



**The Chapels Royal of St Peter ad Vincula and St John the Evangelist
HM Tower of London**

Dear friends,

We are roughly halfway through Lent. On Sunday 03 March we had our third Lenten Lunch of soup, bread and cheese in the Chapel. These lunches have been well attended and have provided valuable opportunities for members of the congregation to get to know each other better in a relaxed setting. On that day we also welcomed to our lunch the third of our series of women preachers in Lent, telling us about women who have made special contributions to theological thinking and to the life of the Church. On this occasion the Reverend Prebendary Dr Isabelle Hamley took as her subject the Dutch woman Corrie ten Boom who stands as a shining example of good in dark times. A number of those who were present had not previously heard of Corrie ten Boom and asked if it might be possible to have a copy of Isabelle's sermon. She has kindly agreed, and it appears in full at the end of this newsletter.



With warm greetings, Cortland.



Easter Flowers

As in previous years, we are collecting money for Easter Flowers.

If you would like to donate towards the flowers, please bring either cash or a cheque with you on Sunday, or you can send a cheque to me at the address at the end of the newsletter.

Flowers are often given in memory of people who have died, and these names will be remembered at Easter.

Thank you.

Sunday Service Details 10th March 2024

The Fourth Sunday in Lent – Mothering Sunday

0915 Said Holy Communion, Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula

1100 Choral Matins, Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula

Readings

1 Samuel 1:20-end

John 19:25b-27

Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we,
who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished,
by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Poem of the week

Here is another poem by John Clare (1793–1864), the son of a poor farm labourer, who was commonly known in his time as ‘The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet’ for his celebrations of the English countryside and his sorrow at its disruption by the industrial revolution. His childhood was marked by deprivation, and the consequent malnutrition may have both stunted his physical growth and led later to chronic ill-health. His declining years were marked by mental instability: for example, he believed himself to be both William Shakespeare and Lord Byron. He was fortunate to find asylum in a relatively humane institution (by the standards of its day), where he finally died of a stroke, aged 71.

Back in July last year, I chose Clare’s poem ‘Summer’, while in October we had ‘Autumn’. Now that the Meteorological Office tells us that 01 March marks the official beginning of spring, it seems appropriate to look at another of John Clare’s poems – ‘Early Spring’. (On reading this poem, you may wonder about the meaning of ‘patty kay’. I wish I knew. Clearly it is some kind of flower, but I have not been able to discover more. If you know, do tell!)

Early Spring

The Spring is come, and Spring flowers coming too,
The crocus, patty kay, the rich hearts' ease;
The polyanthus peeps with blebs of dew,
And daisy flowers; the buds swell on the trees;
While o'er the odd flowers swim grandfather bees
In the old homestead rests the cottage cow;
The dogs sit on their haunches near the pail,
The least one to the stranger growls "bow wow,"
Then hurries to the door and cocks his tail,
To know the unfinished bone; the placid cow
Looks o'er the gate; the thresher's lumping flail
Is all the noise the spring encounters now.

John Clare (1793–1864)

**‘Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross’
performed by the London Haydn Quartet**

Tuesday 26th March 2024, 7pm

One of the world’s leading period instrument string quartets, The London Haydn Quartet was born out of a passion for Haydn. They have received invitations to many of the world's most important concert series and venues, including the Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall and Sydney Opera House. Their complete series of recordings of Haydn’s quartets on the Hyperion label have met with international critical acclaim.

Haydn's ‘Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross’ is one of his most enduring works. Originally an orchestral work commissioned for Good Friday, this popular transcription for string quartet was made by Haydn himself. Following the recent release of the London Haydn Quartet's recording of the work, the Tower of London presents them live in concert at the Chapel Royal of St. Peter ad Vincula.

Tickets available at – https://tickets.hrp.org.uk/hrp_b2c/palace.html?eventcode=TLCHAP



Historic Royal Palaces

YW Barney Chandler takes on the iconic role of Ravenmaster with the ultimate responsibility...the fate of the Kingdom! Barney will take over the role from YW Chris Skaife who has cared brilliantly for the Tower ravens for 14 years.



Jigsaw

This week's jigsaw brings you a view of the White Tower in the sunshine.

<https://www.jigsawplanet.com/?rc=play&pid=06edob30d365>



Prayers

Please continue to remember those on our sick list, some of whom are very ill, amongst whom we name: Norma, Ann, Ros, Mark, Dan, Ian, Patti, Florence and Kofi.

RIP

Bill Hanbury, Graham Matthews, Alexei Navalny and Christopher Hardy.

Please continue to pray for Ukraine, Israel and Palestine:

God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine, Israel and Palestine today.

We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons.

We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow,
that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them.

We pray for those with power over war or peace,
for wisdom, discernment, and compassion to guide their decisions.

Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear,
that you would hold and protect them.

We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of peace. Amen.

With best wishes to all,

Cortland.



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**Sermon preached in the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula, HM Tower of London,
on Sunday 03 March 2024 by the Reverend Prebendary Dr Isabelle Hamley.**

A few months ago, I had the privilege of being invited to join a trip to Poland organised by the Council of Christians and Jews. We spent time with the Jewish community there, we explored the vitality of Jewish life before the Second World War, and we visited Holocaust sites – the Warsaw Ghetto, The Krakow ghetto, Łódź railway station, and Auschwitz. At the same time, Israel was in the first week of responding to attacks on its people, and Palestinians were dying by the thousands. They have been on my mind since, as are the many conflicts around our planet today, and the willingness of one group of people to attack another simply for their nationality, ethnicity or culture.

And as I watch the news, I wonder, what do we do? What can we do? How do we think about this as Christian people and as citizens of the world?

I don't have an easy answer. But as I was asked today to talk about a Christian woman to think about in Lent, it felt apposite to think about a 20th century saint, Corrie ten Boom. You may not have heard of her. She has not left extensive writings, though her book *The Hiding Place* has been a best seller for decades. Corrie ten Boom was in many ways just a normal person. She was a Dutch woman. She never married and lived with her father and unmarried sister in their house in Haarlem, in the Netherlands. Her family had a deep faith and they believed in helping any who needed it. For years they ran a youth club and distributed food and aid. They were watchmakers by trade.

When the Second World War hit and Holland was invaded by the Nazis, they found themselves giving shelter to Jews – because they needed it. They started small, but soon had a significant underground operation running, whereby Jews stayed with them for a few days, and were smuggled to safer places. Some practical friends designed a shelter (the hiding place) in case of a Nazi raid. Sadly, one came all too soon, following the betrayal of an acquaintance. Their Jewish refugees were safe, but Corrie, her sister Betsie and her father were taken away. Her father died in prison. Corrie and Betsie were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where Betsie also died.

The Hiding Place is the book Corrie wrote later. She speaks of their life and faith in the camp, of worship and prayer in the midst of utter darkness, of the conflicting emotions within her and the fear and pain that were their constant companions. And yet her writing is full of joy and hope. As I visited the barracks where prisoners were kept in Auschwitz a few months back, I was reminded of a passage in the book. Betsie, Corrie's sister, drove her a little mad by constantly trying to find something to be thankful to God for. What on earth can you be thankful for in a place like that? Well, Betsie found the most incredible answer to that question. Guards were brutal, sadistic even. But guards hardly ever came inside the women's barrack. When Betsie realised why, this was her reason for thanks for that day. It was fleas. The barrack was so full of parasites, they stayed away. And their staying away kept the women safe.

Betsie did not survive. A short time after her death, a clerical error led to Corrie's release. After the war, she established a rehabilitation centre for those who had survived concentration camps. And she started speaking, and sharing her faith, with a growing international ministry. Later on, she was recognised as a 'Righteous among the Nations' by Yad Vashem, for helping save the lives of 800 Jewish people.

Her story is inspiring. But what I cherish the most about the story - and her writing - is the sense of simplicity, of groundedness and of ordinariness of it all. She never makes out that they were extraordinary people. They just tried to do the right thing, one thing at a time. They were alert to what was going on around them; they were open to God speaking; their imagination and understanding of life were shaped by Christian values of justice, care and kindness. But mostly, they responded to the needs of those they met. It makes me wonder, what kind of practices, of habits, do we need in our own lives, so that we can see what is going on, know what a Christian response might be, and be ready to act on it?

In many ways Corrie ten Boom was a prophet: she read the signs of the time, she stood for what was right and true, and did not flinch. Being a prophet is always a dangerous thing: it makes people uncomfortable, whether it's through words, or through actions. Corrie ten Boom's actions shed light on the evil that was going on around her. Her actions also proclaimed the truth: the truth that every life is valued by God, and that every person should be treated with dignity. This was true of Jewish persons, but she also spoke up for those with disabilities - in particular learning disabilities - whom the Nazis were also persecuting and designating as less than human.

Corrie ten Boom's faith was integrated: there was seamless back and forth movement between beliefs and actions, between spirituality and way of life. And this was rooted in living out the faith that had shaped her - faith such as we read about this morning: the Ten Commandments, with commands not to kill, which Jesus later expands on, in the Sermon on the Mount, as a foundational way in which we regard the other as a person who should be cherished and respected. And this is where it gets hard. Because Corrie ten Boom knew that the dignity of the human person, and the commandment to love our neighbour is absolute - there are no exceptions.

Perhaps the most moving story she tells in her book is this one:

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, a former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbrück. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there - the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraülein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? "Lord Jesus," I prayed, "forgive me and help me to forgive him." I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. "Jesus," I prayed, "I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness."

As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder, along my arm and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

There is little to say beyond this story. Forgiveness lies at the very heart of Christianity, and forgiveness is cross-shaped. Forgiveness is costly - and the cost is unimaginable in this story. I do not know how Corrie ten Boom did it. I think there is much in our current culture that would say she shouldn't have forgiven - much of our current culture is about cancelling and punishing those we disagree with, let alone those who have hurt us. But the faith that gave Corrie and Betsie strength and shelter in one of the most atrocious circumstances of the last century is a faith that does not give us the option to cancel or annihilate the other: the only way forward, as we look to Easter and we see the Cross, is to offer costly, transforming, life-changing forgiveness, so that all people, with no exception, can become part of something different, a different world, a different life, a different way being.

Corrie ten Boom was realistic. She did not pretend it was ever easy. She practised her faith, and did not simply wait to feel able to do so. She reflected on forgiveness at other times and said, "Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart." The call is hard but, ultimately, her entire life speaks of hope and promise: the promise that God himself is our hiding place, and that God is, and always will be, stronger than whatever we face. She relied on that promise of God to guide her in uncertain times. As she herself said, "*Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.*"

Amen.