

Crosstalk

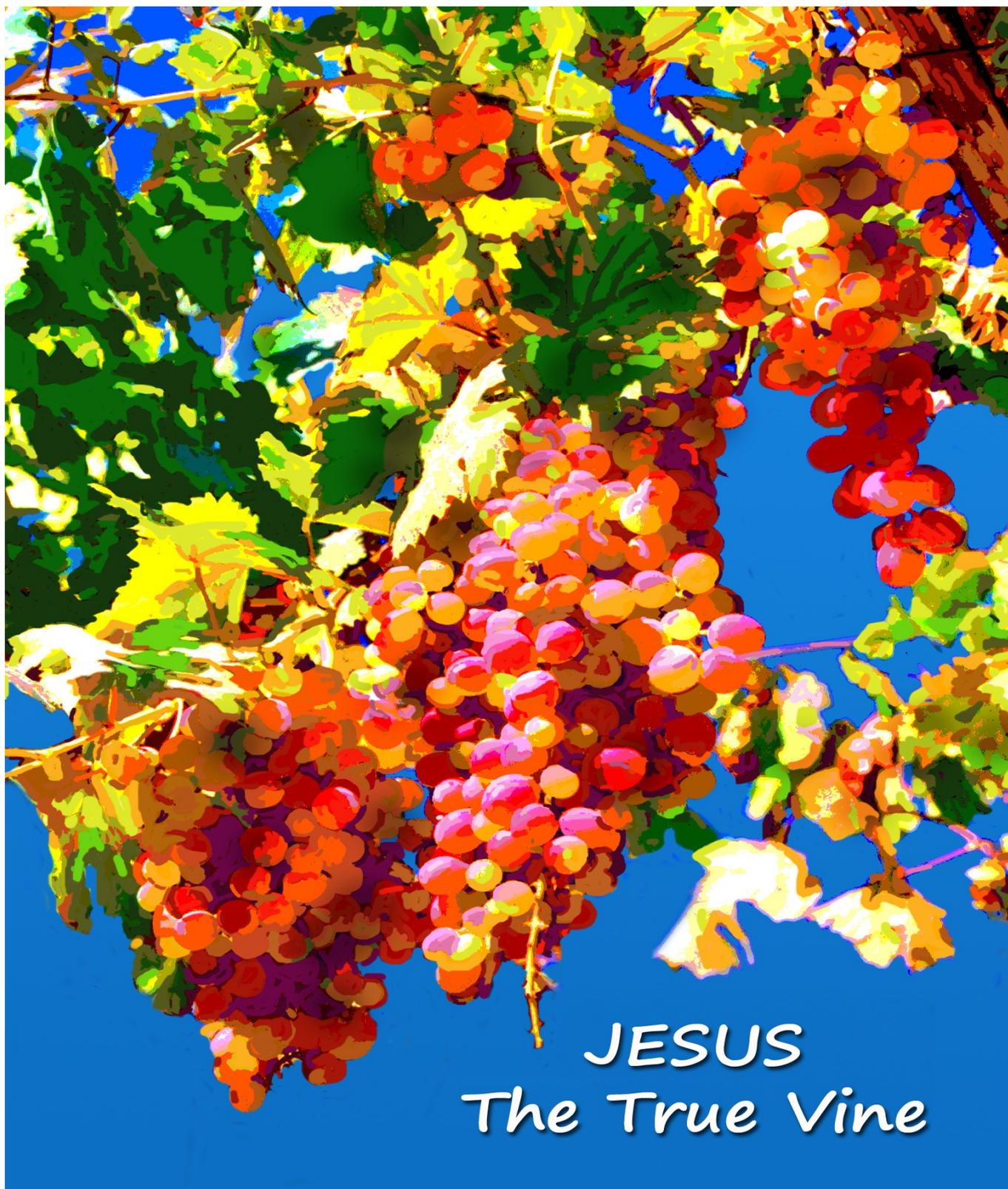
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The Parish Magazine of St Bartholomew with St Chad
www.thurstaston.org.uk

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Chester

June 2020



JESUS
The True Vine

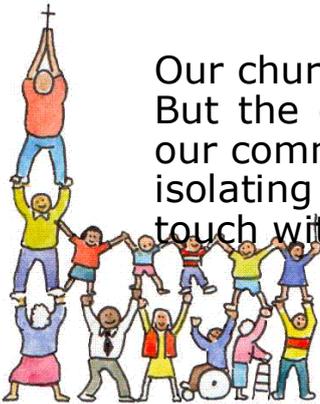


Coronavirus

YOU ARE NOT ON YOUR OWN

If you **feel in need of a chat**,
because you haven't spoken to anyone else today
or you are in need of reassurance, or for any other reason
then please call any of the following people
who will be more than happy to speak to you.

Revd Jane Turner: 648 1816
Revd Margaret Fletcher: 648 1025
Revd Ray Dent: 792 2022
Revd David Trollope: 342 2648
Mrs Liz Whitehead: 606 9083
Mr Alan Jones: 648 1400
Mrs Pat Neil: 345 5232
Mrs Jean Heath: 648 6015



Our church buildings are closed to prevent infection spread. But the church (which is the people) remains ready to serve our community. If you need help in some way with self-isolating give us a call and we will endeavour to put you in touch with a neighbour who can help. If you have a specific prayer need, then again, please give us a call and we will circulate that (anonymously if you wish) to our church members who will pray.

As a church, we have a mission in the community. We should all try to keep more in touch with our neighbours and support efforts to protect the most vulnerable.

The views and opinions expressed in the articles in this magazine are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the editor, the Rector or the PCC.

"Your magazine needs you"

Please send your contributions
(eg. Poems, Prayers, interesting articles etc.,)
to office@thurstaston.org.uk
no later than 21st May

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Diary Dates

Coronavirus Advice

As you will appreciate this is a continuously changing picture. We have been keeping up with the latest government and Church of England advice, which we will continue to do.

We will be keeping in touch with people by email (if we have your address) and will endeavour to ensure that the website is up to date to reflect any changes.

We have also been posting on the church facebook page - See page 21 for more info about how to find us on facebook.

From the Registers

Funerals

We commend to God's eternal care

*Iuean Felix
7th May*

From Your Rector

Dear Friends,

A prophet for our time of testing - Isaiah

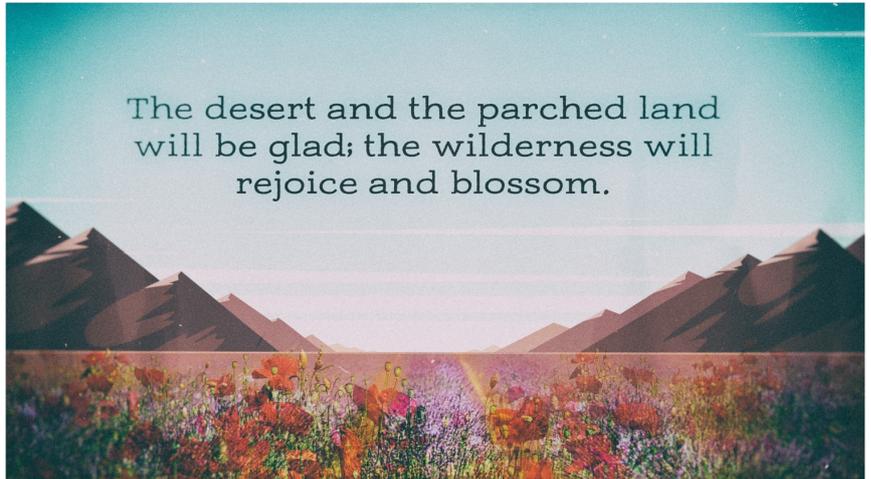
The Scriptures stress the importance of desert experiences as essential preparation for times of spiritual renewal. The desert is the place of weariness, dryness and weakness which we all go through at times. The 35th chapter of Isaiah helps us to understand such experiences, and reminds us of God's purpose in uncertain times.

A Desert Place

In a desert season we are forced to see things as they really are. It could be a time of physical illness or depression; stress or anxiety; questioning or change. It is always a season of deep refining through repentance. The desert offers us no places to hide; rather we are confronted with our sins, hurts and weaknesses. We are called to repent of our desire for control and acknowledge our total dependence on God.

A Desert Renewal

God promises to lead His people out of spiritual, emotional and physical weariness into a place of personal renewal. There will be water in the desert and crocuses bursting into bloom. These are signs of what God wants to do in His people; to enable them to be strong and trust in the new things He is doing in their lives.



A Desert Road

In the desert we cannot escape from the reality of God's judgment and holiness. The road back to God is described as a *Way of Holiness*, for it demands both repentance and a holy lifestyle. However, there is also the promise of laughter, joy and gladness as God's people return to Zion, the home of God's presence and love.

Rev'd Jane

Isaiah 35

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.
³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you."
⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.
⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.
¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Visit the C of E online page

There is now a range of digital resources for to you connect with God at this difficult time. These include:

Time to Pray app (<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/apps/time-to-pray>) which is free and has an accompanying daily audio offering on SoundCloud and iTunes.

Mental health reflections (<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-action/mental-health-resources/supporting-good-mental-health>)

Tips to tackle isolation (<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-action/mental-health-resources/dealing-loneliness-and-isolation-five-top-tips>)

Finally, there are the Church's smart speaker apps, which provide a range of Christian resources. <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/our-smart-speaker-apps> In March alone, the number of people using the Alexa app rose by more than 70 per cent.

More details at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-online>

Mark Tanner named as the 41st Bishop of Chester



The Rt Revd Mark Tanner has been named by Downing Street as the next Bishop of Chester, succeeding the Rt Revd Dr Peter Forster who retired in September 2019.

Bishop Mark is currently the Bishop of Berwick in the Diocese of Newcastle, a post he has occupied since 2016.

“It will be hard to say goodbye to the North East,” he says, “however, Lindsay and I are really excited to return to Chester where I was ordained, and both of our children were born.”

Mark says: “It is an honour and a joy to be appointed to the Diocese of Chester at such a key time in the life of our communities, nation, and Church. In Christ, God offers a gift of hope beyond our imagining; there is no greater joy or privilege than enabling others to step into this freedom and life, whether in deeply practical service or beautiful wonder and worship. God is here for all.”

Bishop Mark and his wife, Lindsay, were introduced to the diocese online via a series of live-streamed events.

“Although I cannot physically be with you today, I look forward to getting to know the people and communities of the diocese from the coast to the Pennines, as we refresh and renew our service of every member of society within our diocese.”

Bishop Christine, the Bishop of Newcastle says: “It has been a real joy to work with Mark as a key member of the team here. I have appreciated his friendship and counsel, his kindness and great sense of fun, and most particularly, his focus on those whom we are called to serve as Christ’s church today. He has been instrumental in helping us establish our Resource Church and imagine new possibilities in terms of ministry and mission. I know the Diocese of Chester will be blessed through his ministry there.”



I don't know what it would have been like without my iPhone getting through lockdown.

Talking to friends and family and being in a whatsapp group for my road has kept me sane, together with a large dose of gardening and going for a walk.

I have talked and messaged my sister more than I probably would have in a year! We have grown closer which is lovely, we've helped each other to get stuff we need and had long chats when we needed someone to talk to.

The whatsapp group is wonderful for cheering each other up with funny videos and pictures, offers of help and support and the odd quiz to keep the cogs turning.

I used my phone so much I wore it out, the screen gave up and it was not worth repairing when I was thinking of a bigger one anyway , so I got a new reconditioned one this week!

Julie DeBoorder





*Over 70's, the headlines say
May be locked indoors beyond Christmas Day.
"Oh I'm fit and I'm able" some people reply.
"I do tennis, pilates: I'm supple and spry".
I look after my grandchildren 3 times a week".
"You can't lock me down, why I'm still at my peak".
Yes, all true I am sure and you're fine I don't doubt,
but there is a good reason we're not to go out.
It's not how you feel in your body and mind.
Our immune system's now a lot weaker you'll find.
If you go out and mix with your family and friends,
You'll start to reverse any positive trends.
So be sensible all and don't add to the stress.
Just do as you're told.
Help our great NHS!*

A Lament:-

*When I used to go dancing, during the winter I would find it hard to
drag myself out, especially on dark, wet nights*

*"I don't want to go out tonight" I said,
"It's wet and it's cold, want to take to my bed.
I wish I could stay home and lock my front door..."
I'll be careful in future, just what I wish for!*



Tina Samson



Graham and Tracy were due to be married on 2nd May 2020 and they sent the following message to Revd Jane (with subsequent permission to be shared)

It has been a very difficult time for us leading up to this date and secretly I think we were both we worried about the day itself.

So I decided....

To order Tracy's bouquet and a button hole from our florists. Then woke Tracy up by playing our wedding march and serving her breakfast in bed. We then spent the morning prepping what would have been our wedding breakfast at the Doubletree

Nbw I knew our family were planning something to distract us today so I told my eldest daughter to make sure it didn't happen till the afternoon as it was my intention to take Tracy to St. Barts at 1pm Tracy didn't know

At 12.30 the florist delivered Tracy's flowers. She cried her eyes out which was not unusual as she'd spent the morning crying at the vast array of kind messages friends and family had sent.

At 12.45 I took Tracy out in the car to visit some of our most memorable places, like the place we first met etc... (essential travel ??? I think so, on this occasion)... Tracy thought we were heading to Llangollen, another memorable place, as we were passing St. Barts and she asked if we were going to the church. I said no but she said we should call in. "Ok Said!" and so we did arriving at 1.10 pm (Yes she was late).

And there, under the lych gate we tied the knot, literally on a blue lace that we will cherish for ever.... I do hope you don't mind us going to St. Barts for our Covid wedding





Well, another month has passed and the novelty of lockdown is definitely wearing off! Not having any physical contact with my family is hard, I long to be able to give them all a big hug. However, this has made me realise what it must be like for those whose families live abroad, who they can only see infrequently or by using social media. At least I know that this present situation will come to an end.

I still keep up with family and friends by mainly WhatsApp and also Zoom, which I had never heard of prior to the pandemic. It has certainly been a life saver for me. I can honestly say I have “seen” more of my sister than I have ever done since I left home at 18! This though, makes me aware of people who don’t have this facility and hope they have contact with the wider community by other means.

I have been gardening a lot, fruit and vegetables are coming on well, except for the lettuce, I think they might be ready by Christmas! I have done a bit more sorting out in my loft, but the weather has been too nice to do much. I have also spent some time struggling with my computer, it usually wins. I have never been good with technology or indeed at sitting still. As for relearning French, I haven’t done anything about that. My holiday in France probably won’t happen now so the incentive has gone.

Sundays are probably the most difficult day, No Church, the idea of not being able to go is weird, Church has always been there even if I didn’t always go. Also I miss ringing the bells, both for the physical and mental exercise. Also I used to see my family on a Sunday, so it was always a busy happy day. Listening to a church service on the radio or television does help to some extent.

Over all this is the constant worry about family and friends, all I can do is pray and I seem to do a lot of that at the moment.

I am spending some time just sitting in the garden, listening to the beautiful sound of the birds singing and this gives me hope for a better future when this surreal time is over and it also reminds me of this poem, which I have always loved.

*The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer to God’s heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on Earth.*

Ruth Eden

God sent a cleaner



Pastor Lee McClelland of The Ark Church, Belfast recently contracted Covid-19 and was in a critical condition in hospital. He describes below what happened next:

I remember one night in the hospital when I honestly didn't know whether I would make it or not. I thought I was moments away from ending up on a ventilator. The nurses and the doctors had helped me with all sorts of things and got drips up and all that they needed to do. I remember really crying to the Lord and asking him to help me and somehow encourage my heart and strengthen me.

I remember the next day, I'd had a night from hell. I'm in an isolation ward and no-one, friends or family, can get in. All of a sudden this cleaner came in. He was like a ray of sunshine and he began to chat to me. He asked me how I was and talked to me about about hanging in there. He said that he was a missionary in Nigeria for 14 years and how God had saved many many souls through his ministry. God had used him over the years to reach people and here he is, as a cleaner, encouraging my heart. He's telling me about souls and the love of Jesus. Just this last couple of years he had found himself back home in Northern Ireland.

When God needs to reach you, he knows exactly who is the right person. In that moment of time, it was a cleaner. No one else could get in and God sent a cleaner.

As he stood at the door to leave, he says, *"Son, can I pray for you?"*. I said, *"Absolutely!"*. He began to pray at the door and asked the Holy Spirit to visit me, heal my body and touch my lungs He pleaded with God Almighty to spare my life and continue to use me and then he left.

That night, I remember, I started to turn around.

Later in my stay, I began to crave a packet of prawn cocktail crisps. It was so bad, I prayed Lord, is it possible that you could get me a packet of prawn cocktail crisps and a can of Coke? The next morning, the cleaner appeared and brought in a bag and in that bag were two oranges, a can of Coke and a packet of prawn cocktail crisps.

Don't tell me that God doesn't know our every need. He knows every desire. The cleaner just passed the bag through the door - he couldn't come in. He just says, *"it's a gift of the Lord."*

I want to encourage you today that God knows what you have need of. Your heart's desire. God sent a cleaner to reach me. Never underestimate how God can use your life. Never underestimate what God can do with you - no matter your title, no matter your position in society. God can use you to reach people.

For those that are saved, keep your eyes on Jesus. For you that do not know Jesus Christ, I would encourage you lift up your eyes and look to heaven and with a cry from your heart say, *"God be merciful to me a sinner."* And go home justified - just as if you have never sinned.

May God bless you and may you know the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Caring for the bereaved

The Church of England is launching a programme of additional support for people experiencing a family bereavement.

Bereaved families can still arrange Church of England funerals and in addition, families will be offered the opportunity to organise a memorial or remembrance service at a time when we can freely meet again.

If you or someone you know has been recently bereaved, the Church of England is here for you. Everyone is welcome to arrange a Church of England funeral, or to plan a future memorial service at a time when we can meet again. Perhaps more importantly, vicars are there if you just want someone to listen to your story and the memories of the loved one you've lost. Talk to us, we can help.

In normal times, a vicar would discuss with a bereaved family exactly how they would like to say goodbye. They would meet with them in person and discuss which music, Bible readings, and prayers they would like.

Much of this has not been able to happen because of restrictions limiting the length of a funeral. Social distancing measures have also reduced the number of people able to attend, and family members have been unable to hug and console each other, adding to their grief.

The Acting Bishop of Chester, the Rt Revd Keith Sinclair says we are living through an incredibly difficult time but urges people to know that the Church is there for them, whatever they may have been through, wherever they are.

"We are living through a profound moment for our nation and the world, the effects of which will be felt for a long time to come.

"But the Church remains a constant Christian presence in every community and an anchor of hope for many. I would wish for everyone to know that the Church is here for you. Talk to us, we can help.

"Contact Revd Jane Turner if you would like to talk about arranging a funeral, memorial service or attending a remembrance service, and the Church is here for you if you simply want someone to listen to your story."



Refugee Week - 15th-21st June

As the annual 'Refugee Week' approaches, various Christian relief agencies and campaign groups warn that coronavirus could have a catastrophic impact on the refugees whom they are trying to help.

First, the big picture: according to the UNHCR, "we are currently witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18."

Refugees are especially vulnerable, as their usual homes of makeshift tents or flimsy shelters are over-crowded and without clean water or sanitation, making social distancing and isolation impossible. Also, many refugees are already suffering underlying health conditions and mental health issues.

As the head of the Humanitarian Division at Christian Aid, Nick Guttman, also points out: "Refugees are some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Access to medical facilities is limited and the destabilisation of the global economy is likely to have an impact on their livelihoods and the flow of humanitarian aid." He warns that it is only a "matter of time" before it reaches the countries with a high number of refugees: Bangladesh, Syria, Lebanon, Nigeria, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Tearfund has highlighted the problem of warning the one million Rohingya people, crowded in camps in Bangladesh. "There is no internet provision in the camps and the mobile network is currently suspended, so getting the message out about the dangers of the virus relies on word of mouth."

Meanwhile, Open Doors is concerned for the plight of the Pygmy people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many fled their rainforest after persecution by Islamist rebels, and are now living in camps, where they are extremely vulnerable to the virus.

Leprosy Mission has warned that India "faces a human timebomb, waiting to explode." Communities affected by leprosy, malnutrition, overcrowded living conditions and poor sanitation, make "ideal breeding ground for the spread of coronavirus. Social distancing and isolation are impossible in the densely populated areas."

*This Poem has been doing the social media rounds
and was submitted by Bill Turner*

I wandered lonely as a cloud
Two metres from the madding crowd
When all at once my name was called
To enter Waitrose hallowed hall.

This was the pensioners' special hour.
I'd gone to get a bag of flour.
But I forgot, when through the door,
What I had gone to Waitrose for.

The Waitrose staff are extra kind.
I told them it had slipped my mind.
They asked what else I had forgot
They clearly thought I'd lost the plot.

I phoned my wife again to ask.
She reminded me of this special task:
"I need some flour to bake a cake
with all that cream you made me take."

"Ah yes I recall" I had to lie.
I dared not ask what flower to buy
But then I saw them next the tills
a bunch of golden daffodils!

Anon.

A Note of thanks and encouragement from the Treasurer:-

During April 2020:-

12 people have set up a new standing order totalling: £681

4 people have increased the amount they give each week/month

Regular weekly (Green) envelopes plus donations in cash or by cheque
delivered to the Rectory have totalled £2250

Our total income for April 2020 has totalled £4337

Well Done all. Many Thanks, Kevin



In April 2019, we had total receipts of £7239. This means our April income is down by £2902. We are making savings elsewhere which helps to balance this a little bit. We obviously have an additional loss of income from Hall Hire and as a result we have temporarily reduced our parish share payments to the diocese.

WHILE BUILDINGS REMAIN CLOSED ALL DONATIONS SHOULD BE SENT TO:-

Mr K Marley (Treasurer), c/o The Rectory, 77 Thingwall Rd, Irby, Wirral, CH61 3UB

OR IF POSSIBLE BY BACS TRANSFER: CAF Bank Ltd, Sort code:40/52/40 Account: 00018674

In the "Reference Box" – please make sure to include your name – and if space allows the words "regular giving". It would then be helpful if you emailed the Treasurer with the start date, frequency and amount.

pcc-treasurer@thurstaston.org.uk

“But this I know” - a new hymn for the Corona virus era?

Revd Dr Sam Wells, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London, included these words in a sermon in Paris in March:-

“The hymn ‘I cannot tell,’ written in 1929 by the Baptist leader William Young Fullerton, gives us an appropriate shape for how we may live in the face of Covid -19. Fullerton structures his convictions around the tune *Londonderry Air*. The tune has four lines of wistful and sometimes sorrowful lament, followed by four lines arising from the ashes of bewilderment, inspired by the words, ‘**But this I know...**’ I want now to offer a version of Fullerton’s hymn for such a time as this.”

“I cannot tell why grief and sadness linger,
Why jobs are lost, and people face despair;
When this will end, if vaccines come and rescue,
Why isolation stalks the earth again.

But this I know,
Christ feels the hurt upon the cross;
The Spirit weaves our lives together still.
And some glad day, through Providence, the Father
May turn this wave of loss to glory by his will.



I cannot tell how we can be together
When all our ways of doing so are lost;
How we can be one body in communion
If every form of touch comes at a cost.

But this I know,
we’re sealed upon the heart of God
The Spirit dwells within our fearful souls.
And Christ finds ways to show his face to all of us,
To lift our hopes and meet us in our mortal fears.

I cannot tell how long this time of fear will last;
If there’ll be months, or years of damaged lives;
When once again we’ll gladly throng together,
To sit and laugh, to dance and play and kiss.
But this I know,
we’re finding things both good and true,
About our God, each other and ourselves.
So after this we’ll know we’ve met our darkest hour
And now there’s nothing we will have to face alone.



Revd Jane heard this hymn read as a poem



Mothers' UNION
Christian care for families



The Mothers' Union has made a very practical response to the coronavirus.

As their website explains, "We know that our work and experience in rebuilding communities and supporting family life is going to be more important than ever once the threat of COVID-19 subsides. Our members will be some of the first in line to support those around them." In the meantime, MU has drawn together a range of resources to "help nurture our members and their friends and neighbours through this challenging time." The resources will "help combat feelings of loneliness, to nourish faith and to help you continue to feel connected to your friends and community."

These include: rainbows, prayer cards, prayer resources, puzzles resources, and Bible study resources. More info at:-

<https://www.mothersunion.org>

In danger from domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is soaring just now. Even as far back as early April, it was up by 30 per cent.

No wonder, then, that charities are urging us to keep an eye out for anyone in danger. The warning signs include bruising, repeated shouting and all types of controlling behaviour.

If someone is in immediate danger, call 999 and ask for the police. If you dare not even speak, then use the silent solutions service by dialling 999 and press 55.

If there is no immediate danger, you can still contact the 24-hour confidential National Domestic Abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247.

Refuge, the national domestic abuse charity, estimates about 1.6 million women already experienced domestic abuse last year, and that "self-isolation has the potential to aggravate pre-existing abusive behaviours."

'He gave us eyes to see them': I am the true vine

Jesus the Good Shepherd has been a popular inspiration for artists from the earliest days of Christianity. But this month we focus on another image that has been just as powerful and influential from the first centuries of the Church: Jesus the vine.

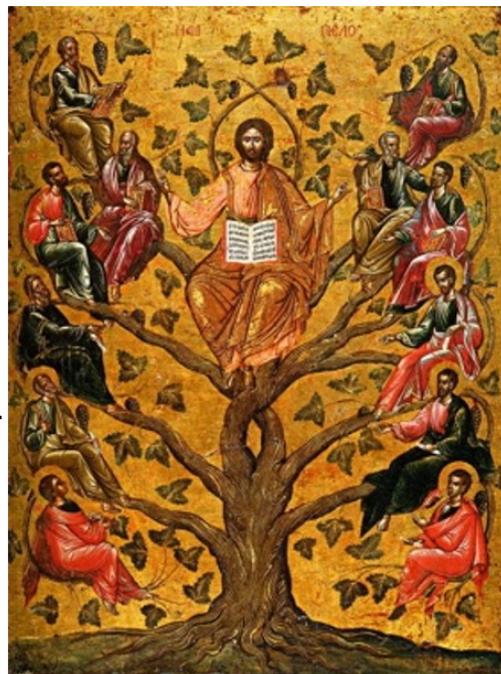
We think of grapes and the vine as symbols of the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Jesus, but early artists borrowed their inspiration from Greek and Roman sources with Dionysos (or Bacchus), the god of wine. For pagan believers, wine was a sign of intoxication and renewal of life, and Dionysos was a god who died and rose again. Under that influence, sculptors would carve vines on Christian tombs as a sign of that promise of new life.

But those artists were also influenced by the vine as an image of the people of Israel in the Old Testament, with God as the vintner tending his vine, as they were influenced by our Lord's own words in St John's Gospel. When Jesus talked of Himself as the vine, He was pointing to two truths. The first was the connection between the vine and the grapes: it was a symbol for the intimate relationship between Jesus and His followers. They are the grapes, because they receive their fruitfulness from Jesus. Without Him, there would be no growth, no maturity, no fruit. 'Whoever remains in Me, with Me in him, bears fruit in plenty.'

The second truth in this image is the wine that can bring life a new taste. Just as Jesus changed water into wine, His whole life was one of transformation – bringing water to the thirsty, sight to the blind, light to those in darkness, forgiveness to the sinner, and eternal life to those burdened by this world and the reality of death. The wine is a symbol of that goodness and flavour, both in creation and in salvation – the wine at the dinner party, and the wine in the chalice in communion. Jesus as the true vine brings that flavour and goodness to us.

Both truths speak out to us from this month's image of Jesus in an icon. In the Orthodox Church the icon is a window into the kingdom of heaven. As we stand and pray before the icon, if we can bridge 'the distance of the heart' (the space between the human eye and the icon), then God can reveal His glory to us. Here we see the face of Jesus in a 16th century icon, which is in the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens – the icon of Christ the true vine. He looks out at us, the Gospel book in His lap and His hands outstretched to bless the 12 disciples. The icon illustrates very vividly that metaphor of Jesus when He says that He is the vine and they are the branches. But those hands are also welcoming us to be with the 12: they invite us to offer our lives to live in Jesus.

Anselm Grün, a German Benedictine, tells how one of his fellow monks wondered what a difference there would have been if Jesus had said, 'I am a slimming camomile tea.' But no, He says to us in the Gospel and in the icon, 'I am the true vine': live in Me like my 12 disciples and your lives can be fruitful in my service.



God in the Sciences

A Scientist reflects on God's heart for the suffering

by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge.

It's difficult as a scientist to hear information that is fascinating, but which also involves so much suffering for other people. I worked for a time in a leukaemia research lab. We had to let other people's pain drive our research without it crippling our ability to concentrate on our work. But, writing this under lockdown, I have found myself – as a biologically-educated bystander – avoiding looking into the science of COVID-19 because the reminders of its impact on people's lives are everywhere that I look.

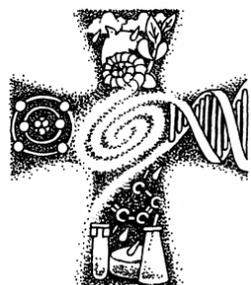
One of the ways I have been managing my own feelings during the pandemic is by digging deeper into what God has revealed to us about His character, letting that fuel my faith, my prayers, and my actions. For more academic types like myself, study – particularly of the Bible – can be one of the primary ways we connect with God and hear from Him. It's not wrong to be comforted by books, so long as the contents turn our eyes upwards and outwards.



First of all, God hears: “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted’ (Psalm 34:18a). In Jesus God took on human form, and He showed us His heart for the world. When His friend Lazarus died, He wept (John 11). God is “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Human sin has affected the whole of creation, and I believe this is largely the direct impact of our mismanagement of creation and mistreatment of each other. COVID-19 may well be another animal's friendly virus, pushed by human activity into causing havoc in bodies where it doesn't belong.

But God's world remains good. It is still fruitful, praising Him, as Psalm 19 describes. Even pictures of a deadly virus can seem beautiful – especially to a biologist! These good things are hints of the promised “new heavens and new earth” mentioned in the New Testament. One day “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay” (Romans 8: 21), and for everyone who follows God, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 21: 4).



Behind the debates about suffering is sometimes the assumption that God doesn't care. My experience is that God does care deeply, and He invites His Church to care for those around them – especially the most vulnerable. He is with us, He hears us and grieves with us, He helps us and promises a better future.

Coronavirus has turned our world upside down. But God is still there, and we can call on Him, as Psalm 91 (vs 1-6) reminds us...

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

³ Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.

Dwells
shelter
most
high
shadow
almighty
refuge
fortress
trust
save
snare
deadly
pestilence
cover
feathers
wings
faithfulness
shield
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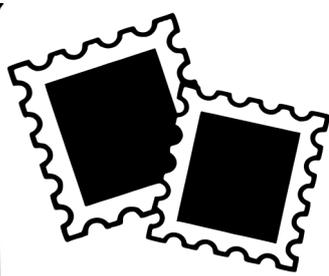
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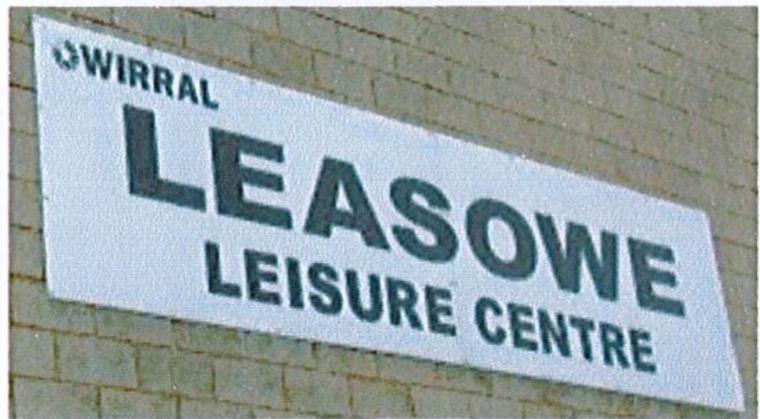
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