

Stranton and Burbank Community

SIGNPOST



**Rooted in God's love
Growing together with Jesus
Branching out in the
Power of the Holy Spirit**

March 2026

Lenten Reflections... (The musings of a priest)

We have just entered the time of Lent, those 40 days of preparation and build up to one of the most important seasons of the Christian calendar – Easter – where we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem only to be brought back down to earth with the stories of His betrayal, arrest, trial and ultimately His crucifixion and death.

Then comes Easter Sunday and His glorious resurrection from the dead. His victory over the cross, defeating death, and establishing His kingdom once and for all. It's a time of great celebration.

But what about the time between his death and his resurrection? What happens then? What does it mean for us, and what did it mean for his disciples?

For us, it's easy to gloss over the emptiness of Holy Saturday, we already know that Jesus will be resurrected. But for the disciples that first Easter, it was very, very different. Everything they thought they knew was taken from them, their faith, their trust, their hopes, and their dreams have been destroyed before their eyes. How can the one who leads them, possibly carry out his promise to save them if He is hanging dead on a cross?

Their whole world falling apart around them. How would they have felt? What would you have felt had you been there?

We know what happens next, but as we prepare for Easter, as we journey through Lent towards the cross, I urge you to continually ask yourself, to reflect on, what it must have been like that first Easter, when no-one knew what was coming.

Easter is a glorious celebration of God's great rescue plan. But it's not something that came easy. It was hard fought and hard won, with Jesus paying the ultimate price, in order to win the victory.

During Holy Week, there will be time and space and opportunity for you to encounter the brokenness, the emptiness, the silence, at Stranton, and at St Luke's. We will be able to spend an Hour at the Cross on Good Friday, as we think about our Saviour, hanging from the cross, crucified by those he came to save. On Easter Sunday we will celebrate his glorious resurrection.

And in the time in between, I encourage you to explore what it means to sit in that brokenness. At least one of our churches will be open, creating space for you to sit and pray in the quiet emptiness of day before the dawning of the very first Easter when Christ miraculously rose from the dead.

Grace and peace, Revd John

From the Home Front

Well, after weeks of planning and preparations our Stranton Weddings Through the Years Exhibition on Valentine's Day has been and gone....

So many aspects had to be considered for the event to happen – mannequins to be sourced; dresses, photos and wedding ephemera to be traced and collected; display boards to be found; catering to organise; additional parties to be booked (choir and Bellringers); photocopying and mounting of display materials; decorations considered; necessary stationary requirements brought together (pins – various types, blue tac, backing paper, staple guns, scissors, glue, laminated & unlaminated signage etc); floor coverings; pew movers to recruit; flowers to buy; fabric steamers to borrow (and use!); banner to buy and erect, plus posters to put up, leaflets to distribute. Then there was media advertising and presence to organise.... the list of jobs seemed endless.

But with prayer and patience. with teamwork, where people used initiative and adaptability, it all came together on the day. It would not have happened if any individual tried to do it all. Because we were working as the Body of Christ in a celebration of our loving Father it did all come together perfectly.

1 Corinthians 12:12-27 English Standard Version

One Body with Many Members

¹² *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

¹⁴ *For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.*

²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.*

²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

The day was full of conversations, music, pleasure, enjoyment, memories, belonging, discovery and interest. The church had a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere – God was welcoming His children into His home for a special gathering, filled with love and joy.

J.A.R.

More photos can be found on Stranton Church Website.

900th Anniversary Valentine's Day Stranton Weddings through the Years Exhibition

After articles in the Hartlepool Life, Hartlepool Mail, Revd Claire talking about it on Radio Newcastle and repeated on Radio Tees; then a piece on BBC Sounds news the day dawned dry and sunny....

What a fantastic day was had by all at Stranton's 900th Anniversary Weddings

Through the Years Exhibition held on Valentine's Day in Church.

Our oldest visitors (and exhibitors) were in their 90s – Stan and Dorry who were married in Stranton 75 years ago! Our youngest visitor accompanying Ward Jackson Choir was Cody at only one week old!



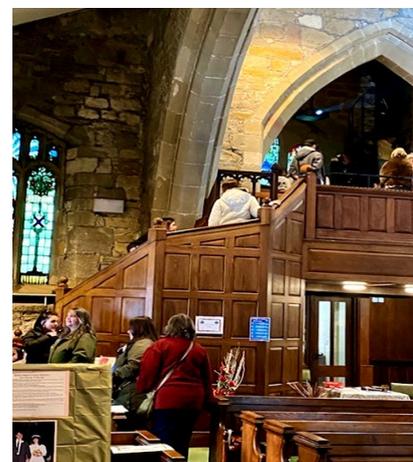
Ward Jackson Choir, was led by Miss Piper and supported by staff and families, serenaded us with love songs which had our toes tapping. The bells rang out from the tower as visitors queued to see inside the ringing chamber.

We had visitors from the local area, other churches, the Northern College of Art, Billingham, Washinton, Hove and even Spain! So many wonderful conversations were had, such a variety of memories emerged and links from the past were discovered.



Everyone enjoyed a lovely choice of refreshments.

The day flew by so fast. Many visitors wrote interesting and complimentary comments in our Memories Book.



The 900th Anniversary Team are very grateful for the additional support they received, which made the day so successful, from Northern College of Art, Bon Marche, River Island, the local media, members of Stranton Church Family and Trish in the Office, the Bell Ringers, Ward Jackson Choir, plus the 'muscles' who moved pews.

The event was a great success enjoyed by all who came through the doors and the organisers too, due to everyone's teamwork and support.

J.A.R.

‘What is an Ordained Deacon?’

Since arriving in Hartlepool after my ordination at the end of June, time has just flown by! I continue to give thanks to God for the very warm welcome that I’ve received from our congregations and community. In this first year of my ordained ministry, I’m an ordained Deacon before I come to my Ordination to the Priesthood a year later. My title of Assistant Curate doesn’t change through the few years that I’m here but ‘What is an Ordained Deacon?’. Well, I’ve been enjoying finding out with you all!

Deacons are to be **‘heralds of Christ’s kingdom’** to **‘proclaim the gospel in word and deed’**. I’ve already had many opportunities to share the good news of God’s love. I’ve loved going into local schools. I’ve led Collective Worship at our church school: Ward Jackson, shared Bible stories with the St Luke’s Open the Book team at Throston and Jesmond Gardens Primaries, supported Hayley with the Jesmond Garden’s Lunch Club and led the Stranton Primary Christmas Service. I’m excited to see how our Children’s/Families ministry can continue to grow!

Deacons **‘share in the pastoral ministry of the Church and in leading God’s people in worship’**. It’s been a privilege to lead funerals for local families. To walk alongside them in their grief, share the Christian hope of life after death and pray with them. I’ve welcomed new families into the church through baptising their children. I find it very special as I invite parents/godparents to support the child in discovering more about the Christian faith. I pray that the invitations that I share with our communities who come to us at key points in their lives will be well received and our churches will continue to be places of warm welcome and ambassadors of God’s love for all.

Deacons **‘preach the word and bring the needs of the world before the Church in intercession’**. I’ve really valued the times that I’ve had to spend with God through Scripture during the week preparing for homilies/sermons. It’s been a challenge to rest in God’s Word but a great blessing! It’s been a joy to preach about God’s Word in our weekly services! I continue to pray for the world in ‘Morning Prayer’ and my own devotions conscious that a Deacon prays for the needs of the world, our country and community.

Deacons **‘distribute communion and minister to the sick and housebound’**. I’m very thankful for monthly visits, with Revd John, to Elwick Grange Care Home where we offer Home Communion and spend time with the residents/team. It’s lovely to be able to meet with those who’ve had longstanding connections to the church and are now unable to share in regular church worship. It’s wonderful to see how they remember hymns from their younger years!

‘Deacons are to seek nourishment from the Scriptures; they are to study them with God’s people...’ I really enjoyed preparing and leading parts of the Advent course that was hosted at Stranton Church. With ‘Discover Hope’, where we’re using the ‘Pilgrim’ material, there continues to be lots of opportunities for us to read through Bible passages and chat about what they mean and what God might be saying to us. It’s great to journey alongside others keen to find out more about God’s Word and the Christian faith!

I pray that I’ll continue to ***‘be faithful in prayer, expectant and watchful for the signs of God’s presence, as he reveals his kingdom among us’***. Amen!

Revd Claire



Easter Eggheads 2026

This year Eggheads will be during Holy Week from Monday 30th March till Thursday 2nd April.

This is followed on Good Friday with Messy Easter.

Eggheads will be from 6.00pm - 7.15pm at St Matthew’s Community Centre Elwick Road.

Eggheads will be for girls and boys aged 5 – 11 years (Y6 at school)

Activities include:

games, crafts, movie clips, songs, quiz and most importantly lots of FUN.

Each day we will follow and hear the Easter Story and see how it is relevant in Hartlepool in 2026.

If you would like to know more please contact George Bainbridge on 07816 445829

Jean Margaret Connell

2nd July 1934 – 1st February 2026



Jean Connell was an active member of Stranton Church for many years. She was involved with Mothers Union, a committed member of the Church Choir and a Sunday School Teacher.

Jean lived off Elwick Road until she had a stroke and then she moved to Warrior Park Care home in Seaton where she lived happily and well cared for until her recent death.

Jean was born near Havant in Hampshire and was part of a large family. Her father was a farm labourer and they lived in tied cottages. She recalled the air raids on Portsmouth and surrounding area as a child. She joined the Women's Royal Army Corps and trained in the Catering Corps. She met her husband to be, Tony Connell, in the camp where she was stationed and he was doing his National Service. They married in 1957. They first moved to Scarborough, then Hartlepool, initially living with Tony's parents, but soon moving into Keswick Street. When their three children – Carol, Bridget and Sean - came along they moved into a larger house in Wansbeck Gardens.

Jean worked part time as a school cook and in a factory when the children were young. Just as Jean and Tony decided to become pub licensees, Tony took ill and died from leukaemia in 1972, aged only 37. Jean was determined to keep her family together and worked in bars, catering and waitressing for Joe and Shirley Brown when over the years they were landlords of The Park, The Travellers Rest, The Marine and The Smith's Arms. Then she worked in Mr Chris' Cake Factory in Brenda Road until she retired. In retirement she helped out at St George's URC Christian bookshop as well as continuing her interests in Stranton. She was a great knitter and enjoyed crafts and reading. Jean had 4 grandchildren whom she loved dearly. With her daughters working Jean acted as carer for Siobhan and Eryn as they grew up.

Grand-daughter Eryn gave a moving tribute to her Grandma during Jean's funeral at Stranton Grange Crematorium Chapel on 19th February. Revd Andrew Craig led mourners in the hymns: All Things Bright and Beautiful, Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer and Thine BenThe Glory; giving the Address (on which this piece is based) and leading prayers, the Commendation and the Committal. Rev Lou from Holy Trinity Seaton read from Revelations 21.

Jean was a faithful believer who departed her long life in the certain knowledge of her Saviour's promise of eternal life.

Editor

The Venerable Rick Simpson to be the next Bishop of Durham



Downing Street has announced that His Majesty the King has approved the appointment of the Venerable Rick Simpson, currently Archdeacon of Auckland, as the next Bishop of Durham.

Rick will succeed the Right Reverend Paul Butler who retired from the role in February 2024. We give thanks to the Right Reverend Sarah Clark, Bishop of Jarrow, for her service as Acting Bishop of Durham in the interim; last month Bishop Sarah was announced as the next Bishop of Ely.

Reacting to his appointment, Archdeacon Rick said: “I am humbled and delighted to have been called to be the Bishop of this diocese, which I love. My deepest hope is to be able to walk alongside and encourage our local Christian communities as they seek to both show God’s love in action and help people to come to life-changing faith in Christ – and through this see our churches grow. It is also an honour to be tasked with representing the needs and voices of people in this region in the national church and the House of Lords.”

Rick has served in the Diocese of Durham since 2006 when he came to be Priest in Charge of St Brandon’s, Brancepeth, helping the church to thrive and develop its mission and the Initial Ministerial Education (IME, Phase 2) Officer for both Newcastle and Durham, supporting curates and training incumbents. He became Archdeacon of Auckland in February 2018. He was a member of the Wilkinson-Jay Response Group, advising on the development of Church of England safeguarding. He served previously in the Diocese of Newcastle where, as Vicar of Holy Trinity Jesmond, he saw the church grow strongly in number and discipleship over ten years.

Rick enjoys the outdoors, especially wildlife photography, playing guitar, sport, films and novels. He is married to Rachel, and they have ten godchildren and one cat.

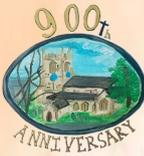
The installation of Rick as Bishop of Durham will take place at Durham Cathedral in the summer. Episcopal arrangements for the short interim period between Bishop Sarah’s confirmation of election to Ely and Archdeacon Rick’s confirmation of election to Durham and consecration are in hand and details will follow shortly.

For more information access <https://durhamdiocese.org/>

Christian Unity Week of Prayer Soup Lunch at St Matthew's Community Centre

Prayers and worship were led by Revd John followed by prayers from members representing St George's URC, Holy Family RC, Oxford Road Baptist, 689 Centre (Methodist), Church of Nazarene, Stranton and St James's. It was with an atmosphere of unity and common togetherness of prayers for the world, tolerance and justice and our role in meeting with young people in our town and seeking answers to the big questions of today. A lunch with a choice of 4 varieties of soup, rolls, biscuits and a hot drink followed as conversations flowed.







All Saints Stranton Church
 900th Anniversary Craft Fair
 At St Matthew's Community Centre
 March 14th
 10.00am - 3.00pm

Entrance £1 includes Drink & Biscuits
 Children are Free.
 Other refreshments are available.

Many Stalls: Jewellery, Prints, Crocheting, Bags & Gifts,
 Wood Crafts, Knitting & Cute Gifts for Children
 and Many More Stalls.
 Plus Raffle & Tombola.

All Welcome
 For more information call,
 Stranton Office: 07305 550009
 Email: admin@stranton-church.org.uk






St Matthew's Community Centre at 4-5.30pm








For more information contact
 Mary Tones on 07972 342890
 See our Facebook page: Stranton Messy Church

Lots of Fun for the whole Family

Ward Jackson CE Primary School Update

Prayer Space Day in Stranton Church

It's Prayer Space Day! A day where we set up lots of activities that help us to reflect, find peace and calm and think about what we are thankful for. #wardjacksonway



Environment Group Clear Up!

Look at our wonderful Environment Team keeping the local area clean and tidy. Last Thursday, we went litter picking and filled 15 bags! Unfortunately, on our journey, we found a huge pile of fly tipped rubbish right next to our school field. It was too dangerous to tidy ourselves, so we reached out to [Hartlepool Borough Council](#) for help. Nearly a week later and the rubbish is still there! Can anyone at HBC help? This is a really safety risk not just for our pupils, but the local area too. [Jonathan Brash MP for Hartlepool?](#)

👍 5 💬 4 ➡



Mental Health Week

We kicked off Children's Mental Health Week with a whole-school breakfast 🍌🍏

It was wonderful to see all the children coming together to enjoy breakfast together, share conversations, and start the day feeling connected and supported.

Moments like these help build a strong sense of community and wellbeing across our school, and the smiles said it all 💙💛



Children's Mental Health Week 💙💛

Thank you to all the parents and carers who came along to meet some of the professionals who support the children in our school, including Thrive, ELSA, therapy dog and the school nurse.

It was lovely to chat with you all, answer questions, and share more about the work we do and how our sessions support children's wellbeing. Thank you for taking the time to come along and for your continued support.



**Are you planning a special celebration or party
and looking for a venue?**

**Have you thought about
St Matthew's Community Centre?**

**We have 2 large halls which can accommodate up to 140 persons
as well as 1 large and 2 small kitchens for your catering needs.**

**One hall is even big enough to house a bouncy castle –
ideal for children's parties.**

**We also have our own private car park and some outdoor space if you fancy
al fresco fun for your guests.**

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A Heavenly Letter

Dear Child

In this life there are many frustrations and too many distractions.

I am in your life.

I am calling you into a deeper relationship with me.

This is not another chore that you must do to please me.

It is an invitation of letting go of the norms of what you used to do.

It is an invitation of encounter, not a to do list on a morning - read your bible, pray, then go on with your day.

It is an invitation to meet with me where you are now. Walking with me to work, going to the shops. Studying for an exam.

Even in the mundane chores, I invite you to recognise my presence with you.

I am in all of your day - in the minute detail.

When I walked the earth, I joined in with what my disciples were doing.

I sat by the fire making them breakfast and talked with them.

I laughed with them. I slept by them.

I walked through challenging towns with them. Yes, I discussed deep theology with them in the Synagogue. Mostly I 'did life' with them.

Please don't put me in a religious box, and only speak to me for a few minutes each day.

Let me be a part of your whole life.

Love from

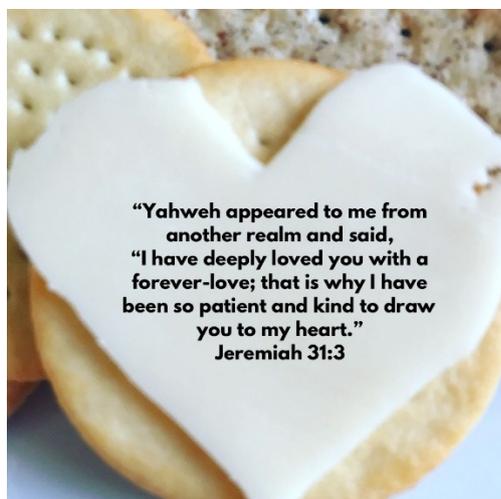
Your Heavenly Father.

"Jesus said to them,

"Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord."

John 21:12 NIV

Ang Hall



Psalm 23

In times of trouble and uncertainty where do we go and who do we lean on? I have recently been listening to a song called “Still Waters” (Psalm 23) by Leanna Crawford. Here is a short excerpt of the song:

“Great Aunt Maurine said at a hundred and three “Write scripture on your heart for when you need it ‘Cause anxiety hates Psalm 23. So just say it to yourself ‘til you believe it” And I’m feeling like I’m needing it right now The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want He leads me by still waters ‘til my fears are gone. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Oh, I know You are with me, my Father, my friend. Your goodness and mercy will follow me all of my days, I know by Your still waters I’m safe Lord, I believe You can set me at ease. Turn this broken piece in me to peace and quiet, I know there’s power in Your word, So I’ll say it over and over ‘til my soul’s reminded.”

It is a beautiful song which has really resonated with me recently as I face an unsure path while I discern where God is calling me. The lyric ‘write scripture on your heart for when you need it’ particularly strikes me as powerful – what scripture would you write on your heart for when you need it? Mine would probably be 1 Corinthians 13 as I believe that love is one of the biggest gifts that we have – love for God, love for others and the love that God and others provide us. However, this song makes me consider Psalm 23 as a powerful piece of scripture to remind me that ‘the Lord is our shepherd, I shall not want’. If I am being honest whenever I used to hear this line I would focus on the second part – ‘I shall not want’. To me that meant that I didn’t want the Lord as my shepherd, yet he would still be there for me, but now I read this line and realise that I think it means that I will not want for anything as the Lord will provide me with all I need.

As I stick my head above my comfortable parapet and explore what God could be calling me to, I feel as if I have just made myself a target for my enemies to attack. However, I try to remember that God is always with me even if the doubts can creep in. Whenever we follow God’s call, we provide a target for the enemy and I think that this song reminds us that God is with us, so we need not fear (although it can be easier said than done though!). Remember that shadows can’t touch us even if they appear threatening. I think this is a great reminder to hold God’s words close to us in times of trouble. I hope that in this world of anxiety and fear that we remember that God is with us and that he has a place for us.

Kate Lawson

Gardening News – Winter

With my head full of wedding memorabilia ('Weddings through the Years'), I nearly forgot to write this article, so, with the deadline upon us, it will be mercifully short (for a change).

It has been a long, hard winter, which shows no signs of letting up, but the one thing that always cheers me up at this time of year is the magnificent snowdrop. There are several different varieties, some large, some small, but when there is a crowd of them (as in the 'crowd of daffodils' in Wordsworth's famous poem), they are a wonder to behold. I missed the open day at Greatham Church, when the grounds are open to visitors, but I have been to see the carpet of snowdrops (on a slightly smaller scale) in the grounds of Kiplin Hall in Yorkshire. I have been dividing and transplanting snowdrops in my own front garden and, after a slow start, they too are starting to look quite impressive, though they are more of a rug than a carpet!

My good friend, Google, tells me that snowdrops symbolise hope, new beginnings, purity, and rebirth, "representing light overcoming darkness as they bloom in late winter to herald spring", so they send a good Christian message. This is why they are often to be found in churchyards and cemeteries – planted as a symbol of purity and hope. Holy Trinity Churchyard in Seaton, where they weave between the graves, is a good example of this and we have our own snowdrops leading up the path at the front of Stranton.

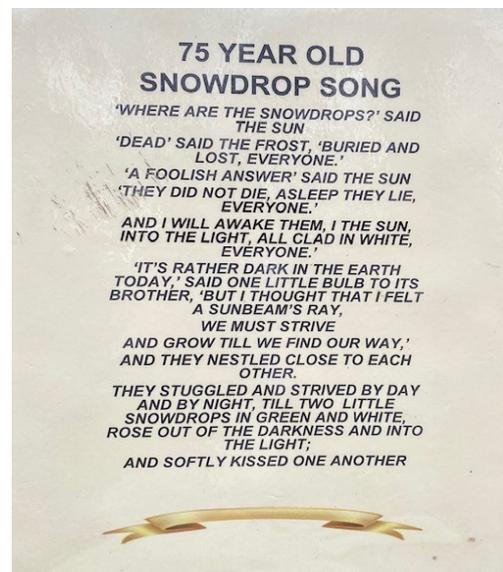
Moving on, the pigeon is still with us and seems to have found a mate. They chase each other round the garden and sometimes fight over the food we are still putting out. He has his distinctive walk/plod and is now much bigger than he was when we first met him, which sometimes leaves me thinking that one day soon he is going to have difficulty getting off the ground – not because he doesn't know how to do it, but because of his size! I have also seen him recently sitting on a neighbour's chimney pot, so it is good to know that there is some sense in his pigeon brain. The magpies are re-building their nest in a neighbour's tree and Jet still knocks on the front door occasionally, but maybe he has found someone more responsive to his requests for attention.

Well, that is going to have to be it for this time. Maybe the next time I am writing, it won't be wet, dark, freezing cold and blowing a gale, but at least we have the daffodils and other spring flowers to look forward to and then Easter will be upon us!

Pam Stockton



Greatham Snowdrop Walk February 2026



February Coffee and Cake

Were you there?

If not, you missed out on good company, great conversations, delicious food and a brain teaser or a quiz!

Come and join us on Saturday 7th March at 2.00pm – don't miss out!



St Matthew's
Community Centre
Elwick Road



Coffee or Tea, Cake and Company

2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday 7th March 2026

*A time to spend together,
meet new people, make new friends*



Boys Brigade News



New Chaplain

Our vicar, Revd John Bell, is to become our Company Chaplain. This allows John to get to know the Boys and Leaders so much so that he is going to our Camp at the Scout Centre in Bonaly near Edinburgh in the summer.

Devotions

Jonah - we have spent a month studying the story of Jonah. The Anchor Boys have completed four crafts based on his story - dot to dot, a collage, spot the difference and colouring which have helped them to understand the story.

After half term we are learning about The Beatitudes in the run up to Easter.

Our Anchors and Juniors will be attending Easter Eggheads in Holy Week and our Leaders and NCOs will be helping to lead it.

Sunday March 29th Palm Sunday

We are holding a Bacon Butty morning for all the "9.00am and 11.00am Worshipers" from 10.00 - 10.45am at St Matthew's CC.

Why not come to sample a tasty butty before or after your service of choice?

News

Both our Juniors and Company Lads have been learning some complex movements in marching and drill which has helped to improve their skills.

In the near future the Company Lads will be trying to improve their communication skills by attempting semaphore.

Sadly, one of our former member's father and Jack's uncle (Ricky Hanlon) died last month. He used to be landlord of the Park Hotel. The family have bequeathed our Company a Colours Stand to use on Formal and Ceremonial Occasions.

Membership and Numbers

Anchors we still have room for a few more Boys aged 5-8 years.

I am pleased to report both the Juniors and Company now both have over 20 members - which is the best this century!

We will still accept new recruits in these sections.

If you would like to see more of our activities, please follow us on Facebook.

George Bainbridge 07816 445829

It's a wonderful, wonderful world...

I have just been walking Wulfstan my dog down at the North Gare. It was a beautiful afternoon with the first sun we have seen for a long time and warmer air so you could actually enjoy being outside and believe that Spring is on its way back to us. It got me thinking about all the things we have to be thankful for – among some of the things I noticed:



- Beautiful cloud formations, Fresh air
- Mist laying over the hills on the skyline making them look magical
- Roaring waves throwing up plumes of foam
- Spiky banks of shrubs on the sand dunes
- Clusters of birds singing on the sand
- Lots of happy dogs and happy dog owners
- A big full moon rising in a sky full of shades of blue
- Patterns in the sand
- All the different shells and sea coal and sticks to look at on the beach
- Being able to take time to enjoy simple things.

We finished the walk with the first ice cream of the year (gluten free 99 with pink sherbert) at Gelato's in Seaton Carew and that really did make it feel like spring is around the corner.

While I know that I am fortunate to have mobility to be able to enjoy walks, and transport to get to beautiful places like North Gare, no matter where we are there is so much to be thankful for. And I know how good being thankful is for the soul and disposition. When I lived in London I used to play a game with myself of 'spot 10 beautiful things' on the way to the station each morning as a way to start my day with thankfulness. Little flowers growing through cracks in the pavement, oil marbling a grubby puddle, children skipping along on the way to school. We are surrounded by so much awe and beauty in the world when we stop to look.

There is a lot of talk at the moment about how the world has been 'disenchanted', how we live in such a rational moment in the history of the world that we have almost come to see people as a kind of machinery rather than as a precious flowerings of God's creation. But it only takes a moment with our eyes and heart open to see the magic of God's fingerprints all around us. While we might no longer get to see God himself walking in the garden in the cool of the day, as Adam and Eve did, his presence is still all around us if we care to look. Whether it is in his creation that I saw on the beach, the birds and plants and the power of the waves, or through his provision of food for us, or more directly through a tangible sense of his working within the push and pull of our lives, he is never far away. This is something we will be thinking about more in the coming weeks, when using the lectionary readings throughout Lent to dig down into the enchantment we can still find in our world, and the way God is threaded through it. So why not take a moment to pause, breathe deep and let God catch up with you, no matter where you are.

Revd Becky

Can you Identify these Bible Books from the pictures?



Andy and Kati Walsh

CMS Link Letter February 2026

Dear friends,

We hope this update finds you well. As we reach the end of January 2026, we're grateful for the opportunity to share some encouraging developments from our life and ministry here in Florianópolis. We remain deeply thankful for your prayers, friendship and partnership, which continue to sustain and strengthen us as we have recently celebrated our fourth anniversary as CMS mission partners in Brazil. One of the most significant developments over the past months has been the progress within the Vineyard church here. Until recently, the church met in a small commercial space of around 80m². As the congregation grew, the space became increasingly confined, often feeling very full and raising genuine concerns about safety and capacity. We started actively exploring relocation alternatives, despite the considerable financial and logistical challenges that would bring. In an unexpected and timely turn of events, both neighbouring tenants on the same floor simultaneously handed in their notice prematurely, releasing their units earlier than planned. This amazing answer to prayer created an unexpected opportunity for us to expand into those spaces and remain where we are. With the support of external funding, we were able to begin removing internal walls, transforming what had been two adjacent commercial units into a more open and welcoming environment for worship and community life. Remaining in the same location has provided important continuity for those newer to faith, while also giving the church confidence to invite others and grow without losing its sense of familiarity and belonging. At the end of January, we also began refurbishing a third area, with plans to make this open-plan as well. This space will initially support our children's ministry and, looking ahead, hopefully create an area for new initiatives focused on younger people. As a leadership team, we sense that this is a stretching but healthy season for the church, and we're encouraged by the way people are stepping forward with faith, generosity, and a growing sense of shared responsibility. In December 2025, we celebrated the baptism of five people, a joyful moment for the church community. Daniel, one of those baptised, completed the prison discipleship course earlier in the year and is now working full-time in the local community. Seeing lives shaped and redirected over time – across different contexts of church and prison – continues to affirm the call we sense to serve faithfully in both spaces.

Andy had the opportunity to be in England from mid-September through early October. That time proved to be deeply encouraging. He was warmly received by some new church partners who are now supporting us as a family. We feel very privileged to be working in partnership with you all.

On a more personal note, December also marked the end of the school year here in Brazil. Eva took part in her school's end-of-year ceremony, celebrating her progress in learning to read and write in Portuguese. Along with her classmates, she received a small graduation certificate – an important milestone in Brazilian school culture. To our surprise and delight, Eva was chosen to represent her class by reading a short message aloud in Portuguese to commemorate the occasion. This took place on a stage in front of around 150 parents and family members. We couldn't have been prouder of her confidence and progress – she's certainly learning the language (and has a far more authentic accent than her dad)!

In November, we travelled to Curitiba, in the neighbouring state of Paraná, to attend a Vineyard conference for the south of Brazil. The weekend was both refreshing and fruitful. We're now exploring how new material might be adapted and used to invest further in local leaders within our church, as part of our commitment to developing healthy and sustainable leadership.

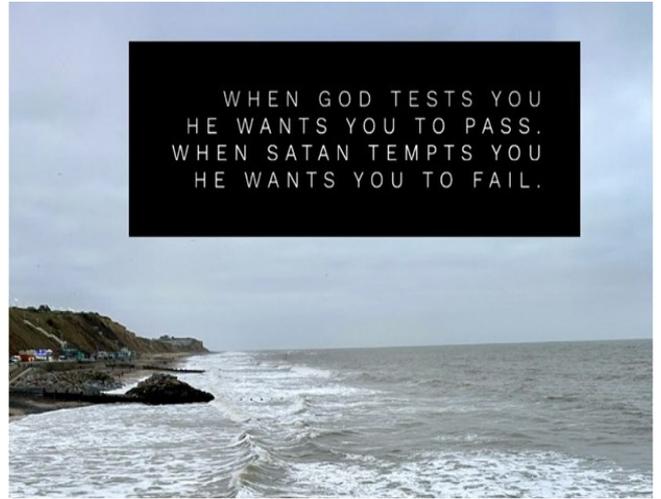
Alongside church life, the prison ministry continues to be a central focus of our work. On 13 January, Andy began another cycle of the Prison Fellowship's discipleship course, this time with 12 men in the Presídio Masculino de Florianópolis. Some of the men are navigating extremely complex and painful circumstances. One young man, Giovanni, is only 21 and facing the consequences of a serious first offence. He has been going through a very fragile season, and on several occasions has come close to losing hope altogether. Andy has been supporting him pastorally, alongside the course content, as he comes to terms with the impact of his actions on his own life and on his family. Walking alongside men like Giovanni underlines just how vital it is to engage people with the gospel, and with the reality of God's truth, love, and mercy – particularly at times when the weight of mistakes seems overwhelming. Looking ahead, we will continue to engage the leadership at São Pedro de Alcântara penitentiary. With a new prison governor now in place, we're hopeful of restarting conversations about establishing a regular space for informal church services within the prison. Even if this begins in simple ways – perhaps in open courtyards and under less-than-ideal conditions – we're committed to persevering. Brazilian law makes provisions for the facilitation of religious services within the prison system, and we're currently awaiting our security clearance for the year ahead before scheduling further meetings. We'd love to share a video about our prison ministry which we recently created with a professional photographer: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLgzdwQqiBk

Thank you, once again, for walking with us. Whether through prayer, encouragement, or practical support, you are part of what God is doing here – in church gatherings, preaching on the prison courtyards, leadership conversations, and family life. We're deeply grateful.

With love and thanks, **Andy, Kati and Eva**



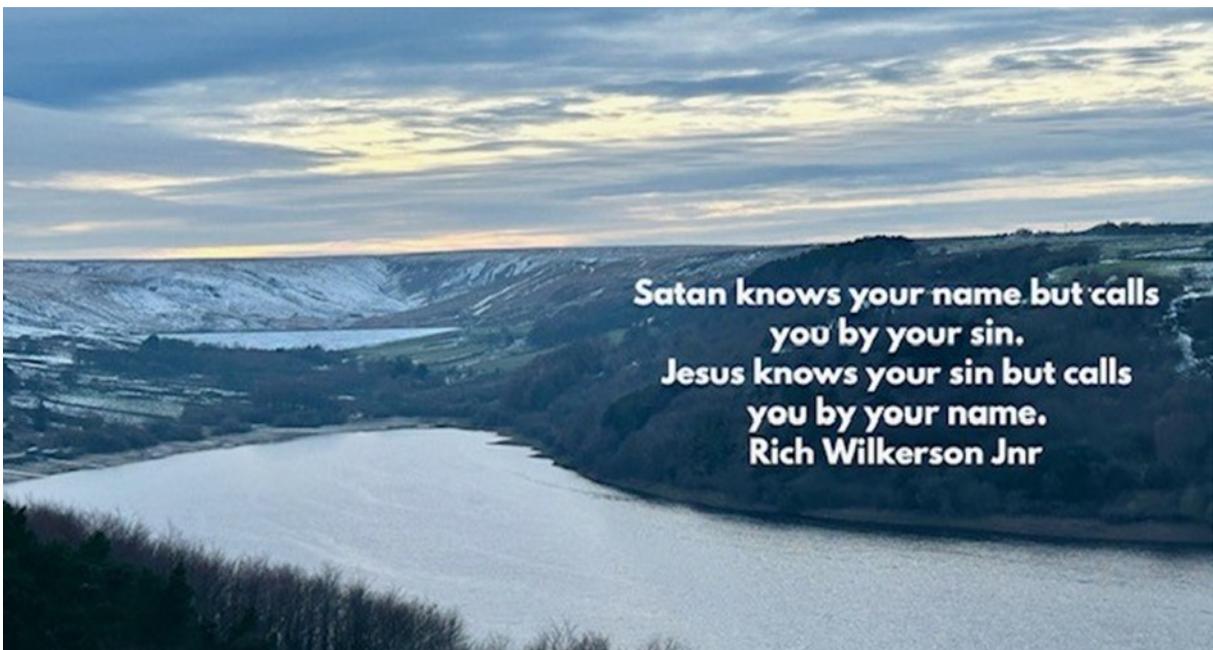
**“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
Romans 15:13 NIV**



**WHEN GOD TESTS YOU
HE WANTS YOU TO PASS.
WHEN SATAN TEMPTS YOU
HE WANTS YOU TO FAIL.**



Our Prayer
©DIVINE INSPIRATIONS & PRAYERS
**LOVING FATHER, I lift my whole soul to You. Every hope, every lingering fear, every longing, I give them to You. Hold my heart in Your steady hands and keep me in Your truth. I surrender all of myself to Your tender loving care.
In JESUS' name I pray,
AMEN.**



**Satan knows your name but calls you by your sin.
Jesus knows your sin but calls you by your name.
Rich Wilkerson Jnr**

CELEBRATE!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

to

March

Rebecca Bell
Teagan Bruce
Kayleigh Bruce
Azam Chaichi
Claire Mead



If you have something to celebrate
we would love to share it - email
admin@stranton-church.org.uk
or phone 894006.

All entries to be in by the 16th of the month.

Bible Books Answers

1 Chronicles
Numbers
Exodus
Nehemiah
2 Kings
Judges
Genesis
Jeremiah
Job

**Donations for a Chocolate
Hamper would be gratefully
received for 900th
Anniversary Craft Fair.
Please drop off in Church
office or contact Trish on
07305 550009.**



Dates for the Diary

March

Sat 7 th	Coffee & Cake	St Matthew's CC	2.00-4.00pm
Sun 8 th	Messy Church	St Matthew's CC	
Sat 14 th	Craft Fair	St Matthew's CC	10.00-3.00pm
Sun 15 th	Mothering Sunday	Stranton	9.00am & 11.00am
	Sunday@6	Stranton	6.00pm

Holy Week

Sun 29 th	Palm Sunday with Parade Service	Stranton	11.00am
Mon 30 th -2 nd Apr	Easter Eggheads	St Matthew's CC	6.00-7.15pm
Mon 30 th -Wed 1 st Apr	Reflection /Compline	Stranton	7.30pm
Thurs 2 nd Apr	Chrism Service	Durham Cathedral	10.00am
	Maundy Thursday Service	St Luke's	7.00pm
Fri 3 rd	Good Friday All Age Service	St Luke's	10.00am
	Messy Good Friday	St Matthew's CC	10.00-11.30am
	Reflection Drop In	Stranton open	12.00-2.00pm
	Hour at the Cross	Stranton	2.00pm
Sat 4 th	Church open?	TBC	
Sun 5 th	Easter Sunday	Stranton	9.00am
		St Luke's	9.15am
		Stranton	11.00am

900th Celebrations Dates for your Diary

Craft Fair	Saturday 14th March	St Matthew's Community Centre
Sunday@6	Sunday 15th March	Stranton Church
Sunday@6	Sunday 19th April	Rev Nick Moore (former curate now Warden at Cranmer Hall Theological College)
Medieval Re-enactment & Fun Day	6th June	pm
Ward Jackson School Grounds		
Rev Claire's Priesting	Saturday 27th June	4.00pm Durham Cathedral
Celebration BBQ	Sunday 28th June	- The Vicarage, 34A Westbourne Rd
'Beer & Hymns'	Saturday 4th July	5.00pm Stranton Church
Tower Abseil & open tower	11th July	10.00am-4.00pm Stranton Church
Hartlepool Community Choir	Friday 17th July	7.00pm Stranton Church
Quarter Peal	August	Details to be confirmed
Beach Party/Church Walk	August	Details to be confirmed
Harvest Supper & Quiz	September	Details to be confirmed
Light Party	October	Details to be confirmed
Final Celebrations & Service with Bishop	November	Details to be confirmed

Who's Who

Church Office	St Matthew's Community Centre Arncliffe Gardens TS26 9JF
Administrator	Trish Playfor "Tues- Fri, 9.00 to 11.00am" 01429 894006 or 07305 550009 E-Mail: admin@stranton-church.org.uk Web Site: www.stranton-church.org.uk
To contact clergy by E-mail	E-Mail: clergy@stranton-church.org.uk

Priest in Charge 34A Westbourne Road 07512 481115
 Revd. John Bell
 Email: revdjohndbell@stranton-church.org.uk

Curate
 Revd Claire Mead (Stranton & St Luke's) 07598 070481
 Email: curate@stranton-church.org.uk
 Usual day off – Friday

Reader
 Mary Tones 40a Blakelock Road 07972 342890
 Hayley Liversidge hayey@hartlepoolcch.coh.org.uk 07712 008772

St Aidan's & Columba's Church

Priest in Charge
 Revd. Becky Reeve 5 Tunstall Avenue 01429 671358
 Email: revbeckystaidanandcolumba@gmail.com

Safeguarding: Jacqui Rogers (Stranton Parish Safeguarding Officer)
 Email: safeguarding@stranton-church.org.uk 07749 163606

Churches Together in Hartlepool

Secretary Susan Atkinson,
 St Mary's RC

Church Wardens Angela Craig 57 Claremont Drive 07899 897444
 Peter Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266

PCC Secretary Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Treasurer David Craig 57 Claremont Drive Contact Stanton Office
 894006

Asst. Treasurer Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Loyalty Treasurer Ken Shepherd 251 Park Road 268007

Notice Sheet The Office (Notices by the preceding Wednesday)
Signpost Editorial Jacqui Rogers 19 Trentbrooke Avenue 265527
Signpost Advertising Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
St Matthew's Booking Trish Playfor Church Office 894006

Magazine articles to the parish office by 16th of every month.

