

Churchyard Walk.

A churchyard is sometimes known as 'God's Acre'; let's look around us, listen, and notice the beauty and Nature here. Some of us know the churchyard well because we care for a grave, or it may be less familiar. At the **Gate to Trinity Road** could be the **1st 'station'** for a pause and a sense of being welcome. Let us use this time to be still, interiorly, and mindful of this moment.

One could say that this is where God, his people and Nature meet. We are surrounded with trees and birdsong in a green landscape of continuous growth. If you look around you see the maturity of the site and the shelter – it is a rare and precious place. There are many memorials, and they are cherished in different ways with fresh flowers or planted ones. Then there are the general plantings, the avenue of roses, the borders either side of the War Memorial and the trees. These vary from the old to the recently planted. The 3 yews may date to when the church was built in 1848/9. The area then was roughly square, divided by paths. Larches were placed just inside the wall. Sadly the roots of one of the best larches were damaged recently; it had to be felled, as no longer safe, but a young one has been donated, and looks healthy; there is a new beginning.

So let's take a moment to thank God for his great blessings in giving us this beautiful country 'patch', our village so close to the city of Oxford. If wished, we can follow our breathing as we walk, saying silently 'Our' to the in-breath, and 'Father' to the outbreath.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

2nd station: East corner, looking over the Glebe. With the smallholding in this field there are ponies grazing, farmyard noises of chickens, and ducks, also pheasants, which add to the rural charm. The view out over the undulating pasture makes an idyllic village setting – providentially undeveloped so far. Families bring their children to see the animals on an evening walk and the community values the area highly. Within the churchyard you can see a young Liquidambar tree which colours brilliantly in autumn. Birdsong is prodigious here, with Oxfordshire natives, many pigeons, and I have heard the young of red kites calling.

We stop to listen, and feel the **SILENCE**.

Come, Lord Jesus.

3rd station: Opposite Porch, by seat. This area has many recent cremation memorials. We may have relations buried or cremated here, ourselves. There is a profound feeling of loss when we read the wording on the stones, gratitude for a life well lived, and grief for those taken too early. Grant us acceptance, Lord, of the harder parts of life, acceptance of the 'stones' as well as the 'bread'.

Here we can remember with love and thankfulness those who have gone before us. We pause to thank God for everything in our lives, including learning through loss to trust Our Father, and to give Him thanks.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

4th station: At C.S. Lewis grave. Alongside a large pine is the grave of the Parish's most famous son, Clive Staples Lewis, and also his brother Warren. This attracts many visitors who respect him for his writing. The Lewises bought the house 'The Kilns' in 1930 and it was his home until his death in 1963. The Parish church became his church, and on Christmas Day 1931 he received his first

communion since he was a boy. You may be familiar with some anecdotes of his life. The idea for 'The Screwtape Letters' apparently originated here. We pause to thank God for his conversion to deeper belief, and for the effect through his books and, recently films, on several generations throughout the world.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

5th station: Middle of the south boundary in the churchyard extension of 1927. We have just passed the compost bins, constructed to make compost from all the churchyard waste. This is a practical operation, keeping hard stemmed matter which does not rot separate from the soft, which does. Each bin takes at least a year to be ready for use on the borders. Activator and manure are used to layer the material and there is a lot of real rubbish to be taken out. So it's hard work, but no rubbish collections are made from here, and we have to deal with whatever is left behind. This could be the place to thank God for all our volunteers at churchyard working parties which happen 5 times a year, Geoff who mows and strims, and all those who help. There is a Churchyard Committee which guides the work and has a keen sense of responsibility for the area.

On the far left there is the area of the Babies' graves – so it is especially poignant. With the field behind us, and several sycamores, we look north towards the wood. The young tree here is a Sorbus, Mountain Ash.

There are unkempt corners too and some of them are deliberate, for wildlife. We pause to give thanks for this wilder part, even for the weeds and nettles, both here and in our own lives.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

6th station: Along the east facing wall, by the Vicarage path. We have just passed another large Larch; it is a wonder that the trees do so well because the soil is very stony, as one would expect in and around a quarry. They must put their roots down deep for moisture. When the working party had to take out several dead standard roses, we were amazed at how they had survived at all, because the soil was so poor. They were, also, too shaded by the big Lawson's Cypress; we have replaced them with variegated box which is shade tolerant. The churchyard has an organic policy, so no chemicals such as weedkillers are used by us in the maintenance, because we value the food chain and environment.

We pause to thank God for the soil in which He has planted us. This is where he causes us to live, whatever the conditions, stony or fertile, and we give thanks that he teaches us to accept all kinds of situations through experiences.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

7th station: Opposite the west window of the church. Not much will grow in the dense shade of a yew, but some cyclamen have been donated and also aconites. We try to encourage these. Everywhere you see the handiwork of people who come to tend the graves, for whom there is sympathy; some come long distances and perhaps only seldom, while others are local residents and are here frequently. Some of us who have lost a 'Beloved' come every week to be near them and caring for the grave is a sign of our love. We of the churchyard working parties 'adopt' old graves that are obviously not maintained, planting, and keeping them tidy.

We pause to thank God for our families and friends present and past. Though we do not see them, we know that not one of them is lost, but held in your loving hands. Father, you are here in those resting for a while: we give them back to you, as they have come from you.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

8th station: North side of the church. Here is a fine golden Irish Yew, a young cherry and a purple plum. Some grass areas are 'set-aside', and so not regularly mown. The idea is that plants can self-seed in these conditions. The wildflowers are an important part of the churchyard; they are loved and accepted for their own beauty and the habitat they provide for the wild life – butterflies, birds, and insects; we enjoy the pale wild Crocus tomasinianus Whitwell purple which spreads rapidly, as well as snowdrops, and wild poppies. Wild flowers flourish in poor soil, so this is a carpet in Spring of primroses and celandines. Several graves, no longer tended, have become established with varieties such as white daisies and scabious. Do stop to feel a plant's leaf and sniff the scent; many are aromatic or fragrant.

We think, perhaps, of our own habits of growing, whether strong or tentative, and know that all is seen, all is taken into account, and nothing is wasted. All is part of your plan, Lord God.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

9th station: From the corner by the school buildings we give thanks for the new generations of children, and the joy they bring to our families. On weekdays there is plenty of noise and laughter as they play in the open air. They are often brought to church, so they get to know it, and also go to Forest School, where they learn about living with Nature. Every Tuesday there is a Pram service for Parents and Toddlers which is a joyful opportunity for the children to understand Bible stories and feel at home here. Thank you, Father, for our children and all that you give us through them. We remember how Jesus loved the children, and they came to Him.

As we walk around our churchyard we are surrounded by signs of life; we are reminded that you are in all of Creation, in the insects and birds, the butterflies and bees, rabbits, moles, mice, even Muntjac deer which eat flowers on the graves, for this is the circle of life.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

10th station. We have come around to **the entrance of the Church.** We give thanks for our Priest, the retired clergy who help with services, the Churchwardens and PCC, and for each other, as we journey together, making friendships as we share aspects of the life of the Church.

The war memorial is here, with Christ on the Cross, present with us in all moments of our life. We thank God for this greatest gift of all, His Son. Because of Easter we remember his resurrection, the way he died for us and rose again. We ponder how, through his Holy Spirit, he is in us and with us continually; how the resurrection was not just an event in the past but a constant happening now, in the present – a renewal and a rising above the events of our lives, with his help.

SILENCE

Come, Lord Jesus.

Father we know that you are our Creator. We thank you for this place, this time, this moment, your Creation. We listen for birdsong, the wind in the trees, distant sounds of traffic. We hear you, we see

you in all the continuous growing around us, the cycles of birth and death. Teach us to be stewards of your Creation, and deeply aware of you, each step and breath we take....Our...Father.... As we seek to ground our faith now in this place may we find you in our Mother Earth and leave with your peace in our hearts.

SILENCE

May the Grace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.