

THE MUSTARD SEED

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus

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Pentecost -Acts 2

*Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share
God's love with words and actions*

50P
May 2024



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At the moment we're into our Spiritual Disciplines programme of learning as a church, for all-ages on Sundays and for our Life Groups meeting mid-week fortnightly. Over the course of this programme we're covering 12 tools or disciplines highlighted in the book '*Celebration of Discipline*' by Richard Foster. Each one of these can bring us into a closer and deeper relationship with God. Instead of being about religious or about being constrained, these disciplines are totally about a life-giving relationship with God, in which we become more joyful and free.

In this article I want to focus on the tool or discipline of Simplicity. Richard Foster outlines in a deeply challenging way what it means to strip things back and keep it simple. For Foster, it's simplicity in its strongest sense: simplicity as opposed to having double-standards in any way in our lives – simplicity in pursuing one goal over all else, simplicity as a single focus for every aspect of our lives. He says: 'The moment we make our lives focused on anything other than God's kingdom we turn it into an idol'.

For Christians, **that goal is to seek God's kingdom.** Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, 'seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,' and that comes before everything else Jesus mentions in his most famous sermon. The moment we make our lives focused on anything other than God's kingdom – no matter how worthy that thing might be – we turn it into an idol. **But when the kingdom of God is genuinely placed first, ecological concerns, the poor, the equal distribution of wealth and many other things will be given their proper attention.**

If you are still practicing the discipline of meditation, why not look up a psalm right now? For me it would be Psalm 139. It reminds us of God's vastness and vested interest in us, ending in David's response at the end. I love the challenge to be searched and sifted and for anything that causes offence to be taken out!

The discipline of simplicity is an inward reality resulting in an outward lifestyle. **What goes on inside our hearts impacts the world around us and who we are in it.** Foster writes: 'Of all the disciplines, simplicity is the most visible and therefore the most open to corruption.' But what does this actually look like? Foster lists 10 outward expressions of Christian simplicity in this chapter – but now I'm going to focus on the second one: **rejecting anything that produces an addiction.** For me, that could be exercise. I've had to consciously remind myself that although exercise is a good thing, it should never become a priority over and above my devotional time. So, I've learnt to practice using my exercise time as an additional opportunity to be renewed by God's presence by having my worship music on as I walk or run, or spend time at the gym.

I wonder, what is it that you could do to simplify your life? Here are three easy steps you could follow in order to make it possible: -

Step 1: Find something that needs simplifying. It could be going through your house and decluttering, or limiting your time consuming the TV, radio, or gaming. **Basically, it's whatever you feel is getting in the way of making the kingdom of God your first priority.**

Step 2: Take time to **reflect and write down how you will embrace simplicity in that area.** For example, you might commit to using your mobile phone one hour before bed keep it outside the bedroom while I'm sleeping. I'm going to have to use an actual alarm clock – retro I know!

Step 3: Ask for someone to keep you **accountable.** This is hard, I know, but it will help. The things that are particularly attached to us will be harder to shift so we may need some assistance... Some say that their husband or wife is keeping them accountable, but if you're single, you could ask a trusted friend or sister/brother in the Lord.

Remember – the idea of simplicity is **more freedom not less**. God is calling us to live a simple life as Jesus lived simply. I want to create more space and the mental capacity to allow the Holy Spirit to move in all areas of my life, for God to be present, and for me to listen from the beginning of each day to the end. Have fun simplifying! Here are some readings you could look up as you think this all through: -

Monday: Simplicity as singleness of heart Matthew 6:19

Tuesday: Simplicity as trust Matthew 6:25–34

Wednesday: Simplicity as obedience Genesis 15

Thursday: The generosity of simplicity Leviticus 25:8–12

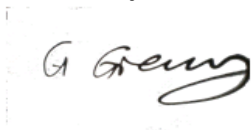
Friday: Simplicity in speech Matthew 5:33–37, James 5:12

Saturday: Simplicity and justice Amos 5:11–15, 24, Luke 4:16–21

Sunday: The freedom from covetousness Luke 12:13–34

With love and every blessing in Jesus,

Rev'd Gayle



New Feature

Lot's of people like doing a Sudoku, so we are introducing one here for you to explore.

This one is classed as medium and the completed solution appears on page 17.

Enjoy. (But no cheating!)

	2			1	4	6
9				3	8	
			4			3
	6	2				
	5				4	
				9	7	
6			2			
		3	9			1
8		1	5			9

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Why your television is like the Trinity

Here is a trick question: How many colours does your television set use?

Answer: Just three: red, green and blue. And in that order, just like a rainbow (where reds are at one side, blues at the opposite side, green in the middle). This is known as "RGB".

These are TV's three primary colours which, when their luminescence is fired at your eyes, give all the colours of the visible spectrum. These are all 'additive' colours. In fact, mix these three together in different proportions, and your screen can offer you 16 million colours.

You thought the sequence was red/yellow/blue? No, that's for painted or printed colours. A TV set positively gives out light in three different colours, whereas paint daubed on paper absorbs and removes some colours, to reflect back merely a small part of the light falling on it the colour that you see.

You'll soon call out the repair man if your television loses one of its three colours and all the presenters look as though they came from Mars. But change the intensity of any one colour (red, green or blue) even slightly and you change the overall colour.

Switch them all off, and you are left with black. Let all three of them shine at full brightness, at the same point – and then as if by magic you have a totally different colour: WHITE!

It's a parable which illustrates the Holy Trinity. Three completely distinct persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), just as your TV set has three quite separate colours: red, green, blue.

Take away any One member of the Trinity, and you slip into theological error; take away any one of the three colours, and you call out the TV repair engineer!

So -

It DOES matter that God is our Creator and Father - otherwise our whole life is merely a meaningless illusion.

It DOES matter that Jesus is God the Son, for otherwise His death is

Continued on next page

simply a human tragedy, with no promise of salvation or eternal life.

It DOES matter that the Holy Spirit is with us here and now, otherwise we are disconnected from God.

Yes it really does matter! Just as it is essential that a TV set can produce white by the equal intensity of all of its three colours. In fact, the more you think about it, the more it seems that the doctrine of the Trinity is far from being a complicated bit of theological nonsense, but is a sort of theological test-card, to make sure that we've got the right picture of God, without distortion.

The rewilding plan turning churchyards into 'living sanctuaries'

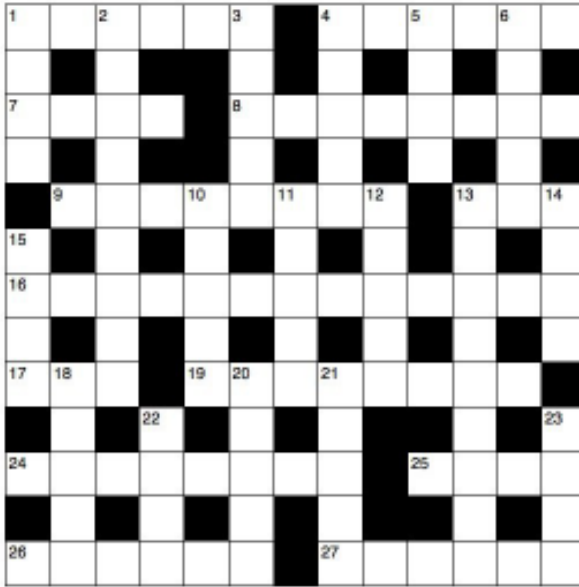
How can we encourage new life in our churchyards this year?

The Bishop of Norwich, the Right Revd Graham Usher, recently called for "land action plans" to be developed to encourage and enhance biodiversity across the estates owned by the C of E. The bishop urged that churchyards should be rewilded to become "places for the living, not just the dead".

With the C of E responsible for around 17,500 acres of churchyard alone (notwithstanding a further 70,000 acres of agricultural land owned by dioceses which is known as glebe land and is largely leased to tenant farmers), such a concerted push could have a dramatic impact on enhancing Britain's biodiversity.

There is another reason that churchyards have the potential to be such an oasis of wildlife across the country. As consecrated ground, they have been largely spared the ravages of industrial farming and development which has decimated Britain's flora and fauna elsewhere. Ancient trees have been left to grow and the earth left undisturbed for centuries.

Several national schemes exist to support the rewilding ambitions of church congregations. A charity called Caring For God's Acre provides an action pack for those considering rewilding consecrated ground, while since 2016 the Christian charity A Rocha UK has offered an "eco church" accreditation.



Across

- 1 One who owes money, goods or services (Isaiah 24:2) (6)
- 4 'A good measure, pressed down, – together and running over' (Luke 6:38) (6)
- 7 Continuous dull pain (Proverbs 14:13) (4)
- 8 This bread contains yeast (Amos 4:5) (8)
- 9 'But take heart! I have – the world' (John 16:33) (8)
- 13 And the rest (abbrev.) (3)
- 16 What Paul was accused of by Tertullus, the high priest's lawyer, in his trial before Felix (Acts 24:5) (13)
- 17 Rap (anag.) (3)
- 19 Founder of the Jesuits in 1534 (8)
- 24 'For where your – is, there your heart will be also' (Luke 12:34) (8)
- 25 The first word written on the wall during King Belshazzar's great banquet (Daniel 5:25) (4)
- 26 'We all, like sheep, have gone – ' (Isaiah 53:6) (6)
- 27 One was given in honour of Jesus in Bethany (John 12:2) (6)

Down

- 1 'The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the – hear, the dead are raised' (Luke 7:22) (4)
- 2 Conduct (Colossians 1:21) (9)
- 3 In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the body of a saint or his belongings, venerated as holy (5)
- 4 'Like a – of locusts men pounce on it' (Isaiah 33:4) (5)
- 5 Very old (Genesis 44:20) (4)
- 6 In Calvinist theology, one who is predestined by God to receive salvation (5)
- 10 How Nicodemus addressed Jesus when he visited him one night (John 3:2) (5)
- 11 Sea (Psalm 148:7) (5)
- 12 'I will – you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever' (Psalm 145:1) (5)
- 13 One of the groups of philosophers that Paul met in Athens, who disagreed with his teaching about the resurrection (Acts 17:18) (9)
- 14 Barred enclosure (Ezekiel 19:9) (4)
- 15 'Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in – with the Spirit' (Galatians 5:25) (4)
- 18 Cares (anag.) (5)
- 20 Garish (Ezekiel 16:16) (5)
- 21 'So God said to Noah, "I am going to put – – to all people"' (Genesis 6:13) (2,3)
- 22 Just (2 Corinthians 6:13) (4)
- 23 'The – of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge' (Proverbs 1:7) (4)

Prayer for May 2024

Dear Lord,

May, the loveliest of months – and this year, as we welcome the blossom and the beauty of late Spring, we also welcome Your Holy Spirit afresh, as we celebrate Pentecost.

May we open our hearts to receive Your Spirit, as Your people did on that first Day of Pentecost. May we be filled and empowered and emboldened to witness to Your goodness and love.

May we be transformed by Him and reflect Your transforming grace to the broken world in which we live. May people who meet us ask, "What does this mean?" May they turn to You and hear You speaking in ways they can understand.

Without Your Holy Spirit we can do nothing. With Him living in us, we can do all things.

Come Holy Spirit, come to us, we pray,

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

By Daphne Kitching



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Historically, the Church of England has had its share of eccentric clergy. Even nowadays, hiding away in remote parishes, there are still some colourful clergy about. Clergy such as the elderly, Anglo-Catholic Uncle Eustace, who is incumbent in the small parish of St James-the-Least-of All, somewhere in Very Rural England. Eustace despairs of his nephew, Darren, who has become an Evangelical curate in a busy urban parish... and so he writes letters, to try and properly 'educate' Darren in parish life.

On the perils of building a kitchen in church

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

It never fails to amaze me how, in church life, an issue can suddenly become an Issue. In the last month, we have acquired an Issue: a proposal to convert a space at the back of church into a kitchen.

Inevitably, battle lines have been drawn and trenches dug. Attendance at church council meetings has soared and unofficial sub-committees meet in the car park after Services. It's obvious that feelings are running high, because people have become remarkably polite to one another.

Some who are wildly in favour see it as an opportunity of being able to leave the pews ten minutes early, in order to get ready for the rush for weak coffee and damp biscuits. I can already hear in my mind the final hymn being drowned by kettles being filled, biscuit tins opened, cups thunderingly placed on saucers, while the volunteers discuss the dress sense of others in the congregation in deafening whispers.

I was a little surprised to hear that Colonel Wainwright was all in

favour – until I realised that it would give him a place to totter into to read his newspaper once he got bored with my sermon, which usually seems to happen in the first minute. Naturally, smaller turf wars have broken out alongside the major battle. There is conflict about whether we should get new crockery, what colour carpeting tiles would look right – and most importantly of all, who will take charge of the coffee rota.

Others are totally against the project: the treasurer dreads the thought of signing yet more cheques, the churchwardens worry about removing pews which have quietly hidden the dry rot, and the theologically angst-ridden agonise about the fact that St Paul never mentioned coffee after Sabbath worship.

Naturally, I encourage all sides, especially if it will bring any possibility of progress to a halt. I proposed bringing in flasks of coffee, thus stopping anyone being able to escape before the end of the Service; I suggested drinks being brought to people in the pews, thus ruining the Colonel's hopes of finding a safe haven; I organised a group to study High Priestly attitudes to refreshments in the Temple in Jerusalem in Leviticus.

I am sure that by the time all these groups have come up with their conclusions, we will have safely moved on to fight the next Issue.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

Always remember . . .

There are no strangers in our church –
just friends you haven't met yet.

Supporting people in trouble

Brothers and sisters, ... Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. (Galatians 6 1-3)

I am always interfering, in situations where I should not. Sorry, but I do. It is probably because of the job I do, that I want to fix things. Christians naturally want to help others. Churches are loving communities, and we want to do the best for each other.

Sometimes supporting others can be difficult. Some people are easy to help. They know what the problem is and what help they need.

Others are very demanding and always need help. They go from person to person asking for support and do not always follow advice. Then there are those who would never ask for help. They battle on and get exhausted and struggle on their own.

Probably the best helper is the person who can listen and not judge and guide the burdened to find their own answers. Often the person who is best at helping others is the one who has experienced life's ups and downs themselves. We can support others by:

Listening and keeping confidences.

Looking out for someone to make sure they are ok.

Respecting their choices even if we do not agree.

And, best of all, praying to know what to say and when to be quiet.

St Paul reminds us that we should bear each other's burdens, and no-one is expected to carry some things by themselves. The law of Christ that Paul was referring to was the New Commandment Jesus gave... that we love one another.

So, I will carry on trying and sometimes failing to fix things. You never know, I might make things better one day!

Many people will be surprised when Jesus comes again – but nobody will be mistaken. - Anon

The U in JesUs

Before U were thought of or time had begun,
God even stuck U in the name of His Son.

And each time U pray, you'll see it's true
You can't spell out JesUs and not include U

You're a pretty big part of His wonderful name,
For U, He was born; that's why He came.

And His great love for U is the reason He died.
It even takes U to spell crUcified.

Isn't it thrilling and splendidly grand
He rose from the dead, with U in His plan?

The stones split away, the gold trUmpet blew,
and this word resUrrection is spelled with a U.

When JesUs left earth at His upward ascension,
He felt there was one thing He just had to mention.

"Now go into the world and tell them it's true
That the love I have shown is not just for U."

So many great people are spelled with a U,
Don't they have a right to know JesUs too?

It all depends now on what U will do,
He'd like them to know,

But it all starts with U.

*The Spirit is not given to make Bible study needless,
but to make it effective. - J I Packer*

Readings for May

The readings are the ones we will use in church and online.

5th May 2024 – Morning Service -
Luke 11 v 1–13

5th May 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 98 & 1 John 5 v 1–6

9th May 2024 – Ascension Day -
Acts 1 v 1–11 & Luke 24 v 44–end

12th May 2024 – Morning Service -
James 5 v 13–18 & Matthew 26 v 36–46

12th May 2024 – Evening Service -
Ezekiel 36 v 24–28 & John 17 v 6–19

19th May 2024 – Morning Service -
Acts 2 v 1–21 & John 15 v 26–27, ch 16 v 4–15

19th May 2024 – Evening Service -
Acts 2 v 1–21 & Romans 8 v 22–27

26th May 2024 – Morning Service -
Ezra 8 v 15–36 & Luke 18 v 9–14

26th May 2024 – Evening Service -
Isaiah 6 v 1–8 & John 3 v 1–17

Humility is the hallmark of wisdom – J Collier

CROSSWORD ANSWERS
ACROSS: 1, Debtor; 4, Shaken; 7, Ache; 8, Leavened; 9, Overcome; 13, Etc; 16, Troublemaking; 17, Par; 19, Ignatius; 24, Treasure; 25, Mene; 26, Astray; 27, Dinner.
DOWN: 1, Deaf; 2, Behaviour; 3, Relic; 4, Swarm; 5, Aged; 6, Elect; 10, Rabbi; 11, Ocean; 12, Exalt; 13, Epicurean; 14, Cage; 15, Step; 18, Acres; 20, Gaudy; 21, An end; 22, Fair; 23, Fear.

The man who created Father Brown

The British writer G K Chesterton was born 150 years ago, on 29th May 1874, in Kensington, West London. A novelist, short story writer, philosopher and critic, he was best known for his Father Brown stories, popular now through their adaptation for television.

He thought of himself as a journalist with good reason, composing 30 years of weekly columns for the *Illustrated London News* and more elsewhere, but he was a prolific writer in many areas, writing 100 books and contributing to 200 others, as well as composing short stories, essays and poems and creating Father Brown.

He was a tall man who weighed in at over 20 stone, and he was notoriously absent-minded once contacting his wife, Frances, to say: "Am at Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" Unsurprisingly, he did a great deal of writing while waiting at stations.

He was a deep thinker, usually getting the better of the many prominent men he argued against, but almost invariably retaining their goodwill, since he was a genial and witty opponent.

An "orthodox Christian" who espoused Roman Catholicism (moving from High Anglicanism) because he felt it was the best resistance to fads of the age, he was against both socialism and capitalism, materialism, determinism and "spineless agnosticism". He fought for freedom and justice.

Chesterton never went to college but did attend art school. Extremely quotable and read now by too few people, he composed some near-perfect lines, concluding for example that "the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried".

Before Christ sent the church into the world, He sent the Spirit into the Church. The same order must be observed today. - John R W Stott.



Seeking Slowworms

There's often a secret to be found within a churchyard or cemetery, slowworms may be living there, rarely seen by visitors as they tend to hide within the vegetation and don't emerge to bask in the sun like other reptiles. Slowworms are not particularly slow and they are not worms, neither are they snakes. They are actually lizards without legs and, when warmed up and active can be pretty nippy! Slowworms hunt in hidden places such as compost heaps, thick vegetation at the base of a wall or hedge and within piles of logs or stones. They catch slower moving prey like slugs and can 'drop' their tails to escape predators, a characteristic of all lizards.

May is a good time to look for them and the easiest way to do this is to put out some pieces of old roofing material, about 50cm square. You can use corrugated tin, but this can have sharp edges, onduline is better and a supplier may give you some offcuts for free. Following a conversation with those who manage the site, place a few of these squares in areas that catch the morning sun and are away from paths, perhaps in rougher vegetation such as tussocky grass. Slowworms will go under the squares to warm up in the mornings before going out to hunt and may be there at any time of day in colder weather.

Check the squares about once a week, lifting one side carefully and looking underneath. Try and check between 8:00 and 10:00am for best results as this is when the animals are warming up. You may be rewarded by a slowworm and also many other creatures such as worms, beetles or woodlice. Why not take a quick picture as the square is lifted, before too much scurries or slithers off! It may take animals a while to find the squares so be patient, having more squares gives a better chance of seeing slowworms.

Churchyards and cemeteries are havens for reptiles and also amphibians such as frogs, toads and newts and we're collecting information to better understand just how important they are for these animals. Please take a photo using the iNaturalist app or let us know what you've seen via email if you don't use iNaturalist. You can keep checking for slowworms from April or May through to September.

Nature and science meet faith in stunning new Baptist-led films

God Saw That It Was Good is a four-part film series that aims to reconnect people with the wonder of the natural world and a sense of the divine within it - and inspire a renewed vision of creation care.

The four short films focus on environmental issues around themes of coasts, sky, trees, and life, weaving stunning visual imagery with a narrative entwining science and faith.

They are written and presented by the Revd Dr Dave Gregory, a Baptist minister and former meteorologist and climate scientist at the Met Office and European Weather Centre.

He says, "In our visual age, people are captivated by stunning images of our world and cosmos seen in nature and science programmes streamed to our TVs and phones. They are entranced by the wonder they see, yet often left with a sense of mystery and asking is there more to know?"

"The *God Saw That It Was Good* films take people deeper in the wonder and mystery of the world. They enable viewers to encounter the wonder, playfulness, and connections in creation that science reveals, and through which God may be encountered."

Sudoku Solution

3	2	7	8	9	1	4	5	6
9	1	4	6	5	3	8	2	7
5	8	6	7	4	2	9	1	3
4	6	9	2	7	5	1	3	8
7	5	2	3	1	8	6	4	9
1	3	8	4	6	9	2	7	5
6	9	5	1	2	7	3	8	4
2	7	3	9	8	4	5	6	1
8	4	1	5	3	6	7	9	2

Places of Welcome

Place of Welcome is an open invitation to come and join us for a cup of tea or coffee and a friendly chat every Tuesday morning. You are equally welcome if you just want to spend a few moments of quiet in church alone.

We also have our Knit & Natter group at the same time – 10-12 noon every Tuesday.

Life Groups

There are now five Life Groups which are meeting on a regular basis. It would be good to think we could increase the number meeting, so if you would like to be involved, please speak to Revd Gayle in the first instance.

Telephone Prayer

If you would like any prayer ministry via the telephone, please contact Gayle on 07545 657 636, or Liz Corbett on 01543 370162.

Magazine Articles

If, in your reading, you find an article that you think bears repeating in the parish magazine, please let us know and we will try our best to include it in a future issue.

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