

The Magazine

Feb. & March 2021



LENT



www.callingtoncluster.org.uk

As I write we are coming out of the dark days of winter into the lighter days of spring. We are looking forward to better times due to the roll out of the Covid 19 vaccines. We have endured a third lockdown and you probably like me are longing to escape the restrictions placed upon us. But, of course, at the present time this is necessary for our own good and wellbeing - especially for those in the NHS who have gone above and beyond the call of duty.

We all know the mantra 'Stay home, Protect the NHS, Save lives'. We have been encouraged to do this, to be responsible in our actions, for the sake of others as well as ourselves. We have been asked to examine ourselves as to whether certain actions are necessary or not. We have seen that selfish actions by a few in flouting the law are likely to put lives at risk. If everyone were to abide by the guidelines then life would be a lot more straight forward.

The Coronavirus pandemic has been a time of soul searching for many, for communities, for nations and indeed the whole world. People have been re-evaluating their lives and lifestyle in the light of the consequences of this pandemic. Some have elected to make certain changes as to how they treat others and the environment. It has been a time of self-awareness and continues to prompt people in questioning many aspects of life.

Every year Christians go through a period of self-assessment during Lent. It is a time which can be less than easy for most of us as we take a closer look at ourselves. It is a period which gives us an opportunity to put things right in our lives so that we can live in accordance with Christian values. No one is perfect, we can all make mistakes. However all is not lost, our God is a merciful God and will forgive us when we truly repent. The Cross of Christ is a symbol of God's mercy and unconditional love. This is highlighted by those words of Jesus which he uttered on the Cross: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

“NO ONE IS PERFECT, WE CAN ALL MAKE MISTAKES. HOWEVER ALL IS NOT LOST, OUR GOD IS A MERCIFUL GOD AND WILL FORGIVE US WHEN WE TRULY REPENT. THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS A SYMBOL OF GOD’S MERCY AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.”



We are living in extremely difficult times, Jesus when he was on earth warned people about the difficulties that they would face: "You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of the birth-pains"(Matthew 24 v 6 - 8). Perhaps this current pandemic is part of all this!

Yes, life is a struggle at times, but we are not left to struggle on our own. We have someone to whom we can turn, someone who has experienced the reality of human life, someone who has known the joys and sorrows of life - Jesus Christ, God incarnate. God has given us hope in Jesus his Son. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah also reminds us of the hope we can have in the Lord when he said: "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 4 v 31).

The time will come when those who have been wearied by this present pandemic will get their strength back. We will pass through that tunnel of darkness and enter into the light of a new dawn. Lent gives way to Easter, to a time of joy and hope. May we benefit from self-examination in the light of our Lord's teaching and become more effective witnesses for Jesus. Let us encourage one another in these trying times and bring hope to a needy world.

Every blessing,

Robert

THOSE WHO HOPE
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THEY WILL RUN
AND NOT GROW
WEARY, THEY WILL
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- ISAIAH 40:31 -



Back in the February 2020 'Ponder Anew' I wrote about transitions and our expectations of the new decade of the 20's. Little did I know at the time that, within a few weeks, the new decade would start with a global pandemic which many are forecasting will result in the transition to a 'New Normal'. As I sit down to draft this article the day after the institution of our new rector Joe, the message of Bishop Hugh is still fresh in my mind which echoed some of the thoughts I have been pondering prior to writing.

Several points struck me from the Bishop's address, although I did cheat and play his message back - one of the advantages of it being on YouTube! What he said included: 'Now is a good opportunity to stop and reflect, God is with us now. There is plenty to discover and explore right now and that is important as we have a unique opportunity in front of us. It has been said that when we eventually emerge from this pandemic every church is going to be a 'church plant'. Church will be reset and need to rethink what it is called to, called to be and called to do.' The Bishop went on to refer to the reading from Romans 15 commenting that, 'for Paul, Jesus was the beginning, middle and end of everything. As we dream, reflect, discern and pray about what that means for us under the leadership of our Rector, Joe, we should pay particular attention to two things; our own discipleship and enabling others to meet Jesus for the first time.'

What I would like to ponder in the remainder of this 'Ponder Anew' are some of the questions that have been on my mind for some time, but particularly of late. These relate to Jesus being the beginning, middle and end of everything, how we see that applying to the issues we face today and how we communicate that to those who do not yet know Jesus. For the majority who have no faith there is a perceived disconnect between Christianity, indeed any faith, and the issues that concern them. Generally those outside of Christian communities do not see that the Christian message of the good news of Jesus has any bearing on poverty and equity, the pandemic and the environmental crisis. They consider science to have supplanted faith. Never the less, if Jesus is the beginning, middle and end of everything, he is at the core of all of these and the other big issues that our society fears, bringing hope and peace where despair and fear often reign.

“GENERALLY THOSE OUTSIDE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES DO NOT SEE THAT THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE OF THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS HAS ANY BEARING ON POVERTY AND EQUITY, THE PANDEMIC AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS.”

So, how do we share this hope, the Good News of Jesus, in the context of these issues and fears? How do we understand Jesus as being at the beginning, middle and end of them? How much time and effort do we spend on this in our teaching, preaching and private reading? The answer to all of these questions is probably 'not as much as we should'. Of course Christians, our Christian communities, are active in helping the poor, rising to the challenges resulting from the pandemic and doing our bit to care for the environment - and quite rightly so.

Today and throughout the ages those who follow Jesus have been active, often at the forefront, of providing for the poor and working for justice and reform. This is good news for, and brings hope to, the poor, those who suffer injustice and all who benefit from reform. But it is only part of the Good News of Jesus we have been entrusted with. The institution service includes the words; 'the church professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds which faith the church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.'

This profession and proclamation is often thought of as comprising two parts, deed and word. The deed part has been summarised in our Cluster as 'looking for the mess in our communities and finding ways we may begin to address it'. The 'mess' will probably differ from generation to generation and may well be different in the post pandemic 'New Normal' from what it has been in the past few years. A fresh approach may well be necessary to minister in the post pandemic era in which there is forecast to be increased personal and national debt amongst all the other legacies.

The proclamation by word is perhaps more difficult and I suggest falls into two main areas; presentation and application. At this stage let's be clear; the fundamental truth of the centrality of Jesus and the authority of the Bible does not change. The way it's presented and the application or interpretation, however, will be dependent on the culture it is proclaimed to.

Increasingly our culture is a visual culture with a limited attention span but also a culture with largely a very high standard of education, this needs to be reflected in our presentation. I find the trend to visual communication difficult as I tend to think in principles and concepts rather than visually or by examples – the heritage of a science (physics) background I suspect! Our teaching, preaching, communication and the way we do corporate worship needs to take into consideration what our culture relates to, which, for some of us, may be a difficult transition.

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If presentation of the word involves some hard decisions, application of the word will probably involve some hard work. This, perhaps, is where the church is way behind the prevailing culture. Since about the middle of the last century, a period many of us have lived through, there has been unprecedented change:

Every branch of natural science has developed exponentially, communications have become global and instant and DNA, the stuff of life, has been decoded enabling, among many other things, the rapid development of Covid vaccines. Added to all this astronomers and sub atomic physicists have undermined the old certainties about the universe and everything in it.

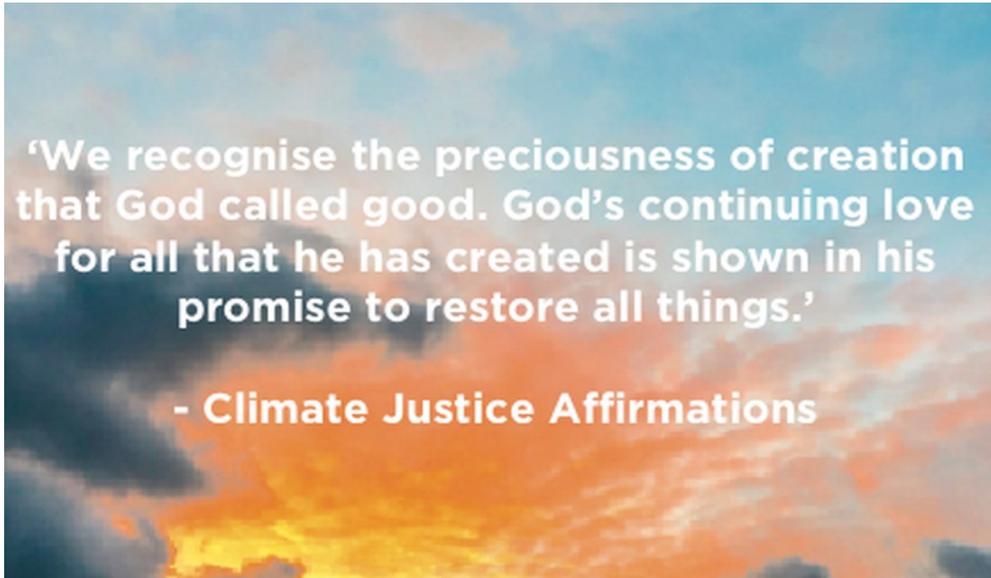
In spite of this development, in spite of this knowledge, the planet's ability to sustain life is under threat, the world's population is set to outstrip the planets resources to sustain it, pollution is out of control, species are becoming extinct at an alarming rate and most recently a pandemic has killed millions and crippled economies. There is a growing fear about what the future holds, a growing awareness that the human race needs to change the way it lives, and change it rapidly, if the planet and the life it sustains is to survive. A IPSOS Mori poll last year found that most of the British population were 'very concerned' about climate change for instance.

Although there is a high level of concern about these issues a recent article on how the church is to minister in this situation noted that: 'few people feel able to speak about them. And indeed there is a public taboo which forbids it in polite company' The same article later suggests that 'The 'very concerned' are in our congregations. On Sunday mornings they bring that fear to our churches, and they leave with it intact after coffee'. Is that true of our cluster churches? If it is, does it matter? If it is true and it does matter, how do we begin to address it?

We have a message of hope, we have good news but we need to work and pray and discern how to proclaim it afresh in this unique and unprecedented time. A 'new normal' when the full consequences of the pandemic will start to become evident and attention will turn again to the climate crisis as the Glasgow World Climate Summit in November approaches.

Brian

Quotes from in penultimate paragraph from 'Transforming Ministry' spring 2021



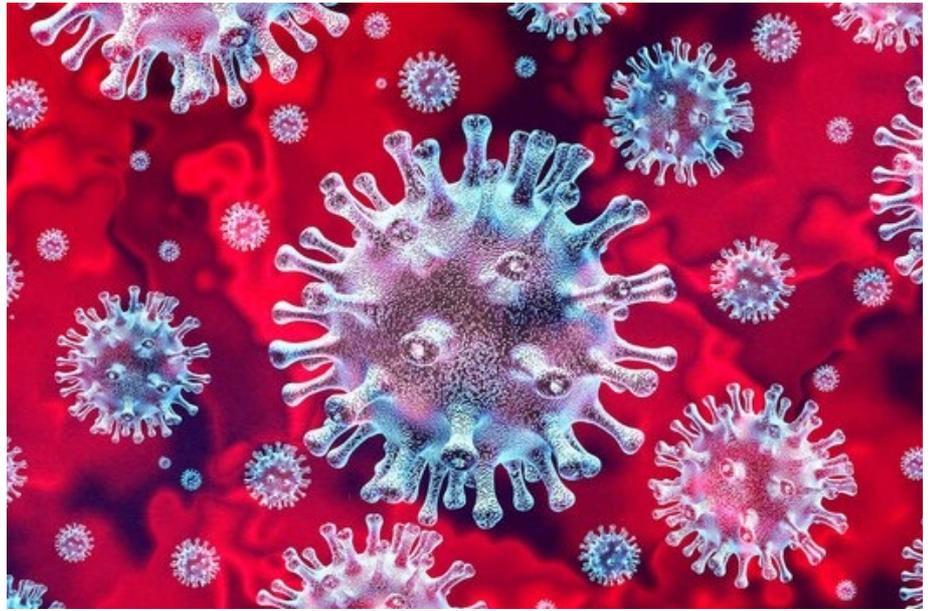
'We recognise the preciousness of creation that God called good. God's continuing love for all that he has created is shown in his promise to restore all things.'

- Climate Justice Affirmations

ONE YEAR ON

The Revd Canon Paul Hardingham looks back on the year that changed the world.

It was just over a year ago that the World Health Organisation discussed the Coronavirus that was starting to spread around the world. None of us could have foreseen the devastating effect on our world, with over 80 million people infected and nearly two million deaths. How has the pandemic challenged our faith, as we look back over the last year?



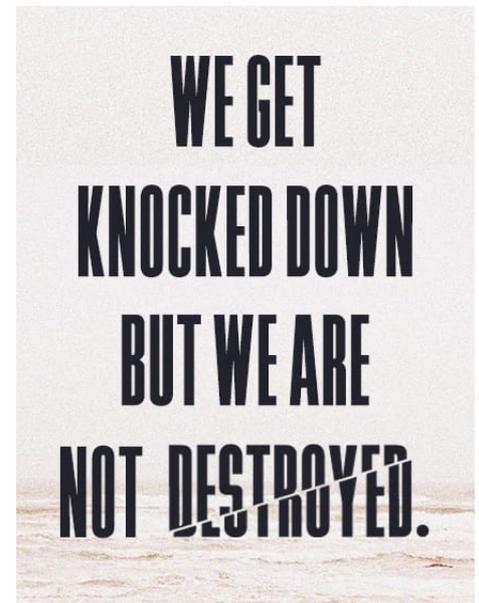
Firstly, it has forced us to face up to the reality of our situation. We cannot underestimate the health, social and economic effects of the virus on our lives, churches and communities. We have learned how to do church online, but the future shape of church life is uncertain!

As the apostle Paul writes: 'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus' (2 Cor 4:8-10).

The pandemic has challenged so much of what we take for granted, but also demonstrated that God is alongside to help us in these circumstances.

Secondly, alongside the fear and uncertainty of this year, we have also learned to find new faith and hope in Jesus. The experience of Jesus' death and His resurrection provides a pattern for us in facing the future: 'so that His life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.' (2 Cor 4:10-12).

During the season of Lent, as we anticipate the events at Easter, it's good to focus on the promise of sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we consider our present struggles, are we ready to surrender them to Jesus? May the hope of Easter Day take us forward into the coming year.



HOW TO HANDLE TEMPTATION

Canon Paul Hardingham considers the temptations of Jesus.

“I can resist everything but temptation”

Oscar Wilde

During Lent we remember Jesus' experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), when 'He was led by the Spirit.. to be tempted by the devil.' (1).

Temptation is a test of obedience, whether we do things our way or God's way. After 40 days of fasting Jesus was tired, hungry and vulnerable. Like Him, the Devil will attack us at our most vulnerable moments, especially during this pandemic.

**I can resist
everything
except
temptation.**

The first temptation was to turn stones into bread: Jesus' ministry was not about meeting His own needs, but being nourished by God's Word. 'We do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Deuteronomy 8:3). Like Jesus, we are called to make God our priority and trust Him completely.

The second temptation was to put God to the test: Jumping off the Temple pinnacle would have been a dramatic way for Jesus to gain popularity, but this is not God's way! 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' (Deuteronomy 6:16). We too need to learn this lesson!

The third temptation was to worship Satan: Finally, the devil took Jesus to a mountain to offer Him worldly power. In contrast, His calling as Messiah was marked by suffering and honouring God. 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only' (Deuteronomy 6:13). This is often our experience in living for God.

Jesus stands with us in our temptations. As we claim the promises of Scripture, we will find strength in the power of the Spirit and the victory of the Cross.

'If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest!'

Corrie Ten Boom

JESUS AND HIS MOTHER

When Jesus was at a Galilean wedding (John 2:1-11), He was there with His disciples and Mary, His mum. During the celebrations, unknown to the groom, the wine ran out. Mary was quick to spot the problem. She knew this could be an embarrassing moment for the groom if people couldn't have a drink, and the married couple would face ridicule and shame.

So, Mary asked her Son for help. Although we know that Jesus responded by turning water into wine, she didn't know this was going to happen. At that time Jesus had not performed a miracle!

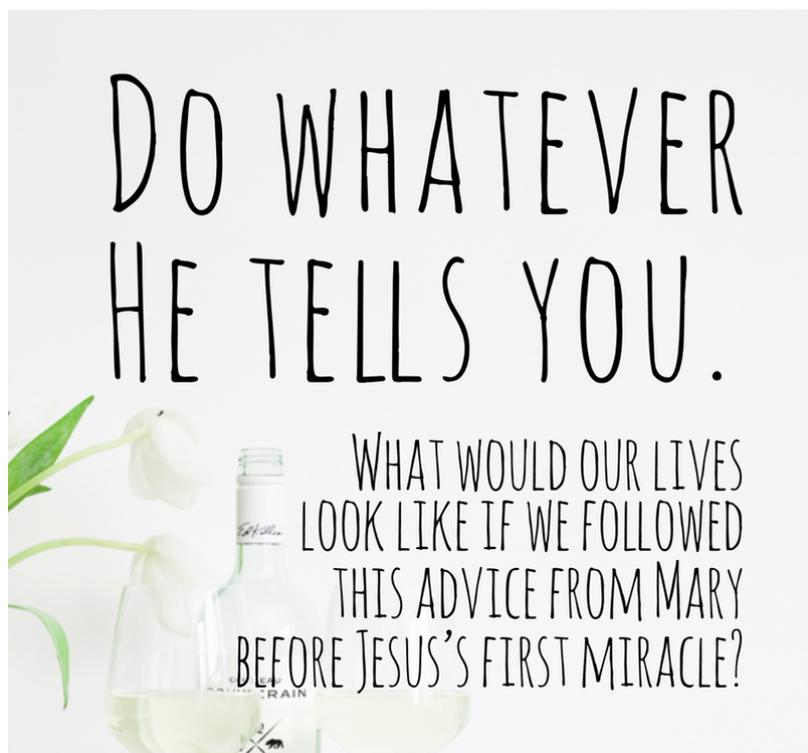
Whatever she thought, Mary simply showed concern and trusted Jesus to do the right thing.

At first Jesus seems to respond to His mum with a rebuke. This dilemma was not His concern. Even so, Mary says to the servants "Do whatever He tells you." Jesus instructs the servants to fill six large stone jars with water. A sample is taken, and it has become the best wine to conclude the festivities. Jesus had met a human need and prevented a ruined wedding day.

The servants obeyed Jesus and a miracle followed. Later, through His ministry, many people obeyed Jesus and their response brought healing or some other beneficial change.

In this story, only Mary, the servants and the disciples were aware of this miracle. It was not a public spectacle such as Jesus feeding 5,000 people with a handful of bread and fish. We too should be alert to what God is doing amongst us while others are oblivious of a divine hand.

"Do whatever He tells you" Mary said. What wise words! When we do this our lives will be transformed. It took a mother to know the right thing to say in a troubled situation. Mary knew Jesus would not let her down. So must we.



"IT TOOK A MOTHER TO KNOW THE RIGHT THING TO SAY IN A TROUBLED SITUATION. MARY KNEW JESUS WOULD NOT LET HER DOWN. SO MUST WE."

WHEN YOUR PRAYER IS NOT ANSWERED

Paul is talking about one of the most mysterious and one of the most baffling aspects of prayer – when God does not say yes.

On the face of it, Paul's prayer was very modest. For some time he had been troubled by 'a thorn in the flesh.' He doesn't tell us what the 'thorn' was and down the centuries theologians and commentators have

made suggestions. Most of them have thought that the affliction was physical because Paul says it was 'in the flesh.' Some have suggested that he suffered from epileptic fits which caused him to fall down, while others have suggested that he was laid low by constant fevers or that he had very poor eyesight, the last based on his remarks in Galatians 6:11. But in spite of this great servant of the Lord praying earnestly three times that the thorn would be removed, God did not answer as Paul expected. A number of things in this passage (verses 7-10) are very helpful to all of us in the matter of prayer.

First, although God's answer was not what Paul asked for, God did answer him. God is never indifferent to the prayers we utter from the depth of our heart. Unlike the idol Baal in the Old Testament story about Elijah, (1 Kings 18) the God and Father of our Lord Jesus is not on a journey, nor is He busy elsewhere, nor is He sleeping. He hears our prayers and our cries when we come to Him in our need and pain and distress.

Second, although Paul did not get the answer he wanted, God made him a wonderful promise. He said, 'My grace is sufficient for you' (v.9). This was not what Paul asked for, yet what a promise it was! God said in effect. 'I will not take the thorn away – but my daily grace is all-sufficient.' In spite of the thorn, Paul will triumph. When God gives us all-sufficient grace, it will take care of everything in our lives.

Thirdly, Paul learnt that God's wonderful grace meant that in his weakness 'the power of Christ' (v.9) would be with him, the power that would make him effective and fruitful in his ministry.

Fourthly, this experience taught Paul that he could be 'content with weaknesses and insults' (v.10) because it was for Christ's sake, and when he is weak in himself, he is strong in Christ (v.10).

So what about unanswered prayer? Unless our prayer was selfish and not for our good in the first place, God does answer our cry. When the answer is not what we expected, then it means that our loving Father has something for us even better and more important than what we asked for.

Written by Dr Herbert McGonigle, formerly Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology & Church History, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester

Three Times I Pleaded With The Lord To Take It Away From Me.

2 Corinthians 12-8

LOCAL PASTORAL MINISTERS - LPMs

In our Cluster we are very blessed in that we have a number of people who have been commissioned by the Diocese as Local Pastoral Ministers (LPM's). Our individual Pastoral Teams support each other and those in our churches and communities in several ways.

What do these people do?

It is recognised by many now, that where there are several churches in a benefice or cluster, as with our own situation, pastoral care of the congregation and the community cannot all be down to the vicar. So, people with a heart for pastoral care, take up some responsibility in their parish to support and care for those in need of a listening ear, support after loss, and helping with things which may seem overwhelming to an individual at the time. We can do this by keeping in touch regularly, at the moment by telephone, but also by visiting and supporting someone through a tough time.

What training have they had?

LPM's across the Cluster will have spent 6 weeks (2 hours per session) attending the "Key Skills in Pastoral Ministry" course. The course has been compiled by people in the Diocese, who have brought together the skills, thought to be required, to enable good pastoral care to be available in parishes. Some of the things the course covers are:

- the importance of good listening skills;
- knowing the difference between what you are able to do as a friend and what you can do as a LPM;
- working together in a team;
- the value of friendship;
- the importance of confidentiality.

Many LPM's choose to take more in depth training in learning more about living with loss, a much broader sense of knowing how loss affects us. LPM's can take further courses in learning about depression and the effects of living with it. There are other courses which the Diocese offers LPM's to help them in this important role in their parish. We have also embraced opportunities to learn more about dementia and its effects on both the person and the person caring for them. LPM's also attend Safeguarding Training organised by the Diocese and we are DBS checked.

Why would I think about contacting them and not the Rector?

LPM's can be the first port of call as a support to those who are struggling and possibly needing someone to talk to. Joe is Rector of 5 churches and may not always have the time available. If you or someone you know needs that bit of extra support, now or at any time in the future, please do call one of the people below, who will be able to put them in contact with a trained LPM.

Contacts:

Vanessa Whitting – St Mary's 01579 382484

Jane Coumbe – Stoke 01579 370372

Norma Draper – Linkinhorne 01579 363572

Judith Ayers – South Hill 01579 384617

NOTICES

Church Services

For details of services, please see the weekly Notice Sheet.

If you do not currently receive it, contact John Kennaugh

Tel 01579 382583

Email pamjohnk@btinternet.com

Knowing Jesus – Discipleship Course – Lent 2021

To be held via ZOOM

23rd February and 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd and 30th March

Afternoons – 2.00 – 3.00pm

Evenings – 7.30 – 9.00pm

Worship, talk, discussion groups and homework!

Week 1: Knowing Jesus and being known by him

Week 2: Living with Jesus in this world

Week 3: Seeing Jesus in one another

Week 4: Sharing Jesus by living as him

Week 5: Hosting the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus

Week 6: Preparing for Jesus' return

For further details and to register please contact Keith Browne via email at keith.browne@aol.com or by phone on 01579 362611.

Christmas cards that keep on giving..

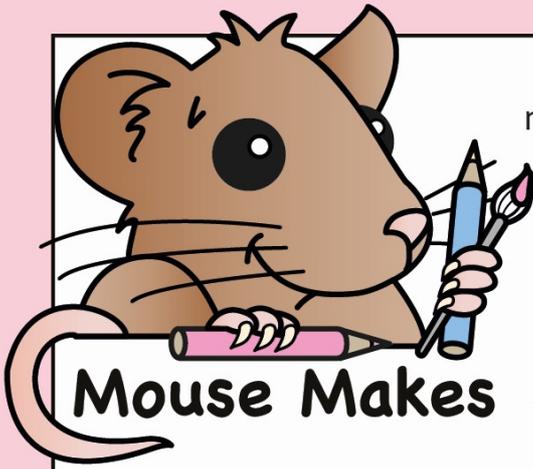
In lieu of handing out Christmas cards to folk who we can greet personally, donations were gathered for Stoke Climsland's partner church in San Antonio Copan in Honduras through the charity Compassion. I am delighted to announce that a total of **£485** was raised to help change the story of struggling children in Honduras.



Cluster Magazine deadline:

The next Cluster Magazine will be the April edition which will be distributed on the weekend of 27th & 28th March.

The deadline is Sunday 21st March. Information can be emailed to the editor at kathryn@pempwell.co.uk.



Mouse Makes

Who is my mother?

Look up the Bible verses then find the mother's names in the word search

CAIN and ABEL
Genesis 4:1-2

JOSEPH
Genesis 30:22-24

ISHMAEL
Genesis 16:15

TIMOTHY
2 Timothy 1:5

RUBEN
Genesis 29:32

GAD
Genesis 35:26

SAMUEL
1 Samuel 1:20

OBED
Matthew 1:5

ISAAC
Genesis 21:3

Jesus was **loved** by his mother Mary, she looked after him, worried about him and prayed for him. She **cuddled** Jesus when he was born, **cried** when he died and **rejoiced** when he rose from the dead.

SOLOMON
1 Chronicles 3:5

JOHN
Luke 1:57-60

ESAU and JACOB
Genesis 25:24-26

JESUS
Acts 1:14



R	A	C	H	E	L	M	A	R	Y	A	V	Z
E	L	I	Z	A	B	E	T	H	H	E	V	I
B	Z	D	R	E	B	V	S	U	A	U	O	L
E	T	M	U	M	L	E	A	H	N	N	L	P
K	M	O	T	H	E	R	R	T	N	I	E	A
A	I	S	H	H	A	G	A	R	A	C	G	H
H	S	T	A	B	A	T	H	S	H	E	B	A

There are two other words in the word search, can you find them?

WHO'S WHO ACROSS THE CLUSTER

Rector: Rev. Joe Lannon

01579 370557

revjoelannon@gmail.com

Church Wardens

Callington

Garry Morris 01579 382944 southernman@radioheadfan.com

Dave Wheeler 07971 072459 davewheeler90@gmail.com

South Hill, St Sampson's

David Brent 01579 362312 (no email)

Miranda Lawrance-Owen 01579 382863 mlawranceowen@icloud.com

Stoke Climsland

Steve Brocklebank 01579 370243 steve.brocklebank@icloud.com

Rob Stewart 01579 370943 wellhouse01@gmail.com

Linkinhorne St. Melor's/St Paul's

Sarah Doney 01579 362602 thedoneyclan@gmail.com

Michelene Norris 01579 363515 michelenenorris@hotmail.com

PCC Secretaries

Callington

Denise Baylis 01579 389038 dcbassociates16@gmail.com

South Hill, St Sampson's

Judith Ayers 01579 384617 judithayers@yahoo.co.uk

Stoke Climsland

Carol Brocklebank 01579 370243 carolbrock57@icloud.com

Linkinhorne St. Melor's/St Paul's

Maxine Browne 01579 362611 linkinhornechurches@yahoo.com

Cluster Magazine contacts

Stoke Climsland Kathryn Carnegie 01579 370187 kathryn@pempwell.co.uk

Callington Pauline & Michael Farr 01579 383482 paulinefarr44@gmail.com

South Hill Miranda Lawrance-Owen 01579 382863 mlawranceowen@icloud.com

Linkinhorne/Upton Cross Brian Norris 01579 363515 briannorrisics@hotmail.com

For God so
LOVED
the World
that **HE**
gave **HIS**
only
Begotten
SON.

John 3: 16

