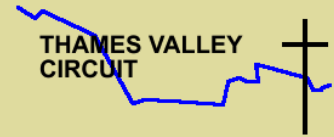




Thames Valley Methodist Circuit
ANDREW BAKER'S BLOG



4th February 2012

It is really cold this morning. The central heating is fighting to raise the temperature in the house. The Met Office is warning us that snow is on the way, which will mean disruption and inconvenience. We like to be able to plan things, for life to work out as we had imagined it the day before. Uncertainty is difficult. The threat of snow fills us with a sense of uncertainty.

There is a “wildness” about life however, which means to live with uncertainty is to live life to the full, to learn about faith, about trust in a faithful God, who meets us in all the uncertainties of life – and when we are most vulnerable. We may want to “tame” the universe we inhabit, but it refuses to be tamed – and the invitation to faith remains.

I am thinking of many this morning, who are living with uncertainty. Come to them, Living God.

Yesterday we managed to fit a lot into the day. As well as getting through much administration at home, Jill and I had a couple of hours at Wisley. Jill has membership this year, courtesy of a Christmas gift from her mother. What a delight. Witch hazel, the alpine house, the tropical house with its abundance of butterflies, stunning cornus. Yes, it was cold, but it was an uplifting break in the day.

Praise be to the creating and re-creating God!

Peace to you today – whatever the circumstances.

Andrew



3rd February 2012

After a couple of days away, it was good to be home again and to be enjoying the fellowship of the stewards of St Andrew's in the comfort of the manse!

I have had a stimulating time at a conference centre north east of London with thirteen probationer ministers from the three districts close to us. The conversation was lively and challenging. The quality of theological insight was inspiring, and I was filled with hope as I thought of these ministers setting out in the early days of their leadership in churches. There is hope for God's kingdom – and even for the Methodist Church.

We finished the conference with Holy Communion and the sharing of the peace. In those few hours these people had become my friends, and it was good to know that I will meet a number of them again. Thank you, Lord for these special opportunities.

I was home in time to go to college to witness our younger son performing his Extended Project Qualification piece, which was being assessed yesterday afternoon. Was that really my son extending the creative powers of the human person to such limits? Quite moving.

So much buzzing through my head, which needs to be tackled in the next few days, but I have the last words of Isaiah 40 ringing in my ears...wait on the Lord...renew their strength...wings like eagles...run...walk...not weary.

Thinking of those who are returning to the challenges of their circuit ministry from the retreat . Thinking of Egypt...and Syria...

Peace.

Andrew



31st January 2012

I am just about coping with this cold weather! I think the years in the Caribbean left me with a searching for warmth! So I shall dress up in my heavy clothes and brave the weather. The gift of winter is special though. As the natural world rests before the activity of summer, the nights are long and the days are cold. Perhaps hibernation would be a good thing. I am returning to my beloved theme of rhythm in my life. The need for rest and exercise, work and play, laughter and tears, prayer and action, worship and service.

Jill was in Loughborough for the day yesterday and that meeting will have generated much work for her to do today at home. After I had returned from a finance and property meeting, we started making preparations for the service we shall share this Sunday at St Andrew's. The ideas began to flow: what an inspiring passage Isaiah 40 is!

So after the rest of the night, the dawn will soon break and there will be activity. Thinking of those who cannot face the prospect of this day. Thinking of those who have no work to go to and no prospect of work. Thinking of those who are stressed by over-work.

Peace.

Andrew



30th January 2012

There is an energy and life about worship on Sundays, which carries me forward into the week. It looks like being an interesting week, which involves meeting new people. Yesterday I led worship at Woodlands Park on the theme of “Homelessness”, and there seemed to be many layers in our thoughts about what it meant to be “at home”, what it means to have a home, how significant it is to know that you are accepted and welcome in a safe place. The Bible stories of Ruth, Abraham, the exile, “no room” at Bethlehem, the flight to Egypt came to mind – but there are many others.

We shared a simple lunch afterwards of soup and cakes; there was good fellowship round the table; I thanked God for the way we as a family have been made to be “at home” in the Methodist Church and in many congregations.

I was able to spend much of the afternoon reading – one of Jim Thompson’s books (do you remember him: he was Bishop of Stepney and often gave the thought for the day on Radio 4?) – in front of an open fire, watching the end of the tennis and some of the football with Jill and Peter. Thank God for this home.

In the evening we had a circuit service at Maidenhead, at which the ministry of healing was offered. A safe place in which to come and receive the grace and goodness of God. It was a privilege to be able to participate in this, and I left quite humbled by the experience.

So to this week: with a new commitment and awareness of the God who is making a home among men and women.

Peace.

Andrew



29th January 2012

This is quite a challenging Lord’s Day – when we are invited to think about homelessness and pray for all who are homeless in this country and around the world. Having known the security of a family home all my life, I am to walk for a while in the shoes of those who do not experience that security. The God of the manger, the refugee in Egypt reveals compassion for the homeless ones.

Those of you who enjoy cricket will have hung your heads yesterday morning. How the mighty fell! Number one in the world bowled out for 72! I wonder if the England team can bounce back from that?

We had fun yesterday evening with some of the teenagers from Slough and Windsor! There was lots of laughter as we played and ate together. Tim then led us in some thoughts about the holocaust and the significance of “Speaking out” when something is wrong. We thought about bullying in school. There was a time for games and a time for discussion. A time to laugh and a time to cry. A time to eat and a time to pray.

As I lay awake through the night, aware that it was very cold outside, I knew I was thankful for the comfort of the bed, the security of a family home. I was invited to pray for those still out on the streets. Can I speak out? Can I do something?

Peace to you as you worship today.

Andrew



28th January 2012

On a “rest day” it is not that I switch off from the life of a Methodist Minister: I thought and talked much about what is being done in the circuit. However it is good to have a day, which is different, away from sitting at the desk, away from emails.

The picnic was made and we drove to Kew Bridge, finding a good place to park. We set off on the south side of the river along the Thames path, enjoying glorious sunshine. Snowdrops. People rowing on the river. Lots of birds making lots of noise. It felt great to be alive. We had a break at a beautiful church by Putney Bridge, which had an excellent coffee shop, and read about the Putney debates. Later paused in the sunshine to eat our sandwiches. Great to be alive.

We reached as far as Battersea, before catching the train back to Kew. Spirits were lifted. An hour at the supermarket was followed by a quiet evening together as a family. Playing “Articulate!” was not exactly quiet, but good fun. Tired, but happy man went to bed.

Thinking of those, who have no respite from their work pattern. Thinking of those, who are unable to smile. Thinking of those in hospital.

It is a new day, and there is much to do.

Peace.

Andrew



27th January 2012

Exactly six months until the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. I am really excited about them being in this country (though I know that not all people share my enthusiasm). I know that I need to be thinking with others how we can best seize this moment of history – that it might be a significant time for this country to grasp something of the love of God.

I was at an inspiring meeting yesterday, led by the President designate of the Methodist Church, Mark Wakelin. We travelled to Horley (and the M25 was in good form!) and there was a real “buzz” as we thought about the possibilities for the church in this generation. I left with a feeling of anticipation, that we might receive the breath of God’s Spirit.

Even the circuit treasurers’ meeting in the evening must have caught something of this, as we had agreed a budget within half an hour! That is something to take to circuit meeting! I was quite upbeat then as I went to meet Jill from the station – she had been in Plymouth for the day. We have a full staff team sorted for September 2012, we are catching the vision of what we are about as a church, and I am ready for a rest day!

I am praying that congregations within the circuit may catch the vision given to them by God, which will drive them forward in the power of the Spirit to fulfil their mission.

Peace.

Andrew



26th January 2012

Sometimes my life seems to be dominated by meetings! I lurch from one to the next at certain times of the year; I seem to have filled the diary – with no space to process what has happened at one or to prepare for the next! Yet meetings are a means of encounter with people; they can be positive, energising and life-giving. They can be an expression of the teamwork I thought about yesterday in this blog. Lord, take away any negative feelings about meetings, which tend to brood over me, so that I can hear you and see you in the encounter with others.

It was indeed life-giving having a colleague with me yesterday, who will be joining the staff team in September. She was enthusiastic, cheerful and engaging. We met and then had lunch as a staff. I met to pray with people from St Andrew's – sharing with God the burdens too heavy for us to bear. I met with a wife and son, who are grieving the death of a husband and father. Three meetings, which were filled with hope and light, as we knew God's presence with us.

So whether this day is filled with meetings or is a day for quiet solitariness, may we encounter the reality of the energy of God. Give me the grace not to despise the meeting-time, but to seize it with all its possibilities for goodness.

Peace.

Andrew

25th January 2012

I have learnt over the years to respect my colleagues, to receive their support and encouragement. Yesterday I spent some time with ecumenical colleagues from the other churches in the town centre of Slough, as we thought about how we can facilitate a community response to the Olympic games. We have come together every lunch time for prayers during this week of prayer for Christian unity.

In the afternoon I collected a new colleague from the airport. She will be joining the circuit staff team from this September and is spending a day with us on her way into London. Her life and energy were infectious, as we laughed and talked together. I look forward to continuing to share fellowship in the years ahead.

Belonging to a team is a significant part of ministry. It is what Paul wrote about to the Corinthian church; letting gifts and graces develop, so that the whole body of Christ develops and grows. Our society has become very individualistic, and the church operates rather differently from that: each person not seeking glory for himself or herself, but rather serving – that God may be honoured.

So I pray for all the ministers, with whom I have worked over the years, who have demonstrated service in their collegueship. I pray for those in ministry, who do not know such collegueship. I thank God for the ministry of the whole church, which is exercised in service and humility.

Peace.

Andrew