

Saints ALIVE

The magazine of:
All Saints, Leighton Buzzard
St. Nicholas, Hockliffe
St. Michael's, Eggington
St. Michael and All Angels,
Billington
The Good Shepherd, Sandhills

March 2021

70p

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to reverse**

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All Saints

And

Seeking

**Choral Scholars:
do you know a
young person who
loves to sing?**



All Saints Leighton Buzzard

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3rd Lockdown

By Rev'd Noel McGeeney

Once lockdown was announced I rooted around for a Christmas present, Barak Obama's latest book, *A Promised Land*, 700 pages and got stuck into it. I am now, mid-February, halfway through. Later in the month I joined a diocesan Zoom forum on January 28th 'Christianity and Democracy', two hours exploring the role of the Church in society, which left me very energised.

Next on the agenda was a Zoom forum- *Living out the Faith in the Public Square*- on February 3rd. I have always been interested in politics. I grew up in the Republic of Ireland, with proportional representation. I lived with military dictatorships for a decade in Nigeria and now I live in a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy.

There are Pro's and Con's to all political systems and if given the opportunity to create a new system from scratch, knowing everything that we do, what might that look like? (Whoever gets to populate Mars first will have an opportunity to create a political system from scratch. That may be sooner than we think.) Christianity grew alongside the Roman Empire so was not born in a vacuum. Jesus had to contend with political and religious power; we have the Gospels to guide us in how Jesus handled the tension and struggle between the religious leaders and political rulers of his age.



Over the past century the world has shifted from Empires to Nation States; in my opinion the crowning achievement in that time is the establishment of the United Nations. A verse woven into a tapestry in the great hall of the UN building written by the 13th century Persian poet Saadi says this: *"Human beings are members of a whole in creation of one essence and soul."* Could this be a starting point of creating a system one planet one people?

The climate emergency has hastened nations into acting together to mitigate disaster; without acting there will be a mass movement of people that will cripple the world as we know it. Failure to act as, as one planet one people, will result in instability on a global scale.

One of my favourite insights says, 'we are one not because we think alike but because we act together'. The UN was created so that nation states would act together on global issues. The planet is on the way to heating up by two degrees, which will cause the sea to rise and cover many islands, farming land, towns, and cities creating mass migration. It will have taken less than 300 years to undo the balance of eco systems that took billions of years to evolve. David Attenborough's new series *A Perfect Planet* is addressing these issues.

Fr. Noel McGeeney

Our present pattern of services across the Ouzel Valley Team

All Saints

Sundays:

During Lockdown:

9.30am Parish Eucharist
(streamed and available
on the All Saints You Tube
Channel – go to You Tube,
search for All Saints,
Leighton Buzzard.

Click on the pen-and-ink drawing.
Or follow the links on
our Facebook page



Weekdays:

Holy Communion

10.00am Thursday (Not streamed)

St. Barnabas, Linslade

Sundays:

8am Said Eucharist
10am Parish Eucharist
(streamed on Facebook)
www.linslade-parish.org.uk



All other services are currently suspended,
meetings and social events cancelled.

We will keep our website and Facebook page
updated.

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**During Lockdown, Sunday services in
Heath & Reach, Eggington and Hockliffe
are being shared by Zoom
from the vicarage at 10am.**

For details please contact
Fr Noel McGeeney.

**St. Michael's and All Angels, Billington &
Good Shepherd, Greenleas School, Sandhills
are also meeting as a Virtual Church
on Sundays at 9.45am.**

If you would value prayer or would like to
join them on Zoom on Sundays, please
contact them via email:

info@goodshepherdsandhills.org.uk

or Facebook or Instagram



Service times may vary.

*For details of services and all other events,
please see the websites.*

Sunday Saints: for age 3+ year olds, meets during 9.30am Sunday service at All Saints.

All Saints Toddler Time: meets in All Saints on Wednesdays during term time.

Morning session 9.30 – 11am every week; afternoon session 1.30pm-3pm, except 1st Weds of month.
£1.50 per parent / carer & child; 50p extra per child; refreshments included: **will restart in October**

ACTIVE: (Senior Youth Group for age 11+) **not meeting at present because of a lack of leaders.**

If you could help, please contact the office.

Young Adults: meets fortnightly on Tuesdays at 8pm. See Facebook page "All Saints Young Adults".

Bereavement Café: a support group offering friendship and understanding.

1st Sunday of the month, 2.30-4pm The Spire Coffee Shop, All Saints

Choir Practice: Friday evenings, 7pm for 30 minutes for all members.

Bellringers: Practice on Monday, 7.30pm-9.30pm.

Spire Coffee Shop: Tuesday, Friday & Saturday 10am-2pm.

Contact Details on Page 2.

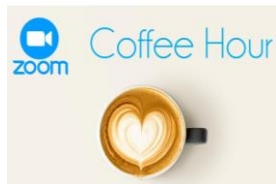
News Roundup

Zoom Coffee on Sunday mornings 11-12am:

To join by phone, call 0203 481 5240;

Online: Meeting ID: 875 602 910 Passcode: 000000

<https://allsaintslb.org.uk/>



Worth a smile : Observations on modern life

Common sense is not a gift. It's a punishment because you have to deal with everyone who doesn't have it.

Save the earth. It's the only planet with chocolate.

A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops. On my desk I have a workstation.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a cash advance.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a broken fan belt and a flat tyre.

The darkest hour is just before dawn. So, if you're going to steal your neighbour's milk, that's the time to do it.

Don't be irreplaceable. If you can't be replaced, you can't be promoted.

A hangover is the wrath of grapes.

When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.

A filing cabinet is a place where you can lose things systematically.

If you think the problem is bad now, just wait until we have solved it. (Arthur Kassepe)

Two choir members recently got married.

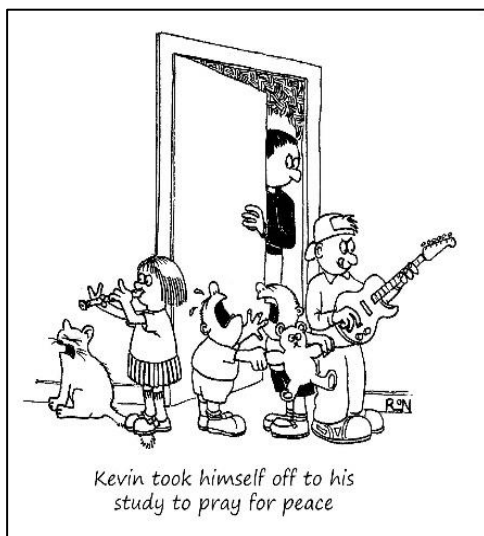
They met by chants.

The most welcome guest is the one who knows when to go home.

Being popular on Facebook is like sitting at the cool table in the cafeteria of a mental hospital.

Why do they lock petrol station bathrooms?
Afraid that someone will clean them?

A priest, a Baptist minister, and a rabbit walk into the Red Cross to donate blood. The nurse asks, 'What's your blood type?' The rabbit replied, 'I'm probably a Type O.'



Parish Registers

Holy Matrimony, January:

No weddings

'Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate'

Holy Baptism, January:

No baptisms

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism'

R.I.P. January:

8: Joan Bailey at St. Barnabas; 20: Cynthia Tucker at All Saints

'Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'

Years Mind, March:

2: Frederick Fleming, Cecil Cleverley; 3: Madge Taylor, Betty Wille; 4: George Perry, Mary Dimmock, Walter Randall; 5: Bunny Winter; 7: Beryl Button, Ivor Prewett, Audrey Cooper; 8: Alfred Bolton; 9: Norman Rumbelow, Richie Prince, Raul Montanana, Dorothy Cleverley; 10: Florence Waddington; 11: Marian Wallis, Julia Bicknell; 12: Margaret Nash; 13: Sylvia Allsop; 14: Raymond Harvey; 15: Arthur Robinson, Bertha Raymond; 16: Walter (Jim) Dell; 17: Rodney Austin; 18: Amy Rumbelow; 19: Paul Hayes; 20: Cora-Anne Ingram; 21: John James Frank Scammell, Laura Maskell, 21: Peggy Heyward; 23: Susan Lennard; 28: Beth Durrington; 30: Norman Barnard, Richard Greensted, Malcolm Alder

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a whole community



Once again, we're half-way through the academic year, returned and refreshed from the February half-term holiday, and looking forward (hopefully as I write) that we will see a full return of all our children in March.

The latest lockdown has been, once again, a difficult time for many of our families, and we have had approximately 30% of our children in, coming from the homes of keyworkers and vulnerable children. The teaching staff have been busy teaching in class and providing high quality remote learning, including daily chats with our classes to see all of the wonderful things that they are doing at home.



Mrs Borrelli and Mrs Gunter have put together a fantastic video of the work produced by the children, presented to the sound of Mrs Borrelli singing "You've got a friend". If you would like to hear it, which you really ought, then please visit the Pulford School Facebook page and look for the Worship broadcast on Monday 1st February.

Just like the rest of the All Saints congregation, we were unable to celebrate Candlemas in Church this year. We did, however, mark this in our worship on 2nd February, which again you can see on our Facebook page.

Mr. Webb, Assistant Head.





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On a musical note.....



Choral Scholarships available

Can you help? All Saints has, for a while, offered Choral and Organ scholarships to encourage youngsters to join our choir and to help them along that endless journey towards a full appreciation of sacred music in our great English tradition.

Those Choral Scholarships may be particularly pertinent in 2021/22. We have known for some time now that, due to a recruitment gap 8 or 9 years ago, we will have no senior trebles in the sixth form during 2021/22; indeed, we have been trying hard to fill that gap for a while. Fortunately, we have some excellent trebles on the way up and there is no reason why one of those should not become Head Chorister next year in the usual way. But we could do with recruiting two or three girls who are presently in (say) Years 11 or 12 to support the treble line for the next year or so. I say girls, because boys' voices will in all likelihood have broken at that age. However, younger boys (or girls) with the ability learn music quickly and to sing confidently are also very much encouraged to apply. We could also do with a few young tenors or basses to join Christian and William, our two ex-trebles who now sing with us in the back row.

The Choral Scholarships encourage youngsters to join the choir, but they are not bursaries. The Scholarship money must be used to pay for music-related expenditure (e.g. singing or instrumental lessons, courses, music books etc.). And of course they are available to our existing choristers as well as newcomers (i.e. for recruitment and retention purposes).

So please would you put your thinking caps on and spread the word as far as possible? Before you turn to read the next article in this magazine, please take a moment to reflect. Do you know someone who might fit the bill? Do you know someone who may know someone who fits the bill? There must be, within a range of (say) 10 miles of All Saints, a few suitable candidates; youngsters who enjoy singing and who are eager to learn more. Maybe you know of people moving into the area?

It is now pretty much accepted wisdom that singing in a choir:

- is good for your physical and mental health (cardio-vascular system, stress levels, immune system etc.);
- increases your confidence and self-esteem;
- improves your team-building skills;
- improves your understanding of music and how you experience and enjoy it; and (incredibly)
- increases your life-expectancy (apparently this was established by a study in 2008 carried out at Harvard and Yale).



Finally, we also have an organ scholarship available to any budding organists or pianists who want to learn – minimum requirement Grade 5 piano (they don't have to have taken the exam, just be able to play at that level).

Paul Dickens

SUNDAY SAINTS

FUN BAGS: Winter to spring 2021

Sunday Saints recently sent Fun Bags containing all sorts of fun activities and ideas for the children to do at home while there is no Sunday Saints. As well as a small winter garden of bulbs, instructions for growing bean sprouts in jars, art and craft activities, stories and prayers about Simeon & Anna, Jesus the Good Shepherd, Palm Sunday, and Ascension Day., there was a mug and a simple microwave recipe for the children to make a mug cake.

SUNDAY SAINTS MUG CAKE RECIPE

The idea is to decorate the mug cakes with hearts, so the weekend before 14th February would be a great time to make these. They are so easy and yummy you could make some earlier and then some around the 14th. This recipe will be enough to make 6-8 cupcakes depending upon the size of your cup or mug.

What you will need.

- One sensible grownup. (Often hard to find. You may have to search high and low.)
- 172g of all-purpose flour; ½ (half a teaspoon of salt).
- 1 teaspoon of baking powder (not needed if self-raising flour used).
- 8 Tablespoons of unsalted butter, melted and then cooled.
- 200g of granulated sugar; 8 Tablespoons of milk.
- 4 eggs at room temperature. 1 Tablespoon of vanilla extract.

What you have to do.

- Wash your hands.
- Mix the flour, baking powder and salt in one bowl.
- In another bowl whisk the sugar, milk, butter (melted), eggs, and vanilla extract.
- Add the butter mixture to the flour mixture: whisk until you have a smooth batter.
- Dip a finger into the mixture and taste the batter. It should be super yummy ready for your tummy. Wash your hands again.
- Pour some batter into a cup or a mug. Only half fill the cup or mug. In the microwave the batter will double in size. Only do ONE mug first so that your grownup and you can judge the correct amount for the other cupcakes.
- Place in the microwave for 90 seconds. Perhaps a bit more or less time, depending upon the microwave. Practice and see how it goes.

Your cake is now ready. You can add some ice-cream, berries, fruit, chocolate sauce or anything you like except mustard, Brown sauce or tomato ketchup. Make the rest of your cupcakes.

Lick the bowl clean and eat the rest of the batter from the whisk. This is the best bit.

You could decorate your cake with a heart shape. Your grownup may know how to make icing. You could buy some sprinkles, chocolate buttons or chocolate drops and make a heart shape. You and your grownup can give the cakes to your friends, family or somebody you know who may be lonely and would really be happy to receive your cupcake.

And here is Isabella, having fun, making the cakes ...

She wanted to make them for her cousin Albert, because she loves him and misses seeing him, we made 6 cakes we had 3 (1 each) and we delivered 3 to her cousin and his parents, her aunt and uncle. Isabella's daffodil has sprouted flowers too, she is finding it fun to look at everyday and see the changes. (See front cover photo)



Lift your eyes ...

Looking at some of All Saints' curiosities

with thanks to Terry Warburton for his help with this series

Keep your head down!

All Saints has been through a lot in its long life, but the passage of years, repairs and careful maintenance have masked the signs and made them hard, near impossible to see.

Here are two examples to look out for and think about:

All the window glass in All Saints, except in one, is no older than Victorian. Why is this?

During the late 16th and 17th century Reformation, and the Commonwealth period which followed, a great deal of damage was inflicted on England's churches by those who wanted a plainer religion (or perhaps just wanted to make mischief - it still happens today as we have witnessed this year in the U.S.). It has long been suspected that All Saints' windows were at one time filled with stained glass dating back hundreds of years. But the changes which followed the Reformation probably saw it smashed deliberately to be replaced with plain, or perhaps tinted, glass.

Proof of earlier stained glass came to light unexpectedly during restoration work in 2007. Shards of stained glass were discovered deep inside the arch of the last window in the south aisle wall. They were carefully prised out and checked by a glass expert who confirmed they were of 14th or 15th century provenance. You can now see them in the small east window on the right in the St Hugh chapel, the only medieval glass in the church, carefully preserved for posterity!





If you peer into the tiny box on the north wall of the chancel, to the right of the door, you will see a musket shot, discovered inside one of the monuments in the sanctuary. It is likely one of the ways the windows were destroyed.

Give us a Ring

The story of the ancient ironwork on the great west door of the church is well known and people come from far and wide to view it. But less well known is the story of the ring held by the skeletal hand.

It is not the original ring. That had worn away down the centuries and was replaced in Victorian times. It served a purpose other than just to open the latch. In 511 Pope Clovis decreed that anyone fleeing justice who took refuge in a church or on church property could be granted sanctuary. The criminal had to get there first and then ring a bell, knock on the door or grab a sanctuary ring usually on a door. After surrendering his weapons he had 40 days to decide whether to surrender to the authorities or leave the country never to return.



This happened in Leighton Buzzard at least once, in 1379. A William Palmere killed a man in Wrestlingworth in June 1370. Nine years later he was apprehended and put in the stocks in Leighton Buzzard. But not for long. He broke them and escaped down the High Street to the church where he claimed sanctuary, probably by grabbing the ring. He stayed in the church for 13 days. He sought liberty and before the County Coroner at the church gate he was banished from England.

Terry Warburton

More about this can be found in the Bedfordshire County Archives

Diary of a Streamer – by John Sykes

As I entitle this: '*Diary of a Streamer*', I see that my computer has spellchecked it to '*Diary of a Streaker*'!!! This could have been an 'OGM' commonly known as an 'Oh Goodness Moment'.

Allow me to share a recent experience that had a few of these OGMs: We had the pleasure recently of having a sermon delivered by the Bishop of Bedford. This was sent from the bishop's office in a form known as .MOV. Just download it, install it on a device and play – simple, right? WRONG. I use an ipad which has pictures loaded to fill in the gaps for instance during Communion. I didn't know this, but ipads don't play .MOV files. Well, mine doesn't anyway.

Simple answer, convert it to something that can be played on an ipad. Nothing could be further from the truth. A lengthy help session from Master craftsman Paul W. eventually gave me something that I could use. Great !!!!

Next, it was decided that a recording of our wonderful choir singing 'When to the Temple Mary went' would be played during Communion. A recording was sent over the internet. This was a simpler task as it was in a form that is easy to use. I simply downloaded it onto a USB Stick, so I could plug it into the sound system, press play at the appropriate moment and all would be well, right? WRONG. My USB stick had so much data on it, the music system couldn't recognise it.

Rule No.1 – Don't Panic and always have a Plan B. It's on my phone as well, thought I. It'll be fine.

So..... The service started, all going well, I had the Bishop lined up on my ipad, obsequiously waiting in the wings. All I had to do was press play and fade in from the Altar to the Bishop.

This, dear reader, was when the OGM delivered itself with full force: there is usually an acceptable gap between reality and the absurd. This gap widened to a cosmic abyss while the Gospel was delivered and during the moments that followed. Fingers poised, I glanced down at my screen only to discover that it had had enough of keeping the Bishop waiting in the wings and had sent itself off to sleep. Easy fix.....swipe fingers over screen to bring it back to life. My sweeping fingers did not only bring it back to life, but actually started the Bishop's Sermon.....NNNNOOOOOO!!!!

Remember Rule No.1 - Don't Panic; always have Plan B ...? I have to share with you that Rule No.1 went flying out of the window at that moment. There was no plan B...

So we now have not only Mother Cate reading the Gospel, but the Bishop of Bedford booming over the airwaves at the same time!!! Frantic finger work that would have made Rachmaninov proud saved the day. There is only one redeeming note to add here: Lindsay was not in my line of sight. The death stare that emanated from those eyes of hers could not penetrate the mighty pillar which mercifully shielded me from the worst.

So there ended a rather fraught hour, but a lesson learnt. Always have a Plan B.

John Sykes.

St. Nicholas, Hockliffe

Vicar: Rev'd Noel McGeeney

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Churchwardens:

Brian Speller: 210 565;

Roger Spalding: 07451 877 501



On Being a Church Dedicated to St Nicholas

The pandemic has brought into context what being socially distanced means when we have been gathering for worship lately, like our small congregation at St. Nicholas. God's gifts to his own people have kept us together with the technology of Zoom, Facebook and U-Tube. Many of us have adjusted to meeting for worship and fellowship at our computer screens or smartphones. We have welcomed previous parishioners to our worship too.

Our small congregation's worship and fellowship has, since lockdown began, benefitted from sharing in worship and fellowship with Fr. Noel's other churches of St Michael's Eggington and St Leonard's Heath and Reach. Three became one as we now share in daily Morning Prayer and Sunday Worship and Communion through Zoom. During seven months of furloughed leave last year I was able to lead Morning Prayer every Tuesday. I have met so many more members of the Ouzel Valley Team. Wonderfully a Team Ministry in lockdown has created options for each of all our congregations as they can attend alternative weekly worship 'on line' around everyday life in their homes.

Summer last year brought a reprieve as the Church of England, following Government guidance, allowed churches to offer communal worship again with the necessary risk assessments. And so, Sunday Worship and Communion in Fr Noel's churches moved into a new phase. We learnt how to worship in our buildings again in a safe way, but we still shared the worship with each other as well through Zoom. So, by rotation St Nicholas took its turn every three weeks to host the service and broadcast it to the other churches' congregations in their homes. Members of the congregation at St Nicholas read and gave the responses while Fr Noel presided, he and I preaching or interceding. Sadly, more recently we have taken the decision to retrench at the beginning of the latest lockdown. For the well-being of Noel's three churches' congregations Sunday Worship and Communion is lead from the vicarage again. Our church building stands empty but we have been continually nurtured in our faith because three became one. And yet, we as the congregation from Hockliffe *remain* the Body of Christ in that place. We are *still* Christ's feet, His hands, His eyes and ears for the people of Hockliffe.

May our Lenten journeys this year be ones of solidarity of faith in a God who has called us to be his witnesses in Hockliffe. May we emerge from lockdown ever stronger in our resolve to further God's work of mission. We pray that through trust in our merciful and compassionate God, we may look forward in hopeful expectation to the time when we will once again be able to shake hands and hug one another, as we share the joy and peace of the Risen Christ amongst ourselves in Church and with those in the village.

Geoff Marchant

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2020 - What a year that was! When thinking about what to write for this magazine, I set on thinking of all the things about last year and how they have and will be changed then, now and beyond.

2020

Covid19

Lockdowns I and II

NHS under severe strain

Job losses

Food shortages

Churches closed

Stress, worry, anxiety

Now and beyond

Vaccination developed, tested and being issued

Making the most of our time and finding new ways to meet, greet and work together

Thursday night Clap for Carers, and getting to hear about Capt. Sir Tom Moore

The chance to volunteer and find a new vocation

Home baking and gardening to grow your own

Zoom services, including lots more people reading, providing music and being involved.

Community groups sharing and caring for each other



*Seeking the silver lining
in the cloud*

It shows to me that in every bad situation, there is something good which can come out of it. The scientists working on the vaccinations at home and across the world have been under their own pressures to create something which is safe and effective to use, and which can be altered to deal with new variants. All of which was under severe time pressures because of the effects of the pandemic everywhere.

At St Michael's Eggington, St Leonard's Heath and Reach and St Nicholas Hockliffe, I certainly feel that we have grown together as a community not just as a shared church group but as friends too. We even know when people's birthdays are now too and are always happy to sing to them on their special day. You can never say that Covid has been a good thing for us, but I think it has taught us new ways to look at ourselves and the way we work together and function as a community. Let's look forward now to a new normal, whatever that might be!

Anne Sheppard



*Some sunshine
breaking through*

St. Michael & All Angels, Billington

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens:

Sandra Brewin 373644; Julia Haviland 850380



Apologies for having new born baby pictures for two months running. Last month we had baby Jasper Thompson who is growing rapidly. This month we have "little chap" Emmanuel Brewin, commonly to be known as Manni, born on 15th February and grandson to Don and Sandra Brewin. Some of you may have met his brother Winston age 7.

The birth of these two babies in the midst of a pandemic has given us cause to ponder on the future for children. Obviously these thoughts have been in our minds for over a year now, but to be so personally involved in the life of a helpless little child brings to mind a great sense of fear for how it will be for them, together with a living hope that their lives will see great changes for the better in our world.

Maybe we can hope that the hungry will be fed, that animals, plants and all the natural world will be given the respect they so desperately deserve, that nations will work together with vigour on enterprises that promote peace and co-operation, that schools will encourage good relationships and toleration as much as academic success. Much is happening already to promote these improvements, but it is up to our generation to believe that they can actually happen, and to put our weight behind movements who are working hard on these issues. I end with a prayer for Jasper and Manni and for each one of us.

Sandra Brewin

[from Because (World Vision) July-Sept 2009]

May God bless you:

May God bless you with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war,
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
And turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done
To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.
Amen



Emmanuel 'Manni' Brewin

Good Shepherd, Sandhills

Vicar: Rev'd Steve Marsh

Tel: 01525 838450

Churchwardens: Steve Nixon



**CHURCH of the
GOOD SHEPHERD**

Pick-n-mix Christianity

'I don't want to join a church, I know too many church goers who are hypocrites'.

When this was said to me, all I could come back with was my positive experience of church and a sense of guilt. I'm probably one of those hypocrites.

I have a confession to make. I'm a pick-n-mix Christian. I bank in my mind the bits in the Bible that support my values, squirm over the bits that challenge me and stick my fingers in my ears at the bits that I outright reject.

I don't imagine that when Jesus set out the Beatitudes, he offered it as a range of options. Nowhere did he say pick the bits that are convenient, lose the ones where it doesn't gel with your life choices. If anything, he said the opposite and called out false disciples and championed those that strive ('Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' (Matthew 5:6)) and those that find it most challenging ('Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness' (Matthew 5:10)).

But in today's progressive society with my current frame of reference, knowledge of scripture and sense of free will, strict adherence to the more restrictive teachings of the Bible are not palatable to me. So what does that make me? A fair weather Christian, the equivalent of a glory supporter football fan that should be mocked for their lack of commitment? Does my pick-n-mix approach show a lack of hunger and thirst?

There are so many flavours of Christianity out there for people to pick and choose. Some restricting choice, already bagged up and every last one inside must be eaten, others have a generous selection of jars. Some use their faith as a guide to their morality, others strictly observe traditions, whilst plenty seek God's counsel on every day aspects of their life.

When presented with a diversity monitoring form, the option to tick Christianity as the religion is easy. But underneath this is a complex myriad of beliefs. Where does each of us belong on the sliding scale of conservatism to liberalism or would it look more like a messy scattergram of individual choice influenced by our own personal lived experiences and spiritual maturity?

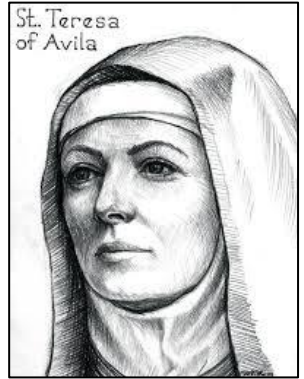
There is one thing I'm sure of. Christianity as a belief is flexible enough to welcome a vast range of difference, yet we can still be joined together as one Body with Christ. I think each person on their journey with faith will likely have chosen their favourite sweet jars so far and avoided those that were too sour for their taste. The greatest limitation is Biblical ignorance and not taking the time to reflect with others and pray. If I haven't tasted all the sweets in the shop, how do I know I've picked the right ones for me?

Jo Bellamy

Saints on Earth

Personal accounts of the wide-range of spiritually significant men and women who have inspired and influenced us. Mother Cate looks at

Saint Teresa of Avila ***The Waters of Prayer, and the Interior Castle***



This month I wanted to share with you a saint who I have found both helpful and inspirational over the years, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). Although Teresa lived in the 16th century her incredible faith and her understanding of people still speak to us today. As we journey through Lent I hope that her vision of our inner life of prayer and how it grows and develops will be an encouragement for you.

Teresa was a bright and attractive woman who was by all accounts very charismatic, and yet in her life she experienced grief after the death of her mother when she was only 15, time spent with unsuitable friends who encouraged her to be vain and self-centred. She endured years of ill health, the doubt and criticism of many - even some who were very close to her. She reformed the Carmelite order for women which demanded that she negotiated with the authorities of the church as well as organising the purchase of land and all things necessary for her sisters and all this took her on many journeys which were often perilous. She knew and understood the pressures of the world probably better than we do, and yet she also found time to write works on prayer that are still classics today. And it was prayer that sustained her and led her on through it all.

Teresa was known for a very particular kind of prayer, she desired above all to find complete union with the divine. Her time of prayer then was contemplation that put all other things aside and rested in God. She writes:

"For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything"

This prayer, this relationship with God is what underpins all that Teresa is and does. Her desire to reform the Carmelites came not from a need to control, but a desire that all her sisters should have the same opportunity to withdraw into the presence of God without the distractions of the world.

In her teaching about prayer Teresa uses two central metaphors which still speak clearly to us today. The first image is that of the water needed to make a garden grow and flourish. Teresa compares our early attempts at prayer to the laborious business of

carrying a bucket of water from a distant well to the garden. We then enter a more passive stage where it is as if the water were carried to us by a pump and we no longer have to struggle to carry it. Then comes a period of dryness but through this time we come to realise that we need not carry the water at all, there is a river hidden beneath us that we can access to find water for our garden. In our final stage of growth in prayer we experience God pouring his grace upon us, uniting us with God's own divine life as if a bountiful rain is falling upon us.

The second image that she draws upon is that of the soul as an interior castle. The Holy Trinity dwell within the centre of the castle and as our life in prayer deepens we are drawn ever further into the castle from room to room until we come at last to where God dwells at the very centre of ourselves.

Teresa recognised that none of us shares the same spiritual journey, but that for all of us we need to make God the centre of our lives and take time often to be with God. She knew only too well of the hardships and trials that come to all of us. It is reported that in one time of prayer she felt that Jesus was telling her not to expect an easy life if she was going to be his friend. Her reply was "if this is the way that you treat your friends, it's no wonder that you have so few!"

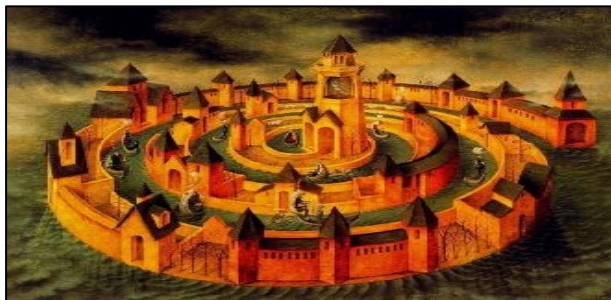
Archbishop Rowan Williams spoke of the importance of contemplation, he said:

"To put it boldly, contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit...to be converted to faith does not mean simply acquiring a new set of beliefs, but becoming a new person - a person in communion with God, and with others, through Jesus Christ."

Rowan Williams is pointing to something that may seem counter-intuitive, but was evident in Teresa's life, that the contemplative life is a significant ingredient in evangelism. If we hope to share our faith with others then we must aim not to provide a series of convincing arguments that touch only the intellect. We must demonstrate the new creation that comes into being when anyone is in Christ. Teresa was more than capable of setting down academic arguments, she has been recognised as a doctor of the church for her teaching, but she knew that the ultimate goal was union with the loving God who lives within each one of us. And what could be more attractive and compelling than a life, like Teresa's, transformed by the love of God, and expressed in her prayer:

*Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing frighten you.
All things pass away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Those who have God
Find they lack nothing;
God alone suffices. Amen.*

Mother Cate



The soul is an Interior Castle

So, you couldn't bear to give up chocolate for Lent, but what about doing a Carbon Fast instead?

Many Christians have embraced Carbon Fast as a Lent challenge in recent years. The idea is to take small actions to reduce the amount of carbon we each produce which contributes to climate change. Lent can be the kickstart for a lifelong approach that helps us take personal responsibility for the part we play in harming the Creation. It can help us reset a relationship of care and honour for God's beautiful world.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of Climate Change and think our efforts are futile. But we can make a collective impact as an expression of faith and respect for Creation. For example, eating fewer animal products helps reduce methane and carbon emissions by livestock, while buying local quality produce supports better animal husbandry and cuts food miles. Our response as individuals is part All Saints' Eco Church commitment so here are a few ideas to try:

- No single use bottles of water – carry a refillable one
- Avoid buying things wrapped in plastic – take your own containers
- Eat less meat – choose quality local produce not factory farmed
- Goodbye fast fashion – keep/mend clothes, and buy secondhand
- Recycle everything you can that the Council will accept
- Buy local produce if you can – try All Saints' honey for zero food miles
- Switch to renewable electricity – it's no more expensive

For inspiration, watch the sunrise, or take a woodland or riverside walk, and regain a sense of wonder. We have so many lovely places on the doorstep. For more ideas see A Rocha- the Eco Church charity www.arocha.org.uk or the Diocese of London Carbon Fast campaign www.london.anglican.org

Diary date: Earth Hour 2021

Saturday 27 March, 8.30-9.30pm

Earth Hour is a global event to encourage individuals, communities and businesses to turn off all non-essential lights and electrics for just one hour. Every year, millions of people across the world join to raise awareness of the issues facing our planet. It's not just a symbol of support, it's a catalyst for urgent change.

Find out how to join in at: www.earthhour.org

Katrina Grant



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