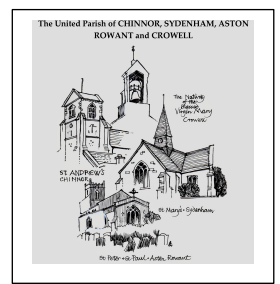


**United Parish of
Chinnor,
Aston Rowant,
Crowell
And
Sydenham**



Pastoral Letter November

Jacky writes:

Earlier this year I found myself unwell with a double ear infection. It left me unable to hear properly for some days which was a very strange and unsettling experience. What surprised me, though, was that while much of the everyday sound around me was dulled or missing, one thing came through with startling clarity: birdsong. This was a rather beautiful and unexpected “silver lining” of a mostly miserable couple of weeks. Listening to my garden’s resident blackbird singing his heart out was truly lovely.

That experience set me thinking about the importance of listening. We live in a very noisy world. The soundtrack of our lives is made up of many layers: the hum of traffic, the rhythm of household appliances, the chatter of children at play, the music of builders’ radios, bells ringing, trains passing. These are the sounds of community life, and in their way they remind us we are connected to others. Then there are the more personal sounds: the conversations we share, the voices of family and friends, the stories we listen to through radio, television, podcasts, and social media. These do not just pass us by; they have power to shape our emotions, our thoughts, even our outlook on life. To listen is never a neutral act. What we allow into our ears and minds has the potential to draw us closer to God or to distract us and leave us restless.

Abbot Christopher Jamison reminds us that the word obedience comes from the Latin ‘ob-audire’ which means to listen deeply. Obedience in Christian life is not about blind compliance; it is about learning to listen with the heart, to tune ourselves to the voice of God amid all the other voices clamouring for our attention. Last year I was blessed to take part in a 30-day spiritual retreat. In that prolonged silence I was able to hear my own thoughts with new clarity and to listen more deeply to the presence of Jesus. It was not an everyday experience, indeed it is rare to step out of life’s demands so completely, but it showed me what becomes possible when the noise is filtered out.

The challenge for us is how to make space for that kind of deep listening in the midst of ordinary, busy, noisy lives. One way is through setting aside time for prayer. Prayer is not only about speaking to God, but about allowing ourselves to be still enough to listen. Even a few minutes of quiet each day can help us filter out the clamour of the world and hear instead the divine birdsong of our Lord, who always sings over us in love.

So my prayer for us all is that in the days ahead we find small moments of quiet, even in the middle of all the noise of daily life. And in those moments we will know the peace of Christ, we will recognise and listen to the voice of the Shepherd who calls us by name, and may we be ever refreshed by the song of God's love that never ceases.

