

May has come. One of life's great gifts, is the month of May.

For some years we had a wonderful view of beech trees as they came into full leaf on Warley Woods. Beeches are always slightly slow on the uptake. While cherries blossom and willows wistfully emerge from winter's grip in April, beeches seem to stay dormant. But once May is in full swing, their soft green leaves start to unfurl and by the end of the month they are a picture of health.

Beeches might be slow on the uptake - but even they notice the change of gear. Oh yes, May's a wonderful month. It seems like it is going to be a very full month as well.

Walking and exploration is a bit of a theme this month at St Hilda's. The early May Bank Holiday, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, is the date for a parish outing to London, a trip which is back by very popular demand (see Jon Goodwin for details - the bus is filling up fast - and may be completely full by the time you read this!).

The following week sees the start of Christian Aid week (May 10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>). As usual, we will be walking round some of the streets in the parish to collect for the charity, which this year focuses on the needs of the communities caught up in the ongoing but little reported conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As we walk the parish, we will pray that the fragile peace emerging in this central African country will blossom into something more long-lasting and fruitful. As we walk we will also pray for the people of our parish, asking God to open our eyes to the needs of our neighbours.

At the family and parade service on Sunday May 10<sup>th</sup> we will be marking Christian Aid week. But we will also be supporting the St Hilda's Girl Guides, who will be taking part in the service having just completed a sponsored sleep-out in aid of Railway Children, an international charity for

youngsters who have run away from home. The girls decided to chose this charity as part of the national celebrations to mark 100 years of Girl Guiding. We look forward to their contribution to our worship.

To round off Christian Aid Week, there will be a fund-raising quiz night in the church hall on May 16<sup>th</sup>. That is the same day that the St Hilda's ramblers group throw out an invitation to all to join them for a pub lunch - and a chance to enjoy a country walk too. This year the destination is Stoke Heath.

May brings with it a change in gears. And so it is the same for this part of the church year between Easter and Pentecost. Over the coming weeks we walk through the Gospel of John as we consider again the promises of Jesus: that he is our Good Shepherd, that we are branches to his vine, that we are to remain in him and he in us and that we as individuals and a community are both to live fully *in* the world but not to be *of* the world.

How is that going to affect what we do together this May? Perhaps we can remember that we walk with our Good Shepherd as we walk the streets of the parish collecting for Christian Aid. Perhaps we will remember how we are invited to bind together more closely as branches to his vine as we enjoy each other's company on the outing to London and the parish ramble. And above all, with Pentecost in our sights on May 31<sup>st</sup>, we will remember that we do all these things in the power of the Holy Spirit - not our own might - as we are shaped and formed as God's people in the world but not of it, as servants not lording it over anyone.

Elsewhere, in this edition, you will see a copy of a report I gave to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting outlining some of the hopes and aspirations for the year ahead. This is not a finished map, but more like a setting of the compass. As your newly appointed Vicar it is still very early days as we

get to know each other and adjust to a different gear together. As part of the discernment process for developing our common life together, I have invited the Readers, church wardens, prayer group leaders, organist, deputy organist and a representative of the Sunday School to join me for a day away at Holland House, a retreat house near Pershore, on May 30<sup>th</sup>. I have drawn them together because they have particular responsibility for the good administration of the church, its worship, its prayerfulness, its young people and its music.

At the same time the newly elected PCC and its members will be bring to bear their wisdom and discernment as we begin to map out the future together with courageous faith and honesty.

May is a wonderful month. It is one of life's great gifts. It is a time to change gear in the power of the Holy Spirit.