

August 2022: Outdoor worship

I have just spent half a morning with a small group of people in one of the most beautiful gardens in Hope Valley. We were there to worship; to praise God, and to pray, and to share one another's company. And, of course, to share coffee and news afterwards. So an ordinary Sunday morning, except that we were outside.

Since the start of the covid pandemic, we have taken our worship outside on the fourth Sunday of every month, with coats and umbrellas when necessary, and always with an option to join us on Zoom for those who are unable to join us outside, or who do not wish to. The services come from various locations, public and private, around the Hope, Castleton and Bradwell Benefice, and always have a theme based on nature or community (often both). So far this year we have looked at gardens and growing, death and new life (for our Easter service), different ways of travelling, caves, and praying with nature.

It is very easy for us to forget that even the oldest of our church buildings are only half as old as Christianity. Beautiful as many of our buildings are, outdoors in God's creation has been the natural place to worship God throughout much of Christian history. It still is across much of the globe today. When I ask people today, people of faith and of no faith, where they are most aware of God, many still answer that the closest they feel to God is when they are outside, in his creation. So we go outside once a month to worship; to help us to grow in awareness of God through focusing on his works, and to help us to see better where he is at work among us, by looking for him in our communities. The services are often recorded, so if you are unable to be there, you can catch up with them later, via Hope Castleton and Bradwell on Youtube. The link is available on the A Church Near You web pages.

My prayer for us all this month is that wherever we feel closest to God, wherever we feel most strongly our connection with all living things, we will make time regularly to treasure that place and that feeling, and so deepen our awareness of God's love and care for us, and deepen our love and care for all that he has made.

Yours in Christ,
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