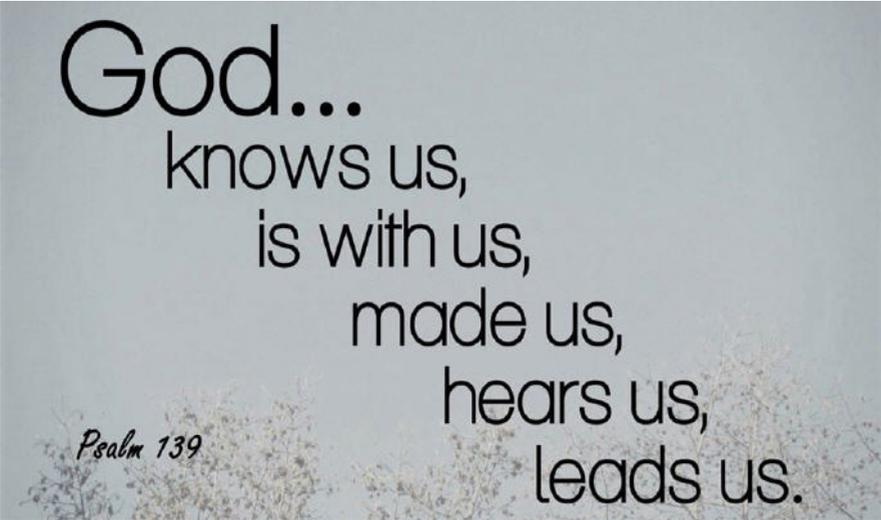


*St Mary and St Cuthbert's Church,
Chester-le-Street*

MAY 2020

NEWSLETTER



God...
knows us,
is with us,
made us,
hears us,
leads us.

Psalm 139

From Rev Jon (from a video he did on our Church Facebook page)

Dear friends,

We heard last month about the passing of Tim Brooke Taylor who was part of 'The Goodies,' a popular comedy programme, and for many years a panellist on the radio programme 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue.' I enjoyed both programmes, they appealed to my sense of humour, which started me thinking about the place of humour in the Bible and in life.



The Bible is a library of books, some of the writing is poetic, some dramatic, some historical, some apocalyptic, and sometimes we find humour. One of my favourite scenes comes from the book of Exodus where the Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah to kill the new born Hebrew boys. However, because they feared God, they allowed the boys to live. When they are brought before Pharaoh to explain their actions they tell him that the Hebrew women are vigorous and give birth before they have time to get to them. I love the cheek, the audacity, the bravery, and their cheeky humour in the face of despotic power.

Much of the Sermon on the Mount, it seems to me, would have struck its earliest hearers as funny. Among the Beatitudes, with which the Sermon begins, we can well imagine smiles, if not out-and-out laughter, greeting this remark: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land" (Matthew ch.5) What could be more foolish than this—the meek inheriting the land? That's what the strong do, don't they? Of course, this is humour with a purpose—to overturn our usual perceptions—but it's humour nonetheless. The sermon ends with the wonderful story of the foolish man who builds his house on the sand. We are in the area of slapstick comedy here. (Matthew ch.7)

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Jesus used humour to help us understand the nature of God's Kingdom, and to shine a light on our own actions, effectively showing us where we go wrong, and our need of God.

So, I welcomed the Facebook post which popped up on Easter Day, showing Jesus outside the empty tomb, being arrested by the police for breaking lockdown restrictions. Some Christians might be offended by this, but I was not. Why? Well the image was not mocking Christianity; in fact, the picture of Jesus outside the tomb was a welcome reminder that Easter is about the resurrection. Also, the target of the humour was not Jesus, but Covid 19. It is an excellent example of how humour can and does overcome fear.

When I was backpacking round Asia and Europe in the 1980s, I was struck when I was in Eastern Europe, still then under the grip of the Soviet Union, how many people were openly mocking communism and the regimes through humour. What dictators fear more than anything is mockery, to be laughed at; because when the people laugh, they are saying in effect - we are not afraid of you. In the face of the all-powerful Pharaoh the Hebrew midwives used humour to show that they feared God, not him. I was not too surprised when the Berlin wall came crashing down in 1989; the people no longer feared

Today we face an unseen enemy, and we acknowledge the pain and heart ache it has caused. But, through humour, as in that Facebook post, we are saying, we are not afraid of you, you will not prevail, "Jesus is Lord". So please continue with your witty comments on WhatsApp, Facebook, etcetera, and if you sit down to day to enjoy some comedy, whatever your taste may be, I will be with you in spirit. When God created human kind he fashioned us in such a way that we need to use 42 facial muscles to frown, but only 17 to smile!

CHURCH FINANCES

As I wrote last month, our church finances are not in a good position at the moment - we are very grateful for all those who are still giving to our church. But we are not receiving any café income, Centre room hire income, no funeral or wedding fees and no loose collections.

Malcolm Austin, our treasurer, estimates that in these months our income is reduced by £8,500 per month, though our expenditure will also be reduced by about £3,500. So, at the moment we are about £5,000 worse off as a parish per month.

A few people are posting their weekly envelopes into the Parish Centre office – but it is not ideal to have cash lying there even for a few days. It is possible for anyone to contribute to our church finances from their bank into the church account.

The account is: *St Mary and St Cuthbert, Chester-le-Street.*

Account No. 50050083 Barclays bank. Sort code: 20-27-41.

We are encouraging everyone in our church family to maintain or increase their giving to keep the mission and ministry of the church going. This may help some of you ...

Last month the national **Parish Giving Scheme** (PGS) launched a 'donate by phone' option meaning givers don't even have to complete paperwork anymore.

You can set up a regular gift to our Parish by a single phone call to: 0333 002 1271. It is free number to call if you have bundled minutes, otherwise the charge is like a normal landline number.

A PGS administrator will take you through the process – it takes about 15 minutes. You will be asked for:

- Your Personal bank account details
- The name of the parish which you wish to donate to
- Whether you want to increase your gift in line with inflation each year (or not)

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- Confirm if you are eligible for Gift Aid (if you pay tax) or not
- The PGS code for our parish, which is 130313004

Already many of us use this scheme it is efficient, safe and completely free. We launched it in the parish in the summer of 2018. £3,500 comes through the scheme from members of our church every month. Those of us who already use PGS have found it works very smoothly.

Rev David

I am to be the **INTERIM AREA DEAN** for Chester-le-Street and Houghton. David Glover (the present Area Dean) starts this month with Hexham Abbey. Someone else is lined up to be the Area Dean properly from December. It is not ideal for me, but the Archdeacon and Bishop encouraged me to take it on. It involves organising monthly clergy chapter meetings, Deanery synod meetings, weekly meetings with the Archdeacon or Bishop and supporting parishes in vacancy.

Rev David

CHURCH OF ENGLAND - A Daily Hope Line has been launched to hear hymns, reflections and prayers. Thousands of people are finding it very helpful. Free phone: 0800 804 8044

FACEBOOK SERVICES – These continue on our church Facebook page [St Mary and St Cuthbert Parish Church, Chester-le-Street](#), each Sunday. There are also video messages posted each week.

Daily prayer picture and suggestions are posted most days on the following Facebook page - [St Mary and St Cuthbert Parish Church Congregations and Friends](#)

FRANK NELSSON - (one of our lay readers) died suddenly on April 9 at his home. He had been ill with gastroenteritis, but the coroner wasn't sure whether Covid 19 was the cause of his death. He faithfully served Scripture Union as a child evangelist and our parish for many decades. We expect there will be a church memorial service when that is possible.

FROM THE REGISTERS - FUNERALS

- March** 27 John Adamson (67)
- April** 6 Elizabeth (Betty) Adams (94)
8 Graeme Oliver (77)
9 Sidney Wilson (86)
Susan Stephenson (54)
15 Irene Cook (87)
Eleanor Hall Skidmore (98)
20 Ellen (Nellie) Laidler (98)
22 Audrey Dawson (84)
23 Ann Laws (70)
29 George Embleton (83)
30 Frank Nelsson (83)
- May** 4 Gloria Balfour (82)

“QUIET CORNER”

from John Hopper, one of our Lay Readers

One of the joys of being in so called “Lock down” is that I often end up doing things I would not normally do, such as watching old black and white movies on TV. I have to say that they are not my “cup of tea”, but I know they are an absolute joy for many people. Now I must confess that there are one or two old movies I really enjoy such as “39 Steps” and “Whiskey Galore”, but not much more so it was really odd that I recently recorded another old classic, which earned a really “steamy” reputation, “*From here to Eternity*” starring Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift and Deborah Kerr and Frank Sinatra.

The story line is one of love and life in the US Army, just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. The story ends with the violent deaths of both the characters played Montgomery Clift and Frank Sinatra and the breakup of the relationship between the roles played by Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr. It also shows the hundreds of lost lives from the attack on Pearl Harbour and America's entry into the World War 2 conflict.

The non-Christian world can be forgiven for thinking that following the crucifixion and death of Jesus 2000 years ago, that His followers would also fall into the abyss of oblivion and perhaps it may seem that way, borne out by subsequent historical events. Why did that not happen, quite simply because of the RESURRECTION. Jesus who died but conquered death, rose again and now reigns in Heaven with God the Father, with the promise that He will return and take us to Heaven so that we might live a life of true Heavenly worship, where there is no more violence, death and destruction.

This is the hope of all Christian peoples everywhere, in the past, present and future. Thankfully, for all who remain firm in the Christian faith, our journey from “*Here to Eternity*” will be quite unlike the Hollywood version.

In dedication to a dear friend and colleague Frank Nelsson

BLESSINGS IN LOCKDOWN

from Jean Turnbull

I begin my day with Psalm 103 which begins: *“Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all His benefits and promises.”*

At the beginning of lockdown, I felt I needed a formal framework to my usual day, so I decided to do Morning and Evening prayer from the 1662, ASB and Celtic Daily prayer books in rotation. I really enjoyed the different ways and wording of all of these versions, but what struck me most was how the ‘voices’ of the Psalmists echoed most relevantly the disorientation in our lives and circumstances in this crisis in our land and world; **but** also with the reorientation of hope found in turning to God for help.

It reminds me of a time of disorientation in my life, before I knew the Lord. I was walking the dog on a beautiful day, but with my head down and full of woe. I looked up and saw hills in the distance and at that moment some words from Psalm 121 came alive in my head, *“my help cometh from the Lord.”* I felt as if a burden was lifted and walked home with my head lifted up. He touched my life!!! It was like a rainbow stretching from the Old Testament into the present. We see the rainbow pattern everywhere to remind us of God’s promise of care.

Facebook is a new area of learning for me, but it has brought a precious sense of inclusivity in the beautifully adapted home-based services, as well as a wider connection with my Church family in other ways. Thank you, Lord, for each one who blesses me every day, through posts, meditations, comments, songs and prayers. BELIEVE, TRUST, HOPE and PRAY.

WHAT AM I NOT SEEING?

Luke 24:13-35 Road to Emmaus

Have you watched that video where viewers must count how many times the players pass the ball? At the end of the video you discover two things, firstly that the ball was passed 15 times, and secondly that you didn't notice a gorilla walk through the group of players!

Cleopas and his companion also miss the 'abnormal' because they are too busy focusing on the normal. It's Easter Day, and the events of the last few days are heavy on their minds as they walk to Emmaus. They had hoped that their rabbi Jesus was going to become king, but their hope had been disappointed. Jesus had been executed by the rulers of the day and they were sad and sorrowful at how he had suffered and died.

As they walk, the risen Jesus joins them and asks what they're talking about, we hear that *“they stood still, their faces downcast.”* Matthew Henry in his commentary on this passage says “Christ's disciples are often sad and sorrowful, even when they have reason to rejoice.” They were so focused on the bad stuff that they missed the good stuff. Jesus was alive and right in front of their eyes!

Even though Jesus had told them exactly what was going to happen they didn't get it. They remembered something significant about the *“third day”*, they knew about the women, the empty tomb, the angel But they couldn't see this incredible miracle right in front of their eyes. What is God doing in our lives, that is right in front of our eyes but which we are not seeing? This passage suggests three tools to help us hear and see God in our lives:

1. Scripture

During lockdown, it's been helpful to watch the many Christian video/reflections doing the rounds each day. And we also need to explore the Bible first-hand, not second-hand every time.

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This time of retreat is a great opportunity to read and study chunks of the Bible. Christ's life, death and resurrection are all foretold in the Old Testament – Cleopas and his companion felt their hearts burning as they were opened up to them. We can ask God to open up those prophecies and promises to us, so we can rejoice in their fulfilment in Christ. Again, I can't say it better than Matthew Henry does - "A golden thread of gospel grace runs through the whole web of the Old Testament". When the disciples saw the risen Jesus, their faces were no longer downcast!

2. Communion

We're all missing sharing in Communion, but we can still be in communion with Christ through prayer. More than ever, we need time with Him, to feed on Him, to glimpse Him, and let Him speak to us. We also need to be in communion with fellow believers. Those travellers no wasted time in sharing their experience of the risen Christ and encouraging the other followers.

3. The Holy Spirit

Jesus had promised to send his Helper to remind and teach his disciples, but this journey took place before Pentecost, which partly explains why they were slow to understand. Later, when the disciples received the Holy Spirit they understood. As Christ's disciples, we now have the Holy Spirit to help us understand what God is doing and saying.

God is at work in these abnormal times. What is He doing in our lives, the life of the church and nation? What are we not seeing that is right in front of our eyes?

Tessa Conder - she contributed this to an April Facebook Live service

WHAT DOES PSALM 91 SAY ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS?

In this lovely psalm we read about God's protection v4,7 – *'He will cover you with his wings; you will be safe in his care' and 'A thousand may fall dead beside you, 10,000 all around you, but you will not be harmed'*.

Lovely words. But when we think about them, we might wonder just how we're meant to understand them. Perhaps there's a niggling doubt – after all, Christians do get ill and die. A few of us will catch the coronavirus, and some of us – though a tiny minority – will not recover. So, is the Bible just plain wrong?

There's a clue in the New Testament about how we're meant to understand Psalm 91. In the gospels we read about the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness. One of the temptations is for Jesus to cast himself down from the highest point of the temple; quoting v11,12, the devil says, *'If you are God's Son, throw yourself down, for the scripture says: "God will give orders to his angels about you; they will hold you up with their hands, so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones."'* (Matt 4.6) - Jesus answers with another Scripture: *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'* (Deut. 6.16).

Jesus knows that God's word can be trusted, and he won't let the devil twist it to say something it doesn't – shows us that we're to read Psalm 91 in the light of the whole of Scripture, rather than just looking at a few verses.

When we do that, we find that God's people often suffer harm. There's a stirring list of sufferings in Heb. 11.36-38: *'Some were mocked and whipped, and others were put in chains and taken off to prison. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword. They went round clothed in skins of sheep or goats — poor, persecuted, and ill-treated. The world was not good enough for them!'* But these martyrs all knew about God's faithfulness – and many of them would have known Psalm 91, with its lovely promise that *'no violence will come near your home'*.

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Looking at Psalm 91, there are four things we can say:

First, let's not test God. It would be quite wrong for Christians to take these words literally and refuse to stop meeting together in spite of the dangers posed by the virus, as a test of faith. We have Jesus' example to show us that it doesn't work like that.

Second, let's trust the experience of our elders. The martyrs who've died for the gospel didn't feel the Bible contradicted itself or was not 'true', just because they suffered. When we're tempted to doubt, we should remember those who've gone before us, and believe as they did.

Third, let's hear the hope in the psalm, it uses poetic language – vivid imagery to say something deeply meaningful: that God always intends the best for us and that he is always faithful. It doesn't just describe the world as it is, but the world as it ought to be. It's not a dry statement of fact, but a prayer.

Fourth, let's believe for the future. The psalm says '*I will save those who love me ... I will reward them with long life; I will save them*' (v14–16), these words are not just about this life, but for eternity. Things may go well for us in the here and now, or they may not. But God's salvation is for ever.

(Adapted from an article by Mark Woods, Bible Society)

JIM SMITH who used to be a member of our church now runs Serving Africa Mission in Ghana. In the last few years, we have as a parish been financially supporting the work and two of our Lay readers Audrey Telford and (the late) David Brooks went out to help with the work in Ghana. Jim is doing regular messages on his website and Facebook page that I know some people have found very helpful.

Rev David

THY KINGDOM COME



This is the annual encouragement to devote time to pray in the days between Ascension Day (May 21 this year) and Pentecost (May 31). It echoes the disciples waiting prayerfully in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit to come. We had planned to have 24 hours of prayer with the other churches of the town; and there was also to be a Beacon event in the cathedral on Pentecost Sunday evening. Obviously, these gatherings are not going to happen this year. *Thy Kingdom Come* have made the following suggestions about what we can do during the lockdown; that we should pray for others and care for those we are praying for.

During these difficult and trying times, we believe that now more than ever, presents an incredible opportunity for the Church worldwide, to unite in prayer so that our family, friends and neighbours will come to know the love and peace of Jesus Christ for themselves. As we are praying for those we love - to come to know the hope and love of Christ; we also are encouraging all to see how they can show God's love towards them. By caring for them. Here are 5 ideas on how we can care and love those we know, even when we are socially distanced:

- 1. Keep up contact. Make a phone call, send an email, letter or card saying that you are praying for them.*
- 2. Keep an eye out for the anniversaries of life events. Make that phone call to let people know you care.*
- 3. Send a small gift or book purchased on line.*
- 4. Serve where you can in delivering groceries or medications.*

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5. *Make sure the people you pray for know how much you value them by whatever means you can find.*

THE DAFFODILS DANCE

The Daffodils dance
Exposed
vulnerable
fragile,
the daffodils dance.
Wind ravaged,
isolated,
rain on their parade
the daffodils dance.
Downtrodden,
flattened.
Back standing,
the daffodils dance.
Broken day,
settled sun,
darkness
The daffodils dance.
Deeply rooted,
held firm,
nourished still.
The daffodils dance.



Smile inducing,
hope-giving,
beauty living -
the daffodils dance
Teaching,
challenging,
affirming,
the daffodils dance.
Arms outstretched,
faces turned,
open,
invitational,
expectant,
the daffodils dance.
Shall we?

*Newsletter produced by Rev David Tully,
Rector of Chester-le-Street.
Tel: 0191 388 4027
Email - david.tully1@sky.com*

Rev Simon