

'KEEP IN TOUCH', Summer 2021

Copy by, but, if possible, before 1st May 2021

All contributions welcome. Maximum preferred length: 500 words!

(If longer, the editor reserves the right to edit!!)

HOPE AND LIGHT

Hope is daring, courageous.

It has the audacity to reach a hand into the darkness and come out with a handful of light. *Sister Stan, an Irish nun*

I BEG TO DIFFER

When you light the lamps in the evening, you say to the darkness 'I beg to differ.' *Anon.*

Quotations shared by Barbara Rhodes

'Keep In Touch'



SPRING 2021

***CHURCH & VILLAGE
BIRSTALL & WANLIP***

KEEPING YOU 'IN TOUCH' IS

Name

Address

Tel. No.

YOU ARE WELCOME TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THEM

THE PARISH OF BIRSTALL AND WANLIP

| | | |
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| No Rector pro tem | Please ring 07570 198810 to speak to a churchwarden, while the parish is in interregnum. | |
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| | Revd Kerry Emmett, 1 Chamberlains Field | 3194736 |
| | 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.

MESSAGE FROM SHERYL

Even though we are now in another National Lockdown, I will remain working in the Church Office on Tuesday and Friday mornings. The weekly Information sheets will still carry on being sent out electronically. If you are not already receiving them, but would like to, email stjames.birstall@btconnect.com, or sheryljupp@hotmail.co.uk, or contact a churchwarden.

You can also access them on the church website (www.birstall.org). Paper copies can be picked up from the little wooden box attached to St James' Church Notice Board.

This Spring edition of the 'Keep in Touch' magazine will be hand delivered to those who usually receive it.

Love

Sheryl

FROM THE REGISTERS

November 2020 - February 2021

Funerals

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 27 Nov | Joseph Matthews | Loughborough Crem. |
| 27 Nov. | Megan Bone | Loughborough Crem. |
| 16 Dec. | Michael McCann | Loughborough Crem. |
| 5 Feb. | Ken Hancock | Loughborough Crem. |
| 9 Feb. | Pamela Dutton | Loughborough Crem. |
| 24 Feb. | Maureen Hardy | St James/L'boro Crem. |

Deaths

| | |
|---------|-----------------|
| 11 Feb. | Dave Alcock |
| 16 Feb. | Barbara Burnham |

A VERY SPECIAL GIFT

Shortly after my first wife Elaine died (over 15 years ago now) a friend gave me a little box covered in floral wrapping paper, tied with a ribbon and a dried flower added. Attached was a note printed over a pink heart which read:



Here is a very special gift
That you can never see
The reason it's so special is
It's just for you from me.
Whenever you are lonely
Or feel a little blue
You only have to hold this gift
To know I think of you.
You never should unwrap it,
Leave the ribbon tied,
Please hold the box close to your heart,
It's filled with love inside.

Yes I know it's soapy and sentimental, but I was very touched by it at the time.

Fr Robin Martin

A NEW BEGINNING

I wonder if you made New Year Resolutions this year, and how soon you may have given them up as just too ambitious.

Churchgoers have two periods every year to take a good hard look at themselves and to aim to redesign their lives: Lent, the five weeks before Easter, and Little Lent, or Advent, the four weeks before Christmas.

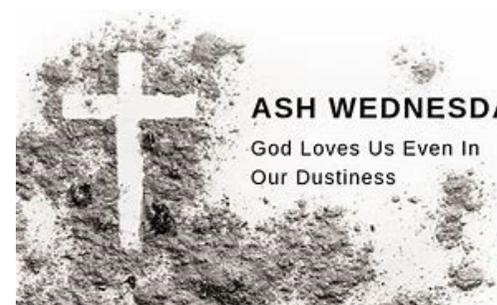
Traditionally, pre-Lent, we clear out all the rich indulgent food from our kitchens on Shrove Tuesday, then go to church the following day, Ash Wednesday, to face up to our many faults and failings. There we are marked with a cross of ashes on our foreheads to show that we are contrite and intend to do better.

Spring is like that too: creation throws off its darkness, long nights, frost and blackness, and bursts into new life: bulbs, shoots, fresh leaves, blooms and blossom; living symbols and memorials of Jesus' resurrection, rising again from his human body to a new spiritual life.

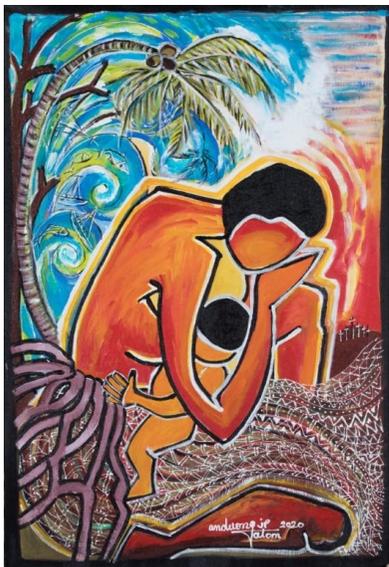
So now is the time to throw off our bad habits, our fears and worries, our sharp words and our miseries. Life is returning with new hope, new resilience, improving health. We'll just keep up last year's new sympathy and helpfulness, our growing into community, and really work towards 'heaven on earth'.

Enjoy the rising temperatures, the brighter blooms and the hopes of this new year. Praise the Lord!

Noreen Talbot



WORLD DAY OF PRAYER



5 MARCH 2021
@ 2 pm

**PREPARED BY THE
CHRISTIAN WOMEN
OF VANUATU**

This year we will be holding our World Day of Prayer service at Birstall on Zoom. Please join with us to share the prayers of the women of Vanuatu and to hear about some of their experiences. Details will be found on the church notice sheets.

Vanuatu is a group of 80 islands in the Pacific Ocean, nearly 2000 miles east of Australia. The total population is small, 312,000. About 25% live in towns, the remainder spread over 65 islands. The Republic of Vanuatu was founded in 1980 and is an independent nation within the Commonwealth.

Vanuatu is a tropical paradise of black and white sandy beaches, coral reefs, diverse birdlife, fruit and nut trees. Yet this paradise can be a dangerous place to live, being prone to earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis and devastating cyclones. The islands are also threatened by rising sea levels and pollution from plastic waste.

This country paradise faces many other problems. With fertile soil there should be food for all, but the introduction of cash crops and cattle is impacting on food production leading to malnutrition.

SPRING FLOWERS

by James Thomson, 1700-48

Along the blushing Borders, bright with Dew,
And in yon mingled Wilderness of Flowers,
Fair-handed Spring unbosoms every Grace:

Throws out the Snow-drop, and the Crocus first;
The Daisy, Primrose, Violet darkly blue,
And Polyanthus of unnumber'd Dyes;
The yellow Wall-Flower, stain'd with iron Brown;
And lavish Stock that scents the Garden round:
From the soft Wing of vernal Breezes shed,
Anemones; Auriculas, enrich'd
With shining Meal o'er all their velvet Leaves;
And full Renunculas, of glowing Red.

Then comes the Tulip-Race, where Beauty plays
Her idle Freaks: from Family diffus'd
To Family, as flies the Father-Dust,
The varied Colours run; and while they break
On the charm'd Eye, th' exulting Florist marks,
With secret Pride, the Wonders of his Hand.

No gradual Bloom is wanting; from the Bud,
First-born of Spring, to Summer's musky Tribes:
Nor Hyacinths, deep-purple'd; nor Jonquils,
Of potent Fragrance; nor Narcissus fair,
As o'er the fabled Fountain hanging still;
Nor broad Carnations; nor gay-spotted Pinks;
Nor, shower'd from every Bush, the Damask-rose:
Infinite Numbers, Delicacies, Smells,
With Hues on Hues Expression cannot paint,
The Breath of Nature, and her endless Bloom.

Submitted by Rita Richards

GOD SAYS 'YES' TO ME

I asked God if it was OK to be melodramatic
And she said yes.
I asked her if it was OK to be short
And she said it sure is.
I asked her if I could wear nail polish or not wear nail polish
And she said 'Honey', she calls me that sometimes.
She said you can do exactly what you want to.
'Thanks God', I said
'And is it even OK if I don't paragraph my letters?'
'Sweetcakes' God said -
Who knows where she picked that up.
'What I'm telling you is
Yes. Yes. Yes.'

Kaylin Haught

The above was shared with your editor by a friend as one of her favourite poems.

GOD SAYS 'YES' TO JULIE



PATIO HOT-TUBBING IN THE SNOW

Malnutrition amongst children is a big concern and is the most common cause of death in the under 5s. The introduction of powdered milk and processed food has helped. In rural areas, access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation are major concerns. Women may have to walk for an hour to find water.

Education is neither free nor compulsory, and in rural areas the school may be a long walk away. Most families can only afford to educate their first born child. Even if children are able to complete primary school, secondary education is only accessible to better off families, and boys are prioritised over girls. However, the gender gap in literacy and education is narrowing. Many young people leave their villages for the towns in search of a better life. They find they lack the educational and vocational skills to find suitable employment. With no money for proper accommodation or food, or enough to return to their villages, they face an unknown future. Urban living and the decline of self-sufficient communities means the gap between the have and have-nots has grown.

The Constitution of Vanuatu provides for gender equality, but this is often not followed through. Women represent 40% of the population, but many work in the subsistence economy and are vulnerable to poverty and other stresses. They have few opportunities to set up businesses due to lack of training and capital. Some determined young women do, however, educate themselves, and acquire skills to enable them to earn a living and provide for their family, often by producing goods to sell. Gender-based violence, however, is a major concern, with 60% of women experiencing physical or sexual violence.

Vanuatu has had only one case of Coronavirus so far, but its economy is suffering. It relies heavily on tourism, but the borders are closed, and there are no visiting cruise ships or flights for foreigners.

Vanuatu was one of the first countries to start to pray on the Day of Prayer. Please join us as we pray with and for them. **If you would like to join the zoom service please email Jackie at birstallwwdp@gmail.com and the link will be forwarded to you.**

Gill Pope

REFLECTIONS ON OUR EVER CHANGING WORLD

There has been much talk about the 'New Normal' over the last year. That's an expression which can be a little bit frightening, indicating as it does that things will never be the same again, and that we'd better get used to it. It implies that our 'Old Normal' was unchanging and constant, and that anything different was unknown and so to be feared.

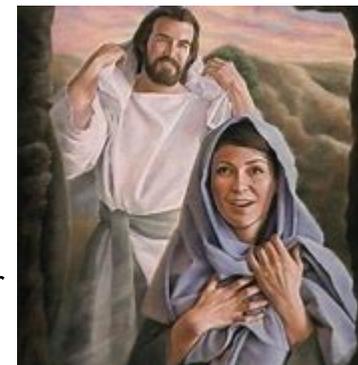
Whilst sorting through some paper work the other day, I came across two extracts from local newspapers which prompted me to reflect on this. The first was the October 15th 1965 Leicester Advertiser and the second from the 29th August 1980 Loughborough Echo. I had kept both because they contained local interest articles. The first included a photograph of my father, George Bate. He was then 45 and in one of the *QT productions.



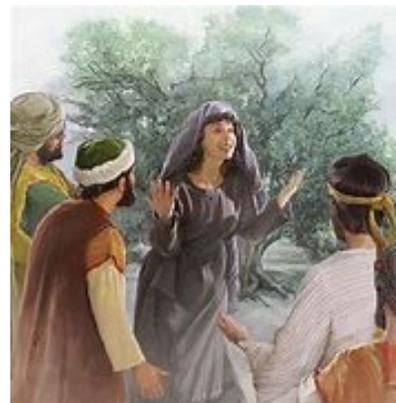
As I re-read these articles, I realized just how much things had changed but yet stayed the same. Human interests remain the same, but approaches and some attitudes have changed quite considerably. Over the years, organizations have closed, closures that must have caused much regret and sadness at the time. Open fields then are now covered in houses - developments which were probably strongly resisted when the projects were proposed. And there have also been general fundamental changes to our lifestyles.

One of the striking differences is that in neither newspaper is there any invitation to 'Visit our Website'!! And even in the 1980 newspaper article (40 short years ago!) there is no mention of mobile phone numbers. Mobile phones, of course, didn't become

Luke went on to describe how Peter and some of the men finally went to the tomb themselves, and found it just as the women had said. Empty. *Luke 24: 13 ff.* Luke's account continues with the story of the walk to Emmaus, and the witness of Cleopas and his friend. And then, eventually, things fell into place for the unbelieving male disciples ... And Jesus appeared to them ... Finally they all seemed to get the message!



And now it's you, at the centre of the labyrinth, reflecting on your own faith experiences. Thinking back to the time when you had a God-encounter. When, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, you bumped smack into God. What did it feel like?



As you walk back out of the labyrinth, reflect on when and with whom you shared your story? Some may not have believed you. Thought you daft, and perhaps a bit inebriated. A few though, perhaps reluctantly, did. What did that feel like? Did you doubt your experience? Or were you just happy

to relive the reality of your experience? Did you have the courage to share it? What does that feel like now? Pray for the people with whom you shared your story.

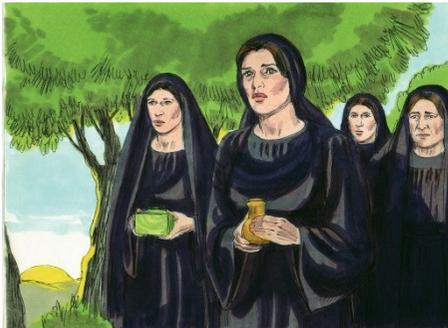
As you continue back from the centre of the labyrinth, reflect on your ongoing calling to witness to your experience of God. Thank God that He is responsible for the rest. He does the convincing. But draw strength from Mary Magdalene, who, at first, was ridiculed and dismissed. And praise God who turns the world upside down, and does it with the lowly and the least likely. Even with you and with me.

Canon Anne

FOR REFLECTION AS YOU WALK

As you stand at the entrance to the labyrinth, read the gospel passage several times. Now put yourself in the place of the women. What were they feeling like? It was two days after Jesus' crucifixion and burial. They couldn't have had much sleep. But there was one thing they had to do. They had to gather together the spices and oils they needed to complete the proper burial ritual, then take them to the tomb.

It would have been still dark when Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna and the other women who had travelled with Jesus from Galilee got up and made their preparations. Then, at first light they made their way to the tomb. They hurried through the streets. By the time they reached the hills where the tombs were, morning was already beginning to chase away the darkness. As they came up to Jesus' tomb, they saw the stone that should have covered the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. They went into the tomb. It was empty. Jesus' body was gone. They can't have known what to think.



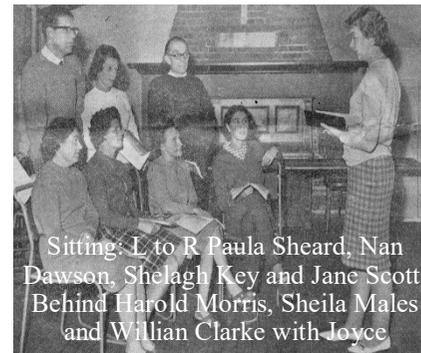
Suddenly they were aware that they were not alone. Two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified. The men spoke to them. 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.'

'Remember what he told you, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Remembering that, they rushed back to the city and the other disciples and told their story. But the men didn't believe them. 'An idle tale,' they said.

mainstream until the mid 1980s, and websites not until the mid 1990s, with the latter only generally and freely used in the last ten years or so.

We change and adapt in church too. We have not been short of changes over the last year or so, starting with Vince leaving at the beginning of December 2019 and the many ways we have had to learn, change and adapt to the restrictions imposed upon us by the pandemic. But change and adapt we have!! We 'Zoom' services and record others which are put on 'Facebook' and 'Youtube'. When we haven't been able to meet in person we continue the church business by 'Zoom'. All these things have been useful tools and stimulated our learning curves, but, of course, will never be a substitute for meeting and worshipping together, face to face. As we get back to being able to do that we will use these other methods less for that purpose but, I'm sure, will find whole new ways to use them in our church life and in spreading God's Word. A good example of 'staying the same whilst changing'.

Our churches are now looking to the future. The advertisement for a new Rector has gone into the Church Times, so, by the time you are reading this we will be (hopefully) preparing to interview candidates with the hope of appointing a new rector who might even be with us by the summer. The various anti-Covid vaccines will continue to be rolled out and, bit by bit, we will move forward into our 'new normal' which, as always, will be a comforting mixture of old and new.



Sitting: L to R Paula Sheard, Nan Dawson, Shelagh Key and Jane Scott. Behind Harold Morris, Sheila Males and William Clarke with Joyce

I leave you with one of the other photos from the 1965 newspaper.

Debbie Shephard

REASONS TO HOPE

A wet winter, Lockdown again, so no meeting of friends or gathering as a community, restricted access to entertainment and shops, we may only meet the people in our bubble, no going on holiday here or abroad, no travelling except locally, Christmas virtually cancelled and churches closed again. Many have lost jobs and there are other restrictions on our lives. 'Brain fog' is one result. We are social creatures made to live in community, which is why so many of us have found all this so difficult. I've found it hard because I enjoy singing with other people and doing Tai Chi. I love being able to go birdwatching and I enjoy the countryside. The earlier lockdowns were easier because I could enjoy the garden and the lovely weather.

But amidst all this there have been good things: phone calls from friends, offers of help, Zoom meetings, the support of the people in my bubble, and now, signs of the coming Spring. In the countryside there are catkins on the hazel bushes, and, on Watermead Park, drake mallards have moulted into their breeding plumage.



In my garden, birds are beginning to pair up as they get ready for the breeding season. The robin, blackbird and a song thrush are singing. Amongst the various birds that have come to the feeders, I've had a pair of long-tailed tits. They breed very early and will soon be off in search of a thorny shrub in which to build their

nest. Two robins are pairing up and a pair of blackbirds is driving off all the others that visit. Blue tits are investigating my nest boxes.

I'm usually irritated by the woodpigeons that Hoover up the food I put down, but this year I've appreciated their subtle plumage and soft calls. Having time to refrain from instant judgment has been one of the good things to come from the lockdown.



AN EASTER LABYRINTH WALK

As you know, we have a labyrinth in the walled garden of St James' Church. Something you may like to do during Eastertide is to walk our labyrinth in the company of the risen Jesus and alongside one of his disciples. I feel most at ease walking with Mary Magdalene. Some of you may feel more at home walking with Simon Peter and 'the other disciple'.

The following meditation, inspired by the book 'A Labyrinth Year' by Richard Kautz, may help you walk our labyrinth with Mary. (The book also includes suggestions for walking with other biblical characters.) The first thing to do, as you prepare to walk, is to read the bible passages several times. (Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-12) It may help to take the passages with you as you walk.

ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE, chapter 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.

Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

A SIMPLE LIFE

As members of the Mothers' Union we are encouraged to pray, support families and children in whatever way we can, even though, during this unprecedented time, we are unable to go out to socialise or physically welcome people into our homes. There are many other ways to keep in touch, and to reach out and touch lives.

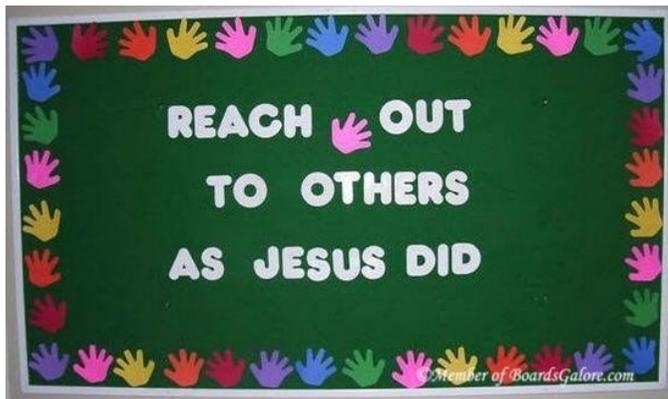
A simple life is all I ask that God will grant this day.
Just enough to meet my need, and some to give away.
Just enough, and some to share with those whose bowl is empty.
Compared with many in this world I know that I have plenty.

I'm grateful for the things I have, I have no need for more.
I pray my heart will always be an ever-open door,
to welcome friends and strangers that I meet along life's way.
And as I do, I'm sure that I will meet with Christ each day.

For I am certain beyond doubt that I am rich indeed.
For Jesus gives me joy and peace and everything I need.

*Margaret Shoemark, Stafford St. Paul's, Mothers' Union UK
Taken from 'Dear Lord ..' A collection of prayers and poems from MU
members across the world.*

Rita Richards



The bushes and climbers that flower early in the year have not suffered from frost so look really lovely. The scented ones such as winter honeysuckle, sarcococcus, the false box, viburnum bodnantense and clematis naupalensis are all in flower.

The honeysuckle is important as a source of nectar for wild queen bees.

Spring bulbs are pushing through the earth and snowdrops are flowering.

There is always something new to see and the days are beginning to draw out. These things happen every year, but somehow they have meant more this time. There is always something to look at to cheer me up.



Out in the wider world, the hope of restrictions being eased is being offered by the progress in vaccination against the coronavirus; many in our community have already been invited to have it.

An added bonus for the needle-phobic is that it was absolutely painless!

So there are signs of hope and reasons to be thankful even on dark days, and even when we don't feel it!

I know that whatever happens God is always with me. We do have reason for hope and things for which to be thankful.

Lesley Walton

LENT COURSE 2021

This year, as we are unable to meet in person for our usual Lent study groups, the parish's four 'permission to officiate' priests have created a Lent Course especially for Birstall and Wanlip. The sessions are based on the gospel readings for the first four Sundays in Lent 2021. Fr Robin Martin offers you Part 1, Fr Michael Webb Part 2, the Revd Kerry Emmett Part 3, and Canon Anne part 4. We all hope that you will find using them both helpful and unifying.

LENT I

FIND OUT, TELL IT, STOP IT

Gospel Reading for Today

Mark 1: 9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

The Good News about Jesus according to Saint Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. St Mark's was probably the first completed Gospel story, based both on the stories he received from St Peter, and another earlier text known as 'Q'. It is possible that some of Matthew's 'words of the Saviour' may have been written down earlier, which may account for the gospel we know as Matthew's being placed first in the New Testament. Both Matthew and Luke rely very heavily on Mark. Matthew and Luke also have 200 to 250 verses in common from another source.

NEW EVERY MORNING

This morning the words of 'New Every Morning' came into my mind and I sat at the piano and played it.

I wondered if we might print the words in the next issue of *Keep in Touch*.

I think that they relate to our present situation.

New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life and power and thought.

New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If, on our daily course, our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

The trivial round, the common task,
Will furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love,
Fit us for perfect rest above,
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

All good wishes for the year ahead.

Cynthia Coltman.

MARTHA STEWART'S FAIL-SAFE PANCAKES



It's that time of year for using up the rich ingredients from your store cupboard. Hopefully the weather is starting to pick up and lift people's spirits. The spring flowers are blooming and the birds are singing. The garden needs sorting out again, but what is better than being in the kitchen in the warmth, making and eating hot pancakes! Make mine one with fresh lemon and sugar. Enjoy yours

whatever way takes your fancy. This recipe makes 8 pancakes

Prepare: 5 mins, plus resting. Cook : 20 mins.

INGREDIENTS AND METHOD

100 gms plain flour, 2 eggs, 300 ml milk, unsalted butter for frying,

Put the flour, eggs and a little of the milk in a large bowl and whisk together until smooth. Gradually whisk in the remaining milk to make a runny batter. Cover and set aside until ready to use (ideally chill it overnight). Or cook straight away.

Put a large non-stick frying pan over a medium heat. Test the pan by ladling in a very small amount of batter. It should take 1 minute to brown on the bottom. If it browns too quickly, lower the temperature slightly. Raise the temperature if it cooks too slowly and becomes rubbery. Discard (or eat) the test pancake.

When the pan is at the right temperature, add a small knob of butter followed by a ladleful of batter. Swirl the pan to coat the base, then leave the pancake to cook for 1 minute. Flip and repeat on the other side, or until cooked through. Keep the cooked pancakes warm in a low oven while you fry the rest. Top or fill as you like!

Julie Ward

Matthew and Luke also have passages that are not in the other three gospels. St. John's Gospel is in many ways quite different, though there are passages, like the Holy Week event, that are in all four. It can often help our understanding, with some passages in particular, if we bear in mind the possible community for which the gospel was primarily intended.

In our Common Worship lectionary, on the first Sunday of Lent we are given the story of 'The Temptations of Christ' from Matthew, Mark and Luke in the three lectionary years A, B and C consecutively. The old 1662 Book of Common Prayer began Lent with just St Matthew's account.

St Mark simply says that 'the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness, and for forty days he was tempted by Satan.' St Matthew and St Luke flesh it out with three types of temptation (Matt. 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13). These are figuratively: stones into bread : the pinnacle of the temple : worship Satan. You may like to read all three accounts, and spot the differences.

QUESTIONS

Can you think of reasons why Mark does not include the temptation examples?

Can you think of reasons Luke reverses the order of the last two temptations compared to Matthew?

What kind or type of temptation is suggested by the three in Matthew and Luke?

Do you think Jesus was tempted at other times during his ministry? C.f. Mark 8: 33

Which temptation might be your own failing?

OWNING UP

A friend years ago told me about making a prayerful self-examination before Confession, whether totally private: general, as in the liturgy; or in the presence of another Christian (also a sinner) who may be able to offer advice and suggest an act of penance, and, if a priest, pronounce forgiveness in the name of Christ.

My friend summarised that process as **Find out, Tell it, Stop it.**

Fr Robin Martin

LENT 2

'INDEED NOTHING SHOULD BE PREFERRED TO THE OPUS DEI'

Rule of Saint Benedict 43:3

Gospel Reading for Today

Mark 8: 31-38.

Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, Jesus rebuked Peter, and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

REFLECTION

This passage follows on from Peter's profession that he believes Jesus is the Christ. Jesus prophesies his own suffering, rejection and death. Peter rebukes Jesus for what he has said, but Jesus in turn rebukes Peter. Jesus goes on to teach that, in order to be his disciple, we must be willing to take up our cross and follow him. And that in order to gain life, we must be willing to lose our lives for Christ.

St Mark's gospel was written during or just after the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Nero.

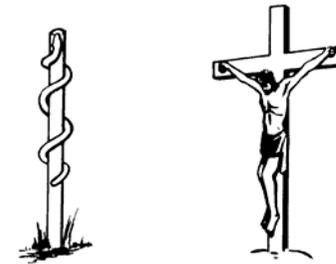
WHAT TO DO

Read both bible passages in various bibles. The Message Bible in particular is good for making us stop and think. (If not on your shelves, you can access on line...)

Reflect on the two scriptural images, the serpent and Christ's cross. Jot down your reflections.

Think about leadership .. not just Moses and Jesus ... but contemporary leaders too. Political as well as religious! Compare and contrast! Does your faith influence your politics, or vice versa?

Reflect on the life of the church. Have a look at our parish's 'vision statement' (at the top of the weekly sheet). In the light of that statement, pray for those who will be involved in appointing our next Rector.



PRAY THE COLLECTS FOR LENT 4

Merciful Lord, absolve your people from their offences, that through your bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins which by our frailty we have committed; grant this, heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour.

Merciful Lord, you know our struggle to serve you: when sin spoils our lives and overshadows our hearts, come to our aid and turn us back to you again; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Canon Anne

LENT 4

Part 4. SNAKES, CROSSES AND LEADERSHIP

Bible Readings for Today:

Numbers 21: 4-9

The Israelites set out from Mount Hor along the Red Sea Road, a detour around the land of Edom. The people became irritable and cross as they travelled. They spoke out against God and Moses: 'Why did you drag us out of Egypt to die in this godforsaken country? No decent food; no water—we can't stomach this stuff any longer.' So God sent poisonous snakes among the people; they bit them and many in Israel died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We sinned when we spoke out against God and you. Pray to God; ask him to take these snakes from us.' Moses prayed for the people. God said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it on a flagpole: whoever is bitten and looks at it will live.' So Moses made a snake of fiery copper and put it on the top of a flagpole. Anyone bitten by a snake who then looked at the copper snake lived. (*Message Bible*)

John 3: 14-21

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (*New Revised Standard Version*)

This was at a time when Christians were put to death in the most gruesome of ways. So death for their faith was a real possibility. Today very few of us are called to really suffer for our faith, so what does the Gospel passage ask of us? Well the cross was, along with his teaching, the reason for Jesus' existence. It was his *Opus Dei*. Which translates as God's work, or the work of God. Peter was thinking like Satan because he was tempting Jesus to refuse to carry out the work God asked of him. And, as St. Benedict said, we should prefer nothing to the *Opus Dei*, to God's work, since to refuse to do God's work is to refuse to do the will of God, and that is the definition of sin.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

What is your *Opus Dei*?

What 'work of God' are you called to do?

1. Has anyone suggested you should do something that you felt you couldn't and so you treated it as a joke?
2. List everything you are good at, e.g. communicating, teaching, leadership, praying. Be honest with yourself.
3. List things that others have suggested you would be good at. If you are feeling brave, ask your family and friends.
4. Have you ever had a niggling voice at the back of your mind telling you to do something for God – God's call? If not, try to listen for it as you go about your business.
5. If you do hear God's niggling voice, or you want to pursue the idea that God is calling you to your *Opus Dei*, talk to someone about it.

COLLECT FOR THE DAY

Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same. Amen.

Fr Michael Webb

LENT 3

OPEN HOUSE

Gospel Reading for Today

John 2: 13-22 (The Message Bible)

When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus travelled up to Jerusalem. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength.

Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, 'Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a shopping mall!' That's when his disciples remembered the Scripture, 'Zeal for your house consumes me.' But the Jews were upset. They asked, 'What credentials can you present to justify this?' Jesus answered, 'Tear down this Temple and in three days I will put it back together.'

They were indignant: 'It took forty six years to build this Temple and you're going to rebuild it in three days?' But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. Later, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this. They then put two and two together and believed both what was written in Scripture and what Jesus had said.

WHAT TO DO

Read the gospel passage above several times, and in other bible translations. In John's Gospel this episode of the cleansing of the Temple occurs after Jesus' first miracle, turning Water into Wine. In the other three Gospels it occurs after the events of Palm Sunday. (Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48)

Jesus was angry that the only Court of the Temple where all pilgrims could gather had been turned into a dishonest market place. Only Jews were allowed into other parts of the Temple.

Animals brought from outside the Temple precincts were considered sub-standard, and had to be replaced at inflated prices. Roman coins were not acceptable as Temple tax, and these had to be replaced at high exchange rates. No wonder Jesus was so angry.

The quotation: 'Zeal for your house consumes me' comes from Psalm 69:9.

Also in the thoughts of Jesus was probably Jeremiah 7:11, 'Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?'

You might like to look these references up.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

What barriers do we put up to people wanting to worship?

In what ways do we make it more difficult for those from different races and social groupings etc. to worship with us?

In what ways might our liturgy be a barrier to others? Are we open to modern worship songs and instrumentalists as well as organ accompaniment?

Do people feel they can't attend worship because they've nothing to put on the offertory plate?

Streamed services have been popular during lockdown. They have attracted many who don't 'come to church'.

There are those who find it more convenient to watch the service at home.

How do you feel about this? Should it continue after lockdown?

Jesus spoke about his death and resurrection in a coded way at the end of our passage. He offers eternal life to all who believe and trust in him.

How can WE share this message and make our church more 'open to all' - making it **GOD'S OPEN HOUSE?**

Kerry Emmett