and at the end of his life it's the crowd who sentence him to death, not Pilate.

In today's gospel reading, we see Jesus in an unusual position, playing to the crowd. You can never type-cast Jesus. Admittedly, he's pushed into it by the local synagogue leader, who is trying to work the crowd against Jesus. It's rather like a bad Question Time on tv. The leader of the synagogue "kept [putting his point] to the crowd" as we're told – telling each new group that comes into the synagogue that there are 6 days to work – come on those days and don't come to be healed on the sabbath. The synagogue leader is not listening to others and he thinks that repeating his point enough times makes it right. By the time Jesus has given his response, "the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things being done by him." If you appeal to the crowd, as the religious leader did, you are at their mercy when the crowd turns.

Let's take a look at the context, and at the person who is ostensibly the main character in the story.

Jesus appears to be actually in the middle of teaching when he notices the woman with a pronounced disability. He stops what he's doing when he sees her, and calls her forward. In Jewish synagogues of the time, men sat at the front, and women at the back. Jesus has to make an effort to notice her. Like many healings, it's a two-part ritual – when the woman responds, Jesus first proclaims her set free, then lays hands on her.

In reading for this sermon, I never knew how many back conditions can leave you literally bent over, at 90 degrees to the floor. Bent double, the woman can't look people directly in the face, she has a very limited view and it was undoubtedly difficult to do many everyday tasks. She would have needed a lot of help, and in the context of the day, probably been marginalized in the community. Jesus heals her physical ailment and her lack of dignity at the same time, as he restores her, or in the language of the passage, "unties" her. As she is straightened up, she gains a new perspective: she can now look people in the face, see over the altar, look out of a window. Like all of his healings, Jesus brings people back into community.

But he doesn't just reset the woman's back and her perspective on the world. Jesus says to the synagogue leader: you need a rethink, a re-set.

The synagogue leader's focus was Jesus' perceived breaking of the law. Justice and keeping the rules were of immediate importance to him. In this, he has forgotten who the woman was, and the purpose of the sabbath. He is so caught up in his own perspective that he discounts pretty much everything else, including the precious nature of a child of God in God's sight.

The woman is not named by Luke, she's just "a woman," but Jesus names her Daughter of Abraham, the highest title he can give. Jesus says: you've missed something about this woman. She is also a daughter of Abraham. And, you've misunderstood your role here as a servant in the synagogue, not as a gate-keeper to God.

Jesus throws back the title daughter of Abraham to the synagogue leader as a criticism of his demeaning of the woman. Do you realise you have unwittingly placed this woman lower than the cows and sheep by refusing to do for her what you were willing to do for them on the sabbath?

The woman can enjoy a true sabbath rest for the first time in nearly two decades. Physical rest is an important part of the sabbath – for working animals, as well as for humans. The synagogue leader's hypocrisy is so blatant because he is intent on keeping the outward appearance of the law – the rule for its own sake – and not the meaning of the sabbath, which is to bring rest, refreshment, and time with God.

Let's be clear: keeping the Sabbath is important. It was absolutely central to Jewish faith, and the Jewish people had suffered long and bitter exile from their land because, in the prophets' understanding, they had collectively failed to keep the Sabbath. It is right and good for the synagogue leader to be concerned about his people keeping the Sabbath. But Jesus shows the leader how he has put his own concern for a particular way of observance and outward keeping of rules over understanding the deeper meaning of the Sabbath as a time of liberation, of unbinding.

I don't think the synagogue leader is a bad person. He just doesn't want someone else's freedom to get in the way of his religious views. His own perspective on God, and what's important to God, is stopping him seeing another truth, someone else's truth. He's also human. His own authority is being called into question, by unauthorized actions in his sanctuary, and he's upset at losing face, losing the sheen of his authority. He takes it out on the crowd, chiding them for "coming to be cured" on Saturday. He's wrong at so many levels. Wrong because the woman hadn't come to be healed. Jesus had taken the initiative. She has just turned up for worship as she has, presumably, every week for the last eighteen years, despite the pain and the awkwardness, despite not being healed. She has been a faithful worshipper despite everything. And Jesus notices this.

In the actions of the synagogue leader, meanwhile, I'm reminded of something I saw on holiday. I've just come back from a trip to Norway for a god-child's baptism, and on the way back I came through Stockholm. At Bill (Goyder)'s suggestion, I went to see the Vasa, the recovered ship that sank in August 1628 on its maiden voyage, ten minutes from where it was launched. The thing that struck me most was not the magnificence of the carvings on the sterncastle at the back, or the size of the ship towering above us in the hangar of a museum where it now sits, but the hubris and over-reach of the monarch who ordered it to be built. Gustav Adolphus was waging war against the Polish at the time, and had seen double-decker ships elsewhere in Europe. Gustav was so confident of his own beliefs and position that despite the ship-builders having no experience of double gun-decks, he insisted on this design feature, and when the ship failed its pre-launch stability test in the harbour, listing from side to side, he insisted the boat could sail anyway. The experts told him it wasn't sea-worthy, he didn't trust them.

Someone single-mindedly holding to own perspective, despite the experts in the room, and despite common sense. Someone who doesn't know his own limitations, and puts others at risk.

The synagogue leader has already seen the outcome of the healing – seen that it led to the woman straightening up and praising God. The result is glory and praise to God – and he is still indignant, because the means to this end didn't fit his understanding. For him, the rules, and other people keeping them in the manner in which he wanted, were more important than a woman in pain able to rejoice and praise God. It's the absurdity of this that propels Jesus to rail against his hypocrisy, and the crowd to turn against their leader. In our terms, it's mansplaining par excellence. The leader loved religious rules and his own position more than the people in his care. He didn't want the needs of the worshippers to distract from the worship. He has misinterpreted the Law, because he doesn't know the character of God well enough. His lack of compassion reminds us of the elder son in another parable – someone who can't just be glad at another's joy because it treads on their own toes.

Jesus is frequently tough on leaders, and for him hypocrisy seems to be a cardinal sin because it sets a different standard between rulers and ruled, it uses my privilege to put others down – which is why the crowd delights in his response; we all like it when a leader is taken down a notch or two. And despite seeing what good the healing did and how it led to God being praised, the leader's response is self-serving, as he tries to re-assert his authority.

Jesus calls us out on our unexamined behaviour. Love and compassion always trump religious rules.

We are, in reality, more like the religious leader than we might want to think. It's easy to overlook other's suffering, especially when it's chronic. We are less likely to see, and respond to, those we don't think important in society. And when we are challenged or our religious views are threatened it's easy to retrench, and dig our heels in, rather than let Jesus expand our vision. The recent Lambeth conference reminds us how many issues of interpretation and liberation the church still faces.

Jesus uses a bent-over woman to challenge an unbending man, someone of no status to shame someone who overplayed his authority.

Where might we need a new perspective, a reset, today?

When have we held onto our own self-righteousness even at a cost to others?

And where might we be holding on to views about God that are too narrow, which fail to do justice to God's love and liberation?

On this Sabbath, let's rejoice with the crowd in a God who does wonderful things, and liberates both the afflicted, and those who bind others up too.

Amen.