

Vicar's Vista Feb 2012
A Letter from America

Good evening (that's how Alistair Cooke always started). I'm in America and yet aware that the Parish Magazine deadline draws near from afar!



From my viewpoint the Episcopal Church of The Ascension and Saint Agnes that stands right across the street from my apartment block is undergoing some refurbishment. "Open for business as usual", declares a very large sign on the building. The contemplation of church as a *business* on first consideration seems to strike a clashing note as loud as the trash collection service that rudely awakened me and the whole block far too early this morning. Didn't Jesus berate the turning of 'My Father's house' into a business concern?

Then, on reflection, I considered how so many words here in the USA have different meanings or connotations to their usage back in Blighty, where the Queen's English is still spoke proper. 'Business' might actually mean that the church is still busying itself with its primary function – even though the building is having some repair work done. Now that's a heartening thought - that the people are not constrained by the building and are keen to advertise this. (I wonder how they got permission for such a sign when we cannot get permission for a modest new noticeboard).

I pray that the church might always be busy and that there may be lots of *signs of life*. Ah, but what is 'usual' for the church across the road one might ask? That, Dear Listener, I am yet to experience, but *all shall be revealed that once was hidden* as Sunday draws near and the street far below my present 'high-rise view' of Massachusetts and 12th will be crossed by this *Pilgrim Father*. What kind of a *New World* might I discover? What I can tell you is that each Sunday they publish an A4 (that's double the size of our Magazine) Order of Service and Parish News. It contains all the liturgy (which is 1928 Book of Common Prayer) hymns, bible readings, prayers, news and all. Someone is definitely busy putting that together every week! My son informs me that I can expect a good hour and a half service (see how you get off lightly) often

with double thuribles and servers holding open the priest's cope as he senses the altar at the Offertory. Golly it sounds higher than St Peter's in Rome! I notice that they even capitalise the 'C' in holy catholic church in the Nicene Creed (that probably signifies some particular theological stance, even if it is of an incumbent from years ago).

Speaking of capitals and 'C's' did I mention I'm in "D.C." and being midday here, shortly we're off to visit the Capitol having already called by at the White House (Yes we can!). So what thought may I pass through to you good folks back home across *The Pond*, where the grass is greener and the chips are crisps, and the fries are chips? Let's keep busy about the usual business of the church in 2012 (Happy New Year by the way). That business is to love God, love one another, offer worship to God, pray for and to serve the community. That's usual and that will keep us all busy.

See y'all real soon. Have a nice Day - Andrew.

Vicar's Vista

MAPing the future at St Mary's

When I was running several businesses in the 90's one of the 'in vogue' things that came along was that of the Corporate Mission Statement. The theory was that organisations should be tightly focussed on their core purpose and then define just how they would 'deliver the goods'!

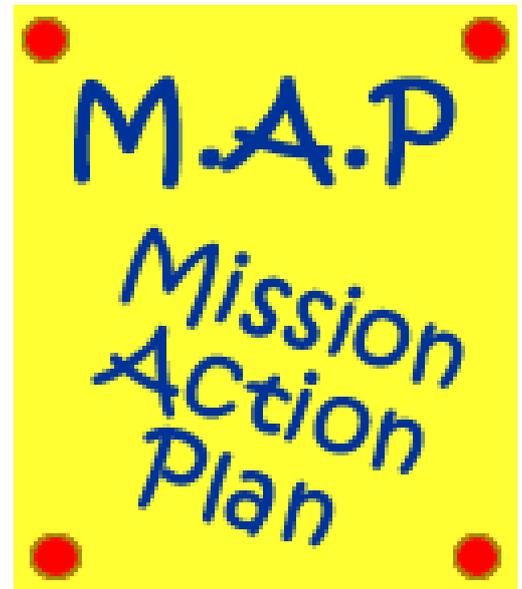
It wasn't long before Mission Statements became a 'must have' for churches too.

The church I attended then, after much consideration, landed on this rather snappy offering; "To know Jesus Christ and to Make Him Known". Years later it still seems to hit the mark, although I did rather worry that the notion of God revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit was blurred.

One of the things I learnt along the way was that unless one is in a monopoly position there is complete business necessity for trail-blazing pro-activity, rather than self-satisfied reactivity. Growth might materialize by organic means but it is far likelier to occur if one goes out and resolutely looks for business. The timid response was that 'Going-out' is a more expensive and risky venture than 'Staying-in' (in the comfort and safety of the office) & someone has to look after the existing customers, don't they? Often though unless one is going forwards it is more than likely one is actually going backwards! Out there in the market place conditions are changing rapidly and if one doesn't pay attention, quite suddenly, the business can run into difficulties!

So our Mission statements were intended to stir us up. There's no real time to rest (even Jesus alludes to this in his parable about the farmer and his barns). We had regular progress and planning meetings. In these we reviewed progress and then varied our strategies, admitting our failures, learning from our inevitable mistakes, and kept moving on. It wasn't always comfortable but it was dynamic and energised.

It was with great delight after years of being told that church should not be modelled on business practices that I was instructed by my Salisbury bosses to get into Mission Action Planning. No problem! – I found a template from a *go-ahead* London church on the internet and quickly drew up a draft version for presentation to our *Board of Directors* – (that's the PCC - church council).



With apologies to all who find commercial language unholy....do you remember that original Parish Away Day in 2005? What emerged from that was new vision. We needed to re-establish our *market presence*, (visible role in the community) and modernise the *factory* to improve output (new hall and facilities). Personnel needed training in new ways... The first plan was defined back in 2006 and whilst not widely publicised, crystallised our hopes and dreams. Since those days much progress has been achieved with your help and that of many newer members.

The church of St Mary the Virgin, West Moors, is a growing church with increased confidence and potential. So what should we do? Rest on our laurels and live off the surplus crops now stored in our larger barn? (*Sorry for the really awful mixing of metaphors*).

The PCC has agreed the 2012 Mission Action Plan and by the time you read this it will literally be in your hands, by way of its publication in booklet form and presentation during worship on February 12th. The MAP is a standing item at our PCC meetings whereby we add items early in the PCC year and review progress thereafter.

The church is not the building, it is not the traditions and liturgies that we practice (although they are cherished parts of our spirituality. The church is you and me, and our binding together in relationship with Jesus Christ. To survive and flourish in our rapidly-changing world we need to put our *hands to the plough* together. Yes we can resist change for changes' sake, but new ways have to be found to communicate the gospel by word and deed, appropriate to today. That is what our MAP is all about.

Our new Bishop, Nicholas, has made growth and ministry to young people his prime diocesan objectives. Our own plans concur with this, amongst others. I have been permitted by the PCC to research into ways and means of introducing a families and young persons' worker in the parish, and will be reporting back on that in the near future.

Plans are afoot to address the lighting, heating, flooring and decoration of the church. There is so much more in the MAP and we're open to positive suggestions and feed-back. I realise that I'm putting a kind of pressure on you all, but then that is the Gospel Way of the Lord Jesus.

I ask you to look through your copy of the 2012 MAP this Lent and pray about your part in its success. *Every little really helps*. Together, with prayerful thought and spiritually guided action we can do much to further the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church. Let's go MAPing! A.R.

Vicar's Vista

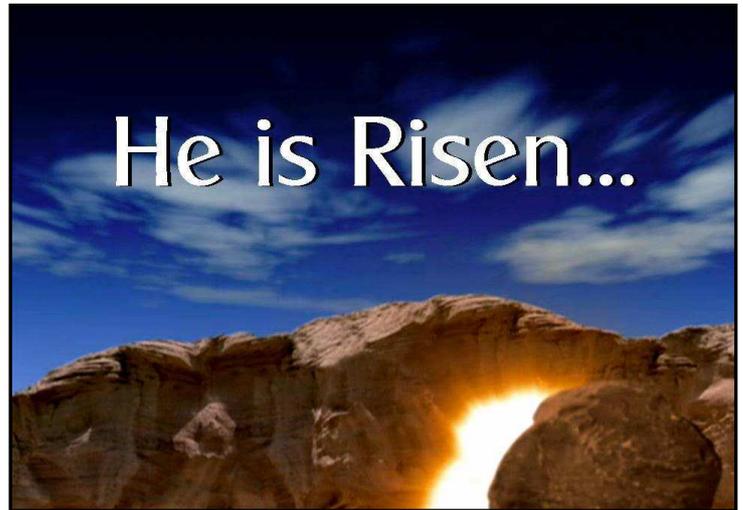
Death and Resurrection at Eastertide

April begins with the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem which we mark as Palm Sunday – life moves on and this year we can process around our new hall and embedded paths which is now all 'bought and paid for'.

The Hall Project was signed-off as complete, free of snags, by final agreement between the Vicar (myself), Church Wardens (Mike Bowler), Main Contractor (Jonathan Morris Construction) and Architect (David Illingworth) on the 8th March. Just for the record the final contract sum was £257,047.27 and all this was raised locally with the exception of a Grant from The Erskine Mutton Trust of £20,000. The old has given way to the new and we thank God that having gone through considerable sacrifice and pain we have much to celebrate. The hall has been suitably equipped at additional cost, Photo-Voltaic Panels are installed on the roof and absorbing all this early Spring sunshine and happily converting it into electricity which is sold back to the National Grid. (This article was written in March, in case the weather has changed by April)!

We have a new service for Wednesday evening of Holy Week this year – an Easter Songs of Praise where we will sing through favourite hymns and hear key bible readings, with several anthems from the Choir that will enable us to journey through the highs and lows and final glory of Passiontide. (Thanks to Valerie for her key role in this). All welcome.

There will also be Compline (Night Prayer) each evening until Thursday when, if you missed it last year, there is the opportunity to participate in an Authentic Jewish Passover Meal at 6pm on Maundy Thursday. I hope this will enable the participants to make the historical connection between Passover – the ancient celebration of the Jewish escape from slavery to freedom under Moses. It was at such a celebration that Jesus instituted what has become the centre-piece of Christian worship (Holy Communion). Thus following our Passover we will celebrate the Eucharist of the Last Supper with Foot Washing and shortened Vigil. Look out for all the Easter sign-up lists please.



On Good Friday morning we join with our friends at St Martin's URC and later on at 2pm there is the Solemn Liturgy at St Mary's with the reading of the Passion Gospel of Saint John. These are thought provoking and challenging services – but I always feel one cannot feel the full joy of the glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday unless one has first experienced the death and despair of Good Friday!

Easter Sunday begins early at sunrise, outside the church, with our brazier and the lighting of the new Paschal Candle. Entering the darkened church we throw on the lights to reveal the miracle that our Flower Ladies will have faithfully wrought as they fill the church with celebratory flowers and decorations. Then we will Praise God for the resurrection! Our response is to renew our baptismal vows at the Font and perhaps get splashed with Holy Water (a wash?) before Breakfast (Smoked Salmon, Oeufs Scrambléd, Bucks Fizz and all the luxurious accoutrements) as the Lenten Fast officially ends....

I will celebrate 1662 Prayer Book Communion at 8.00am (it's 350 years old this year) and our regular Common Worship Parish Communion (Holy Eucharist of the Resurrection) at 10.00am, recognising that last year the combined service at 9.00am wasn't well attended. I hope not too many of you are 'away' this year, although I recognise that many take holy-days and travel to family at this time!

'Death and Resurrection' at St Mary's. Happy Easter Season – I pray new life for us all. Christ is Risen, Alleluia! Love Andrew & Zahra

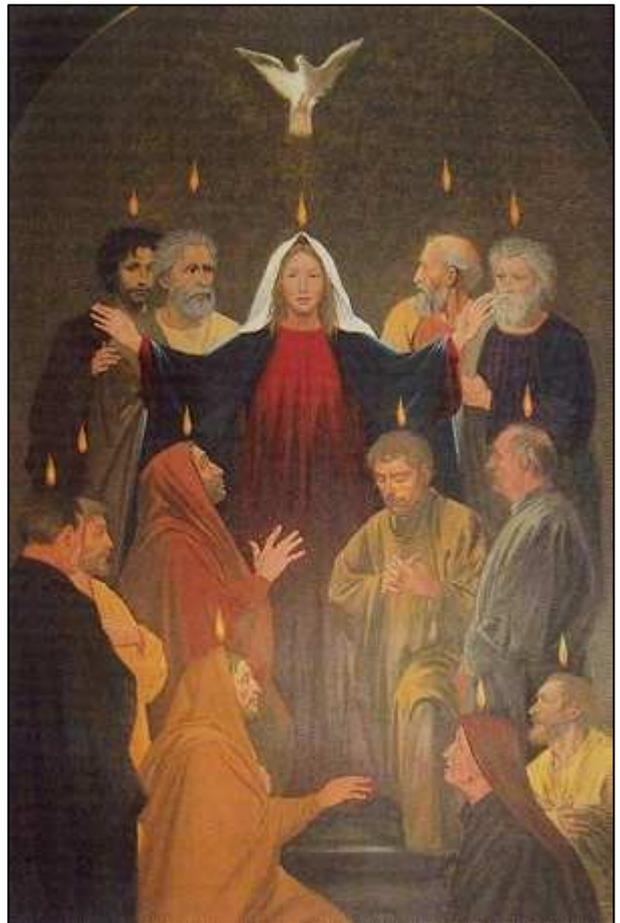
Vicar's Vista

Ascension & Pentecost

The month of May this year encompasses Ascension and then Pentecost. These are celebrations of two important post-Easter events. Easter is all about Jesus overcoming all the evil that the world could muster.

Ascension

Jesus overcomes death by crucifixion and rises to live again; his resurrection changes everything. In a short time many become devoted followers as they see him alive again. This forms the nucleus of the church. Jesus says he cannot remain and will soon rejoin his Father in Heaven. He is seen



ascending into the clouds...and is gone! It's all very mystical and not an easy doctrine but it is no more miraculous than much of the Gospel story of Jesus. Jesus was a remarkable and unarguably memorable man. He is written about, talked about, worshipped and remembered more than any other man. His story is ancient and has had more influence than any other event in human history. That's no surprise if you believe that Jesus lived a blameless life, that he performed many inexplicable signs and miracles, that he rose from death to life and that he ascended into heaven. Most normal people would want physical proof to believe in such wonders – even his family and disciples doubted him, right to the end and the bible does not hide that from the reader. It is hard in this day and age to accept miracles. It is much easier to look for rational explanations and to condescendingly reason that the folk of two thousand years ago were uneducated, naive – little more than cavemen! That would be a complete mistake – they were as clever as you and I, they just didn't have technology.

Pentecost

The Gospel accounts are full of eye witness accounts...if you will accept them. But if you cannot, then we need to consider what happened after the Ascension. Jesus asked his Father and He sent The Holy Spirit upon those disparate disciples on the occasion of Pentecost. This

leaderless group of disappointed and fearful followers rapidly became powerful evangelists; powerful in word and deed, and even able to perform miracles themselves! The Jesus movement grew. It grew fast; it first permeated the Jewish community throughout the Roman Empire and then the Romans themselves. It was opposed and persecuted, but the Spirit of God was so powerful in its effect that men and women readily committed their lives to Jesus. Sadly many were martyred in the process. It takes more than simple belief – it takes complete conviction to face hardship, persecution and cruel execution. It wasn't just a few, but thousands and still the Way of Jesus (later to be called the Church) grew in numbers and influence. The Spirit of God in Jesus is at work in the world today. Judeo-Christian laws, ethics, morals and philosophies shape much of the world. Humanity still struggles to believe and trust in God. Many people still reject a notion of God that they freely decide is unbelievable. That is because they do not know God as revealed in Christ. They only know a flawed human imaginary God. The real God is Spirit and transcends human failings and limitations. The 'Father' God of Jesus is perfect, his Spirit fully able to work *signs and wonders* in hearts and minds that are receptive. Jesus came that we might have life in all its fullness and that is as worth having today as it was in those far-off days. The Gospel is Good News!

Faith

May I just conclude by saying that it is The Holy Spirit of God that enables one to trust (have faith) in the mystical nature (supernatural) of the story of Jesus. It is often comes a step at a time, perhaps like this: - (I aim to help you to set aside your instinctive distrust of the unknown)

Jesus lived and died – Fact. Massive historical evidence is available.

He rose again after Crucifixion – Yes, in some mystical way...

He ascended to Heaven – In a figurative way....

The Spirit of God is with us – Yes, there is goodness but there's also a lot of badness still, even amongst those who profess to follow Jesus.

We cannot physically see Jesus like hundreds did after his resurrection. We can learn how their lives were radically changed by their encounter with God. We are reliant on their collective witness (in the bible & vast swathes of literature since). We do however see the Spirit of God at work in the World (if we open our hearts and minds to look and see) and we can recognise how this influences and changes lives for the better.

The Way of Jesus – is a movement towards the living, loving and eternal God – it moves us onwards and upwards! Ascension?

A.R.

Vicar's Vista

Pearls of Wisdom and Pearls of Love

Zahra and I have been celebrating our thirtieth wedding anniversary. Like most men (I suppose) I was at a loss of what to give to my nearest and dearest. In the course of buying a suitable card it suddenly dawned upon me that thirty might be PEARL. I asked the young shop assistant – she didn't know and went off to check her chart, and back came the answer that all you wise folk have safely stored in your minds and cannot quite believe that anyone could be so dense as not to know!



YES, thirty years was pearl and my immediate problem was solved!

An opportunity arose to spend many hours in Salisbury where the best pearls are to be found for miles around - it was either that or a trip back to Dubai or Bahrain – both places which I have visited and seen the most magnificent pearls many, many moons ago. In the 70's before Dubai was developed there was a slogan on the outside of the Arrivals Hall at the airport. It read, "Welcome to Dubai the Pearl of the Orient".

Years ago I flew to the Persian Gulf on business and whilst in Saudi Arabia was asked to 'pop' across to Bahrain where I was to meet one Sheik Hassan, 'in the second shop on the right, inside the Souk'. So I dutifully flew to Manama, located myself in the Inter-Continental Hotel and next day set off by taxi to The Souk.

Sadly Sheik Hassan was unknown at either end of the Souk, or in shops one through five on either side. How foolish to fly all that way without a full address (in my defence it was in the early 80's before the era of fax, mobiles, internet etc). Well I wandered aimlessly around The Souk for an hour or so looking at the shops lustred in Gold and draped in Pearls.

Then the brain clicked and I thought – wait a minute this is the Gold and Pearl Market and actually the man I'm visiting is big in the chicken trade.

Aha, back to the taxi and with my brilliant Arabic told my driver I wanted the Animal Souk. He was most perplexed, “but all the foreigners come to this souk for presents for their wives and girlfriends”. Not me I’ve come to *talk turkey*, not *trinkets*, I said. In case you’re still interested, yes I found Sheik Hassan in the second shop on the right, surrounded by feathers and all was “Hamdillah as Salaami”. That means, ‘Thanks be to God for your Peace’, meaning safe arrival.

Another pearl of wisdom I can impart on you is that the Arabic for ‘Pearl’ is “Lulu”. So now you know; also Sahara means Desert and Caravan means a procession of camels not a grockle box that impedes all traffic!

I should have bought Zahra a string of pearls way back then in the souk, it would have been a great investment but the time wasn’t quite right.

I looked all over Salisbury and I found some nice everyday antique pearls which I couldn’t resist but in the end I had to go back to the oldest and best shop in the city where I had first seen a set that were fitting for the wonderful lady who deserves even more than I can give.

My Paramount *Pearl of Wisdom* is that the best pearls are those of the many drops of love that accrue in a long term loving relationship and come together over many years to form a ‘string’ that is unsurpassed in value. Jesus taught that in his briefest ever parable (pearls were the diamonds of his era).

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45).

Jesus also warned folk not to cast their pearls before swine – in other words scriptural truth or knowledge should not be put before people who do not appreciate its vale. Quite a challenging thought (Matthew 7:6)!

Enough of our anniversary – the more important one is of course that of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of Her Majesty, the Queen Elizabeth II’s Coronation and long reign which my math’s calculates is a double pearl – or a Pearl of Inestimable Value.

God Save The Queen and long may she reign over us – do join in with all the celebrations in the church and community. The Revd Andrew Rowland, Vicar



Vicar's Vista

The Perfect Summer

You probably realise that this article has to look ahead and try to capture the mood of the season. As I write its raining again and it hasn't stopped much since when we were all praying for rain to break the drought (remember that!). I hope and pray that July and August will be a Perfect Summer and that all our plans for events such as Fetes and Barbecues, and Holidays go off well. Sadly the good ol' weatherman did predict summer '12 wouldn't get going for another four weeks (that takes us up to the 8th July). I wonder if his prophecy will prove correct?



George Gershwin wrote a famous *Folk Spiritual* song in the 1930's for his hit musical *Porgy & Bess* called 'Summertime'. Apparently it's been covered some 35,000 times, one of the most successful songs in history.

*One of these mornings you're going to rise up singing.
Then you'll spread your wings and you'll take to the sky.*

That's the spirit of summer, with the brilliant mornings, long days and lighter evenings; the day stretches and, if, the weather plays its part all feels good and perfect. It makes one want to spread one's wings...

Summertime and the livin' is easy, fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high

I wish you all a relaxing and slightly slower paced summertime. I hope this year is a good'un for us all, I hope all the unseasonal weather patterns experienced to date don't afflict our farmers too badly and that their crops grow well, makin' for easy pickin'. I hope we won't need to get the covers out too often! Who will ever forget the London rainstorm that blighted the Thames Diamond Jubilee Pageant, (let that be added to the folklore of British weather). I've noted how every Bank Holiday has been wet thus far but tomorrow is around the corner and it's always best to live with hope in one's heart. Jesus remarked how everyone could read the signs of the sky and seasons but was perplexed that they couldn't read the signs of The Age. Spanish Banks and Welsh Holiday Parks have been bailed out alike and we press on hoping and praying for better things. There's always something to be upbeat (*Gershwin-ite?*) about, and with our steadfast *Faith in God*, and *British Resolve* nothing can defeat us! Have a Perfect Summertime. Hopefully yours, Andrew

Vicar's Vista

Was there life on Mars?

Vicar's Vista is a contemporaneous viewpoint on life.

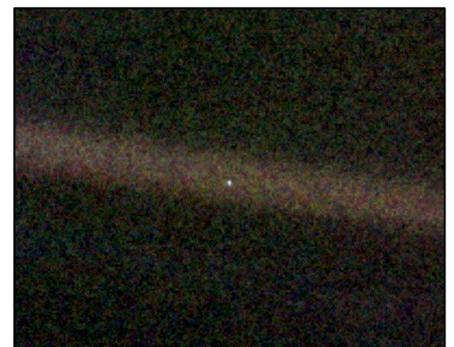
My view has been rather 'extended' recently by news of the latest NASA



mission which has successfully landed the 'Curiosity Rover' on the surface of the planet Mars. It is a truly marvellous feat of science and a technological achievement that promises to expand knowledge of Mars; which once had an atmosphere and surface water. It is funded for two years but the plutonium power cell will provide power for fourteen years.

Fourteen years is a long time in anyone's lifespan. Looking forward into the future Mars may well become a new home for humanity. It may be possible to establish a permanent base using buried frozen water from the planetary poles. In the far distant future as our Sun begins to die it will expand and get hotter. This will make earth uninhabitable – perhaps humanity will move next door for a while? The question about whether conditions for life once existed on Mars will be addressed by 'Curiosity'. It is not looking for life but for prehistoric conditions that may once have supported life. The question is about life itself. Is life commonplace, or unique to earth? There are theological implications for certain religions. I am easy on the findings, either way. I look beyond the ancient creation story which has served humanity well for many generations in its deeply imaginative explanation of the origins of the cosmos and life. Actually I'm more interested in the question of whether there will be life on Mars in the future, inasmuch as will there be a long term future for humanity?

The more humanity stretches out into the universe, the smaller planet Earth becomes. Have you seen this photograph of Earth taken by Voyager 1 from four billion miles as it left the solar system? We are just a tiny insignificant dot in the vastness of space! Are we alone? The conditions for life though are rare indeed.



Life is precious and the ever more pressing challenge for humanity is to acknowledge the finite and dwindling resources of our home world. The present financial crisis is born out of greed and is a correction to certain 'Western' nations having had an undeserved too big a 'slice of the cake'. Supplies of commodities are becoming ever more pressurised as not only population increases, but also the expectation of growth perpetuates. The vital challenge is to establish a sustainable and fairer sharing of planetary resources. We desperately need to find a balance between progress and runaway consumption. Just a few generations ago the Modernist answer to life seemed to be in technological industrialisation and commercial growth but this is now evidently as much part of the problem, as the solution. How can we establish a just regulation?

What might be the view of a vicar in a small place, on this small planet? I do feel that the 2012 Olympic Games have given us a vision of a way in which the diverse peoples of the earth can come together in a unified



way and it is inarguable that the *Olympic Spirit* has been felt by us all. At the moment those 204 national petals of flame rose together to join in becoming one universal brilliant cauldron of light I think we were moved by the symbolism and all the possibilities it seemed to offer. We who see Jesus as The Light of the World can see the innate power of

bringing individuals together to form a whole. Team GB together, have exceeded all expectations, and from the exciting Opening to the Closing Ceremonies the Olympics have been simply inspirational. Similarly the message of Jesus hinged around inspired righteous, unselfish conduct. He championed the poor and meek against the rich and powerful. Jesus wanted his society to trust and believe in God; the author of life. If we would acknowledge our dependence on God and the need to live respecting others, then salvation was near, he said. His essential gospel message was to recognise the immediacy of the present moment, to think things through and see the need for a personal change of heart and mind – so that the Kingdom of God might be finally established.

God's Kingdom is in the world, but not of this world. It is of the Earth (and Mars?) and anywhere where there is life. Let's hope (and pray?) that someday some other beings might not be probing this small planet, looking for signs that life once existed here!

A.R.

Vicar's Vista

Things aren't always what they seem!

During the spectacular London 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony (do you remember that?) this devilish figure conjured up from Harry Potter saga (called Voldemort) towered over the National Health scene below. Was it a separate celebration of the NHS and English Literature, or was the watcher being prompted to link these two images. Things aren't always what they seem. Might it not have been a provocative attempt using image association? Hands off our NHS – just who is this casting a malevolent spell? Who is Voldemort?

Christians should be attuned to this genre of allegorical representation. Jesus was deliberately provocative in his communication. He stirred up great crowds who were attracted to, and animated by him in remarkable numbers. A careful reading of the Gospels shows that Jesus was not 'gentle, meek and mild', (though he was thoughtful and caring). Jesus had a message to proclaim and he had a messianic mission to fulfil. Jesus was often misunderstood and this included his closest associates; his teaching was not always clear. We have the lens of many centuries of tradition and interpretation to view Jesus through. But things weren't always what they seemed! Jesus when asked why he always taught using allegory said, "The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." He was quoting a biblical passage from Isaiah and then he said; "But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it." The problem was many still didn't get it, because their hearts had grown dull (Matthew 13:13-17). We can all look, but not perceive and hear, but not listen. We need open minds and hearts to comprehend!



What then should we see? Indeed, Jesus asked what the crowds had gone out to see (in John the Baptist) and then likened John to Elijah who was prophesied to return to announce the coming of the Messiah (Matthew 9:11-15). The Gospel of Jesus, his message, fully sits within the context of Jewish faith history and his story is a fulfilment of its promise. To begin to understand Jesus one must know of the biblical Jewish meta-narrative of the Covenant between God and man, and the promise of salvation through a Messiah. Jesus often wasn't what he seemed and yet he fulfilled over Old Testament 600 prophecies in his life and death and resurrection! He was on plain view and yet remained hidden and that hasn't changed to this very day. What does it all mean?

Hearts and minds that are dull do not seek deeper meaning; they are content to live within the 'here and now', suggests Jesus. His message is one of gaining life in all its fullness, which increases to include an eternal dimension. Life has lasting and deep value if only we could have faith in that which lies beyond in the spiritual dimension. There is more to life than we can see. God's kingdom is near. Jesus was provocative.

Consider the Christian images conjured up by Jesus; water into wine, walking on water, feeding the five thousand, raising the dead, and in the perspective of this article; the restoration of sight to the blind. Things are more than they seem and it takes thoughtfulness and application to see beyond the immediate. Lost sheep are loved and prodigal sons are welcomed home in Jesus' parables. A favourite of mine is the Parable of the Sower, as Jesus speaks of seed cast liberally and some falling on rocky ground, some not deeply rooted, other seed is choked by weeds or gobbled up by birds. Then there is the seed that prospers and grows to provide a bounteous increase, a fine harvest. Do read the Parable at Matthew 13:3-8, Mark 4:4-8 or Luke 8:5-8 if you can be bothered. Then ask yourself who cast the seed, and then what kind of soil you're in.

The king sends his servant into the world to invite his favourites to the banquet. Don't be too busy or the opportunity will pass and he will invite complete strangers. Jesus challenged that God invited his special people and they ignored him, so he widened his invitation to everyone. Jesus also spoke of the vineyard owner who sent his servants to collect the harvest and they were killed. Then finally he sent his son, expecting them to respect him, but they killed him also, to grab the inheritance! What then should the owner do, asked Jesus? The crowd responded, "Bring those wretches to a wretched (Voldemortian?) end". They must have understood the meaning fully, once Jesus had been put to death!

Vicar's Vista

INSIGHTS...

Trying to understand!

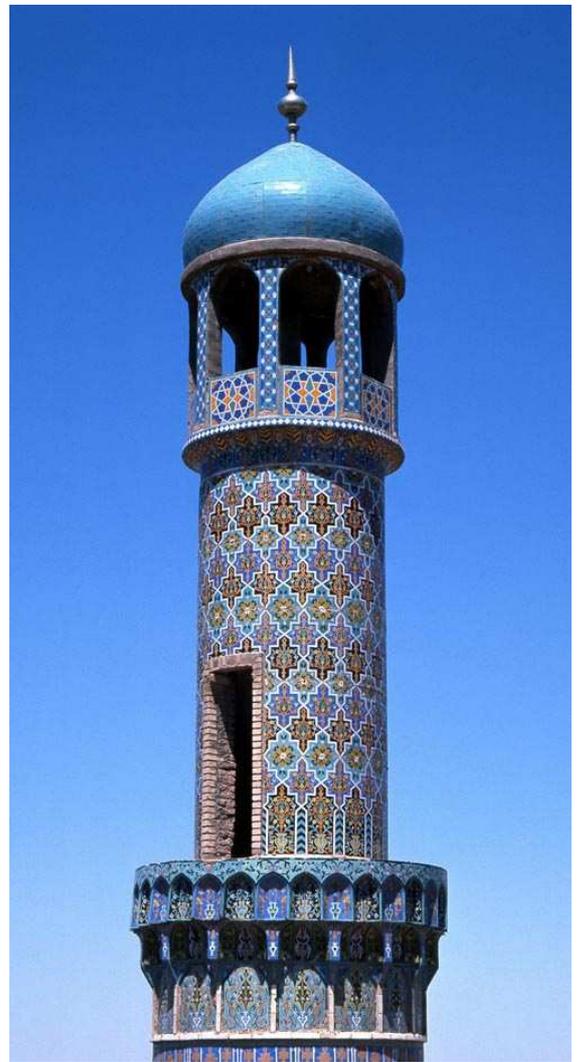
On Tuesday evenings we are arranging a variety of Talks and Visits with the intention of deepening and broadening our vision



of the world. Gaining INSIGHT is our aim and intention. Trying to understand or even make sense of the world around us is a lifelong task unless we're the type to live in our own small world. Followers of The Way of Jesus (Christians) are sent into the world to take 'The Good News (Gospel) out and be good news in the communities in which we live and work. But relating to and communicating with 'The World' is not straightforward and the older I get the more time I have had to perceive how life, in terms of culture and standards, changes. Now I'm not a Luddite, decrying change and wanting to turn the clock back with 'rose-tinted spectacles' to some imaginary former golden age. Coping with societal change is however a continuous challenge to all persons old and young. Traditions provide an anchor – they often are founded in reason (even though the origin may have been forgotten). The 'Lessons of the Past' are often born out of costly experience and this month of Remembrance-Tide is not just about honouring the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice but importantly is 'Lest we Forget'. We should never forget that 'Jaw Jaw' is better than 'War War' and in recent times with all the headline-making economic upheaval in Europe, as difficult as this is and so painful to many – ultimately the cause of peace is beyond measure as we recall the devastating price of conflict.

Conflict is born out of many causes; Jealousy, Greed and Selfishness. This happens at clan and national levels, as well as at personal. It is part of human sinfulness and something that Jesus stood against to the cost of his life. Religions have had the greatest influence on human morals and ethics – but it must seem to the 'unbeliever' that they are the problem of and not the answer to modern life. In our liberal and secular 'Western' society we are rejecting religion. 'Eastern' peoples are not so, and chiefly are ordered by the Islamic Faith and way of life.

In November we're beginning to look at the world's second great religion of Islam. With some 1.5 billion adherents' it is arguably very close in standing to that of the Christian faith/tradition. As Christianity seems to continuously wane in influence, so it appears that Islamic authority and faith increases. This is indeed a challenge to our society at many levels. Should we feel mutually threatened and fearful – or should we reach out to each other and try to engage and befriend? The caption above uses the symbols of Christianity, Judaism and Islam to spell out the word 'CoeXisT' – but they can also be arranged to spell 'ToXiC'!



We need fresh INSIGHT and that's our aim over the coming year with three talks;

1. An Insight to the Islamic Faith.
2. An Insight to Islamic Culture and
3. An Insight to Islamic History & Politics.

As with all church events this is open to all members of the community in West Moors and beyond. So dear reader if you want to join with us – the first talk is at 7.30pm on Tuesday 6th November in the church hall, given by yours truly. A Mosque visit to Bournemouth is arranged for Tuesday 13th November at 6.30pm. I have spent many years happily 'coexisting' with Muslims but I also recognise the explicit dangers that extremism present us all at this time. Extremists aim to drive a wedge between different (faith) communities and then prey on the 'fear of the other' factor to destabilise and drive forward their narrow vision within the 'toxic' environment they deliberately create and foster. So don't be ill-informed and thus unaware. It is easy to be apathetic about all these things and that plays right into the hands of extremists.

Why is Islam expanding in numbers and influence? What do Muslims believe? What do we have in common? What is different and difficult for us? Have they got something that Christianity has lost? How do Muslims live and what is their history, and what drives their politics?

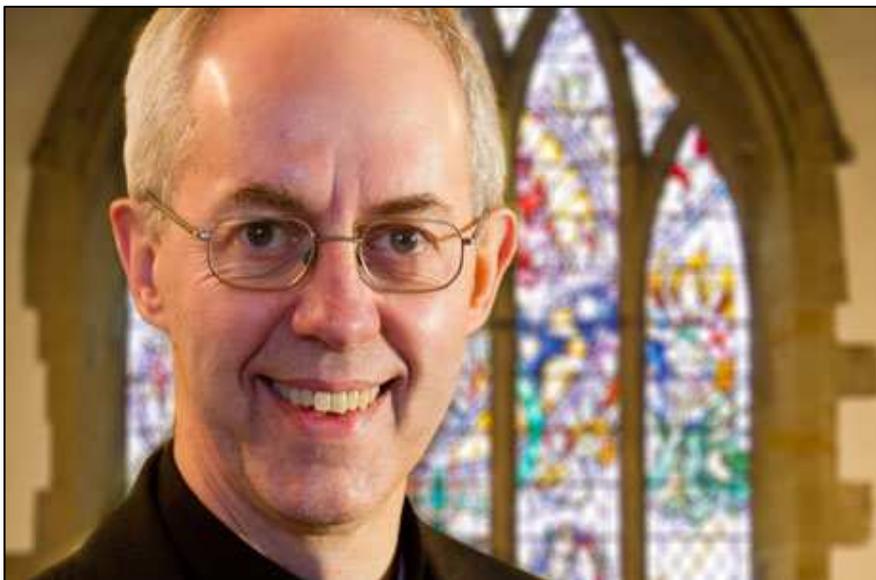
Come and gain INSIGHT !

Blessings - Reverend Andrew Rowland

Vicar's Vista

What do you want for Christmas?

One could say that Christmas has come early this year for the Church of England with the appointment of Justin Welby as our shiny new Archbishop of Canterbury replacing Rowan Williams



A new Archbishop is the opportunity for a new beginning, whilst also fulfilling this ancient role as Primate of the Anglican Communion. We wish him well. I note he has immediately called for the passing of the measure to consecrate women. By the time Justin Welby retires or steps aside there could be some women in consideration for his post! The consecration of women as bishops is wanted by a clear majority of both clergy and laity but curiously we are informed by our own Canon Jane Charman that in the National Synod many who do not wish to see this matter progress have got themselves elected and may still be able to hold up the process. Democracy doesn't always work well; activists can obtain both power and influence in situations where the silent majority remain just that...silent!

There is always a balance to be made between tradition and innovation and any change is likely to upset some. I smiled at our recent Salisbury Diocesan Synod meeting when The Dean, June Osborne, showed us her photograph taken in our cathedral with Her Majesty the Queen and the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Sarah Troughton. Mrs Pitt Rivers serves us in



Dorset. It seems the church is lagging behind! It's high time we recognised that we are living in an era when the ideal is equality for all. Surely this is a core message of the Christian Gospel and yet traditionalists managed to fashion a culture that favoured men over women. It's no surprise that they're busily defending the status quo! However, Salisbury Diocese has now appointed its first female Archdeacon (of Wiltshire), Ruth

Worsley. We wish her well too.

Last Christmas I wrote about what constitutes an authentic Christmas and tried to point out that many traditions are fairly recent innovations. Anything that is repeated is on its way to becoming a tradition and when a practice has been established for just a few years it's as if nothing else will do. Jesus was an innovator (whilst respecting tradition). He spent his ministry challenging and explaining the underlying meanings of traditions and in so doing gave them a new life that has lasted. Each new generation though must stir up within itself the gift of faith and relate it to its day and age. That can be risky. Jesus himself was rejected by those who were in charge – the story of his birth even includes the necessity of his parents fleeing to Egypt for safety from the authorities. They didn't like the innovation he brought. They felt threatened.



The faith of Jesus, which is the 'gift' that I hope all of you will want for Christmas will bring change and new things must happen. As the year turns we face 'the new' with hope and confidence and I pray are prepared to try some more new things – to stir ourselves and seek and expect new life in so doing. I am very appreciative of the new things that have happily fully established themselves in 2012 such as the Tea

@ 3, the Men's Breakfast and the Tuesday evening INSIGHTS programme. Well done indeed!

We will of course run all our traditional seasonal services for church and public and welcome them once again into the story – but I hope it is not some tired old tale being trotted out for the occasion. We have sent our Seasonal Card around to every home in the parish inviting all to come. At the heart of the story we want to tell is the birth of a renewed and lasting faith in God that is made real in the person of Jesus Christ. That was God's gift to humanity.

May His Spirit be born anew in us and may we find new and effective ways of communicating the relevance of His Gospel. Some new things are planned such as *Messy Church* events, training and starting *Open the Book* (acting-out gospel stories in schools). Somehow I've also got involved in a double-decker bus that's fitted out for Youth Work...perhaps I'll learn to drive it in 2013! Wherever we go, I pray that the Spirit of The Lord will go before us.

2012 has been a special year with the Olympics and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee; it hasn't been memorable for good weather though. It has on

balance however been a good year for the church and we look forward expectantly...

Zahra and I wish you Seasons Greetings (Advent, Christmas and Epiphany).