

The LINK

Church of St. John & St Philip

June to August
2020

Church of St. John & St. Philip
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Stories of Hope

By Andrew Taylor (Interim Minister)

Welcome to the Summer edition of our chaplaincy magazine, The LINK. As you will notice, it is a reduced version of our normal 16 pages. We hope, however, that you will find much to enjoy with what we have included here. So much has happened since we produced the Spring edition. Even at the beginning of March we never imagined that we would find ourselves where we are today, and much of the last three months has been spent in re-adjusting ourselves to these new realities. We still have a long way to go, of course.

Inside you will find news about our plans to re-open our church building for public worship, as from June 14th. We also bring you up to date with the process of finding and appointing a new permanent chaplain for our chaplaincy. Carolyn Jones has written a wonderful piece about the impact that the Lent Study book, *Saying Yes to Life*, has had on the Home Group to which she belongs, and the way in which individual members have both responded and decided on corporate action to put its ideas into place. As a Chaplaincy we have already become the beneficiaries of that, as you will notice when you return to church and see our newly tidied grounds!

Elsewhere in this edition we have another entry in our popular "Sixty Seconds with..." column. Only one this time,

but as it involves a couple from our church who also happen to be married to one another, we can consider ourselves as getting "two for the price of one"! And we have also taken advantage of an initiative from the Church Times which, since the onset of the pandemic, has been producing some excellent free to reproduce resources for parishes and churches. Entitled "Lift up Your Hearts", each week's edition (still available from the Church Times website, by the way) contains little articles from leading thinkers and others in the Church, as well as some more light-hearted moments. We have decided to reproduce one of each! So inside you will find a piece from Paula Gooder, Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral, reflecting on the power of stories during times of crisis, and especially that of Anna the prophetess in Luke's Gospel; Roger Wagner tells us about pieces of art, literature and podcasts that he has found particularly helpful at this time; and, in a more humorous moment, some newly written "lockdown psalms" from Catherine Clarke from the University of London.

We stand in a very different place to where we were even three months ago. And much has happened in our world since that has brought both deep sadness and new perspectives on hope. As individuals and as members of the Body of Christ, our only prayer is that God will keep us faithful to our proclamation of the gospel, and hopeful for the future that He has in store.

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Getting Back to Church

by Andrew Taylor

Over the last few weeks, a sub-committee of the Chaplaincy Council has been meeting, via Zoom, to create a policy for re-opening our Church building for worship. As you might imagine this has not been an easy or straightforward process, and the Group has spent many hours in thinking through every possible issue or eventuality. Out thanks, therefore, to Jeanne Tubbergen who has chaired the meetings and has dealt with the seemingly endless practical details; in which she has been ably assisted by Therese O'Connor, Jay Dennett and Jaimie Keppel. We have much to thank God for in their unassuming service in this regard.

It's not my intention to lay out the exact details of every action that we shall be taking to return to worship in church. This is partly due to the fact that the details are so many that they might well fill many pages of this edition of The LINK. But it is also the case that the situation is still fluid, as further advice is received (sometimes on a daily basis) from both government and diocese. But we should like to assure you of some general principles that you need to know:



The first is that we intend to "go slow" on this. We want to make sure that we proceed with genuine caution, and that we shall be taking everyone's wellbeing with the utmost seriousness. With that in mind, we are re-introducing only two of our four Sunday Services to begin with, being both 10.30 Services in the Church and the Hall respectively. This is because we wish to hold no more than one Service in each location on any given day, which will make the "cleansing" of each so much more straightforward. And because we have two separate meeting places located physically well apart from each other, it does mean that we can have twice the number of 30 worshippers presently allowed under government legislation. Each "congregation" will have its own entry and exit points.

You will, however, need to "register" to attend either Service, no earlier than 7 days beforehand, by emailing or phoning the Chaplaincy Office. We shall be operating a "waiting list" as well, in case we have places to release at the last minute. We would ask, therefore, that if you "secure" a place that you can no longer use, you let the office know ASAP. We recognise the incongruity of this way of doing things. It is not the way we would wish, of course, but it is the only way we can see a way forward for now. And it goes without saying that we will need to be fair in allocating places on a week by week basis, so that all who may wish to attend worship will have that opportunity.

When you arrive at Church, you will be met by a series of volunteers who will be asking you some basic, non-intrusive, questions (required under law), such as whether or not you are displaying any symptoms etc. Other volunteers will be showing you to your place in church in such a way that preserves social distancing. We ask that you be patient with us in this particular duty.

The Services in both locations will continue to be recorded and placed online for all who haven't been able to attend in person.

We shall also be re-introducing a *Service of Holy Communion on Wednesday evenings at 19.30, beginning on June 17th*. Again you will need to pre-register to attend this. And we wish to assure you that your wellbeing will be a priority at this Service as well. Communion will be in one kind only, being the bread. The priest presiding will wear a face mask at all times, including during the administration. The wafers will remain in a covered ciborium throughout the Service, and a pair of tongs will be used to hand them to communicants.

We hope that this brief outline will give you some insight into how we intend to proceed on our "re-opening". No doubt we shall have much to learn in the days ahead, and we would ask for your prayers as we begin this new chapter in the life of our church.



Lift Up Your Hearts - Lockdown Series I

by Paula Gooder, a theologian and lecturer, and Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral

As it has for so many people, this period of lockdown has brought with it dislocation. In my case, the dislocation is literal. My usual weekly pattern of travelling from my home in Birmingham to work at St Paul's Cathedral in London has gone; instead, I work in my study all day every day, often via Zoom or telephone calls. Working with and among people who are actually a hundred miles away brings all sorts of challenges – for them, as well as for me.

One of my greatest sources of consolation and inspiration has always been stories. Stories offer us another world to inhabit – a world in which we can immerse ourselves, see things from a different perspective, or through another's eyes, and, in doing so, untangle knots of anxiety or uncertainty within us.

Stories – both long and short – offer us a brief respite from the present. In the company of their characters, they help us to lift our vision, offer comfort for our souls, and the strength to return to our own lives once more, renewed and refreshed. At times like this, when we can't travel bodily to a new place, we can travel in our imagination to new places, with new people, and new worlds.

At times of particular distress, the stories that I return to are the ones I know best. They are old friends who, like the comfiest of comfy jumpers, provide security and reassurance in troubling times. One

of the authors I often reach for is Elizabeth Goudge, a 20th-century writer whose writings pulse with themes of grace, forgiveness, and hope.

So it was lovely to run across a quotation in the first volume of her Damerosehay trilogy – *The Bird in the Tree* (Duckworth, 1940) – which indicates that she felt exactly the same about other old books as I feel about reading hers: "David also, on going to bed, resigned himself to hours of reading, but he had a good deal more control over his thoughts than Nadine had and he was able to keep his attention firmly riveted on his book. It was his favourite book...

"In times of storm and tempest, of indecision and desolation, a book already known and loved makes better reading than something new and untried. The meeting

with remembered and well-loved passages is like the continual greeting of old friends; nothing is so warming and companionable."

MY FAVOURITE film also explores the power of stories to transform. *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café* (starring Kathy Bates and Jessica Tandy) tells the story of Evelyn Couch, a timid, unhappy housewife, who – through her friendship with Ninny Threadgoode, in a nursing home where her husband's aunt lives – hears the story of the Threadgoode family, and in particular of two friends, Ildgie and Ruth. Through their story, Evelyn finds herself and is transformed. The story that Ninny tells her gives her the key that opens the door to her freedom.

Given my love of reading, and the ways in which it has

healed and restored me when I have needed it most, it is hardly surprising that the painting to which I am drawn in times like this is Rembrandt's *The Prophetess Anna*. It depicts Rembrandt's own mother, dressed up as Anna (Luke 2.36-38), who, when Jesus was brought to the temple by his parents as a baby, not only recognised him, but spoke about him to everyone she met.

By this stage, Anna was old. It is not quite clear from Luke whether she was 84 or had been a widow for 84 years – she was either old or very old – and she had spent her years as a widow fasting and praying

in the temple. Rembrandt interpreted this as including her reading the scriptures, and there is something so beautiful about the still, rapt attention of Anna as she immerses herself in the text that lies before her.

Of course, the key thing about Anna after all those years of isolation – of watching and waiting alone – is that she immediately recognised God's presence with her in the unexpected guise of a tiny baby. That long, lonely time was a time not just of waiting, but of preparation, so that when the moment came, she was ready. This picture is also my prayer: that as we read and read and read we might learn more about God, about ourselves, and about the world, so that, like Anna, we are ready to recognise and welcome "God with us".

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THERE are so many verses and passages in the Bible that feed my soul, but, at the moment, I keep returning to my most favourite of Paul's epistles: 2 Corinthians 4.8-10. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies."

Choosing my favourite piece of music is almost impossible. It depends on what time of year it is, or what time of day, but, if I really have to choose, then I would go for Mozart's Serenade for 13 Wind Instruments in B-flat major, "Gran Partita", (K.361). I can distinctly remember when and where I was when I first heard it: I was 19 and, at a dark time in my life, felt so surrounded, comforted, and upheld by its rhythms and melody that it gave me the strength to carry on. Like my beloved literary companions, this piece has accompanied me through the most difficult times in my life, and reminds me that I have survived this far, and can do so again.

Dr Paula Gooder is a theologian and lecturer, and Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral.



September's Book *Texts of Terror* by Phyllis Tribble

Phyllis Tribble is an American feminist biblical scholar. In "Texts of Terror" her aim is "to tell what she calls sad stories, those Biblical tales of terror generated against women. Belonging to the sacred scriptures of synagogue and church, these narratives explore four portraits of suffering in ancient Israel: Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine, and the daughter of Jephthah".

Discussion Dates

Thursday September 3rd: Evening Meeting via Zoom 20.00 – 21.30

We will set up an entry code for this and notify everyone in advance.

Friday September 4th: Meeting in Person, Church Hall 14.30 to 16.00

Meeting in that location allows us the greatest possible social spacing, with only one entrance to negotiate via the side door.



The Benoordenhout Homegroup's Adventures in Ruth Valerio's "Saying Yes to Life" by Carolyn Jones

At the approach of Lent the homegroup' leaders neatly planned the conclusion of the previous study to allow for the start of a new project: this time we would pick up the Archbishop's Lent Book for 2020; Ruth Valerio's *Saying Yes to Life*. On the back cover the description includes, "Ruth Valerio imaginatively draws on the Days of Creation (Genesis 1), as she relates themes of light, water, land, the seasons, other creatures, humankind, Sabbath rest and resurrection hope to matters of environmental, ethical and social concern."

As comprehensive a pass through the natural world as the material might be, none of us could have guessed, as we tackled chapter 1 together in early March, what a curve ball the natural world was about to throw at us. By the time we were into chapter 3, a mere two weeks later, the Corona virus lockdown meant we had to conduct our

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homegroup meeting via Zoom. That circumstance did make the material under discussion - mankind's treatment of the earth, its resources, its wildlife and each other from a Biblical and ethical perspective - not just more relevant but urgent, and action imperative.

Each week the online communications between group members were alive with shared video clips and news

reports showing the pollution clear over huge cities in China, the dolphins return to swim in the canals of Venice, clear skies as air traffic all but ceased and many more such examples as the natural world bounced back, with mankind forced to retreat into our homes.

Through the seven-chapter framework of the book, based on the 7 days of the creation story, Ruth Valerio gave a wonderful insight into various aspects of environmental issues. Each chapter was augmented by online interviews, included discussion questions and concluded with prayers from different nations.

Some of the group were already well

informed about the environmental issues and were enthusiastic to look at the faith connection to the subject, others were relatively new to it all, but there was a shared sense of wonder of what was unfolding before us. In the end what were our 'takeaways' from this study and most importantly, what are we going to do about it? Could we challenge ourselves to go further in 'resurrection practices'?

Some responses from group members:

Nick Thomas: clean up our planet

I am already trying to help make a difference with cleaning up the planet - especially in the area of waste plastics, old tyres and (recently) household solid waste; to identify different technologies that can be used to achieve this, specifically at the situation in South Africa, Sri Lanka and the South Pacific. The good news is that there are many new technologies being developed in the fields of energy creation but also in cleaning up air emissions, water purification, and other processes to clean up our planet. In the context of our Lent course the three most important messages that came through are:

- The natural world is not Divine - but it is sacred;*
- Not only as Christians, but as human beings we need to understand that we are living on Earth*

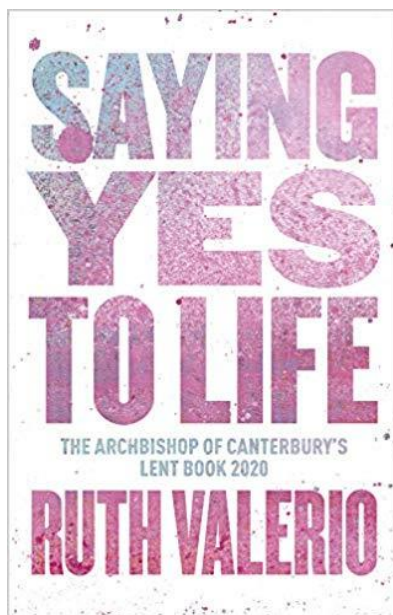
which is a "Common Home" to all of God's creation.

- Our efforts should be focussed on education/awareness raising of the damage that has been done to the planet and finding ways to reduce it.*

Carmen van der Waard: small actions daily add up
Last week I opened my Bible and read: 'For the

Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk, it's living by God's power'. (1 Corinthians 4: 20). During the Lenten study, we were very much invited to 'live' and take action by God's power. I try to make changes in different areas on a daily basis. For instance, I try to find an alternative for the products that I buy in plastic; I try to buy food that is grown locally. It's a process; I haven't found a solution for bananas yet. These are of course very small daily actions, but it adds up in the course of a year.

One of the measures we explored was the use of water in our homes, particularly in our showers. As we wait for the warm water to reach the shower all the way from the water heater



valuable litres of clean water disappear down the drain. This water loss could be prevented, we worked out, either by getting into the shower when it first comes on, without waiting for water to warm up (invigorating!) or by collecting the still-warming-up water in a bucket, to use to water the plants.

Michael Freeman: Adventures in water management at home

I decided to siphon off the water I had collected in the shower tray into a bucket. This bucket is a silicon, collapsible type. Having filled the bucket, all 10 litres, I went off to have breakfast. (I don't always do strange things before breakfast - just this time). The next I heard was squeals from the bathroom. Fearing the worst, I rushed there to find a family member standing in about 1inch of water covering the whole bathroom floor. The bucket was indeed collapsible! We now have an immaculately clean bathroom floor and our patio plants are as happy as Larry. A win all round except that I shall be doing the cooking for the next week!

Call to Action

So we had various ideas on how to prevent waste, use our purchasing power to good effect, save water,
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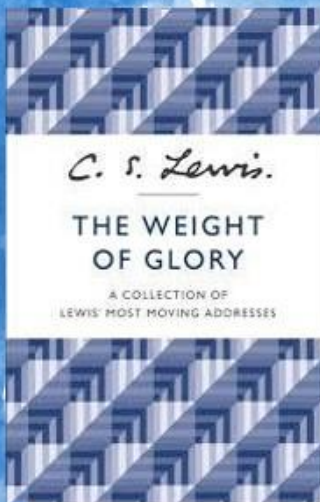


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reduce plastic, support projects in the developing world but... was this enough? As a group we wondered if we could take a further step into action *as a church*, in our direct environment. We came up with the following ideas to possibly pursue:

- ✓ committing to clean up the playground/surrounding park area next to the church
- ✓ creating a church compost heap
- ✓ repurposing some church garden area to create a vegetable garden
- ✓ placing a garden bench (a resurrection bench??) in the church grounds (maybe with a plaque?)
- ✓ Reestablish contact with AROCHA, a Christian environmental group.

Ironically, the Corona restrictions prevented us from gathering at the church and leaping into action. Perhaps it is just as well that we need to see how deep our motivation really runs, when the dust has settled. One thing is clear: we ignore environmental issues at our peril, and we need to do something, something real, something substantial. And do it now.



June's Book *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis

Everyone knows the name of CS Lewis! One of the most famous apologists for Christian faith, his writings have influenced generations of believers. *The Weight of Glory* is a collection of his Sermons and Addresses from the 1940's and 1950's.

"CS Lewis was a superb apologist for Christianity, especially when he showed so splendidly that believing is not the same thing as being gullible – that Christianity, robust Christianity is intellectually defensible, intellectually respectable". *Desmond Tutu*

Discussion Dates

Thursday June 18th - Evening Meeting via Zoom 20.00 – 21.30
We will set up an entry code for this and notify everyone in advance.

Friday June 19th - Meeting in Person, Church Hall 14.30 to 16.00
Meeting in that location allows us the greatest possible social spacing, with only one entrance to negotiate via the side door.

60 Seconds with...Anne and Jaap Jan Baan van Kijk

Where are you from originally, and how did you arrive here at St John and St Philip?

Jaap Jan: While I was growing up, my parents did development work for the Dutch Government in South East Asia; initially they worked with refugees so we moved around a lot from country to country. I was born in Hong Kong where I was baptized in the Anglican Church where my parents found a home. This being part of the reason we came to St John and St Philip.

Anne: I was born in a small village in the north of Overijssel. I moved to The Hague to study and after a few months Jaap Jan moved here as well. We were looking for a church in The Hague and after attending a Service of Lessons and Carols at St John and St Philip, we never left this church!

Do you have a particular role of responsibility here for the chaplaincy?

Anne: I am part of the music group for the contemporary services as well as a Church Council Member.

Jaap Jan: I fulfil my duties by being a good husband and support Anne in her endeavours. ;-)

What do you do when you're not in Church?

Jaap Jan: I work as a Social Worker for The Salvation Army. I work with people with a homeless background who are dealing with psychiatric disorders, among other issues.

Anne: I am in the final months of finishing my study in Social and Cultural Development. Besides that I am also working on my own creative business, Alenna Creative Studio.

What do you like best about the Church?

We felt very welcome from the moment we started visiting. We also really appreciate the spiritual diversity and different worship styles in this congregation. And we are grateful that we could get married in this church.

And what do you feel we could do differently?

We really enjoyed the church weekend away that happened right after we joined this congregation. It was a great way to start to get to know the wonderful people that are a part of this community.

What do you do in your leisure time?

Jaap Jan: I like to read, mostly classic literature,

sometimes I solder and program electronic circuitry. I also love to swim long distances or stroll along the beach. The only shopping I like to do is thrift shopping.

Anne: I spend most of my time being creative in many ways, usually by embroidering, weaving, knotting macramé, and writing calligraphy. I also like singing and shopping in second-hand stores.

Favourite food/drink?

That's such a difficult question haha! We both love a good Indian curry, but a classic Dutch pancake with bacon and cheese is very hard to beat.

And what book/piece of music could you not live without?

Anne: I usually listen to either worship songs or classical music. In my opinion VOCES8 reaches perfection as

far as classical music goes. Their version of Rachmaninov's Bogoroditse Dyevo is just one example of how incredibly good they are. But I think John Rutter's *The Lord Bless You and Keep You* is also very beautiful. It has sentimental value to me because I used to sing it with my high school choir at the end of concerts.

Jaap Jan: That's a really

hard question. I love exploring the mind and trying to understand the evil that resides in it through books like *If This is a Man* by Primo Levi, or enjoying the descriptive power that Kundera and Proust show in their work. I read *Pale Fire* by Nabokov so many times I all but memorized it. There are so many fantastic books out there that I can't choose a favourite. So, I'm going to say the book I can't live without is usually the book I'm reading at that moment, which currently is Javier Marias' *A Heart So White*.





Appointing a Permanent Chaplain for St John and St Philip

by Andrew Taylor

We need to bring members of our church up to date on the process of appointing a new permanent chaplain. As many of you will know, the advertisement has now been running for two weeks, and to date there has been a good expression of interest in the post. Some 14 or so individuals have requested the further details from our patron, The Intercontinental Church Society (ICS for short).



Formal applications will be received until the middle of June, and shortlisting will take place shortly thereafter. The process will be conducted by representatives of the patron, the Diocese, and our representatives.

In case you don't know, our representatives for the appointment are Mark Jones and Magda Koole. Kathy Franssen has kindly agreed to act as observer of the process.

The plan is for initial interviews to take place via Zoom in July, the exact date still to be confirmed. A second round of interviews will take place in September, and these will be "in person" here in The Hague. The exact arrangements for these will, of course, be subject to whatever travel restrictions are in place at the time, but it is to be hoped that, by that time in the year, things may have eased up in such a way to make this possible.

We would ask, please, that all members of our chaplaincy continue to pray for this appointment, and especially for those who have the responsibility for making it, our chaplaincy representatives most of all. In due course, we shall look forward to welcoming to our church and city the man or woman that will take this church forward in the years to come.

Wellspring Service Gone Online!

As physical meeting for worship remains a challenge due to the current pandemic crisis, Wellspring which is an informal service continues online via Zoom until further notice.

Based on what our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them", **it doesn't matter where we meet, but it does matter that we meet for Jesus.**

Zoom is a virtual platform where we have been meeting since the Covid-19 outbreak to worship God praying for one another, for the needs of others, and for our church. We also share God's Word, "a lamp to our feet and a light to our daily path (see Psalm 119:105)."

Words are not enough to describe the benefits of worshipping as a community via zoom in this time of crisis: we see each other's face; we do break-out rooms where people have the opportunity to chat with and pray for one another in small groups, etc.

It is quite simple if you want to join

1. You need to download zoom on your device (Smartphone, Tablet or Laptop)
2. Sign-up to create a zoom account for free
3. Contact Guy (guy@stjohn-stphilip.org) for the Wellspring Meeting ID to connect with us
4. The Service is every Sunday 5pm CET

Wellspring
St. John & St. Philip

A Lighter Side of Lockdown

ALTHOUGH some of our lockdown contributors have lightened the mood, it is possible that these pages have not represented the great efforts being made to cheer people up during the pandemic.

This week we feature just two of them: two "Lockdown Psalms" written by Professor Catherine Clarke, from the Institute of Historical Research, University of London; and one from a series of strip cartoons drawn by Jim Godfrey, a verger at Christ Church, Oxford, and a worshipper at the Wesley Methodist Memorial Church nearby.

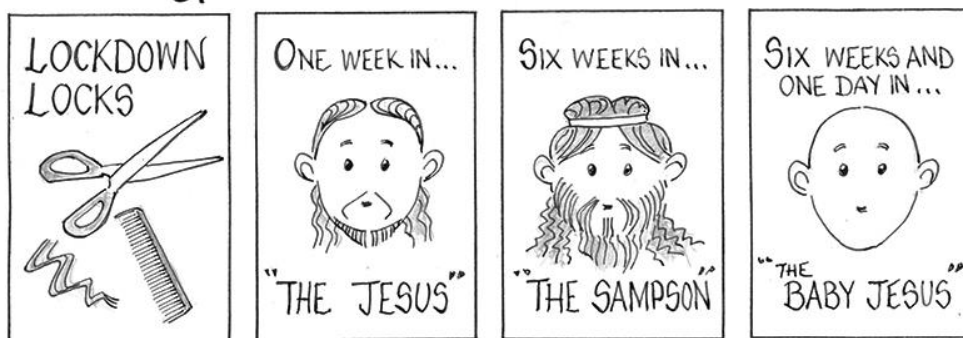
ONE

1. I have dwelt long in the house of lockdown: I have enclosed myself in the habitation of Netflix and groaning.
2. They have set me my bounds which I shall not pass: I keep the statutes and observe the laws.
3. I entered into the supermarket, but it was barren: its plenty was turned into empty shelves, and there was no toilet paper in it.
4. Neither were there delivery slots by day nor by night: verily, not even from Ocado.
5. [2nd part] Deliver us from the wilderness of delivery: and deliver our deliveries unto us.
6. I am become a stranger unto the pub, and unto the office: even an alien unto Pizza Express.
7. The sun ariseth, and I go forth to work and to my labour: even in my pyjamas until the evening.
8. I am weary of Zoom, my throat is dry: it melteth away like wax as my broadband vanisheth.
9. Yet they gape upon me with their mouths and say: thy toddler sitteth lurking in the corner of the screen, and lo he imagineth mischief.
10. And thou, oh daughter of lockdown: thou shalt do thy phonics in exile.
11. Also thy literacy and numeracy work, and thy comprehension: yea verily, even thy fronted adverbials.
12. They have sprayed markers for my feet: they have set a place for me on the pavement outside Tesco Metro.
13. The unrighteous forget their social distancing: I swerve from their transgressions.
14. [2nd part] The people rebuke each other: and bear in their bosoms the rebukes of many people.
15. A mask hath covered my face and I wash my hands: neither have I found any hand sanitiser to comfort me.
16. The pestilence layeth siege against me: according to the cleanness of my hands shall I be recompensed.

TWO

1. Clap your hands, all ye neighbours: clap in the front gardens and on the doorsteps.
2. Make a thankful noise, for it is Thursday: clap your hands and bang the pots; bang the mighty pan from the stove, the frying pan from the draining board, and the little pan from under the sink.
3. Rejoice, for thou hast booked a delivery: a weekly slot even unto the end of June.
4. Surely plenteousness shall be in thy house: goodness shall follow thee, at a two metre distance, all the days of thy life.
5. [2nd part] Our garners shall be full: and Netflix shall bring forth thousands and ten thousands of new episodes for evermore.
6. Arise! Yea, verily, for the lockdown easeth: gird thy face with apparel and go into the city.
7. Rejoice in the fruitful offices, all ye who were furloughed: but thy going out and thy coming in shall not be on public transport.
8. Rest ye alert by day, and alert by night: and the pillars shall deliver ye out of the wilderness.
9. Judgement and remembrance shall be thine heritage: and ye shall dwell in the house of austerity for ever.

TRYING TIMES WK6





Lift Up Your Hearts - Lockdown Series II

By Roger Wagner

At a pub lunch with three Oxford poets, just before the lockdown, we all agreed that self-isolation would hardly alter our lives, and so (poetic lunches excepted) it has proved.

Almost the only change to my working rhythm in recent weeks has been ringing the handbell from my grandfather's school out of my studio window on Thursday evenings (though, the first time I did this, I mistook the day, and my wife was afraid that the fire brigade might turn up – it's a very loud bell).

Having said that, the shadow of the present situation falls on us all, and the effect on some painters has been a heightening of creativity. Richard Kenton Webb had started a while ago on a series of huge **drawings** illustrating Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but has now produced 130 and is still going.

I saw The Loneliness of Adam (below) in his studio last summer. No reproduction can really convey the effect of size – each drawing is more than seven foot wide – and, in this image, that scale magnifies the effect of the figure of Adam against the vast waste of sea and the blank immensity of sky.

Is it a consoling image? I find that it is. In placing the loneliness of the human condition against the immensity of creation, it reminds us that, however isolated we may feel, we stand in the presence of a creator who recognises that it is not good for us to be alone.

ALTHOUGH (despite the easing of restrictions) we cannot travel much in the landscape, we can travel in our minds, and I have been **reading** *Travels with a Writing Brush*, an anthology of Japanese travel writing from the seventh to the 17th centuries.

The wonderful combination of fiercely concentrated poetry and gently rambling prose in the great 17th-century poet Matsuo Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North* is the culmination, I now discover, of a thousand years of wandering Buddhist monks and others' going on pilgrimage and recording their journeys in prose and poetry. The last Haiku that Basho ever wrote is a crystallisation of this millennium of spiritual yearning:

Sick on a journey
Over parched fields
Dreams wander on.

As a schoolboy, I dreamed about being a Zen monk wandering through the Japanese landscape, but never got beyond dreaming. A more intrepid schoolfriend, Pico Iyer, did travel to Japan, and even lived for a time in a Zen monastery.

It was not quite what he expected, but, having married a Japanese, he has made his home in Japan while continuing his travels around the world. His latest book, *Autumn Light*, is a beautiful meditation on love and loss in the autumn of life, focused on his life in Japan and his membership of the Deer's Slope Ping-Pong club.

Another book that I have been reading is by an Iffley neighbour: Michael Bourdeaux. His Cold War memoir, *One Word of Truth*, is an inspiring read.

If you imagine a book that begins in the area of *Cider with Rosie*, moves into the landscape of John le Carré, with cameo roles for Shostakovich, Solzhenitsyn, and a succession of British prime ministers from Harold Wilson to Margaret Thatcher, you will get some sense of its richness and scope.



In contrast to the ethical ambiguities of le Carré's world, however, this is an account of a clear moral vocation staunchly pursued against intense opposition.

A **FILM** that allows a somewhat different kind of mental travelling is *The Story of the Weeping Camel*, which documents life in a family of Gobi desert nomads. The travelling here, though, is almost metaphysical: it would need a heart of stone not to weep with the weeping camel.

I have not in fact been watching many films, but have been following some **YouTube videos** that people have been filming in their homes. Malcolm Guite's *A Spell in the Library*, in which he reads from books in his collection, is a delight, as in a similar way is Philip Mould's *Art in Isolation*, where he talks about pictures in his house. (I was astonished to see a picture of mine, which I thought had disappeared without trace 30 years ago.)

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Morning Prayer led by the Dean of Canterbury from various points in the deanery garden (accompanied by one or other of the deanery cats) has become a fixed point in my day.

I DECIDED that I wouldn't sing "Happy birthday" while washing my hands, and opted instead for a chorus from my youth: "From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same the Lord's name is to be praised", thus combining ritual cleansing with what Paul calls "making music in your heart to God".

The internet attributes tune and lyrics to Paul Deming. He is the writer of the wonderfully harmonizable tune; the lyrics are, of course, from Psalm 113.

As a selection of my illustrated psalm translations is being published, I am more than usually absorbed in the psalter. My

Hebrew editor insists on excising Tiberian sigla with the removal of all cantillation marks (not my strong point), and, because our software is not compatible, this is proving fiddly.

Nevertheless, through it all the voice of these ancient poems sounds in our present moment as a constant encouragement:

He that goes out and goes out and weeps
Carrying a handful of seed
Shall return and return
With shouts of joy
Carrying his sheaves.

Roger Wagner is an artist, painter, and poet, www.rogerwagner.co.uk. The Nearer You Stand: Poems and images by Roger Wagner is published by Canterbury Press at £12.99 (CT Bookshop £11.70). For more on Richard Kenton Webb, visit www.richardkentonwebb.art.

