

A few words from the Vicar

'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die..... a time for war, and a time for peace.' Extracts from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Polly and I both have a significant birthday fast approaching. Naturally, to save Polly's embarrassment, I won't say which one – I'm too gallant for that (*Some mistake – Ed.*) – but here's a clue; in the very near future we'll both be celebrating one of those birthdays that ends in a '0'!



This got me thinking about the ways in which we mark the significant events and milestones of life. We celebrate the birth of a baby, special birthdays and wedding anniversaries. On the flip side of life, we mark the death of a loved one with a funeral and a wake and on the anniversary of their death we remember them, perhaps by paying a special visit to place flowers on their grave.

What is true for families is also true for communities, organisations, nations etc.

This year, for example, Scottish Nationalists will doubtless be banging on about the Scots victory over the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. [Yet they were strangely silent last year about the Battle of Flodden (1513). I wonder why!]

Then again, as the start of the FIFA World Cup draws ever closer we'll no doubt be reminded, *ad nauseam*, that England actually won the competition sometime in the dim and distant past (1966 I think).

More importantly, later this year, as a nation we will be remembering (rather than celebrating) the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. In common with every other part of the country, the war impacted upon life in Ainsworth and the surrounding area (a cursory glance at the 'Roll of Honour' in Church will confirm that) so Ainsworth History Society are hoping to mark the centenary in some way. Whatever our feelings regarding the war itself, it's only right to do this and perhaps we the Church ought to mark the anniversary in some way too. We have Remembrance Sunday, of course, but something more is needed to mark the centenary of a war that had such a significant impact upon this nation and the world.

This neatly brings me onto the Church. An important part of the spiritual and pastoral care that the Church of England offers to the people of this country is to help them to mark important events and anniversaries. Remembrance and memorial services, weddings and funerals are obvious examples, as are services for school leavers and the marking significant wedding anniversaries through the renewal of wedding vows.

We get a lot of Baptisms at the parish church and long may that continue. Nonetheless, I deliberately excluded these from the list. It is true that the old Book of Common Prayer Baptism service included the option of naming a child but Baptisms (Christenings) are not specifically intended to mark the birth of a child (plenty of adults and older children are baptised). Baptism is about new life but in the sense that it marks the new start in life we have following a decision to follow Jesus within the life of the church. This is a decision we

make for ourselves or is made on our behalf in the expectation that we will come to own it for ourselves when we are old enough to do so. Baptism is about new life in Christ and isn't so much a celebration as something to be celebrated.

A 'Thanksgiving' service is available for those who simply wish to mark the birth (or adoption) of a child.

By the way, in case you wonder, I have no intention of using the proposed new dumbed down version of the Baptism Service if it's ever approved for use within the C of E. Baptism-Lite, I shudder at the thought!

When I think of it, as a parish church we do quite a lot locally (and always have done) to support the people of this area as they mark the important events in their lives. But could we do more, I wonder?

Well, here's something we used to do.

The Book of Common Prayer contains a lovely service that fell into disuse decades ago; *'The Thanksgiving of Women After Childbirth'*. Otherwise known as *'The Churching of Women'*, it has absolutely nothing to do with the old wives tales that were told years ago about women needing to be 'purified' following childbirth before they could be allowed back into polite society (such a foolish notion). Rather, Churching was a service for thanking God that a woman had safely come through the 'pain and peril of childbirth.'

Shame we don't have a modern version!

Every Blessing

Dave

P.S. I'd love to hear from any older parishioners who experienced a 'Churching' in their younger days.