

INSPIRE

NOVEMBER 2025



**The monthly magazine
for the Parish of
St John The Baptist, Frome**

**The parish of Frome Selwood
in the Frome Local Ministry Group**

Vicar	Rev. Seamus Hargrave rev.seamushargrave@stjohnsfrome.com 01373 433933
Reader	Janet Caudwell 01373 461176
Reader	Rosemary McCormick 01373 451055
Group Clergy	Revd Liz Dudley (CC/SM) 01373 473249 Revd Ian Snares (HT) 01373 462586
Administrator	Karolyn Curle 01373 462325 Email: admin@stjohnsfrome.com
Safeguarding officer	Steve Smith 01373 454083 / 07548 250805 Email: smith.steve.71@icloud.com
Churchwardens	Neil McCormick 01373 451055 Sky Dale 07464 603571
Lay chair	Peter Connew 01373 474158
PCC Secretary	Angela Pater Email: pccsec@stjohnsfrome.com
PCC Treasurer	Christine Holland 01373 461604
Choir Leader	Rosemary McCormick 01373 451055
Sacristy Team	Margaret Veakins 01373 473031
Tower Captain	Matthew Higby 07971 441042
Flowers	Elaine Gilburt 01373 466072

November 2025



Rosemary's licensing day—see pages 5-6

The Vicar's View

November: the nights are getting longer, the days colder and the trees now look completely bare. The Church too matches this increasing starkness of the season, by setting aside November as our time – for one day – to rejoice in all the saints but – for the rest of the month – to remember and pray for the dead. And so, to mark this sombre time, I am leaving you all to go on holiday!

But don't think that my travels will rescue me from the remembrance of the dead. Quite the opposite in fact. In Holland, I expect to be doing quite a lot of it – it is almost impossible not to. A fascinating fact about Holland is that, for people of any status, the church itself was the graveyard. In St John's we are used to seeing the odd person buried under the floor, but in Holland it was a recurring theme through the centuries, and there is usually no stone on the floor that is not a grave. Every inch is filled, often with three or four generations of people. Because of this constant interring of the great and the good into churches it's said that it became normal, during the summer, for many of church services to be held outside the church because the smell coming from under the church's floors would be unbearable.

I thought about this the last time I was at a Eucharist in Holland. As I went up for communion, every step I took I was walking over the grave of a centuries-gone soul; as I lined up for the altar, there were the dead; I received communion standing on the dead. Their witnesses, their memories, literally made the path for me to the altar as gravestone upon gravestone formed the paving slabs of the church floor. Standing there, I received what they in their turn had received several centuries ago – different people, but the same sacrament.

For some this might seem quite macabre, but for me there was an intense beauty in it. Jesus reminded the Sadducees that 'they were not still dead, for God is the God of the living and not of the dead' (Matt 22:32) and that is the great miracle, the holy truth of our faith, but especially of our worship, that in as much as God is present, and the Body of Christ is received at each Eucharist, we have a communion, not just with God, but the saints and the dead of all the

ages. If to be baptised is to be grafted into the body of Christ, then to receive Christ's body and to make up his body as the community of the Church is necessarily to have a union with those through all time and space who are also grafted into his body and life, for to share in Christ's body is to share in his life.

It is for this reason that most of our prayers and remembrances of the dead this year will be in the context of the Holy Eucharist. It is why most Eucharistic prayers have a special remembrance of, or prayer for, the dead, because the Eucharist is not a personal devotion but a corporate gift and everlasting communion or covenant across the universe that unites us with the people of all ages, because we get to share in the one God who holds and sustains all times and places, the whole universe in being.

There is a habit in our society to keep death – even the thought of death – at arm's length: churches are no longer built with cemeteries – we have cast them out beyond the town limits; people are scared even to use the words 'dead' and 'died', preferring ever more floral and vapid euphemisms that make it hard to tell whether the soul in question is in God or the toilet. Even our language is used to try and put barriers between us and the contemplation of finality – there seems to be an idea that death is too cruel and miserable a force even to truly name, and yet the challenging, strange, and even paradoxical teaching of Christianity is that death is not miserable or to be feared at all. What impressed the Romans most was the willingness of Christians to embrace death – not fearing it but seeing it as an opportunity. They believed, as we do to this day, that death is a more true and real form of life than the present, because in death we are able to be with God free from the limitations that sin and narrowed vision put upon us. We see God fully and find our true selves as we finally understand what it is to be made in God's image and likeness, because we finally see God's full image. For us who measure everything in time, death seems like a tragic and all encompassing loss, but for the God who is beyond time and space, death is a new way, a state of being, one that draws us unto a deeper union with him.

I encourage us all to think more deeply about death in this month, to pray for our departed, to rejoice in their memories – not for a love of the macabre but to renew in us what is our fundamental hope: that in Christ death has been conquered by true life, and that we, with all the departed, are on a pilgrimage back home, of which death is a necessary step. Death is not a loss but a gain, and that is a message of hope that I think a great many people are needing to hear.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Seamus Hargrave



A new Reader writes

After all the studying, the essays, the tutorials and the residential weekends it has happened – I am licensed and officially a Reader. I should like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who have supported and encouraged me over the past two years, as well as making the journey to Wells on a wet and windy Saturday afternoon to

be part of the licensing service. It was a very memorable weekend, and for me personally the highlights were:

- ♦ The Bishop's 'charge', when all those of us about to be licensed gathered in the Bishop's Chapel and he spoke to us about our future ministry. He urged us to 'be subversive' – which was very similar to something we were told at our very first residential ministry weekend, two years ago, when we were advised that the role of a Reader is to 'be disruptive'.
- ♦ Gathering on Saturday morning at the Retreat Centre for a quiet service of Holy Communion before we returned to the Cathedral.
- ♦ The moment in the Cathedral Undercroft when we made our declarations before the Bishop,
- ♦ Being anointed by the Bishop.
- ♦ Arriving back at St John's to the warm greetings of so many friends and family who had gathered to share tea and cake.

And then on Sunday morning I was 'Introduced' officially to the congregation and put firmly 'in my place' by Janet – who would have known that she had such a firm grip?

But what next? In many ways the Licensing service might be seen as the 'End of the Beginning' as I now have to define my ministry. One of the joys of being a Reader is that one has a certain freedom to choose what our ministry will be. I realise that I am very blessed to be working alongside both Seamus, who is very supportive of Lay Ministry (which sadly cannot be said of all Parish Priests), and Janet, who is in every respect an inspiration and excellent role-model. In many ways you will see me continuing to do more of what I do



already: leading the choir on Sundays and planning the music for services; a role which I am already beginning to grow with the development of the 'Occasional Choir' for monthly Choral Evensong, as well as planning for the creation of a Children's Choir early in 2026. You are likely to hear me preaching more frequently and leading more services. Behind the scenes I am already very involved in the development of the new service booklets, which we hope to have ready for Advent Sunday, and I am advised that now I am licensed I am entitled to a seat at PCC meetings.

It is a real privilege to have become part of the Ministry Team here at St John's, and I pray that I shall be serving you all for many years to come: in the words of the licensing service itself: With the help of God, I will.

Rosemary McCormick

Confirmation Retreat October 2025

The sun was shining as we arrived at Great Elm Church in the morning of Thursday 23rd October for the Confirmation Retreat. For the previous six weeks we had been meeting regularly at the Vicarage on a Tuesday evening – the four confirmation candidates together with a wider group of people who were interested to learn more about faith and what it means to be confirmed. For those of us who, like me, were confirmed a long time ago (50 years + for some of us!), it was very helpful to be reminded of the commitment we make as Christians when we come forward for this rite of passage which admits us into full membership of the church.

The Retreat Day was one of worship and reflection, punctuated by tea and coffee breaks which afforded the opportunity for more informal conversations. Seated in the ancient box pews of St Mary Magdalene's Church, we opened with a service of Matins, which was followed by a session when we explored a passage from the book of Romans. After a brief introduction to Paul's epistles, we read together some verses from Chapter 6 which were to be one of the readings in our subsequent Eucharist service. We were given time to discuss the text, especially those words and phrases that had spoken to us personally, and then we spent a short time silently meditating on what we had learned.

After the Eucharist service we moved down the hill to Jackdaws, which was to be our base during the afternoon. Lunch was followed by an informal question and answer session, before we all paired up for our 'Emmaus Walk', a chance to explore some of our beautiful surroundings as we talked to each other. On our return to Jackdaws, Seamus had set up stations for a Service of Reconciliation, and the afternoon closed with a return to St Mary Magdalene Church for a Celtic-style Evening Worship.

I think we all valued the opportunity to take a step back from our busy daily lives and spend some time in quiet prayer and reflection with each other. I should like to thank all those people who made it possible, especially the churchwardens of St Mary Magdalene Church and the staff at Jackdaws, especially our own administrator, Karolyn, for their hospitality.

Rosemary McCormick



Photo: Rosemary McCormick

Fashionable Faith

The Fashionable Faith event was unexpectedly fabulous! I'm sure that Seamus knew that it would be, but come on – nothing like this has ever been put on in St John's, to my knowledge.



In the past, at two of Elaine's Flower Festivals, we have been privileged to explore many of the astounding vestments which usually lie hidden from public gaze in their wooden cases, lovingly shrouded in paper and white cloth.

But never before have we seen members of the congregation strolling nonchalantly through the church is an astonishing array of increasingly elaborate chasubles and copes. And hats – don't forget the hats!

All of this accompanied by an entertaining and informative narration by our compère, Seamus.



This all involved an enormous amount of preparation: the gathering and setting up of the vestments in the impressive exhibition which filled the church during the morning, the extensive printed information, the rehearsal of the models who were amazingly assured.

Already people are saying, 'We must do this again!' I think that Seamus and his team will require a long rest before they tackle it again, but we do hope they will.

There were a number of church people in the audience who probably knew a bit of the history and significance of everything (a bit). But there were a number of others drawn in by the promise of something unusual, rather



exotic, and they were not disappointed!

Did you see one of our Funeral Directors gloriously attired in the magnificent Funeral Cope? A member of the congregation has requested that Seamus wears it if he takes her funeral!

Thank you to Seamus for inspiring everybody; to his dedicated team who worked so hard too, Elaine, Margaret and Dinah; to everyone else who rallied round on the day; and finally to the elegant models who brought it all alive.

Janet Caudwell



Photos: Angela Pater



FROME HERITAGE CIC
Sharing the past, engaging the community



“A Weekend to Remember” for all generations

**Marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the
Second World War 1945-2025**

A weekend of theatre, talks, walks and film bringing alive the
history of Frome during
“A War to Remember 1939-1945”

Friday 7th November at 7.30pm

**“Festival of Remembrance including Frome Town Band,
Service Standards and Drumhead Ceremony”
Memorial Theatre, £10 plus £2 booking fee**

Saturday 8th November

**9.45am, 12.45pm and 4.30pm, WW2 Grave Walks
11am Reading WW2 Role of Honour, Memorial Theatre
2.30pm WW2 film archive, Assembly Rooms
7pm Cinema Night showing iconic 1942 film
“In Which We Serve” Memorial Theatre, £5**

Sunday 9th November at 10.55am

**Parade and Act of Remembrance,
Memorial Theatre**

**Tickets from Memorial Theatre
<https://fromememorialtheatre.org.uk/>
Telephone: 01373 462795**

Christmas Shoeboxes

Thank you to the industrious and creative team of 'Christmas Elves' who joined the Art Workshop in church on 20th October. Together, a fantastic 23 boxes were individually decorated with collage, paint, glitter and a bottomless vat of PVA glue.



A bottomless teapot was also put to good use during this session, with some delightful biscuits providing inspiration and fuel.

We are planning another workshop after half-term to fill these boxes for various age groups, including adults. Please see the weekly notices for these dates and times – all are welcome to help.

It is a lovely, generous activity for someone to prepare their own or their family's shoebox completely, but it can be quite challenging practically, so to help everyone to have a chance to participate, we will be happy to accept donations of the following items and similar, to pack into boxes:

- ◆ Toiletries: soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, razors, flannels, face cloths, sponges, deodorants, brushes, combs, makeup, baby/wet wipes
- ◆ Hats, gloves scarves, jewellery, hair accessories.
- ◆ Toys and treats: cars/vehicles, dolls/teddies, wrapped sweets in bags/packets, colouring/drawing books, stickers, small toys, jigsaws/puzzles, pencil cases, pens, notebooks, erasers, sharpeners, rulers

Donations of £4 per box for onward transport costs to Salisbury and then into south-eastern Europe will also be gratefully received—either by us to send with boxes or as online payments directly to the

House of Opportunity Charity through their website. If you choose this latter route, please let us know so we can reconcile with the whole St John's consignment.

Some things to note:

- ◆ Chocolate and knitted toys are not accepted for safety reasons or customs restrictions. All soft toys need to have a CE label and so be compatible with European Standards. A teddy purchased from a shop with appropriate labelling is acceptable.
- ◆ Sweets - chewy/jelly/Haribo style – are acceptable but must be in date and sealed in the proper manufacturer's packaging - loose sweets scattered in boxes are not customs compliant, and they can melt and spoil the box contents. Asda usually do affordable small bags.
- ◆ Hand-knitted hats and scarves are acceptable.
- ◆ Boxes for older adults are welcome - but they should be labelled to say this as the contents may differ considerably from those suitable for a younger adult.
- ◆ Blankets and large toys are not accepted – customs restrictions again.
- ◆ Household tools for adults are acceptable but should be sent in their original retail packaging - e.g. scissors.
- ◆ Please avoid war toys - so no knives, toy guns, bags of soldiers, etc.
- ◆ Liquids – such as drinks, shampoos – cannot be included.

Things to consider when preparing boxes:

Variety – warm things to wear, practical items, tasty treats, fun items.

Condition – new, in good working order

Quality – Ask yourself, 'Would I be happy to receive it?'

Category - We always need more boxes for older boys and men!

Please bring in boxes to St John's by Sunday 23rd November. The House of Opportunity will be collecting on Monday 24th. Distributions normally take place in SE Europe in December.

Alison Henderson

Christmas Lunch

Saturday December 13th

Bennett Centre

12.00 for 12.30pm

2 course meal *

Tea & Coffee

* Vegetarian option



Bring
Your
Own
Bottle



Tickets £15 (£10 for a child under 10)

available from Peter Connew 01373 474158,
bennettbooking1@gmail.com or from Mandy or Peter in church

News from other churches

St Katharine's, East Woodlands

The church looked beautiful for the Harvest Festival on October 5th. We even had sheaves of corn in front of the altar (thanks to re-thatching in Lullington). Our organist, Diana, has broken her collarbone but she still came to choir practice and played hymns on the piano left handed. We are grateful to organists Paul Eyre and Daniel Leach-Wilkinson for playing at services and to Nick Cotterell for helping with our choir's four part harmony.

On 19th October in our Holy Communion service, Olivia Ruth Hallsworth is to be baptised. Her parents are Helen and Simon and her grandpa is Bill Randall.

East Woodlands Village Hall

Pop up pub - 7.00 pm onwards on Friday, 7th November and Friday, 5th December.

Tuesday, 9th December 10.30 am to 12 noon - Coffee Morning

Pam Chapman

And in the churchyard ...

The Tuesday morning gardening group have been planting daffodil bulbs – and also meeting the Venerable Anne Gell on her recent visit to the parish.



Meanwhile Ian and Phil, who are usually to be seen working in the forecourt on Wednesday mornings, ventured into the southern churchyard instead last week in order to rescue some of the gravestones that had become completely covered in ivy.



Advent Group

To help us explore Christian faith at Christmas, Rev. Seamus will be hosting an advent group called **Icon**.

Each week we will examine a film or other art form, such as music or sculpture, and explore how these encourage or challenge our Christian faith and draw us more closely into examining the good news of Christmas.

Every Thursday at 7pm in the vicarage, from 27 November to 18 December Refreshments provided.



The Parable of the Dishonest Manager

Eds: Thank you to Rev Andrew Alden who was our visiting preacher on 21st September when two of our readings were

Amos 8: 4-7 and Luke 16: 1-13

He has kindly allowed us to publish his sermon here.

I love this gospel reading in Luke. It is one of those outrageous stories that Jesus told that have Bible commentators performing all sorts of contortions to try to explain why Jesus has said something shocking. It is one of those moments when a quotation from *The Life of Brian* seems apt ... 'He's a very naughty boy!' And it is a shocking story! Jesus seems to commend a dishonest steward for cheating his master!

This is a pattern when you look at the teaching of Jesus. He was outrageous! You might think of the parable of the persistent widow. That is a parable promoting persistent prayer - the constant rapping on heaven's door, not giving up. The parable says that the widow is only heard by the judge - who in the parable would most obviously be taken as a representation of God - because she bothers him so much that he wants to shut her up. And so he gives her justice. How outrageous to liken God - the tender Father who knows all your needs before you ask and who counts the hairs on your head - to such a one as that judge! Or the story of the workers in the vineyard - where those who work for only an hour get exactly the same wages as those who break their backs from early morning through the heat of the day and don't give up before clock off time! How unjust, we cry!

At times I think we take Jesus far too seriously! He was very funny! We read the story of the plank in the eye with a straight face - we're in church, it's what we are supposed to do! But were you to draw a picture of that, it would be very funny! Or the camel trying to get through the eye of a needle. We get ourselves into all sorts of theological knots trying to explain that one away - but what if Jesus was being funny, but to make a serious point? Maybe we miss the serious point - because we don't take the humour.

And that, I think, is what Jesus is doing here: he tells us an outrageous story to provoke us to a deeper love and commitment to him.

This parable is addressed to the disciples - you see that in verse 1. Much of the previous chapter is addressed to the crowd about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. But here Jesus instructs his disciples - which today is us! So we should pay particular attention!

So - what is the story? The manager or steward has been accused before his master of fraud. Squandering the master's property. Presumably taking some of the profit for himself, or adding a fee or interest and making the bills too big. The master's business partners bring a complaint - presumably with enough evidence that he decides straight away to sack the manager. Clearly there were no disciplinary procedures in Jesus' day! So the master asks the manager to present his final accounts before he is dismissed. The manager, realising that his time in this employment is up, considers his options:

I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'd be too ashamed to beg -
but I am great at being deceitful!

The manager shows his true colours at this point by going to his master's debtors and reducing their bills on official headed paper! So everybody loves him! He has made friends with people who might help him in the future. Even the master commends him for defrauding him! Because by doing so he showed he was a shrewd and wily dealer who understood that friendship and personal connection were more powerful than business.

What are we to make of this? Jesus goes on in explanation to challenge the children of light - which is you and me, brothers and sisters - because he says that in comparison with the children of this age we don't know how to live in the material world in such a way that we make friends with those that really matter. In the story the one who really mattered was the owner. He is the one with the power - in this case with material resources that meant that he could offer the manager a job - and take it away when he decided to. But the manager has no personal connection with the master. He showed no love for his master. He defrauded him! Their relationship was

purely a functional business relationship, and the manager was interested only in his material comfort. And so was quite content to improve his lot at his master's expense.

Who is it who counts most for us? Who should we be making friends with? Most of you will know the Sunday school answer – it is always 'Jesus'! The Lord Jesus who will welcome us into an eternal home once our days here are ended. Jesus is saying, make your friendships with Him now, using all the resources of the material world to do so. We are called not to be business servants of the Lord God - doing what we have to to get by. No! We are called to love God, to have a personal connection with him - indeed to be passionate in the expression of that love.

The church I ministered in before moving to Frome had a large number of people in recovery from addiction who attended services. When they came to know the Lord Jesus for themselves they became very passionate. After one morning eucharist in which we had declared in word and sacrament our unity as a body, a fight broke out in the car park. As you might imagine, some of these recovery guys were big guys – proper gym bunnies, gorillas! So they were really going for it. Once we managed to get them to stop - I didn't do it single handedly I hasten to add! – we calmed them down and tried to work out what was causing the problem. Eventually one of them spoke, 'He's not taking the Gospel seriously!' – which was hysterically ironic!

Now that is not how I recommend expressing your passion for the Lord. No! But taking the good news seriously and expressing that with true worship is one way we can use the material things that God has given us to develop our friendship with him. The reading we had from Amos made it clear that God hates hypocritical worship where we attend a ritual perhaps to be seen or out of duty – that is a business relationship where we are serving our own ends at God's expense. But that doesn't mean that attending services is wrong. It is very helpful – and indeed right – when done from a place of grateful devotion to God for all he has done for you.

If I may speak into your worshipping life here at St John's – and particularly to those of you who worshipped here under the previous incumbent and through the interregnum. I understand that your worshipping life is very different now from what it has been, and that can cause confusion. But you can worship through different traditions, and I think there is little that is right and wrong in worship – other than the inclination of the heart: am I here from love for Jesus and a genuine desire to know him and his way better. For my part, I love attending worship here because I am transported through the ritual, drama, colour, smell and movement to an experience of something 'beyond' – something 'other'. In an era in the world marked by darkness, despair, grasping selfishness and hopelessness, I need to glimpse another world to be strengthened and sustained for the week ahead; to believe that there is glory around the corner, to have hope to carry on.

So if you are questioning approaches to worship, I'd encourage you to go with it; to go a bit deeper this year in your personal commitment to the way of Jesus expressed in worship. Autumn is a great time to start something fresh, it's like the start of term! Perhaps spend some of your time – which is precious I know, to some of us more precious than money – to attend a midweek service or join a team. I've spent a couple of lovely Tuesday mornings with your gardeners! What a wonderful group and a lovely experience. There is a choir, opportunities as a server and other areas for service. The churchwardens would love to hear from you.

If you are new and still finding your way, arrange to have a conversation with Seamus. You will come away inspired and encouraged and with some ideas about how you might grow in your faith.

And all of you, invite family and friends. Church festivals – harvest and remembrances such as All Saints or Remembrance Sunday – are great opportunities.

And did you notice I didn't even mention Christmas!

Rev Andrew Alden

SERVICES at ST JOHN's – NOVEMBER 2025

Regular weekly services in November

Sundays

8.45am Online service via Zoom – contact admin for link & code

10.00am Choral Eucharist*

*Sun 2 Nov: Requiem Mass - All Souls Day

*Sun 9 Nov: Remembrance Sunday

*Sun 30 Nov: Advent Sunday

5.00pm Evening worship in the Lady Chapel:
Week 1, Sun 2 Nov: service starts at 4pm—see below
Week 2: Benediction and Evening Prayer
Week 3: Come and Sing Evensong
Week 4: Holy Hour
Week 5: Flexible Fifth

Mondays

8.45am Morning Prayer in the Ken Chapel

Fridays

12.30pm Lunchtime Eucharist in the Lady Chapel

Saturdays

5.00pm Evening Eucharist in the Lady Chapel
Sat 1 Nov: All Saints Day

Additional services in November

Sun 2 November 5pm Reading of Names and Compline

Thurs 20 November 7pm Confirmation Service
with Bishop Michael

Tues 25 November 12.30pm Eucharist - St Catherine

DIARY DATES – NOVEMBER 2025

November

Sat	1	9am	United Prayer at St John's
Sun	2	11.15 to 2pm	Cafe and Mini-market
Wed	5	6.30pm	<i>Inspired to Read</i> Book Club
Fri	7	7.30pm	Festival of Remembrance (see p 11)
Sat	8	Various	Remembrance events—see p 11
Sun	9	10.55am	Act of Remembrance at the Memorial Theatre
Tues	11	11am	Act of Remembrance
Thurs	13	2pm-4pm	Craft & Conversation
Tues	18	7pm	Rehearsal for Confirmation Service
Wed	19	7pm	PCC Meeting
Thu	20	7pm	Confirmation service
Fri	21	5pm onwards	Frome 'Light the Night' Lantern Parade
Sat	22	10am	Worship Committee Meeting
Tue	25	11am	Julian meeting
Thurs	27	2pm-4pm	Craft & Conversation
		7pm	Advent group 'Icon' starts
Fri	28	2pm	Hospital Service

December

Wed	3	6.30pm	<i>Inspired to Read</i> Book Club
Thu	4	7pm	Advent group: 'Icon'
Sat	6	9am	United Prayer at St John's
Sun	7	11.15 to 2pm	Cafe and Mini-market

St John's Café and Mini Market – 11.15am to 2pm

First Sunday of the month:

Sunday 2nd November & Sunday 7th December





Links in a Golden Chain 15 St Dunstan

We have recently learnt of the appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury. Our prayers are with her. One of her predecessors was a local man. Dunstan was born at Baltonsborough, near Glastonbury, and educated by the monks in what became the Abbey. He was ordained priest in 939, and through family connections he worked at the court of King Edmund. He was having difficulties with the King and was preparing to leave his service when the King's life was miraculously saved after a riding accident at Cheddar Gorge, and the King appointed Dunstan as Abbot of Glastonbury as a gesture of gratitude to God.

On taking up his new office Dunstan began to develop the monastery by enlarging the Saxon church and other monastic buildings. He also devoted himself to the renewal of monastic life in other parts of the kingdom after the destructive effects of the Viking invasions. In 960 he became Archbishop of Canterbury and was assisted in developing the church by other bishops who had been monks at Glastonbury – Beithwold, Athelwold and Ethelnoth. One wonders why these Saxon names have fallen into disuse in our land.

Dunstan encouraged the revival of learning, the liturgy, the decorative arts. and practical administration of churches and monasteries. He was skilled in all these fields. There is a story that he was working in the monastery forge when the devil appeared in the form of a voluptuous woman. Dunstan put him/her to flight with the red-hot tongs in his hand! He composed the coronation liturgy for the crowning of King Edgar at Bath Abbey in 959 and served kings Edmund, Edgar and Edward the Martyr. He died at Canterbury in 988.

The job of the Archbishop is a demanding one and involves the difficult blending of both spiritual and administrative leadership. Our thoughts for our new Archbishop might include prayer for her tasks in speaking to those who lead the nation, the King and all his ministers, all in public life.

Kevin Tingay

Prayers for the Dead

Praying for the departed has been a part of our faith since before Christ.

We see it practised in ancient Israel through the Second book of Maccabees (12:39-46). Maccabeus finds pagan amulets among his dead soldiers, which suggests that they had worshiped a pagan deity as well as the God of Israel, as a kind of insurance policy for going into battle. This deeply grieves Maccabeus as he knows, by their bravery and willingness to fight for Judea, that these soldiers have rightly earned their place with the just, yet their lack of a full trust in Jehovah must surely mean that when they died, they were not yet fully trusting in him, or ready to embrace him – and him alone. Maccabeus undertakes to have sacrifices offered for them, to make up for their mortal imperfections, trusting that this will somehow help their embrace of God in death and assist in their entry to heaven. The chapter of Maccabees concludes that prayers for the dead 'for those who fall asleep in godliness ... was a holy and pious thought'.

At the time of Jesus, therefore, the idea of praying for the departed was already well established and would have been a practice that Jesus encountered regularly. It survives in Judaism to this day.

Christian tombs for the first few centuries of Christianity would often have an instruction such as 'Let every friend who reads this pray for me.' And, indeed, there is still a custom among some to have their gravestone begin with the words 'Of your charity, pray for the soul of ...'

So, throughout Christian history, there has always been an understanding that the individual's journey, and life is not ended with death but goes on into the arms of God. The Christian belief is that in Christ, 'Life is changed but never ended', that 'God is love'. In Christ Love has conquered sin and death, which necessarily means that 'our relationships don't end'. To have ever shared in Love is to have shared in God, and where we might fall away, God does not; where we might be unfaithful, God remains steadfast.

Our love, then, even in the face of death, remains a full and steadfast link with us and the departed, no matter how damaged or neglected it might be. The Book of Job speaks about Job offering sacrifice for the sanctification of his sons (Job 1:5); the same principle is applied to the dead, in as much as our Christian hope is the assurance that Christ has entered into death, so that, even there we are not parted from him, neither are we left to destruction. Our souls are held safe until they reunite with our bodies in the Second Coming. And our love – our relationship with the dead, who are alive in Christ – remains a vehicle – a channel – through which prayer and love can continue to have an effect and meaning for the departed, just as it did for Maccabeus and Job.

Prayer for the dead then, becomes a way in which our desire for the wellbeing and happiness of those we love, and even those we do not, continues to add to God's work of drawing all people, living and dead, more closely into himself. It helps those who have died to move towards God as they see and feel our love for them carrying them to love's source. It keeps us in communion with the world beyond our earth, of heaven and directs our hearts to see our lives as something beyond the purely present here and now.

Another issue that perhaps is little talked of but nonetheless very relevant is how Christians cope with deaths of those with whom we have had a difficult or broken relationship. An emotionally distant father, an interfering mother, a former friend for whom we waited – too late – to reconcile. Death is difficult at the best of times, but when that death has robbed us of the chance to say or do things we know we ought to have said or done, then death can be the cause of some of our most bitter griefs. But, again, it is here that the Christian practice of prayers for the dead can give the healing and reconciliation that is Christ's mission and ministry in the world. The things we wish we had said still can be said; the things can still be done, though perhaps changed to suit this new transition in our relationship, because the dead are still alive in Christ. Our acts of love and care for the dead are never wasted but remain as exchanges of affections with those whose bond of love with us can never be severed, even by

death, and which prove our all encompassing hope that in Christ all things are one, and though death may keep those we loved from our sight for a time, it has not ended them or our love for them.

This November, a month set aside for praying for the dead, walk into a graveyard if you have the chance, and say a quick prayer for all the people there, or walk through and actually read one or two gravestones to pray, particularly, for the individuals interred there – the older the better as it is more likely that no one else prays for or remembers them. At about the age of 12, I remember going to the cemetery around our hamlet's chapel and being very moved by the grave of Thomas, Reese and Sarah, three children killed in a flu endemic in our community just over a century ago. To dwell on, or spend time with the long dead might, to some, seem morbid and depressing, but for Christians it is quite the opposite: it is an affirmation of our faith, our confidence that, though these people's bodies are awaiting the resurrection from the dead, they are yet very much alive in God and still form a real part of the Christian family and faith. Our small acts of kindness to the long dead reflect our own hope that, centuries after our own deaths, we might still affect and move the world, that the love given and received in our time will still echo through the years, that we are for ever bound to the earth, as to the heavens, and that there will come a time when God will unite heaven and earth, like our bodies and souls, and we will speak as easily and fully to the peoples of every age as we can now in our prayers for their souls.

Some traditional prayers for the dead:

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

May they rest in peace, and rise in glory. Amen.

Lord all pitying Jesus blessed, grant thy servants eternal rest. Amen.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice!

O let your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleadings.

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, LORD, who could stand?

But with you is found forgiveness, that you may be revered.

I long for you, O LORD, my soul longs for his word.
 My soul hopes in the LORD more than watchmen for daybreak.
 More than watchmen for daybreak, let Israel hope for the LORD.
 For with the LORD there is mercy, in him is plentiful redemption.
 It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. Amen.

Rev Seamus Hargrave

St John's Women's Group

We have enjoyed two meetings recently. Rev Seamus kindly gave us a talk about his journey through his life so far, framed around his selection of 'desert island discs'. It was a compelling and immersive experience. We heard about his Irish roots and how his family came to live in Wales, listening to Irish folk music from the Chieftains and an evocative rendering of a beloved Communion Hymn, 'Sweet Sacrament of Peace'. His school experiences and Sixth Form memories came with a dynamic track from Katie Perry. Memories of his role whilst a student as an altar server in Scotland were recalled with 'The Skye Boat Song', the final piece being 'Suo Gan', a gorgeous and emotional Welsh lullaby – Seamus remembered how this particular hymn was significant in the commemoration of a Welsh mining disaster, and this final tune also has a deep emotional connection for me.

Our second recent get-together was a trip out to East Woodlands Village Hall for a lively, talented fun performance by the famous Woodlanders – they were all in sparkling form.

Forthcoming events:

Christmas Party Monday, 15th December from 7.30pm.

All welcome. Hosted by Jan Scudamore at 56, Weymouth Road. Lifts available. Sign the list in church for the 'bring and share' buffet. We do a Secret Santa, with a prize for the best gift wrapping.

Local pub for Sunday Lunch, 11th January 2026.

If you would like to attend either or both of these events, please let me know before 13th December. Thank you. **Alison Henderson**

Archbishop Cherry



Two women archbishops: two different churches



Archbishop Sarah

I have been waiting for a female Archbishop all of my life; and now we have two within a couple of months. I am very pleased that the Church in Wales, under which I was baptised and confirmed, was the first to elect a woman as Archbishop of Wales: Cherry Vann. Now the Church of England has chosen Sarah Mullaly to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Church in Wales, which has been disestablished for over a century and runs itself with its own rules, had the easier job and has been more radical in its choice. Cherry Vann, Bishop of Monmouth since 2018, has been chosen as the 15th Archbishop of Wales. Archbishop Cherry was ordained deacon in 1989 and among the first women to be ordained as priests in the Church of England in 1994. She was Archdeacon of Rochdale, in the Diocese of Manchester, for 11 years.

What is surprising is that Cherry has been chosen, despite the fact that she is English, speaks little or no Welsh, and has been in a long relationship with Wendy Diamond, and they are now in a civil partnership. She was simply the best person for the job, with over 30 years of ministry work from parish to diocesan level. On her personal position she admitted:

I wasn't courageous enough to be 'out' when in England. I was petrified of being on the front page of the local newspaper. So, I kept very quiet and we lived a really private life. I got on with my ministry, and Wendy didn't feature in any respect. Once I got to Wales I said 'I can't go on like this anymore. I'm coming as any individual in a civil partnership. Now Wendy comes with me, she is very welcome within the churches that we go to.'

The Church of England has been slightly less radical in its choice. Bishop Sarah is married, with two children, and has lived all her life in the south of England. But her career has already been much wider than most bishops. She started life as a nurse and rapidly came to the

top, becoming the youngest ever Chief Nursing Officer of England before changing her career to become a full-time priest, one of the first female English Bishops in 2015 and rising quickly to become the Bishop of London in 2017. In a sense, she was the obvious choice, the right age, and with the required seniority.

There are many who are unhappy just because she is a woman. Social media sites have gone to town with their criticism. But none addresses the point that she is the most competent person for the difficult job required of our Archbishop. Her first response that she 'intends to be a shepherd' has set the right message. Although she is not known for her sound bites, her phrase that *'in an age of certainty and tribalism, Anglicanism offers something quieter and stronger'* will probably be much quoted in the future. As will her statement *'I am the bishop that I am because I have been a nurse'*.

Archbishop Sarah also inherits an international role which is now being challenged. This is not surprising to me as I see this as being a hangover from the British Empire. The Empire changed to a Commonwealth long ago, and it is time the Church of England realised this. Its international role is now being taken away by others; but it would have been better if this position had been given up voluntarily by Archbishops of Canterbury from 1960 onwards.

On safeguarding, Archbishop Sarah has spoken at length on *'the misuse of power within the Church of England'*. She has said it will not be easy, and she has promised to listen to survivors and the vulnerable. Archbishop Cherry has similar safeguarding and misbehaviour problems to cope with and has said *'I will work to bring healing and reconciliation, and to build a really good level of trust across the Church and the communities the Church serves.'*

Church structure is probably the most difficult problem for the new Archbishops, specifically addressing whether the current parish system can survive in its present form. The Church in Wales has already concluded that *'the current parish system is unsustainable'* in a 2012 report from a Review chaired by Lord Harris, the former Bishop of Oxford. Cherry Vann has followed the report's main

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recommendations in the Monmouth diocese, which has reorganised 121 parishes into 16 ministry areas. She has said: *'We encourage lay people to tackle ministries and to guide worship; it feels to me rather more like the body of Christ working together, compared with the hierarchical model where the clergy do the whole lot and the laity tag along and maybe help or perhaps resist.'*

Archbishop Sarah is inheriting similar problems, with more and more English parishes having a vacancy for longer and longer periods. Currently, general guidelines are published for dioceses to solve problems of matching demand for ministry against availability of clergy; in the longer run there may be a need to move towards Archbishop Cherry's ideas on more encouragement to lay ministries to guide worship. This will need both a top-down and a bottom-up approach: St John's is doing its bit from the bottom-up, with Rosemary's recent inspiring action in taking on her new role of Reader.

More generally, wider management solutions may be needed as towns continue to spread into the countryside. For example, are the current four town-centre churches with poor parking the best church buildings for a Frome stretching the 5 miles from Oldford to Tytherington?

Chris Lewis

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Porgy and Bess: the 'most religious' opera



Last Sunday evening I watched the 1993 film version of George Gershwin's American opera, *Porgy and Bess*. I found it very appropriate to watch this on a holy day. Despite all the history and criticism of the opera as *'a white man's false impression of southern black life'*, I had the feeling that it is a highly religious opera: the characters may steal, gamble, fight, take drugs, and cheat each other, but hardly 20 bars go by at any time before there is a Biblical reference, a moral message or a spiritual judgement.

As in a Greek Play, the mainly female chorus passes frequent comment on how the main characters (Porgy, Bess, Crown and Sporting Life) behave: there is a firm belief throughout that it is important to point out the misbehaviour of your fellows as a way to encourage them to behave better. The basic reference point is Biblical and a common understanding of how one should live life to *'serve the common good'*.

The disabled Porgy, the good-time girl, Bess, her lover, Crown, and the drug-dealer, Sporting Life – they all have a person relationship with God. The gist of the story is how Porgy tries, and temporarily succeeds, to rescue Bess from the snares of Crown and Sporting Life. However, the opera is also realistic, and, as in real life, characters have good intentions but fall by the wayside and cause sorrow and distress to others. In particular, you can see how the devil gets in the way as far as Bess and Sporting Life are concerned, and how the Christ-like figure Porgy suffers despite all his forgiveness and forbearance. We are reminded about the prayer *'to give and not to count the cost.'*

Porgy and Bess is an all-black opera set in Catfish Row, a working-class fishing community in Charlestown, South Carolina, in the USA in the early 1920s. To quote the composer: *'Porgy and Bess is a folk opera. Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I began work*

on the music, I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Therefore, I wrote my own spirituals and folk songs.' Many of these songs have since become popular in their own right and a 21st century listener would find it difficult to distinguish Gershwin's spirituals from the originals.

Gershwin spent some time in a seaside town in South Carolina to get the feel for how the people he was writing about actually spoke and sang. *Porgy and Bess* was first produced at the Carnegie Hall in 1935 and later ran on Broadway. It featured a cast of classically trained African-American singers—a daring artistic choice at the time. Anne Brown, who played Bess, was the first African-American to be admitted as a vocalist to the Juilliard School: at the age of only 20, she so impressed Gershwin that he extended the part of Bess and added her name to the title.

It is now a favourite opera and has been filmed many times. Many songs have become very familiar:

- ♦ 'Summertime', a beautiful lullaby, where the young mother, Clara, sings her baby to sleep by listing all the good things of summer life *'fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high: your daddy's rich and your mamma's goodlooking'*
- ♦ 'Bess, you is my woman now', a duet where Porgy and Bess think for a brief while that they will have a happy future together. In my younger days, I sang this as a duet to a full church at Christchurch, Wimbledon, in the interval of Captain Noah and his floating zoo. Very 1970s!
- ♦ 'It ain't necessarily so', where Sporting Life takes a satirical look at Biblical passages in the light of how they affect him personally.
- ♦ 'O Lawd, I'm on my way. I'm on my way to a Heavenly Land', when Porgy sets out on his trolley, in a forlorn hope of finding Bess who has left him for the high life of New York.

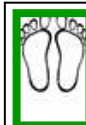
The opera has divided critics ever since the beginning. Gershwin insisted that only African Americans could sing in it when performed in America, which caused problems when it became a part of the

repertoire of the Metropolitan Opera. Some saw it as demeaning to African Americans; others used it to promote their own agendas. I prefer to see it as good music, reflecting its time and rising above such agendas: after all, nobody criticises *Madame Butterfly*, *Anna Karenina* or *Doll Tearsheet* for their immoral behaviour. They are just characters in good opera or literature.

But there are plenty of questions that come from a viewing of *Porgy and Bess*: I'd like to have a Sunday every month where the sermon text is not from the Bible: eg the preacher could discuss the parable of *Porgy and Bess*:

- ♦ What would we have done in Porgy's place – or in Bess's?
- ♦ Is Porgy being sensible to continue to try to rescue Bess, when it's obvious that she's not going to respond to him? Shouldn't he do more good if he stays where he is familiar with the environment?
- ♦ Is Bess to be blamed when she looks for a better life in a distant city? She might turn into a good woman, when removed from Catfish Row. Look at Mary Magdalene.
- ♦ Is Sporting Life to be blamed for poking fun at the Bible when it doesn't fit into his own lifestyle? Don't we all, to some extent, *'take dat gospel, whenever it's pos'ble, ... wid a grain of salt.'*?

Chris Lewis



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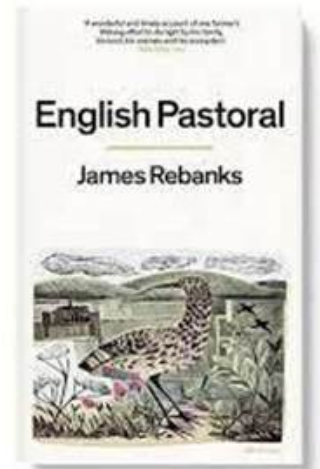
Inspired to Read

James and Helen Rebanks

I read a lot of books! Many of them I read and enjoy, then I put them down and move on to something else, but just occasionally I encounter a book that stays with me – I might almost say haunts me – and which I will return to frequently, with something new to discover in it every time. One such book is *English Pastoral* by James Rebanks. I wrote about it in this column after first reading it back in 2022, and it made such an impression that I was keen to include it on the schedule for our *Inspired to Read* book group here in church. At our October meeting I was delighted to find that everyone around the table had found it an inspiring read. I am not going to review it again, although I will urge anyone who is interested in environmental sustainability to read it. I will however quote something I wrote back in June 2022: *“From the first sentence, one realises that this is a book written by someone passionate about his subject and who uses words as an artist uses his palette. Every sentence is beautifully crafted, which makes reading it a pleasure.”*

Rebanks writes eloquently about how farming practices have changed over the past fifty years, and the impact of global markets and multi-national corporations have driven farmers into adopting unsustainable, environmentally damaging methods. On his own Lakeland fell farm he is trying to return to some of the former practices such as crop rotation, working in harmony with nature to ensure that the soil remains healthy and fertile. Janet referred to this in her reflection for our harvest festival, quoting from Leviticus 23:22:

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner.



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It was the following passage that struck me most keenly when I re-read the book recently: It has given me much to reflect on and pray about over the past month:

What will our descendants say of us, years from now? How will we be judged? Will they stand in the dust of a scorched and hostile world, surrounded by the ruins of all that exists today, and think that we, who could have saved the earth, were thoughtless vandals, too selfish or too stupid to turn back? Will the future know us as the generation who pushed everything too far, on whose watch the world began to fall apart, who had so little courage and wisdom that we turned away from our responsibilities? Or will they lie in the cool green light of the oak trees we planted and be proud of us, the generation that pulled things back from the abyss, the generation that was brave enough to face up to our own flaws, big enough to overlook our differences and work together, and wise enough to see that life was about more than shop-bought things, a generation that rose above itself to build a better and more just world. This is our choice. We are at a fork in the road.

While preparing for our book group meeting I came across a book on the shelves of a local charity shop written by Helen Rebanks, James's wife. In *The Farmer's Wife* she describes farm life from the point of view of the wife and mother, struggling to support her husband while still running a home and raising her family. While she does not share her husband's talent for poetic language, she describes the challenges that face many modern mothers, not least how to create a home and manage a household when income is tight. Within the book she includes lots of housekeeping tips and budget family recipes, but it was this paragraph that I thought summed up her experience:

These days with all six of us together in this farmhouse are so precious. They are the best days of my life. The chores always seem mundane, like things we should be escaping from, but what is life without work? It becomes empty and meaningless. Doing things like cooking, cleaning and errands to help my family is purposeful and important to me. Caring roles in our society are all too often invisible,

ignored in the crazy 'look at me' world we live in. Individuals are celebrated instead of families and communities. But no one does anything entirely on their own. ... I know that the small domestic things matter; they always have – my mum taught me that. Learning that the word 'mundane' has its roots in the Latin word 'mundanus' – of the world – made me see everything through a different lens. To me, caring for my family is, and always has been, the most important work in the world.

Not everyone is able to live off the land in a tight family group; many women have to combine a working life with raising a family, but are we in danger of becoming a generation that values material personal wealth to such an extent that we no longer care about the wider cost, the unsustainability of such a way of life?

In my present, reflective mood I feel drawn to a poem by the Welsh poet W.H. Davies, which I am sure is well known to many of you, as it encourages us to stand back, to take time, and be grateful for all the good things we have.

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

Inspired to Read Book Group will next meet at 6.30pm on Wednesday 5th November in church, (bring your own blanket!) when, in this her anniversary year, we will be discussing 'All things Austen'. If you would like to join us for this session please let Rosemary know: rosemarymccormick@hotmail.com

Our December meeting (Wed December 3rd) will be hosted by Dinah, and we will be sharing our thoughts on V.V. Ganeshanathan's novel *Brotherless Night*, winner of the Women's Prize for Fiction 2024 and described as 'A masterpiece of historical fiction'.

Rosemary McCormick



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10am SUNDAY SERVICE ROTA FOR NOVEMBER 2025

Date/Week	Readings	Readers	Prayers	Sidespersons	Chalice
Sunday 2 November All Souls Day Fourth before Advent	Isaiah 25:6-9 Romans 5:5-11 Luke 7:11-17	R McCormick S Caden	Rev Seamus	B Essex D Bardgett M Smitherman	C Holland
Sunday 9 November Remembrance	Job 19:23-27a Psalms 17:1-9 or 17:1-8) 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13- end Luke 20:27-38	B Essex E Gilbert	J Caudwell	M Veakins K Gurr	A Crook
Sunday 16 November Second before Advent	Malachi 4:1-2a Psalms 98 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 Luke 21:5-19	A Barr-Sim J Arnall-Culliford	R McCormick	J Bruges W Jennings	J Davies
Sunday 23 November Christ the King	Jeremiah 23:1-6 Psalms 46 Colossians 1:11-20 Luke 23:33-43	C Holland C Harrison	L Bushell	A Crook J Davies	C Holland
Sunday 30 November Advent Sunday	To be advised	N McCormick S Smith	A Crook	C Holland D Bardgett	A Crook
Sunday 7 December Advent 2	To be advised	N McCormick S Caden	Rev Seamus	B Essex K Gurr M Smitherman	J Davies
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Inspire magazine

Editors

Mandy Crook

01373 467828

Karolyn Curle

01373 462325

Email: amandacrook@blueyonder.co.uk

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