

Villages - February 2024

Dear Friends

Rain!

We've had a lot of it recently, haven't we?

It's been so lovely to have a bit of a dry spell lately (I'm writing in mid January, I have no idea what the weather will be like between now and you reading this). Last year we had more rainfall across the UK than we have had for a decade, and I'm pretty sure North Wiltshire was even wetter than that. The flooding was on a scale many of us haven't experienced, although thankfully for the vast majority of our area the damage caused was short term. It was miserable.

And yet, when you are a child, weather is exciting, isn't it? The rain on the roof, the wind blowing the trees are spectacles to watch. A thunderstorm lights up the landscape with dramatic flashes. Waves crash against the sea wall.

To a child, weather is only a problem if it stops you having fun, but for the most part a fallen tree, heavy snow or floods blocking a road meant a school-free day; which was a treat even for someone who loved school.

As adults we have to look at the bigger picture. Not being able to get to work might have financial implications, storm damage affects our insurance, but perhaps most of all we learn to worry about what might go wrong. It is our responsibility to keep ourselves, our families and

possibly our employees safe and well-provided for, and anything that makes that harder is a problem to be addressed rather than a minor inconvenience to be embraced. While it is right and understandable that things change as we get older, not everything is necessarily an improvement.

When covid went from being a daily important news item to a thing to leave behind us, many of us were good at seizing the moment. Long-delayed holidays were finally taken, families visited, major decisions finally made. There was a freedom in feeling justified in being a little more care-free than before.

Since then, as time has gone on, I wonder if some of us have lost sight of the things that are truly valuable. I know times are hard, and some of you are possibly struggling just to keep your heads above the water; if that is you, then you have my heartfelt sympathy. But maybe some of us have simply got back into bad habits, giving competing priorities the wrong respective values. If you have, as I have, then all I want to do is remind us of what mattered then, and encourage us to pause and reflect before we let ourselves get sucked back into a way of thinking and acting that isn't right.

This is not a call for living for today only—we all know we need long term thinking to solve many of the issues facing the world today. Nor am I suggesting we all become Polyannas (although I do find a good song does boost the spirit). It is rather a call to keep things in perspective. I don't know if you've heard of the 5x5 rule: "If it won't matter in 5 years, don't spend 5 minutes on it now." While it's not perfect — anyone under 18 years old or facing an exam please ignore it! — it's not a bad rule of thumb to help us save wasting energy on

things that don't matter, and save it for the things that do matter. There will be enough of those, after all.

If you do a search in the Bible for "rain", it's almost universally a good thing (with the obvious exception of Noah's flood). A part of the world which suffers regular, devastating droughts finds it hard to be critical of rain! But flooding is equally dangerous when the ground is hard and dry. The prophet Isaiah comforts his people who were facing disaster after disaster with the following promise from God:

*When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you. (chapter 43)*

There are times in life when it feels like we are wading through deep, dangerous, fast-flowing floods. If that is you, may you know the strength of God's hand preventing you from being swept away.

With every blessing, Matt

Midweek communion for Lent

As a bit of an experiment, this year we will be having a communion service every Wednesday in Lent (not including Ash Wednesday and Holy Week). This will be a short service beginning at 9.30am and lasting about 30 minutes, held at St James' Cherhill.

For clarity, the dates are:

21st and 28th February, 6th, 13th and 20th March

More details to Holy Week itself, including the walk up to the cross, will be in next month's Villages magazine or at our website <https://www.oldburybenefice.org.uk>.