

'KEEP IN TOUCH', Autumn 2020
Copy by, but, if possible, before 1st August 2020

All contributions welcome. Maximum preferred length: 500 words!
(If longer, the editor reserves the right to edit!!)
The editor wishes to say a big thank you to all who kindly contribute.

'Keep In Touch'



Julie's Easter Garden

KEEPING YOU 'IN TOUCH' IS

Name

Address

Tel. No.

YOU ARE WELCOME TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THEM

SUMMER 2020

CHURCH & VILLAGE
BIRSTALL & WANLIP

THE PARISH OF BIRSTALL AND WANLIP

No Rector pro tem	Please ring 07570 198810 to speak to a churchwarden while the parish is in interregnum.	
Hon Asst. Priests	Revd Sheila Skidmore, 15 School Lane	2673318
	Revd Kerry Emmett, 1 Chamberlains Field	3194736
	Canon Anne Horton, 8b Copeland Road	2677942
	Revd Robin Martin, 22 Sycamore Road	07971632268
	Revd Michael Webb, 31 Bramley Road	07813144645
Churchwardens	Mr Tony Bloxam, 17 Sandgate Avenue	2675381
	Mr John Borrajo, 8 Hallam Avenue	2209289
	Mr John Ward, 28 Walker Road	2677600
	Mrs Debbie Shephard, 41 Roman Road	2672630
Licensed Readers PTO	Mr Peter Chester, 12 Oakfield Avenue	2120236
	Mrs Lesley Walton, 16 The Crossways	2674995
Pastoral Assistants	Mrs Doreen Wilson, 13 Poplar Avenue	2674680
	Mrs Gill Pope, 26 Blenheim Road	2675086
Safeguarding Coordinator	Mrs Annette Marshall	annette.marshall8@gmail.com
Sunday School	Mrs Rose Parrott	rose.parrott@btinternet.com 07811662235
Church Office	Mrs Sheryl Jupp, Church Office, Church Hill	2671797
	email: stjames.birstall@btconnect.com Sheryljupp@hotmail.co.uk	
Treasurer	Mrs Nicki Wills, Church Office, Church Hill	2671797
	email: stjames.birstall@btconnect.com	
Tower Captain	Mr Clive Mobbs, 30 Wanlip Avenue	2677156
	Practice night—Thursdays at 7pm	
Wanlip Church Hall Bookings	Mr John Ward, 28 Walker Road	2677600
Nearer Group	Peter and Gill Chester	2120236
	pete.chester@ntlworld.com	
Editor of Keep in Touch	Canon Anne Horton, 8b Copeland Road	2677942
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The views and opinions of the authors who have submitted articles to 'Keep in Touch' belong to them alone and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the wider church.

CORONAVIRUS

Following on from an instruction from both our Archbishops all public worship has been cancelled. As a consequence no services or events will be held in either of our churches until we are advised otherwise. In line with Government advice this instruction is taken to include all meetings etc. *Information correct at time of publication*

From the Church Office - Sheryl is working from home

While there is no public worship happening in our churches due to the coronavirus, I will be working from home until things return to some sort of normality. The weekly Information sheets are all available on the church website (www.birstall.org) and are also being sent out electronically to all those for whom we have an email address. If you are not already receiving them this way, but would like to, please send an email to stjames.birstall@btconnect.com, or email me directly sheryljupp@hotmail.co.uk or contact one of the churchwardens. Also, if you would like me to put a notice in the information sheets, can you send information to me at the email addresses above, or contact a churchwarden who will pass it on to me. **Please do not leave a message on the church telephone until the churches have reopened.**

Sheryl

REGULAR SERVICES IN OUR CHURCHES

None during Coronavirus 'Lockdown'

St James, Birstall

Sundays

8 am Holy Communion (*said*)
10 am All Together (*1st Sunday*)
10 am Parish Communion (*other Suns*)
10 am Sunday School

Weekdays

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,
Friday 9 am Morning Prayer
Thurs. 9.30 am Holy Communion

Our Lady & St Nicholas, Wanlip

Sundays, 6 pm

1st Sunday
Holy Communion

2nd, 3rd, 4th Sundays
Prayer Book Evensong

5th Sunday
Alternative Service of the Word

REGULAR EVENTS AND GROUPS

Not meeting during Coronavirus 'Lockdown'

Weekly

Thursday	7– 8.30 pm	Bell ringing practice (St James') <i>Contact Clive Mobbs 0116 2677156</i>
Saturday	10-12 noon	St James' Church open + Tea and coffee

Monthly

2nd Monday	7.30pm	Monday Group (Village Hall) <i>Contact Jane Scott 0116 2673761</i>
4th Monday	10.15am	Mothers' Union (St James') <i>Contact Helen Tarry 0116 2677493</i>
3rd Tuesday	10am -12.30	Old Nick's Coffee Shop <i>Wanlip Church and Community Centre</i>

Bi Monthly

Weds	2.30 pm	God, Me and Art (See weekly sheet) <i>Contact Tony Bloxam 0116 2675381</i>
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Other Groups

Group agrees dates!	St James' Striders	<i>approx. 8 miles</i> <i>Contact Gill Pope 0116 2675086</i>
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St James' Wanderers are currently not wandering

Contact Lesley Walton for information

FROM THE REGISTERS

March 2020 - May 2020

Funerals

24/3	Margaret King	Birstall Cemetery
22/04	Rupert Stant	L'boro Crematorium
23/4	Doreen Marks	Birstall Cemetery
6/5	John Middleton	Birstall Cemetery
29/5	Alastair McHugh	Gilroes Crematorium

A MESSAGE TO US ALL

from the Bishop of Loughborough

Dear friends,

I was very much looking forward to visiting St. James the Great on 10th May for a service of Holy Communion and Confirmation. Like so many events, this is one we've had to postpone, but we will rearrange it as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I wanted to take this opportunity to send you all my very best wishes and to assure you of my prayers during these strange and unprecedented times that we are all experiencing.

I'm sure none of us could have imagined we would be living life in lockdown with so many restrictions on our movements and social interactions, but in true British spirit we are trying to make the best of it. Everyone's situation is different, of course. Some are key workers and on the front line, putting themselves at risk for the rest of us. This is deeply humbling, and it can be hard to accept that the most helpful thing the rest of us can do is simply stay at home. It can be particularly testing for those who long to be active and useful and productive. But now more than ever it's helpful to remember that as children of God our worth is never to be found in what we do or how successful we are, but in the quality of our relationships and in how we embrace our limitations.

I'm conscious that for many who live on their own, the lack of contact with others will feel especially isolating. For me, the challenges are different – there are 5 of us (including teenage twins and a 20 year old back from university) living under one roof, trying not to get on each others nerves too much! We are fortunate to have good space and a garden and we have created routines. Meal times have become especially important, we say a simple service of Compline each evening after supper, we take it in turns to walk the dog and we co-ordinate our TV viewing! We rely on Zoom for school/university/work meetings and for keeping in touch with family and friends.

Amazingly, work for me continues to be quite busy though it has changed in nature somewhat. I enjoy having more time for pastoral conversations and am trying to do some more reading.

As we look to the future there's a lot of uncertainty for us all, as individuals and as churches – it's a time to live by faith and learn to trust more fully. Whoever you are and whatever your fears and anxieties, I hope you'll experience something of God's love and peace, and that you will be sustained and grow in faith.

Thank you for whatever part you are playing in the ongoing life of your church and wider community – and if you can't do much that feels practical then remember the importance of praying for your friends and neighbours, for this nation and for the world. I hope and pray that you will know deep within you something of the truth underlying these words of comfort written by Julian of Norwich who lived through the Black Death: *'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'*

+ Guli Loughborough

Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Loughborough

Please pray for Kieran Follows

Kieran, a member of St James' congregation, one of our bell ringers and a junior server, was to have been confirmed by Bishop Guli on May 10th. Because of Covid 19 'lockdown,' Kieran remains 'in waiting'. Please pray for him.

**Defend, O Lord, your servant Kieran
with your heavenly grace,
that he may continue yours for ever,
and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more
until he comes to your everlasting kingdom. Amen**

Canon Anne

I could feel my legs, and the bike's saddle, but I was confident that I should be okay, hopefully without too much pain. I arrived at Wisbech at 11 o'clock. 70 miles done - 25 to go to Sandringham.

Between Wisbech and Kings Lynn there are villages with wonderful 'Christian' names such as Marshland St. James, Wiggshall St. Mary the Virgin and St. John's, Fen End. I pedalled east out of Wisbech, hoping that I was on the right road. I wanted to cross the A47 without actually having to cycle along it, and was looking for one of the bridges that cross the Great River Ouse. Like the villages they are also 'Christian', with names such as The Magdalen Bridge! The alternative to a bridge was the ferry from West Lynn. I continued northeast, finally approaching Clenchwarton, just west of the Ouse. By then I was some 5 miles from Kings Lynn, and very tired. The pain in my legs increased from early fatigue at 70 miles, to 'I'm not sure that I can continue' fatigue at 85 miles. Time was passing! A short rest was unavoidable. The ferry was near, but I wasn't sure which road. I needed a massage, a coffee and a prayer! The massage was not possible, but I found the coffee, said the prayer and was soon back on the road, refreshed in spirit and somewhat in leg.

Finding the ferry terminal proved too much for me. By the time I realised that, I'd missed my turn and was on the slipway leading down to the A47 dual carriageway. I should have turned back and had another look, but it was just a short stretch on that main road, so I went for it! Down the slip road, over the river bridge and then off into Kings Lynn. This was the most daunting part of the whole trip, and indeed one of the worst stretches of road that I have cycled on. In that few hundred yards all the peace and calm of the whole experience was lost. However, I got across safely, but have never repeated it, always finding either the ferry, or one of the small road bridges in subsequent years.

Sandringham beckoned, and the B & B at Dereham. I had clocked my first 100 mile cycle ride, but did I pay for it in terms of mobility over the next 2 days! Not that my children made any allowance for my aches and pains! I can't remember if I got any sympathy from Sarah!

John Borrajo

TO NORFOLK: 100 MILES OR BUST!

I was given my first road bike for my birthday in September 2000 and started to enjoy getting out into the countryside. It's a wonderful way to explore what is around you. During the Covid-19 lockdown I have missed the freedom that cycling gives. So allow me to reminisce about the first 100 mile trip that I took on my bike.

In October 2001 our family had booked a few days away at a B & B near Dereham, Norfolk, 130 miles from Leicester. That was a lot further than I had ever cycled! But it couldn't be that difficult, could it? Sarah, my wife was willing to grasp the short straw and take the luggage, children etc. in the car and we arranged to meet up at Sandringham for lunch! Some 95 miles from Leicester. This for me was before the days of sat navs and mobile phones; I was navigating by sign posts and maps. It was impractical to take the four Ordnance Survey sheets that covered my route, so I copied relevant sections onto A4 sheets and hoped that they would do.

I thought that eight hours should see me at Sandringham and I was up at 5 and off by 6. It was cold, but I reckoned I would warm up and so would the day. This duly happened! By the time I was near Tilton daylight had arrived. From there to Oakham is a great downhill stretch, then onto an A road to Rutland Water and on to Stamford. 38 miles done, and my breakfast stop had arrived. Café Black on the High Street did a great full English!

Exiting Stamford, I was looking for the Barnack Road going east, and discovered that my maps were not quite as good as I had hoped. Being a man, I didn't want to have to ask someone! Eventually I found it and headed for the Fens. I felt a great sense of liberty as I rode off towards the sun. Passing through Barnack and Helpston, I came into Peakirk, then headed across a stretch that is just flat farm land. I went along small roads with names like English Drove and French Drove, and wondered how the French had been involved when these old rights of way were created between the fields and ditches. It may not be as beautiful as some parts of Britain, but its quietness and emptiness make it special. 50 miles done.

WALKING IN HOPE AND LOVE

Last year, in St James' Church, we created our own Stations of the Resurrection, Stations of Joy. Like Jesus' first followers, women and men, we prayed and walked together throughout Eastertide as 'pilgrims of joy'. This year, our pilgrimage through Eastertide, has been somewhat different, arguably more challenging, not least because of the isolation of social lockdown. We have all felt 'cribbed, cabined and confined,' as William Shakespeare put it.

Shakespeare knew a thing or two about being in lockdown. He was writing Macbeth during the bubonic plague when people were as aware of its dangers as we are of Covid-19. Theatres were closed in 1605, so Shakespeare was writing while self-isolating. He has Macbeth say *'Then comes my fit again: I had else been perfect, whole as the marble, founded as the rock, as broad and general as the casing air. But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears.'*

Sir Walter Raleigh (d.1618) was another who sought to break free of national 'cabining, cribbing and confining'. As well as attacking Spanish galleons, he was involved in 1587 in England's first attempts to establish a colony in the 'New World'. His poem 'The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage' was written just before his execution in 1618.

*Give me my scallop shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gage,
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.*

Another group of people who broke away from Britain's 17th century religious 'lockdown' were the Pilgrim Fathers. This year marks the 400th anniversary of the journey of the Mayflower to the New World in 1620. They were breaking free from the Church of England's stranglehold on religious expression, feeling themselves 'cabinéd, cribbed, confined' by the Act of Uniformity 1559, which made it illegal for people not to attend official Church of England services.

The scallop shell has long been the symbol of the apostle St James. This may have been because, when the remains of the apostle were originally unearthed in Compostella, they were said to be covered in scallop shells. Thereafter the image of the 'scallop shell' became the mark of all pilgrims, hence the imagery in Sir Walter Raleigh's poem.

Contemporary hymn-writers have also used the scallop shell image to symbolise that aspect of Christian living which is pilgrimage. In 2016, Timothy Dudley Smith wrote the hymn 'Look upon us Lord in blessing' which included the verse

*Christ it is who walks beside us,
living Way and Truth divine,
with his open word to guide us
and the scallop-shell as sign:
day or night, dark or bright,
Christ our Love, our Life, our Light.*

To mark the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower from Plymouth to the New World, Andrew Pratt, has written '**A Hymn for Pilgrims**'. It would be a lovely hymn to use in July to celebrate the feast of St James, Birstall's patron saint.
(Possibly to the tune of 'Lord, for the years?')

*A scallop shell the badge of our devotion,
as, travelling on where other steps have led,
we trust in God for all our life's provision,
for love and joy, and for our daily bread.*

*We seek the path wherever Christ may lead us,
held firm by love and grounded in God's grace,
we share companionship with those who join us,
and in each one we meet Christ face to face.*

*The past has witnessed, through our history's pages,
to life-long sacrifice, to faith and praise;
as pilgrims let us vow to future ages
we'll walk in hope and love through all our days.*

Canon Anne

By the outpouring of the Spirit we are given the same Easter Faith as the disciples were given at Pentecost; a Spirit empowering them to overcome the power of the cataclysmic trials and tribulations of their time. For it is this same Spirit-driven Faith, that overcomes our present-day crisis in the midst of this devastating global pandemic.

The sending of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost is the revelation of God's indestructible affirmation of life and His abundant love for us all. In the coming of the Holy Spirit we experience Christ in the world.

The Spirit of Pentecost is thus a living Spirit, who lives in us today. It is by this Spirit that we witness to the global message of hope in God's future, here in our time.

Sheila Roberts
Reader Minister

Reflection: Names for the Holy Spirit

A prayer-meditation for young people

The Holy Spirit is given various names throughout the scriptures, which reveal different aspects of the character and role of the Spirit:

John 14.16 – Advocate, Counsellor or Comforter

1 Peter 4.14 – Spirit of Glory

Romans 1.4 – Spirit of Holiness

Romans 8.15 – Spirit of Sonship

John 14.17 – Spirit of Truth

Isaiah 63.14 – The Spirit who gives rest

John 14.26 – The Spirit who teaches

Looking at each name in turn, spend a few moments thinking about how the Holy Spirit plays that role in your life.

Which is your favourite name for the Holy Spirit?

Which role do you most want the Spirit to play in your life?

Are there other names that you could give the Spirit?

Give thanks to God for all the different ways the Holy Spirit works in your life and the life of the Church.

from Roots on the Web

PENTECOST 2020

The exciting and exhilarating account in Acts 2:1-22 has given me cause to reflect on that first Day of Pentecost and its relational meaning for us on this Pentecost 2020.

The first Pentecost was a launching forth into a new beginning, a new relationship with all God's people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Augustine called it *Dies Natalis*, the birthday of the Christian Church. The significance of this day is that it is Peter, who, standing with the other disciples, filled with the power of the Spirit, gave a truly global message of hope in God's future to all people. Only 50 days prior to this event these disciples had been hiding inside a locked room in fear of those in the outside world who were seeking to do them harm. In their 'lockdown', the Risen Jesus came and stood among them giving words of peace and reassurance.

The Christian theologian, Jurgen Moltmann, in his book *The Source of Life* explains the background to the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples at Pentecost:

'If we look closely at the Easter Faith of Jesus' men and women disciples, they had found a faith that overcomes the world and were not afraid of anything anymore. True Easter Faith is the work of the Spirit. Believing in Christ's resurrection doesn't mean affirming historical fact and saying, 'Oh really?' It means being seized by God's life-giving Spirit and experiencing the 'powers of the world to come'. There is no Pentecost without Easter, that is obvious. But there is no Easter without Pentecost either.'

I believe that we, as Christ's disciples, here in today's Pentecost, should use our time, in our 'lockdown', to engage more deeply with the scriptural reading of our faith in Jesus. For as we wait in lockdown it is important to listen to what God is saying to us amidst the chaos and darkness which surrounds us. For through God's Word we shall find an inner strength in the power of the Spirit, to enable us to emerge at peace within ourselves and with each other.

SOME THINGS THAT MADE ME SMILE

It's not easy under lockdown, separated from family and friends, no church, no going out, but a few things made me humble, made me proud, and made me smile.

Children are painting colourful rainbows,
Proudly display them in their front windows.
Thursday night clapping our front line teams,
Dedicated workers beyond all our dreams.

Meeting with strangers when exercise walking,
And at distances social, standing and talking.
Telephone calls ask, "How are you today?"
Thank you for calling, that's made it OK.

Home-schooling children leaves parents confused,
What is the square on the hypotenuse?
Everywhere's quieter, new sounds are heard,
The goldfinch, the blue tit and the lovely blackbird.

100 years old, Captain Tom Moore,
For the NHS raising millions galore.
Time's less important, no appointments to keep,
Don't even know the day of the week.

**Everything's changed, but one thing is sure,
God is still with us, and we will endure.**

Tony Bloxam



TAKING SPIRITUAL STOCK

We can view the current 'lockdown' either positively or negatively. Is it a time when distractions are removed, or a time when we don't feel pressurised into always being busy, rushing from one activity to the next? Or is it a time of loss, of being prevented from doing things and of meeting physically with others? I have used it as a time to take spiritual stock: to consider where I am, and to ask where I want to be and what I need to do. Should I change, add or remove things from my life so that I may continue to grow spiritually?

The obvious place to start was with my devotional and prayer life. Whilst in training at Cuddesdon, I did a parish placement with the Wooler team in Northumberland. There we met with a hermit who spoke to us about his life and ministry. I decided that to help me get the positives out of this lockdown I would start by seeing it as a time for me to live as a hermit. So my house and garden became my hermitage, and my lounge my hermitary or cell. This pointed to the most obvious of spiritual changes concerning my pattern of daily devotions; I needed to add midday prayers and Compline.

My reflections led me to consider my biggest spiritual loss due to the lockdown – celebrating the Eucharist. When the Church in England split from Rome there was a problem of indulgences, people 'buying their way' into heaven. Wealthy people paid a priest to offer the Mass for them. This was a service they didn't attend but believed it would gain them remission of sins. The only person present was the priest, so, to stop that practice, the Anglican church ruled that, in order for the Eucharist to be a valid celebration, there had to be at least two people present. (I can't imagine anyone thinks these days that paying a priest to say a Eucharist for them will increase their chance of getting into heaven!) That problem has passed, but we still have the remedy in place, despite its no longer being needed. There have always been cases where the ruling hasn't been observed. In monasteries where there are a number of ordained monks, they are allowed to celebrate their own Eucharist, and hermit priests, by definition, must celebrate the Eucharist privately.

A COMMUNITY DEVELOPS

Seven years ago (2nd May 2013) Trish and I moved to Birstall from Mountsorrel. A lot has happened in those seven years, but I would like to focus on how Hallam Fields has developed in that time. When we moved into Chamberlain's Field we were on the edge of our side of the estate. Since then, it has grown tremendously. We were welcomed by two of our immediate neighbours. People were friendly, but there was no meeting place. It was very quiet, and we were able to reassure people in other parts of Birstall that this was a good place to live.

The years passed and still there was no meeting place. The *Nearer* group hoped to be based on the estate, but there was no venue. Then things started to change. *Cedar Mews Care Home* opened and various groups, including *Nearer*, began meeting there. A Children's Nursery opened and some shops. *One Stop* saved us going to Kingsgate Avenue or Sibson Road for newspapers, groceries, flowers, cashpoint and other things. Then a pharmacy and a fish and chip shop appeared. The fourth unit is still empty, although the sign saying that it is to let has come down! A school has been built and is slowly filling up one year at a time. When we first had elections, our polling station was in a caravan on the service area car park by the A 46. Now we vote at the school! Finally, Hallam Fields Hall opened at the start of this year. It had just started being the venue for groups and other activities when we went into lockdown. No doubt this will be a great benefit and will prove a blessing to the estate. *Nearer* has plans for a monthly meeting there.

Covid 19 has suddenly made life very different for all of us. Community cohesion has grown. Five of our neighbours have offered to do shopping for us. And the numbers clapping and banging saucepans etc for the NHS and carers is growing every week.

Hallam Fields is alive and well. May it continue to develop and prosper in the years ahead. We enjoy living here.

Kerry Emmett

THY KINGDOM COME 2020

Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost that more people will come to know Jesus. It is an initiative that has been promoted by our two Archbishops for several years now.



This year, we kept this important ecumenical and global wave of prayer under the challenge of 'lockdown'. The Rev Paula Hunt, Debbie Shephard, Daphne Stevenson and Canon Anne held a Zoom planning meeting for the programme, which was fun, encouraging and mutually supportive. As I write we are looking forward to keeping this important ecumenical

event via Zoom and following the services with the written word. As you read this, we hope you will have been able to participate. There was an opportunity to gather online for Evening Prayer at 9pm each evening from Friday May 22nd until Saturday May 30th. And on Sunday May 24th we enjoyed a *Thy Kingdom Come* service at 10.30 am.

There is still some lovely material on the 'Thy Kingdom Come' website <https://www.thykingdomcome.global>. Click on the resource button on the top line, this will give you the options of several prayer journals. You will also find more information about the movement.

If you know of someone who doesn't have access to the internet and you think they would like printed copies of the prayer journals please let me know. I have several copies of the 2019 one which I could arrange to deliver. Just drop me an email to debbie.shephard54@gmail.com, or call me on 0116 2672630 (please leave a message if I don't answer!)

Debbie Shephard

I therefore decided that I would celebrate the Eucharist. As those of you for whom I have an email address and received an Easter card from me know, I offered up the Eucharist on Easter Sunday, letting my neighbours know that I was, so that they could 'join' me. Before I started the Eucharist, I could hear people in their gardens, then it all went quiet. I immediately thought that they had all gone in. Then, at the end of a prayer, I heard my neighbour Lillian respond 'Amen'. At the end of the service I discovered all three neighbours on my side of the road to whom I had given cards had some members listening in. All thanked me at the end. I have continued to offer up the Eucharist for us all every Sunday in the garden while weather allows.

The other thing I have realised is that I have lost the silence in my life. As a curate I attended the *Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer* meetings at St. John's House. When I became a team vicar, St. John's House closed, and the busy-ness of running a parish pushed out my times of silence. Then I got married and gained three teenage children. Silence stood no chance. I realised last week that I have got in the habit of putting the news on or music. I have now stopped doing that. On the *Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer* website, www.contemplative-prayer.org.uk, I have discovered Bible phrases to use in contemplation each month. Now I need to decide whether I want to go it alone, or gain the support of a community.

When I was a curate, I considered whether I was called to the religious life. I visited three communities; all said they would be pleased to accept me. One community asked me whether I might be called to live the religious life in a parish. I decided to try, but found that, with the responsibility of a parish, it was extremely hard. Now, after considering the Celtic Christian communities, I have decided, for various reasons, they are not for me. As someone drawn also to the English mystics, especially Julian, in whose anchor-hold I have made a point of spending quiet time whenever I have been in Norwich, I need to decide if I feel drawn to membership of the FCP or apply to join the *Companions of Julian*. Please pray for me.

Fr. Michael

THE JOYS OF LOCKDOWN

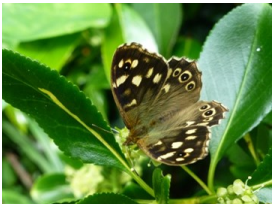
I hate being told what I've got to do if I've not been consulted! It usually makes me resist or want to do the opposite even if I know it's been done with the best of intentions and for my own good. Very childish! So having lockdown restrictions imposed with particular conditions on the over-70s filled me initially with a sense of rebellion and inner rage. I have complied! Although reluctantly.

Now, several weeks later I have discovered unexpected joys in the imposed isolation and restrictions. There is no rushing, no timetables. My 'normal' life is busy with meetings, church duties and preparation for them, leisure activities like singing, Tai Chi and birdwatching, gardening, seeing friends as well as domestic chores. Even though I retired some years ago my life still seems to be dominated by the clock. These last few weeks have been so different.

At first I felt lost and rootless without the familiar routines and the possibility of seeing people face to face. Gradually, however, I have begin to discover or rediscover the joys of enforced leisure. No rushing, so I have been able to sit in the garden enjoying the sun and watching the life around, especially the huge variety of insects. With my daughter's help, I have discovered and identified the enormous number of hoverfly and solitary bee species visiting the flowers. I am enjoying the butterflies; holly blue, speckled wood, brimstone, large white, orange tip.



Marmalade Hoverfly



Speckled Wood Butterfly



Orange Tip Butterfly



Holly Blue butterfly

I must admit that by the end of the day, I was 'churched out'. I admired the architectural and historical value and marvelled at how they were built, but I had no sense of the spiritual or of pilgrimage. We actually had some free time to wander round the town and look around the shops. Of course they were filled with tourist souvenirs. The local people wanted to speak English and find out all about us. They were very friendly, but it became a little intimidating and annoying. We soon made our way back to the hotel.

Day 6

This morning, a highlight of the tour was a visit to witness a service at Bet Giyorgis, the rock-cut church dedicated to St George. As it was the Feast Day of St George, worship started in the very early hours with chanting, hymns and sermons relayed by loudspeaker over the town, and went on until 1pm. It sounded very reminiscent of the Moslem calls from mosques. As I had been up most of the night I felt too weary, thus missing one of the few spiritual experiences on this pilgrimage.

After lunch our third internal flight to Gondar was delayed for a couple of hours. We then had a long minibus journey to our destination, the Simien Mountains Nature Reserve. Noticing that our guide was getting agitated we found out that the Reserve locked the gates at dusk, well before we would arrive later. We were concerned about being locked out and having nowhere to spend the night. After a lot of negotiations, someone was persuaded to unlock the gates when we got there. We picked up a tourist guide and an armed guide with a rather intimidating rifle. As it was pitch black, we missed the spectacular views we'd been promised.

Simien Lodge, where we were staying for the night, is at 10,700ft (3,260m) above sea level, claiming to be the highest hotel in Africa. The temperature drops to freezing at night, so I was very grateful to be given a hot water bottle after the evening meal to take back to my lodge!

To be continued



Again, the Holy of Holies, containing the tabot, was guarded by the 'Guardian' of the church. We carried on visiting the other similar churches in this group, through tunnels, up and down steep staircases. . At one point we climbed up to a very scary ridge to look down on churches. Health and safety is non-existent, there are no hand rails. The shoe boys again came into their own, giving us a helping hand.

Day 5

A 15 minute walk up through a lovely juniper forest, took us to Yemrehana Krestos, a church built inside a cave. This church is built of alternating blocks of wood and white gypsum, giving a similar appearance to the cathedral in Florence. Murals inside are considered the oldest in Ethiopia, but are difficult to see in the darkness.



Lunch was taken at Ben Abeba Restaurant overlooking Lalibela. The design of the building is unique and very different to the historic buildings in the area. The food was wonderful. Eating shepherds' pie overlooking the stunning Ethiopian countryside was quite a surreal experience. The owner is a Scottish lady who had gone to live in Ethiopia and decided to open a restaurant. She delighted in telling us that they had been visited by Ben Fogle and would be featured in his programme *New Lives in the Wild*. Watching that later brought back some wonderful memories. The afternoon was spent visiting the remaining rock-cut churches, again accompanied by the shoe-boys. One was very keen to tell me his life story. How his father was killed in the civil war, how he was working to pay his way through college by training to be a tour guide. His American sponsor had dropped out and he needed to find a new one. Could I help? All I could do was give him a generous tip; I'd gratefully appreciated his assistance.

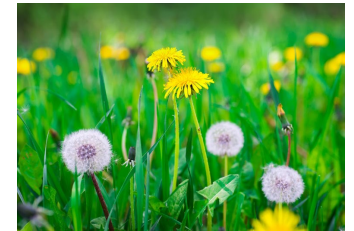
I love watching the birds on the bird feeders as they sort out their pecking order. A pair of long tailed tits. One has a bend in its long tail caused by incubating eggs in a tiny, enclosed nest.



A pair of robins has used one of the nest boxes and the adults are busy feeding their brood. In the early morning there has been no traffic noise. The A6 is virtually silent and I can hear the songs of robins, song thrushes, blackbirds and chaffinches instead.

The verges on the main roads have been left unmown and they have been full of a gold carpet of dandelions and clouds of lacy white cow parsley instead of the regularly mown plain green grass.

We can't visit nurseries or garden centres but I have time to sow seeds, bought long ago but never planted. Tomato seeds, 'sow before 2015' have come up; I shall have tomatoes this year!



I have time to enjoy all these things and more besides. I have been touched by the concern and kindness of neighbours offering help, some of whom I hardly know. I have missed the church community, realising how much I take it for granted now that we can't meet face to face. I am grateful for all the technology we have. It's enabled conversations with friends, ordering things we need online, and even singing together through Zoom meetings. And, one more thing! I have relieved the guilty feelings I have harboured over what food lurks unused in the depths of my chest freezer. I've got time to unearth and use the buried treasure! Nevertheless, I shall be overjoyed if and when life returns to 'normal'. I hope that I may find a better balance in life and time to enjoy some of the things I have rediscovered.

Lesley Walton

‘NEARER’ IN LOCKDOWN

I recently came across an article by N.T. Wright, in *Time* magazine, entitled ‘*Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It’s Not Supposed To.*’ The article suggested that Covid-19 should not be seen as anything like punishment from God but it related the pandemic to lament: *Lament is what happens when people ask ‘Why?’ and don’t get an answer.* ‘It is no part of the Christian vocation to be able to explain what’s happening and why. In fact, it is part of the Christian vocation *not to be able to explain* - and to lament instead. As the Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And, out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope.’

www.time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/

In our small way, *Nearer* has sort of found itself in a period of lament. Like everyone else, *Nearer* is currently unable to meet – and it’s frustrating! Particularly so as an important part of what *Nearer* does is to try to be engaged, in whatever way we can be, with the community. To be involved with people who are not necessarily involved with church.

To this end, at the beginning of the year, we had begun ‘Soul Games.’ Some of us enjoy board games and, over the last few years, there has been a surge in interest in new board games. Meeting monthly we had invited people to join us to play games and talk about issues that may come out of the games (we played the co-operative game, *Pandemic*, when we met in March!). It was going well, 14/15 people coming, most of who had no involvement with church. We were also about to start *Soul Space*, a time for people to take time out to meditate, to spend at least 30 minutes with God, being quiet and reflecting. We had heard of some who were definitely coming.... but we never started – lockdown happened on the Monday of the week we were due to start. *Lament is what happens when people ask ‘Why?’ and don’t get an answer.*

A PILGRIMAGE TO ETHIOPIA

continued

Day 4

We were on the move again, a short 30 minute flight from Axum to Lalibela, So as not to miss an opportunity to cram in another sight, we stopped at some very impressive ruins known to the Ethiopians as ‘The Queen of Sheba’s Palace’ where they suggest she lived during her time in Ethiopia. It is certainly grand enough to be a palace, but as it has been dated to the 7th century AD, any connection to the Queen of Sheba has to be purely legend, but, as we’d heard before, Ethiopians love a good legend.

Lalibela is called the ‘African Jerusalem’, one of the wonders of the modern world. Its rock-cut churches are the highlight of any tour to Ethiopia and did not disappoint. For all Orthodox Christian Ethiopians it is a place of pilgrimage and devotion. The complex of eleven churches was conceived by King Lalibela as the ‘New Jerusalem’ in the 12th Century. He named the stream running through, the Jordan River, and the churches include Bet Golgotha and Bet Lehem. One story states that the whole complex was hewn out overnight by the King Lalibela assisted by angels. I knew about Lalibela and it had been on my list of places to visit. However I was not prepared for the sight before me, looking down into the pit around the first church we visited, Bet Medane Alem (House of the Saviour of the World). It was quite overwhelming (ignoring the unsightly weatherproof covering). Once I’d climbed down some steep steps, its magnitude was even more remarkable. It is a rock hewn monolith standing 11 metres high, dwarfing the people around. It was a monumental feat to carve these churches out of the sandstone rock with the limited tools available. Inside was quite stark and dark, very little light coming through the carved window, the layout inside conforming to previous churches we had visited.



'NOW THAT WE HAVE THE TIME'

'A Christian's eyes ought to be turned inward' wrote Thomas Fuller in 1640, 'yet how many are there whose home ... is to be always abroad.'

Well, here we are, no longer able to be abroad, out of our homes, so we could heed Fuller, as well as George Herbert in his poem 'Content', and turn our hearts and minds, indeed our whole souls inward.

We are all in a virtual spiritual retreat, in the sole presence of God. At 11 am daily, the Archbishop of York has asked us to say 'The Lord's Prayer', so that all the world is united.

The Church Times gave its readers a booklet for Morning and Night Prayer with a collection of intercessions related to coronavirus. A letter in the paper reminded us the Book of Common Prayer suggests that people unable to receive Holy Communion could join in or read the service and receive Communion spiritually instead of physically taking bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ.

God has blessed us with sunshine, a burgeoning springtime and birdsong. Let us rejoice and worship, now that we have the time.

Noreen Talbot

OPPOSITES

When I feel myself weak
God is building my strength.
When I feel low
God is lifting my spirits.
When I stagger with fear
God is cheering me on.
When I feel faint and lost
God is walking beside me.
When I neither see nor hear
God fills me with hope, and speaks.

L.A.H.

So, time to, maybe, lament, is important. Our plans have been thwarted and we miss each other. Others will have many more, much bigger reasons, for lament.

But, God is still working.

When Gill and I were living in the Democratic Republic of Congo we observed how the Congolese did not complain about their situation – and they could have done! 'No', they said, 'this has happened, this is the situation we are in so what can we do to make it better?' So, when there were rebels creating all sorts of problems a short distance to the north of us, a small group, at some risk to themselves, went to find out what was going on. They returned and reported back to the local administration and to the U.N. When the rebellion was over, someone went to live in the region for six months to undertake peace and reconciliation work. Similarly, when a water-hole broke, a group got together and fixed it so that a supply of clean water could resume in that area.

So, what is *Nearer* actually doing now? Well, it's very limited. We are, as are many others, keeping in touch via the phone. Some of us are shopping for each other. One thing we have recently started is a 'Shabbat' service using Zoom video conferencing. So, on a Friday evening, we log onto Zoom and, using a Celtic form of service from the Northumbria Community, we do *Shabbat* together. In *Shabbat* we prepare ourselves for the Sabbath, we give to God our concerns, we pray for the people God brings to mind and we have some bread and wine. If we were physically together we would then eat together but we can't do that so, after catching up, we have our evening meals.

So far we have found this to be a good time of peace and of sensing God's presence together. We look forward to meeting properly again, and, hopefully, re-engaging with those we have already met in *Soul Games* and those we were going to meet in *Soul Space*.

Peter Chester

MUSINGS IN ISOLATION

In order to stay positive I started to think of all those people who help in these very difficult times and came to the conclusion that beyond our families and friends there are an enormous number of people who deserve our thanks for helping us cope. We can all add our own but here are a few thoughts to get us started:

the medics, the pharmacists, the ambulance drivers, the hospital cleaners, the research scientist, the carers.

the farmers, the fishermen, the butchers, the bakers, those who work in the supermarkets, those who deliver the food, the dustmen, the paper boy, maintenance teams keeping the water, electricity and gas flowing, the telephone engineers, those who maintain the vans that deliver the food.

I conclude with a litany from someone who has been a great support to me with numerous 'phone calls and emails.

From uncertainly and anxiety caused by failing to trust in You,

Good Lord, deliver us

From the temptation to be negative in our uncertainly and anxiety, and to lose our faith, **Good Lord, deliver us**

From over concern about ourselves and failing to be concerned for other people at this time, **Good Lord, deliver us**

From the temptation to be angry with God when faced with the suffering and death we see around us, **Good Lord, deliver us**

For failing to take negative situations and concerns to God in prayer, **Good Lord, deliver us**

From allowing the continuing length of lockdown to wear down our positive approach to life, **Good Lord, deliver us**

For failing to bring joy and humour into our conversations and approaches to other people, **Good Lord, deliver us**

Anonymous Parishioner

LOCKDOWN BAKING

No Flour - No worries! Just hope you have some eggs!

Use the egg whites to make a Pavlova, one large one or several smaller ones. Then use any fruit and cream available to fill the centre.

Recipe:

4 egg whites; 8oz caster sugar; 1½ tsp cornflour; 1½ tsp white wine vinegar. Preheat oven to 160° C, Gas 3.

Mark a circle or circles on baking parchment, turn over and line a baking tray.

Whisk egg whites until stiff, then add sugar 1 tsp at a time, whisking constantly. Blend the cornflour and vinegar, whisk into the egg-white mixture. Spread mixture inside your circles, building the sides up so that they are higher than the middle. Place in the oven, immediately reduce the heat to 150°C, Gas 2. Bake for 1 hour or until firm to touch. Turn off the oven and leave the meringue inside for another hour. Peel the lining paper from the meringue and transfer to a serving plate. Leave to cool. Fill with fruit and cream to your liking.

If you are lucky enough to have some flour, make fairy cakes and have some fun decorating them with smiley faces.



If you have a birthday or celebration in the household, instead of being unable to go out for something to eat or drink, why not put on your own afternoon tea.

Anything goes, let your imagination run wild. A welcome glass of fizz tops the event.

Have fun experimenting, keep well and keep safe.

Julie Ward



WE ARE BECOMING AN ECO CHURCH

The Diocese of Leicester
is seeking environmental champions in every deanery

The Parochial Church Council has agreed to our churches in Birstall and Wanlip joining the **ECO Award Scheme**. This is an scheme open to all churches in England and Wales who want to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth.

The scheme is based upon a series of online surveys and supporting resources, which are designed to equip our churches to express our care for God's world in both worship and teaching, in how we look after our buildings and land, in how we engage with our local community, in global campaigns and in the personal lifestyles of members of the congregation.

The actions we take will count towards a prestigious Eco Church Award at Bronze, Silver or Gold level. An initial trial survey for Our Lady and St Nicholas, Wanlip indicates that we very nearly qualify for the Bronze award ! I am working to identify the areas where some 'fine tuning' to what we already do will get us the award. We can then start the process for St James' Church.



WE ARE NOT ALONE
in working to become an ECO Church – the Diocese of Leicester has committed itself to work towards achieving a bronze award in the **Eco Diocese scheme** by 2022. If you would like to become involved in working to get awards for both our churches please contact me.

John Ward

For full details on the Award Scheme see ecochurch.arocha.org.uk

A ROUND TUIT

Two Christmas's ago a very good friend gave me a beautifully turned piece of elm wood, as a present. Said present was given a cursory look. Having admired the tactile nature of the wood, I rewrapped it (an old/odd habit of mine) so that I could have the pleasure of unwrapping it a second time. Then put it back in the bag containing other Christmas presents, to be looked at later. Well, the later eventually came this week, during the current lockdown situation, when I decided it was time to tackle the 'stuff' accumulated in my study (read front bedroom). Not only had I not got round to re-unwrapping several presents from that Christmas two years ago, I had not read the message in the centre of the wooden circle. So here is that message which seems very appropriate at this time when many of us have the time to do things that we have put off until we 'had time to do it'!

Rita Richards

At long last,
we have a sufficient quantity
for each of you to have his own.

GUARD IT WELL!

These Tuits have been hard to come by.
Especially the round ones.

A R O U N D T U I T

This is an indispensable item. It will help you
to become a much more efficient worker.

For years we have heard people say
'I'll do this when I get a round tuit'. Now
that you have a round tuit of your
very own, many things that have
needed to be accomplished
will get done.

KEEPING UP WITH OSCAR

In our Autumn 1919's edition of 'Keeping in Touch' I wrote about ***New Life, New Beginnings, Fresh Prospects***. And I introduced Oscar, our new puppy, to you. I have some up-dates on Oscar's progress. He will be one year old on the 14th May, but I wanted to start by reviewing that title: ***New Life, New Beginnings, Fresh Prospects***.

I can't think of a more appropriate one for current circumstances than this. The Coronavirus has affected our lives in every possible way we can think of, effectively not just putting us into lockdown but briefly switching off the world as we knew it. Enforcing us to stop and look and reflect on the world around us, something our ever increasingly busy lives have prevented us from doing. Clearly there are many, our front line workers, wonderful nurses and doctors, for whom life has done anything but stop, quite the reverse, but for the rest of us this really is a unique opportunity to look at ***New Life, New Beginnings, Fresh Prospects***.

As Christians in these difficult times it is our instinct to turn to our church and church family for prayer and support. With the closure of the church buildings this hasn't been possible, not in the normal way, anyway. We haven't been able to do that but it has certainly encouraged us to really focus on one another and, hopefully, be the disciples that Christ wants us to be. We love our churches but our Christian faith is us, not the buildings. When we can return to our churches and celebrate God's gifts to us, may Jesus's resurrection be reflected truly in our ***New Life, New Beginnings, Fresh Prospects***.

Back to Oscar

Well, what can I say!! Oscar has certainly been a revelation, nothing like any dog I've had before but then, he isn't any other dog, he is Oscar.

Enthusiastic is a word that comes to mind when describing him or, as Andrew would have it, a hooligan!!

Oscar is still scared of his own shadow and any sudden noise can trigger his fiercest barking routine. This is likely to cause a heart attack in Andrew or me as it quite often happens when we are least expecting it and makes us jump out of our skins.

His training is coming along - slowly! But he is getting there. I'm not one to wish my life away (not a good idea at my age) but I do look forward to May 2021 when he will be two years old and, I'm assured, true harmony and understanding will exist between dog and owner.

He does, however, like to lend a hand!!



Here he is helping to dig a few holes in the garden. Not necessarily where we want them but it's the thought that counts!



Oscar also likes to hold hands!

Sometimes he just isn't allowed to, but has to

watch through the bars!



And when it is all too much

and he needs a rest,

a skirting board is a good place to lay his head!

Debbie Shephard