



Abbey Lane & Newport United Reformed Church incorporating Saffron Walden Methodist Church

Proclaiming the Gospel – Growing in Faith – Reaching out in Service

4 April

Welcome to our weekly newsletter



Good Friday Service – 2nd April

**Narrative Service
Online at 10:30 a.m.**

Music, drama & images for
reflection

**Led by Rev. Caroline
Vodden**

Easter Sunday Service – 4th April

Worship Online at 10:30 a.m.

Including Holy Communion

**(please have available bread and juice or wine if
you wish to join in at home)**

Led by Rev. Roy Fowler

Reflection by Rev. Caroline Vodden

*Please remember this will be our chance to say
farewell to Caroline as she retires from ministry*

**Zoom meeting and Passcode details are listed on
the order of service sent separately,
or call our Church Contact on 01799 528325**

If you prefer to watch live on the website please go to
<http://saffronwaldenurc.org.uk/services-recordings>
where you will also find a recording of the service to
YouTube each week available from Sunday afternoon.

Above: Thorns by Elfreda Tealby-Watson, adapted from photo by Val
Bowtle of the Abbey Lane wooden cross, & right: photo by Jenny Evans

The Roadmap out of the Pandemic – part 1: Change

For many of us being able to meet in small groups again this week or share a cup of tea with a neighbour – albeit outdoors - has been a welcome change. But returning to ‘normal’ or developing ‘new normal’ is slow progress and not all change is welcome. What changed circumstances we inhabit from just one year ago when we wondered if it were necessary to cancel our planned Christian Aid speaker coffee morning. Since then, there have been so many losses not just of events and our ways of life but tragically of so many lives. Whatever road we are following out of the pandemic surely it cannot be back to where we started, because too much has changed. On that issue, I attended an online meeting with the URC “Walking the Way” team, where participants shared our experiences of lockdown worship and discipleship and I have written a short report below. Surely, we must have faith as urged in Romans 8:28 “For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” Caroline Vodden has quoted that to me on several occasions when I have found situations difficult and of course that is another change upon us: at Abbey Lane & WEBS this Easter we say farewell to our minister Caroline as she follows her own road map to the next stage in her life, to move north and begin retirement. We will say farewell on Easter Sunday, sadly not as we would have liked with perhaps a joyous lunch and loud singing, but we hope as many of you as possible will join us online. (Elfreda TW)

Psalm 22: 18 -19

They part my garments among them: and cast lots upon my vesture.

But be thou not far from me,
O Lord: thou art my succour,
haste thee to help me.



Ministers	
Revd Caroline Vodden	01799 524 416
Revd Roy Fowler	01279 814 809
Church Secretary	
Val Bowtle	01799 526 271
Vestry Phone & Church Contact	01799 528325

Elders	
John Ford	07969 850 109
Stephen Rapkin	07730 393 603
Karen Start	01799 522 096
Elfreda Tealby-Watson	01799 530 175
Margaret Howell & Meg Nettle	Non-serving Elders offered pastoral care



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Notes for your diary

- Please note that after Easter Sunday Roy will be taking leave until the 12th April, so if you have pastoral concerns approach one of the Eldership team.
- Sunday worship will continue on Zoom as usual on 11th April, led by Val and Elfreda at 10.30am but next week's newsletter will be a little shorter without the pastoral letter.

Church Family

We offer our warmest congratulations and best wishes to **Olive Newman** and **Margaret Clement** who are going to celebrate “special” birthdays in April.



Congratulations also to **John & Louise Luke** who have now got the keys to their new home in Scotland and will shortly be completing their move from their temporary accommodation.

Pictured another lovely view from their new home area!

Schools are now on holiday – please pray that our young people and all those staff who work with them have a chance to refresh minds, spirits and body.

The Roadmap out of the Pandemic – part 2: New Paths

Elfreda went to the online open meeting of the “Walking the Way” steering group who wanted to explore how URC churches had experienced online discipleship and worship, with a view to what resources might be helpful in future. She writes: Firstly, I was greatly encouraged sharing what we have managed to continue and introduce as a church and pastorate – weekly Minister's letter, WhatsApp group, prayer group, bible study, Zoom worship, virtual choir, private prayer, virtual or outdoors fundraising, newsletters by email and post. Many churches represented have been unable to do so much. Secondly, I was struck by the contradiction that this year has been excluding and isolating for some and yet simultaneously, others reported extremely positive outcomes of being able to use technology to reach greater numbers of people more easily. Examples included those with varying work patterns and others for whom accessing Sunday morning physical church can be a challenge. We shared a realization that our

road map might lead to a new place where we can welcome back those desiring our previous practices whilst also accommodating people who were previously excluded. Many more may now join in our journey of faith, if we use the gifts that our time of restriction has brought us: live streaming, recorded services to watch later, online options reducing travel needs and including the housebound in our prayer groups, bible study and worship. Our discussions ran out of time and the



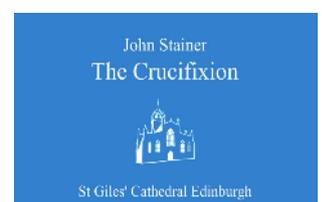
steering group promised to bring us back together for more! There is much to consider post-pandemic to develop worship and daily discipleship. Also last week, here at Abbey Lane, John Ford hosted an open online discussion about possible ways ahead with young people's engagement and worship. We had a group of around 12 people joining the discussion including some of our older-young-people, also with Jo sharing the ideas gathered from Junior Church members. Thanks to all who joined us and to John for leading. We look forward to his reporting back to Elders and Church Meeting.

Photo by Stephen Rapkin of the Junior Church palms made during in their Zoom Room on Sunday.

Wishing you could sing?

It has become part of the Abbey Lane Easter tradition to sing Stainer's Crucifixion on Good Friday but for the second year running we will be unable to do so. The work was originally written with the intention of being performed by a congregation and church choir, and has become popular with a number of churches who do so as part of their Easter worship. We will include a little of the organ music in our Zoom worship but for anyone who would like to hear the work in full, St Giles Cathedral Choir in Edinburgh has just released a full recording of the piece for all to enjoy on YouTube, recognising that churches are as yet unable to gather and sing.

The link to listen is <https://youtu.be/tshvog2Eow> or simply type *Stainer Crucifixion St Giles* into your browser.





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Meanwhile, here are the notes prepared by Stephen Rapkin for our own service sheet when we were last able to “Come and Sing Stainer’s Crucifixion”:

“Sparrow-Simpson’s appalling doggerel set to Stainer’s squalid music is a monument to the inane” thus writes Kenneth Long in “The Music of the English Church” where he elevates musical snobbery to an art form. Yet *‘The Crucifixion’* – first performed in 1887 – is now 130 years old and still some of us want to sing it. What can we say about it?

Unlike Handel’s *Messiah*, *The Crucifixion* comprises a mix of biblical texts and words written by a librettist, Rev. J. Sparrow-Simpson. Arguably the texts which work best are those taken unaltered from Scripture with, perhaps, “God so loved the World” as the high point. Here Stainer’s music rises well above the mediocre and Sparrow-Simpson’s use of John 3:16 is eminently restrained. As a result it’s often performed as a ‘stand-alone’ anthem. Elsewhere Sparrow-Simpson is sometimes less sure-footed. Generations of choirboys have giggled as tenor soloists have struggled to express depth (of the right sort) with the words ‘here in a basement’.

One of the most interesting passages is the bass recitative, ‘Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?’ Haven’t we heard these words somewhere before? Are they the words of Jesus, as Sparrow-Simpson implies? Indeed, do they even come from the Bible? The answer: the text is from ‘Lamentations’ (Lam 1:12) and is perhaps the most poignant verse from that most poignant book of the Old Testament.

Jesus is depicted as despised, disregarded, ignored and humiliated in the same way as Jerusalem is described by Jeremiah (the traditional author of Lamentations): desolate following siege and pillage. Lamentations’ personification of Jerusalem is transferred to the person of Jesus, afflicted by the ‘fierce anger’ of God. Some will want to reject out of hand this interpretation of the atonement – and are relieved that the words are sung by a soloist! Yet the understanding that Jesus was punished in our place by a God who demands justice – that *he* paid the price for *our* sins – has been central to Reformed Protestant thinking since the Reformation and it’s interesting that Sparrow-Simpson was clearly intent on getting this idea into *The Crucifixion*. In contrast, ‘Fling wide the Gates’ is a chorus in which most singers find uninhibited

enjoyment – and would probably attract the greatest opprobrium from Kenneth Long! Of course, it’s not Palestrina. It’s not ethereal, elegant, beautiful or sophisticated. It’s just a great sing. As the choir take the part of the crowd, welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, it sets just the right tone including a slightly manic, portentous edge. These weren’t the scribes and religious leaders, professional choir members if you like, but a crowd of ordinary folk, a rabble even, who a few days later will shout ‘Crucify him!’.

The Crucifixion is clearly not intended as performance or entertainment but as an act of worship. This is reinforced by the congregational hymns which form an important part of the work and, in this sense, *The Crucifixion* is a cantata in the German protestant tradition. Even Kenneth Long concedes that the hymn tunes ‘Cross of Jesus’ and ‘All for Jesus’ are two of the best of the nineteenth century.

Whatever our view of the music there is little doubt that this *‘Meditation on the Sacred Passion of the Holy Redeemer’* has helped many to reflect on the narratives which have always formed the core doctrine of our Protestant faith.

From ‘The heart of the journey’ for Maundy Thursday (Rachel Portman, URC

Prayer Handbook) - **“With betrayal in the air you lay at the table a rabbi listening, teaching, feeding – the word of life.”** Thanks to all who made donations of chocolate eggs to Uttlesford Foodbank – we will deliver over 25 gifts this week.



and from WhatsApp....



Fritillaries: Mary Duxbury

Anglesey Abbey
Daffodils: Elfreda Tealby-Watson



Magnolia: Ruth Fothergill

Hyacinths: Caroline Vodden



Minister's Letter for Sunday 4th April

Dear Friends,

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1.3)



It feels a strange moment to be writing this letter. With a monthly newsletter it is usually clear whether it will reach its readers before or after Easter, but this letter will be circulated during Holy Week so some of you will be reading it on Good Friday while others will not do so until Easter Day. Should I focus on Jesus' Passion (suffering) or on his Resurrection? It is a threshold moment.

We have passed several thresholds lately: The threshold between Winter and Spring; between Greenwich Mean Time and British Summer Time; between Lockdown and the easing of restrictions. Easter Day will mark for me a personal threshold between work and retirement, and in a few months the WEBS Pastorate will stand on the threshold between a time of settled ministry and an uncertain period of ministerial vacancy.

There are echoes here of Holy Saturday, an unsettling time between what was and what is to come – for me and for you. But the silence and waiting of Holy Saturday becomes the breaking dawn of Easter Day. In the between-times, like the butterfly preparing to emerge from the chrysalis, new life is happening hidden from sight, and at the right time will burst forth in the unfolding of wings and brilliant beauty, leaving the old cocoon as a sign of what went before. For Jesus just the folded graveclothes marked the spot where his body had lain, and his Resurrection appearances brought life and hope and a joyful new beginning to his anxious and fearful followers.

It seems particularly fitting that the time of my moving falls at Easter with its promise of new life and resurrection hope. I don't know what the future will hold for me, but I plan to use the next twelve months as a waiting time, a Holy Saturday, to see what new life God will bring to birth in me. And although I may be many miles away on the North Yorkshire Moors I will be watching and waiting to see what new things the Lord will do in and through you, at Abbey Lane, Stansted and Water Lane and in the WEBS pastorate as a whole.

Thank you for welcoming me and Paul and Alice when we first met you six years ago, for your friendship and support, your faith and love, your caring for one another and for sharing yourselves and the life of your churches with me. I have been blessed and I thank God for you all.



Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15.13)

In Christian love,

Caroline