

THE REVIEW

MARCH 2021



*Springtime at the Eden Project
In Cornwall*

WADDINGTON STREET UNITED REFORMED CHURCH,

DURHAM CITY DH1 4BG

Church Website: www.durhamurc.org.uk



Dear Friends,

Thankfully the thaw is well under way and temperatures are getting into double figures. Cold weather is necessary for the ground to prepare for new growth. But I'm sure we're all glad nonetheless that spring is on its way.

For this issue, I thought I'd share a picture I took during the freeze to remind us that water is in an ever-changing state. It can be frozen in ice, disturbed as the raging sea, life-breathing as vapour in the air, life-giving as thirst-quenching drinking water. If molecules of water had awareness and could think (in English!), I wonder whether the oxygen and double hydrogen combination stuck in the icicle would grumble that nothing was changing; whether the same droplet in a raging North Sea would yearn for peace; or whether that molecule in air or a glass of water would exclaim 'here we go again!' as they head towards an open mouth.

Of course this is an imaginary scenario. Water doesn't have awareness. But we do. And for all that we appreciate that we're part of a longer story, our immediate experience is limited to a small portion of our limited lifespans. On the other hand, God is well aware of the longer, larger picture and the changes in our lives, communities, and climate. We who pay attention to God also come to appreciate this wider worldview when we pray.



Prayer is a privileged peak into the yesterday, today, and forever of God. The practice of prayer is like being a photographer who can freeze a moment in time to dwell on the details of life; it's like being a videographer who can speed up time or slow it right down to gain fresh perspectives; and prayer is like being an artist who can create shapes, colours, patterns and marks—thus filling a blank sheet with a new creation.

As our imagination interacts with God in prayer, not just of the intercessory type but introspective, we can begin to appreciate our place in time. Our part has beauty, as in these pictured icicles; it has usefulness, too, as well as uncertainty—for we cannot know what our future will be. We cannot be other than we are, but we can connect with our Creator in prayer and so gain another perspective on life as we pray.

Regards,

Marcus

"Self-denial means knowing only Christ, and no longer oneself. It means seeing only Christ, who goes ahead of us, and no longer the path that is too difficult for us... Self-denial is saying only: He goes ahead of us; hold fast to him." *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

(From February 2021 issue of the Bethel URC Newsletter. Used with their kind permission.)



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY AND CHURCH NEWS

Ministerial Services – Revd. Marcus Hargis is contactable in the following ways:-

Phone: 0776 949 2629 and 0191 366 4930 (messages can be left on either).

Email: marcushargis@outlook.com For routine pastoral matters, please first approach your Elder.

Time of Sunday Services – 10.45 a.m.

COPY DATE FOR THE APRIL REVIEW IS – SUNDAY 21st MARCH 2021.

Please be aware when submitting articles that our Church Magazine goes on the website and is available for anyone anywhere in the world to read.

DATES OF CHURCH SERVICES AT WADDINGTON STREET

There will be no services at Waddington Street until further notice.

Details when available will be posted on the church website and by email.

An Elder's Plea

In the January issue of "The Review," I advertised the merits of Brian McLaren's book "Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha and Mohammed cross the road?" It would be very helpful to know how many people have taken up the challenge of reading the book, and what they have made of it. So, if you have read or started to read the book, do give me a ring (Tel. 0191-3782544) and let me know how you have got on. And if you are only mildly interested, but would be willing to borrow a copy to look at, again let me know. Nothing ventured, nothing gained! **Ron Todd**

Juggling Jigsaws (from Janet Thornborrow).

As one of our fund raising activities, jigsaws from our collection can be taken and completed upon payment of a donation towards our nominated charities – St.

Cuthbert's Hospice and Christian Aid. If interested, then phone or email me and I will ensure a jigsaw is delivered to your door. The jigsaws can either be returned to me when complete or passed on if desired. email jthornborrow@outlook.com or phone (0191) 384 3702



Ian Watt (also known as "the 5p guy" as he has, so far, collected 1,230,000 5 pence pieces for St. Cuthbert's Hospice) has set himself a new challenge to raise funds for the Hospice. This is to cycle 500 miles on his exercise bike - at home (due to lockdown).

If you want to support Ian in his latest fundraising effort for the Hospice you can donate at www.Justgiving.com/Ians500miles

Or send a cheque to the Hospice (with Ian's 500 miles) so they can keep track of the result.

Ian is a member at Bethel URC Chester le Street and has worked tirelessly for the Hospice for many years.

We wish Ian well on his cycle ride.



Notes from Elders' Meeting on Wednesday 3rd February 2021 (held on ZOOM on line)

1. The meeting opened with a reading from John chapter 4 verses 31 to 38 with contemplation of the aspects of church life that energize and the aspects that drain, followed by prayer.
2. It was agreed that the ordination/induction of our new elders could be via a Zoom service.
3. Our fundraising activities over the Christmas period have raised £1300 with some more to be added.
Michèle Woods is waiting until the end of February to add the final sum to the church account.
The elders thanked Marcus for his efficient and sensitive judging of the entries to the photographic competition.
4. Val clarified the arrangements for the occasions when she is hosting Sunday Zoom worship. Unfortunately Marcus will not be completely free of a commitment on these Sundays, as he has to schedule the time for the link and hand over to Val before the service commences.
5. District Reports were given with those mentioned to be remembered in prayer.
6. Marcus stated that he would be happy to attend as our representatives for the 2021 General Assembly of the URC on the 9th to 12th July 2021.
7. The Elders discussed Margot's Legacy in conjunction with Marcus' article in the February review entitled "What Is the Church Here For?" It is hoped the article will stimulate views and comments from our church family. Elders have to gather comments from those in their districts to bring to the next Elders' meeting for further discussion.
8. Marcus and Richard had attended a meeting called to raise awareness with churches on the issues surrounding those people from Hong Kong who decide to settle in the UK. The Elders decided that we would not sign up to the website and so to the assumption that we are a "Hong Kong Ready Church." Instead we would continue to improve on our provision of offering the best possible welcome to all those who come to us.
9. The students expressed an interest in the topic of eco friendly churches, with one student in particular volunteering to be part of a group to research the steps our church needs to become eco friendly.
Marcus is going to make enquiries to discern the interest of church members in participating in this group.
10. The meeting agreed that the Church would remain closed until the week after the next Elders' meeting in March and that this decision would be reviewed at the next Elders' meeting.
11. The next Elders' meeting will be by Zoom online on Wednesday 3rd March 2021 at 7 p.m.

(Janet Thornborrow)

EDITOR'S LETTER

DEAR READERS,



Thanks to Janet Thornborrow's offer of delivering jigsaws, for a donation to our Church fundraising for St. Cuthbert's Hospice and Christian Aid, I have been attempting jigsaws for the first time in years. I struggled with the first one and the second one has proved even more challenging, due to the odd shapes of the pieces, but I was determined to finish it! I think I have possibly become a little addicted to doing jigsaws and look forward to tackling the next one. It makes a change from reading and watching Television, so thank you Janet for that idea.

When I was dusting the other day, I looked at a Prinknash jug which I bought at a street market a few years ago for the sum of 50p! Yes, it only cost me 50p and must be one of the best bargains I have ever had. It got me to thinking – what is the best bargain **you** have had – or the worst? Please let me know. I am sure there must be a wide variety of items out there. I am trying to convince Les that I might be the best bargain he ever got but he seems to be a little undecided still!



Les and I were glad to have our first vaccination against Covid – first time we have been pleased to be in the older age group! It was well organised. We continue to follow the lockdown rules. There are charts on the Internet showing how different countries have prioritised groups to be vaccinated. Les and I also had eye tests in February – not having been given one last year. The Covid pandemic has meant that many routine health checks were not available last year.

There has been a new gameshow on T.V. called LINGO. You are given the first letter of the word and have to guess the word within five steps. It sounds and looks very easy but we do not always manage to guess the word. It is quite a good game to involve children in as it could help their spelling and increase their word power.

I am not clairvoyant but I suspect that Ted Cruz, the American Senator for Texas who flew to Cancun on holiday while his people were in the grip of bitter winter weather will not be re-elected next time round! Apparently, at least 56 people were killed as a result of the extreme weather conditions, including one man who was found frozen to death in his recliner. Firefighters had to cope with frozen hydrants when trying to put out fires caused by the storm.

My thanks to anyone who has contributed to this month's Review and, please, keep on sending your articles in to me - it is very much appreciated.

Lucille Thomson

The next issue of The Review will be published on **Sunday 4th April 2021**.
Contributions please to Lucille Thomson at church or BY POST or **Tel. 0191-3861052**
or e-mail **lesthomson@talktalk.net** – no later than **NOON on Sunday 21st March 2021**.



YOU ARE UNIQUE (Helen Redfern)

You may not feel beautiful.
 You may not feel special.
 You may not feel wonderful.
 But you are.
 You are special.
 There's no one quite like you.
 You are unique.
 There is only one of you.
 Nobody has the same fingerprints as you.
 Nobody has the same pattern of freckles as you.
 Nobody has the same teeth as you.
 Nobody has a birthmark in the same place as you.
 You are special.
 There's no one quite like you.
 You are unique.
 There is only one of you.
 No one else can laugh your laugh.
 No one else can cry your tears.
 No one else can smile your smile.
 No one else can sneeze your sneeze.
 You are special.
 There's no one quite like you.
 You are unique.
 There is only one of you.

WORDS IN WORDS [A Quiz from Jill from Bethel URC Newsletter]

The answer is a country's name. In each case it is made up of the letters you are given and the word for which a clue is given.

1. - - - land. Part of a fish.
2. - - - - - n. A root vegetable.
3. B - - - - -. A girl's name.
4. S - - - -. An uncomfortable feeling.
5. O - - -. A male person.
6. Ru - - - -. Obsession or type of madness.
7. - - - aica. Comes in pots to spread on bread.
8. - - - land. Frozen water.
9. - - - ga. 2240 lb.
10. Den - - - -. To give a score to
11. Le - - - on. To forbid.
12. Gibr - - - -. Large table at the front of churches.
13. Ba - - - as. Meat from pig.
14. - - - - ugal. Where ships unload.
15. - - - ama. Utensil for cooking in
16. T - - - - and. Solid ice lumps from clouds.
17. Pa - - - uay. Scrap of cloth.
18. - - - - apore. To use the voice in music..
19. Ku - - - -. To stay for someone or something
20. - - - land. Anger.

Answers.

1. Finland. 2. Sweden. 3. Bolivia. 4. Spain. 5. Oman.
6. Rumania. 7. Jamaica. 8. Iceland. 9. Tonga.
10. Denmark. 11. Lebanon. 12. Gibraltar. 13. Bahamas
14. Portugal. 15. Panama. 16. Thailand. 17. Paraguay.
18. Singapore. 19. Kuwait. 20. Ireland.



[Left – statue of Alexander Selkirk)
(1676 – 13 December 1721)

Reflections on Robinson Crusoe.

In a village in Fife called Lower Largo there is a statue of Alexander Selkirk, a mariner who is generally acknowledged to be the inspiration for Daniel Defoe in his writing of 'Robinson Crusoe'. The book was immensely popular when it was published in 1719, and still is today. Perhaps it has a special piquancy for us in this time of our lockdown and isolation. Defoe, a Londoner, was a Dissenter, a Presbyterian. He was a bit of an adventurer in his own way, and a prolific writer.

The narrative tells of how Crusoe, having set out in defiance of his

father, and surviving a series of misadventures, finds himself washed up on a desert island, exhausted and despairing; of how, by his courage, ingenuity and labour, he managed to live successfully and, indeed, happily in isolation for over twenty years; how he was joined by Friday whom he had rescued from a party of cannibals and who thereafter served him with great devotion and admiration, and who, in return, was greatly cherished by Crusoe.

Among the objects salvaged from the wreck there were three Bibles, which Crusoe read with increasing devotion and deepening faith and acuity. He began to instruct Friday in the Christian faith which he eagerly adopted as they studied the Bible together.

The narrative discusses how Crusoe's experiences led to a development of greater wisdom and maturity. The reckless and disobedient son became a mature and wise leader who respected and consulted those who served him.

Ruth Cranfield



Born the eldest son and third child of James and Mary Defoe, Defoe received a very good education, as his father intended him to become a Presbyterian minister, but he chose to become a merchant instead. In 1684 he joined the army of the rebel Duke of Monmouth, but when the rebellion failed, Defoe was forced into semi-exile. He went bankrupt in 1692, and began writing professionally. He wrote a satirical pamphlet in 1703 called "The Shortest Way with the Dissenters", for which he was pilloried. After a stint in Newgate prison and more troubles with his bankruptcy, Defoe wrote "Robinson Crusoe" and "Moll Flanders", both of which were great successes. Labelled a social historian for his interest in colonization, economics, and exploration, Defoe died of a lethargy in Cripplegate on 24 April 1731.

- IMDb Mini Biography By: Nichol

A Walk Around Durham In The Snow – By Angus Robson

On a day of bitterly cold, but sunny weather, we decided to have a walk near home in accordance with the government rules. We crossed an almost empty market place, over Framwellgate Bridge and along the very icy riverside path to the viewpoint at the Old Corn Mill, where there is a great view of the Cathedral and the Fulling Mill.



Leaving the viewpoint, there is a short, steep slope which was very icy. I suggested that Jan follow me, and it is just as well she didn't because after a few yards, gravity and ice took control. My feet slid off in different directions and I pitched forward to the point where I almost kissed the icy path.

My dignity regained, we crossed Prebends Bridge, from where there is another wonderful view of the river and Cathedral.

From there we followed the riverside path to the old Elvet Bridge and turned uphill to the Palace Green.



The Cathedral looked very bleak against the cold clear sky and I have never seen so few people there. Skirting around the almost empty area in front of the Cathedral we crossed Kingsgate Bridge and made our way down to the riverside by the old Durham Baths, stopping to have a look at the Cathedral Rose Window on the way.



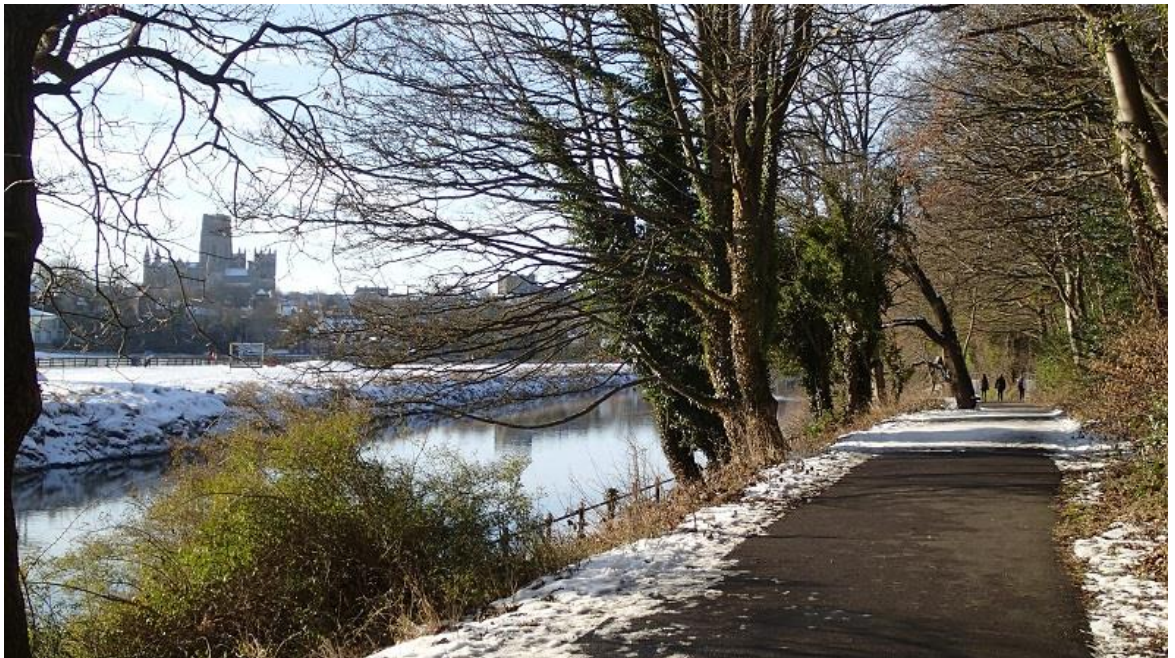


The icy riverside path and snowy riverbanks made for difficult and tiring walking. There were a few people out enjoying the day, some just strolling and some running. We carried on as far as Shincliffe before crossing the river to return to Durham on the opposite bank.

There were more people out on the riverside on the way back, most giving a cheery greeting and keeping their

distance, but some of the younger ones walked straight at us, relying on us to move. We also noticed groups of younger people meeting up and hugging each other, a great way to spread viruses.

Without leaves on the trees, there are some great distant views of Durham Cathedral across the river.



Along the way there were glimpses

of various birds, as well as a Grey Squirrel. The closest we got was when a couple of swans glided past, close to the riverbank. All in all, a very satisfying, although very tiring walk of six miles.



3... 2... 1... John

PART ONE: THE SCENE IS SET

The Elder sighed, he didn't like writing letters but felt he had to: "I've so much to say, but it can't wait till I visit. That man Diotrephes is trouble—he always has to be first, only listening to himself. Too many are taken in by him, and they then freeze out good, generous folk. There's no reasoning with them either: they think they're perfect, without sin—so perfect in fact that Jesus hardly gets a look in. So what to do? Gaius is a good man; I'll send Demetrius to him to see what's really going on..."

This imagined inner conversation is perhaps what was going through the mind of the person who wrote the Biblical book of 3 John. Named only as 'the elder', historical tradition (based more on fancy than fact) names them John. The process of deciding on which writings to include in the Bible as we know it today and in which order, chose to sort the Biblical letters by author (Paul first) and then size but not by date. So, for instance, Paul's letter to the Romans (written around the year 57) is placed before his first letter to the Thessalonians (written seven years previously).

The letters of John in the Bible are placed from longest to shortest. But in reading them, and consulting articles and commentaries including a recently published volume¹, I think it right to read the three letters of John in reverse order—i.e. 3, 2, 1 John—because it makes more sense as a compelling story in the light of what we know, and has more practical relevance for today. What starts as a personal recommendation for an envoy sent to correct an apparent power-hungry local leader (3 John), develops into a correction of congregational theology and practice (2 John), and then—when the rogues get widespread—a circular letter is called for (1 John).

All three letters were written in response to a group, faction, or community the commentators name as 'the secessionists'—people who wanted to depart from the ideas and founders of an original community. The author, stated only as 'the Elder' and whom we shall refer to as John, represented orthodoxy and was an eye-witness to the events of Jesus' time on earth. All three letters of John are linked in terms of style, language, concepts—so it is likely that the same author wrote them all.

For now, we shall begin with 3 John, written to Gaius whom John praises as one who walks in the truth and is faithful to it. This shows itself in generous hospitality shown to travelling witnesses to the truth whom Gaius has hosted. John encourages Gaius to continue his support, in contrast to someone called Diotrephes who refuses to provide hospitality to John's friends, even throwing out of the church those who do welcome them. Gaius is encouraged to welcome Demetrius, ending the letter with greetings from friends to friends.

With this letter, we learn that news has reached the Elder that there may be trouble ahead and he is sending an emissary, perhaps to find out more and to persuade those he meets to follow the way of the Truth. We can surmise that John the Elder is part (or maybe the main leader) of a community, often referred to as the Johannine Community, informed by the Fourth Gospel also attributed to John.

¹ My sources for scholarship and background material are: Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2020; C. Clifton Black, "The First, Second, and Third Letters of John" in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. XII, Abingdon Press, 1998; and Robert M. Price, *The Sitz-im-Leben of Third John: A New Reconstruction*, *EvQ* 61(1989): 114,19. Accessed online on 20/1/21 from https://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/art_thirdjohn.htm. What I have written, however, represent my own views unless stated otherwise.

Whether the ‘John’ of community, gospel and epistle is the same person or different writers remains unknowable. We can, however, see from 3 John that the elder from the Johannine Community is in conflict with Diotrephes.

What was the matter? Firstly, this person Diotrephes we are told “likes to put himself first.” This term, φιλοπρωτεύων (philoproteuon) appears nowhere else in Biblical writings. It’s made up from ‘philos’ (‘lover of’: e.g. philosophy, bibliophile) and ‘protos’ (‘first’: e.g. prototype). The meaning therefore is ‘loving to be first’ and a picture is being painted of someone who likes to be in first place among his community, perhaps someone who absolutely had to win, a dominant alpha male maybe. That is not necessary a sin in itself, but the guy in question used his first place to turn his community against the Elder. Not only did Diotrephes fail to accept John, he spread false charges against the Elder; not only does this rogue leader refuse to provide hospitality to other Christians, he prevents those who want to do so, and even expels them from the church.

The precise nature of the rogue community, details of differences, and the backgrounds to the personalities involved are lost in the mists of time. Maybe Diotrephes was a ‘gnostic’, the heretical branch of Christians who claimed exclusive special knowledge leading to all sorts of weird and wacky ideas. As we continue our exploration, this seems to be quite likely based on what the text tells us. John the Elder follows by saying, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.” (v11) This may be in part in response to the conduct of Diotrephes, but it also introduces a theme that will recur in 2 and 1 John: doing the right thing, living lives of love, in a struggle between good and evil.

I was struck by how contemporary 3 John feels. There are too many people around in all walks of life today who like to put themselves first, plenty who *have* to win. We have seen people like this reach positions of power and the results are not pretty: falsehoods not backed up by evidence, freezing out those not on the same side, exclusive special knowledge leading to all sorts of weird and wacky ideas. These traits recur also in the actions of those who gain a little control over a situation and misuse that power to make sure they stay in first place among their people. There’s an abundance of modern-day Diotrephes’, so the Elder’s situation and his response matters to us.

Another aspect of the letters of John is strikingly contemporary as well: John the Elder is not present with the people; there is physical distance between the communities; and communication is remote or, at best, through representatives. Sound familiar? Indeed, church life has that feel about it, though not quite in the same way. The worry is, like the situation in 3 John, that some things cannot wait for a face-to-face engagement, and also that communities may be drifting apart. Again, John’s response matters to us today.

The Elder’s first step is to commend Demetrius as a follower of the truth. In other words, he was encouraging Gaius and the remote community to stay connected with the original Johannine community by continuing to receive and listen to established, commended voices. That is a temptation for many today, in an age where any one of us can access content that is grounded not in love but in the ego of someone who loves to be first among their people—and there are plenty of all political and religious persuasions.

Sadly, it doesn’t seem to go well for the the Elder. 2 John shows that the problem is deep-seated and threatens the very existence of authentic discipleship wherever the rogue community was. In the next edition, we turn our attention to what happened next.

(Marcus)



A Covid Wilderness: Lent 2021

For many of us, if not all of us, this global pandemic has become a traumatic wilderness experience. The virus has been indiscriminate, infectious, and insatiable; we have become isolated human beings, confined to our homes, fresh air has been rationed, human interactions regulated, we've had to let go of familiar routines. As a result, we have had to face new challenges, establish new habits, encounter new temptations. But alas, it is the not-knowing which is precisely what makes this covid wilderness a real-life wilderness experience. We know that a wilderness experience can change us, for good or ill. How we are changed is determined, in large measure, by our response to circumstances beyond our control. I guess for most of us during the last 12 months we have learnt to develop at least to some degree patience, embodied kindness, discovered humility, found courage and became our own friends.

As the season of Lent begins Matthew's Jesus is found going into the wilderness. He remained there for 40 days after his baptism and then, we are told, he was tempted. He heard many tempting voices during his sojourn in an environment not too dissimilar from the surface of planet Mars where the recent robot, unmanned spacecraft, *Perseverance* landed a few days ago. During this recent lockdown, we too have heard voices, mostly on social media, voices bloated by ego chat, too much stuff and food. Coming up out of the water following his baptism Jesus heard the unmistakable voice that really mattered. What he did know for sure was that he was cherished, loved, wanted - and for always.

It was in the wilderness that Jesus realised his vocation could only be lived when he learnt to live up to the voice that he heard that day in the river. Not to the ones that wanted him to live some different and submerged existence as a consumer of the world, or getting bogged down in administration and ecclesiastical politics, playing games with doctrinal language. Lent spent in the dry wilderness should be an adventure, listening for and trying to live up to that voice Jesus heard in the river. And as we listen for that voice and react to it our hearts and imagination will be enlarged as we grow through our Lenten studies and prayer. To give in to other voices of temptation will make our lives like a pancake that we cooked last week – fat and flat.

So, if you feel you're wandering these days in a wilderness, rest assured you're not alone. We're all walking more by faith than by sight now. But just because we're wandering, doesn't mean we are lost, for we are always walking in God's sight. We keep following the light that shines in the darkness and trusting in the One who promises us we are loved, cherished and wanted, who will be with us always.

As we journey on in hope to the light, as the country cautiously begins its lockdown defrost, a continued Lent wilderness might well still be needed to do more heart repair as we start to pick ourselves up and follow our crucified Saviour again this year, to Easter and beyond.

Morning Prayer, URC Northern Synod - Matthew 4 v1-11 - 25th February 2021

Ray Anglesea



New Life For The World 2020 Easter Reflection by Tony Haws

[This article came too late for the Easter issue last year but is still very relevant today. Editor]

Easter is the season when we celebrate and reflect on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's Anointed One, the Saviour of the World. I begin with the words from John's Gospel ch.3 v.16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

A wonderful promise that is made to you, to me and also to everyone who believes. Eternal life is available to every person in the world, not just to a select group or nation. It is hard now for us to realise what a radical change this was. Yet it proclaimed a new world order.

The first apostle that we know of to understand this was Paul, apostle to the Gentiles. So radical was this message that Paul was constantly reviled, undermined and shunned by fellow Christians as well as by Jews. It could not have been easy working with Paul, but he paid a heavy price for his commitment to proclaiming and living out the good news.

Easter is a time for you and I to rejoice, celebrate and give thanks. But we should never forget that it is not just for you or me or the people we like or some special group. It is open to everyone and we need to recognize that truth before we lay claim to God's promise.

The Lectionary Gospel for Easter Sunday this year tells of the initial confusion, lack of understanding, misery and fear that the various disciples felt that day. 50 days would pass between

Easter and Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit fell with power upon the assembled disciples. 50 days is a long period by Scriptural standards. 40 days or fewer is almost always sufficient. This was clearly a massive change.

During many of those intervening days Jesus taught, instructed and challenged the disciples, preparing them for his great commission. I should like to propose to you all that the next 40 to 50 days is a good time for us to undertake a similar development programme.

Coronavirus and the restrictions it has imposed on everyone is a powerful symbol that the world is changing radically at present. The world that we enter when we leave our self-isolation and when those shops and businesses that survive reopen will be radically different from the one we left a few weeks ago.

The human race can be remarkably adaptable. Despite the horror, shock, grief, constraints and anxiety amazing things have happened. Most of us have changed our behaviour radically.

Neighbours are helping each other and keeping in touch more frequently; passers by wave from a safe distance. Creative people have become even more creative and entertain us in all manner of exciting and stimulating ways. We are fortunate to have Steve Nelson who keeps us so well informed and entertained.

Even the traditional denominations of the church which often appeared to be moribund, twenty years or more out of date and in accelerating decline have found new ways of being church. Jackie and I have links with many churches across the North East and in London. We are receiving stimulating electronic newsletters and recorded services. Members of the Robert Stuart Memorial congregation have travelled across Newcastle to bring us beautiful primulas for Mothering Sunday, Palm crosses and hard copies of their devotional newsletter. I broke off writing this reflection at this point so that Jackie and I could attend a live zoom service at St. Andrew's U.R.C., Ealing last Sunday. We saw members of the congregation we served for over 10 years live in their homes and they even saw us. What a bonus!

This is all very positive but what is uppermost in my mind is will this loving creativity continue and will we make the most of these new opportunities to develop and strengthen our mission. And will the world finally accept the need to change its values and priorities?

Scientists have been saying for some time that an outbreak such as the Corona virus is only the beginning. Climate change is wreaking tremendous havoc on the whole of creation. As a result, increasingly virulent and contagious diseases are likely to cause further pandemics and consequent lockdowns for the human population.

What should we do as Christians during the period until the end of lockdown? I propose we should think deeply and prayerfully on our own faith, values and witness. God has given us different personalities, gifts and opportunities but we could all start by studying our Bibles, especially the two great commandments, the Beatitudes and the ten commandments. There is also much else in Scripture and church teaching that each one of us can benefit from by applying to our situation. Then, equipped with Biblical insights we can each embark on our individual journeys of faith and discipleship. Some questions we might usefully ask ourselves are:

What can I do to further the work of the Kingdom of God?

How can I contribute to the welfare of society?

What can I do or give up to help creation and avoid the exploitation
of the world's creatures and resources?

Very big questions: they deserve at least the next 50 days to consider them and probably much more.

Christ is risen, Alleluia!

May you have a blessed Easter and feel God's life-giving presence wherever you go.

Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (From Wikipedia)



Jesus enters Jerusalem and the crowds welcome him. *Entry into Jerusalem*, by Giotto, 14th century.

In the accounts of the four canonical Gospels, Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem takes place in the days before the Last Supper, marking the beginning of his Passion, his time of suffering, death, and resurrection celebrated during Holy Week. Christians celebrate Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday which begins a week of celebrations known as Holy Week ending with Easter Sunday.

In John 12:9–11 crowds gather around Jesus and believe in him after he raised Lazarus from the dead, and the next day the multitudes that had gathered for the feast in Jerusalem welcome Jesus as he enters the city. In Matthew 21:1–11, Mark 11:1–11, Luke

19:28–44, and John 12:12–19, Jesus descends from the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem, and the crowds lay their clothes on the ground to welcome him as he triumphantly enters Jerusalem.

According to the Gospels, Jesus was staying at Bethany before entering Jerusalem. John 12:1 states that he was in Bethany six days before the Passover. In the synoptic gospels, Jesus sends two disciples ahead to the nearby village of Bethphage in order to retrieve a donkey and a colt and if questioned, to say that the donkey was needed by the Lord. Jesus then rode both the donkey and colt side by side. Jesus then rode the donkey into Jerusalem, with the three synoptic gospels stating that the disciples had first put their cloaks on it (presumably to make it more comfortable). Matthew 21:7 maintains that the disciples laid their cloaks on both animals. Heinrich Meyer suggests that "they spread their outer garments upon both animals, being uncertain which of them Jesus intended to mount". In Luke 19:41 as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he looks at the city and weeps over it (an event known as *Flevit super illam* in Latin), foretelling the suffering that awaits the city.

On his entry into the city, Matthew's account suggests that Jesus evoked great excitement - "all the city was moved". The people of the city asked "Who is this?" and "the multitudes" answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee".

would come to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives: Matthew 21:1-11 refers to a passage from Book of Zechariah (9:9) and states: "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." Though Jesus had been to Jerusalem several times to celebrate the feasts, his final entry into Jerusalem had a special meaning. He was solemnly entering as a humble King of peace. Traditionally, entering the city on a donkey symbolizes arrival in peace, rather than as a war-waging king arriving on a horse.

The Golden Gate is located in the north section of the east wall of the Temple Mount. In Jewish belief, the gate is called 'The Gate of Mercy' (*sha'ar harakhamim*), and is considered to be the place from which the Messiah will enter in the end of days. According to Jewish tradition, the Shekhinah (שכינה) (Divine Presence) used to appear through the eastern Gate, and will appear again when the Anointed One (Messiah) comes (Ezekiel 44:1–3) The gate is believed to be the place from which Christ entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, thus implying his own messianic status.

The triumphal entry and the palm branches, resemble the celebration of Jewish liberation in 1 Maccabees (13:51) which states: "And entered into it ... with thanksgiving, and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and with viols, and hymns, and songs.



What a joyful welcome the fickle crowds give Jesus,
When, seated on a donkey colt, he rides into Jerusalem.
How could it be that such adoration could vanish,
And our Lord could, so soon, be betrayed by them?

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to God,
While the disciples who were on watch just slept.
How heavy their hearts must have been to see Him taken,
We can only guess that in their remorse they wept.

Jesus was tried and sentenced to death by crucifixion,
He ended his days among murderers and thieves.
Who can know the reasons behind His awful fate,
Hidden in the mysteries that our God weaves?

(L.T.)

