

## Vicar's Letter – February 2020

### 'Going Around in Circles'

#### Dear friends

I wonder if you ever have that sense that you feel like you are on a 'merry go round', that the same challenges you face in life keep recurring?

Last weekend, Sharon and I were in the swimming pool complex at 'Center Parcs'. My sister had kindly paid for us all to have an extended family time away together to celebrate her birthday. Most of the swimming pool complex is outside the large domed building in beautifully warm water from which steam rises. One of the features is a water course called the 'Wild Water Rapids'. The idea is you throw yourself into the water course and the current takes you over a winding and twisting route over watery slipways that increase your acceleration before depositing the helpless 'victim' in a whirlpool, part way along the route. Having arrived in the whirlpool the current then swallows you up into a circular motion. Some people manage to project themselves straight through the whirlpool and continue on the 'watery' journey whilst others get caught up going around and around in circles. I think we all had that experience. To break out of the current you either had to grab a friend's hand to pull you through or forcibly fight against the current as best you can so that you can continue down to the next 'rapids'. This all probably sounds more dramatic than it actually is! Needless to say, it is all great fun with lots of laughter and screams of delight. Those who have been to Longleat CP will know what I am trying to express!

How often do we seem to be going around in circles, swept along by the current of life, revisiting the same old sins, coping with the same old disappointments? Even our faith which was once vibrant and exciting can grow dim with the passing of the years and the never ending pressures of simply living and coping.

#### A Spiritual Journey

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February is Ash Wednesday.** This marks the start of the season of Lent – a time for reflection, a time to think about our mortality, to repent of our sins and seek God afresh. I see this as a time to break out of the 'whirlpool' in which we may have become caught by the currents of life and be renewed, inspired and refreshed in our faith. It is a time to get back on track with God, to let the Holy Spirit breathe fresh life and perspective and get excited again about what is and what could be when we are in partnership with the Almighty.

#### How can I use Lent to renew my faith?

In the physical whirlpool I have described, it would take a conscious effort to move through it and beyond it. In the same way, being renewed in faith won't just happen on its own. If you do nothing, you might just keep going around in circles. But if you do something, you can continue on your journey with God to learn more about him, his love for you and his purposes for your life.

In the coming weeks we will give some suggestions as to how you can actively observe Lent and use the season for spiritual refreshment but for now I would like to recommend one of my favourite and most inspiring books, '**Set me on Fire**' by **Malcolm Macdonald**. Some of us have heard Malcolm speak at New Wine and been stirred by his passion to see revival visit our shores. It is subtitled 'Being Filled with the Presence of God' and the blurb on the back reads:

*'Set me on Fire* is aimed at people who want to go deeper into God, who feel spiritual hunger and a desire for revival, but are not sure what this means or how to get there. Malcolm describes what it is like to be on fire for God, writing eloquently on themes such as holiness, intimacy with God and suffering, and offering personal reflections from his own journey. "Lukewarm is not normal", he explains. "We were born again for more than this" '.

I love this book. I have read it through several times. It ministers to my soul and connects with my own passion and heart's desire. The Bishop of Chelmsford writes; 'Read this book carefully. It will burn you'.

If you feel your spiritual life needs stoking up, recharging, then I commend this book to you as a means of taking the initiative, refusing to stay in the whirlpool any longer and actively pursue God. What better season to do this than that of Lent? So, you have 3 weeks to get ready!

#### And Finally..

In my new role as Area Dean of Tewkesbury with Winchcombe, there will be occasions when I will be visiting some of the other churches to support their clergy and congregations on Sunday mornings. I am grateful therefore to have such a great team here at Holy Trinity to lead our worship in my absence.

**Every blessing in Christ, Stephen**