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Notices

Sunday Services for January are as follows:

Sunday 10th January, 10am, St Cuthbert's Kirklington, Morning Prayer

Sunday 24th January, 6pm, St Cuthbert's Bewcastle, Evening Prayer

At the time of writing, we have no idea what restrictions the Government will impose in the New Year. These services are planned on the basis that we will still be allowed to gather for worship, but there must remain a question over whether this will change. The services are therefore offered on a provisional basis, pending Government guidelines to keep people safe.

Funerals: maximum = 30. These will continue to be held at the graveside unless weather conditions dictate otherwise, in which case they will be held in the church. The maximum number of people that can attend is **30**, including the officiant, undertaker, and pallbearers. Memorial Services can be arranged at a later date so everyone can celebrate the life of the deceased. Please see the notice above concerning Sunday services in church for further details.

Weddings: maximum = 15. Weddings may take place but are restricted to a maximum of **15** present – including the priest, church staff, and bride and groom. Please see the notice above concerning Sunday services in church for further details.

Baptisms: maximum = church dependent (20-30). Baptisms (christenings) may take place and are now restricted to the maximum number a church can safely hold based on its COVID-19 risk assessment. Presently these are Bewcastle – 20; Stapleton – 30; Hethersgill – 20; Kirklington – 30. These numbers include the priest, church staff, parents, godparents and all children.

Prayer Resources. There is a series of 15-20 minute meditative Morning Prayer videos with a Celtic flavour that I have produced, focussed on the life of St Cuthbert. Please do use these as and when you feel able. They can be used on any day. A number of people have come back to me saying they find them 'calm, peaceful', and 'a joy to listen to'. They are available on the Bewcastle House of Prayer Website (www.bewcastlehouseofprayer.org.uk), where this newsletter can also be viewed or downloaded.

Bewcastle Book Swap This is a new facility for our area and you are invited to come and choose a book or two to read – then return it and change for another! Our own mini library: Wednesdays 10.30 – noon, Roadhead Village Hall – completely free of charge. Returned and donated books will be kept separate for a week before being reintroduced.

As the distribution of paper copies of the newsletter is severely restricted at present, we have arranged several pick-up points around the Benefice where you can collect a copy from a box. These are: Kirklington Church porch, Hethersgill Church porch, Stapleton Church, Bewcastle Church, Stapleton Parish Hall Porch, Smithfield Garage office, Garry Phillip's Garage, and Mary Phillips, 7 Sleetbeck. This Newsletter can also be downloaded from the following sites: www.Bewcastle.com/news-events, www.BewcastleHouseOfPrayer.org.uk/parish-notices

Deadline for the February 2021 issue is 1pm on Saturday 23rd January to Tricia Coombe, Damhead, Lyneholmford, Roweltown, CA6 6LQ. 016977 48833 or triciacoombe@damhead.me

" Good things " they say " come in small parcels." The ring that pledges love. The photograph or lock of hair so lovingly preserved. Often it will be that the smallest things tell the best stories.

I guess the same can be true of Community Life. What helps to make our community here so special are the infinite small acts of kindness which enrich it. The word of support when we are down. The smile. The hug. The telephone call, card or even cake! Such things are special, and speaking only for myself I have been deeply moved by being on their receiving end so often during these last few months. Thank you.

But then as I wrote this letter I found myself thinking how often that same principle applies to Faith too. Inevitably I suppose I am perceived as a " "Professional God Botherer". Someone who because I wear a dog collar apparently knows all the answers, and for whom God shines always as brightly as a 150 Watt Light Bulb! Wrong!

Like everyone else there is so much that I do not understand or can put into words. Like everyone else often I feel buffeted when things go wrong, life seems unfair and God far away. Like everyone else at the Crematorium or Graveside I find myself wondering what has happened to the person I loved, and where they might now be.

When this happens it's often the small things that help me to maintain faith - however dimly grasped or understood. Maybe a verse from a familiar hymn or Holy Writ will suddenly ring true. Other people's constant kindness. The silent witness of our churches with their pews polished smooth by generations of worshippers which simply seem to say "Hold on in there. It's okay to believe. ". To this end I have always thought that the Church should be a place which welcomes and nurtures a "spiritual shallow end" in which all can explore what they can and cannot believe, and still know that they are loved and that they belong.

I am not one for Spiritual Experiences but I have had just one which came close to it and remains with me still. Whilst in my twenties I was in Chartres Cathedral marvelling at its incomparable stained glass windows when by chance the organist climbed into his organ loft and began to play one of Bach's majestic Toccatas and Fugues, flooding the Cathedral with a paean of praise. Overcome, I remember just sitting down and muttering "If that be true all is well." Such a small event - but it spoke to me of Heaven.

Greatest of all small things though, for me, is that moment when I come to the altar rail and the priest places in my hand a tiny piece of bread with the words " The Body of Christ ". As I hold it in my cupped hands I dare to believe that I hold God Himself.

Our Beloved Lord once said that even if our Faith is no bigger than a mustard seed, with His help it can grow into a tree big enough for the birds of the air to roost in. Often it is through the tiniest things that God seems to speak loudest - helping us to discover that out of our equally tiny understanding we may know a Love which may be trusted and which will never let us go.

So beloved, whoever you are, be of good courage. As St Teresa once said " In the end all will be well and all manner of things shall be well."

With my love and prayers,

Bishop John