

Dear all

My apologies for the recent 'quiet on the western front' from me. It's been an incredibly busy time, for diverse and strange reasons! Hopefully back to normal, with a new and much faster computer.

Today we had a very strange and new problem with the livestream. Facebook seemed to be telling us we were already streaming – we weren't! – and wouldn't let us in. Hopefully we can sort this in due course. Meanwhile, the link for the recorded service is here:

[Candlemas - YouTube](#)

The first song, 'First Light' by Graham Kendrick is a favourite of mine from my previous church (it is not in our current hymn book). I hope you liked it.

The choosing of this song actually made me reflect on how I choose hymns for a service. You might be interested. The choice of music for a service, hymns particularly, can almost make or break a service. As I often say, not entirely tongue in cheek, if someone comes away from a service saying that it was a really good service, they often mean we enjoyed the hymns that we sung! So, how do I choose hymns?

Let me say from the start, closing my eyes and sticking a pin in the hymn book is NOT the method I use! Neither do I choose only my favourites (well, not usually purposely!). I will occasionally choose hymns I'm not a great fan of, because they fit with the theme or the mood. Obviously, hymns must be chosen to suit the theme of the service – perhaps the readings, or the season in the church year, or perhaps what is happening in the world today. As well as personal experience, I use the lists in the back of the hymn book, and an invaluable crib list from the RSCM (Royal School of Church Music).

The next question is "do we know the hymn?". So often it happens that a hymn that "everybody knows" ... they don't. Hymns that I've known all my life are new to others, and vice versa. The St James' uses a hymn book that I have never used before, so some of my usual choices are not necessarily to be found in it. The plus side is that I am discovering some wonderful new hymns.

Talking of new hymns, one of the greatest sins of a vicar is to choose a hymn "we don't know". I will occasionally throw in a new hymn, because of the quality of the words. In that case, I will always try to find a familiar tune. Hymns are listed by metre (number of syllables in a line) e.g. 8.7.8.7, but an 8.7.8.7 tune will not necessarily fit all words, depending on the emphasis or stress of syllables. And don't get me started about 'irregular' tunes (e.g. 'I am the bread of life!').

The next question is, where does the hymn come in the structure of the service? The first hymn should usually be quite a bouncy hymn of praise, drawing us into a spirit of worship, and invoking God's presence with us. The Gradual hymn is the one before the Gospel. At St James, we tend to have a Gradual Psalm – but if we don't the feel of the hymn should draw us into a mood of expectation, of preparing to listen to God's word for us. And it may well point to key themes in the Gospel reading. The Offertory hymn, before the Eucharistic Prayer is often a more thoughtful feel. It may focus more on what the receiving of communion means to us. It is also often a longer one, as it needs to cover the time of setting up the altar! The Communion Hymn needs to have a quiet and meditative feel, helping us to understand what it is we're here for. And then the final hymn is usually a bouncier one, aiming to fire us up to send us out into the world, to share the love of God in our lives.

It can easily take a good ½ - 1 hour choosing just the hymns for a Sunday. And, incidentally, I rarely omit verses. I believe in respecting the gift and calling of the hymn writer. Omitting a verse can lose the sense of meaning for the hymn.

There! My secret is out. I hope it is an enlightening explanation.

Bible Study: In our bible study, we will be looking at the Gospel of Mark. This week we will be looking at Mark chapter 2.

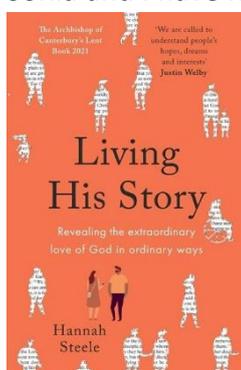
We will meet on Zoom, Thursdays 2.30-3.30ish pm. The Zoom details are:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/8109399155?pwd=STVVTU44RzJxTFFHbTY1MnI0bjJ2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 810 939 9155

Passcode: 1w2C9a

Sonia and I have had a chat about the Lent Course we will follow, and have decided to look at the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book this year - *Living His Story: Revealing the extraordinary love of God in ordinary ways*, written by Hannah Steele. The blurb about it says...



How can we convey the love of God to our neighbours in a post-Christian world that has largely forgotten the gospel of Jesus Christ? In Living His Story, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2021, Hannah Steele uncovers liberating and practical ways of sharing the gospel story afresh. With warmth and encouragement, She shows us how we can live Jesus' story in our own lives simply by being the people God made us and allowing people to be drawn to him through our natural gifts. Living His Story is a Lent devotional that will change the way you think about evangelism, show how ideally suited it is for the world we live in and fill you with confidence in sharing God's love with the people around you. Set out in six sessions to take you through Lent, each chapter of the 2021 Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book can be used as a single study for individuals or small groups to prepare for Easter. It will help you find space to see evangelism from a new practical perspective.

Evangelism – sharing the Good News of the love of God for us all should be in the DNA of all Christians, however, we often find it so hard to do. This book may well help us to discover how to do it in a natural way.

Other lent books/courses that you might be interested in on an individual level:



A Cross in the Heart of God: Reflections on the death of Jesus by Sam Wells. Sam Wells, vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields (and husband of the Bishop of Dorking) is always a thought-provoking and challenging writer, well worth reading.

Fans of Julian of Norwich might be interested in. *The Way of Julian of Norwich: A prayer journey through Lent* by Sheila Upjohn.

York Courses are always a good approach. They are produced as a CD with 4-5 contributors from varied backgrounds. The CD is accompanied by a booklet with further reading and questions, and a transcript of the CD. These can be bought in any combination of the 3. This year has an environmental focus: *Caring for Creation* by Brian Davis. *The human race is facing its greatest challenge: the threat to the environment and climate change. Faith in our Creator God should enable us to see what is actually happening. "an informative course... Caring for Creation digs deeper into issues, and is particularly good at calling out misplaced Christian attitudes"* (Church Times review Jan 2021) [Caring for Creation - York Courses](#)

Another environmentally focussed course, with a global focus, is a free course from USPG: For such a time as this. [United Society Partners in the Gospel | Lent Course 2021 \(uspg.org.uk\)](#)

The world is in crisis; Creation is groaning. People and the Earth have been crying out for many years. But for too long, many people - particularly those in the global North - have chosen not to listen, instead remaining complicit in destruction and continuing to increase inequalities. In such a time as this, what have Christians got to offer? Our doctrine of creation suggests that it was never meant to be like this, but that human nature is tarnished or fallen. The biblical narrative of salvation provides a remedy and challenges us to play our part in the process of redemption and re-creation. This is the journey that we will take together over the six sessions looking at the implications for our daily lives both as individuals and as communities of faith and hope. We are here for such a time as this. Called to respond with words and actions. USPG partners with churches across the world in their mission of transforming lives through education, health care and justice for all. USPG's partner churches offer us insights, hope and encouragement in the ways that they are confronting the issues of ecological justice in their own context: and in doing so, challenge us to respond: are we ready to accept the challenge?

Reflections for Lent repeats its excellent formula of lectionary readings for Morning Prayer, with concise reflections by well-known writers on one of the daily readings, together with the seasonal text of Morning Prayer and Night Prayer.

Finally, for something completely different, Rachel Mann has written a book that is inspired by the Elton John biopic – *Still Standing: A Lent course based on the Elton John movie "Rocketman"*. You will need a copy of the film to go alongside the book.

Books can be bought from Peterborough Christian Bookshop (currently open for collection). If you prefer online, Amazon or the Book Depository are always options. However, I would recommend Aslan Christian Books [Aslan Christian Books | Books Change Lives](#) While not matching Amazon Prime next day service, I have always found them to be very prompt, and they are often at least as cheap, if not cheaper!

This week's musical link... I came across a link to one of my favourite songs – *Come again* by the Elizabethan composer John Dowland. This performance, 4 parts, is all one man, and claims to be authentic pronunciation. I love it! [John DOWLAND | | Come Again, Sweet Love Doth Now Invite - YouTube](#)

I passed it on to Philip Astle, who, in turn, recommended [Vespro Della Beata Vergine - Claudio Monteverdi - John Eliot Gardiner - YouTube](#) This link lasts for 1½ hours, but it is a wonderful performance, and features a talented young bass-baritone called Bryn Terfel. I wonder if he got anywhere!



Stay safe.

Blessings and love

Mark