



St Peter's Window

The Language of Prayer

It's a fact that whenever we use the Lord's Prayer in English, and we don't have a service order in front of us, we tend to revert to *'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...'* In my experience this practice shows no sign of dying out. In fact all the young people's groups I pray with still tend to use this older version. The reason is, of course, that the language in which we first learnt our regular prayers will often be the language of prayer for our whole lives. It is because we know them, as we say 'by heart'. How I love that turn of phrase: 'by heart'! It reminds me of that lovely passage in Deuteronomy 30.14, where Moses asks the people to imagine where the commandments of God are: *'not in heaven...nor across the sea... No, the word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.'*

As we begin Lent, this season of spiritual refreshment, I want to spend a minute or two exploring the use of language in prayer: above all, familiar language, the language of our upbringing. In my section from the Holy Land journal this month I write about our visit to St George's Anglican Church in Jerusalem – a bi-lingual service in Arabic and English, and our visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum: Yad Vashem.

Learning by heart. Perhaps there are poems or sayings you learnt as a child and can still recite word for word. It is important, I think, that we have such resources in our memories – they can be unexpectedly useful at times. I have spoken before of those wonderful moments of praying with someone whose mind is confused and cannot remember much at all, when they simply join in with The Lord's Prayer, as if it resides in a

secure and deeper vault of memory.

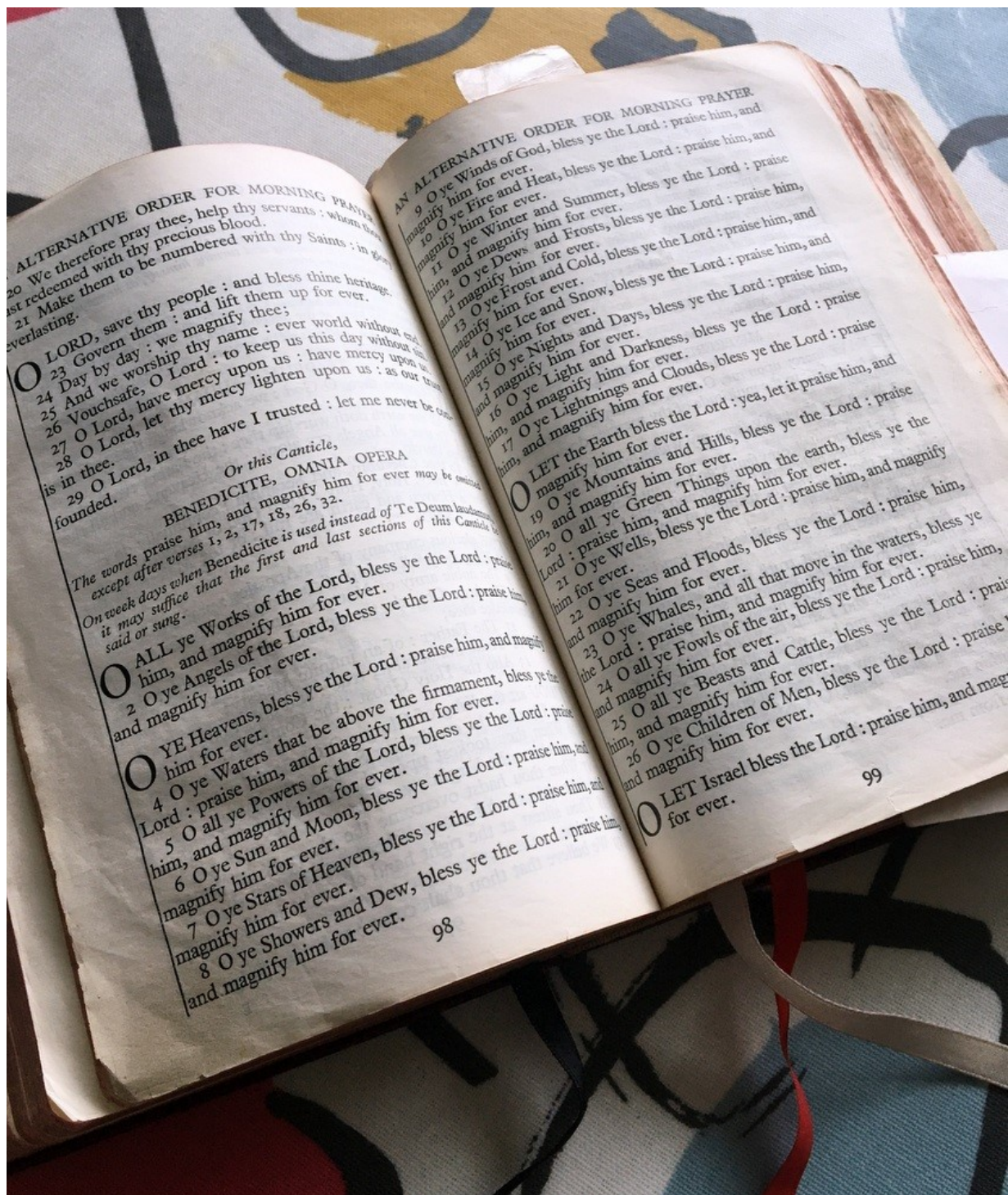
I have rediscovered the joy and usefulness of knowing verses by heart this past year. I have sometimes reflected on the importance of the offices (Morning and Evening Prayer, as well as Midday Prayer and Compline) in the life of the church: all thanks to the great monastic tradition we are part of. Go into a cathedral on a typical weekday afternoon and you will be able to hear and take part in the offering of Evensong – usually beautifully sung by the choir and ministers. For me, personally, Morning Prayer especially has been my 'daily meat' – the substantial portions of scripture read daily, the canticles, the psalms. It roots me in scripture and helps articulate the inarticulate grumblings, mumblings and outbursts of joy and thanks, which make up my prayers in an ordinary day. In recent years – and I have valued this too – we have been able to read a ready-prepared Daily Prayer on an app on our phones: all the psalms and readings set out for a simple reading and praying through. But there has been something lacking: for me, switching on my phone is not what I always want to do when I begin praying. It can be distracting. Nevertheless it is very handy. It goes with you everywhere and there is minimum effort involved.

Yet, somehow, because there are a number of different translations of the Bible and because there are a joyful series of variants for different seasons, it is just about impossible to say the prayers by heart, to memorise them, to repeat them without turning back to the page. This changed a year ago, as I wrote in my sermon on the Sunday before Lent. I was talking

to a young man, who was exploring his own particular vocation, about the daily offices. He asked me if I had ever regularly used the Book of Common Prayer – first published in 1662 and revised in 1928 – as the basis for daily prayer. ‘Well, occasionally, I said. Look!’ I said, taking a red leather-bound volume from my bookcase, ‘this is my father’s Office Book, which he used daily from when he was given it in December 1959 to his death in February 2002. Let me try this. Let me use this daily (and the set readings as advised by the lectionary printed in it, as well as the Psalms appointed for the day of the month, for you read the whole Psalter every month) and see what happens.’ I promised we would compare notes later on.

A year later, here are my observations.

Firstly, it is very familiar despite changes to our everyday language. The language really is the language we can still hear in every English cathedral, the language we still use on Wednesday mornings and in Evening Prayer on the first Sunday of the month. It was the language of childhood churchgoing, and the praying of the prayers of my school assembly. And because it is familiar (and because Morning and Evening Prayer are the same every day and throughout the year, with a limited variation of canticles) it is easy to put the book down and say it by heart, until we come to the pages of the Psalms or the Old or New



Testament Readings. This means you can listen to the words and repeat them when prompted at any time and sort of digest the meaning. I see what they mean in the Bible when they say: 'Your words are sweeter than honey to my mouth.' And, of course, because the English language was at a high point in the time of Shakespeare and King James 1, it is beautifully expressed. Phrases we use every day have their roots in it. Many modern translations still have their roots in it.

Secondly, it is a bit like a serial on TV, or a book where you want to read on. By reading the Bible daily in fairly large chunks – a chapter is typical – it flows on from one day to another. You pick up where you recently left off. And the Bible never ceases to inspire, to intrigue, to puzzle. You learn something new every time.

Thirdly, the shape of Morning Prayer goes like this, every day of the week:

Opening responses, Canticle of praise (*Venite* Psalm 95 - O Come let us sing unto the Lord), Psalm(s) of the day, Old Testament Reading, Canticle (*Te Deum* - We praise Thee O God, or *Benedicite* - O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, (It is significant that, in a time of climate crisis, we can be praying the *Benedicite* 3 times a week) or *Miserere* – Have mercy on me O God, New Testament Reading, *Benedictus* Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel (Luke 1.67) or *Jubilate* (Psalm 100), The Apostles' Creed, The Lord's Prayer, The Responses, the Collect for the Day, two Collects for peace and safety. So our daily diet contains all we need to root our faith in what matters of what we have inherited: praise, prayer (of all sorts of emotions in the Psalms), Scripture reading, focus on praising God for Jesus Christ, or for the beauty and order of creation, or repenting our sins, the main tenets of our belief, the Lord's Prayer, calls to pray for our Queen and ministers of the church, for God's people and for peace.

Because of this weekly diet I have found, not only that it has a sort of inner peace-making focus, but that it encompasses breadth in my praying: anger and protest, joy and sorrow, gratitude and hope, focus on Jesus Christ and what we believe together. And, finally, curiously enough I have realised again why there is so much emphasis on praying for peace and for security:

O God who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us thy humble servants from all assaults of our enemies that we; surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (2nd Collect at every Morning Prayer)

One of the things that the internet teaches us, sadly, is that we are constantly under attack: thieves trying to steal our personal information or to trick us into signing up for things we can't afford or are complete scams, or those who want to mess up our systems with computer viruses. Never, therefore, has the prayer to be delivered from assaults of my enemies seemed more relevant. I answer no emails whose sender I don't recognise or where the message is odd, and I answer no phone number that I can't identify in some way.

Yes, prayer matters. It keeps me focused on living for this day and the next, and for the people who matter to us all in this beautiful world, which is eternally loved by our gracious God. So, this Lent, dig into your own resources, or try out a new one for daily living and praying. Yours will be different to mine. Let us hear each other's stories. Why not share your experience in the pages of St Peter's Window?

Martin

St Peter's Pilgrimage to Israel and the Palestinian Territories 2019

Sunday 27th October 2019 – Jerusalem

Today, we join the congregation of St George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem for their Sunday morning Sung Communion. So this is our first drive into the city. Jerusalem; where does it begin? The journey from Bethlehem is about 7 miles, we pass through the checkpoint: all Palestinians off the bus, the rest of us under the watchful aim of a sub machine gun in the hands of a young soldier having our passports checked. We edge through the traffic and then sweep along the motorway past hillsides of housing, rocky hills and crude farming terraces, a little scrub, a few trees. This is landscape over used, overpopulated, not particularly attractive. The traffic builds up as we approach Jerusalem. We slow to a crawl, creeping along the Kidron Valley, above which the walls of Jerusalem – as complete as any city walls you can see anywhere – loom defensively and majestically. We had set off at 8.00am. It is 9.50am before we get off outside the archway into the courtyard of St George's.

The church is smaller than I had imagined: not a lot bigger, for example, than St James' Shirley. It is an attractive, light and yet solidly structured 19th

century church in the gothic style: nave with sturdy pillars, clerestory, side ambulatory passages, central altar at the crossing of the transepts, high altar and choir behind. So all the congregation is in the nave and the service is conducted from the crossing in front of the chancel steps. By the time we have taken our seats the nave is nearly full. It all feels very comfortable and familiar. We could, it appears, be in any Anglican parish church, which conducts its worship in the style we know at St



St George's Cathedral Jerusalem

Peter's. The ministers process in from the West end wearing albs and stoles, the Archbishop of Jerusalem presiding. We stand and sing 'How Great Thou Art'. It is soon clear that this is not quite the same as any typical Anglican congregation: for some of the worshippers speak Arabic, and the rest of us speak English. So hymns are sung in both Arabic and English (you can sing How Great Thou Art in Arabic to the same tune). Some of the readings are in Arabic, some in English – we can follow the

Scripture in our own language if we need to. The Psalm was read in Arabic and the responses to the verses in English. The sermon (an excellent reflection by Dean Hosam Naoum on the value of truthfulness in prayer, on an awareness of how God sees us, the Gospel being the story of the Pharisee and Tax collector) was preached in English and then in Arabic.

This bilingual approach helps us all universalise the Gospel – a Gospel of Pentecost and the interpretation of languages – and prevents this particular service of lapsing into ‘comfortable’ English liturgy. Yes, it is true, it feels very English, rather polite in a home counties sort of way, but it is very lovely too. And we all loved the splendid Widor’s Toccata on the organ at the end!

After the service coffee (in the Middle Eastern style, spiced and in little paper cups) was

served in the Cathedral garden, a truly lovely garden, well cared for and accessed through the well-appointed restaurant in the courtyard. The congregation of mainly older people, smartly dressed, chatted comfortably under the citrus trees. Around us lovely blue and orange climbers adorned the walls, and each border glowed in the morning sun. After coffee we swiftly picked up our sandwiches (hastily prepared for us by the kitchen staff) and sat in a circle in the meeting room for a quick talk by Dean Hosam before his next appointment at noon. The Dean, a charming, kind and intelligent man, succeeded in giving us a very succinct summary of the role of the Cathedral today in education, pastoral care, reconciliation and mediation (the Anglican church is seen as a good mediating influence), healing ministries through its own clinic and serving both an expatriot English speaking and an Arabic speaking indigenous congregation, now joined as one following the 1967 war, when many Palestinians (Christian and Muslim) were forced from their Jerusalem homes.

St George’s Cathedral garden



We drove straight to Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial museum in West Jerusalem on Mount Herzl. (Yad Vashem is a Hebrew quotation, meaning 'a monument and a name' from the prophet Isaiah 56.5: *'I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.'*) As we walked towards the modern glassy atrium, which is the entrance to the museum site, Jess ran forward to greet Ophir, our guide for today. Ophir is a professor of Jewish studies who is a highly skilled and

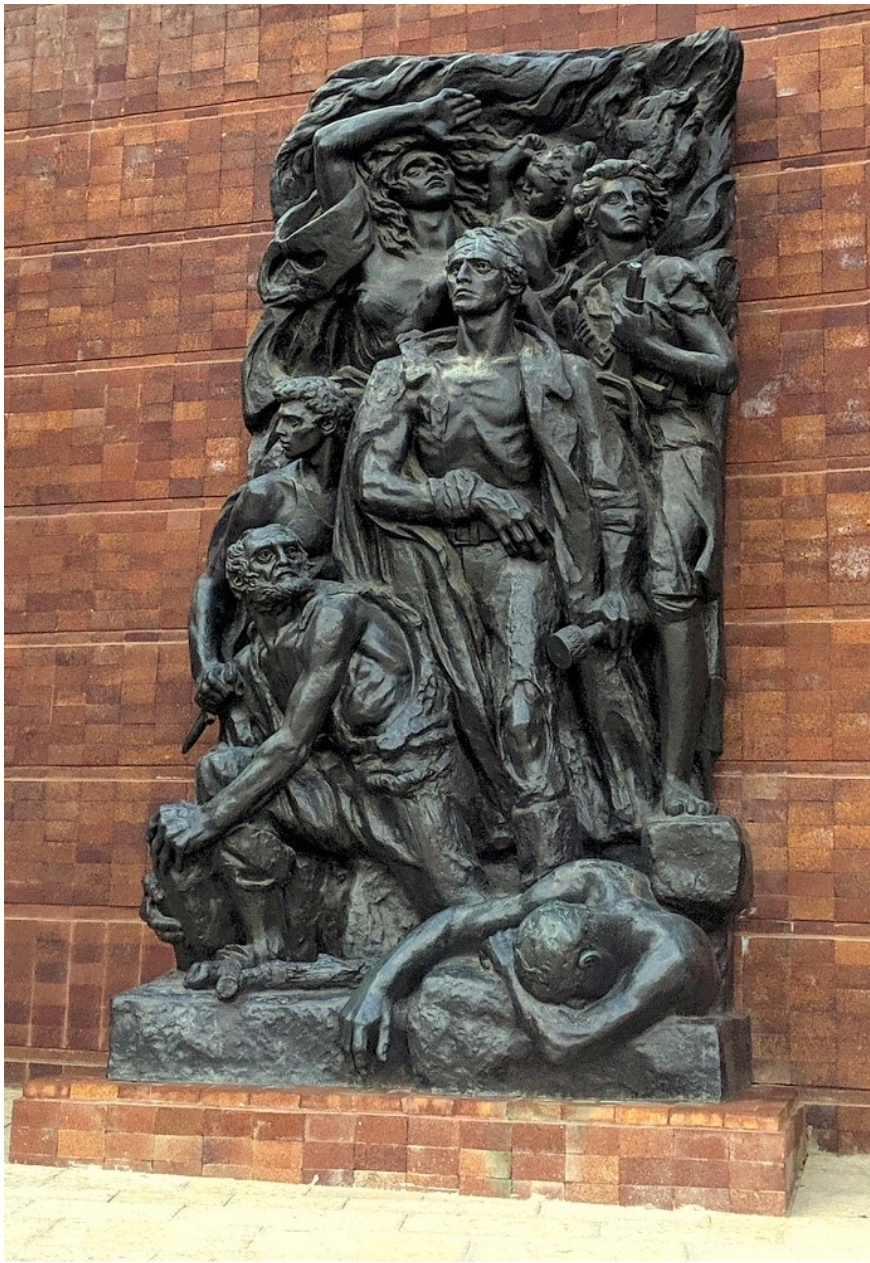
thoughtful communicator. Welcoming us in his soft American accent, he directed us to the entrance and arranged to meet us under the carob tree. After depositing our luggage in the marvellously efficient manner provided by the wheeled tubs for guest parties, we met Ophir under the carob tree the other side of the atrium. Carob trees are planted around the site, each for a person who is remembered as 'righteous among the Gentiles'. These are people who, though not Jews themselves, have saved the lives of Jewish people in the horrors of persecution.



Ophir in front of the memorial panels

We stood in front of the memorial sculptural panels at the far end of the courtyard: two panels with different messages. Ophir asked us to reflect on one which showed a scene of women, children and men on a death march, heads bowed, soldiers' helmets visible in the background. Resignation, desolation, inevitability, all might be words to describe it. In

contrast, the panel to the left marks the Warsaw ghetto resistance in an heroic style. Ophir helped us to understand something of the changing attitudes to holocaust memorial: from shame at not resisting, to acknowledgment that some, particularly the elderly, children and those accompanying them simply had no choice. There was no resistance possible.



From here we passed the hall of reflection to the children's memorial. We descended into a darkened space illuminated with thousands of starry lights, bringing to mind the thousands of children who died, and evoking the promise to Abraham of descendants more than the stars of the sky. We entered the museum itself, furnished with a piece of paper guiding us, in Ophir's helpful manner, through the exhibition, drawing attention to certain displays and encouraging us to move more quickly through others. The building is a triangular prism, the central corridor descending to the depths of the horror and climbing again towards the daylight. On each side of the corridor are rooms dedicated to a chronological account of the stories leading up to and including the planned extermination of Jewish children, women and men. Light falls from the apex of the prism on to the corridor, so you move in and out of the light as you weave your way down and up to the exit, where there are stories of liberation and hope. It is a searing experience: moving little videos of survivors talking are particularly engaging and horrifying – shaming of humanity. We are left, as we should be, asking 'How did this happen? Why to these people? How can we make sure it doesn't happen again? There are supplementary questions which become apparent in following days: 'What trauma has this caused Jewish people worldwide and what effect does this have on the ways some behave to real or perceived enemies now?' And another question might be: 'What can we do to prevent genocide happening to other communities in

various parts of the world?'

From Yad Vashem we climbed the few steps to Mount Herzl – grave and mausoleum of Theodore Herzl, first president of the international Zionist organisation. Ophir described for us the birth of Zionism as a modern political movement and the creation of this sacred space for national commemorations and the burial of significant leaders of modern Israel. The key moment in the birth of Zionism, it appeared, was when Herzl, writing in Paris for his newspaper, realised that anti-Semitism against Jewish people would not be solved by changing minds and bringing justice to a particular national context. Therefore, he concluded, it was a political necessity for Jews to have a national heritage of their own – a nation state like other nation states. To me, this seems quite a big assumption, which raises a lot of questions. And now, visiting Palestinian territories, I might accept the fact of a Jewish state, not to be undone, but am hugely uncomfortable about the consequences this has for people who have an equal, if not greater, right to live freely in the land which is called The State of Israel. As the sun set, rather cold and hungry by now, we left the Mount for the coach and the journey back to Bethlehem.

Martin Stephenson

Childrens' Memorial Dedication





Panoramic view as you leave Yad Vashem



Mount Herzl Mausoleum



Ophir talking to the group explaining the secular state of Israel

Tomb of Theodor Herzl





Tiled panel at St George's Cathedral
Group with Dean Hosam and his wife



What's on over the next few weeks...

Lent Sunday mornings:

8.00am **Holy Communion** every Sunday

10.00am **Parish Communion**

(except 8 March – Stepping Stones)

(Children and young people meet separately for the first part of the service on 15 March)

Lent 4 – 22 March is Mothering Sunday and traditional posies will be given out.

Sunday evenings:

6.00pm (except where stated)

8 March Holy Communion, 15 March Praise 3 at 5.00pm, 22 March (Taize inspired reflective prayer), and 29 March at 4.00pm Bread for the World.

Thursday 2 April 5.00pm - Chilcote School Easter Assembly at St Peter's - The Easter Story as presented by Chilcote School Year 4. All welcome

Holy Week begins on **Palm Sunday**, 5 April

8.00am **Holy Communion**

10.00am **Parish Communion, with procession of Palms from 9.45am and with dramatic reading of the Passion according to Matthew, for all.**

Monday to Wednesday in Holy Week

7.30pm Holy Communion with reflection on Israel and Palestine today.

Maundy Thursday

7.30pm **Last Supper Communion** with washing of feet, stripping of the altars and watch in Prayer

Good Friday

10.00am **Children's Service**

11.30am **United Walk of Witness –**

meet at The Quaker Meeting House, Hamlet Road.

2.00pm **An Hour at the Cross**

Holy Saturday

8.00pm **The Easter Vigil and Lighting of the Easter Fire**

Easter Day

8.00am **Holy Communion with hymns**

10.00am **Parish Easter Communion**

6.00pm **Taize inspired Easter reflective prayer**

10.00am **Wednesday** – Holy Communion

6.30pm **Thursday** - Holy Communion (except 26 March, 2, 9 and 16 April)

Healing Service

(monthly – usually on 1st Tuesday):

7.30pm on 7 April at Holy Communion.

Place of Welcome - Wednesdays

Coffee and tea served from 10.45 to 11.45

PCC Meeting – 7.45pm 31 March