

Sunday 14 December 2025

Dear brothers and sisters,

On Sunday I spoke on Habakkuk 2 – my second sermon on Habakkuk in three months, having preached on it only once before in over 25 years! The chapter begins with these words:

*I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me. ...
For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
it will certainly come
and will not delay. (Habakkuk 2.1 & 3, NIV)*

And I made a promise to you all: to do what Habakkuk did, to ‘stand at my watch and look to see what God will say to us.’ And I invited you all to join me in doing that. God has called *me* here to do that as the leader of this church – but Jesus tells *all* of us to ‘Keep watch’ (Matthew 25.13). At the end of the letter I include a prayer I shared in my Vicar Writes email and podcast this week – please keep praying it over the coming weeks. My hope is that it will help us stand, watch and wait for what God is saying and calling us into.

Thank You

I’d like to say a few ‘thank-you’s.

First, on behalf of the PCC I would like to thank everyone who gives of themselves so sacrificially to serve God in and through the ministries of Christ Church. It is a testament to our long-term commitment and faithfulness that so many things have been sustained for so many years. Second, I would like to thank the members of our PCC. Like our lives, churches go through seasons, and this is not an easy season in which to be responsible for leading Christ Church. We have an excellent mix of people on the PCC, and I am grateful to each of them for their different contributions. Third, I would also like to thank those who have taken the time and effort to share their thoughts with grace and generosity. Finally, I would like to thank those who have been praying for and supporting me personally through what has been an extremely challenging term for many of us.

What Could Be

This week the Spirit reminded me of a picture someone had a year or so ago, of a volcano that is ready to blow. That volcano was Christ Church, and on Tuesday my sense was of the tremendous potential for the gospel that there is within our church. We are stuffed with people full of love and compassion for those outside our church family. It’s no secret that our church love-language is food... we love to feed people! That hospitality is such a gift, nurtured and expressed over many years of faithful service by so many of us.

To that gift I long to add a deeper and growing confidence in the gospel, so we might make the most of the opportunities our hospitality gift gives us, whatever that looks like in each group.

This last term as we've learned about *The Heart of Hospitality*, we've seen that hospitality is first an invitation, an invitation from God to us, which he in turn invites us to share with others. That invitation is a critical bit that churches – including Christ Church – often struggle with. We are great at helping people belong, but find it harder to invite them to explore what it might mean to believe – *both* are vital. Doing one without the other leaves us lopsided, but doing both together is tremendously powerful.

That has to be at the heart of our vision for the future of our ministries at Christ Church, and as I've said before I believe God is calling us to lay things down and make space – to make space for prayer, to make space for him to work a new thing in and through us. There are so many possibilities and potential ways we could serve him in our parish as it is today. **I would love us to have the space to pray through such options and really seek what God's *immeasurably more* is for us in the next season.**

Some of those possibilities include (in no particular order):

1. Exploring how to support neurodiverse children in the parish.
2. Engaging with other faiths (the Muslim population has risen significantly in recent years).
3. 'Teach to Reach' – a programme from 2:19 which enables churches to offer conversation classes and build relationships through teaching English as a Second Language.
4. Running Warm Welcome Friday all year round. Apart from Sundays this is the only thing we offer that entire families could come to together.
5. Engaging with local councillors over the issues faced by people living in supported housing.
6. Supporting St Andrew's Healthcare with lay chaplaincy and visiting.
7. Running an evangelism course this term (e.g. Alpha / 321) alongside our hospitality ministries.

Other things we haven't done to help build up our fellowship include (again, in no particular order):

1. Regular social events for people to mix and interact with others they don't normally sit with.
2. Holding 4th Sunday evening gatherings to explore 'big questions' of faith and culture.
3. Volunteer training – we've done the bare minimum.
4. Gather feedback and encouragements – and any new ideas – from the 777 Prayer week.

Every single one of those has been suggested or come up in the last six months (many of them before that as well) and there are more besides! Of course I am not suggesting we do all of them, but I do want to give a flavour of some of the options and potential new and different ways we could serve God, our local community and one another, to expand the range of things we offer.

Sisters and brothers, I am genuinely excited about what could be! I see a vision for our ministries that is creative and open to God, and where we are willing to keep going faithfully or to change. I see a church family that is willing to be shaped and moulded by God as we respond to the changing needs in our parish. That is my agenda: that we are a church led by the Father to share Jesus with all (by showing and sharing his love, and speaking his gospel), and in all things to be energised by the Holy Spirit: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty (Zechariah 4.6, NIV).

Our vision statement reads: We long to see God's name honoured, his kingdom come, lives transformed. How wonderful it would be to see those things happen *immeasurably more* in Selly Park!

A Bigger 'Yes'

It is within that context of a positive vision for our ministries that we are having serious conversations about what we do. It's hard to disagree that we are trying to do too much. We have regular calls for volunteers across almost every ministry and rota, because few of them have enough people to run as they should. And, most recognise we need to broaden the mix of what we do to reach a wider range of people.

I have had so many conversations about this since the day I arrived four and a half years ago – at some point we need to move beyond simply recognising or diagnosing the problem.

The truth is: the busier we are the harder it is to hear God, as individuals *and* as a church; the more we fill our space, even with very good things, the harder it is to imagine what *else* we could be doing in that space; every time we say 'Yes' to one thing we say 'No' to something else. So the extremely difficult question is: **what do we stop doing in order to make the space for us to hear what God is saying to us?**

Over the past few months almost every ministry has come to me – some multiple times – saying they need more people. A few weeks ago there was an urgent need at Lunch Club; when I was told, it necessarily began a series of conversations about whether or not we can continue running it well. After the call for help, I am grateful to everyone who stepped in to help keep it going until Christmas. Lunch Club requires a huge amount of volunteer time to run, so we have to ask: is it still the right way to serve our parish?

At the same time, it became clear that our Thursday Toddlers session was struggling for numbers, some weeks being even in single digits, with an average of just over 11 across the term. Of course, numbers are not everything – but behind every number is a person, and *people* matter. When we have limited resources, we have to ask: how can we make the most of what we have? When people attending reduces like this we have to ask: what does that tell us about the changing demographics and needs of our parish? And the big question: is this still the best way to reach the families in our parish today? If yes, how do we make the most of that opportunity, and if no, what might God be calling us to do instead?

These questions do not presume a negative answer. The answer might be: yes, Lunch Club is the best way to serve our parish! It might be: yes, Toddlers is the best way to reach the families in our parish today! **But we have to be willing to ask, and we have to be willing for the answer to be 'Yes' or 'No'.** I have no problem with God calling us to continue doing what we're doing, but I do have a problem if we aren't even willing to ask him and be open-handed enough for him to call us to something new. Because, every time we say 'Yes' to one thing we say 'No' to something else. What if by saying 'Yes' to something good like our existing ministries, we are saying 'No' to something *immeasurably more*, to God's **bigger 'Yes'**?

Midweek Ministries

On 21 October and 9 December our PCC had extended discussions about our midweek ministries. As I have done previously, I would like to thank them for their openness and honesty in those difficult debates. I had hoped that we would be able to make some positive decisions for making space on 9 December, but it was clear that the emotional temperature around Lunch Club was far too high to make a decision about it. And, on the morning of the meeting God reminded me of Saul's impatience in Gilgal (1 Samuel 13) and the need to 'Wait'. So, with regards to Lunch Club, we are 'waiting'.

PCC also discussed the future of Toddlers, Coffee Mates and Warm Welcome, and we agreed the following proposals, together with a plan for a series of group and one-to-one discussions in the New Year about our ministries and the large budget deficit we are facing in 2026. PCC also recognised the vital importance of leadership: not simply co-ordinating teams but helping a ministry grow into its vision.

In the immediate term, no groups are being stopped – but the reality is that cannot be our long-term vision. Healthy things grow and change, they do not stay the same forever. It doesn't mean what has gone before is wrong or bad or unappreciated – it means that whatever grows in the future is only possible *because* of the faithful service that has gone before. It might be a cliché but 'standing on the shoulders of giants' applies here. So, **one of my commitments to you is that if things change, part of that change will include a way of recognising, acknowledging and thanking people for all that has gone before.**

Here is the full proposal that PCC have agreed regarding our midweek ministries from Christmas to Easter:

1. Toddlers

- a. We accept the request to delay the decision about whether or not to continue the Thursday session until February half-term.
- b. Alongside that extension we ask the group to explore options for increasing Monday attendance as that has also dipped recently (one option could be merging the two groups).
- c. We would like a vision document to be completed before Christmas.

2. Lunch Club

- a. With thanks to all those who have offered additional help, and to those who have been serving but are stepping down, this will continue until Easter at least.
- b. I will take on leading it for a term, as I have done previously for Warm Welcome. Allan Bartlam will assist me in leading it, including covering the weeks I am not able to be there.
- c. He and I will gather the team together next term to pray and discuss the vision for the ministry, as I am doing for all our ministries currently.
- d. We would like to see Lunch Club continue to grow towards the church's vision and mission.

3. Midweek Service

- a. In order to enable me to give the significant time required to lead Lunch Club, we are pausing the midweek service until after Easter. (I am deeply saddened by this, but every 'Yes' comes with a 'No' – other 'No's include stopping my monthly involvement in Renew, and needing the Prayer Team to lead all the Engage Together gatherings for the term.)

4. Coffee Mates & Warm Welcome Tuesday

- a. We invite the leadership teams of Coffee Mates and Warm Welcome Tuesday to meet to discuss merging Coffee Mates into Warm Welcome Tuesday by February half term.
- b. In particular we would like to see the best bits of Coffee Mates brought into Tuesday's group, for example the emphasis on prayer for and with guests.
- c. The name will remain 'Warm Welcome' – partly because it will be in that Tuesday slot, and partly because we are able to get grants to help cover the cost of 'Warm Welcome' spaces.

5. New Year Conversations

- a. From the middle of January through to the end of February the PCC and I will host a series of up to four small group discussions for anyone to sign up to, and Life Groups will be encouraged to invite me (and someone from PCC) to join one of their meetings. The purpose of these discussions is to:
 - i. give people an opportunity to share how they think and feel, and know they are being heard by me and the PCC; and
 - ii. discuss a positive vision for the future of our midweek ministries; and
 - iii. talk about our budget for 2026, including regular giving and staffing.
- b. Smaller conversations will also be offered where appropriate and as requested.

These proposals are offered with the sense of a positive and open-handed vision for us, recognising some of the significant challenges we face, but trusting God to continue to lead us on.

Be Strong And Courageous

In this letter I have tried to:

1. Express my – and the PCC's – deep and sincere thanks to everyone who gives so much and so generously to serve God, Christ Church, and our parish.
2. Introduce a positive vision and a 'bigger Yes' for what could be – whether that involves new things, doing old things in new ways, or continuing on faithfully. Ultimately I don't mind what that looks like in practice, as long as we are led by God and make space for him, are committed to sharing our faith (as well as fellowship and food), and have a good balance of ministries.
3. Explain and share the current discussions and decisions about our midweek ministries.

Things are not easy right now but I would love us to step forward positively, following the vision God has for us as a church family. We may face struggles, difficulties and changes, and God may use some of those to 'shuffle' things – but the bottom line is: God is good, we can trust him, and if we have the courage and faith to follow him, we will see his name honoured, his kingdom come, and lives transformed.

I end with David's final words to his son Solomon, through which God spoke powerfully to me last week. Let us build: with courage, on the foundation of the Word, in the power of the Spirit – for God is with us.

'Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.' (1 Chronicles 28.20, NIV)

With much love, and every blessing in Christ,



The Revd Ben Green
Vicar, Christ Church Selly Park

A Prayer For Our Church

Loving Father,
we thank you for your love for us in Jesus,
and the gift of your Holy Spirit,
 which you lavish upon us.

We thank you for the gift of all those
 who have given themselves first to you, and then to us,
 in faithful service over many years.

We also repent of the ways we have failed you,
the attitudes which turn us away from you,
our hardness of heart and our lack of love,
 for you, for our neighbours, for one another.

Help us, we pray:
open our hearts and our hands,
to hear and receive all you wish to give us.

Help us, we pray:
pour out your Spirit upon us,
equip us to grow as disciples of Jesus.

Help us, we pray:
fill us with wisdom to see the way ahead,
and the grace we need to follow you together.

Please bless all those with responsibility to lead,
and all those affected by difficult decisions.

Show us how we can all work as one in our mission –
 making, growing, and sending disciples of Jesus.

For we long to see:
 your name honoured,
 your kingdom come,
 and lives transformed.

Amen.