



## ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'SUSPENDED CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### NEWS UPDATE



#### Mothering Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March – Back to church!

It has been over two months since we last held any gathered services at St Christopher's. We are looking forward to gathering again for worship at 9.30am next week, with Mothering Sunday being a nice occasion on which to do so. Mary Clarke is adding a display of flowers to the church, and there will also be some posies to give out as is our tradition.



Face masks and social distancing will nevertheless have to continue for a some time to come. We do not anticipate that we are likely to go over capacity, however we will be monitoring the numbers over the weeks and months ahead. Knowing that not everyone will be returning to gathered services at this stage, we intend to make a video next week for Mothering Sunday next week also, with it being one of our special occasions.

Junior Church is not able to recommence until we enter step two of the government roadmap out of lockdown. The date set for this is *no earlier than 12<sup>th</sup> April*, so best case scenario Junior Church will restart on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April. Dawn and Louise are keen to get going again as soon as it is possible.

#### Retiring collection for Malcolm



Thank you to those who have already donated to the collection for Malcolm's retirement as treasurer. We can continue to take donations for a few weeks, which can be arranged through Peter, Hilary, or Debra Foster.



#### World Day of Prayer – from Louise Walton



World day of Prayer is celebrated every year on the first Friday in March. Each year a different country is celebrated, and this year was the turn of the tropical islands of Archipelago. There are 80 tropical islands, and the focus was on Vanuatu. Situated 2000 miles East from Northern Australia there is lots of colour with the coral reefs, exotic birds and tropical fish but there are no venomous spiders or snakes. Coconut is viewed as the tree of life with the oil used for cooking and toiletries. Coffee, sandal-wood, white wood, cocoa and kava are grown to earn a living.

Each island has its own Gods and ways of worship, so Christianity sits alongside other religions. This year the service focused on 'Building on a Strong Foundation' using the Gospel of Matthew and the verses of 'The Sermon on the Mount'.

Next year we celebrate England, Wales and Northern Ireland – so it will feel closer to home! For any other information, please go to the website [www.wwdp.org.uk](http://www.wwdp.org.uk).

## **BIBLE READING – Philippians 3: 12-21**

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

*Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

## **THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE – written by Peter**

### **Looking forwards, pressing onwards**

I was age fifteen the year I first attended a CYFA youth holiday (Christian Youth Fellowship Association). They were held at Mayfield College boarding school in Sussex, and we always had a whale of a time. I challenge you to find me in the photo below, taken in 1994. The quality isn't brilliant, so you may struggle.



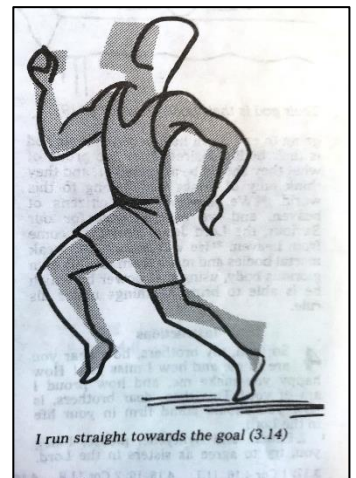


We were arranged into dormitories, each of which had youth leaders allocated to them. The leaders were encouraged to build friendships with the young people, and it was common practise to exchange letters with your leaders throughout the year in-between. I dare say this might raise concerns today in terms of good safeguarding practise, but back in the day exchanging letters with your dormitory leader never caused any harm (as far as I'm aware), and it was something I got a lot out of. The youth leaders were typically young adults in their twenties, and they acted as positive mentors and role models to us.

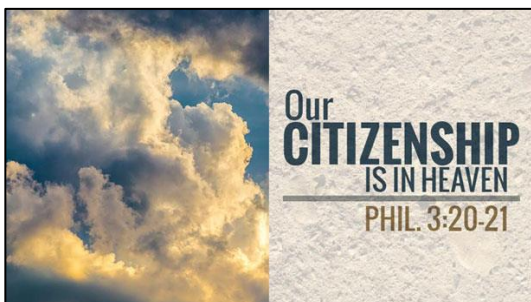
I remember my dorm leader that first year was called Paul Chesworth. He was really great with us. He kept in touch afterwards, and on one occasion he said he was passing by where we lived, and he'd like to call in. So he visited me and my friend Jason one weekend.

He asked us how we were getting on, and I told Paul I felt like I was failing as a Christian. I had gone on holiday to Mayfield, I'd told God that I wanted to follow him wholeheartedly, then when I came home I had quickly slipped back into the old ways. My mum commented that every year when I came home from these Christian youth holidays I was a reformed character, and for a week afterwards I would offer to do the washing up. Then after that first week, it went back to normal! I realise now that these youth holidays have had a lasting impact on me, but at the time they seemed to act like a spiritual shot in the arm, which wore off after the initial high.

I shared these feelings of discouragement with Paul, and he thought quietly for a moment. Then he led me to a verse in the bible, and it was this very passage from Philippians 3 – *“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* He told me not to dwell on my past failings, but always to look forward. It was just the right advice, and possibly the first time in my life that a verse from the bible had really hit home to me personally. I had a Good News bible with pictures in, and this drawing of the man running forwards has stuck in my mind ever since.



## Becoming who we are



The world tells us that we are who we have become, but God tells us that we become who we are... The difference is subtle. Are we defined by who we have been, and the things we have done in the past, or is our identity based on who God says we are now and in the future? When God looks at those who have put their faith in Him – when He gazes upon his beloved children whom He has bought with the blood of His own dear Son – He sees us as the people we will be for eternity with Him in heaven, because that is our true identity. St Paul says that *our*

*citizenship is in heaven* (3:20); that is where we really belong. Our life in this world is transitory, we are just passing through on our way to somewhere better.

This being the case, we must endeavour to set our minds on heavenly things, in order that we might live and act more and more like we are citizens of another country. We ‘hold fast’ to the blessings we have already received through the love of Christ (3:16), and we press on towards the goal of our heavenly call (3:14). Paul compares this perspective on life with those whose minds are ‘*set on earthly things*,’ whose ‘*god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame*’ (3:19). Such people are citizens of this world only. We, by contrast, grow into our identity as citizens of heaven as we learn to focus our lives on our heavenly destination.

### **When you feel like you don’t belong**



Do you ever feel like you don’t really belong? Fast-forward eight years from the age of fifteen, and I attended a residential jazz course in 2002 at Higham Hall in the Lake District. These jazz weekends were wonderful from a musical point of view, and I did a lot of trombone playing. However, there was a side to the Higham Hall weekends that I struggled with. It was mostly middle-aged men from the London suburbs who attended, and the culture was

‘worldly’ to say the least. Every evening involved getting drunk in the bar, and then there was the swearing and the utter vulgarity of the lewd jokes, that left you feeling at the end of the weekend like you had bathed your mind in filth. I am not exaggerating!

When I went back for a second year in 2003, I remember feeling that I didn’t want to go along with the prevailing bawdy culture. Higham Hall is positioned in a beautiful location above Bassenthwaite Lake, and before I arrived I parked up my little white van by the Lake, and sat down. As the water lapped upon the shore, I prayed. I asked God to help me not join in with all the ungodliness I knew I would be exposed to. I didn’t wish to separate myself in a way that would be antisocial or judgemental, I needed God to help me be ‘in the world, but not of the world.’

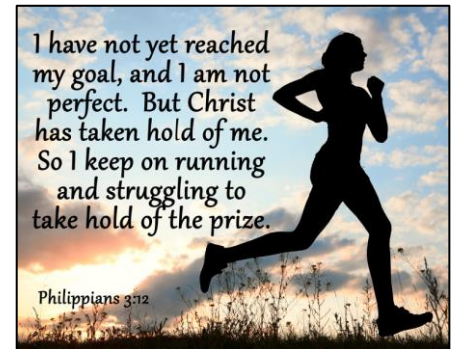


My prayer was answered in the most remarkable way. It was early Sunday morning, and as I woke up in my bed, I could hear the sound of hymns and prayers coming from somewhere. It was rather a contrast to everything I had heard in the bar the night before ... Somebody was listening to a church service on the radio. As I came back from the bathroom, a lady walked out of the room next door, and I said, “excuse me, but were you playing a church service on the radio?” It turned out that this lady, who had come on the course with her saxophone, was a committed Christian. She worked as a GP, and she

described how she had found God on the day of her wedding in a church whilst singing the words to 'Oh Jesus I have Promised.' The vicar had shared the Gospel with her through their marriage preparation, and after she was married her husband couldn't understand why she was suddenly attending church all the time! Later that morning she and I were singing worship songs at a piano, much to the shock and bewilderment of the other guests, who were not used to that sort of thing!

### **Strength in numbers**

In both of these stories, I was struggling to live out my identity as a citizen of heaven. Thankfully, the Lord brought others alongside me at just the right time, to remind me of who I was in God's sight. God already knew that my real home was not of this world, it just took me a while to figure this out and apply it to my life. Not that I have already succeeded, or have already become perfect, but I keep on striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has made me his own (3:12).



What about you? Do you know who you are? If you believe in Jesus, and you desire to follow him with all your heart, that makes you a citizen of heaven too. Sometimes we falter, we may slip back into a life focused on earthly things, and then we feel at odds with our true identity. If and when this happens, God calls us to get back on track, to press forwards rather than dwell on the past. And if my experience is anything to go by, you might just find that another Christian comes alongside you at these times to point you back in the right direction.



### **Prayers – Written by Hilary Holderness**

Heavenly Father, how timely is the passage from Philippians in our lives this week. We are all beginning to look forward, children returning to school, church services returning for us, the vaccine rollout moving on. Our children's work recommencing in the not-too-distant future.

We all feel that at last we can move forward in our lives.

But let us remember that this is in our earthly lives and we need to be like Paul and move forward in our spiritual lives and relationship with Jesus.

We pray that you will help us with this, especially in the times when we need encouragement.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray that as our children return to church, we can help them grow in their faith; have a positive effect on their lives. We can always be someone they can turn to; we can listen to their happy times and support them through difficult times. We pray especially for Dawn and Louise in their roles in our church. Give them grace to be a shining light with our children and young people.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**



Heavenly Father, in our lives we have all had times where we feel as though we are stuck and can only look backwards and dwell on what may seem a better time. Help us to remember, that you have a plan for us, and we can move on if we trust in you and allow your plan to work.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we pray today especially for those who are suffering both physically and mentally, we pray that they receive the help and support that they need at a time when our health service is still being stretched with the effects of Coronavirus. Let us all remember one person who needs our special prayers.....

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Heavenly Father we pray for those who have suffered a bereavement within their family or friendship group. May your love surround them in the rawness of their grief.

Lord in your Mercy: **Hear our Prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we know that you have promised that we can join your heavenly family by believing and trusting in you. Help us to not to forget this as we live our lives. Help us to try to follow the example set by Paul, as he always tried to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Let us remember Paul's words not to dwell on the bad times and failings in the past, but look forward.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

*Did you find me??*

