

Good Morning Everyone

As you may know, this week would have been Morning Worship led by Gordon Hayes and (before this pandemic) he had asked me to speak to properly introduce myself as the Children and Families Youth Worker at St Laurence's. As I'd prepared something, I thought it may just pass a few minutes of a long day for you so here goes.....

As most of you know I started in February officially, but I was around for a few months before that recovering from a ruptured Achilles tendon. This originally happened playing netball at Woodlands Academy - a Special School next to the hospital- in June but, after 12 weeks in a cast and 8 weeks of learning to walk fluently, it re-ruptured. I had surgery in November - just before my interview which I thought could have blown it for me but our lovely church family at St Laurence's looked beyond my cast and crutches, and rather pitiful appearance at interview and chose me, for which I feel very blessed. I am thrilled to say my leg is strengthening daily.

So, what brought me here?

We started attending here in September - not to spy on you or get inside information before applying - but to get my children's approval to apply. We had worshipped weekly (and then some) at Hunmanby All Saints all of their lives. Having twins, who, as babies, inevitably woke for a feed mid-prayers, the congregation there had nursed them, nurtured them and are still a part of our extended family so the decision to be at work here on Sundays would mean they had to change, and that's a big deal. My children are the reason my faith is so strong.

I grew up going to Sunday school and my grandma was a devout Christian throughout the 91 years of her life (a large part of her weekly worship in the form of literally thousands of tirelessly baked butterfly buns right up to her 90th birthday!) But, although through my teenage years my faith was there in the background, at 18 I trained as a nurse and for the following 6 or 7 years I worked weekends, and nights, saw terrible things happen and it remained a background faith.

Then at 24 I married Darren and a year or so later discovered I couldn't have children. We had 3 or 4 years of real heartache going through IVF which is a gruelling process full of uncertainty but which brought us closer as a couple and closer to God. When you're completely helpless in a situation, you have no choice

but to turn to God for strength and guidance in prayer and trust Him. And that's what happened.

I don't want to bore you with details but IVF is very clinical, measured science - something as a nurse I knew, I trusted, I understood. But there comes a point - once you have a 4 cell embryo under a microscope -when they have to admit there's nothing that science, drugs, anyone can do to influence whether that embryo survives or not.

And yet - after several failed attempts.....6 weeks later, on a scan we were presented with what looked like a baked bean...those 4 cells had divided, into exactly the correct proportions of a thousand different types of cell -and some had been organised to form a heart - beating with an electrical pulse - not a side effect of drugs, with no medical intervention - that tiny cluster of cells had been worthy of the hand of God to give it life and I felt so humble, so fragile, so grateful that my love and faith and trust in God has grown ever since. 3 years later He blessed us with twin boys. I have a very real sense that God created Molly, Jack and Samuel on purpose - as He did with all children - and they teach me new things every day.

You may have heard this joke - about a class of children drawing and the teacher is admiring their works in progress - she asks one girl what she's drawing and she says, "I'm drawing God". The teacher smiles and says - "No-one knows what He looks like" and she replies "Well they will in a minute!"

But that just reminds me of the positivity of children, their trust, optimism and energy that's so contagious.

The potential for God's plan in all children led me to give up my nursing career to be at home with my children until they started school, then to change paths and work for the past 7 years at Woodlands Special School with the most inspiring children with learning difficulties, physical difficulties and autism. But when this post was advertised, it was the perfect combination of being able to nurture children and fully express my love of God - so I went for it.

I'm new to the job but I know children and I love God and I keep reminding myself that God doesn't call the qualified- He qualifies the called...at Messy Church training recently we were shown this;

Jacob was a cheater, Peter had a temper, David had an affair,

Jonah ran from God, Paul was a murderer, Gideon was insecure,

Miriam was a gossip, Martha was a worrier, Thomas was a doubter,

Sara was impatient, Elija was moody, Moses stuttered,

Zaccheus was too short, Abraham was old and Lazarus was dead...

and God found a use for all of them! SO I know he will qualify me for His work! I also know He calls anyone, including those who comes to our youth groups or other congregations too

I've been very blessed since coming here to be surrounded with the most inspirational, caring, compassionate, enthusiastic, passionate hard- working team of volunteers and supporters. Even people I haven't met yet have donated craft resources, sent messages of encouragement and included me in decisions and conversations and I am very, very grateful.

I've been welcomed into the Open the Book team headed by Gordon, the Messy Church team headed by Christine, the Sunday Supper team with Claire, Kate and Joan, the toddler team with Sarah, Hilary and a long list of helpers in setting up. Planning all age services has been a joy with Marion, Marie, Joan and Christine and Marion has dedicated so much time to me and set up a support group to keep me on the straight and narrow.

Since this pandemic - a few of us at St Laurence's have set up a way to help our most vulnerable. Most of the ones we're shopping or collecting prescriptions for or just ringing to offer friendship don't come to church and it's proving to be a wonderful mission. Also 2 of my volunteers are mums from Messy Church and Sunday Supper which is an exciting prospect: to engage our 'non-Sunday' congregations / families in showing God's love through action.

I have been grateful that this awful situation has given me the opportunity to get to know our older church family members. I know many of you generously support youth work financially because you feel passionately about it, but don't directly benefit from the groups I co-ordinate with brilliant volunteers. So thank you so much from me and all the children and families who benefit from your generosity and vision.

Things to look forward to;

I'm looking to start a new group called Reach - to disciple the families of Sunday Supper, Messy Church and Little Steps on the second Sunday - at the same time as services [from whenever we can get back to our new normal]. I already have offers of help with children's crafts and adult discussion, but all are

welcome. As we'll be there after when you all come down for coffee I am asking for your help in making those people welcome, talking with them, getting to know them and showing encouragement as you have to me.

I'm also hoping to arrange a day (or two) at the North Beach in the summer (or when we safely can) for our whole church family - our usual Sunday family, Messy, Sunday Supper, Toddler Praise, Little Steps - all ages. As and when we can arrange this - if you possibly can - come down even if just for half an hour to have a coffee or an ice-cream. Bring a picnic for yourself - smile and get to know someone or a family you don't know. We will all need and appreciate this fellowship more than ever before and I pray this will begin a new normal with our new Vicar and our very much extended family.

Thanks again for all your warm welcomes!

Love from Tracy