

Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit

Facebook Posts

December 2025

A thought from Rev Neil:

The group - some people who knew each other, and some strangers - sat in a circle introducing themselves. I had asked them to give their names and to say a little about themselves - to tell a part of their story. One by one they did so, sharing a little of what made them, them.

I was struck by how they defined themselves.



To a great degree they focussed on what had gone wrong: I was retrenched, I lost a child, I'm lonely - and this started me thinking about the stories we tell about ourselves. While I don't like the kind of philosophy or theology that says whatever we say sets in motion something in the spirit world so we must watch our words, I do think that the stories we rehearse and tell shape our lives.

I'm deeply aware that all too often the stories we tell are stories that focus on our own inadequacies and are rooted in what we perceive to be our shortcomings. "Not good enough!" is a common refrain.

The difficulty with believing that we are not good enough, or somehow inadequate, is that we think we can compensate in other ways. As I mentioned last week, we try to find our meaning in the things that we have. If I own an iPhone (or the designer clothes, or the fancy car or whatever it is), I must be okay!

Advertisers capitalise on our feelings of inadequacy! To be okay you have to have more, the latest, the best, otherwise you are a nobody. And so we find ourselves caught up in a never-ending cycle of trying to achieve self-worth by being better than others by what we own, accomplish and can do. Sometimes if we are rich enough, bully others enough, and rise to a high enough position we may stop thinking we are inadequate and end up with an inflated opinion of ourselves, believing that we are greatest who ever lived, the very best at everything, that there is really nobody better at doing what we do. That's also problematic!

The solution of course, is restoring our self-image. Of realising that yes, I mess up sometimes, and may not always be very likeable, or may even be odd in my own way, but ultimately, I am a person of value. I think it's an oversimplification to suggest that if we always speak positive into our lives, we will only experience good and vice-versa, but I do think that when we realise that we're okay, and bad things don't happen to me just because I'm a worthless person I start to discover a more meaningful life.

I'm grateful for the role of the church in my life. A community of people who accepted me when I felt the worst about myself and affirmed my value as a person. I believe that in its best expressions the church is still accepting of all, especially those who seem to be the least worthy of love.

Over the years I've changed the story I tell, acknowledging my failures, but celebrating my strengths and remembering that I am a person of infinite value. I hope that you also will be able to that, and not need to rely on an endless cycle of shopping to give you value.

I do still love my iPhone, though!

A thought from Aileen:

Advent and our preparation for the birth of Jesus.

I've just been fortunate enough to have 4.5 days in Krakow (Poland) as a break, but also to give me confidence that I can travel abroad on my own still, as it's a few years since I have done so. The Christmas markets were a draw but also Krakow, a city I once spent a day in some years ago. Opposite my hotel was a white painted church with a curved wall encircling it. On the gate a poster reminding everyone of the Catholic Pilgrimage 2025 year of Jubilee.

Apart from the poster, unless you looked up and saw the dome it would just be one of many churches. The poster announced that this was a Church involved in Pilgrimage, the courtyard was welcoming, all-pleasing to the eye, and the statue of Mary encouraged worshippers in. When you went through the church door there was a small area behind wrought iron gates looking into the richly decorated interior. The whole porch area was simply for prayer and it was fairly full of people of all ages sitting or kneeling silently in prayer. The gates would only be opened for mass but you could see the beauty within. Do we hide our Churches away? Do we hide what we are about? Are people drawn in out of interest or curiosity?

Advent is easy to skip through in the rush for organising Christmas. The market in the main square in Krakow was not scheduled to open until the next day but preparations were being made in the wooden chalets. Trees were everywhere and lights hung up. The market square with the former cloth hall is apparently the largest in Europe and in the corner of the square is the much-photographed St Mary's Basilica - its tower so impressive and well-lit in the evenings. (I'll describe the interior in a future post).

Christmas markets all over the world are full of light, each city or town decorating with lights brightening up the dark evenings. All vary but many of the continental markets use mainly gold or white lights. On Friday 28th the lights went on, the crowds descended on the area, the smell of food and mulled wine, the decorated stalls, the square was full of life, people enjoying the atmosphere and the lights were impressive. I walked across the square many times during my stay and St Mary's really brought out the photographers, especially once dark. All was bright, everyone seemed happy, lights really do help us through the darkness.

On my last evening I attended a concert the other side of the square behind the cloth hall and market. It wasn't raining but everywhere was damp and still, a little snow, though the main areas were clear. It was also misty. On my way back I saw the angel lights brightening everything up, the first time I had seen them lit. It seemed very appropriate on the first Sunday in Advent. We remember the angel visiting Mary. Light and hope but for Mary fear, humility and wonder. Handel's oratorio The Messiah brings to my mind those inspiring words from "Isaiah 9 v2 "The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light". We need light to be able to see, yet are we willing to be lights that walk alongside others? Are our Churches offering light and reassurance to others? Do people really understand about Jesus? Are we willing to be lights in a dark and difficult world?



Please pray for the congregation and community in Saham Hills



A thought from Rev Derek:

"We are an ageing church" are we?

Way back in the 1980s the Bradford Woodhouse Grove Methodist Circuit decided to put on a youth pantomime. We did it one year and it was so successful that we repeated it over several years with a cast made up predominantly of teenagers. We had a load of fun, raised money, made friends, drew young people together from several different churches and generally the thing was good, and we made memories that will live on for some of us many years after the pantomime ended. During the run I had a whole list of different roles, I was a thief, a policeman, and an ugly sister, all these years on I can't remember the rest. Towards the end I was writing the scripts along with a friend and have even turned my hand to painting scenery and directing. I will never attain operatic standard but could belt out "a policeman's lot is not a happy one" and "happy days are here again" - they were good days.

I thought that my pantomime days were over, but when we moved to Dereham last year, I discovered that one of the Churches put on a show in the weeks leading up to Christmas; Karen and I went along and had a wonderful time. I was daft enough to mention to the lady who was producing the show about my history with the youth pantomime in Bradford. I was asked if I would be willing to be in this year's performance which was going to be "Ali Baba and the naughty thieves" I was kind of cornered but agreed. Fortunately, I only had four lines to speak, and they were on the final two pages of the script.

What is important about events like this is the friendships forged. We have met to rehearse twice a week for the last few weeks and have had a load of fun. We performed over two afternoons to a full church, the show only lasted about an hour but was good. Back in the shows in Bradford, I was one of the older ones, here I was one of the youngest members of the cast. The majority of the company were over eighty and as I stood behind the scenes watching what was happening, I thought of the comment made so often in churches today "we are an ageing church" and "most of us are over eighty now" which suggests that we are past it and are restricted in what we can do. We had a cast of about twenty and with exception of a couple of people, the rest of us were beyond retirement age and I think that we proved that despite our age we can still have a good time.

Age is so often seen as a barrier for some reason, and yes, for some of us the joints don't function in the way they used to do and maybe the memory isn't quite as good as it used to be. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't still have a job for us to do, I applaud this little gang of a couple of dozen people in Norfolk who have given of their best.

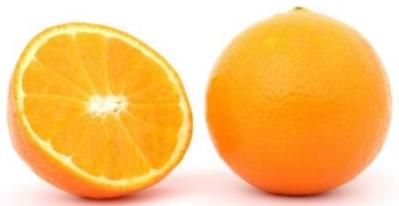
We are not done for yet!





A thought from Rev Neil:

As we journey through Advent we have been encouraged to do so using the British Methodist theme of "Gift". This past Sunday the theme was "the orange in the stocking". I had to confess that I had no idea what this was referring to - In South Africa we have our oranges in July and so an orange has absolutely no connection with Christmas. So far this may be the most cognitively dissonant thing I've experienced in the UK (together with salt and vinegar crisps being in a green packet instead of blue!).



After the service I had some conversations with people about the meaning of the orange in the stocking. Some were confused, some suggested it was a stocking filler. Yet others suggested that it stemmed from the post-war years when an orange was a special, tasty treat, still others noted that the orange (together with chocolate coins) represented the gold of St Nicholas and his gifts to the poor.

Writing in a time of relative abundance it is difficult for me to imagine a Christmas where the most exciting thing in a stocking is an orange, but the thought invites us again into a place where Christmas is not primarily about the extravagance (even though it may have been extravagant at the time).

At a time of the year when days are getting short and the darkness can be more overwhelming, I think it's helpful to imagine the times when an orange was the best one could hope for at Christmas. Imagine the pain and struggle of parents wanting to make Christmas special even if just with an orange. Imagine being filled with joy at finding, what to our sensibilities today, is "only an orange"!

Perhaps in our places of sadness this Christmas we can look for the oranges?

During this time when many of us are not as happy as the world tells us we need to be, when we may be mourning many things, we need to look for the orange. Maybe we're struggling with the loss of a loved one - perhaps the first Christmas without someone special, or family who are distant, or our own lack.

Maybe as we go through our own struggles this Christmas or when simply the nostalgic memories of Christmases past seem overwhelming That is a time when seeking the orange can bring meaning.

For some that may mean more work than others. Perhaps as parents struggling post-war - perhaps single mothers - struggled to find an orange for the stocking, we need to struggle to find that flash of colour in the darkness of our life today. That small thing that will brighten Christmas Day. As I remember the story of the first Christmas as told by Luke, we see God born in a stable. Not a clinical, clean, birthing room, but a room characterised by the mess and dung of daily life. Yet in that we discover Emmanuel, God with us.

As we search for oranges this year in our daily mess I hope that we will find them, and their colour and sweetness will keep us going until the nights get shorter.

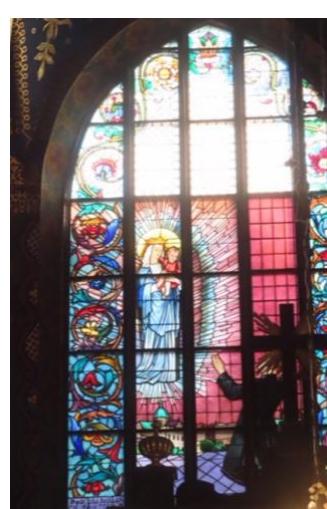
A thought from Aileen:

As we continue through Advent, I am sitting in Walsingham Methodist Chapel surrounded by 80 plus cribs, carols playing in the porch and thinking and reliving memories. As I look at the cribs I am reminded of where I purchased some of them, of happy times exploring a different country on holiday, or visiting a Christmas market. The cribs often reflect the culture of the country or a particular skill of craftspeople. Other cribs are the result of gifts to me, again pleasure and memories thinking of the giver. Sometimes the memories are bittersweet.

I recently went to Krakow to revisit and stay in a city that I had only visited once before but never stayed in. I vaguely knew my way around, and St Mary's Basilica in the Main Square was always a point to aim for if I was struggling to find my way. I could then usually find my way back to the hotel. On one day I went into St Mary's and was immediately taken aback by the beauty, richness, craft and depictions all around in comparison to the exterior which is plain yet majestic. As I looked closely, Jesus and Mary were in paintings, altar screens and in sculptures, sometimes I had to look more closely to find the birth depictions. Each craftsman had found their own way of interpretation. All added to the visual impact on me. Afterwards as I looked at my photos, I saw again Jesus and as I looked further there were also depictions of the cross. Jesus isn't just a picture or a nativity crib.

Keeping Jesus in our hearts is vital all year round, and we need to remember that he grew into an adult and experienced a cruel death for each one of us. He didn't stay in the manger, he experienced life, saw and experienced joy as well as sorrow. Whatever life throws at us, Jesus is there walking alongside us, whenever we have to make difficult decisions, he is there. We may not know whether the right decisions have been made, we may not always feel that Jesus is with us but he is there alongside us and longs for us to turn to him. When the going is tough, he carries us even though we may not realise it at the time, and sometimes he sends human angels to assist us.

The cry goes up there was no room in the inn! But there is room for each one of us in the Christmas story, are we prepared to open our hearts and let Jesus in?



A thought from Rev Derek:

The Bude tunnel

We had our first holiday near Bude in North Cornwall way back in 1987 and fell in love with that part of the country; we went back several years running when our girls were little and stayed on a farm just North of Bude. After a gap of about twenty-five years, we went back in 2022 and had another lovely time. I was fascinated when watching an episode of QI, the BBC satirical quiz show when one of the questions related to “The number 1 attraction in Bude” I guessed that it might be the lovely beaches, the wonderful coastline, the castle, or maybe the surfing (I’ve never done it, but have watched others) but the answer was none of those things, it was The Bude Tunnel. I’d never heard of the Bude Tunnel and was intrigued, but sure enough if you Google “Top attractions in Bude” on Trip advisor you will discover That the Bude Tunnel is number 1.

So, what is this number one attraction? Sainsbury’s had a problem, the front doors of the supermarket opened onto Crooklets Road, but the car park was at the rear and customers had to walk about 70 metres down the side of the store with their trolleys and during inclement weather they were getting wet, as was their shopping. So, to resolve the issue, a 70 metre Perspex tunnel was erected. Initially as a joke people started rating the tunnel on the website Tripadvisor and the tunnel became such an attraction that Tripadvisor took it down. The tunnel was erected in 2009, and even today people visit it from all over the country and according to the Independent Newspaper it currently has 1100 excellent ratings and has a 4.5 star rating. The supermarket has embraced the popularity of its Perspex walkway and installs Christmas lights and best of all it's free!

The whole pandemic experience of five years ago taught us an important lesson in Church, which most places have forgotten. With our churches closed at Christmas 2020, I encouraged people to go outside, and churches decorated trees outside and put nativity displays in entrances. At a time when we were being told that Christmas had been cancelled, the Church was making a statement to say that even though our doors were locked to comply with Covid rules, the Church was still very much alive - and we made an outward demonstration that the Church was still very much alive and in some small way we were sharing the joy and hope of the Christmas message.

Today, churches are decorated inside, and we invite people to come in. Maybe the Bude tunnel teaches us a lesson, to be out and be of service to people and meet them where they are.



A thought from Dee:

One of my favourite modern Christmas hymns is 192 in Singing the Faith. ***"Beneath the paper wrappings there's an open stable door"***

This is written by one of our newer hymn writers, Rev Clare Stainsby, a Superintendent Minister in the Salford Circuit.

This hymn invites us to look beyond all the Glitz and glamour, the trappings we surround ourselves with, looking at the child but also looking, with hindsight, at this wonderful gift we have been given, and there's more! The chorus:

***Look inside, look above, look beyond and see the love,
look inside and you will see.
Look inside, look below, look beyond and you will know,
the one who came to give his life for you and me.***



This is an invitation for us all. Sometimes we like the comfort and familiarity of 'what we always do' – 'what we always sing,' the same format! This chorus sends out a message, asking us to look beyond, expand our horizon, maybe do things differently, look around at how things are changing, and what different approaches are needed, looking and thinking deeper. This message is so important, look everywhere, it says and ***you will know***, and with the right eyes and guidance you will see God, ***The one who came to give his life for you and me.***

This is a relatively new carol, maybe not so well known, short but so meaningful, guiding our thoughts to see the presence of God not only in this small child, but beyond to the fullness of life he brings. The door is always open.

A Prayer in response to the attack at Bondi Beach 🙏

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who grants us light, sustains us in life and guides us in the ways of holiness.

On a day when peaceful celebration has been distorted through acts of violence and hatred, we pray for those who have died and been injured in the attack at Bondi beach at the beginning of Hanukkah. Comfort those who have lost loved ones. Strengthen them and grant them peace.

Stand close to those who seek answers and with those tasked with understanding and responding to these acts of violence.

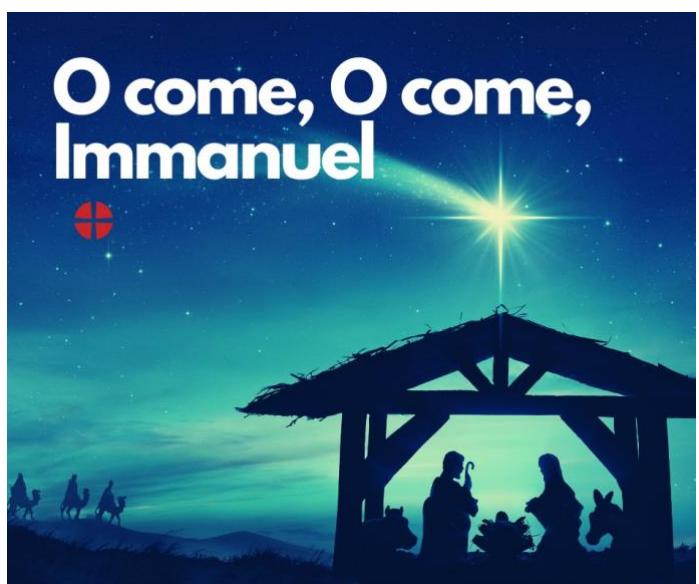
May the deep darkness of this day be met by responses of respect, compassion and solidarity as we continue to draw alongside our sisters and brothers of Jewish faith in our prayers.

We pray for an ending to all acts of religious or racially based hatred that we may dwell in your light and seek a world in which all may walk safely alongside their neighbour.

Amen.

Please pray for the congregation and community in Sculthorpe & Fakenham







HOLT METHODIST CHURCH



FESTIVE

AFTERNOON TEA

FRIDAY 19TH DECEMBER

2.00 - 4.00 PM

DELICIOUS HOMEMADE CAKES



FOLLOWED BY
A LIGHT-HEARTED CAROLS SINGALONG
5 - 6 PM

ALL WELCOME TO
BOTH

