

Anna and Chris Hembury

Link Letter no. 29 | February 2020

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The call in action

Dear friends,

Jesus is a Capricorn (apparently)!

It was Anna's birthday in January. She was having a cup of tea with her friend Louise. An entertaining regular at Orts and our Tuesday meal and many of our other activities, Louise has become very much a part of our family over the years we've known each other. "Hey, you're a Capricorn, like Jesus!" she announced, as if the connection made something make more obvious sense. Christmas is always a reminder for us that context is everything – the Incarnation, God with us in a particular time and place, in particular form, so we can make sense of a universal God. The African theologian John Mbiti puts it well: the Gospel comes "to each culture as a stranger, a stranger who settles down. The Gospel does not throw out culture – instead it settles in the culture and makes its impact on the lives of the people within that culture". Louise did that work of translating, embedding, incarnating the gospel into her own frame of reference, so she could make sense of her experience. If Jesus had a birthday, then he had a star sign, just like everyone else. Somewhere in the soup of all these possibly semi-dodgy (though I find the judgements unhelpful) thoughts, Louise was making a connection between her experience of herself and her sense-making of a God who makes himself known. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14); it's a funny business how our Christ-light illumines sometimes! Please pray that Louise continues to discover who Jesus is for herself.

The inaudible audible

We continue to delight in our newly expanded Orts space. We have been busy building and putting up shelves, enjoying unpacking and reuniting with all our materials and sewing paraphernalia and bringing our celebratory stamp of colour to the enlarged space. We are home again and it feels good. With the long pause over the summer for building work and our temporary camp in the hall next door, we felt somewhat in limbo and it was hard to maintain momentum in many of our relationships. Now there is a gentle hum of activity, much laughter and chat, old friends getting back into the rhythm of Orts as part of their week and new people finding a sanctuary here. Over the last couple of years God silently seemed to be saying, "hold your nerve!", when the building work seemed a massive responsibility and we had a vision we needed to sell to others. Then later, with excruciatingly slow progress with our funding bids, the inaudible audible sentence was "trust the abundance!". So we did, and have been floored by how much came in, often as unsought gifts, always at the right time to pay for the next needed bit. We now have enough to put in the second new window and a kitchen upstairs, with works due to start in February. The accessible toilet is next on our list, and while we continue to write bids and to trust, God very much seems to be saying, "focus on the relationships", so that's what we are doing! Give thanks with us for all God's good gifts, especially the treasure of relationships we have at Orts.



Name: Anna and Chris Hembury

Location: Hull, Britain

Our call: To share life with those on the margins, who struggle to know their worth but have much to teach us; to help usher in God's kingdom.

Our role: To listen, learn, imagine, provoke and create; supporting individuals, people groups and the local church to connect with each other and with God.



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Light in our neighbourhood

Ordinary miracles

You never know who's going to come through the door on a Friday morning at Selby St Mission, but it's a place where people are welcomed and accepted just as they are and just as we are. Those with little left to lose are disarmingly honest about their stories. Sarah, who we hadn't seen before, came with her story – a mother with six mostly grown-up children, she is addicted to heroin and crack cocaine. Sarah has been clean since late December but this day she was struggling: having been in hospital over Christmas her money had been stopped but payments were due to be restarted in this particular week. It was now Friday, but when she rang the benefits office she was told there was a problem with the computer, making it unlikely the money would come through before Monday.

This is the knife-edge that those who are battling with their addictions live on, while trying desperately not to fall back into the yawning pit. Paradoxically, with no money, Sarah would be far more likely to use, as she would be unable to put money in her electricity meter or visit family in North Hull, doing things which help keep her occupied and so clean. She was devastated, watching the inevitable happen, resigned to the usual pattern of what happens next. As we listened and prayed silently, Sarah received a message on her phone: her money had come through. Sarah joined in with our little morning liturgy and shared lunch together then said goodbye as she made her way to visit family and make it through another day, maybe even the weekend.

We so often find ourselves accompanying those teetering on this brink, and yet we have access to a God who can turn the most despairing situation to hopeful on a pinhead. Not all our prayers are answered. Not all the stories that come through the door have happy endings. But we see at least as many ordinary miracles as we see daily tragedy, and each time we are reminded to bring peoples' stories into God's expansive embrace. Please pray for Sarah and so many others for whom even "one day at a time" is still a long road full of pitfalls – that they might find Christ, the steady rock on which to plant their feet.

Peace,

Anna & Chris

Photos from top to bottom: Homemaking in Orts; Chris taking a break from jobs in Orts' new sofa space!; Selby St Mission – all are welcome



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