

Tel: 0113 278 2864  
[lizjeanbrown@btinternet.com](mailto:lizjeanbrown@btinternet.com)



*I came to proclaim  
good news to you*

36 St Chad's Court  
St Chad's Road  
Leeds LS16 5QX

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Dear Friends,

Today is the third Sunday of Advent (Luke 3: 7 – 18). Would you invite John the Baptist to your Christmas party? Well, would you ...? Maybe we would feel more comfortable with this hovering and warmly dressed angel. Certainly the preacher I was listening to this morning escaped to the less challenging ground of food banks, where she was undoubtedly preaching to the converted. Not that I have anything against food banks – I work in the busiest warehouse in Leeds every week and promote them wherever I go – but we should be doing all we can to make them redundant. This is much more difficult to do and harder to make sermons about.

This brings me to my major news of the year ... I have finally retired! My age is catching up with me both physically and mentally and I have decided to stop leading worship and preaching. I am told that I am very fit for my age, but sometimes it doesn't feel that way. My worsening sight and vertigo are a nuisance and my memory is not always reliable. So I am having a great clear out of all my Bible commentaries, etc.

Arranging holidays with my cousin will be easier now as my diary will be less complicated and we will only have to manoeuvre around her commitments. In 2017 we went to Cromer to the B&B where she used to stay when her boys were young. Besides outings to beauty spots and leisurely walks we also enjoyed a lively play put on on the pier by the local amdram society.

Our main holiday was to the Hartland Peninsula, in Devon near Bideford. We stayed in a very good hostel owned by a neighbouring farm and met some interesting families. The whole area was very isolated and initially very confusing to navigate as there was only one main road and the hostel was in the middle of a network of narrow lanes with high hedges. The coastal scenery, especially, was very dramatic and wild and the hostel was close to the SW Coast Path – though neither of us flet energetic enough to tackle it.

I continue to enjoy the activities of the United Reformed Church History Society (in Birmingham in 2017), the University of Leeds Ladies Club (monthly coffee mornings and various lectures and outings, including a visit to the University of Leeds Mechanical Engineering Department where I was impressed by their emphasis on creative thinking and inventiveness and their very positive outlook on the value of failure), the Retired Members Branch of UNITE the Union (interesting talks and coach outings and I now get hugs instead of being referred to as 'that lady'), and meetings of the Yorkshire Associates of the Iona Community.

I am still actively involved in the local Labour Party. Our membership continues to increase and our branch now has just over 500 members. I don't know what we would do if they all turned up to meetings. As it is we have had to find new meeting places at increased expense. At the May 2017 Leeds City Council election all the seats were up for grabs, three for each ward. Our Weetwood Ward took two seats from the LibDems so we were very pleased. Our new councillors are both good, but it will be a battle to hold on to them as the LibDems want them back. We have teams going out canvassing at least twice a week all year round, but I'm not physically up to taking part. Instead, I'm acting as a liaison between one of the local councillors and local residents in this area concerning rerouting of bus routes and changing traffic patterns. Unfortunately we are up against the (Labour) City Council.

Life in St Chad's Court continues to be pleasant, though we have been without a Manager for most of the year and this has obvious disadvantages. Safety of the residents is being compromised as when we have a manager s/he has to keep a casual eye on us by making sure that she sees everyone every day and investigates the well-being of anyone who is missing. There are also issues regarding building repairs, getting new washing machines, etc. We are unhappy with the management company which largely keeps us in the dark.

I'm a member of Wigton Moor United Reformed Church. It is about five miles away from here. I lived there when I first came to Leeds, but now that I can't drive it is difficult to take a full part especially in evening activities. On Sunday mornings I have to take two buses and walk for 10 – 15 minutes partly across a sports field. Another member brings me home after church. I'm not sure how long I shall be able to continue doing this especially in the winter. We have recently started a 'Community Coffee Stop' with very good home-made cakes etc. Pay what you like. About 50 or so people come every Tuesday afternoon. It seems to be meeting the needs of isolated people and some friends who like a congenial place to stop off and chat. Some new people have started coming to church and some members of the community who are not connected with the church come every week to help. I think it is important that the Coffee Stop is 'owned' by the community.

I have started to see double because of the sunlight, so it's time to stop.  
With all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year

from

Liz

P.S. Thank you very much for the cheque. I will use it to pay for a few days away, maybe in the spring. I often think of you all with affection and happiness.

Liz