

Vicar's Reflection APCM 2025

12 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Invocation

Going on a journey is something which is an everyday part of life. We have all journeyed to be here today, some a short distance and we know from our Electoral Roll that a third of you have probably travelled from outside the Parish. Each of us will have many little journeys we go on throughout our lives: to work, to friends, to family, on holiday, and so on.

Of course these are not the only journeys we go on, and many of life's greatest journey and adventures are not what we do 'out there' but what happens 'in here'. These come with all types of names – journeys of self-discovery, spiritual journey's or journeys with God. These are journey's which might be ours alone to take, but we rarely do them alone. We do them with loved ones, wives or husbands, with children, friends and family. We even do them with strangers and those not like us at all.

It is no wonder then that the Bible, that great story of humanities relationship with the divine, contains a lot of journeys. They normally start off as the physical kind – a call to go somewhere, or to do something. Think of Abram's journey in Genesis, or The People of Israel in the Wilderness, or even as we have heard more recently the short journey to Emmaus. But, as seems to happen, they become a journey of far deeper significance and meaning.

The church, through its ancient wisdom, knows this all too well. Just look at how most churches are designed – we enter in through the west door, pass the font – a reminder that baptism is the entry point into the church, and then sit in the nave. The nave comes from the Latin 'navis' meaning ship, and I think St John's roof is one of the best examples of an imitation upside down boat.

But all is not as it seems. For whilst in church we might all look east towards the cross, a sign of God's love for us, and to the altar upon which we are nourished in the sacrament, life is rarely so straight forward and easy, as an individual or even more so as a community. And of course I know this saying we are all part of more than one community and these different spheres of our lives don't always line up.

This journey will involve mis-direction, dead ends, false promise, pain and suffering, as much as joy, happiness and gratitude. Each somehow prepares us for the final destination.

To be the people of God is to be a people on the move, always in search for the next destination, for God never calls us to stand still, no matter how comfortable it might be. But always travelling with friends and a God who is always with us.

Our journey as a church has been typical for many – with lots of highs in 2024 – Ritah's ordination to the priesthood, five confirmations, 19 baptisms, a new Director of Music, growing Junior and Minit Church, and successful Patronal Festival, Harvest Festival and more – and I'm sure you can each add many of your own blessings you have seen and been a part of in the life of this church.

One really good piece of news is the update you on our Christmas appeal, and how the money is being used – from Fr Bliss Spillar, Dean Designate of The Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, Lima, *I cannot tell you how thankful I am that St. John's sent their Christmas offering. We were able to send Christmas and back to school packages to 150 children in some of the most remote villages in the Amazon jungle. They were so excited to get these presents and supplies. We also used some of the funds to create a classroom space for our outreach academy. The Academy will offer a variety of FREE classes to people of the community such as Spanish for the English Speaker, Crochet and art classes, and parenting classes. It is exciting to see how the congregation is opening up. We have been able to expand the outreach of the church so much and seeing more and more people benefit from it.*

But there have also been some woes as well – a year beginning with the vicar being off sick and time for recovery, a year without any churchwardens, challenges with finances, and realising that project phoenix needed to change course.

The good thing about any journey, and especially our journey with God, is that we are rarely asked to do it alone, and there are quite a few people I'd like to thank for their part in St John's journey this year.

When we are thinking of thanking people there is always that chance someone will be left off, so I first want to thank everyone in the congregation, from the very young to the wiser in years, we cover quite a breadth. Amongst you the life blood of this community runs. At my last count there were over 65 different jobs which help the church to function, from the polishing of the door handles to mowing the lawn, to cleaning linen to arranging rotas and meetings. All of it is seen and valued and we should never take any of this for granted. So thank you to all of you!

But there are some people without whom St John's wouldn't run at all.

To those elected to the PCC, and members of the standing committee, thank you. For your dedication and service to God, and to St John's, and how we discern together how to meet the many needs of the church to enable us to flourish.

A special thanks to Alison our PCC Treasurer, whose attention to details has seen us this year (my 4 APCM) as the first year where I know we really have a close idea of what is going on financially. Each of us have our gifts and skills which God invites us to use for the benefit of the kingdom, and thank you for all the time (and blood, sweat and tears) you have put into our finances. Not only this, but as a Lay Leader of Worship, Alison also leads some very popular Taize services in church.

To Mary Jean, our PCC Secretary. I've heard it said that the PCC secretary is probably one of the most important positions in the life of a church – the recording of meetings and administration, helping to plan the APCM, and ensuring we follow the right due process. Without your attention to detail and process we would be much the poorer. Thank you.

I know you both do this for your love and God and St John's, but I know it's an extra pressure in a year without churchwardens.

Another very important Parish role is our Parish Safeguarding Officer. As we are all becoming more aware that good safeguarding, and a culture where everyone feels safe in church, is incredibly important. There is an admin and oversight aspect to that, and we are very lucky that Liz Macdonald has undertaken this role with great attention to detail and sensitivity thank you Liz.

We are very blessed to have a very proactive Ministry Team, with a curate, three readers and new in 2024 two Lay Leaders of Worship

To Ritah, thank you for your ministry among us. It was a great joy to see you get ordained, and celebrate your first of many Eucharist with us here at St John's. thank you for all the many ways you enrich the life of this church.

To Lauryn, thank you for your thought provoking preaching, and for your teaching. I know many have enjoyed your bible study session and books clubs and we are fortunate to have your wisdom as part of this church.

To Anne, thank you for prayerful presence on the prayer life of this church. Our Daily Office, held every morning at 9.30am forms the heart beat of our ministry of prayer and the bedrock of which our ministry comes.

To David thank you for your pastoral presence in this community. If there is someone how is unwell or ill it is usually David who has already been in touch. This is a blessing not just to us as a church but also to this community.

To Christine thank for all you do with our ministry to our early years – leading our Toddler group and leading our Toddler Service. Being so welcoming to new families is one of the key things that as underpinned our growing number of families coming to church, and Christine has been at the forefront of this for many years.

It's fair to say that the person who knows everything in a Parish is not the Vicar, but the Parish Administrator. We are very lucky to have Amanda in the office, whose dedication to the life of St John's not many of us know, and without her the life of St John's would almost fall apart. She is not here today, but I'll be passing on our thanks on Monday.

We were very blessed as a congregation to be able to appoint Matt Harrison as our Director of Music in 2024. Matt has a real infectious energy for music here, and has re-started our junior choir, recital series and is master minding our Come and Sing next Sunday (do come along to evensong at 5pm).

So that's something about where we have been looking back, but what about where we are to go next?

I think the story of Abram gives us a helpful perspective. He was called by God to go to a new land, into a new territory. I'm sure it was scary and uncertain, but he trusted God, even despite difficulties along the way.

Now I am not encouraging us to move church (we have done that once after the last one burnt down over 100 years ago), but we are called to follow God into a new ways of doing ministry and new ways of remaining faithful to the teaching of Jesus, as they have been passed on to us.

We can no longer expect people to come to church as in times past, church is just one of many things to do on a Sunday. We also can't expect people to have the same time commitments as before, and doing the same thing but harder or faster will not make a difference.

We first need to trust in God and have the courage to follow where God calls us, whatever our age, so that we might not just be blessing for our ourselves, but that through us this community might be blessed too.

I certainly feel that these are positive times for St John's – a record number of children, growing church, but still more to do – but I know that the God who calls us is always faithful. Amen

Pray for our new church wardens and PCC member who are here today (ask them to stand)

Lets finish my prayer our parish prayer together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the members of our Parochial Church Council. We ask for your blessings and guidance as they begin their service. May they be filled with your Holy Spirit, inspiring them with wisdom, vision, and strength to carry out their tasks. Amen.