

Jac's talk delivered at the Hopeweaver Gathering, Saturday 25th Feb 2012

I woke in the night a few weeks ago and whilst getting a glass of water from the kitchen noticed white circular marks all over the greenhouse outside. Curious – I had never seen anything like this before – it is a relatively new greenhouse - I slipped on some shoes and stepped out onto the crunchy frosted grass and walked through moonlight as clear as day. Looking more closely I saw that frost and ice was growing and sending tendrils and arms out from the centres of the white circles. Seemingly before my eyes the circles were joining together with crystal pathways forming a network of connections. They appeared to fill the glass panels which reflecting the moon, sparkled with this new light.

I was reminded of this image during our morning prayers this week on Wednesday when someone was describing a recent joining and meeting of new friends and family through hopeweavers.

And I praise God that today is one of those times when some of us involved and connected through hopeweavers can make ourselves known to each other. We usually meet in small groups – and I know here today are folks involved in so many ways through the Theology Group Thornhill Art Group Tardisart attending Quiet Days for spiritual direction As part of our core team ... through weekly prayers as part of the growing Community Days ... Today maybe we get a glimpse of the connections in Christ that have been formed over the past five years. I would never have dreamed in the early days that we would be meeting here today in this way. I guess that is one of the things the family and team have grown to accept through our involvement with hopeweavers – to expect the unexpected. As a matter of interest, we estimate that there are over 20 different churches and traditions represented here today - Geoff and I were able to list 35+ churches and traditions recently, who have been part of hopeweavers. What a privilege that we can all agree to meet together, as we sang earlier, with 'Jesus at the Centre'.

People often ask me what hopeweavers is – is it a Fresh Expression? Are you a new emerging monastic community? Are you Pioneer Ministers? Or a small missional community or a new church or many other suggestions People sometimes come walking down the drive and ask – what is this place? I guess the answer if I am truthful – and this must sound bad coming from me – is that I really don't know quite what to call 'it'. When folks ask I can however, describe a little of what we may see and experience as part of this network.

Since 2007 our work has included a programme of Quiet Days, Community Days, Creative Days and workshops. The support of others – maybe prayer ministry and leadership teams from churches and secular organisations, and days we create alongside specific groups – older women, young nursing mothers, of ecumenical groups wanting to take time out to listen to God.

The vision described on our website has stayed virtually the same since 2007: 'The team aims to offer a focus for individuals and groups who seek silence and stillness as part of a Christian faith journey and has an Overall Vision

- to create a place away from our everyday lives where we can be refreshed and experience peace and quiet ...
- a safe place where we can dream dreams and receive from God in stillness and calm ...
- somewhere to share silence with others, to learn more about prayer and to make ourselves available to God, to listen ...
- for Christians and people of all faiths or none, of all ages, in small groups, teams, as individuals, in family groups ...
- for as long as we thirst for a sanctuary place, accessible to all, that aims to weave hope into everyday lives.'

This still seems to be Gods call on our time and resources. We often describe this work as 'holding a space in which people can experience the presence of God – somewhere to draw closer to Him. The people who come have very varied experiences of life's journey. Through the core work of Quiet and Community Days and spiritual direction, we estimate numbers in excess of 600 a year coming as guests and participants. And people keep coming. We can often only offer a place on a waiting list but will always make every effort to fit you in - even if you ring the day before. There is a real issue of how to make space for new people as we have gathered a core of regular participants over the years many of whom are here today - which is so lovely.

Yesterday, we had a Quiet Day at hopeweavers. Amongst the participants were Christine and Jo from Christian Youth Enterprises nr Chichester. I have permission to share this by the way! Christine went to light a candle in our outside Chapel space to use as a focus to pray for the new retreat ministry she is developing at CYE. But the matches that she struck were repeatedly blown out by the wind. So she decided to use one of the other candles which were already alight, from which to light her own.

Sharing this experience with us later, she spoke of how she believed that the new retreat work and ministry would develop at CYE, using the light already burning at hopeweavers. What a humbling yet powerful vision!

And indeed their visit to us yesterday was our second meeting together as we at hopeweavers gladly accept the offer to accompany Christine and the team as they seek Gods direction for this exciting new work.

So why do all this?

Perhaps I can best explain it as a response to the familiar question pondered by the Northumbria Community – **How then shall we live?**

I guess some of us struggle with the idea of taking time out – it feels indulgent – there is simply so much else to do! The people who come share stories of their work alongside homeless people, accompanying women coming away from abusive relationships and the sex industry, alongside older people living with dementia, as church leaders, as mothers, fathers, neighbours, daughters, sons and friends.

Horatius Bonar – quoted in Celtic Daily Prayer says and I summarise ‘The soul will often make more progress in one single hour of quiet than in days of company with others. And so it is that in this way we become truly useful to others – coming out fresh from communication with God so that we may go forth and do his work.’

Today we celebrate our very existence – clustered around Christ at our heart. We come from many traditions and none, but seem to be able to agree that there is something about our journeying towards God through Jesus Christ, that is compelling and attractive and that leads us on.

And a journey is always so much better in the company of others – we see the presence of God within the lives of all those around us. Some may have life styles and views which are different from our own, but I guess right from the start welcoming everyone has been how we have developed.

So we thank God for our fellow companions and celebrate all the blessings we have received as individuals, as a team and as a wider community.

And thinking back to the ice crystals Like them there is fragility about our networking within hopeweavers that relies on our often flawed and imperfect relationships with each other, but held in a place simply filled with God’s Grace.

Five years have passed And so on to the future

Like the early Christian communities we read about in the Bible, like the friends walking together on the road to Emmaus - my prayer is that we may all continue to journey towards the Cross – in the dust kicked up by our masters shoes - as individuals and with the company and encouragement of each other, walking together to create Gods kingdom here on earth.

On to some practicalities ...

It is our delight and pleasure to be able to introduce some more members of the team – firstly Geoff Holden our Treasurer and then Jane and Hayley from the Finance little group all of whom have been working towards our sustainability. So Geoff please come and tell us a little more.

Thank you!