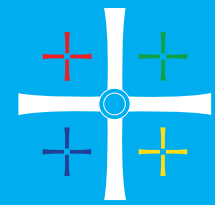


Free for All



THE MAGAZINE OF THE VENTA GROUP

MARCH 2025



What do you think of when you hear the word “Deeper?”

The period running up to Easter, which you might know as Lent, is a time when Christians often spend time thinking about how they can deepen their faith in Jesus. In our churches we have often used the word “Deeper” as an invitation to people at this time of year: whatever we feel about how deep our faith and our love for Jesus is, it can always get deeper. It might feel like the first tentative steps into the sea, or swimming further out into the water; it might be diving in headfirst, or plumbing new depths—but it’s deeper all the same.

Why not come and go deeper with us somewhere this Lent?

Ash Wednesday evening 5th March, 7.30pm at the Church Hall

3 Wednesday “Deeper” evenings from 19th March at the Vicarage, starting with soup and bread at 7.30pm—contact Rob (p3) to join in

Vintage Lent on Thursday 20th March at the Church Hall

Look out for some Saturday morning gatherings as well—these may be online or in person, we’re just firming up the details

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Would you welcome a visit from
one of our church team?

We will do our best to come and say
hello to new people moving into the
village where possible. We would be
very happy to come and visit you.

Maybe you would like us to pray God's
blessing over your new home, for
example. Please do get in touch with
Rob, Lyn or the churchwardens if you
would welcome a visit. Also members of
the church are always pleased to come
and bring communion to you if you
would like to get in touch.

Rob



For reasons that will become clear, I've been trying to remember where I heard the phrase, "If this is the answer, what is the question?" When I looked it up, I discovered that it comes from *Mock the Week*.

It is amazing what questions people came up with on that programme. A lot of the comic effect was that they obviously had nothing to do with the right answer, and in the end, after a number of occasionally highly inappropriate questions, someone would come out with the correct one, related to something that was in the news that week.

I say this because recently we have been reading some stories from John's gospel, both on Sunday mornings and at All Invited on Sunday afternoons (you're all invited, by the way, to both of them) and one of them was about the time Jesus met a man who was unable to walk, by a pool in Jerusalem. This

pool was said to have healing properties, so that each time the water stirred up, the first person to get into it would be made well. I've read this story lots of times, but Cathryn pointed something out that I hadn't noticed before.*

Jesus asks him a question, and the man answers like this: "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

So let's play the game for a minute: *If this is the answer, what is the question?* I asked some people in my house and they both suggested it would be something like "Why aren't you in the pool?" You might suggest "Why haven't you been healed all this time?"

But that isn't anything like the question Jesus asks him. He asks, "Do you want to get well?" Given that he is at a pool which is famous for its healing powers, and he is frustrated that he can't get in, you would have thought that the only logical answer would be an exasperated "YES!"

The fact that the man doesn't give that answer ends up showing us a lot more about where his heart is than we might have expected. A whole lot of disappointment, and reasons why things aren't going to work out for him, come pouring out in response to a very different question.

It makes me wonder how often I don't listen to the question Jesus is asking me. Where do I jump in, and give him a whole lot of reasons why something won't work? What if I am introducing all sorts of complications, when all Jesus is doing is asking me "Do you want to get well?" Why don't I just give in and say, "Yes?"

It's a good question, isn't it? And like the comedy show, we already know the right answer. Whether it's physically well, or emotionally well, or spiritually well – at peace with God through knowing the forgiveness and love and grace that come through faith in Jesus – isn't your answer the same? Shouldn't you really just give in and say, "Yes?"

*Much of this article was inspired by a brilliant scene about this story from the fantastic TV series *The Chosen*. You can search YouTube for *The Chosen – Jesus heals at the pool*. It's definitely worth 5 minutes of your time.

VICAR OF THE VENTA GROUP

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kirstylong204@gmail.com 07878 047289, 01508 830368

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Search Facebook and Youtube for "Venta group of churches"
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St Patrick

17 March is the day the Irish celebrate one of their important people in their history, Saint Patrick. When I visited Ireland last year, one of the places top of my list to visit was Downpatrick, where it is said St Patrick is buried (supposedly in the graveyard in the photo below).

There's lot of myths or stories about him. But his story echoes so many people's stories around the world today, sadly. When Patrick was 16 he was taken into slavery from Roman Britain to Ireland. He was a shepherd and maintained a belief in God even though he was far away from his family. His father was a priest in the Christian church and it seems Patrick clung to his faith during this difficult time in his life. Patrick felt God told him at some point to go to the coast where there would be a boat waiting for him to take him home, and that's what he did. He escaped slavery and went back home. However, after a few years he felt God was calling him to return to Ireland and so Patrick did, telling people about Jesus which led to thousands to believe in Jesus too.

The church in March observes Lent, a time traditionally to fast or abstain or give things up. Yet in the middle of it the Irish have a bank holiday and celebrate St Patrick with parades, dances and plenty of Guinness! In fact St Patrick's day is celebrated in Irish communities across the world. In a time when many will be struggling to keep a Lenten fast, some will be having anything but a fast, there'll be having plenty of food and drink. Jesus and his disciples were criticized for celebrating. Some religious leaders asked Jesus why his disciples didn't fast and Jesus said his disciples would, when he was no longer with them. There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. What season are you in, in your life?

When I took this photo it was blue sky but it didn't stay that way, it never does in Ireland and it never does in life. I do know, like Patrick, my faith helps me when I feel trapped, in a strange land, a place I don't want to be, facing an illness I don't want. In those times I could use part of the prayer attributed to St Patrick:

Christ as a light, illumine and guide me.
Christ as a shield, overshadow me.
Christ under me;
Christ over me;
Christ beside me on my left and my right.
This day be within and without me,
Lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;
In the mouth of each who speaks unto me.
This day be within and without me,
Lowly and meek, yet all-powerful.
Christ as a light; Christ as a shield,
Christ beside me on my left and my right.



Lyn

Stoke Holy Cross Thursday Club
St Georges Hall, Upper Stoke.

We are an over 55's club that meet on the first Thursday of every month.
We enjoy a cup of tea and biscuits, play cards, scrabble etc and catch up on the latest gossip.
Our members are varied and have great stories to tell and love chatting with each other.
On the other Thursdays in the month we meet to play bingo and different games.
As a member of the club you will be able to enjoy our outings, meals out and lots of other varied entertainments.
Please don't be shy you will be warmly welcomed.
Our dates for March are as follows:
March 7th Club day. (As this is our AGM we will be starting at 12 noon. Our normal start time is 1.00pm).
Come and have a sing-a-long with Julie or even a dance if you are feeling energetic.
March 14th - Bingo, eyes down 1.30pm.
March 21st - Games, if you have a favourite game bring it with you, we all like to learn something new.
March 28th - Bingo.
We really look forward to meeting and getting to know you.

Join us today and make a difference . . .



Our community based Dementia Café & Carers' Support Group is held at St George's Hall on Long Lane in Upper Stoke. It is open every second and fourth Monday each month except bank holidays. The doors open a little before 10am until 12midday and there is a small car park. Those of us who are able will sometimes park on Brickle Road/Chandler Lane, with consideration to residents, to free up spaces outside the hall on busy days.

A Carers' Meeting facilitated by 2 volunteer staff takes place in an adjoining room from 11am to 12midday, for those wishing to attend. Our fellow volunteers and some partners remain in the main room with our guests during this hour; should a need arise a volunteer will summon a carer back to the main hall.

Many of our regular guests settle in fairly quickly at each café, some may take a little longer. Our long standing volunteers have a wealth of interpersonal skills, including patience and a deep understanding of individuals' needs honed from their own personal experience, past professions and from spending significant time with our guests and their carers throughout the year.

Setting aside an hour for the Carers' Meeting affords our carers the opportunity to articulate their feelings, to share and discuss their concerns and issues. Some of these may be simple and others more complex but they are never irrelevant.

St George's Café is a small community within several nearby outlying communities. We acknowledge and observe a code of confidentiality during these gatherings.

However, we are an informal group within a relaxed setting. Some individuals do exchange personal contact details and indeed, strong and supportive friendships have evolved over the years.

The role of a volunteer is multifaceted and the team at St George's Café encourages growth and diversity. We all lean in, listen and learn . . .

there is a volunteer who meets&greet guests and obtains information from new arrivals. Others work in the kitchen serving hot/cold beverages with a biscuit for £1pp and a smile is thrown in for free. There are those on the Craft table who ensure that suitable materials are available and a project planned. Some of us become involved in whatever has caught the eye of our guests that day. We adapt and accommodate to change.

If you are partial to table top puzzles and games we would love to have you on board (pardon the pun). Are you adaptable and can you respond to needs . . . you could be come an essential cog in the wheel on our biannual charabanc outings. If you are a chess player or a dab hand and ace at cards then we're not calling your bluff. Anyone who has 'Technologically Proficient' on their resume then all I can say is "YW" *. But essentially, if you are a good listener with empathy and kindness then please contact us.

Are you an adult of 18 years or over? Apply to become a volunteer at St George's Café - you will make a difference.

Volunteering offers a wealth of benefits, from forming new friendships to enhancing social and practical skills. For young and midlife adults considering a career in healthcare and health promotion then experience at our café would add great weight to your resume/CV.

Volunteers genuinely change our world and it can change yours.

St George's Café&Carers Support Group.

*You're Welcome

Our next Café sessions are:
 Monday 10 March
 'The Girls' - Ladies Choir
 Monday 24 March
 Easter Crafts with
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Venta Group of Churches:
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Quiz Night

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**Saturday March 15th at the new
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Coffee and chat

Want to meet others?

Come and join us and chat over a drink every Thursday morning except Vintage Church weeks (below)

10.30-11.30am at Stoke Church Hall

2nd, 9th, 23rd & 30th January

6th, 13th & 27th February

6th, 13th & 27th March



Short communion service at 10am right before
Coffee & Chat on 2nd Jan, 6th Feb, 6th March

Join us for Vintage Church:

16th Jan, 20th Feb, 20th Mar—see separate posters etc

www.venta-group.org | Facebook/YouTube "Venta Group of Churches" | lyn@venta-group.org | 01508 493422

Vintage Church



**3rd Thursday of the month at 10.30 am
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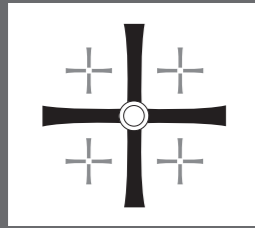
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MARCH 2025

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Tuesday to Saturday mornings

9am Tue-Fri Zoom—contact us to join Prayer meeting
10am Sat with Bible reading

Sunday mornings at Caistor St Edmund

2nd March, 9.30am Praise & Worship
16th March, 9.30am Holy Communion

Morning Worship at Stoke Holy Cross at 10.30am

2nd, 16th Mar Morning Worship with children's group
9th, 23rd Mar Morning Worship with communion and children's group
30th March Mothering Sunday service for all ages

Sunday afternoons in March

9th, 23rd Mar All invited at the Church Hall from 3.30-5pm—
Food, fun and faith for all ages

Midweek gatherings in March

5 th March	7.30pm at the Hall	Ash Wednesday special prayer meeting
6 th March	10am at the Hall followed at 10.30am by	Communion Coffee and Chat
19 th , 26 th Mar	7.30pm at the Vicarage	Deeper Lent evenings (soup and bread to start)
13 th , 27 th Mar	10.30am at the Hall	Coffee and Chat
20 th March	10.30am at the Hall	Vintage Church

Caistor church building is open about 10-4 daily -
space to reflect, and to pray

Join us for Communion,
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on Thursday
mornings —
see above
for all the
times
and dates

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