

Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit

Facebook Posts

March 2025

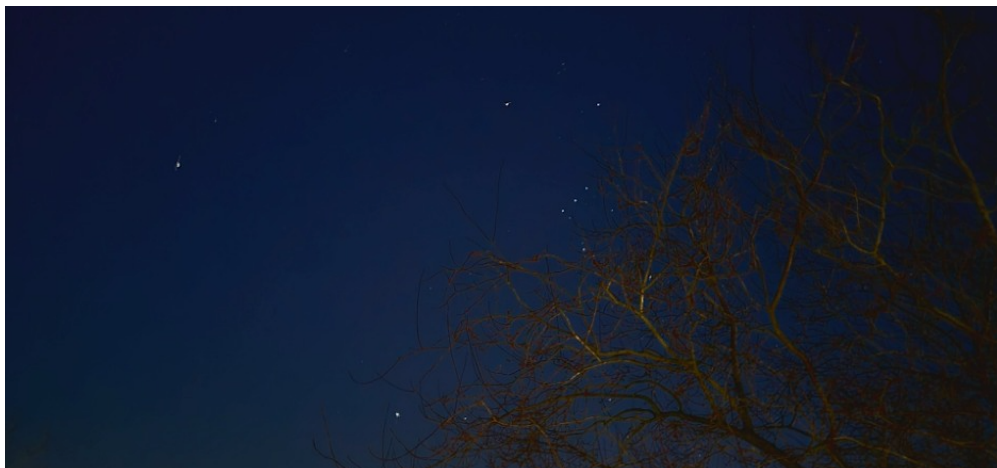
A thought from Rev Derek:

The beauty of the darkness

I made an evening funeral visit earlier in the week to a couple who live out in the Norfolk countryside. I parked my car in the road outside their house and went and sorted out the service. When I came to leave, I became aware of the darkness, there was absolutely no light pollution whatsoever. My car is white, but even so, I couldn't see where it was, or where to put my feet as I headed gingerly out onto the road. Thankfully, my car had remote unlocking which turns on the lights both inside the car and at the front and back and the feeling of relief was palpable when I could see where I was heading. I have never been the kind of person who has ever been afraid of the darkness, but I confess that driving along narrow, unfamiliar country lanes in the dark stresses me today in a way that it never has done before and I find the glare of modern headlights coming towards me at high speed quite frightening. I have noticed in recent years that I struggle more during the days with shorter hours of sunlight and always look forward to the days lengthening and the sun shining.

This week is another of those occasions when we are experiencing an unfamiliar phenomenon and according to the media, this only happens around every fifteen years, so we will next witness this in 2040. If you look at the photograph above, taken from one of the bedrooms at the front of our house in the middle of the night by my son in law you might spot the three stars, just to the left of the tree which form a straight, apparently equidistant line and if you look really closely, you might spot a further two, much fainter stars moving into alignment. This week, Mercury, Venus, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars will be visible with the naked eye, in a straight line, while Uranus and Neptune can be spotted too if you have a telescope. I am unlikely to witness this myself, partly because I don't possess a telescope, but mainly because I will be fast asleep when this wonderful moment in nature is occurring.

Around Christmas time, we often talk about Jesus as "Light coming into a darkened world" and what that suggests. In honesty, I have always found that concept helpful, even though I wouldn't describe myself as being afraid of the darkness, but I do prefer the daylight, I do like to be able to see where I am going. It is surprising how often some of the most amazing things happen during the hours of darkness and I feel extremely privileged to be living in a place with very little light pollution and have a son in law who stays awake during the night and is generous to share pictures like this with me. If it wasn't for him, who is fascinated by this kind of thing, I would have been oblivious to this wonderful event and once again I am reminded of the amazing world we live in and the even more amazing universe and am thankful.



Please pray for the congregation and community in Sporle



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A thought from Rev Jonny:

Today is Ash Wednesday, and traditionally, we wear ashes as a sign of our mortality, our limits, our sorrow. So often, the world tells us to “move on” from pain, to stay positive, to hide our struggles – but Lent invites us to something deeper.

In her book *Night Vision*, Mariana Alessandri calls us to face our dolor – a Spanish word for our grief, our disappointments, our weariness, our emotional pain – rather than pretending it away. Jesus Christ never asked us to fake joy or strength; he meets us in the ashes, in the quiet places of sorrow, in the truth of who we are. Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent is an appropriate place to be open to our dolor. Perhaps it is a time to lament the world's dolor, allowing Jesus Christ to be alongside us in it.

This Lent, may we have the courage to dwell in our darkness, knowing that even there, God is present.

Image: Pieta (After Käthe Kollwitz) (2024) by Jonny Bell



A thought from Aileen Fox:

Hope and Trust

I was a Boys' Brigade officer and the motto was Sure and Stedfast (and yes, the spelling is correct as far as the motto goes) and it came from the verse in Hebrews 6 and part of verse 19 King James Version (KJV) which many of us knew as the Authorised version. 'Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and stedfast.' The badge of the Boys' Brigade is an Anchor and their hymn is 'Will your anchor hold in the storms of life...'

Like many people I am distressed at what I am seeing going on in the world; our inhumanity to others and the political issues concerning people. The ongoing situation after 3 years of war in Ukraine, the continuing atrocities in Gaza, Syria and D.R Congo and the disregard for human life in so many countries. The stopping of and cutting aid funding by governments in the UK and the USA. Social media showing the hatred by many for anyone who is different. Are we standing up and showing Christian support and love?

As Christians do we pray and hope for an end to all war and destruction? It is very hard to hold on to hope at times! Yet easy to sing of hope in our worship songs and hymns. But look again at the questions posed in Will your Anchor Hold... (StF 645) Is our faith holding fast in difficult times? Are we truly praying for peace?

The photo of a sunflower is a symbol of standing in solidarity with Ukraine; the BB badge shows the anchor which if you are into sailing is vital for securing your boat. Are our hearts and minds anchored in Jesus? As we are into Lent, we remember the temptation Jesus underwent in the wilderness. His answers were anchored in his trust in God. Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?



Please pray for the congregation and community in Stibbard



A thought from Rev Derek:

The story

The actor Sir David Jason said in a television interview once that the modern television schedulers have forgotten that their primary task in life is to entertain people, not to win awards, and I applauded his comments. I find that as I watch some modern television programmes, they are not in the least bit entertaining, and I lose patience very quickly. In fairness I fall asleep all too quickly these days, which might reflect my boredom, or tiredness. Every so often a television programme comes along that I find entertaining, inspiring, moving and worth spending half an hour of my life watching. I stumbled almost by accident one Friday on the BBC1 programme "Life Portraits" where the comedian, actor, musician and artist Bill Bailey presents a marriage between inspiring people and renowned artists. What fascinates me most is the story of the sitter and during the first series (available to binge on the BBC I Player) focuses on the heroes from the NHS, ordinary people, with extraordinary stories, who might otherwise never be the recipients of a portrait or a sculpture, marking their achievements. The second series is just as inspirational and focuses on ordinary people once again from all walks of life.

Stories have always been important throughout my life and as a man in his sixties now I find myself looking back on some of the most amazing people I have met over the years, sadly, many of whom are no longer with us. I would love to be able to pay tribute to ordinary people, who never saw themselves as being in the least bit special, but who in no small way shaped me into the person I am today. The vast majority of these people have never had a portrait painted or will ever have a biography written about them, but their stories live on in my heart and mind.

One of the tasks I need to accomplish over the next few years is to thin down my somewhat vast collection of books. For many years I never read fiction but had dozens of biographies and autobiographies and the kind of people I wanted to read about were proper people. My real heroes in life have always been the kind of people who came from humble beginnings and made something of themselves, I particularly like those who have been proud of their early lives, honoured those who believed in them and encouraged them, but never lost sight of the real people they were. I believe that we have enough "celebrities" in life who live only to be worshipped by others and jump from one celebrity reality show to another, putting themselves through torturous experiences just to earn as much money as they can and be as popular as they can be.

Consequently, I love Bill Bailey's Friday evening show on BBC1 and commend it to you. I love hearing the stories people tell, both the sitter and the artist, and the moment the sitter and their closest friends and family gather to see the great reveal, is often stunning and moving. God Bless the BBC, just when I think that they have forgotten what they are there for, they come up with a gem like this.





A thought from Rev Jonny:

Reflecting on our holiday in North Wales, Seb, Bagel, and I went hiking and visited the breathtaking Rhaeadr Nantcol waterfalls. There is something truly humbling about the intensity and beauty of the flowing water. The tremendous sound, the sheer volume of water, and its force moving through the terrain are awe-inspiring. In landscapes like these, we are reminded of something far greater than ourselves. Just as the landscape is magnificent, so too is God even more awesome than the nature around us.

The world may feel volatile and even frightening right now, but God is greater than all these challenges. I believe that God is still at work in the world, transforming it - even if we humans often get in the way of that process! Just as the natural landscape is greater than me, so is God even greater than all the challenges that life presents.



A thought from Dee Moden:

This is one of my favourite poems in this time of Lent.

Ann Weems was a Presbyterian Poet Laureate, an elder, a lecturer, and a popular author of many books, she lived in Nashville, Tennessee, United States, and died in 2016 at the age of 81. She herself suffered tragedy when her 21-year-old son was murdered. Over the years she poured out her thoughts and feelings into her writing. So, I will leave you with her thoughts on Lent.

Lenten Poem by Ann Weems

Lent is a time to take time to let the power
of our faith story take hold of us,
a time to let the events get up
and walk around in us,
a time to intensify our living unto Christ,
a time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts,
a time to place our feet in the streets of
Jerusalem or to walk along the sea and
listen to his Word,
a time to touch his robe
and feel the healing surge through us,
a time to ponder and a time to wonder...
Lent is a time to allow
a fresh new taste of God!
Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,
for thoughts come unbidden.
Perhaps we're afraid to face our future
knowing our past.
Give us courage, O God,
to hear your Word
and to read our living into it.
Give us the trust to know we're forgiven
and give us the faith
to take up our lives and walk.



Rev Anne writes: Here we are in Lent - and you may recall the story of Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness before he started his ministry. I spotted this on my walk - the top photo looks like being in the wilderness - sand stretching into the distance! But zoom out to the next photo and you can see it's a field, with sandy soil, but ploughed ready for planting. It made me wonder - how often do we perceive something as wilderness/ desert wherein reality it's just preparation for the next season of growth?



Please pray for the congregation and community in Swaffham.



A thought from Rev Derek:

Can we guess your job?

We have now lived in the delightful Norfolk market town of Dereham for just over six months and I am fast beginning to feel as though this my personal little corner of heaven. The place is quite remarkable, and the people are lovely. My daughter and I had to wander to the chemist this afternoon and arrived at one of the major roads with heavy traffic travelling in both directions. I muttered to my daughter that it was going to take ages to cross but how wrong I was. A young woman stopped and waved us across in front of her, we weren't at a designated crossing, just standing at the kerb edge, we crossed in front of her and somebody coming in the opposite direction waved us all the way across. I can't imagine that happening in many places. I was just commenting on that as we arrived at the next road and the same thing happened again, and we were waved across. My opinion about human nature soared.

Walking back through town, we came across a teenage boy and girl sitting on the doorstep of the closed bank, the lad, who reminded me of Ben from the sitcom Outnumbered with a mop of curly dark hair beckoned me over, I was ready with my rebuff if they were asking for money, but to my surprise he politely asked if he and his girlfriend could guess my job. My ego took a real polishing that this young lad looked at an old gimmer like me and assumed that I still had job, which took years off me. He looked me up and down and asked for a clue "he talks in front of people" my daughter offered.

The young lads face lit up "are you a stand-up comedian?" he asked enthusiastically, I smile "not exactly" I replied, not giving too much away "are you a politician?" he asked, "no" I replied, the two of them conferred before their third attempt "are you a lecturer, do you teach people good stuff?" he asked, "sort of" I replied. They gave in and asked what I did. To keep things simple, I told them that I am a vicar, you should have seen the look on their faces, I was wearing trainers, joggers, a T shirt and hoodie and maybe didn't look particularly vicarish. Suddenly enthused by my response he asked which Church I worked at and I told him, they said bye, bye cheerfully and we made for home.

I'd had a busy day and was tired and had set off from home feeling a bit down, but today was a pleasant day, the sun was shining and my encounters with a handful of kind and thoughtful people had made my day. I walked back home with a dirty great big smile on my face and couldn't wait to tell my wife about the experience. It never ceases to amaze me how some of the simplest things in life can brighten up our day. Life is pretty good and maybe we should all take a leaf out of the book of this teenage couple and invest time in making other people's life that bit better and putting a smile on their face.



A thought from Rev Jonny:

How often do we pause to appreciate the simple wonders around us?

Whether it's the warmth of the sun, the sound of the waves, or the quiet moments shared with loved ones – these are reminders of our connection to something greater. In our busy lives, let's not forget to embrace these instances of awe and gratitude, recognising that they are gifts from God.

How might we carry this awareness into our daily routines and interactions, fostering a deeper appreciation for the world and our place within it? Just as I stood on that beach, enveloped by the beauty of creation, I invite you to take a moment and reflect on the presence of God in your own life.



A thought from Aileen Fox:

Patience

I set an Amaryllis bulb in early January, I'd forgotten all about it and there it sat in a box waiting to be potted up. I was away for a couple of weeks so the house was cool and when I returned at the end of January, nothing much seemed to have happened. It showed green but gradually a shoot and it began to grow a little taller with more heat on in the house. Each day I turned it so that it grew straight. I couldn't even remember what colour it was, having thrown the box away.

My patience has been rewarded - it has grown tall and strong with the second stem getting taller and the flowers, glorious white trumpet shapes, so beautiful. It needed some additional help, regular turning to grow straight, warmth and water. We are a bit like that - we need a bit of TLC (*tender loving care*) from time to time; friendship, warmth and love, knowing that even on our bad and difficult days we are loved by God and He is with us. It is also good to have friends around to share with us. I'm trying desperately hard to be patient when held up in the queue at the checkout as the customer in front keeps chatting and making no effort to move away after paying. I keep telling myself perhaps that is the only person they will speak to today, or they may just be having a bad day! Patience, it has its rewards like my Amaryllis, sometimes having to be patient stops us making impulsive errors. God is patient with us sometimes he steers us in a different route, I'm sure he must think '*not again Aileen, when are you going to learn to slow down*' but God is there always loving and caring for us.



A thought from Rev Derek:

At the breaking of bread



For many years Karen and I went to St Andrews Methodist Church in Undercliffe Bradford and one of the features of life in that Church was Scarborough Weekend. Every year during November a large group of us would take over Green Gables hotel (pictured above) and in its heyday we would number a hundred plus spending a weekend together. As I look back, I owe a great debt of gratitude to those who organised those weekends, the speakers who inspired us, the people I shared the journey to and from Scarborough with and the dozens of ordinary people, who made the weekends special events, I have so many happy memories. One of the most important parts of the weekends was mealtimes when we shared food with whoever fancied sharing the table with us, often different people at each mealtime. By and large the food was good, I remember a few questionable dishes over the years, but fellowship over a meal is always something special for me. Mealtimes are informal, unstructured, and an opportunity to share food and fellowship, and I treasure times like this.

Looking at the Bible, we read of times when Jesus shares meals with his disciples. There are the mammoth occasions like the great feeding miracles, we read in some accounts how the disciples wanted to send the people away, but Jesus made time to share food with them. You might recall at the beginning of St John's Gospel when Jesus attends a wedding feast, or where he shares food with Martha and Mary. The story of the last supper, which we mark during Holy Week was always special for me when we were living in Norwich, when we shared ecumenically a Passover Meal, and relived what it would have been like to walk in the footsteps of the disciples. I love the moment in the story of the Road to Emmaus, recorded later in St Luke's Gospel where Jesus shares a meal with the two and they recognise him as he breaks the bread. One of my favourite meal stories is when Jesus meets with the disciples on the shore of the sea of Galilee and they cook fish for them to eat together, right at the end of the Gospel of St John. Mealtimes seem to be an important part of the Gospel story.

One of the final moments that we shared together on those weekends in Scarborough was a communion service, not in a chapel, but in the lounge at the hotel. During the course of the weekend, we would intermingle, but in that service we would sit in families and share bread and wine in our family units, which was always special for me. I always find Holy Communion a humbling experience, it doesn't matter who we are, where we are on the journey of faith, as we come to the table, we are all equal in the sight of God, and I believe that is precious.

- How important are mealtimes for you?
- Do you find it special, being able to sit around a table with friends or family and share good food and good conversation?
- Is Holy Communion special to you?

Please pray for the congregation and community in Tittleshall



A thought from Rev Jonny:

We had a bonfire on Monday evening, burning some of the branches and twigs we had taken off from gardening. It reminds me of the idea of being a firebrand and loving one another.

Love is like a firebrand, a burning piece of wood that can set things aflame. This fire may be slow-burning, like embers, warming and persisting; it is much like the everyday care we show others, of listening and supporting. This fire may be like a blazing torch, enrapt by passion: the passion of love for someone, like a partner or a child, or the passion of anger against injustices, of accepting one's own responsibility in the world's happenings, as well as being a bulwark to protect others.



Being a firebrand illuminates the way, showing the way forward, but the fire can burn out if it isn't properly fed. If our firebrands are to persist, they must be fed by love, by the Love, by God. If they are to illuminate the way of life and how to love the other more fully, they need to be sustained by the Spirit. It is by this that we can be firebrands in the world, setting it alight with the power of God, alight with Love.

