

SFS

De Trinitate

Slimbridge, St. John

Purton, St. John

Sharpness, St. Andrew

JUNE 2020



50p

Trinitate 2

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Wedding Arrangements etc...**

Please contact the Vicar.

Benefice Website: www.heuristika.co.uk/lfgdiscussion/

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This is the third online issue of 'De Trinitate' due to the restrictions that are now in place. As with earlier editions I am sending out a digital copy of the magazine to those on our mailing list who have the means of receiving it. Hopefully, some will find it helpful in these difficult times.

We have also made an attempt to keep a connection to our worshipping community through a Benefice website which has been set up by our Reader, Stilman Davis. You can find the address in the highlighted box on page two. Please do log on to it. You will find links to various local sites offering help and support, as well as links to worship in the Benefice and from the Diocese.

A prayer in lockdown

The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked.

(John 20.19)

Ever present God,
be with us in our isolation,
be close to us in our distancing,
be healing in our sickness,
be joy in our sadness,
be light in our darkness,
be wisdom in our confusion,
be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar,
that when the doors reopen
and we are once again free
to inhabit our communities
we will speak of your goodness
to an emerging world.

For Jesus' sake.

Amen.

“Words, words, words!
I’m so sick of words! If
you’re in love, show
me! Sing me no song, read me no
rhyme, don’t waste my
time, show me!”

Trinity tells us that God is, for want
of a better word, a *community* – of
perfect, unbroken, personal rela-
tionships. God is love, and love can-
not exist except in
relationship.

This is the cry
of Eliza
Doolittle in
*My Fair La-
dy*. She
could well
be speaking
of all the
many
words that
will be spo-
ken on Trini-
ty Sunday (7th
June) by preach-
ers trying to explain
the Holy Trinity. The
trouble is none of those clever
words will work. There are innu-
merable attempts at explanation:
it is like a three-leaf clover; or
three things that are the same
but different – ice, water and
steam. Or it’s like how one person
can be three different persons at
the same time – a daughter, a moth-
er and a sister.

The truth is that even if we could
find the best formula for the Trini-
ty, it wouldn’t help us. The invita-
tion today is not to find a
formula, but to respond to the na-
ture of God who is Trinity. The

Personally Speaking

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptising them in the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... And re-
member, I am with you always, to the
end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:19-20)

The Gospel
reading for
this Trinity
Sunday is
the end of
Matthew’s
Gospel (Matt
28:16
20), com-
monly re-
ferred to as
the Great
Commission. It
takes place in the
days after the resur-
rection. The disciples
are still trying to make
sense of what has hap-
pened. Jesus has been ap-
pearing to many people, but
faith in him is not straightforward.
Matthew makes clear that even in
this final resurrection appearance
to the eleven disciples, some wor-
shipped but some doubted.

It is into that mix of faith and doubt
that Jesus speaks these extraordi-
nary words. He tells them that he
has all authority in heaven and on
earth – nowhere, no one, nothing is
outside his jurisdiction. And he

Trinitate 5

gives them two things – a task and a promise. These two things go together. He tasks them with going and making disciples of all nations. Interestingly, Matthew makes no mention of requiring people to have faith before baptism. The thrust of Matthew’s Gospel has always been about the inclusion of all people in the Gospel. Jesus is not just for the Jews who believed in him, he is for the Gentiles – that means everyone. So, his disciples are to baptise people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – the Trinity. Most contemporary scholars see this triadic baptismal formula as authentic – it used to be assumed that the words had been added in by the early Church. However, most wonderfully of all, Jesus gives them a promise – he will be with them always.

In baptism, through God’s great grace, people come into this divine relationship that is God. And it doesn’t end there – loved eternally by God, we are to love one another, and so to reflect the image of God in us. This is the Great Commission – that, by our lives, all people may know that they too are invited into God’s great love.

We are made in the image of God. That means we belong in relationship. None of us is designed to be self-sufficient. We need each other – to be fully human, we must love and be loved. This is one of the reasons why we need the Church, because the Church puts us into relationship with others. Each one of us exists to be a channel of God’s love to others, even those, who in normal times, we find most difficult to be with. A perfect Church would be a community of people in perfect relationships with each other, and it would be continually inviting others in. That way we would perfectly reflect God the Holy Trinity.

We fail, of course, and that’s why we have a confession and absolution in every church service, to mend what is broken, as Paul urges the Corinthians. Jesus calls us to know the eternal love and presence of God. From the security of the knowledge of the love of God, who is with us always, he calls us to love all people. It is a tremendous commission, and an even more tremendous promise. These are not just clever words – No! This is life and action in all its fullness.



Historical Snippets

*Taken from the Parish archives
held at St Johns Church Slimbridge;*

*Years ago, each of the local parish churches submitted their news to a publication called 'The Parish Magazine'. Contributors came from quite a large area including: Lower Cam; Coaley; Eastington; Frocester; North Nibley; Stinchcome; and *Slymbridge. (Old English spelling) It was printed by: O. E. Hill, Cam, Gloucestershire, for the cost of 2d (tuppence) per copy.*

This month's historical snippet is taken from June 1938

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Holy Baptism: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me"

April 24 th	Christopher Thomas Green;
April 24 th	Malcom David Partridge;
May 1 st	Maurice William Lord;

Whit Sunday, June 5th:

The Services will be as follows:

Holy Communion:	6, 7 and 8am;
Choral Eucharist,	10.30am;
Children's Service:	3.pm;
Festival Evensong:	6.30pm.

Whit Sunday is one of the Church's great festivals and we hope that all who profess and call themselves Church People will make every effort to give this day its due observance.

Sympathy:

In the name of the Church we extend our sincere sympathy to the relatives and friends of those parishioners whom we have lost from our midst during the last month.:

Elizabeth Browning. Arthur John Noad. Margaret Emily Cullimore.

"Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them."

Bishops Visit:

Everyone seems to have enjoyed very much the visit of the *Bishop of Tewkesbury to our Parish on Sunday evening May 8th, and all who made the effort to worship in Church that evening agreed that the service was very inspiring. The Bishop equally enjoyed his visit and expressed the wish that he might be invited to come again.

**The Rt. Rev. Austin Hodson was the first Bishop of Tewkesbury. He was consecrated by the Rt. Rev. Arthur Headlam, Bishop of Gloucester, on 24th February 1938. His visit to Slimbridge was one of the first parish visits he made. He retired in 1955.*

Congratulations:

I very heartily congratulate the children of our Parish, our Sunday School and Choir, who have been successful in gaining County Junior Scholarships, and, as Chairman of the School Managers, and on behalf of that body, I should also like to congratulate the School, the Headmaster, and his staff on this result.

Church Finance:

It has been suggested that I write a few notes in the Parish Magazine about this matter. As some of our regular subscribers have moved away from the Parish and others have died, the Parish needs a few who would be willing to make up this deficiency.

Small envelopes are supplied, free of charge, (52), that is one for each Sunday of the year, into which you place your 'free-will' offering. Whatever that may be and either send it along or better still, bring it to Church each Sunday and put it in the offertory. In this way you will systematically and regularly assist in the upkeep of our Parish Church. Kindly give your names to me or to one of the Church wardens.

Mother's Union:

July 3rd is the Sunday nearest the day set apart by the Church to commemorate the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As is one of the festivals of the Mother of our Lord, it should be a day to be observed by all mothers everywhere. Shall we then all meet at a Corporate Communion? At 8am on that day? The Mothers' Union Corporate Communions have, so far, been very disappointing, only a very few of our members attending. This service will end the session for the M.U. until we re-open on September 29th. So shall we make an extra effort to be present at 8 o'clock on July 3rd, and make our service a real inspiring one? G.M.T

Sunday Schools:

We feel it only fair to give due notice and warning to all children and parents that the Sunday school cannot afford to take, free of charge, on the annual outing to Weston-Super-Mare children who have not been regular in their attendance. Parents must therefore, be careful to see that children wishing to go on this outing shortly, are regular in attendance every Sunday afternoon.

Rev Bill Thomas.

Rector

NB: Access to our Parish Archive records: Our records are not complete, this may be because the records were not strictly kept month after month, (bearing in mind there was a war on at that time) or sadly, some have disappeared for one reason or another. Therefore, anyone who may wish to view these archive records will be by supervised access by arrangement. Please contact the Vicar, me or indeed, any of the PCC members when access can be arranged but sadly, not to take away.

David Carrington [Vicar's Church Warden]

Nigel Beeton writes: During the lockdown, we are forbidden from driving to beauty spots and walking in National Trust parks. I wonder what the birds make of it all?

Titwillow

(With apologies to WS Gilbert)

*On a tree by a river sat little Tom Tit
Singing 'willow, titwillow, titwillow'.
His mate fluttered in and beside him did sit,
Singing 'willow, titwillow, titwillow'.
"Oh, where are the people?" bewildered, he cried,
"Tis many a day since a soul I have spied"
"I think," said his wife, "they're all staying inside!"
"Oh willow, titwillow, titwillow".*

*"I do like the quiet, I do like the peace!
"But find myself wondering why did they cease
"Singing willow, titwillow, titwillow?"
"The people in hundreds of cars they all came
"Especially when there was no sign of much rain,
"The weather's so nice, it seems such a shame!
"Oh willow, titwillow, titwillow!"*

*"I think I can tell you!" – she'd a smile on her beak,
"For I saw some people last Saturday week,
"Singing willow, titwillow, titwillow,
"They stood in a group, they were flying a kite,
"Along came a police car with lights flashing bright,
"It seems the Old Bill gave those people a fright!
"Oh willow, titwillow, titwillow!"*

*A buzzard, above them, then uttered his 'mew'
As quick as they could off to safety they flew,
Singing willow, titwillow, titwillow!
Arrived at their nest then our avian pair
Correctly concluded what caused human scare:
"They're frightened of critters that fly in the air!
"Oh willow, titwillow, titwillow!"*

From the Registers - April 2020

	<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Gift Aid</u>	<u>Envelopes</u>	<u>Cash</u>
<u>Sharpness:</u>	0	£	£	£
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE	SURPLUS (+ / -)	
For the Month:	£	£	£	
<u>Purton:</u>	0	£	£	£
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE	SURPLUS (+ / -)	
For the Month:	£	£	£	
<u>Slimbridge:</u>	0	£	£	£
	INCOME	EXPENDITURE	SURPLUS (+ / -)	
For the Month:	£	£	£	

Churches Closed - figures not available!

*If you have not been able to donate during the lock-down
and you would like to help, then please contact one of our
treasurers - details on page 2*

FUNERALS:

We commended to the Lord's keeping:

RUTH PEARCE (<i>Gloucester Crematorium</i>)	4 th May
KATHLYN WEBB (<i>Gloucester Crematorium</i>)	15 th May
HILARY MAY (<i>Canford Crematorium</i>)	22 nd May
IRENE SAVAGE (<i>Westerleigh Crematorium</i>)	27 th May

*Shortened funerals - Quarantine restrictions in place

Creature Feature



WORDS FOR TODAY

Written by Bob & Debby Gass

*'Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head.' -
1 Samuel 10:1*

Looking for donkeys - and discovering your destiny

Here's the remarkable story of how Saul became Israel's first king. He was out scouring the countryside for his father's lost donkeys when he met the prophet Samuel. 'Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us." And he went on. "But you stand here awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God." Then Samuel took...oil and poured *it* on his head, and...said: "*Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?"*" (1 Samuel 9:27-10:1).

Think about it: Saul went out looking for donkeys – and discovered his destiny! And it can happen to you too! God has a habit of calling people who are busy doing other things. James and John were mending their fishing nets, Matthew was collecting taxes, Elisha was farming, and Saul was out looking for his father's lost donkeys. It was just another day on the job, working to make a living. But when God has a destiny for you, and a date on His calendar with your name on it, He will come and get you. You say, 'But I'm nobody special!' That's what Saul said too: '*Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?*' (1 Samuel 9:21).

Your social status doesn't limit God. When He has a plan in mind for you, He will reach into the background and bring you into the foreground. So stay faithful, keep serving Him, and your time will come!

Looking for Hope Amongst the Clutter

Jane Brocklehurst on the value of going through our 'sentimental' stuff...and finding some wonderful memories.

In this strange locked down season, because of the coronavirus pandemic, I've noticed a change in the type of pictures posted on social media. In place of the look-here-at-me selfies are snapshots of buds opening to display the colours of spring.

Such hopeful images counterbalance gloomy statistics in the news media. There are also more memory pictures – this is what I was doing on this day years ago with people I love – I wish we could be together now.

While we're not allowed to make the kind of memories depicted in those pictures, we find comfort in memories we already have.

One thing I've done with this unexpected free time is to organize printed photographs into albums. The photos and the albums have been there for a while, waiting for me to get a round tuit. You remember the old joke? Imagine people finding their round tuits in cupboards and drawers all over the country. How would you use yours? To sow seeds that had not been planted? To read the book gathering dust on a shelf?

What else needs tackling? Now may be an ideal time to face the daunting corner where clutter lurks. Daunting because of what you may disturb among age-old piles of unsorted belongings. Looking squarely at the past may be an unwelcome prospect. It makes us face uncomfortable questions. Projects we may never finish, equipment we cannot use any more, objects of attachment from people we've lost. Isn't that like what we're doing as a nation in these unprecedented times? Issues we have been avoiding are suddenly highlighted through unfamiliar circumstances.

There is much talk about how we're looking forward to getting back to normal on the other side of this international crisis. Some people

say they hope things will have changed, that normal will not look the same as it used to, because we have learned valuable lessons about what really matters in life. It's up to us whether or not we rise to the challenge, to reorganize society more fairly, to care more for the environment.

By myself I cannot change the world, but I'm determined to look after the little space that is in my care, not to let it be overwhelmed with needless clutter. Be brave. Use this negative time to make a positive change in your small corner. If you choose to sort it out, I guarantee that amidst all the mess you will find at least one thing, however small, to bring you joy – even if it's just a clean and tidy corner.

the GABERDINE SWINE by MITCH.



Smile for a While!

The Grim Reaper came for me last night, and I beat him off with a vacuum cleaner. Talk about Dyson with death.



A mate of mine recently admitted to being addicted to brake fluid. When I quizzed him on it he reckoned he could stop any time....



I went to the cemetery yesterday to lay some flowers on a grave. As I was standing there I noticed 4 grave diggers walking about with a coffin, 3 hours later and they're still walking about with it. I thought to myself, they've lost the plot!!



My daughter asked me for a pet spider for her birthday, so I went to our local pet shop and they were £70!!! Blow this, I thought, I can get one cheaper off the web.



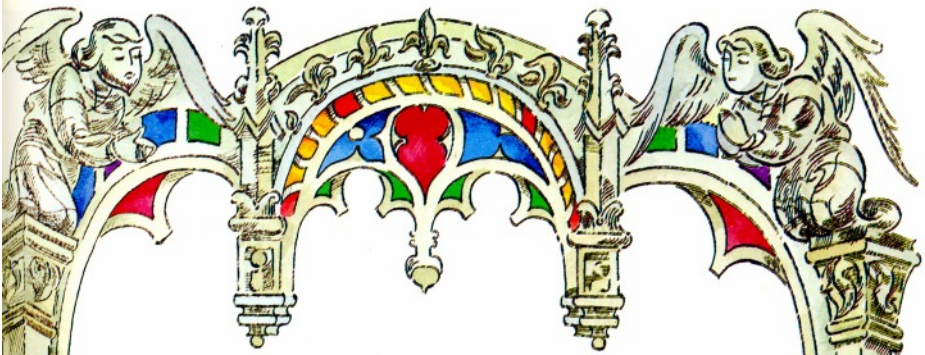
I was at an ATM yesterday when a little old lady asked if I could check her balance, so I pushed her over.



I start a new job in Seoul next week. I thought it was a good Korea move.



I was driving this morning when I saw an AA van parked up. The driver was sobbing uncontrollably and looked very miserable. I thought to myself that guy's heading for a breakdown.



Quotes of the Month

Miscellaneous observations on life and faith...

Are you someone God wants to hear from? The message of the Bible is that however unworthy, sinful and useless we may feel as human beings, God can't wait to hear from us. - Anon

A home is no home unless it contains food and fire for the mind as well as the body. - Margaret Fuller, writer

What we desire our children to be, we must endeavour to be before them. - Andrew Combe, writer

Ideal parenting is modelled after the relationship between God and man. - James C Dobson, writer

Flattery is the art of telling a person exactly what he thinks of himself. - Anon

Sunday-morning Christianity is the greatest hindrance to true revival. - Vance Havner, writer

Fathers' Day, a time to celebrate male role models

In the UK, USA and Canada, the third Sunday in June is Father's Day. It's usually a good time for sons and daughters to take their father to his favourite restaurant, or to watch a favoured sport, or whatever else he enjoys doing.

Just how families celebrate it this year will no doubt be testing, but I'm sure that there will be some very inventive methods employed.

How do these special days ever get started, anyway? Well, Father's Day began because way back in 1909 there was a woman in Spokane, Washington, named Sonora Louise Smart Dodd. That year she heard a church sermon about the merits of setting aside a day to honour one's mother. Mother's Day was just beginning to gather widespread attention in the United States at this time. But Sonora Louise Smart Dodd knew that it was her father who had selflessly raised herself and her five siblings by himself after their mother had died in childbirth. So the sermon on mothers gave Sonora Louise the idea to petition for a day to honour fathers, and in particular, her own father, William Jackson Smart.

Sonora Louise soon set about planning the first Father's Day celebration in Spokane in 1910. With support from the Spokane Ministerial Association and the YMCA, her efforts paid off, and a 'Father's Day' was appointed. Sonora Louise had wanted Father's Day to be on the first Sunday in June (since that was her father's birthday), but the city council didn't have time to approve it until later in the month. And so on June 19th, 1910, the first Father's Day was celebrated in Spokane.

Gradually, other people in other cities caught on and started celebrating their fathers, too. The rose was selected as the official Father's Day flower. Some people began to wear a white rose to honour a father who was dead, and a red one to honour a father who was living. Finally, in 1972, President Richard Nixon signed a presidential proclamation declaring the third Sunday of June as Father's Day - a permanent, national holiday.

Out of the Silence . . .

*The monthly journal of the journey of a Priest,
Contemplative and Community Chaplain from lock down!!!.*

As I write there is the first twinkle of light at the end of the ‘lock down tunnel’, but from conversations on the phone and via e mail there is also still much fear about ‘coming out too early’ and ‘what if it all starts over again?’ By the time you read this things may have changed enormously and I hope for the better, but I wanted to share with you my experience of that ‘first twinkle’ and the feeling of God at work in our lives.

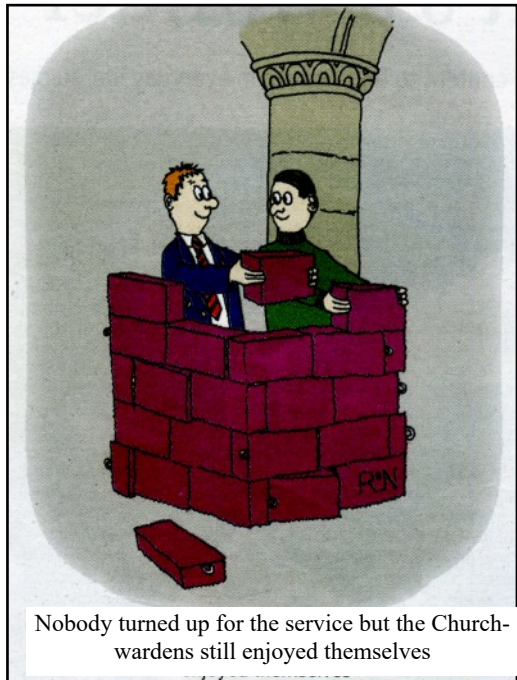
Monday 11th May 2020

Can waking in a mood of boredom and low spirits become a habit? an expectation? Is it boredom at all? There are plenty of jobs to do – just not things I particularly want to do. Never has an Easter season felt less joyful! And this journal writing business isn’t helpful at the moment, it’s just encouraging self-pity and really I have SO little to be pitying about, so I think I’ll leave off for a while. ‘Happiness is an emotion, joy is a decision.’ I once said (hmm!?) OK then – I’ll decide for joy! God help me!

Sunday 17th May 2020

A week since I last sat down with journal in hand and I am in a better place through your gracious help, Lord. It started that very day when I last wrote and cried out to you and . . . as though it was in my power . . . ‘decided for joy’! I certainly felt anything but joyful as I wrote that but then I read the following extract from Frederick Buechner (who?),

“By grace we see what we see. To have faith is to respond to what we see by longing for it the rest of our days, by trying to live up to it and



toward it through all the wonderful and terrible things; by breathing it in like air and growing strong on it; by looking to see it again and see it better.”

I'm not entirely sure what this means but the words 'grace' and 'faith' and the realism of the phrase “wonderful and terrible things”, somehow spoke to me and I shared it with a good friend on line. This led to an e mail dialogue about quite deep and complex issues - the nature of faith, the reality of life after death and the definition of prayer. As this virtual conversation went on (and it took some serious thought for both of us) I was also preparing a new 'kitchen table communion' service for the church website and adapting a sermon (quite a challenging one) to go with the reading from Acts about the 'altar to the unknown God'. I suppose I should not be surprised that the process of wrestling with all this, Jacob-like, helped to bring me back into closer interaction with you, Lord. It also, by its very nature, meant I was thinking of (ministering to?) others and not looking inward all the time. And now . . . this morning, a slight easing of movement restrictions means that I can begin to say Sunday Morning Prayer, alone, in church each week on behalf of the community – it will be interesting to see how that feels.

Very appropriately today is kept for Edward Jenner, another of our local 'saints', remembering and giving thanks for his discovery of the use of vaccines against the scourge of smallpox and other diseases. As people work throughout the world to find answers to our present pandemic we pray a blessing on them in his memory.

“God of all truth,
you gave your servant Edward
patience and wisdom to discover new ways to bring healing
and hope to the world:
give us the same determination and integrity
to serve your people,
after the example of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.”

Tuesday 19th May 2020

Apparently a lot of people have been having very vivid dreams at the moment – I'm one of them but to wake to early morning laughter, Lord, can only be a gift from you.

The dream – a communion service to be taken, but a catalogue of problems:-

- I was in the wrong church! (it seemed to be a version of the one I went to in my child hood)
- I didn't have my cassock (and was wearing only my surplice, like a short white nightie with my knobbly knees on show!)
- The congregation was just a load of inadvertent visitors (and was constantly expanding)
- I didn't have any keys so no wine or bread or silverware (I found a glass and an old saucer and a younger version of my mother (!) who I dispatched to buy some biscuits and a bottle of sherry)
- There was some sort of server who was behaving like a jester (and popping up in unlikely places and distracting everyone)
- I'd just found an old prayer book from which to read the service when a small, tweed-clad woman started asking if she could take everyone to the toilet. I said, 'No!' She asked again, I bellowed, 'NO!' My mother appeared and asked what was going on and I told her I was dealing with 'a turnip-head'!

I woke suddenly, as one often does from a nightmare and for a second was still stressed – then remembered that the last thing I'd done was to call a member of the congregation a 'turnip-head'! Oh what joy! Oh what laughter! Increased when the Old Testament reading, from Numbers this morning, proved to be about God 'smiting' the priests in the wilderness who were behaving abominably! Hmm – perhaps benedictine congregations need to brace themselves for when all this is over and I start calling them 'turnip heads' and then get 'smitten' by a divine bolt of lightning for my trouble!

I will definitely put this journal extract in the next magazine as a warning and also hoping it will make them laugh as much as it has me this morning. Thank you, my loving and laughing God.

Ascension Day, Thursday 21st May 2020

It's a paradox, but a comforting one, that to be without you, Lord, is to be able to be with you all the time. Untrammelled now by the human body so vital to your saving work on earth, to your demonstrating that your love of us, your understanding of us, is total in both tragedy and joy, you can walk now beside each one of us every step of the way if only we remember to turn and see you there.

I love the words of today's responsory,
“... God has gone up with a merry noise;
... and given gifts to his people ...”

Sometimes your gift comes in the form of a poke in the ribs! Sometimes via someone else. And as I started to slide back into ennui (a wonderful word I discovered to describe my current feelings of boredom, weariness and low-level anxiety) you did both. You poked me into making a phone-call to a parishioner. You poked me again into not answering the inevitable question, ‘How are you?’ with the usual thoughtless, ‘I’m fine,’ but with an honest sharing of my mood. Then you gifted me, through her, with a companion in understanding. As we talked we ‘ministered’ to each other and you ‘ministered’ to us both.

The prayer that accompanies today's Psalm 110 is perfect for the two of us and for so many, struggling, as lock-down continues.

“Lord Jesus . . . inspire us with the confidence of your final conquest . . . and grant that daily on our way we may drink at the brook of your eternal life and so find courage against all adversities; for your mercy's sake. Amen.”

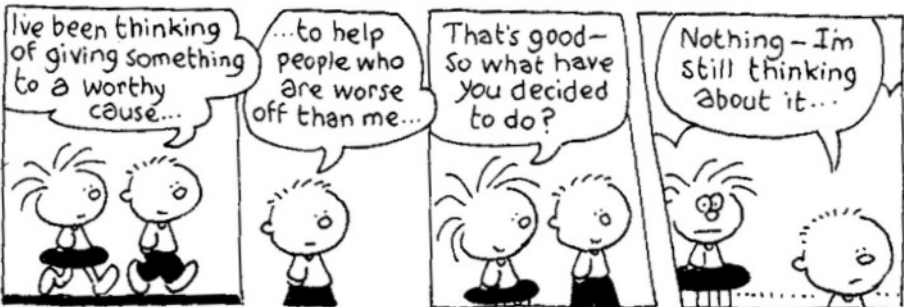
More next month either digitally or perhaps in the actual paper magazine!

Keep safe, keep separate but remember you are never separated from the love of God or from the prayers of us all

With love and many blessings

Mary Tucker

the mouths of babes

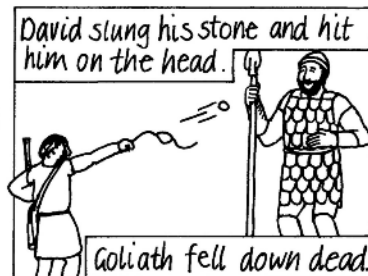
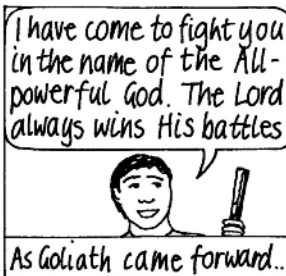
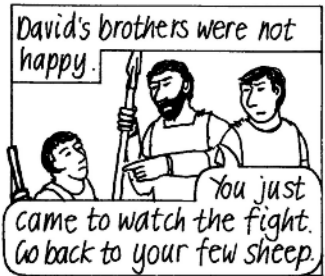


Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
1 Samuel 17:1-50

The Philistine and Israelite armies
faced each other. For 40 days, the gigantic
Philistine champion, Goliath, taunted them..



The Way I See It

Giles Frazer considers the reality of gazing up to the stars.

Elon Musk's SpaceX company has made history by becoming the first commercial organization to send astronauts up into space. Musk has described his long-term aim as being to grow a rose on Mars. And his Twitter feed illustrates this aim with a quotation from Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody: "Open your eyes, look up to the skies." To some he's a visionary, a latter day Leonardo da Vinci; to others, more like Icarus, someone who will be brought down by his hubris. And, of course, the commercialisation of space is highly controversial. Does private ownership really make sense when thinking about the vastness of the cosmos?

But my own thoughts on this are shaped by something that I don't suppose has troubled Elon Musk - and that is that we have just moved out of the liturgical season of Ascensiontide, that period after Jesus ascends into the heavens following the completion of his earthly ministry. And there is a line about this in the first chapter of the book of Acts that has always struck me as important. "Men of Galilee" it goes "Why do you stand staring up into heaven?" And what I have taken this admonition to mean is: stop gawping up into the sky and get on with all the practical work of living out the gospel.

Nietzsche may have been no friend of Christianity, but it seems to me he got it right when he said: "remain true to the earth". From this perspective it is almost as if there is a moral purpose to gravity, keeping us together, loyal to our earthly home and to each other. Salvation is not some sort of escape pod for the elite few who are rich enough or religious enough to be transported to another world.

I suppose that's also why there's so much anger at Dominic Cummings. There are, of course, different views on the morality of what he did - and I, as it happens, am on the more understanding side of the spectrum. But after months of lockdown I also get why people are angry. Because his behaviour is seen as a violation of the basic "we are all in this together" principle. And it's this same basic principle that is at stake in the SpaceX project.

I know many will be excited by the thought of exploring new frontiers, to boldly go and all of that. But private space travel, with the purpose of colonizing Mars, looks like a fantasy of the super-rich who have given up on planet earth with all its environmental challenges. That is my basic objection. Stop staring up into heaven. This is not a world we should be running away from. Let's stay here and fight for it instead.

Charles Dickens - prolific writer with a social conscience

Tim Lenton recalls one of our best-loved novelists.

Popular Victorian novelist Charles Dickens died 150 years ago, on 9th June 1870. His books include *The Pickwick Papers*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield*.

He died of a stroke in Gad's Hill Place, his country home in Kent, when halfway through writing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The last novel he completed – most of them were written in regularly released parts – was *Our Mutual Friend*, in 1865.

He had been born in Portsmouth in 1812, the second of eight children. His family were relatively poor, and his mother wanted him out at work, so he never received a formal education. Nevertheless, he edited a weekly journal for 20 years and wrote 15 novels, as well as many other stories, articles and letters. He was also a staunch social campaigner, particularly for children's rights and education.

As could be deduced from one of his most loved works, *A Christmas Carol*, he was a firm believer in Christian elements such as compassion and redemption, and he loved the New Testament, while having little time for the Old or for organised religion. His parents were nominal Anglicans. He is said to have wanted his stories to be seen as 'parables' emphasising the teaching of Jesus.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR





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for
Sharpness Church*



THANK YOU!



LETTERS TO UNCLE EUSTACE

*On why holding an Arts Festival in church
is not a good idea*

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

Your decision to hold a Summer weekend Arts Festival in church, bringing culture to your inner-city streets, was most commendable. Pity, how it all turned out.

The Friday evening started well with the concert of Scott Joplin piano music. Obviously knowing that the pieces were originally played in seedy bars on pianos wildly out of tune with several notes missing, your committee must have gone to endless trouble to find precisely the right instrument. Your stage-hands, were, however, less careful and hadn't noticed that the platform had a noticeable list to port. After each piece, the pianist had to relocate the piano stool closer to his nomadic piano, with the last piece being performed with both entirely out of sight behind the pulpit.

It created much innocent entertainment for the audience, but the fault really should have been remedied before the Saturday evening choir concert. Discarded kneelers and rotting hymn books do not form a stable base for a stage supporting an 80-strong choir. So when it came to the enthusiastic rendering of hits from 'Oklahoma', with copious hand movements, it came as something of a relief that the stage took this as the moment to signal defeat, tipping the tenors behind the altar. The audience's thunderous applause, assuming this was a carefully choreographed part of the performance, was quite touching. I am sure all the compensation claims will soon be sorted out.

Your one great mistake was to take on responsibility for organising the refreshments afterwards. Church entertainments committees have centuries of collective experience in judging the numbers of ham sandwiches and bottles of milk required. I am forever proud that our own ladies – through years of experience – can now get five cups of tea from every tea bag and can butter bread so thinly that one pack can last several months.

What you now do with 29 surplus loaves of bread is a problem you have brought upon yourself. You could possibly use them for supporting the stage next year.

Your loving uncle,

JUNE 1940 - a month to remember

June 1940 – 80 years ago – was a dramatic month in the Second World War, and one which saw two of the most memorable speeches in English.

As the evacuation of Allied Forces from Dunkirk was completed, recently appointed Prime Minister Winston Churchill told the House of Commons on 4th June: “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”

Surprisingly he did not broadcast it to the nation: it was not recorded until 1949, “for posterity.” When he spoke, the French had not surrendered, and the idea that “in God’s good time” the USA might conceivably have to ride to the aid of a ‘subjugated’ England actually depressed as many people as it invigorated.

Two weeks later, on the 18th June, with the battle in France lost, Churchill did address the country directly with a rallying call in what must indeed have seemed a very dark hour. “The Battle of Britain,” he said, “is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation.” He concluded by saying that if Britain were to last a thousand years, people would still say, “This was their finest hour.”



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