

# Christward

The magazine of



July – Aug 2024

## **~ Church Weekend 2024 Edition ~**

Summer is here and incredibly the weather for the Church Weekend was surprisingly warm and sunny - the odd shower or two coming at night. The July -August issue of the magazine is always a difficult one to fill. People are looking forward to, or are away on, holiday. They understandably want a rest from lengthy discussions on the future of the church both locally, nationally and internationally. This year particularly most of our attention, outside our family, is taken up with the imminent General Election so it seemed to me that a magazine filled with Church Weekend would be a welcome distraction. I hope that for those who attended the record of a few days spent together in idyllic surroundings will bring back happy memories and for those who were unable to come it might provide an enjoyable read.

## **~ The Place - Rydal Hall ~**



## ~ The People ~



## ~ An Overview ~

*We begin with an overview of the event in the style of a Mumsnet thread posted by Rachel Eecklaerers. (Acronym glossary at the end of the article.)*

***Does anyone know a good place to visit in the Lake District with a group of 35 people aged 4 months to 80? TIA***

FWIW Just come back from a wknd at Rydal Hall with DS (3) and DD (4 months) and we had a great time.

Great selection of biscuits and hot chocolate available in rooms great for the toddler who is currently on a rather beige diet... the pastries at breakfast were as big as DS's head.



Local walks met wide range of tastes- definitely bring wellies and puddle suits for little ones as there are some great caves to (get soaked in) explore. Also bring first aid kit with plasters for inevitable bumps 🤕



Great selection of toys in the children's room- my little one loved the pirate ship which is impressive as he usually completely obsessed with dinosaurs.



Entertainment was great - there was a travelling group that did several sketches, games and songs which my 4 month old was fascinated with - they were also promoting a new film called Journey - a low budget Indy film that has been tipped to win big at the BAFTAs next year. There was also someone called Judah .... he looks like he's going to be big on the acting scene HIHF

DD also loved the singing before each meal. There is also a tea room behind the hall which does a great bacon sandwich and selection of cakes- you can sit next to the waterfall too - great if you want to be in nature but have little legs that can't do big walks two days in a row!



HTH

### ***Acronyms***

TIA thanks in advance  
HTH hope this helps  
DS darling son  
DD darling daughter  
HIHF heard it here first

### **~ Friday ~**

There was the gathering, the finding of rooms, the unpacking of cases, the choosing of dishes for the evening meal, the losing of room keys (in truth that only happened to two people), followed by a chance to sit down and talk before dinner.

Dinner was, as were all the meals, buffet style which suited the appetites of most people - plates could be loaded to just the right amount. Of course if you had erred on the cautious side you could always slip back for a top up.



After the meal we assembled to listen to the reading of the House Rules by Carole. These included restrictions on children going into the formal gardens unless accompanied by an adult. This rule was obeyed until Sunday when the distinction between child and adult suddenly vanished.



Carole's final words to the gathering were 'The bar is now open.'  
Commendable restraint was shown by everyone and we settled down in groups to a competitive quiz set by Gwyneth. It was very entertaining and if you want to try it again or have go for the first time it's printed below. (Answers at the end of the magazine.)

### **Followers: The Quiz**

- 1) *Follow, follow, follow, follow – who or what?*
- 2) *And who said goodbye to the answer to the previous question?*
- 3) *Name the twelve disciples of Jesus*
  - a) *Bonus point for the one added in Acts*
- 4) *What are the names for the followers of:*
  - a) *Robin Hood?*
  - b) *The England cricket team?*
  - c) *Voldemort?*
  - d) *L Ron Hubbard?*
  - e) *Bonnie Prince Charlie?*
  - f) *Mary Baker Eddy?*
  - g) *Rabbit?*
- 5) *“Girl by the whirlpool  
Lookin’ for a new fool  
Don’t follow leaders  
Watch the parkin’ meters”*
  - a) *Name the songwriter for one point*
  - b) *and the song for two points*
- 6) *Some say they follow Paul, some Apollos, some Peter, some Christ: in which book of the Bible?*
- 7) *Dunbar’s number – the number of people it is claimed that you can maintain a stable social relationship with – said to be the average historic size of a village – is how many?*
- 8) *Who are the Swifties?*
- 9) *“If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” Which book of the Bible is this a quote from?*
- 10) *In business, what is the difference between cat goodwill and dog goodwill?*
- 11) *Which group had a hit with Dedicated Follower of Fashion?*
- 12) *Where do you end up if you follow:*
  - a) *The M6 going north?*



- b) Hadrian's Wall going east?*
  - c) The A34 (Kingsway) going south?*
  - d) The Isle of Wight coast path, starting from Ryde?*
  - e) Swallows in autumn?*
  - f) The road paved with good intentions?*
- 13) *Would you follow one of the Redhouses on a walk?*

And so to bed....apart from those for whom the attraction of the bar proved too strong.

## **~ The Sessions ~**

During the course of the weekend we had three sessions of talks and discussion on the theme 'Following'. The two on Saturday morning, led by Steve, were entitled 'Followers - Then and Now'.

**In session 1** we reflected upon the different types of followers of Jesus found in the Gospels. Not everyone could be disciples. There were only twelve of them. They had a specific role to play. They were men (no women) without commitments who could travel around.

But there were other followers. A rough list of these found in the Gospels:

Women (and a few men) who provided: Many, at least some rich

Friends and relations: Hosted meals, provided donkeys etc. For example Martha, Mary and Lazarus

Supporters with influence: Low key, secretive, working within the system.. Such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea

Those in need: Praised for their faith, but only turning up when Jesus could help. Those asking for healing or seeking advice.

Those with responsibilities such as the man having to bury his father. Would have followed more closely if they could

Multiple commitments: [eg Zealots, Jewish rulers]

Those who undertook one-off projects such as the 70/72 sent out on a mission by Jesus.

Looking at the variety of ordinary followers of Jesus. The question arises why has the Church taken as a model for a follower of Jesus that of the New Testament disciple. That is one of total commitment.

**In Session 2** we were in Groups discussing questions

Which of these follower's stories resonate with your story? Who Do you admire? If you were around 2000 years ago who would you be?

The church has always promoted a version of the disciple model - fully committed - to the exclusion of everything else. The people in the pews have generally taken it less seriously. Discuss

What would the church look like if we really demanded and expected less commitment?

**Session 3** was a talk by Geoff followed by discussion on the topic

### **'Following - Believe in Faith or Faith in Belief?'**

*(The article below contains text which time did not allow to be covered during the session.)*

At last year's church weekend, we explored and shared some of our spiritual backgrounds. Here is a recap of my background, because what I want to say follows on from it.

In a nutshell, my parents converted to CD when I was 4 years old. I grew up in it and eventually was baptised into it. I thought I believed it all, at the time. At 25, I found their version of eternal bliss lacked any incentive for me to remain, so I found another church, and joined that. At the time I thought the new church was right, and since I had resented the CD's and especially my father's intensity. It seems, with hindsight, that I had become predisposed to see anything different as at least an improvement, or even being right.

Do we have Belief in faith or do we have have Faith in belief? My background was definitely faith in belief, because without belief, in their doctrines, there

was no salvation. Does one come before the other? And what are they? It all depends on what you mean by belief and what you mean by faith.

Sometimes people say they wished they had faith, and sometimes they say they wish they could believe. Although in general people who say that, probably mean the same thing, and their vocabulary is probably not so nuanced.

*I believe I could walk across those stones but do I have faith? Better ask Mum.*



The Church of my upbringing referred to their beliefs as the saving doctrines. The fact that I left is enough to convince anyone that I didn't think they were saving doctrines. So, it is possible to think you believe things you don't believe in.

When people are asked if they believe in God, they might reply, Well it all depends on what you mean by God and what you mean by believe. And then they may say that they are spiritual but not religious. Spirituality seems to mean pursuing something which is higher than us. Are belief and faith restricted to religion? Faith and belief in the context of religion are probably a subset of faith and belief as used in every language, just with the addition of a deity which elevates it into something else.

Jesus said "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye have received *them*, and ye shall have *them*". His followers have experienced more disappointment over prayer, than success ever since, and that is putting it mildly. Jesus thought belief was important. When he said to people he had healed, "Go your way, your faith has healed you".

We read of faith in Hebrews 11:1-2

*“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”.*

I don't think that it means faith can make a universe appear! It seems to be saying that we need faith to believe it, because it is impossible to know anything else. But it feels as if it is saying faith and belief are very close. Belief often seems to mean a conviction that something is correct or incorrect as the case may be. Faith seems to be closer to trust. But belief feels as if it is the opposite of knowledge. Other words for belief are a conviction, opinion, persuasion, surety or certainty. These words might be all the same, on slightly different levels. The rest of this chapter in Hebrews goes on to say that Old Testament characters endured the most horrendous treatment because of the faith. Faith was, it seems, their motivation. Faith, not belief.

If life is a journey, are we ever meant to discover certainty? Would being certain mean our journey has come to a halt?

We so often act on impulse or instinct, without understanding why we have done it, and so we might assume that any underlying philosophy on which we act instinctively, or subconsciously, is a result of a belief. Whether that is really the case or not, we cannot be sure. But it seems to be a useful starting point when questioning what we think we believe.

James 2:18 reads

*'A man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.'*

This seems to mean faith by works is living differently and being caring, rather than keeping the Mosaic law, since most people seemed to observe the laws. Perhaps if we want to know what we believe we should take note of how we have acted.

I have found in hindsight, that my leaving the church of my youth was not an issue of belief, as I thought it was at the time, but it seemed decades later that painful events had somehow translated into a conviction that an alternative belief, along with a more contemplative attitude, was better and attractive. Although as far as I can tell my actions were sincere at the time, did my inner self see that I needed to escape and so I saw the different belief

system as attractive? This leaves me reluctant to think I knew what I really believed. And if I think I know what belief and faith are, even if I am right, I am not sure about it! But I am quite happy to scratch beneath the surface, to allow the subconscious to process it all, unhindered by my conscious awareness. For a very long time I have thought that perhaps it is safe to do this, especially if Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

So much of Christianity is about changing behaviour. But think of the difficulty people can have giving up a habit. Think how many sermons it takes to make people kind and loving. Others may manage to do it with almost no trouble, whether they heard sermons or not.

Spirituality, however is a form of curiosity. Curiosity is a driver which makes us explore that which seems to be beyond us. Like the stars in the night sky make us feel there is something bigger than us. The ancients had a far better experience of it than we ever do because they had no light pollution. Whenever we see a shooting star, we are still a little excited. Similarly we respond with awe in a massive cathedral. Something within us that is looking for that which is bigger than us. (One Rabbi suggests that awe is a mixture of love and fear.)

This spiritual side of us, makes us love archetypal stories and milk them for their meaning, and meaningful stories are not easily forgotten. Archetypal stories remain in our history for generations, because they are so significant, we all resonate with them on some level. Spirituality makes us pursue art, music, literature and other abstract beauties. Artists and poets manage to convey more eloquently what we try to do, which is to give voice to the nebulous, the indistinct, hazy, cloudy, because we all see through a glass darkly. The closest we seem to get is through metaphor and stories, because we don't have the vocabulary for very much of this sort of stuff.

In trying to convey the abstract, we soon need to use metaphors. We we say to children, God is like an old man with a long beard sitting on a throne who can see everyone everywhere, and this is clearly inadequate. Eventually we might say that God is consciousness which permeates everywhere, and our consciousness is like a wave in the ocean of his consciousness, meaning we share one universal consciousness. Metaphors come first, then stories, and perhaps after that come mystical interpretations.

Many of our stories follow a pattern, where a hero goes out to conquer, and to rescue. The hero's journey is the journey of every man, every woman, family, workplace, city, country and the world. During the journey one is likely

to find out what one really believes and who we are! These stories frequently seek to restore something that is lost, like the Garden of Eden. And so the ultimate hero's journey story is that of the world and human redemption.

The stories exemplify a significant universal theme in the life of every one and that is the will to triumph over adversity. Survival, reproduction, food, safety, weather, relationships, cooperation or adversity, accident and almost every area in which things can go wrong, that is to say the whole of life, await the hero and us on our life's journey.

So does belief register as a survival issue to the brain as we struggle to overcome the challenges which face us through life? Probably, if the belief is that one can cheat permanent death. If such a belief is challenged, the survival brain defends it as if a predator had appeared. The actual belief being challenged may not matter. So in this context challenges to religious beliefs might be seen as an existential or survival threat. Threats to any ideas we hold, that connect with a survival issue, may elicit a strong reaction. Reactions such as we witness when the beliefs of some religious groups are questioned.

In John's gospel Doubting Thomas was visited by Jesus, solely in order that he might believe. In the account there is not even an aside from Jesus to add anything more for the ten disciples he visited earlier. His visit was solely for Thomas, and it was to be witnessed by the other ten disciples. This time all eleven were in the same upper room behind locked doors. Oddly enough it says of the other ten, the first time Jesus appeared, that they also doubted, and he had to eat some fish because they thought he was a ghost. And by eating, he addressed the nature of their doubts. But there was no chiding of the ten for any lack of belief or faith.

Thomas wasn't told that Jesus had come "But unfortunately you missed him", because written into the story was a demonstration that Jesus cared, as the Good Shepherd would be expected to do. But is the purpose of 'believing' in this story to take Thomas into secure knowledge? After all what would be better than knowing? Is doubt the opposite of faith? And what is certainty the opposite of? Faith.

Rabbis say that doubt is a cleansing process. But the story of Thomas often causes Christians to be more perturbed than cleansed. Thomas presumably felt some considerable discomfort when the other ten disciples told him Jesus had visited them. Only Thomas knew why he wasn't there. His reply seems

very defensive, “Unless I see I won’t believe”. When Jesus did come to meet him, his he was overwhelmed and declared “My Lord and my God”. Sometimes it is an enormous relief to have ones tensions melt away. Rather like Job at the end of his book, when God overwhelmed him. Job declared “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

The same reaction!

Sometimes it is only necessary to be told that all is well and to be hugged, and our discomfort can melt away. But theological assurances, that all is well, often achieve comparatively little. But a few words lovingly spoken can be transformative.

## ~ Saturday Afternoon and Evening ~

People, as is tradition, were left to their own devices on Saturday afternoon. There were walks round lakes and into caves, walks into Ambleside, walks to tearooms, walks into the hills or you could just chill out at Rydal Hall.

Naturally the attraction of the good weather and the great outdoors meant that some people jumped the gun exiting the sessions in rather unorthodox ways.



The traditional social took place in the evening with games, songs and sketches. Words cannot do justice to all these happenings and images are worth a thousand words. So you just have to open the photo album accompanying this magazine to get a full idea of all these activities

Both Saturday and Sunday opened with a short period of reflection and prayers. These were led by Anne and Gwyneth respectively. My memory for all the details of each meeting is not great but on Saturday I was struck by the visual image laid out at our feet of a path of pebbles splitting into two paths one terminating in a walking boot and the other in a soft shoe. The hard and soft paths which 'following' often throws up and which brought into my mind the Robert Frost poem 'The Road Not Taken'. On Sunday morning it was a song which had the effect. It was a version of the Magnificat whose chorus ended with the words 'Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near/And the world is about to turn.' As on the previous day it reminded me of another song the seventeenth century ballad 'The world turned upside down.' This phrase has formed the basis of protests over the centuries. To be a follower of Jesus we ought perhaps, even if only occasionally, put on our hard walking boots and try to turn this world upside down.

The Sunday morning service led by Andy brought an end to the proceedings and it only remains to say thank you to all who contributed to a very enjoyable weekend. Special thanks to Carole who took on the housekeeping role and made the weekend run so smoothly and to Steve, Andy and Geoff who arranged the programme.



*Nor far now milord... and the porter's making pretty fair progress too!*



**Answers to the Quiz (Award 1 point to each answer unless instructed otherwise)**

- 1) The Yellow Brick Road
- 2) Elton John
- 3) (half a point per name) Simon Peter; Andrew; James, son of Zebedee; John, James' brother; Philip; Bartholomew / Nathanael; Thomas; Matthew / Levi; James, son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus / Judas, son of James; Simon the Cananaean; Judas Iscariot
- a) Matthias
- 4)
  - a) The Merry Men
  - b) The Barmy Army
  - c) The Death Eaters
  - d) Scientologists
  - e) Jacobites
  - f) Christian Scientists
  - g) Rabbit's friends and relations
- 5)
  - a) Bob Dylan
  - b) Subterranean Homesick Blues
- 6) Corinthians
- 7) 150
- 8) The fans of singer-songwriter Taylor Swift
- 9) Matthew (ch15 v14)
- 10) Cat goodwill is attached to a place, but dog goodwill follows the people
- 11) The Kinks
- 12)
  - a) Gretna
  - b) Wallsend
  - c) Winchester
  - d) Ryde
  - e) South Africa (half a point for Africa)
  - f) Hell
- 13) Yes – 1 point; No – 1 point; Only if I had my own map – 3 points


Possible total 33 points (my counting is probably wrong but it is late at night)  
If you got more than 25 try Mastermind, if you got below 10 stick to Eastenders.

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