

What are you thankful for?

As many of you will know, we now have a wonderful dog. Jess is a gentle, sensitive and intelligent border collie-cross. What she is crossed with is a matter of some debate. She has all the collie traits: she is black all over apart from the tell-tale white tipped tail and a flash of white on her forehead and a white bib. Oh, and she also has white and black toe nails! She has a serious face in the house and looks a little like a whippet with the doleful expressions she pulls. But outside, in the garden or running through the woods, all the collie in her bounds free. Her ears are pricked up, her tongue hangs out and she is ready to run and chase. It is quite a transformation. Another sign of her 'collie-ness' comes out when we mow the lawn. She seems to think that our mower is a living thing. More than that, she appears to believe it needs rounding up. As we go steadily up and down cutting the grass, she runs rings around the mower. I call her my curate, for at times she seems more clerically dressed than me - dog collar and all! And she certainly has a wonderful way of putting people at their ease when they come to the Vicarage. She also enjoys her pastoral visits, especially to Cameo every Monday in the church hall, where 'friends' give her biscuits. As always, pets teach us a lot without knowing it. Would that I had half the desire to please my Maker that Jess has to please her owner. Her fixed focus and sheer sense of freedom when chasing a ball makes me think of the words the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us with: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." (Hebrews 12.1&2)

And so, we at St Hilda's are very conscious of the great cloud of witnesses that surround us at this time in our history. We are getting ready to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the consecration of our beautiful church building.

We are thankful for those who have gone before us to lay the foundations of this church community. And we are encouraged to keep on running with perseverance the life set before us, keeping our eyes always and only fixed on Christ. At the end of the month we look forward to welcoming back Bishop Tom Butler, the now retired Bishop of Southwark and, of course, a graduate of the Miss Masons' Sunday School (among other accomplishments).

He will be preaching and presiding at a special service which will, weather-permitting, begin outdoors at 10.30am on Sunday June 27th.

We hope to remember with thanksgiving the story of that first Sunday in June 1940 when the congregation walked down the hill from the old building in Rathbone Road with their chairs and began a new life here in Abbey Road.

Then, when Bishop Tom has finished preaching, we will walk into the church (though, not carrying our own chairs) for Holy Communion.

And afterwards we will have bring and share lunch which will hopefully spill out onto the grass where there will be some games for all. It will also be a very special day for one person in particular - for it will be Martin Hadlington's last service as a Reader. After 28 years serving St Hilda's so faithfully, with such carefulness and gentleness, he has decided to retire from the role.

So many, past and present, will owe Martin a debt of gratitude for the words he has spoken and the way he has led his life. I know Martin does not want a fuss or to overshadow the 70th celebrations, but at the same time I am sure many will want to express their appreciation on that day.

And then on July 11th, when some minds may drift towards South Africa and the World Cup Final match, we will be continuing our celebrations with a service of thanksgiving and blessing for pets.

As I write elsewhere in this edition, we believe we are called to be an open church and one that connects more to people's every day lives.

So this is one opportunity we have to open up to all who are thankful.

And may our 'curate' Jess be joined by many more pets.

Paul