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News:

Sam Sharpe Lecture: change-making faith

Are we living out our faith in such a way that it will create lasting change in our society? That's one of the challenges the Revd Rose Hudson Wilkin will present at the seventh Sam Sharpe Lecture next month

Rose, Priest in Charge at St Mary at Hill, City of London, is the chaplain to the speaker of the House of Commons, the first woman in that role.

She is also from Montego Bay, Jamaica, which has a statue of Sam Sharpe in recognition of his part in bringing about the abolition of slavery. Sharpe was a Baptist deacon who instigated a plan of passive resistance against slavery. It cost him his life, but within two years slavery would be abolished. The annual lecture explores his legacy.

'Having been born and brought up there (Montego Bay) I know the value of Sam Sharpe and what he brought to that society,' Rose said.

'I want us here in the diaspora in the United Kingdom as people from minority ethnic background, and also for ordinary white people living here, to understand something of what the faith brings to ordinary life.

'But I also want to ask the question: are we living up to the sacrifices they made, huge sacrifices that cost them their lives?

'What are we doing about those sacrifices? Are we taking them for granted? Are we building on that foundation?'

This wasn't simply a question for the Sam Sharpes, but 'every single one of us', Rose continued. 'We need to ask ourselves why are we here? What purpose do we serve?

‘How might we create the kind of change in our society, in our community, that in years to come other generations, future generations will look back and say this generation has indeed built on the foundation and the sacrifices of the Sam Sharpes?’

‘In other words, have we used our gift, the gift, wisely?’

The 7th Annual Sam Sharpe Lecture will be held on: 18 October 2018 at University of Roehampton Whitelands College.

New church in Castle Donington

A new Baptist church officially launched in the rapidly growing Leicestershire town on Sunday (9 September), the culmination of several years of prayer

Castle Donington Community Church officially came into being during an evening service which also saw the induction of its minister, the Revd Roy Monks, and 300 people attend.

The journey began after a group of Baptist ministers in the Soar Valley started to explore the possibility of planting a new church. After much prayer, talking and consulting, Castle Donington was identified as the place: the town is near East Midlands Airport and is expanding rapidly with hundreds of new houses being built and new industries being attracted.

A small Baptist community has been worshipping in the town for decades, but it was felt that a new church would better serve God’s purposes.

And so plans were set in place to raise the necessary funds and call a leader/evangelist/minister. Roy was appointed in May this year.

Roy said that having been the minister at Ibstock Baptist Church in Leicestershire for the last seven years, experiencing great blessing with many baptisms, new building work and a growing membership, he had no plans to move.

However, ‘The Lord of course had other ideas.’

‘Having attended the regular monthly Baptist ministers meeting to pray about finding someone for a new pioneer church in Castle Donington we all felt a little discouraged,’ Roy said, ‘because over quite a long period we couldn’t seem to find the right person to fill the post.’

‘One of the ministers just before we began to pray asked me if I felt it might be me. I completely rejected the idea, stating that I was very settled in my own church and had no reason to move.’

“God” I said, “would need to write it in the sky if he wanted me to do this as I had no earthly reason to leave my current church.”

‘In the middle of our prayer time my phone buzzed to say I had received a message. I ignored it while we were praying, thinking it might be a pastoral issue, but on opening the message at the end of prayers my mouth fell open in shock and amazement.

‘The message, from a friend who didn’t know we were meeting or praying or anything about a new church, read:

Roy, the Lord keeps bringing you to me to give you a word of encouragement. I don't understand it and am not trying to. He says you have a dilemma that he is talking to you about, something important in your life and ministry, and you are not sure whether to pursue it or not. He says it's from him, even though it seems like a sidestep.

However trust him in this as it is an exciting chapter in your ministry with endless fruit in the kingdom of God.

‘The whole room stood astounded. God hadn't written it in the sky but had instead sent an email from HQ.

‘I left the room in a daze knowing that the Lord had truly spoken to me in a most astounding way. Other confirmations were to follow and a particular one that allowed my wife to see that this was truly of the Lord.

‘In the last few months God has brought nearly 40 local people together to pray in a shop in Donington every Wednesday morning, a place he miraculously provided.

‘We have already led one person to Christ and held successful praise night in a local club which saw non-Christians coming forward for prayer and ministry, and we hadn’t even officially started!’

Around 300 people attended the launch and induction, which was led by the Revd Mark Clay, regional minister team leader of the East Midlands Baptist Association. Writing on the church's Facebook page, Roy said, "Amazing night!! 300 people came from all over, as far away as Wales!! Move of the spirit.'

He added, ‘It's all very exciting and we wait in faith and anticipation for all that the Lord is about to do.’

When the church plays catch up

Andy Fitchet reports on how, and why, a church is beginning to form on a new build development in Andover

Picket Twenty is a standard new build development. No doubt you will have one not too far away from you. It currently stands at around 1000 houses with 600 more planned in the next phase, and more to come after that.

There is a good C of E primary school, a packed community centre and nothing else. No shop, no pub, no GP/Pharmacy and no church.

If anyone lives on a new build estate you will know the many varied issues that crop up; bad or no drainage, street lighting that doesn't work for years, hedges blocking paths, curbs you could abseil down, damp, leasehold fees and so on. This is where the story starts. A local community fed up to the back teeth with local authorities and the developers blaming each other and nothing getting done.

As a local councillor this is where I come in. To write emails, have meetings, point at these issues for grumpy local paper shots and generally try to help. Helping, not because this is covert evangelism, but because that's what you do and I have the position to do it.

18 months on, we are getting somewhere. Slowly. The shop is about to be built, drainage is being overhauled and there are more lights on than there were.

What I didn't expect was to be planting a church.

Turns out the local community would quite like to have a local church and a local minister to be able to go to.

I had no intention of planting a church in Andover. There are far too many of the things already. In and around Andover there are 36 churches. 36. For a population of 50,000. We most certainly don't need anymore...but what do you do when a distinct local community, of which those asking are not churched, ask for one?

You kind of have to say yes. So I did.

We (the deputy chair of the resident's forum and I) decided to start something easy to plan, community focussed and open to anyone. So we held a picnic. 10 turned up, five churchy and five not churchy. Seven people sent apologies.

We still have no permanent home, or indeed a temporary one, that's all being worked out. What it does seem to me, though, is that after six years perhaps God got bored of waiting for the church to do something and so decided to use the community to start something instead?

Windrush celebration at All Nations Baptist Church

Beverley Hillman reports on an uplifting spiritual service marking the 70th anniversary of the arrival of SS Empire Windrush

Our church, All Nations Baptist Church, held a special service for Windrush 70 in July. The SS Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury docks on 22 June 1948 carrying passengers from the Caribbean and other countries. We commemorated and celebrated the contribution of the Windrush pioneers and the Windrush generation to Britain. Our church, has a diverse congregation, but the majority are of African and African Caribbean heritage.

Prior to the service, you could feel the 'buzz,' in the air as our members volunteered, supported each other and bonded together in preparation for the service.

Our Windrush service was also an opportunity for outreach. We invited family, friends, past members and our sister church Raleigh Park Baptist Church (Brixton SW2). Christ's Academy (which hires our church hall for their Sunday service), closed their church for the day and their members and pastors joined our service.

It was a glorious sunny day and more than 200 people attended. The congregation were informed of the contribution and sacrifice of the African and African Caribbean community pre-Windrush, and their response to the call after World War two to help rebuild Britain.

The legacy explored the challenges, achievements, resilience and lessons for the future.

Our pastor Paul Ogunyemi led the service and his sermon reflected on the diversity of life in Britain and the importance of Love (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Five other pastors were in the congregation, and a reading was read by one of them. The children sang action songs and an interview enabled others to reflect on their own experience of 'Coming to England.'

Poetry, prayers and the worship team, touched our hearts, minds and soul with their contributions. Prayers were said for those across the country, who had been affected and traumatised by the Windrush fiasco. After the service, the congregation networked and enjoyed mouth-watering refreshments. A special anniversary cake was donated, decorated with scenes from the Windrush.

It was an uplifting spiritual service of praise and thanksgiving to God. Many had been unable to attend the Windrush Service held at Westminster Abbey held at 22 June 2018.

We thank God for a truly spirit-filled, memorable day.

New chaplains for railway industry

Several new chaplains – including three with a Baptist background - have been appointed by the Railway Mission as it seeks to increase support to the under pressure railway industry

The industry has experienced a time of extreme difficulty with timetable changes, strikes, and passenger dissatisfaction all having a negative impact.

The Railway Mission, founded in 1881, provides pastoral support through a dedicated and professional chaplaincy service.

It has invested into the chaplaincy service to help staff through the recent industrial problems that have been faced by Train Operating Companies, Northern, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), Southern Rail and South Western Railway.

Three of the new chaplains have a background in Baptist ministry. They include Levi Lee (left), who has pastored Baptist churches in Dartford, Gillingham and Crawley. Levi becomes chaplain to the Southern Rail area. John Roe (right), a former pastor of the Lawn Community Church in Swindon, will be chaplain to Paddington and the Greater Western Railway and the South West. Mike Roberts (back, centre) who has pastored Baptist churches in Yorkshire and Dorset, will cover Manchester and the Northwest.

Liam Johnston, Executive Director of Railway Mission said, 'As a chaplaincy service, we have responded to the needs of the industry and the railway staff, by increasing as far as possible the support we provide to rail staff and British Transport Police.

'We hope that this increased support will help alleviate some of the pressures faced by front line staff on the railway.'

Other full time appointments include Colin Fraser (East Midlands) and Andrea Smyth (North London). As well as the addition of these new full time chaplains to the chaplaincy team, Railway Mission will also increase the hours of some of the part time chaplains too.

For more information, visit railwaymission.org

JPIT appoints poet-in-residence

The Revd Lucy Berry, a performance poet and United Reformed Church minister, has been named as the first poet-in-residence for the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT).

JPIT responds to current social, political and policy issues on behalf of the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

Ms Berry will write and perform poetry related to the policy areas JPIT work on such as poverty and welfare system in the UK, immigration, political engagement and broader themes around peace and justice.

The unremunerated position began on Monday 3 September and is marked with a poem specially written by Ms Berry, entitled 'An empire and a village'.

Explaining how the joint venture began, Ms Berry said: 'It came about through my residency at JPIT's last national conference, 'Brave New World: faithful living in a time of change', in Manchester in March.

'We all hit it off brilliantly. JPIT have an attractively practical attitude towards the issues of the day and I love practical Christianity.'

A new page has been created on JPIT's website entitled 'poetry hub' and will feature all poetry she writes during her time with the organisation.

She explained what lay behind the inspiration for her work.

'It's the Bible,' she continued. 'It seems to me that what is happening in the Bible is always happening; which makes the Bible eternally – and urgently – relevant.'

Lucy Zwolinska, JPIT Policy and Engagement Officer, added, 'We are delighted to welcome the Revd Lucy Berry as our poet in residence. When Lucy joined us for our Brave New World conference in March and performed her poem "Ideas, like doves" the positive feedback was overwhelming, demonstrating the power of her work. Lucy's words allow people to engage with issues of justice and peacemaking on a deeply spiritual and personal level. We look forward to working with her more closely.'

'An Empire and a Village'

I've been thinking for a while now about 'empire' and 'village'. Not in terms of specific regimes, but in terms of an ongoing global impulse. Empire can never be a good thing. Because although it uses humans to function, it isn't human. Empire needs a vast underclass to keep going. It needs various kinds of 'us-and-them' conventions to optimise its operations. It subverts education to its service. It requires collusion and coercion to maintain stasis. It uses society and community but is neither. It is in relationship to no-one. It breaks every rule in the book and it exists within each of us or it couldn't work nearly so well. I see almost all news and current affairs as drifts towards either empire or village. We all have village in us too. But that often loses out, doesn't it?

An Empire and a Village

You and I, inside us, have an Empire and a village.

Admit it and acknowledge.

Now, let's forage for our courage.

Citizens of Empire are the haywire folk of hellfire;

of hiring, firing, miring, and of razor-wire and gunfire.

Citizens of Empire never listen to the village.

Empire will imprison any prophet of the village.

Empire has the cash, the whips, the slaves, and the advantage.

Empire screams for tribute which the village cannot manage.

Empire drinks the river and the village feels the shortage.

Empire starts the carnage and the village needs the bandage.

People of the village must rummage through the rubbish,

calling through the garbage for the children in the wreckage.

Empire knows to massage every message to the village;

to authorise as classified each image of the pillage.

Empire feeds off doubt and debt and luxury and slaughter.

Village dreams of crumbs of bread and never-ending water.

All of us, inside us, have an Empire and a village.

Admit it and acknowledge.

Now. Go forage for your courage.

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