Holy Land Pilgrimage 2019 – an incomplete, entirely subjective account

Revd Alan Sykes reflects on the recent RTM pilgrimage to the land of Jesus

Where there's ointment, there's always a fly or two hovering near. One particular fly we couldn't help but notice was the sheer number of pilgrims we encountered everywhere. I presume that the world’s burgeoning middle class means that many more people can now afford to travel. So, for instance, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre we weren’t able to venerate the site of the Resurrection at close quarters. The size of the queue was simply too intimidating. A definite fly in the pilgrimage ointment but, on the distinct other hand, it was a joy to see people from all over the world expressing their devotion to Christ by wanting to be in the places where he had lived, taught, died and risen. Vivid evidence of a truly catholic Church.

Of all the places we visited I found the Sea of Galilee the most evocative. You feel that you can almost trace the very footsteps of Jesus in the earth, hear his words as he preaches by the lakeside, see him pondering his next move as he contemplates the hills across the water. Things have changed of course. Our accommodation was far more comfortable than anything Jesus, Peter, James, John and the rest would have known. They would have gone everywhere on foot. We had our air-conditioned coach. It felt like cheating but in a 40 degree heatwave I didn’t feel disposed to complain. On the contrary I’m grateful that we were very well looked after in every way. We had a wonderful
guide in Ranya, a young Palestinian Christian. And the food was plentiful and tastily middle eastern. A vegetarian’s paradise. You could live just on hummus. I think I almost did. After 9 days even I was getting a little tired of it.

In Bethlehem we stayed next to Manger Square – the perfect location. The town is bustling and untidy, and bears absolutely no resemblance to any image you might see on a conventional Christmas card. From there we went on to Old Jerusalem – an evocative mix of ancient buildings and narrow shops in narrow streets. It contains so much in a such a confined area. Impossible to do it justice here. Consult a guide book for details.

I can’t end without mentioning our visit to Nablus where we met Father Jamil, priest to the Anglican congregation there. Christians make up a very small proportion of the town’s population. They have steadily declined in numbers over the years but they still keep going. We visited a thriving kindergarten that the church runs. The children – mainly Muslim – seemed very pleased to see us. It was high fives all round. Though Nablus seemed a pretty dynamic place in many ways (there were lots of shops), you couldn’t help noticing the difference in prosperity between the West Bank and Israel. And to be honest you couldn’t help noticing the Israeli settlements that protrude into the West Bank on many a hillside.

In the Holy Land there is so much to wonder at, so much to think about, so much to enjoy and treasure, so much to mourn over. If you ever get the chance, go.

PRESS RELEASE – THE ARTS SOCIETY RICHMOND / ST MARY MAGDALENE, RICHMOND

Children go exploring at St. Mary Magdalene, Richmond with the Arts Society Children’s Trail

The church of St. Mary Magdalene was thrilled to host two classes from King’s House School as together they formally launched the Arts Society Children’s Trail. The children found it enjoyable, engaging and a great way to explore the church, looking at the various features of the building, as well as learning about some of the history and artefacts. This is especially significant as this year St. Mary’s marks 800 years of a place of worship on the site where the church stands.

We were fortunate to have the creators of the Trail with us for the launch, as well as Jenny Lebus, chair of the Arts Society Richmond. Our grateful thanks to Heather Montford and Ann Saunders who worked so hard to produce this lovely Trail, with beautiful hand-drawn illustrations and great questions to prompt curiosity. Why not visit the church and explore, using the Trail, answering the questions as you go and then checking your answers against the yellow sheet in the box – all near the entrance. There is no charge to take part, it is simply for your enjoyment.

With 800 years being commemorated, there are also many other events coming up over the next few months, so do take a look at the flyers in church. The church is open daily 8.30am – 3.00pm (making a lovely dry and warm destination on a cold winters day)! For more information contact: Helen Williams – Children & Youth Ministry Leader: 020 8948 4676 / 07732 901669.
Visit to Cookham
by Elspeth Fearn

On Monday 28 October, 28 people from RTM travelled by coach to Cookham, Berkshire, home village of Stanley Spencer the artist (1891-1959), who called it ‘a village from heaven’. He was a devout Christian who used the unorthodox setting of Cookham to portray incidents in Christ’s life. The day was organised and led by the Revd Anne Crawford.

After morning coffee at the Ferry Inn, we visited the Stanley Spencer Gallery at the former Wesleyan Chapel attended by Stanley and his mother and also went for a guided walk around the village. The sights included the Spencer family home and the war memorial whose unveiling Stanley painted in 1919. Then on to Cookham church where Stanley is buried in the churchyard - the setting of one of his most famous paintings The Resurrection (1924), now at Tate Britain. Finally, walking along by the river, we came back to the Ferry Inn, scene of Stanley’s unfinished last painting ‘Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta’, where we had lunch.

In the afternoon the group travelled to another important place associated with Stanley, to the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere, Hampshire, now a National Trust property. The chapel was built by John Louis and Mary Behrend and dedicated to Mary’s brother, Harry, who had died in 1920, shortly after returning home from active service in Macedonia. The Behrends commissioned Stanley to decorate the entire chapel with paintings reflecting the theme of the Great War. Stanley had been an orderly in the Royal Army Medical Corps and had also served in Macedonia after earlier working in a Bristol military hospital. The 19 canvases took him from 1926 -1932 to complete. We were given a talk about the paintings which include small Bristol domestic scenes such as Sorting Laundry but culminate in a magnificent painting of the Resurrection in the form of soldiers at the Macedonian Front, taking up the whole wall behind the altar. The soldiers climb out of their graves, cut through barbed wire and pile up in great heaps, dozens of their white crosses no longer needed. As the light began to fade we took part in a short atmospheric act of worship, which was immensely moving. Afterwards we enjoyed tea and cakes in the small cafe before setting off on the journey home to Richmond. Many of us felt that the day and what we had seen of Spencer’s thought provoking art, had indeed been a pilgrimage.

Speaking to Team Talk Anne Crawford said “To visit the Sandham Memorial Chapel during Remembrance-tide gave an added poignancy to our day. There was a deep sense of us all standing on holy ground, of the privilege of being allowed to worship in the gathering dusk surrounded by images of hope, beauty and peace as Christ sat serenely gathering to himself the spent crosses and trauma of war. I’m delighted to say that we will have more opportunity to explore Stanley Spencer’s spirituality on 5th March at St Matthias when Bishop Stephen Cottrell (Bishop of Chelmsford) will be at St Matthias to give a lecture focussing on Spencer’s Christ in the Wilderness paintings. Perfect reflection for Lent!”
Ministry to Schools

by Helen Williams

We are blessed to have six super schools in our Parish:

**Christ’s Secondary & Sixth Form** – Our Church of England School, which despite being just outside our Parish boundary, enjoys historical links and several members of our congregations are involved as Governors.

**Deer Park** – a Primary, Free School, currently at Parkshot but set to move across the bridge, into Twickenham during this academic year.

**Falcons** – an Independent Boys School for Yr.4-Yr.8, on Kew Foot Road.

**King’s House** – Nursery (mixed), Junior & Senior Departments – Boys Independent for Reception to Year 8.

**Old Vicarage** – Pre-School through to Yr 6, Independent Girls School.

**The Vineyard** – State Primary School on Friars Stile Road.

Over the last few years Helen and the Clergy have seen relationships grow and trust build as we have got to know our schools better and helped with delivering some of their Religious Education curriculum and some of their Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), through workshops, assemblies, church visits, prayer spaces and pastoral support.

We now have regular contact with most of our schools and would welcome opportunities to do more with those who have not yet taken up the opportunity.

Some of our Ministry has included:

- Providing ‘Prayer Spaces’ at our Secondary School, where the youngest three year groups came through the Chapel to experience and engage with these creative spaces, helping pupils to reflect, and, for those of faith to pray; thinking upwards at God (or something ‘other’), outwards at the needs of the world and inward at ourselves. It provided space to slow down and think about ‘big topics’ and also opportunity to seek support with any difficult issues for individuals.

- Developing a Christmas Service in church, with one of our schools we previously had not worked with. We worked together to plan and prepare the service with this, one of our smaller schools.

- Providing ‘Parables Workshops’ with another of our schools, through which we have shared six different parable stories and reflective activities for each of the classes in the youngest two year groups, over two terms, each year for the last two years.

- Welcoming school groups for church visits (especially to cover the ‘signs and symbols’ curriculum), exploring the building and understanding a bit more about ‘what happens’ in the building.

- Weekly assemblies at St John’s for one of our Independent Schools, who really appreciate the space and who also call on Father Neil and Helen to lead the ‘talk’ for Christian Festivals and topics.

- Regular Eucharist at our Secondary school, for Pupils and Staff.

- Assemblies on all sorts of different topics

- ‘Prayer for Schools Fortnight’, in May each year, where we are proactive in focussing on our schools in our prayers

- Regular meetings between Team Rector Wilma and Christ’s School Chaplain, Tom Rutter – both pastorally and in a mentoring capacity.

The implications of these school interactions go beyond ‘just a lesson’ or ‘an assembly’ and it is apparent as we travel around the Parish from one task to another, take part in social and community activities locally and through activities like the Glass Door Night Shelter, to name but a few, of how much impact this engagement and ministry has. It is such a privilege (and responsibility) and is so valuable and valued by our church, schools, families and wider community.

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*'Pray for the World’ at Christ’s School Prayer Spaces*

Helen Williams
Some of the most powerful moments have been where we have been able to offer a space for children to explore ‘theology’ together, to consider some of the bigger questions, to provide spaces to pray (in varying ways) and to share what it means to us as Christians, to have faith. I have also been humbled by weekly contributions to Glass Door Night Shelter, from many people including Scouting families, Toddler Group families, church families and not least from our schools, in the form of weekly baking for this project, which clearly made a significant impact. This impact was evident when a five year old boy (having shared the story of ‘the Good Samaritan’ and explored ‘who is my neighbour’) stated that he gave the remaining birthday cakes to the homeless because “we did not need them all, but they did” – powerful stuff.

The feedback from those that we work with has been really encouraging and positive. The response from schools has been great, but also from individual families who appreciate our contribution – some families known to me, but also anonymous messages and greetings in the street. Thank you for your support of the Children and Youth Ministry; to those who connect with our schools, to the children and families who have been so affirming (and who have also encouraged their school to ‘let us get involved’) and to those who support from the ‘side-lines’ – through prayer, through giving, through spreading the word about the things we can do. We are really blessed and so very thankful.

King’s House Parables Workshop, Autumn 2019
King’s House School

Falcons School Assembly for Remembrance 2019
Falcons School

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Tom Rutter, Lay Chaplain at Christ’s School, Richmond

Tom’s role as Lay Chaplain at Christ’s School enables him to be there for students, staff and parents. He works in the school four days a week. The role of a lay chaplain is different from an ordained priest, although the primary tasks in school are very similar: looking to provide pastoral care for the students and staff, leading on Collective Worship, as well as developing the spiritual life of the school community. Sharing the Eucharist at school still takes place but with the help of local clergy who come in to visit and preside at the services in school. This really helps to both build and deepen local relations within the wider church community.

In 2003, before his appointment, Tom was the founding coach of Kick London, a local Christian charity based in Richmond. Kick now works in 66 schools in London, reaching well over 10,000 young people a week in the capital. It was here that Tom began his ministry journey through the world of Sports Ministry. He has taught, coached and ministered throughout London, the UK and the world. Tom is passionate about training and equipping others and has worked as far afield as Brazil and South Africa in the run up to the FIFA World Cups. Being involved in youth ministry for over 20 years has been a real privilege and through this Tom has come to understand many of the changes and challenges that young people face as they become young adults in the world.

Coming from a coaching background, planning was essential. However, chaplaincy has shown Tom that you make light plans and need to be flexible and agile with your days. This makes a typical day of chaplaincy exciting and never the same again! The most inspiring and favourite parts of being a chaplain for Tom are being able to listen to someone’s story. Here the chaplain is always a guest, invited on to other people’s ground, never quite belonging, yet never fully being able to relinquish a sense of the primary identity of being rooted in Christ.

Presenting Christian faith relevantly is an important role of a chaplain both at moments of either individual or corporate crisis and celebration. Finding words for the unspeakable and being present on days of significance for the community is so important. Tom has found that chaplaincy must not shy away from the need to say uncomfortable things, but it never lets go of continued . . .
Late autumn in the Christian calendar is a sobering time of year when we are brought face-to-face with sometimes painful memories, darkness and death – not least our own mortality. In our hemisphere, the weather begins to chill, the days grow shorter and the nights can feel very long.

We’ve recently marked three significant days – All Hallows’ Eve, All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day, religious and cultural attempts to deal with the inescapable reality that all of us will die. The mediaeval thought process goes like this: If All Saints celebrates the ‘redeemed’, then, understandably, the ‘damned’ will want to disrupt it, so the night before is a wild night when the ‘unredeemed’ roam the earth. All Souls’, the day after All Saints’, is a gentler commemoration altogether, gathering up our memories of those we have loved who have died, and declaring that - despite the best efforts of the restless forces of chaos on Hallowe’en - no one is lost and that nothing, not even death itself, can separate us from the love of God that spans all eternity. Taken together, these days are communal expressions of deep human wonderings: What happens when we die? Is it a great adventure or a terrible disaster? How do we go on living when someone we love dies?

It’s interesting that these festivals haven’t gone away, despite coming from a pre-modern worldview, but the only one that makes its way out of the Church and into the broader public consciousness is Hallowe’en, influenced as it is these days by American-style commercialism. When I was a child, just about the only concession to Hallowe’en was throwing a white sheet over yourself and saying daft things in a ghostly voice to spook your family and friends! We hadn’t even heard of ‘trick or treat’. But in amongst the commercialism, perhaps our modern marking of these three days reveals something about human nature: the real energy goes into the one day that is expressing our deepest fears, the frightening and unsettling aspects of life and death. We make it fun because the real fear is almost too much to bear. It’s collective escapism, and who can blame us? Most days we don’t want to think about it, but, once a year we give free rein to expressing communal anxiety about forces beyond our control – the forces of chaos and death. That’s not necessarily a bad thing in itself, but, by contrast, these three days also cause us to remember other things: human courage, selflessness, joy, sadness and love. Mirroring the process of grief itself, perhaps as a society we need to have been through the anarchic night to give us the strength to live well in the light of day. Talking of which…..

…..we now move into Advent and a new liturgical year. This season may well begin in dark shadows, but this time any trepidation is countered by anticipation and hope because, as we light the Advent candles week by week, the darkness gradually diminishes.

It must be admitted that the traditional themes of the Advent season are not for the faint-hearted: death; judgement; heaven; hell. But we wait expectantly once again for the birth of a child who will show us all we need to know about God, who comes with healing in his wings, who judges only with mercy and, as St John reminds us, whose life is the light of all people, putting darkness and death to flight.

The overall vision that even when things are at their worst, God is present and can be trusted.

Please do pray for the work of chaplaincy in schools, particularly at Christ’s. That it may be a place that grows a culture of prayer and also be a place where the young people and staff can see the transformative work of God’s love at work in their lives and the lives of others in the community too.

ERRATA
In the last edition of Team Talk on the 800th Anniversary of St Mary Magdalene, the reference on page 7 to Edmund Kean’s tomb being in the North Porch should have been to the South Porch.
A Visit to the Poppy Factory
by Elspeth Fearn

Appropriately at this recent season of remembrance, a visit to the Poppy Factory in the Petersham Road was organised from St John the Divine. The factory has been supporting veterans with physical and mental health conditions into employment for no less than 97 years. The tour, which lasted about two hours, began with a presentation and film on the history and the work of the Poppy Factory. The poppy first appeared in Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae’s 1918 poem ‘In Flanders Fields’ and which inspired an American academic Moina Michael to suggest adopting the poppy in memory of those who had fallen – an idea that spread across the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK. In 1921 a young Frenchwoman, Anna Guerin, came to London in order to sell some fabric poppies she had made and met Earl Haig, the founder of the Royal British Legion, who was persuaded by her to adopt the poppy as an emblem of the Legion.

Following the presentation, the group were shown how to make up a poppy and tried it for themselves. Although most poppies are made inside the factory there are also some workers who make up poppies in their own home, assembling something like 3,000 each in a day. The factory makes 6 million poppies a year, thousands of wreaths and also special remembrance symbols and arrangements for different organisations. (Poppies are sent all round the world from the factory’s distribution centre.) The group were also shown people working on different aspects and the various machines involved in poppy manufacture plus the rolls of material from which the red part of the poppy is made. The offcuts, once the poppies have been stamped out, are recycled. At the end of the tour visitors can visit the factory’s gift shop and purchase souvenirs such as poppy china.

Speaking to Team Talk, Richard Rondel who was part of the group said - 'It was a most rewarding visit. The introductory talk was fascinating; I had not previously appreciated the sheer size and scope of their charitable activities. The tour afterwards, showing how the poppies are made, was an equally worthwhile experience.'

St Matthias’ September BBQ
by Revd Anne Crawford

To celebrate the beginning of the autumn term and to welcome the safe return of our St Matthias families from their summer holidays, we held a very happy and enjoyable BBQ in the church garden after worship on 8th September. It was good to be back together again, and with Chris Gough and Chris Shone working their magic over the coals and a table groaning with delicious salads and a vast array of desserts, a great time was had by all. It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends and make some new ones, and judging from the curious (and perhaps even envious) gazes of those passing by on the 371 buses, our party obviously caused quite a stir for all the right reasons. Burger anyone?!

Maggie the dog was guest of honour!
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Our Churches

St John the Divine
St Mary Magdalene
St Matthias