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Briefing 103: Wednesday 23rd February, 2022.

Dear friends,

Over the last few weeks, I've written a little about keeping going as disciples of Jesus. We thought about some practical ways to help us stay focused and to keep growing. We've been encouraged by some theological truths about God and over the last 2 weeks we reflected on some verses from the book of Hebrews. Since Lent begins next week, I wanted to roundup this short series with one final encouragement. Here it is.

Taking up our cross and following Jesus is often difficult and costly, but we do not do it alone.

As a child I was well schooled in country-western music, and one country-gospel song included this line: "*You've got to walk that Lonesome Valley, you've got to walk it by yourself. Ain't nobody else can walk it for you, you've got to walk it by yourself.*" In one sense that is true about the Christian life. No one else can confess our sins for us. No one else can make a decision to follow Jesus on our behalf. And we each must decide to take up our cross and daily die to self and seek to obey God, loving and serving him and our neighbours with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. However, we are not alone on that pathway. And that's very good news, because we cannot walk it alone.

We have a living map: the Bible. How do we know the unchanging truth about God? How do we know how God would have us live? How do we know about the hope to which we move? How can we find strength, encouragement, wisdom, truth for our minds and light for our path? In the Bible! My friends, we are not alone in this life because God has spoken! He has revealed himself to us through his living and active Word, and so we can walk through life, no matter what challenges or difficulties we face, on a sure and stable footing. God's living map, the Bible, shows us how to live, and what a great comfort it is to those who take the time to read and meditate upon it! But there's more...

We have travelling companions: the church. During my vicar training I spent a day on Dartmoor watching Royal Marines recruits attempting to complete a 30 run/march each carrying, I think, an 80-kilo backpack plus a rifle. Each recruit had to complete this task or they would not qualify, but this was not a test they did solo: they did it with the same troop they had been training with all along. And not only was it a great comfort and encouragement to see others running the race alongside them, but they could also encourage one another when things were getting tough, and even stop to pick one another up if any stumbled. In the same way, God, in his great mercy, has called us not just to himself, but into a family of believers – into the church. And not just into the universal church, with people from many nations and languages we know are there but never see. God has also called us into a local church family, a place where we can see one another running the same race we are in; when we can encourage one another with our presence, strengthen one another with our words, and help one another by our deeds of kindness; even stopping to pick one another up when we fall down. The New Testament does not speak of any Christian living as a disciple of Jesus on their own. The church is a gift of God to Christians because it gives us travelling companions on the discipleship road. So, if you are not attending regularly, now is the time to start again! But there's more...

We have God himself with us: The Holy Spirit. Unsurprisingly, the disciples were distraught when Jesus told them that he was going away. But very surprisingly, Jesus told them that his leaving was good news, because he would send the Holy Spirit to be with his disciples for ever. When Jesus was on earth, he could be with his disciples only in one place at any one time. That was okay when he only had 12 followers, but today there are billions of Christians the world over, and yet each one has Jesus with them through the gift of the Holy Spirit. There isn't space here to list everything the Holy Spirit does in the life of the Christian, (*I suggest reading John chapters 14-16 and meditating on those chapters if you want to think more about this,*) but the Spirit is our comforter, and he helps us pray and witness. The Spirit helps us understand God's word and gives us wisdom. He fills our hearts with peace and assures us of God's love. He changes us into the likeness of Jesus and gives gifts so we can serve him in the church and in the world. So however hard the road, keep going, my brothers and sisters! For God is with us, and he's given us all we need!

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

PRAYER GATHERINGS: Our next Prayer Gathering is **tonight** from 7:45pm in the upper Parish Room. This will be in-person only at St Nicholas Church. Our next 7-8am early morning zoom prayer will be on Tuesday 1st March. Why not put those dates in your diary now and commit to coming along? The church will also be open for **visitors and private prayer** on Tuesdays from 2-4pm, Wednesdays from 12noon-2pm and Thursdays from 10am-12 noon.



Find life that lasts. It's closer than you think. Life

QUIZ AND PUDDING NIGHT

A fun trivia quiz with a pudding buffet. There will be a short Christian message during the evening.

Sat 12th Mar 7:45 - 9:45pm

FREE

Longmeadow Evangelical Church

Book your place at: life22stev.org



Find life that lasts. It's closer than you think. Life

THE ROOTS OF JAZZ

Live music and a talk exploring the intertwining stories of the roots of jazz and Christianity

Fri 18th Mar 7:45 - 9:45pm

Tickets £8pp
life22stev.org

Grace Community Church



Find life that lasts. It's closer than you think. Life

COMEDY NIGHT

WITH ANDY KIND

Stand-up comedy from award winning comedian, Andy Kind.

Fri 1st April 7:45 - 9:15pm

Tickets £5pp
life22stev.org

St. Nicholas Church

Who will you be inviting along? Book your tickets at www.life22stev.org Hard copy fliers available soon.

The aim of these events is to gently introduce people to the Christian faith, have some fun and promote the main **Passion for Life** events which will take place in Letchworth in the week of 25th April. More details on those soon...!

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

20th February: Matt 22:34-46

27th February: Matt 23:1-39

6th March: Matt 24:1-51

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH. Our 2-session course looking at the LLF materials will be from **6pm-8pm** on **Sunday 27th February and Sunday 6th March**. If you'd like to come, please let me or Martin Bailey know.

LENT 2022. We're not having a special Lent course this year, but here are 2 ways to make the most of Lent:

1: Quiet Evening Prayer: For the 7 Wednesdays of Lent, we are restarting a quiet service of evening prayer in St Nicholas Church. This will run from 7pm to 7:30pm, starting on Ash Wednesday (2nd March) with imposition of ashes.

2: Read and Pray: A range of books is now available, all priced at £2 each. Why not take one and find someone to read it with, making time each week- in person, on the phone or Zoom - to chat and pray through what you've read?

EVANGELISM IN THE BENEFICE: As well as running events to which we can all invite our friends and neighbours to hear about Jesus (see above!) we are also committed to making new contacts with people. Over the past months we've done this by visiting 100s of houses in the benefice and, more recently, serving hot drinks to secondary school pupils and walkers on Thursday afternoons. We're now keen to encourage more people to get involved in these efforts to reach out to our parishes and have 3 opportunities in mind. Might that be you?

- Could you help serving hot drinks to passers-by 2:30-4pm on Thursday afternoons outside St Nicks church?
- Might you join some folks from Oak Church to run a weekly after-school club at the Thomas Alleyne's Academy?
- How about joining our team of door-to-door visitors, reaching out to people in our parishes?

Your commitment wouldn't need to be every week – every 2,3 or 4 weeks would be fine – and you'll never be alone – there will always be others with you. But in these small ways you'd be helping in God's mission to make disciples. I'll say more on Sunday, but if you can't wait till then, contact Karen Walker for more details on enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk

RESTARTING OUR MEN'S AND WOMEN'S WORK. You are all invited to a special joint breakfast at St Nicholas Church on Saturday 12th March from 8:30am. We'll enjoy a good breakfast together (cereals, bacon butties, toast, drinks) and then gather as men and women to discuss restarting our 2 groups. There are sign-up sheets in both churches.

RESTARTING SNACK AND CHAT: In the past, S+C provided a wonderful place for people to come and relax, to enjoy good food, to get to know one another better and as a place to invite people to hear something of Jesus. Our hope is that we will be able to re-start this venture, maybe with a new name – [perhaps **NOURISH**], after Easter, and run it on the 3rd Wednesday of every month from 12:30-2pm. So- we need...

- a small committee to plan menus and organise/rota volunteers.
- volunteers to come on the day between 11:30am and 2.30pm to set up and clear away.
- volunteers to cook in advance– Menus still to be sorted, but there will be nothing too complicated!

If that could be you, please contact Judy Brown (01438 213587 or enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk) as soon as possible, and by Monday 7th of March at the latest. We hope that you will get involved either as a volunteer, planner or participator!

ST NICHOLAS FLOWER GROUP: **this Sunday**, the Flower Group will be starting its collection of '**bring-your-loose-change-to-church**' to help with raising funds for the flower festival and flowers in the church. The change tin will be on the welcome table as you arrive, and every last Sunday of the month going forward. Christine thanks you all for your support.

ST NICHOLAS WALKING GROUP - the next walk will be on Thursday 3rd March, at 10am walking from the Waggon and Horses pub in Graveley to Weston and back. Please let Karen Cattell know if you wish to stop for lunch in the pub. Robust footwear definitely required and appropriate waterproof clothing.