

A new day



Take a look at this picture. It is called 'A New Day'. In the painting there are three figures.

The one seated, with the light shining on, through and around him, is reaching out. It is as if he is about to give a sort of laid-back open-handed greeting to the taller of the two standing men. The one on the left has a dog which appears to be doing a jig! That dog owner seems to be gently pushing forward the man in the middle, as if he is introducing him to the one who is seated.

We are witnessing an introduction: "Here's my brother, Simon. Simon, this is the one I was telling you about, the Special One."

The painting is inspired by the account in John's Gospel (John 1.35-42) of the introduction of Simon Peter to Jesus by Simon's brother Andrew. Andrew, holding the dog on a lead, is the one gently pushing forward Simon, who seems to have a slight look of apprehension on his face. Jesus is the one who remains seated giving that open handed greeting. And the dog leaps for joy at this introduction!

For despite Simon's apparent apprehension, it is the moment of huge significance and great promise - which at least the dog seems to understand. It is a new day. For at the outset Jesus sees in Simon his true potential and goes on to call him Peter, the Rock.

The painting has been created by artist and vicar Nigel Done for 'Back to Church Sunday', which we are marking at St Hilda's at 10.30am on Sunday September 26th.

'Back to Church Sunday' has become a fixture in the calendar of hundreds of churches across the country, just as it is for us at St Hilda's. For it provides a very specific and intentional opportunity to introduce - or re-introduce - friends, family members or neighbours back to a place where God meets people.

It has been estimated that there are four million people in England who would be delighted to respond to an invitation to go to church - it is just that they need that gentle and encouraging push and a friend to go with!

As the picture tells us: we worship a welcoming God who sees us as we are, loves and challenges us to the core and sees us as we shall be. We worship a transforming God who changes us as we are drawn deeper into the astonishing realisation that we are both deeply marred and flawed and deeply loved. We worship a God who leads us deeper into open-handed relationship rather than stiff formality - a relationship which promises peace the more we are radically open to the truth.

At St Hilda's we are together exploring what it means to be a welcoming church. At the end of the month, we start a course called 'Everybody Welcome' (see the diary). There will be sessions on Wednesday mornings (11am in the Choir Vestry) and Wednesday evenings (7.30pm in the Small Hall) between September 29th and October 20th. Please sign up for one or other. There is a brief resume of the course elsewhere in this magazine.

A New Day is dawning for someone you know. I end by asking you to reflect on how you were introduced by someone to Jesus. Give thanks for them. Remember them in your prayers. And follow their example.

Paul