

A reflective walk around The Community Orchard and St Michael's Churchyard



Reflective walk

Over the past 18 months there have been many changes. Changes that we hadn't foreseen. Sometimes change can be good. If we stood still over a period of time we might stagnate. St Michael's Church, and surrounding area have seen a number of changes, some of which are remembered on this prayer walk. You may know of other changes.



The walk starts behind the church and halfway down the graveyard path where you will find the gate to the Community Orchard on your left. It is relatively new although perhaps you remember how it used to be. It was a piece of unused land for some of the

time although a bonfire and fireworks used to be set off from here until the turn of the century. It was a local community event that was so successful that it became too big to accommodate crowds safely. Perhaps you remember seeing some of those fireworks. Now home to the community orchard, it is here for all to enjoy. Access is from St Michael's churchyard or Mill Lane. Changes are still happening here. Throughout the seasons, you will see new growth of leaves, trees, bushes, fruit and flowers. How many items can you see that you could eat? If you visit here regularly, what changes have you seen since your last visit? If this is your first time, take note of what you see, hear, smell. What do you think will be different next time? Take time to

thank God for what you see. 'I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds' (Psalm 9:1).



Walk from the orchard to the lower part of the churchyard.

This part is where the more recent burials are. This is now a closed churchyard. You may know some of the people who are buried here. What do you remember of them? How has life changed since they passed away? What legacy did they leave behind? What would you like to leave, or be remembered for when you leave this earth? What are you grateful for? Have you any regrets? Can you change or make amends for your mistakes?



As you walk up the path towards St Michael's Church what can you hear? Do you recognise the birdsong? Perhaps you used to be able to walk up here easily, but now you struggle. There's a verse in the bible that Jesus says: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,

and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11.28-30). Jesus walks alongside us and shares our troubles. Perhaps you can talk to him about

something you are struggling with at the moment. He's there to listen to your prayers and can change situations.



As you reach the top of the hill, turn round. What can you see? How many

different trees can you spot? You might want to do some bark rubbings and compare the different trees? Perhaps some are smoother than others. What changes do the trees go through? What is different from the last time you were here? What has changed in your life since your last visit? Talk to God about it; thank him, praise him. If times have been hard, tell God (he knows already) but he longs to hear from you. Take time to listen too.



Now look back at the church.

What do you notice? Can you see the blackened stone? Do you think it has always been like that? Why do you think that has happened? The grime over the years has left its mark. What have you done in your life that has left

its mark? Look up at the effigies; these are The Brooke Memorials, the surviving elements of a substantial monument to the Brooke family who lived at Madeley Court during the 16th and 17th centuries. Some have worn away. What has made them change over time? Many of us have rough edges in our lives. Over time, as we allow

ourselves to be changed by God, those rough edges become smooth and they don't irritate us (or other people) quite as much as they did. Take time to thank God for the changes he is making in your life, and think about those things which still need changing. You may be familiar with the hymn 'Through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in joy, the praises of my God shall still my heart and tongue employ.'

As you make your way to the front of the church, turn and look out towards the road. What can you see? **To your left is the vicarage,**



and to the right is the old vicarage, now a private home. John Fletcher, a



famous vicar of Madeley, used to reside here in 1760-1785. I wonder what he and his wife Mary would make of the world we live in today. One thing that doesn't change is the God that we worship. 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever' (Hebrews 13:8).

As you look across the road you will see a building that used to be a junior school. Perhaps you remember it? Do you think schools have changed for the better or not?



Turn now and look up at the clock. Below it there is a date in Roman numerals. Can you work out what year it is? What other dates can you see as you look around? The clock is a constant reminder that we live in a changing world where time dictates our lives. However, we can use time wisely. What do you do with your time? How do you spend it? You may want to spend a moment or two thinking about this. Perhaps you may want to make some changes.

You may want to write on a stone, or paint it, as a reminder of what you have experienced on this reflective walk. You could also use this space to note anything that you have discovered.