

Dear all

I hope that the opening up of the church has been a cheering sign of hope that something vaguely normal is coming back.

I had an email a little while ago from someone asking me to light a candle on a specific day, in memory of someone. It is a day that the church won't normally be open. I am happy, however, if someone wants to enter the church on a particular day, if I am available, to open the church for a short period.

Today and tomorrow is the Diocesan Clergy Conference. It was something I was looking forward to – meeting clergy from the diocese, and having a challenging speaker, who I have heard earlier. Unfortunately, it has all had to happen differently. It's not as immediate and personal, but a Zoom conference does work. Needless to say, the virus dominates thought. The reflection by Bishop Rob focussed on the importance of Lament, and how, in the Psalms, lament and praise went hand in hand – praise of God being the context that we are able to lament.

Then 2 workshop sessions. One led by our archdeacon, the Ven Justine Allain Chapman, on resilience, using the example of Peter. After he had failed, he went back to Galilee, to where he first met Jesus, to begin anew his life – a man changed by his experience. Justine noted that Peter's denial is almost casual, until the cock crows, and realisation hits him as to what he has done. But she reminded us too that the cock crow signifies the start of a new day, and a new hope.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> today was on acknowledging and responding to the trauma to self and community caused by Covid-19. This was more of a sharing of experiences than specific teaching, and we reflected on the sense of loss and bereavement – not only of people but of events and places, not least the church building. There has been some significant new practices and ways of being the church, which it would be good not to lose – not least the number of people phoning, emailing, Skyping or Zooming one another regularly. The overriding feature of the virus however is the uncertainty. The Christian faith does hold the answer, but we reflected that it is easy to lose sight of that in the experience of the present. It's OK to not be OK – and that's where we can be there for one another.

On another event done differently, don't forget our Rose & Sweet Pea show website. You can log in and enter competitions (by photo!) or take part in the raffle – all of which raises invaluable funds for the church. The link is <https://rose-and-sweet-pea-show.wishpondpages.com/>

My former training college, Cuddesdon, holds a summer school every year. Usually it is in person, but obviously this year it is different. For anyone wishing to take part in this year's Online Summer School in Biblical and Theological Studies, the course is "The Earth is the Lord's": Caring for Creation, Honouring God.

The course is over 2 separate days (I assume you can book just for one if you choose), via Zoom. They are Wednesday, 8th July and Thursday, 9th July 10.00am – 1.00pm. Cost £15 each.

*The opening words of Psalm 24 are well known: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it," and yet, humanity has historically treated the earth as if it was ours and ours alone to do with as we pleased. Christians have, sadly, often taken our dominion over the earth and other creatures as permission for exploitation. Both the Bible and the Christian tradition offer us an alternative vision for humanity's*

*relationship to the rest of creation, one of care, responsibility, and mutual flourishing that shows us that caring for creation is an act of praise honouring to God.*

*Humanity is now having an unprecedented impact on the natural world. How we care for our world is becoming an evermore pressing question. This Summer School will explore the themes of creation care found in scripture and tradition, and look at how a theology of creation care is being put into practice in different contexts.*

The sessions are:

Day 1

Dr Hywel Clifford: Creation Care in the Old Testament

Dr Rebecca Dean: The kingdom of God and the transformation of the wilderness in the Synoptic Gospels

Revd Dr Darrell Hannah: The work of Operation Noah, a Christian charity working with the Church to inspire action on climate change

Day 2

Prof. Meric Srokosz: Caring for the Oceans

Revd Jen Brown: Loving our neighbours - the inclusion of non-human animals in Creation Care

Revd Dr Andrew Gosler: Of Faith and Feathers - or Conservation as a Human Rights Issue

<https://www.rcc.ac.uk/study-centre/online-summer-school-in-biblical-and-theological-studies>

Something completely unrelated (except the animal reference!), the other day I caught on the radio an amazing recording of a bass-baritone aria from Handel's cantata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo - Fra l'ombra e gl'orrori*. I was stunned at the range. The presenter said that the singer sings low, then lower... and you wonder when he will stop. For the technical, the range is 2½ octaves, from C sharp at the very bottom of the bass range to G sharp in the tenor range. I hope you enjoy it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFcY40h-vH8>

(Among the shades and the horrors, the dazed moth, already dying, shall never know the pleasure of the flame. Likewise, among its fears, this soul disappointed never finds peace nor hopes for pleasure).

Cheery isn't it!

The Scripture Union initiative 'Pray for Schools' is encouraging us to remember schools and children as some start back at their schools. They have suggested the following:

#### **Praying for schools as lockdown eases**

Dear praying friend,

We know you'll be praying over the current situation as we are all painfully aware of the effect of this crisis on our children.

#### **We hope these prayers are helpful.**

*- Lord, please help school heads and staff as they manage the many complicated logistics involved as children come back. May they find ways to adapt and reconnect with them. Amen.*

*- We remember children affected by poverty, unhappy family life, abuse of any kind, lack of stimulus and mental health problems. Help them to begin to thrive again. Amen.*

- O God, please grant wisdom to those in authority as they plan ahead and make decisions on many issues. We intercede for children to be able to make up for what has been lost. Amen.

Nick Fawcett's prayer for today is a real tonic for when life seems a bit bleak and dark:

Light of wisdom,  
guide us.  
Light of hope,  
enthuse us.  
Light of strength,  
protect us.  
Light of compassion,  
comfort us.  
Light of goodness,  
bless us.  
Light of truth,  
challenge us.  
Light of love,  
embrace us.  
Light of life,  
renew us.  
Amen.



Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark