

Charlotte Boyall: What happened at Birmingham Celebrate July 2019

This is the story of how my life has been turned, not upside down, so much as back the right way up. The short version: I went to a Celebrate Conference with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME) and went home without it. I asked for help from God and he gave in abundance.

The longer version is somewhat more complex.

Background - CFS/ME (chronic fatigue syndrome): I was diagnosed in 2016. For some years before that, probably since 2013, I had thought I was simply suffering from C.H.I.L.D.R.E.N. as, with three daughters born since 2004, I was permanently exhausted. However, I began to see a pattern. I was unable to get any benefit from rest or sleep, would completely collapse for up to a week after any big work or family event, had short term memory loss, had problems sleeping at night and waking up again in the morning. Sometimes it felt like I was taking my “energy” temperature when I woke up each morning: could I get up, or did I need to tell the girls to get themselves to school? People only saw me when I was having a good day, so most had no idea that I was even ill, but even a good day was rather like one where you are recovering from flu.

The problem with being diagnosed with CFS/ME in 2016 was that there is no treatment beyond pacing yourself. I was told to think of my energy levels in terms of spoons or bars of chocolate. For example, if you have six spoons of energy per day, and you use them all up by lunchtime, you will have to stop, regardless of what you have left to do. So, I paced myself, with varying results, and they were not all bad by any means. However, by July 2019, I had missed both of my parent’s 70th birthday celebrations, lost touch with many friends due to being too tired to socialise and was taking Tuesdays off work just so I could get over each weekend. I had to start going to 9.00am Mass as I could not guarantee being awake for 5.00pm Mass, but often could not get out of bed in the morning. I stopped gardening, abandoned the school PTA, missed my god-daughter’s hen party and was in permanent agonies about asking for help all the time, so often kept going when I should have stopped.

Going to church began to feel like something I did because it is what you do, not that it was something that I got anything from or had anything to give to it. I did not have any consolation that God could help me as I seemed to be speaking into a void. The only reason I could cling onto any sort of faith was that believing in something had to be greater than believing in nothing. Nick was doing all the housework and was the most understanding husband 99% of the time. However, sometimes I got too tired to speak at all and he would think I was ignoring him and become cross with me until me realised what was going on. I cancelled so many events for our three girls at the last minute, much to their frustration and disappointment. I would exhaust myself by trying so hard to keep calm in order that had the energy to look after them. I may also have been a little irritable. By the summer of 2019, I was somewhat strung out as I felt as if I was getting worse, not better, and could not see any way of it changing.

Celebrate Conference July 2019, Oscott College, Birmingham: I had convinced my family that we wanted to all go to a retreat weekend arranged by Catholic charismatic renewal, mostly because my sisters and their many children were going to be there. Whilst I had grown up with charismatic healing masses and many, many religious retreats and feast days, this was to be Nick’s first experience of both charismatics and a Catholic retreat. I think Nick agreed to go mostly so he could look after me, as I had managed only one day at the same conference in 2018 and then had had to have several days off work to recover. I had enjoyed the speakers but found the enthusiasm of the whole charismatic aspect almost overwhelming. However, my daughter Imogen had loved it, so I wanted our other two daughters to have a similar experience. So, Nick and I agreed that we would do the first day of the conference, but probably go home after dinner on Saturday and not stay for the evening session (a miracle healing service). We were in two minds over whether I would be able to manage the second day of the conference. Emotional engagement was the biggest trigger for my chronic fatigue, and a charismatic conference was almost the “worst” thing with which I could get involved, with its assumption that you want to stand up and take part, physically and emotionally.

So, we drove up from Bath almost on time for the start of the retreat. Sent the girls off to their streams (age appropriate workshops) and went off with Nick to the big marquee behind the seminary to find my two sisters. First activity: Prayer and praise in the big marquee. It was uplifting in a way that I had not anticipated, having felt so drained by it last year. Nick got a shock at how many times you could sing the same worship song over and over and still clap and cheer at the end. David Wells, the key note speaker, came next and was his usual amazing, inspirational self. Mass followed, but I don't have any clear memories of that apart from the lovely priest Fr Julius speaking in such a warm voice. So far, so good. We picked up the girls and their seven young cousins from their streams at lunchtime and had the usual palaver over where we were going to eat, who was going to eat what where, whose crisps had been dropped, who needed the loo, who had gone missing, and where they were hiding. Real life, after the bubble of inspiration and spiritual refreshment.

When it came to choose the two afternoon adult workshops, I was tired and disappointed that there were none that leapt out at me. They all seemed to be very woolly, whereas the previous year they had been a lot more practical. My sister Abi would not be director of St Chad's Sanctuary (refugee centre in Birmingham) without meeting Sr Margaret Walsh at the workshop last year. To top it off, there was going to be a miracle healing service in the evening rather than another speaker. I wanted someone to listen to, not an emotional evening. Then my sisters and brother in law all surprised me by choosing the prophecy workshop, which seemed the woolliest activity of all, particularly as you were encouraged to go the second workshop that provided an opportunity to prophesy to one another. Not for me! Still, none of the other workshops seemed to call to me, and Abi suggested that I could just nap at the back of the room. Naturally when we got there, the only seats left were at the front, directly in front of the speaker. There would be no sleeping in this workshop.

Without trying to make a pun, the prophecy workshop was a revelation. How you can make prophecy sound like an activity that can happen every day and be believable, is a real gift. The speaker was Niklas Carlsson from the Cor et Lumen Christi community, who live as if we are in the times of the Acts of the Apostles, daily expecting miracles, healings, revelations from God. Swedish, with a dry sense of humour and total sincerity of character, he was a very engaging speaker. He talked about what prophecy was and what it was not. He talked about how we listen to God, and what we think God is asking us to do, and the need to practice discernment. By the end of the session, the news that Niklas would be leading the miracle healing session reconciled me to staying for it. He seemed very normal and I felt I could trust him not to lead anything hysterical or demanding. However, I still did not want to get engaged in trying to prophesy as it just felt a bit close to the bone in terms of emotional engagement. I would try to keep a lid on my feelings as highs and lows of emotion left me exhausted and unable to do anything.

So, after a wonderful workshop with David Wells on virtues and a repeat of the rigamarole with all ten kids as we sought out dinner for them, it was time for the miracle healing service. Several hundred people in a big marquee led by a worship band. I stood with my sisters, Abi and Georgie, husband Nick and brother-in-law Chris. Eldest daughter Madeleine was with the older teenagers behind us. I thought I knew what was going to happen having been to many such services as a teenager. We started off with more prayer and praise, which felt great and truly prayerful. However, I was now exhausted from the events of the day and from trying not to cry from all the emotion I was feeling. Saying that, the atmosphere in the room was happy and calm, not at all hysterical or demanding. So I had to sit down whilst everyone else was standing, and felt so useless because I could not even manage to sing anymore. I felt sad thinking about a friend who had been recently diagnosed with secondary cancer. I was busy trying to hold everything together so as not to worry the others.

Then we all sat down and Niklaus showed us lots of videos of people who had been healed at Cor et Lumen Christi miracle healing services. Two of his team gave testimony about their work with the community. The best testimony came from a man who described how he had only been able to work successfully in the

healing ministry once he had put aside all thoughts that *he* was the special one, that people would be healed because of *his* faith. It was only when he knew he had nothing to give that Jesus could move through him. As the team members spoke, everything they said seemed to resonate with me. My lack of belief and sense of being separate from God was not a problem because it was not about what I could do, but what God could do. Dangerous mental territory for someone who spent most days trying not to crack under the strain of not being able to do everything I want to do and have to do.

Niklas explained we were going to start with a penitential service.

“Now we are not going to say, oh God, forgive me, I am so awful. No. God knows that you are sorry already and forgave you anyway. No, instead,” and he smiled a great big grin, “we are going to forgive all those who have hurt us”.

A great sigh of “Urghh” swept around the room. I swear Niklas’ grin grew bigger. I immediately thought of four people that I could not stand and felt real animosity towards. (When I told my brother this later, he said I sounded like the Nazi officer off Dad’s Army: “You! Your name will go in my little book.”) Yet as I thought about forgiving them, the anger I felt towards them did not seem such a big deal anymore. We all had to say together “I forgive those who have hurt me” but as we all mentally congratulated ourselves for doing this, Niklas threw a curve ball, grinning again:

“And now we will repeat, “And I ask God not to punish them for anything they have done to me””.

Well, I let out such a squeak of indignation that my sister started to laugh. What a mouldy old swiz! Yet I said it all the same and I felt as if a bond around my shoulders had loosened.

Then Niklas explained that we were going to lay hands on each other as we prayed, that it was not about queueing for Niklas to lay hands on us. Instead we would lay hands on those around us and the power of Jesus would move through us and heal. Niklas explained things in such a matter of fact way that it was almost amusing:

“First, we pray for backs, bones and spines. Put up your hand if you have such an ailment. Then if someone next to you wants you to pray with them, ask them if you may put your hand on the back, bone or spine. I said appropriately. APPROPRIATELY! (Another grin) And you need to ask first.”

First miracle of the night: Nick let us lay hands on his back; my sisters, Chris and myself. Nick, who had never been to any charismatic service before. I was so overcome with joy that he was happy to be involved that I started to cry as we prayed for his back. He had been in such pain and so grumpy ever since he hurt it. However, I couldn’t pray out loud, I was too afraid that I would totally break down and spoil his moment. Niklas led us and we kept saying “Come Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit, back pain be gone, bone pain be gone, spine pain be gone!”. When we finished praying Nick was smiling but said his back was still the same. We were all so giddy that he had let us pray over him that it almost did not matter that he had not been healed!

Abi and I were laughing about how the combined prayers and faith of us, plus Georgie and Chris were not strong enough to heal Nick of his back pain (see, we still did not get it). Nick, Chris and Georgie were commiserating together, yet we were all so buoyed up by the fact that Nick had let us pray over him despite it being only his first experience of both charismatic renewal and of a healing service. A man came right up to us. He was slight, and very energised, with silver hair and probably in his mid-sixties:

“Hello, hello, I had to come and speak to you. Do you know where you are?” He was addressing me, but both Abi and I answered, assuming he was about to tell us off for being flippant during a service.

“We’re in the marquee?” – slowly, as if were a trick question.

“Yes, but what’s another name for a marquee? he persisted. His badge read “Terry”; I did not recognise him at all.

“A tent.” (Still waiting to be told off).

“Yes, and tonight this tent is so full of God’s love with all our prayers, it has become a holy place. So, what’s the special tent in our churches?” It was at this point that I realised that something truly unusual was happening. He had all the enthusiasm of a teacher whose well-behaved but usually slow students were finally getting towards the point.

“The tabernacle.”

“And what do we keep there?”

“The Blessed Sacrament!”

“And in the Old Testament? What was their holy place?”

I don't know what made me say it, but I replied on my own:

“The Ark of the Covenant”.

Terry beamed and looked directly at me.

“And what did they keep there?”

Again, I don't know what made me say it but:

“The Holy of Holies”

Terry beamed. “Yes, yes, and in the Ark of the Covenant was the Holy of Holies, and tonight, in this place of prayer, your heart is the Holy of Holies and you will be cured.”

Well, I was so overwhelmed by this, my own prophecy in the midst of the everyday normality and did not know what to do... so burst into tears and hugged Abi as hard as I could as we both sobbed. I completely believed what he was telling me, and it felt like such a relief, but an unbelievable thought. I don't tend to pray for myself or ask to be healed, I usually pray for other people. Even when I had leukaemia as a teenager, I used to pray for other people as I just knew I was going to be fine. It always seemed presumptuous somehow to pray for yourself.

I could hear Nick asking “What did he say? What's the matter with La?” Georgie must have been listening to Terry as well. She seemed completely fired up by this:

“Right, that's it, I'm going to get the big guns.”

She brought back two of her friends who were on the prayer team. Abi and I were still crying and laughing. I knew I had to have help and wanted to be prayed over as soon as I could; and stumbled over to the two ladies. We were on the right-hand side of the marquee, slightly apart from everyone else, next to an exit. They had such kind, caring faces that were so reassuring; both held my hands and shoulders and asked why I needed help. When I said that I had chronic fatigue syndrome, the lady on the right began to smile and said that she had had it twenty years before; but had been healed overnight. What with the hope of the prophecy and now someone who understood how I felt, plus the prayer and praise that had gone before, all my protective boundaries dissolved. The idea of praying with someone who knew without being told how hard it is not to be able to do what you want when you want to do it, without suffering the next day or without making life difficult for your family, was such a relief. I started to tell them about how I have to be strong for everyone else or fall completely apart. I said that I did not feel able to ask for healing when I should be praying for other people who needed it more than me. I told them about the enormous guilt that I feel about having survived cancer when other people, good people, die. I said that I felt like the Angel of Death as I send one email asking friends to pray for someone with cancer and then the next email asked them to pray because that person has died. They assured me I was not the Angel of Death, which I knew really but why am I alive when others die? Then they if asked was I ready to pray with them.

I was crying again now (had I stopped?) and shut my eyes. The ladies began to ask the Holy Spirit to come down upon me saying “Come Holy Spirit”. As I listened to their voices, and one lady began to sing in tongues, I seemed to be in a well of light. I felt completely open and could feel no barrier between myself and God. Their hands seemed to be exerting the most enormous pressure on my shoulders, but it seemed to be holding me up rather than pushing me over. I just kept saying over and over, “Come Holy Spirit, you have to help me. I can't do this anymore, I just can't. Jesus, you have got to do this for me. I cannot do this anymore. I have got no way of doing this without you.” I had not felt so open to Jesus since when I first had leukaemia where, again, I had nothing to keep me from collapsing but total trust in God. I felt as if I had collapsed on my knees, yet I knew I was still standing.

I have no idea how long we were praying but far too soon, they said to open my eyes. I felt happy but no great change. The lady who had had CFS/ME spoke again, grinning.

“I think you need to run”.

Not what I was expecting her to say and, baffled but happy, I replied

“I don’t normally want to.”

She smiled at me with such love.

“I think you need to run. I think running is important to you. Where are we going to do it?”

So, I agreed because it seemed the most obvious thing to want to do, even though ten minutes before I could not even stand. We hurried out of the marquee; seemingly in the five seconds that Abi, Georgie and Nick had taken their eyes off us as no-one saw us go.

After the hubbub of the marquee, it was almost silent outside. Still twilight, perhaps 8.30pm, on a lovely summer’s evening. I had stopped crying and was grinning like a fool. There was no change in how I felt except that I realised the silence was inside my head. The constant low-level buzz of intense irritation and frustration had switched off, even though I had not been aware of it beforehand. I felt as if a great calm had come over me. The lady was still with me and asked where I was going to run. In front of me was a long path next to the seminary, maybe two hundred metres long. It was crossed by three yellow barriers maybe fifty metres from where we were standing and I thought: “They’re in the way.” I ran as hard and as fast as I could, like when I was little and wanted to get to the sea first when the tide was out. Then I ran straight back. The lady was waiting for me, bouncing with excitement.

“What do you want to do now?”

“I want to do it again”

And I did, just as fast, just as determined, there and back again: this time collapsing into huge, heaving sobs of amazement as I reached her on the return leg. It was real, I was healed. I felt normal for the first time in years, the way that you feel on your best day ever. The dragging tiredness and miserable, grudging acceptance of a frustrating, unresolvable situation had gone. At the same time, I realised that the barriers I had put up to protect myself from falling apart emotionally had also been stopping me from receiving the love and comfort of God. Stu Plimmer, one of the organisers, came out to find out why I was running around.

“What’s with the marathon running out here?”

He was thrilled when I said I was healed; no doubt in what I said, just glee and big hugs all round.

Now, in the marquee all those who had been prayed over and had experienced healing were on the stage, testifying to their recovery. The ladies who had prayed with me tried to take me up, but I almost ran to the front. I could see Georgie, Abi, Nick and Chris all beaming and waving from the other side of the marquee, but I could tell they were just working out that something momentous had happened as hands were flying to mouths. Ahead of me a man was showing how the torn ligaments in his right arm had been healed: totally mind blowing, but suddenly it felt like more a case of “of course it worked”. Niklas Carlsson almost did not spot me standing by the stage and turned away to start the next round of prayers.

“Me too!”, I said, stepping up onto the stage, alone. Talk about stealing the limelight. Niklas had a curious smile as if he was not sure what I was doing up there (obviously, I looked fine) and asked me to describe what had happened. He was so utterly thrilled by what I told him (Georgie filmed it on her phone, thank goodness). I then had to write down exactly what had been wrong with me and why I thought I was healed.

I went back over to where my family were waiting, and they all looked completely thrilled and utterly stunned. Bright eyes (all that crying), beaming smiles. Not one atom of incredulity. Around us Niklas started to ask everyone to move on to praying for those with ears, eyes and stomach problems. A lady in front of us asked us to lay hands on her, and as we did so the children came back in. Madeleine came over too (I had forgotten that she was in the marquee).

So, there we were. I was healed. Totally well. In my head, I kept taking my “temperature” to test out this new feeling of normal. Happiness and calm. No hysterical sense of joy, more of overwhelming relief that I had not go to deal with it anymore. It was also as if I had been clenching my whole body without knowing it and could suddenly release it. Nick grinned and said “Well, you can go back to work then”, meaning teaching. Maddy said “Right, well, if you can run, let’s have a race.” She believed I was cured but needed a demonstration of this new Healthy Mummy, just to double check. We got outside the marquee and before

she had time to say "go!", I was off. She only beat me by a metre and the look on her face was priceless. Imogen said "Well, you can carry the bags now", whilst gripping my arm as tight as possible, as if I was about to disappear. Florence said "Hur hur, now you have not any excuse for not going in the sea with us." I said "Oh Flopsy, CFS was never why I did not want to go in the sea! It's too cold!"

The other lady who had prayed with me came over and we hugged. She looked a bit sheepish: "I don't know what it means but I keep hearing the same three words every time I look at you." When she said "Great North Run" I burst out laughing.

"I think God's forgotten where I live" (Not in the North East anymore).

We giggled and said maybe the Bath Half was a better idea. However, when I told Nick, he did not laugh or scoff. He just said the Great North Run was a much better route as it finishes by the seaside and why not do it?

As we left the seminary, Abi handed me a yellow post-it note that read "2 Corinthians 1:18-22".

"Terry said I had to give this to you and tell you to pray it. Not read it but pray it."

I did not get to do it until the next evening, mostly because I wanted to read it quietly. It says:

As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been "Yes and No." For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not "Yes and No"; but in him it is always "Yes." For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason, it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first instalment.

At the conference the following day, people kept asking if I was still healed and how it felt. Whenever I said that I felt completely normal, they tended to look a bit cheated. I had to explain that CFS/ME is like waking up every day feeling so unwell and exhausted that having a shower takes courage in case that is all your energy used up for the day. Therefore, to wake up this morning and feel normal was like the best present ever. That CFS was waking up every day as tired as you went to bed the day before. That it was like living with the awful exhaustion of early pregnancy without the hope of better things to come. Feeling normal had also made me understand that my so-called good days with CFS/ME had been no such thing, more like the awful tiredness after having flu. My sister Georgie had come downstairs for breakfast on Sunday, taken one look at me and said:

"Oh! It was real! I thought I had dreamt it."

I had to give my testimony again to Niklas and the rest of the Cor et Lumen Christi team just before they left for Cumbria. This time it was on camera phone and I told them the whole story about Terry too. When Niklas asked me to run, I did a lap of the garden in front of the main entrance to the Oscott main building, which shocked them as they were not expecting me to sprint (nor was I). Throughout the day, I kept smiling; amazed that I had this bubbling energy to keep going.

Two things happened that day that were unusual in a spiritual way. The first was in a workshop with Si Ireson. I was expecting him to talk about his life since his wife died of cancer. and that is one of the focuses for workshops. Yet instead he led us in almost silent prayer. He explained that the previous night God had told him to ditch his prepared PowerPoints and be led by Him. We had paper to write down our thoughts and feelings in the silence, to try to hear what God was saying to us. Immediately, I thought "Lazarus". I had not been dead, yet I had been brought back to life just as surely. As I prayed, I noticed that the chapel in which we were sitting had the identical full-size statue of Jesus to the one at my home parish of Banbury. As I watched it, the statue did not move and yet at the same time I saw it climb down from the plinth and hug each one of the people praying in the seats across from me. It was remarkably comforting and seemed completely normal. A voice in my head kept saying "Tell everyone about me", and that carried on for about a week.

The second event was very simple. As I took communion at Mass on Sunday in the marquee, I thought “This is the first time I will have communion in this new part of my life.” It felt significant in a way that Mass has not felt for a very long time.

I am telling everyone I meet about my miracle cure. I have had some mixed reactions, but no one can deny that I am up and about and full of beans without any sign of a relapse. I did some gardening last week and felt really tired, and started to think “Is this it?”, but thought what do normal people do when they are tired? They sit down. So, I lay down for a bit and then boom! After ten minutes I was full of energy again! I had got so used to the idea that resting was a waste of time that the idea that it could work seemed like another miracle.

On Monday morning, I went to work (as a parish administrator) and told everyone who came through the door what had happened. When I walked into St Mary’s Church for the first time after my miracle, I came face to face with another full-size statue of Jesus. It was Friday and I was by myself and putting out the bulletins. This statue has never been a favourite as Jesus looks so disappointed. Yet that day we seemed to smile at each other as I walked in through the sacristy and again, although the statue did not move, I saw it climb down from the plinth, and as I walked away down the aisle towards the back of the church, I felt an arm around my shoulders and felt footsteps walking along beside me.

July 10th 2019: I was watching War in the Blood, and one protagonist, Graham, was talking about how your body talks to you sometimes without you being aware of what it is trying to say. He described how some time before he relapsed with leukaemia, he felt the need to write goodbye letters to his family. At the time he had no idea what provoked this desire to record his love for his family but was glad that he had. I had exactly the same experience about four weeks before I was diagnosed with leukaemia in 1989. I remember being in my bedroom, aged thirteen, convinced that I was going to die. I sat, crying, at my desk as I wrote goodbye letters to my family, and added a lock of my extremely curly hair to each envelope. Then I carefully hid them in a small plastic box at the top of wardrobe...until I mentally slapped myself about five minutes later and shredded the lot. I was not going to die.

July 13th: Some of the best responses I have had to my miracle cure have been from the unlikeliest of places. I wanted to celebrate my miracle cure by being spontaneous, and the best way to do it seemed to be to spend the weekend down in Devon at Pennymoor campsite. We have been there every year since 2012. I rang up to book a static caravan, knowing that it was high season and there was a big event going on, so any vacancies would be unlikely. Needless to say, all the caravans were booked:

Me: “Oh that’s a shame. You see, I had a miracle cure from chronic fatigue syndrome last weekend, and I wanted us to celebrate by coming down to Pennymoor.”

Nice lady, not missing a beat: “Well, the lodge is available.” (I don’t think kids are usually allowed in.)

I explained that we would be arriving later than 10pm as the girls were in the school musical.

Nice lady: “Oh that’s fine. Because it’s you, we will leave it unlocked and you can check-in in the morning.” (Unheard of!)

We agreed a price, drove down in the dark the following Friday, got lost twice and arrived at 1.00am. Not only was the lodge huge, totally beautiful and pristine, there was also a bottle of Prosecco waiting for us on the countertop. When I finally checked in the next day, I thanked them for the Prosecco. The nice lady said they had been so pleased that we had told them about my miracle, that they wanted to help us celebrate.

Aug 11th: Started running today. I had been running on the beach on holiday but just chasing the children. I read “Renew Your Wonders” by Damian Stayne, who helped found the Cor et Lumen Christi community. He talks about the need to listen to everything carefully in case it is God talking to you. I had decided that I needed to do something about the Great North Run prophecy/prediction. I saw my friend Colette the next day and she suggested the Couch to 5K app that helps beginners run. Next morning as I ate my breakfast, I looked into the apps and they all seemed to use a nine week timetable. I opened the free paper that had arrived and straight away saw an advert for the Dorothy House Breakfast 5K run on 13th October. I knew

immediately that it would be in nine weeks' time; and it was. Bought some trainers yesterday and did my first run this morning, supported by my three daughters.

Sept 23rd: On week 7 now of the Couch to 5K. I ran for 25mins yesterday without stopping; from Oldfield School to the church on the end of Newbridge Hill and back again. I had a 1-2-3-4 running pattern in my head that went: "I can be/the person that/God wants/me/to be". Last Monday I spoke to hordes of Y7, 8, 9 and 13 pupils at my sister's school about miracles. It was not easy but I think/hope I got better at it each time I did the talk.

October 15th: The 5K for Dorothy House Hospice was a great success with all four of us completing the course and raising £1400 in sponsorship. Mum and Dad came down as a surprise to watch and support us, and my niece and nephew made banners to make us run faster. Mum even found a sparkling wine called "Abel Charlotte".

November: There is a statue of Mary holding toddler Jesus in St Mary's. We were in Sunday Mass but sitting in a different place than usual so I could see the statue whilst we were singing the opening hymn. The toddler Jesus looked so wriggly that it reminded me of the girls at the same age and I grinned at the statue. He seemed to leap out of Mary's arms and scampered up to me and gave me a hug. The most peculiar thing about all the incidents with statues is that I never seem to need to tell anyone whilst they are happening or even straight after. I just feel very happy and, at the time, it seems so normal.

December: Two incidents of note, both at Sunday Masses. The first, I think, was Gaudete Sunday when you are supposed to be joyful, but I woke up grumpy and could not get into the Mass at all. I looked up at one point and realised Fr Jeremy had just finished his homily and I had not heard one word of it. I just thought "Oh I don't know what the matter is but I am just not in the right mood for this today". Straight away, a voice just said "That's ok, I'll just sit with you instead" and I felt someone sit down next to me on the empty chair. The second was the following week when we got to the words "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof..." which I have always loved ever since I was a child, and even more so once I made the connection with the Roman centurion. This time, as I said "Lord, I am not worthy" I heard a voice say "But you are, you are" in impassioned tones.

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