



GRAPEvine

grapevine@stjohnswelling.org.uk www.stjohnswelling.org.uk 020 8303 1107 editors: MCC & NC

'I like Apples, but I don't like Apple Trees'

A few months ago, Richard Dawkins, the arch apologist for the New Atheist movement surprised people by saying that he was a "cultural Christian". Some Christians derided him for saying the equivalent of, "I like apples, but I don't like apple trees". These Christian critics said that Dawkins meant, "I enjoy the good life I can lead in a country such as the UK, a country where I can have freedom and feel safe and valued at the same time. However, I don't want to recognise this culture as coming from Jesus". Dawkins, who is no doubt, genuinely committed to "truth" and motivated by it, may not want to say it, but others do: "Culture is downstream of faith". Moreover, different faith heritages produce different cultures with different world views and different values.

We assert, as Christians, that everyone has value and equal value, because they are made in the image of God and are loved by Him, so we assert that everyone is equal in the eyes



of the law and in the eyes of God. There may be a problem here: we are so confident in this assertion we cannot countenance the reality that some people do not agree. We then may be "shaken to our core" to see societies where equal value is nonsense. We may notice societies where "the King is the law", and definitely not

"the law is King". These are places where power is everything and the law is no protection for an individual against a more powerful person, nor protection against the state.

As the recognition is growing that our culture is not the default world culture but the product of Jesus, some might be seeking to use Christianity as a tool to strengthen this culture and use our faith as a bulwark against other cultures: we might actually be seeing the growth of Christian nationalism in the UK! As followers of Jesus, we want to see the Kingdom of God grow but do not want to conflate Jesus and party politics. We may dislike the idea of the slogan "Jesus is King" being used for unchristian ends. How should we respond? Our new evening service series will help us address this question.

Blessings,
Ian

Rev Ian Jennings
Vicar, St John's Welling

St John's News

If we know anything about the Bible and the Christian Faith, we will almost certainly know the events of Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Yet is so important that, regularly, we 'walk through' the events of that week so we never take them for granted or downplay the incredible consequences: they enable our relationship with the risen and ascended Lord Jesus.

Easter weekend at St Johns was Ian's second with us; preceded by the beautiful solemn Good Friday service and the Walk of witness through Welling before a wonderful time of celebration, starting with Kay Andrewartha's lovely Testimony at the Sunrise service, through to the Baptism reaffirmations, Danny Branch,

James Coburn, Bailey Towler and Charlotte Gibson, and the Baptism of Michael Coburn, all at The Life Service.

We have so much evidence that Jesus IS alive and at work in Welling!

We have had to say goodbye to Danny, Sarah, Harry and Millie Branch as they moved to Gillingham in preparation for Danny's ordination and beginning as Curate at St Mark's following his ordination at the end of June.

Our Spring/ Summer Alpha Course is well underway and we are having a great time getting to know each other and considering the Christian Faith.

Friendships within or Church family, have continued to grow as we have enjoyed Breakfasts and Curries.

The impact of the Work Day on May 9th is immediately evident in the lovely, tidy church grounds. I have heard a whisper that another work day is being planned!

It was a privilege to welcome Matilda Wetheridge and Luna Rice officially into the Church family at their Baptisms on May 17th. I say officially, because Both families have been worshipping with us since before Christmas and are already part of us!

Family Life is a tapestry of celebrations, sadnesses, welcomes and farewells. We grieve with her family over the death of lovely Wendy Cole, with Andre and Kwun on the death of Andre's Mum, and Julie and Jon Stedman on the death of Julie's Dad.

Our World grows more stress filled and war torn by the day but we hold fast to the One who knows the end from the beginning and will Never leave us.

We head on towards our Centenary Celebrations, the Summer and SPARK! So, until July

Estelle Woodcock

Rukungiri

My name is Sharn and I am a recovering alcoholic/addict. I used to come St Johns from 2011 – 2021 until I moved home. I went into Recovery in 2024 and managed to get 6 months sober and then I relapsed which lasted for 5 months. This



relapse taught me how powerless I am and from that I gave my whole will and life over to the care of God. That was when He revealed that He had something in store for me and my son Hayden. It was no coincidence that we bumped into Sue and Steve just a few days later in 2025 and without thinking I just asked if we could go with them to Uganda. God led and of course they said yes. Obedience started playing a huge role in my Recovery. I'm a sponsor for the 12-step program and work in this plan of life recovery. God told me to take my AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) book and 5 days before going to Uganda, He gave me the number four, so I took 4 books.

We arrived at Rukungiri and my plan was for us both to put our time into Modern Primary, particularly the Nursery section. We visited the school and met the children which was one of the most amazing experiences of our lives. We saw God's love and faith in so many children that we hadn't experienced before. These children didn't have material things but had love and faith in abundance. We came and worshipped with the classes; we spent an evening with P7 for a movie night and helped with the party for the whole school. We saw children laugh; love play, sing and dance. I helped to take a lot of sponsored girls out shopping and Hayden helped with the boys. Their faces lit up with all their new things. I believed I was going to be a blessing to these children, but they

were a blessing to us. Hayden spent most of his time there and visited different schools. We saw a young boy whose name is Baram and decided to sponsor him there and then and took him straight in the school. He was a blessing to us. God had a different plan for me though. I took someone through the 12-step program that is designed for living. We did it in five days which is unbelievable. He learned about his illness and that there is a solution. He was becoming well again, and he was sober for a month. The seed was planted. God started doing for him that which he couldn't do for himself. I was asked to go to church, and give my testimony and that drew people to come to Rondavels, where we stay to find out more and discover the solution. I started realising that there was no solution in Rukungiri or the surrounding areas. There were too many people suffering and I alone couldn't help them all in the short space of time we were there, so I prayed "Lord, I am one person; there isn't enough time for me to take everyone through the book. What shall I do?" I didn't see the whole of God's plan at this point, but He guided me step-by-step. I called a number from the AA line in Uganda, and it led me to an Australian man who was in Entebbe (near Kampala) who set up a meeting and gave me other numbers. 20 calls later, it was clear, I had to set up an AA meeting. I



continued praying and calling numbers. I found two people in Rukungiri - 1 male and one female who had completed this 12-step program - Perfect! Men must take men through the program and women must take women. They told me they had been praying for this! What a miracle! We met up and created a 'step' meeting which I guided them through and it still running every Saturday.

A Doctor, who runs a rehab facility for people who suffer with addictions, contacted me and asked if I would go to his hospital, so my sponsee (who I just taken through the program and can now sponsor others) and myself, went to the hospital to speak to the patients about

the 12 step program . I suddenly realised how big this problem was.

We needed more books to make a difference, and I managed to find somebody through my calls, who had 17 books translated into Runyankore, their own local language. This was a miracle!



There are over 70 languages and dialects in Uganda. Not only books, but there were sobriety coins for milestones and other literature – brought down from Kampala to Rukungiri by our driver, when he came to pick us up for our return journey. This meeting can flourish!

Since coming back home, I'm a sponsor to 3 people in Uganda and I'm currently helping the meeting via WhatsApp. I'm also taking the doctor through the AA book for his own knowledge. It has become apparent in speaking with him weekly that people are dying because of this illness every week.

My aim is to go back and to help the Doctor by taking people through the book, so that others can become sponsors and pass on the message of experience, strength and hope. I also would love to create a meeting there.

I know now that this is a mission that God has given me. He never wastes an experience. He turned my mess into a message and my test into a testimony. The biggest thing I've learnt is that taking small steps in obedience creates massive changes and brings many blessings and sets the captives free.

From someone who's been disobedient her whole life, I have really been shown how God changes our lives with obedience. Glory be to God and by the grace of God, I am 1 year sober and to be able to pass the message on to those who are still suffering.

'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!' **2 Corinthians 5:17**

Sharn Taylor

The Collation

The Collation by the Right Reverend Simon Burton-Jones, Bishop of Tonbridge

and The Induction and Installation by the Venerable Allie Kerr Archdeacon of Bromley and Bexley of The Reverend Ian Richard Jennings to be Vicar of St John the Evangelist, Welling. Tuesday 24th March at 7.00pm.



This was a Service in which Ian Richard Jennings was made Incumbent of St John the Evangelist Church, Welling.

About 220 people attended, being drawn from Ian's family, the congregation, friends and representatives from local Churches, CMS, the Leprosy Mission, CRIBS, Rukungiri School. Safe Families and Home for Good, Spark in the Park, Good news for everyone, and the Mayor of Bexley.

We learned that the Incumbent is the vicar, and the benefice is the parish. A person is collated to a new ministry in a benefice where the Bishop is the Patron. The Declaration of Assent is made, and the Oaths are taken whenever a minister of the Church of England is commissioned for a new ministry. The readings of this service are usually chosen by the new incumbent; they therefore give some suggestion of the new incumbent's understanding of calling and ministry.

The renewal of ordination declarations reminds the incumbent designate of his original promises made at ordination, but also the giving of items symbolic of various elements of ministry that ministry in any place is shared.

The formal collation by the Bishop and Induction and Installation by the Archdeacon follow. These elements constitute the legal and traditional form by which a person is commissioned for a new ministry as incumbent within the Church of England.

The new incumbents' first act of public ministry in his new benefice is to lead the people in prayer - this is intended to set the pattern as minister and people share together in prayer.

Ian also received the Church keys, and went outside to ring the Church bell.

Every element was properly and well performed, and afterwards we all gathered in the hall for refreshments, and lots of introductions and pleasant chatting.

MCC

My Faith Journey: Tom Snow

I have worshipped at St John's Church for about 15 years. I don't remember a time when I didn't go to church. I first went to Bishop Ridley with my family when I was a week old. When I was 13, I decided I would like to join St John's Church where my Uncle Doug is the Organist. Miriam gave me Confirmation lessons, and I was excited to be Confirmed in 2018. I have attended Lamplighter's since I was 8 years old and I still go along as a helper. On Zoom, I regularly join Morning Prayers and Compline. You will usually see me at all 3 services on a Sunday. I live with my parents in Bexleyheath. My older brother, Matt is married with two children and lives locally. I went to Woodside School, then to Marlborough School. I really enjoyed Secondary School, especially the 6th Form, where I was Head Prefect. I also received 2 Civic Awards from The Mayor for Services to the School Community. I now attend LECB, where I do a mixture of courses including Drama and Dance, Green Skills and Cooking.



I volunteer at Blackfen Community Library's 'Rooted Café' on Friday afternoons. This is perfect for me as I am very sociable, I love to chat to everyone and never forget a face or a name.

My main hobby is singing. I am a member of Greenwich Community Choir, we meet weekly and perform in concerts 2-3 times a year. I enjoy being in St John's choir, singing for special services. I also attend singing groups with Mencap.

I love The LORD and I love church. With my family, I have attended services at over 60 different churches and cathedrals, both in the UK and abroad (the last one was in Bruges in a blizzard!). Locally, I often go to services at Bishop Ridley, Trinity Baptist, Christchurch, St Michael's and New Gen.

Rev. Mark (BR) has been very supportive and has trained me as a Sacristan. I serve at Wednesday Communion and understand how important this is.

I plan to continue serving The LORD both in this way and in my singing.



Walking has been part of my life since childhood. Some of my earliest memories are of walking our local parks and woodlands. My parents never owned or drove a car, so local travel was either on foot or by bus, which still called for some walking. In the 1950s I don't recall anyone being dropped off or collected from school by car, irrespective of the weather. At least once, I had to find my way to school in thick fog by keeping within touching distance of the front garden walls along the way. Although my secondary school was more distant, I nearly always shunned buses in favour of walking. Meanwhile, early family holidays introduced me to the challenges of taking in cliff-top views whilst avoiding cowpats.

My own children soon learned that holidays meant donning walking boots, albeit they might not have been as enthusiastic as their parents. As they neared adulthood, we were free again to seek out Lakeland fells and high Alpine pastures. That wasn't to last however, and early bereavement left me seeking consolation in long lonely walks. It was then that a friend encouraged me to consider walking with the Christian Rambling Club (since renamed the Christian Walking Club). Their walks certainly appealed to me, but Youth Hostel accommodation with its dormitory sleeping arrangements was a definite turn-off. Then I noticed that they also advertised local Christian day-walking groups. So, after running out of excuses, I finally joined the South East group for a Saturday walk near Eynsford.

That was about thirty years ago and still I'm walking with them. Obviously, walking was the prime attraction, but the group has delivered so much more. Though we attend different churches, there's a great sense of Christian fellowship. Some walks are followed by shared meals, further extending opportunities to get to know each other and make lasting friendships. As a result, I've been on a number of holidays with group members, both in this country and abroad.

We normally walk on the third Saturday of each month and begin with a prayer, which almost invariably includes a request for our Lord to walk with us. That's an apt request because, during His earthly ministry Jesus was most certainly a walker. It's been estimated that during a public ministry lasting no more than three years, He walked more than 3,000 miles, much of it in mountainous terrain. So, for example, when we read that "Jesus went up to Jerusalem", it's easy to overlook that this likely involved a walk of more than 100 miles, with a final day's ascent greater than that required to climb England's highest mountain. None of our walks come close to matching such a trek, but with walks anywhere in Kent or Sussex and sometimes elsewhere, we get to experience parts of our lovely countryside that car drivers' and even cyclists' seldom see.

Most of our walks are taken at a relatively gentle pace and many can be joined for just half the day. Even so, with full walks averaging about 10 miles and often hilly, it's great exercise. Even aside from the benefits of the exercise, scientific studies are showing that just being in green spaces improves health and wellbeing. The sights and sounds of the countryside apparently lower

blood pressure and slow heart rate – though perhaps not when actually climbing a steep hill. Stress hormones, we are told, are lowered and

the natural cells in blood that fight viruses increase. It's even said that breathing in the good bacteria found in country air may boost our microbiome in a similar way to probiotics – though we don't go out of our way to look for smelly farmyards or farmers spreading muck/slurry on fields and footpaths. Interested? Then please have a word with me or visit our website for much more information and a gallery containing scores of images – albeit not many of me as I'm usually the one behind the camera.

Brian Rainsbury



Memorial Garden

