

Together as One

Newsletter of the Methodist Churches in Hungerford, Lambourn,
Newbury and Thatcham during Coronavirus Pandemic

Verse for the week

And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness - secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name.
(Isaiah 45: 3 NLT)

Treasures in the darkness

With the arrival of a new year, the lights of Christmas taken down, the special food eaten up and January's reality pressing very hard upon us all, where are we to find fragments of renewed confidence, the pinpricks of light in the darkness to sustain us? Where can we find rays of hope to sustain us through another wave of this evil virus which seems worse than before? What has brought cheer to you this week? Where do you look?

I have found comfort both within the experience of the pandemic and outside of it. I listened to the, at times harrowing, account of intensive care nursing and experience of children's author and Radio 4 presenter Michael Rosen and his wife on the reunion programme on that radio station. You can still listen to it here [BBC Radio 4 - The Reunion, The Covid-19 ward](#). Michael spent 10 weeks in the Whittington Hospital in London, nearly seven of which were on a ventilator. In the midst of that frightening and dark place, the courage, selfless love, compassion and transformation described pointed me again to their source in the God of all comfort and the Father of compassion. He is the One who is making all things new. He is the One who can transform bleached bones and dry dust to vibrant new life.

I found comfort too in the world outside of the pandemic, to the rhythm of the seasons which are unaffected and untroubled by the pandemic crisis ravaging human populations, lives and plans. The coming of each new day to be welcomed and greeted with praise and thanks; the green shoots of bulbs forcing upward through the frozen ground; the crunch of ice under the soles of my shoes; the sunrise and sunset and the slightly longer days are all unlimited by the concerns we all have and all direct me to the reliability, timelessness and the faithfulness of God our Creator and Sustainer. 'The world is charged with grandeur of God'. All these and so many more are in Isaiah the prophet's words, treasures in the darkness, secret riches so that we may know God who knows us all by name. Sometimes these treasures have to be sought and mined, at other times they just appear, unlooked for. They are all gifts from God out of His grace which remind us He is still God, still with us and still compassionate and kind.



With love and prayers, Peter.

West Berkshire Homeless at Christmas - Answer to prayer

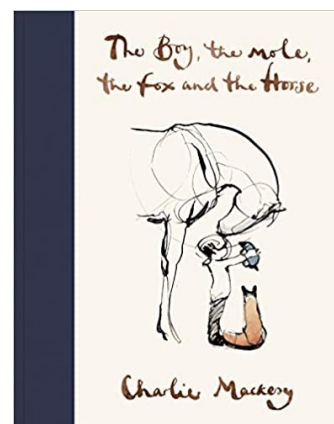
I have been very humbled this Christmas by the amazing support of the local community for the work we are doing through West Berkshire Homeless. We sent out an appeal in November to our supporters asking for Christmas hampers and initially planned to do 16. We waited on the Friday a couple of weeks ago for delivery of these and, during that morning, I received the numbers for another request we had had as the Food Bank, who were so busy, had asked if we could also cover the Council's Housing First people - they needed 16. I thought 'Oh dear Lord, how are we going to cover another 16 hampers?!' Within 10 minutes of me exclaiming this, two cars pulled into the parking area and each one had eight hampers in them! The quickest response to a prayer I have ever had! We ended up collating 39 hampers and a local company gave us sufficient funds to buy meat products to go with each one. These were distributed to 39 people /families on the poverty line within the local area.

Another local company collected over £1000 for us to provide a takeaway Christmas lunch. A chef I know came up from Southampton (his wife is a nurse and works on Christmas Day) and we provided a total of 40 three-course Christmas meals in takeaway containers each one with a delicious looking mince pie! An excellent team of willing volunteers buckled down and worked hard on the day to make sure that the food was ready and hot for delivery. To see the delight on the faces of those to whom we delivered the food was wonderful.

None of this work would have been possible without the super companies and individuals in the local area. I am very humbled by the wonderful generosity that there is in our area for those who are less fortunate. God indeed provides! Erica Gassor (West Berkshire Homeless)

Recommendations for new year reading and listening

If you would like a big warm hug - then I strongly recommend that you settle down comfortably, close your eyes and listen to 'The Boy, The Mole, The Fox & The Horse' by Charlie Mackesy. We were given the book for Christmas and by chance I found it was on the radio too. It is a simple and gentle story, but very life affirming and brought the tears to my eyes. It is a children's book for all ages with a strong Christian message; the author is a Christian. If you can read the book, the illustrations are beautiful and if you can listen on the radio (limited time so don't wait too long!), the gentle music and countryside sounds will lull you gently. Here is the link for the radio broadcast: [Click Here](#) Kathy.



Anne recommends 'A History of the Bible - the Book and its Faiths', by John Barton, read in 5 episodes by Hugh Bonneville [Click Here](#) and 'God's Dangerous Book' by Nick Page. A few prejudices but a good read!

I am currently reading 'Looking for Mrs Livingstone' by Julie Donaldson. It is a travelogue in the footsteps of Mary Livingstone, wife of explorer and missionary David Livingstone, through which the author interweaves the complex and remarkable life story of a woman of courage and intelligence who has been too long in the shadow of her husband. It is an engaging read.

If you have recommendations to share, please let me know.

Acorn Christian Healing Foundation - Online Courses

If you wish to improve your listening skills, here is a wonderful opportunity. The Acorn Christian Healing Foundation, which we recommend, are currently offering online listening courses as follows:

Effective Listening Practice, Modules 1 and 2, mornings of 19 & 20 January, cost £40

Applied Listening Practice, Modules 1 and 2, mornings of 9 & 10 February, cost £40

Using Zoom, you will discover what it means to listen well, to yourself, to those around you and to those in the wider community. For further details please click here. [Click Here](#) If you would like to take part and the cost prevents you, please do contact me as funds for training are available .

Other courses being run by Acorn this term include:

Grief and Loss: A Journey of Hope in Unprecedented Times

Mind Matters to God

Do not be Anxious

Finding a New Vocabulary in Prayer.

Further details are available on the website, Peter

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is from 18th to 25th January. If you would like to take part the material for daily devotions can be downloaded here. [Click Here](#) Online worship is also planned in Hungerford at 6pm on Sunday 17th January and in Thatcham at lunchtime on Tuesday 19th January and at 7.30pm on Thursday 21st January. Links to these events will be available shortly. Please contact me if you do not receive details and would like to attend any of these events. Peter

And finally

My daughter asked if she could have a lipstick for Christmas but I misheard and I thought she said 'gluestick'. She hasn't spoken to me since!