

St Mary's Church Newsletter

January 2019



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Beyond New Year Resolutions: Exploring a Rule of Life in 2019

By Canon Simon Butler | January 2019



We're all familiar with New Year's Resolutions; and we're all familiar with the frequency with which we fall away from them! The promises to go to the gym, to keep in touch with friends, to be more...well you fill in the gap for yourself.

Despite the failure that often bedevils us, the turning of the year is an opportunity to take stock and to reflect on our journey through life as followers of Jesus Christ. Maybe you don't often think of yourself like that, as a follower, but all of us who value St Mary's and our church life will know that, deep down, being part of a church is different from other forms of belonging. A church is far more than a social club for those who like a bit of religion on a Sunday morning; it's a community of people gathered round the Lord Jesus Christ, who seek to follow his way of life in work, home, leisure and in the values we seek to promote in society. We remain individuals, but we are bound together through baptism into a community of Jesus's followers.

The church is pretty good at telling people this; it's certainly part of my regular approach to preaching, because it's easy to forget we are Christ's people before we are our own. What perhaps the church isn't so good at in the modern world is telling people *how* to do this. One ancient way of exploring the 'how' is through the tradition of a Rule of Life.

'Rule' is a misunderstood word. We get the word from the Latin *regula*, which can be best translated as a pattern, a model, an example. Esther De Waal, who writes on Christian spirituality, points out that the word has gentle connotations, not the firm idea we get from 'school rules'. She talks about a 'rule' as a signpost, a railing, something that gives support as we move forward in our goal to become more like Jesus Christ. Having a 'Rule of Life' then is having a gentle rule that keeps us trained towards God.

A Rule of Life is a great asset in our busy 21st century life, because it gives shape to living even when

we cannot be as much part of the church as we might hope. Sunday commitments to elderly parents, ill health or the demands of child-rearing all make it hard for some to be part of the regular community of faith as we might wish. A 'Rule' helps us know we are sharing in Christian worship, service and faith-sharing with others. It has its origins in monastic communities.

I'm keen to reset my own relationship with God and my own discipleship in 2019. And I've found a new resource which I think could be of great help to many of us, not just myself. The Diocese of Liverpool have launched a website called Rule of Life (ruleoflife.org.uk) which provides online resources and regular encouragements to keeping a simple rule of life, based on six key themes: Pray, Read, Learn, Tell, Serve, Give. Over the coming year it will be rolled out to assist people far from Liverpool to share in a Rule of Life.

I'm keen to try this resource and to encourage as many members of St Mary's to have a go as well. To that end, I'm going to mention this idea on regular occasions during the year, offering invitations to many of us to join in the Rule. I hope that many of you would consider taking this on. We will have opportunities during the year to meet and discuss our own developing understanding of our own Rule of Life, and the joys and struggles on the way. I'll promise to keep you updated as the year goes on. Outside of our regular Lent and other Home Groups, this will be the priority for helping us develop our faith in the year ahead.

In the first instance, anyone who would like to find out more can come to a first meeting on **Thursday 3rd January at 7.30pm in the Church Crypt**. I'll prepare a light supper for those coming straight from work: all I ask is that you email me (vicar@stmarysbattersea.org.uk) to confirm your attendance for catering purposes.

Come along and find out more on one of the occasions we meet in the coming months. Here's a genuine chance to move beyond a New Year Resolution towards a real change of lifestyle based on the values and life of Jesus.

Simon Butler

Updates on Improvements to St Mary's in 2019

By Canon Simon Butler | January 2019

The Vicar, writing as Chair of the Parochial Church Council, shares the latest news

The year ahead will feature two, if not three, major projects at St Mary's related to the fabric of the building and the churchyard. The two we are confident will take place during the year are internal to the building; the one with some uncertainty about timings concerns the moorings.

Lighting

The Church lighting is poor and will be completely replaced in the coming year (save for the

chandelier). The plans we have made, through a highly-talented lighting consultant will see all the lighting replaced with LED lights, providing a much more cost-effective lighting system and one which will produce far less heat. The designs, which have been out to public consultation and through the various heritage bodies, are now the subject of a "Faculty", the ecclesiastical equivalent of planning permission. Apart from one or two small matters which we expect to be resolved by the Faculty process, we are very hopeful that the entire scheme will be approved in the coming weeks. The project is currently out to tender.

Redecoration & Improvements to the Fabric

It is now twenty years since the church was redecorated and the building needs a little 'tlc'. We are currently seeking a Faculty to do several things:

To redecorate the church, porches and vestries in the existing colours;

- To shorten the three pews between the central columns (at the ends closest to the road and the river) to permit wheelchair user space. To install pew-length cushions in royal blue fabric for greater comfort;

- To sand and reseal the floor;

- To install a bespoke servery/kitchen area in the south-west corner of the church

(i.e. in the area which is currently a 'storage' area) to provide facilities for the serving of light refreshments.

A proposal was also in the plans to place three 'folding leaf' tables along the wall of the south aisle, to provide some fixed furniture for the use of serving food and for those who find it hard to stand.

However, this proposal has fallen foul of all the heritage bodies, who have objected to them, and has not commanded the support of the Diocesan Advisory Committee; as a result we have withdrawn the proposal and will need to look at this issue in some other way. All these proposals will be open to public consultation in early January and is currently out to consultation with various heritage bodies. We anticipate the Faculty will be granted before Easter.

We are planning to undertake the work relating to lighting and kitchen improvements in mid-summer, probably as soon as Thomas's Kindergarten finish for the summer. There will be some necessary phasing of the work, and at some point scaffolding will be erected in church. Alternative plans will be made for weekday worship although Sunday worship will not be affected, apart from temporary lighting solutions and the usual disruption associated with building works. We anticipate the greatest level of disruption will be during the autumn term, but wish to seek the works completed in their entirety by the end of November.

Plans for all these items can be found in church or by enquiry through the parish office.

Moorings

Although things may have appeared to have gone quiet on the mooring scheme, significant steps have been taking place in the background. Following the granting of a permanent injunction against the trespassing vessel, its owner and occupants by the Courts in the Spring, the PCC has now done all it can to facilitate the removal of Landrail. With such an injunction in place, however, we were able to alert the Port of London Authority (PLA) to the absence of access via the churchyard. The PLA has, after a lengthy and unsuccessful period of appeal by the barge owner to the Department for Transport, refused to grant a Licence for the vessel to moor in the river. As a result, Landrail is now trespassing on the river bed itself, and we are told that the PLA have instructed solicitors to act to take the next steps towards resolving the matter, which we believe will - probably through the courts - see the eventual removal of Landrail, either voluntarily or by enforcement. As we enter 2019, therefore, it is not entirely clear how long this process will take. What does seem clear now is that the matter of the beginning of the mooring project is a matter of 'when', not 'if'. We will need to

await to see whether this will be in the current calendar year or into early 2020. That is a matter dependent on the owner, the PLA and the courts. We just must be patient now.

We hope this will be useful information for readers of St Mary's Newsletter. Sometimes we need to give a season to significant expenditure on our historic building and its setting. Fortunately, the funds are available for all three elements of the work.

A Sermon Preached by Canon Simon Butler

By Canon Simon Butler | January 2019

A Sermon Preached by Canon Simon Butler

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Sunday 23rd December 2018

During this service, Revd. Aaron Kennedy baptised his son, Gabriel

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. (Luke 1:41-42)

They tell you when you learn to preach that you need to get people's attention at the beginning of a sermon. Today I'm going to do that by reading a sonnet by the priest and poet Malcolm Guite. It's called The Visitation and it tells the story of today's reading we've just heard. After I've read it we can have a short pause to think about it.

*Here is a meeting made of hidden joys
Of lightnings cloistered in a narrow place
From quiet hearts the sudden flame of praise
And in the womb the quickening kick of grace.
Two women on the very edge of things
Unnoticed and unknown to men of power
But in their flesh the hidden Spirit sings
And in their lives the buds of blessing flower.*

And Mary stands with all we call 'too young',

Elizabeth with all called 'past their prime'

They sing today for all the great unsung

Women who turned eternity to time

Favoured of heaven, outcast on the earth

Prophets who bring the best in us to birth.[\[1\]](#)

“Two women on the very edge of things/unnoticed and unknown to men of power/

But in their flesh the hidden Spirit sings/and in their lives the buds of blessing flower.

As we were worshipping at the Eucharist here on Thursday, Aaron read us an extract from a sermon of the 12th century monk and preacher Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard reflects on the whole creation waiting for this ‘too young’ woman, this “woman on the edge of things” to respond to the angel’s invitation to bear God’s Son. He pictures the whole creation on tenterhooks, the whole of salvation hinging on her response. It is extraordinary to think of God waiting on Mary. We’re so used to being asked to think on us waiting on God but, for this one moment, God has to wait on us. God waits, the creation waits, presumably the pre-existing Son waits, for this consent. “No payment was promised, no promises made; no wedding was dated, no blueprint displayed. Yet Mary, consenting to what none could guess, replied with conviction, “tell God, I say yes.” One word is enough, but that ‘yes’ is absolutely necessary. Without it, nothing could be achieved.

From that moment, the story can unfold. According to Luke’s account, Mary next travels to her kinswoman Elizabeth, the one who is ‘past her prime’. Just as aged Sarah births Isaac and just as barren Hannah births Samuel, both prefiguring these later Galilean births, these two women share something in common. And what that is, apart from a pregnancy, is joy. The baby John leaps in Elizabeth’s woman and she cries out in joy, while Mary responds with her Magnificat of praise. It’s as though this one word ‘yes’ sets in motion a whole story of joy unconfined. Joy is one of the great themes of Luke’s Gospel; despite all its light and shade, the whole story of Jesus is infused with joy in the promise of God coming true. It as if the word spoken by God and the responsive ‘yes’ from Mary unleashes a whole salvation plan of joy, joy not just in God’s promises, but joy in the world being put right. Someone asked me the other day (Aaron, was it you?) how two so different themes of joy and judgment could be so closely associated with Advent. Once we see that judgment is about the wrong things in the world being put right, which is what Mary means when she talks about, in the word of the Book of Common Prayer “He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their conceit, Casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” When we see judgment like that, of course, then especially if you’re at the bottom of the pile, then seeing the wrong put right is surely a cause for joy. Unless you’re near the top of the pile: something for us all to ponder there.

But let's pull back from the big picture here, let's draw away from the big 'yes' of Mary to our own world of choices and responsibilities. If, as she does, Mary stands as a type of human response to God, and if, as she is, in some way she is a model of holiness, what about our response to God? To what are we invited to do for God? What is God asking of you? What is it we are to say 'yes' to? Of course, in some way, this moment of baptism for Gabriel is *the* quintessential moment of 'yes' in anyone's relationship with God. As Grace, Aaron and his godparents make their baptismal vows, in humility like Mary, they say yes to God for him, until such time as he says yes for himself. But what that means in, God-willing, a long life for him and for you who stand for him will be a lot more little 'yesses' and perhaps a few 'no's' as well. His life and yours will be full of choices and decisions about what it means, created and loved by God, to respond to God's call. And he is no different to any other one of us here. Each of us is asked to live an affirmative life for God, as God waits, ever-so patiently, for our own 'yes'. In what way is your life, or mine, directed in that positive way? It's a great question to ponder, because positive Christian living, living out of the 'yes' if you like, is such an attractive and compelling way of life. What difference might it make for us to live positively like this, embracing our Christian vocation in positive way, rather than see it as a negative way, a way of self-denial and self-sacrifice, of avoiding sin rather than embracing life in all its fulness, to live out of the original blessing as Mary seems to do. Maybe, and maybe more than maybe, God waits for your 'yes' and 'mine' each day.

But maybe others do too. Who else waits for a word from you, apart from God? Are there those you know who need that call, that word of encouragement, or forgiveness, or that word that sets them free from misapprehension or guilt? It's so easy to go through life ignorant of the effect we have on others around us, especially if we could change that with a word that might make a difference. I was challenged about this myself this week when I had what is called my Ministerial Development Review, a sort of supervised self-assessment of my ministry that happens every couple of years. One of my reviewers mentioned that maybe I don't show that I value what some people say, that I don't give them the time they deserve, or that I'm a little abrupt or brusque. It's good to be reminded from time to time about how we are perceived and that a change of approach, or a different way of speaking, might just set someone else on a new path, or open up new potential in a relationship, or perhaps even to move on from what may not have been so good in the past. I'm sure many of you are recognising an aspect of that in yourself right now. Who else needs a word from you, a new word, or an old word spoken in a new way? How might responding to that challenge positively change a situation in which you find yourself? How might it change the annual Christmas argument that always comes up in your family? Who else waits on a word from us?

And finally, to return to that great theme of Luke's of joy, how can we bring joy to the world by living this 'yes' that we see in Mary? Notice the effect of her 'yes' on Elizabeth and her unborn child. Leaping for joy in the womb. Charles Wesley puts it like this:

*Hear him, ye deaf; his praise, ye dumb,
Your loosen'd tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,
And leap, ye lame, for joy.*^[2]

When Mary's 'yes' unleashes joy into the world, she models for us what it is to live the Christian life. It is, in short to be people of joy, infectious joy. If you want to know where God is, look for where there is joy. It has become very fashionable to talk about God in the midst of suffering in the past 100 years, as we have wrestled with the horrors of global war and the Holocaust. But, to quote a Jesuit writer, joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God. And to bring joy to the world, to live out of the joy of knowing Christ, is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian, to be a baptised person. Not everyone can do that - and we shall acknowledge that tonight in our Blue Christmas Service - and there are those extraordinary souls who point us to Christ through their pain and struggle. But, when we say 'yes' to God, a joy is released that cannot be explained. What a calling it might be for Gabriel and for Aaron, Grace and his godparents, to bring Gabriel up not just as a messenger like his angelic namesake, but as a messenger of joy, who brings the Good News of God's love to others, the *Good News* note. And for us all, where is the joy for you? Where can it be shared? Because when we discover our true joy, we begin to discover what it is God calls us to, we find our vocation.

So let us rejoice today, rejoice with Gabriel and with his parents and godparents, rejoice, as Malcolm Guite encourages us to, for "all the great unsung/Women who turned eternity to time/

Favoured of heaven, outcast on the earth/Prophets who bring the best in us to birth. But most of all let us rejoice in the sheer generosity of God, who despite our brokenness and weakness, chooses to come to us in great humility, that we might be raised to the heights of joy and bliss.

And it all starts with one word, the most important in the Bible: yes.

[1] <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/a-sonnet-for-the-feast-of-the-visitation/>

[2] O for a thousand tongues to sing, Common Praise 534

St Mary's Winter Recital Series 2019

By James Potter | January 2019



WINTER MUSIC SERIES 2019

A series of free recitals, Sundays at 3pm

Sunday 13 January

Fabian van der Geest, horn

Vinter, Chabrier, & more

Sunday 20 January

Carolina Blaskovic, violin

Faure, Ysaye, & Stravinsky

Sunday 27 January

Monika Skowron, soprano &

Chris McCracken, piano

Oratorio & Lieder

Sunday 3 February

George Robarts, baritone

Beethoven & Ibert

Sunday 10 February

St Mary's Scholars

Sunday 17 February

Madison Hallworth, oboe

Telemann, Vivaldi, & Britten

A retiring collection is taken in support of the music of St Mary's Church. Refreshments are provided after each recital. Enquiries: music@stmarysbattersea.org.uk

St Mary's Church, Battersea Church Road, London SW11 3NA

All recitals are at 3pm on Sundays, with refreshments served afterwards. Entry is free, with a retiring collection in aid of music at St Mary's.

Sunday 13 January

Fabian van der Geest, french horn

Vinter, Chabrier, & more

Sunday 20 January

Carolina Blaskovic, violin

Faure, Ysaye, & Stravinsky

Sunday 27 January

Monika Skowron, soprano, with Chris McCracken, piano

Oratorio & Lieder

Sunday 3 February

George Robarts, baritone

Beethoven & Ibert

Sunday 10 February

St Mary's Scholars

Sunday 24 February

Madison Hallworth, oboe

Telemann, Vivaldi & Britten

Jessica Crawley, alto choral scholar

By James Potter | January 2019



Jessica Crawley, alto choral scholar

How did you get into singing?

I had singing lessons in my early teens following a less successful stint at piano. My school had great choirs and I grew up performing in local/school musicals before going on to study musical theatre.

What's been your best or most enjoyable singing/playing experience to date?

My favourite experience so far has been singing in Kylie Minogue concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. My dad was very jealous – he's a big fan!

What are you up to now?

I sing with the Southern Spirit Singers and work for Perform where I teach drama, dance and singing to children. I've also gone back to the piano lessons – so far so good.

Do you have a favourite piece of choral music? Why that one?

My favourite piece of choral music is Northern Lights by Erik Esenvalds. It tells the story of seeing the northern lights for the first time; 'the world is on fire'. The choir sings alongside tuned crystal glasses that produce magical, shimmering tones – just as I'd imagine the lights to sound.

Oscar Hansen, bass choral scholar**How did you get into singing?**

I first got into singing (and music, more generally) when I was around 16 years old. I was lucky enough to be at a secondary school – Tiffin School in Kingston upon Thames – which has an excellent choir, director, and music department. Initially, joining the choir was something I saw as an academic and social necessity for my music A-level, but quickly I realised I really enjoyed all of the aspects of singing in a choir: the music-making, the community, the repertoire, the tours, the many pints, etc. Since then I have always regularly sung with a choir and have also developed my solo classical repertoire.

What's been your best or most enjoyable singing/playing experience to date?

There are too many to count! I've always loved choir tours and performing solos in recitals, but perhaps my most enjoyable singing experience lies outside of my choral career: playing Mack the Knife in a student production of Threepenny Opera whilst at university in Oxford will always be a favourite memory of mine.

What are you up to now?

Having just graduated this summer, I'm currently starting my first full-time job after university, working in sales for an intellectual property software company in Chiswick. Around this I'm keeping up my singing and learning to drive!

Do you have a favourite piece of choral music? Why that one?

Tough choice. One of my top choral pieces is Belshazzar's Feast by William Walton. It's a completely over-the-top setting of an already very colourful biblical text. For me it combines the best in English symphonic writing with huge choral parts and a fantastically lusty baritone solo. It sounds like it could be the soundtrack to a Star Wars film.

News in Brief - Jan 2019

By Emrys Lloyd-Roberts | January 2019

Celebration of Baptism: Sunday 13th January

We've issued a special invitation to all those who have had their children baptised at St Mary's in recent years to join us at the 11am Service on Sunday 13th January, the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus. Do come along and welcome back those who have joined us in baptism and their parents and godparents.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service: Sunday 20th January

There is a joint service at Sacred Heart Church, Trott Street, at 6pm to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Our relationships with Sacred Heart is growing, but from our side the numbers attending joint events are far smaller than those coming from Sacred Heart. It would be great if we could join our brothers and sisters in prayer on this special annual moment of ecumenical awareness.

Advance Notice: Lent Groups 2019

Some of you will have seen the moving BBC Drama *Broken*, starring Sean Bean as a Catholic Priest in Northern England, facing dilemmas and challenges, personal and pastoral. The Church of England theologian and writer Paula Gooder, has produced some stimulating study material and we are planning to use this programme and the material for our Lent Groups in 2019 (which, of course, we will share with our Catholic friends). Details will follow but the Course will include a Sunday evening session. Please be aware, however, that with an hour-long programme and allowing time for discussion will mean that the groups are likely to be longer than usual, about 1 hour 45 minutes. Please note that Lent is late this year (Ash Wednesday is not until 5th March) so there's time to have a look at your diaries and make plans.

Reverend Aaron Kennedy: Shared Parental Leave

As a new father, Aaron is entitled to ask for Shared Parental Leave and he has been in discussion with Simon and the Archdeacon about this. We have agreed that Aaron will take May and June 2019 as a period Shared Parental Leave, and he will return on Sunday 30th June.

Simon on Holiday

Simon will be away on holiday in India from Wednesday 23rd January and will be available again in the parish from Friday 8th February. Please contact Aaron Kennedy in that time for any pastoral need.

Parish Secretary

Lia Mendes left the post of Parish Secretary towards the end of 2018 and we are currently seeking to appoint a new Parish Secretary. We hope to appoint a new Parish Secretary very soon and have been extremely grateful to Chelsea, a former work colleague of David Britten, who has helped us out on a temporary basis.

Sunday Sermons

Don't forget that you can read a Sunday sermon on the parish website, stmarysbattersea.org.uk if you weren't able to be in church. We will try to get them posted within 24 hours of preaching (that's a New Year Resolution!)

Change, Change, Change

By Gladys Ikeme | January 2019

Are you ready to change? The year 2018 is at an end. What have we achieved in 2018? If you cannot answer this question you are not alone! The good news is that we have the opportunity now to make any necessary amendments. To do this, we have to try to meet change with assurance and peace.

At times, most of us feel overwhelmed by change. This can be change in employment, in relationships, in housing or in other areas of our life. I believe that God is within and around us and continually at work in all areas of our life. When we understand this we can make God our guide in all that we do in life, including change, and we can remain calm, filled with peace feeling confident in any change.

As we clothe ourselves in a forward-looking consciousness of health and flexibility and an attitude of grace and acceptance, we can feel the assurance of God's presence in and through us. In this way we should not fear or feel undue concern about changing events in our lives.

We should also remember that change inspires growth and is a natural and welcomed part of life. We can go forward to meet and accept the good that changes bring to us. Living without change causes stagnation and frustration in life. People, and in fact countries, improve and benefit from change. This is good.

I read in Isaiah 42:9 "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; behold they spring forth. I tell you of them."

We should always give change a chance. Do not give up too easily but accept changes in life. Behind everything there is the thought that lead to the action. So, if we are serious about change, we must change the way we think.

We must also keep company that is helpful and encourages a positive attitude to change. Our friends influence the way we think and the way we act. I have even seen bad company causing a decline in health. May God grant us good mature positive thinking advice from friends when we have to make decisions in life.

In Matthew 17:20 we read that if we have faith even as small as a mustard seed we can move mountains and that nothing will be impossible for us. Jesus says in Matthew 7:7 that we should ask to be given, to seek in order to find and to knock to have the door opened for us. We often fail to ask or seek or knock and in this way deny ourselves a lot.

Don't be afraid; our Lord is full of love and will help us with all changes we encounter. He will gladly receive us and sort out all our problems. Just talk to him!

May God bless you all!

Gladys Ikeme

(Child of God)