

AGM 2018

On Monday mornings a team led by Jenny Rankin takes worship at St Paul's School. They read a story from a children's bible most weeks and often – if the story is from the Old Testament – these words will be part of the conclusion 'Every story whispers his name'.

That strikes me as a pretty good summary of my purpose as a disciple of Jesus and for our purpose as a community of disciples. The whole of each of our lives and the result of our lives as a church 'whispering his name'.

Part of my job today is to look back at 2017 and the thing I need to ask is 'Did our life together whisper his name?' There were some changes in our life and our aim was that it should have been so. We swapped chairs for pews and as a result the building became more flexible, more roomy and I hope more welcoming. We started the process of redeveloping this building and the aim was to be a more effective blessing to Holgate [What a wonderful help Steve Crowther has been in that]. We finally let go of Scarborough in February in favour of Wydale in the summer for our weekend away together - and a big part of that was to release the creativity within our community and to enjoy being together. [I hope you'll join as we do it again in July]. Did our life whisper his name? I hope so.

I suppose that where I am sure it did was in our losses in 2018. Some timely and life giving losses, like Kath and her family leaving to train for ordination. Some untimely losses like the death of Alan Nicolls. Somehow in the pain and the sorrow of that I felt that the name of Jesus was whispered. I hope you did too.

It's not just in the new and the unexpected but in the everyday that Jesus name is whispered. I love the phrase of Eugene Peterson - who produced the Message version of the Bible: He calls discipleship 'a long obedience in the same direction'. For many – perhaps for most of us - that has been the character of this year – perhaps of most years. Thank you for the ways in which that long obedience has blessed us: thank you for the ways in which it has enriched our mission and ministry.

So, what about the year ahead? Well I have some thoughts but I should say that I'm sure it will surprise us and probably challenge us, so take everything I say in that light. Let's walk humbly into the year rather than with too much certainty. Here is the best I can do about the big directions for us.

1. The building. We have our architects [Purcell] and soon we will begin to have some proposals and plans. We'll see progress this year but it will take time. While what we do will matter to us and to future generations here – how we do it will matter at least as much – I think more. Our future will be shaped by this building but it will be shaped too by whether we can do this in a way that whispers Jesus' name. It will be crucial that our financial planning is good, that the structure that emerges is useful and flexible, that the materials are of high quality: it will also be crucial that we are compassionate and gentle with each other, that we are attentive and honest, that mercy and kindness, generosity and wisdom and love above all mark this process. I think that if they do then what we build will bring joy and hope and peace to our community. Let's invest in that. Let's build that together.

2. Our Partnership with St Barnabas Church. I have been asked if I'll be Priest in Charge of St Barnabas as well as Rector here, and I've said yes. So what does that mean? Well it does not mean a 50/50 split with me trying to have the same role in both churches. Instead it will mean me leading a team whose goal is to grow St Barnabas and to be ready for the huge opportunities that the York central development will bring. That team will be the leaders from St Barnabas along with Hannah, Matt Woodcock and me. How will this affect us? Well let me put it this way – In 1900 St Paul's was the mother and St Barnabas was the daughter church, in more recent times we have been sister churches. Matt very helpfully described the future relationship the other day as being best friends. I think that's perfect! Best friends have common interests and shared values. They probably have different characters, gifts, resources and experiences but what is different is at the disposal of the friend. We have much in common, we have much that is distinctive – 'I think this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship'. We'll be praying for each other, finding things that work brilliantly when we do it together, cheering each other on when we doing our own thing, discovering common ground, blessing each other in unexpected ways and seeing the Kingdom of Heaven growing out of our affection. I think our friendship will whisper the name of Jesus.

3. Here is one last thing. A few weeks ago in Church we welcomed Sara Goyea the new Headteacher at ST Paul's school. We governors are patting ourselves on the back and also reeling at her appointment. Sara is excellent – generous, affectionate, wholehearted and also relentless, perceptive and brutally frank. So when she visited she told us how disappointed she was that so few families from the school are part of our Sunday life. She was right and it set me thinking about our outreach and evangelism. It's on our agenda - of course it is – Alpha, Start, Holiday Club, DMC, the community choir, Thy Kingdom Come – all evidence of that.

But outputs are one thing – outcomes are something else altogether. We mostly grow by attracting Christians who are looking for a church. That type of transfer growth is inevitable and mostly perfectly healthy [and you can find evidence of it the NT]. We are blessed here by many of you who have done that and I want to thank without reservation for your friendship and your ministry. My ambition if for our future is that this kind of growth should continue but that it should be dwarfed by the number of people who are becoming disciples of Jesus for the first time.

So this is what I propose – let's look at our shape this year. We've begun with the building but let's not stop there. Let's survey our life together, let's draw up some plans to redesign it. Let's look at our time together and how we use it – what we do on Sunday, what we do in the week. I suggest that over the year we look at 8.45, 10.30 & 6.30 and ask ourselves do these times together help or hinder our mission? Are they comfortable habits or acts of obedient service to Jesus? I know this is tricky and I also know that, just as we take something of our inheritance forward in the building, we will do the same with our time. But let's bear this fact in mind – our responsibility is not to the past but to the future.

Let's look too at our staff team. Steve Crowther points out that we are hoping to spend a million pounds on this building to make it more helpful – among other things – to our ministry among children and young people and yet each year our budget for staff

ministering to them is just c. £20K. What could we do with a children's team that was twice as big, what could we do if we employed a parish nurse to reach out to toddler's parents and older isolated people?

Let's think about how resource each other as partners in mission. Shamefully we probably think more about our mission partners in central Asia or Africa than we do about the mission of the people we worship with each week. Isn't that crazy. Let's change it. Say you're a teacher, a civil servant or in business, you're retired, a volunteer, an allotment holder, a good neighbour, a homemaker, an artist, a musician, a sports player, a friend, an NHS worker, and employer or a leader in your field – where does that call of God take you? Who does it set you among? That is your place of mission, that is your place of prayer, those are the people you are called to be Jesus for. Does St Paul's resource you for your mission? Is this community a place where you could bring people with confidence? My guess is that the answer is probably 'up to a point' and 'probably not'. The answer needs to be 'Yes' and 'Usually'. Getting there will take some listening from all of us but let's do that shall we? Let's do it because Jesus' call on every Christian is Go! Make disciples!

Well I hope all that is helpful. What I'll do is make this available as a script. Who knows what the year will bring us but I hope that this at least can be a help in our thinking and praying together.