

Dear all

A few years ago, I attended the first Church Times Festival of Preaching. It was based in and around Christchurch Oxford. It was the first time I had looked properly around the place, and at our evening meal in the Great Hall, I happened to mention it looked surprisingly like Harry Potter's Hogwarts. Doh!!!

Anyway, that was a slight digression. One of the speakers/preachers there was Pádraig Ó Tuama, who is a poet and a theologian. As well as writing books of poetry and prose, he is the host of Poetry Unbound, a podcast from On Being Studios. He lives in Ireland. You can find out more at <http://www.padraigotuama.com/>.

As you might imagine, he had a wonderful way with words, and was both thought provoking and challenging. He has provided the latest of the reflections from St Paul's Cathedral.

Stories of Eden: Bodies

God liked the evening, even then. God walked among the garden in the cool.

In the writer's telling of Genesis, God must have had a body, or a body like a body.

A body that had limits, skin, a body that had starts and ends, and bits to point and bits to hold a branch back when you're searching for your friends.

"Who told you you were naked?" God asked and the man said that it was the woman who God made.

Oh how the world unfolds. These people are barely people up till now. But now, in Adam's words, whole worlds are made: of Blame; of Sexism; of Blaming Parents; of Blaming Anyone But Him. The Thing You Made Me Do is the Thing That Made Me Do it.

Who told you you were naked?

What was God dressed in if not the sun and moon and stars?

God has limits in this story. God needs us to ask the question about the knowledge that set them free. And, in this story, God has skin, or something like it. In the same way, this story of God has limits too. What language could approximate a semblance of a God? For Eden, God slips into skin inside the story in order that we'll see the skin. Once we've seen the skin, we must recognise that God will slip outside the skin, and slip outside the story. God is a story always bigger than the story we tell.

God slips into limits to show us God beyond the limits of the limits God slipped into.

That's not a tongue twister for a serpent in a garden, it's a truth. In order to say something about God, we must put words around a God. That's a limit, and a limit God steps into and God steps out of.

In a certain way, we only know God by knowing what God's not. And here in Eden, we see the edges of that God; God's finger clippings, the skin cells that fell from God's body. It's limited, but that's the point. This story points beyond the story. This story says no story's big enough to hold a thing that we cannot contain. But the story holds a little.

Someone knew that right from the earth we came from, we can fall into stories of blame that can make a river shrivel up. And they wrote it into Eden. And they wrote it into us.

Eden always asked us to go beyond. To move beyond the stories we tell. Even the stories of God need a different skin. What new stories of God can you tell?

Anyone wishing to be creative for this Sunday, Pentecost, here are 2 things to make:

How to make a Pentecost Flame Candle decoration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go1Mv-p7wZI&fbclid=IwAR0HjGHq1HUEiZpE6BuFcC8-XQg8M15uBIMR-yaP1gs0cwMzEsQ67TlJJNk>

How to Make a paper Pentecost Dove

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5oZ7eXMB\\_8&fbclid=IwAR2FkbBhc95kDDq2fFTVCnleyYnzuwvNcrrTqvpk9XHR9RRCrDZ4j66ilAI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5oZ7eXMB_8&fbclid=IwAR2FkbBhc95kDDq2fFTVCnleyYnzuwvNcrrTqvpk9XHR9RRCrDZ4j66ilAI)

A very big thanks to all who are asking after Nugget. The latest pupdate is that she has had the stitches removed. The vets were very pleased with the look of the wound and the way she was moving about. She is able to climb stairs and up onto the sofa. Walking still tires her somewhat as she adjusts to 3 legs, but she manages to bound around a bit. She has her sporty lycra onesie to stop her licking or scratching the wound, but that is removed quite a bit while we are able to keep a close eye on her.

There is a fascinating article in the recent edition of the BBC Music Magazine, entitled *Sick notes*. It looks at the effects on classical music of the COVID-19 virus, and comparisons with the Spanish Flu of 1918-19. Stravinsky, Rachmaninov and Bartok all survived it, whereas Prokofiev fled to New York to avoid it. Here in the UK, Hubert Parry, best known for composing the music for *Jerusalem*, already immune-compromised with septicaemia, succumbed to it.

The article mentions that there were few pieces written specifically as a response to the pandemic – one exception being Milhaud's *Sonata for flute, oboe, clarinet and piano* which ends in a dirge for the victims of the pandemic. Milhaud was quite a modernist – the piece may be found here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhQJ4\\_8rQlo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhQJ4_8rQlo)

Other pieces specifically composed for the pandemic include *Spanish Flu Blues*, *The Microbe*, and *Oh, You Flu!*.

This led me to wonder what else was composed in 1919. What a year! A year after the Great War had finished, and society was still reeling from the loss of life, destruction of buildings and communities, and the economic hardship this all brought. The pandemic was abating, leaving millions more dead around the world. One reaction was, of course, the 'Roaring Twenties', where society tried to forget the previous decade in a period of joy and frivolity. But 1919 wasn't quite there yet. I wonder how many pieces reflected the loss, nostalgia for the past, despair or hope for the future... Here is a small selection. Make up your own mind on what they reflect:

Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HqkrwgbsZ8>

Eric Satie's Nocturnes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR627jMtu40>

Sergei Prokofiev's Overture on Hebrew Themes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3t0VndnuPIM>

Maurice Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* (orchestral version – piano version written 2 years previously) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NA4j3VhGY4>

Paul Hindemith's Viola Sonata no 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCihWJgJWjE>

(Other pieces I could have included were Bax's Tintagel, Sibelius' Symphony 5, Villa-Lobos' Symphonies 3 & 4, Holst's Ode to Death and a revision of Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis, originally written in 1910).

Nick Fawcett's prayer for today:

Lord,  
is there any end in sight to this crisis?  
It wasn't so bad, at first –  
well, bearable anyway –  
novelty making up, at least in part, for the hassle,  
the inconvenience,  
the sacrifices that had to be made.  
But that was then,  
and this is now.  
Weeks have gone by –  
weeks of not being able to do what we once enjoyed:  
of being denied the company of family and friends,  
of social distancing, self-isolating, and all which that entails –  
and quite frankly, I'm tired of it now,  
wanting simply to put it behind me  
and get back to normal living.  
Only we can't do that,  
none of us,  
and the disturbing thing is there's little prospect of us doing so,  
few signs that things are going to significantly improve anytime soon.  
For all the progress made,  
we're told it may be months,  
even years,  
before the spectre of this virus can finally be put to bed.  
Can I stick it, Lord?  
Will any of us be able to stay sane?  
Help us.  
Grant that,  
somehow,  
the situation may change for the better more quickly than predicted,  
that an unexpected breakthrough may change the picture entirely,  
meaning that these demanding days may at last come to an end.  
Provide solutions where now we see only problems,  
and open the way to a fresh and brighter new chapter.  
Amen.



Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark