

Your Monthly Update from Earley St Peter's – August 2024

Thought for the Month *from the Revd Kate Wakeman-Toogood*

'Who am I?' It is the title of a song from the musical *Les Miserables*, which I am going to watch in London this month (I shan't confess how many times I have seen it, but it is my favourite show!) It is also an interesting question. Our identity is a complicated thing. How we describe or define ourselves may change over the years as we grow and mature; as we experience things. The question of who we are also ties into our relationships as we do not exist in isolation. It may be that in our various relationships we see different aspects of ourselves. Indeed, it is probably true to say that all of us at some stage have been in situations or environments when we feel we can't be ourselves, and this can leave us feeling isolated, unhappy, frustrated or confused.

What we can be sure of however, is our identity in relationship to God. We are his beloved children. We are his creation with whom he is well pleased. We are valued and truly known by God in a way that we may not even know ourselves. We are called by name to follow Jesus and have life in all its fullness, discovering throughout our lives more of who we were created to be.

On 6th August, the church celebrates the Feast of the Transfiguration. This is the account of Jesus ascending a mountain with Peter, James and John, and when at the top of the mountain, Jesus' appearance dramatically changes. The Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus' face and clothes become dazzling white and that a voice from heaven can be heard saying 'this is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him'. The figures of Moses and Elijah then appear, representing the law and the prophets, and this significant moment in Jesus' life is a revelation both of his identity and purpose. Reflecting on the Transfiguration often leads Christians to reflect on their own identity, the person God knows us to be beneath the layers and shields that we may put up.

How we feel about our identity is tied in with acceptance and this inevitably links to thinking about inclusion. Last month I attended Wokingham Pride, along with some other local clergy, and between the different acts on stage, the host went round to speak to people to ask them what Pride meant to them. Possibly because I was wearing my clerical collar, or possibly just because I happened to make eye contact when the host passed by with the microphone, they asked me what Pride meant to me. I confess I hadn't got a well thought through or particularly articulate answer, but I responded by saying that it meant 'celebration, joy and inclusion'. I went on to talk about the importance of inclusion in the church and how many people have been made to feel deep shame or rejection by the church in the past, and this has made people doubt their value. I added that there are many LGBTQ+ people of faith, not just Christians, and that it is important for all people of any faith or none to know that there are safe places where people can feel welcome and loved. I then advertised that Oxford Diocese has a LGBTQ+ Chaplaincy service and I also wanted to mention that in this reflection as there may be people reading this who would like to talk to someone in confidence about faith in relation to sexuality or gender.

I have used Pride as an example as I recently attended in Wokingham, but the truth is that we all need to feel that there are places we belong, and to feel loved and valued. There are many ways in which we may feel unvalued, due to age, background, gender, ethnicity or any other thing that it is a part of our identity. Past negative experiences will have affected how we see ourselves which is why the message of God's love is so important and why it's so important for the church to be a place where all people feel welcome, safe and valued. We are a welcoming and friendly church at Earley St Peter's and I want to encourage all of us to extend that outside our church walls, to our places of work, leisure, education and to our neighbourhoods. We can be instruments of God's love and make people feel valued, and in doing so we are continuing to reveal Jesus' identity and purpose in our world today.

Services and Events in August

We meet every weekday morning at 8.45am in the church for Morning Prayer. All welcome.

Thursday 1st August	9.30am	Holiday Club
Sunday 4th August	8am	Holy Communion
	10am	Bread & Wine
	<i>Reading: Luke 15.11-32</i>	
	6.30pm	Evening Worship
		Questions and cake with Kate
Tuesday 6th August	9am	Church drop-in
	11am	Holy Communion
	12pm	Board Games and Lunch
Wednesday 7th August	9am	Church drop-in
Sunday 11th August	10am	Parish Communion
	<i>Readings: 1 Kings 19.4-8; Ephesians 4.25-5.2; John 6.35, 41-51</i>	
	6.30pm	Evening Prayer with hymns
	<i>Readings: Psalm 91.1-12; Job 39.1-40.4; Hebrews 12.1-17</i>	
Tuesday 13th August	9am	Church drop-in
	11am	Holy Communion
Wednesday 14th August	9am	Church drop-in
Sunday 18th August	10am	Parish Communion
	<i>Readings: Proverbs 9.1-6; Ephesians 5.15-20; John 6.51-58</i>	
	6.30pm	Reflective Communion
	<i>Reading: Luke 12.49-56</i>	
Tuesday 20th August	9am	Church drop-in
	11am	Holy Communion
Wednesday 21st August	9am	Church drop-in
Sunday 25th August	10am	Parish Communion
	<i>Readings: Joshua 24.1-2a, 14-18; Ephesians 6.10-20; John 6.56-69</i>	
	12pm	Baptism of Freddie and Arthur Lunnon
	6.30pm	Choral Evensong
	<i>Readings: Psalm 116; Exodus 4.27-5.1; Hebrews 13.16-21</i>	
Tuesday 27th August	9am	Church drop-in
	11am	Holy Communion
Wednesday 28th August	9am	Church drop-in

'Board Games and Lunch' is a new weekday group and the clue is in the name! On the first Tuesday of each month from 12-2.30pm there will be a range of board games in the church hall. We have classics such as ludo, snakes and ladders, and scrabble as well as newer games to try including dobbie and battle ships. There will also be a light lunch. If you'd like to come along, please sign up on the sheet at the back of church. For more information, speak to Mary Brooke.

Confirmation course: Revd Kate is hoping to run a Confirmation preparation course, probably in the new year. This will depend on numbers of people wanting to be confirmed, and the availability of one of our Bishops. If you are an adult or a young person in school year 6 or above, and would like to be confirmed or find out more about confirmation preparation, please email vicar@earleystpeters.org.uk

'Questions and Cake with Kate' continues on the first Sunday of each month from 6.30-8pm in the church hall and is for young people in year 6 and above.

The next session will be on 4th August

Please note this group will still take place on Bank Holiday weekends and school holidays.

Bible Study: Thank you to everyone who attended the Women in the Bible study sessions. There will be further study sessions in the autumn, looking in particular at Luke's Gospel. Please look out for further details.

Bicycles for Shinyanga: For the past few years, Earley St Peter's church has supported the work of projects in Shinyanga, Tanzania, where Bridget and Lesley Green are Mission Partners. One project involves training and sending out evangelists to live and work in rural communities. Bishop Johnson, the Bishop of Shinyanga, has advised Bridget and Lesley of the need for bicycles for the 45 most recently trained evangelists to help them travel the long distances they need to cover. These evangelists not only share the Gospel, but also support the communities in various practical ways.

Reconditioned second-hand bicycles can be purchased for £80. If you like to donate towards the cost of these bicycles please make a payment to the following account with the reference 'BIKES'.

Account Name: Friends of Amani Tanzania
Account No.: 00036740
Sort Code: 405240

Alternatively, contact Bridget on 07711 384672 or bridgetg@talktalk.net

Church is open 9-11am on Tuesdays and 9-10am on Wednesdays. There are prayer stations for private prayer, along with a prayer guide, a small library and a chance to have a hot drink in our coffee area. We have had visitors to church every day since it's been open, both church regulars and some who have never been before. If you'd like to commit to one morning a month to help set up and be a friendly face to greet any visitors, please speak to Kate.

Pastoral support: Our pastoral team will be happy to hear if you, or anybody you know, would welcome a phone call or visit. Please contact the parish of office (0118 9668575) or Mary Brooke (0118 926 2153)

Food Bank donations: Thank you for all your support to our local food bank with donations of tins, cartons, dried goods with a long shelf life and also personal hygiene items. Please donate if you are able in the box at the back of church. Our continued support is still very much needed.

More information here: www.woodleyfoodbank.org

Dates for your diary

14th September: **Ride and Stride.** Consider joining the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust's Ride and Stride fundraising initiative for Berkshire churches. You can be sponsored to walk, run, cycle, ride or drive between churches, and half the money you raise goes to the church of your choice. We will be among the churches opening for people to visit. More information from Peter Durrant (berkschurchestrustchair@gmail.com) or here: <https://www.berkschurchestrust.org.uk/ride-and-stride-2/>

14th September: **Beetle Drive** organised by our young people to raise money for Shinyanga. All welcome.

28th September: **Talent Show** in church to raise money for Parkinson's UK and for children and youth work. There will be refreshments, a raffle and face-painting. It is open to acts of any age, with even the vicar and churchwarden performing! Please contact Sarah Godwin as soon as possible to book a performance slot, as performances will be limited due to time: sarah_e_godwin@hotmail.co.uk