



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

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

7 February

Welcome to our weekly newsletter

Sunday Service – 7th February

Worship Online at 10:30 led by Rev. Roy Fowler
Reflection by Rev. Caroline Vodden

With the ordination & induction of Elders for Abbey Lane, and Holy Communion

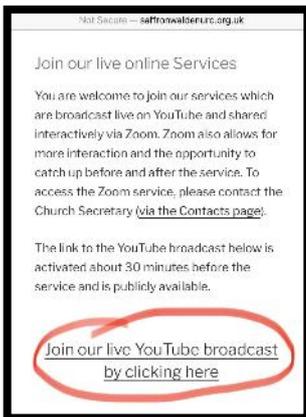
Please have available juice or wine, and bread if you wish to share in Communion

Call our church contact on 01799 528325 for Zoom meeting details

LIVE ON THE WEB AGAIN

Last week we successfully trialled live-streaming using a YouTube connection. This means once again, if you do not use Zoom, you can watch live via our website. Type this into your web browser on Sunday morning:

<http://saffronwaldenurc.org.uk/services-recordings>



You'll then see a link to click through to the live service just before 10.30am. (See left)

The service is also available on the website to watch later. Last week's is there to see. Using the YouTube tool means additionally we can email a simple link for the recorded service

each week direct to you. Please take up this option if nothing else works for you! You can let Elfreda know and she will add you to a weekly distribution list.

Praise God: Psalm 113:3

Sunset seen from the Manse; photograph: Caroline Vodden



“From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised.”

A Round of Applause

In the last few months new circumstances have brought changes for a number of Abbey Lane members. We have already bade farewell to John & Louise Luke; we now have a few more 'players' in our church life to whom we should highlight our thanks.

Meg Nettle has retired as an Elder but we are so pleased that she has offered to keep her duties as a pastoral Elder. Her regular efforts to phone people and stay in touch is an amazing example of fellowship to everyone. Margaret Snowdon has also retired from the Eldership with Meg and Louise, and we want to pay special thanks to Margaret for her determination to continue her term following the debilitating consequences of her stroke. Margaret was ahead of the game in virtual communications as last year she had rejoined Eldership meetings via video link before the rest of us had even heard of Zoom... Her determination is inspiring, & we hope so much that when we return to Abbey Lane for worship we will enjoy her company once more. Unfortunately, at the current time Ron and Margaret can't connect live to Zoom



Ministers	
Revd Caroline Vodden	01799 524 416
Revd Roy Fowler	01279 814 809

Church Secretary	
John Luke	C/O 01799 530175
	07968 730 079

Elders	
John Ford	07969 850109
Val Bowtle	01799 526271
Stephen Rapkin	07730 393 603
Karen Start	01799 522 096
Elfreda Tealby-Watson	01799 530 175



worship, but maybe the return of recordings & streaming via our website will help.

Finally, we are pleased to report that we received a generous response to the collection for Mark and Janet Hayes to wish them well as they begin a new church life in Thaxted. We will be presenting them as soon as possible (hoping for photos to follow!) with book tokens towards Mark's required texts for study, and John Lewis vouchers as a thank you to them both for their years of service. Again, Val has done a beautiful embroidery (pictured previous page) to commemorate their time.

Meanwhile, John and Louise sent a message of appreciation for their wine - one bottle of which they opened to celebrate their finding and having an offer accepted on a house in Perthshire to be their new home. Your generous donations to them mean that we will also be sending them gift tokens with the framed embroidery & messages book.



Book Notes continued...



Comments about books in last week's newsletter have started a trend - this week Stephen Rapkin and Val Bowtle share some more recommended reading.

Val writes, "Caroline told us last week she was reading Rachel Clarke's book 'Dear Life'. The

book was recommended by John Luke in one of his sermons nearly a year ago when we were still able to worship in church. I decided to give it a try and agree: I found it in no way a depressing read. A number of years ago, when a group of us visited Iona and stayed at the Abbey for a week, I joined a seminar led by Tom Gordon who was then Chaplain at the Marie Curie Centre, Fairmile, Edinburgh. Similarly to Dr Clark, he worked with cancer patients, their relatives and those bereaved, and admitted the work was hard, sad and stressful at times but never depressing. He also wrote a book about his work which while perceived to be about dying, he says is in practice

about living. Hence the title, 'A Need for Living', and I can thoroughly recommend it. There is a copy in the Church Library and I have a copy anyone is welcome to borrow." The book is also available for download at <https://www.ionabooks.com/product/a-need-for-living-downloadable-book/> Their own review explains that Tom Gordon, trying to respond to people's search for meaning in difficult life situations, has come to use 'word pictures', which can articulate their feelings better than words. "It is a book for people who care for the dying but also for anyone who needs new images to help them face a crisis and live again."

'A Theology of Nonsense'

(Review Stephen Rapkin) *This book is published by Lutterworth, whose synopsis claims that there is within all theological utterances something of the ridiculous, given its tendency for the paradoxical and the childlike. The author explores these ideas using comparison with the features of literary nonsense such as Lewis Carroll's Alice stories.*

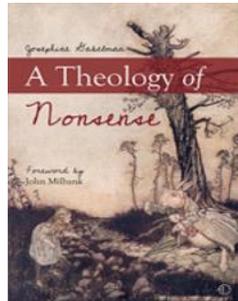
Sometimes the Christmas presents you buy for yourself are the most appreciated – after all who else knows which colour of socks you like best? In that spirit I treated myself to 'A Theology of Nonsense' by Josephine Gabelman. I thought it might be my sort of book after reading a review in 'The Expository Times': I could have therefore expected it to be a challenging read, but I hoped for and was rewarded with some nuggets of interest. The introduction proved challenging, explaining that theology is 'dialethic' (a word I'd not come across before) – it means 'committed to the truth of certain outrightly contradictory statements'.

And so, we move on to Alice – who features prominently in the book - and an assertion that experiencing God can be likened to falling down the rabbit hole: all manner of things become believable which were previously thought impossible. At this stage I began to think of our Small Group bible studies. We've been looking at Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. The problem with Paul is that he continually 'explains' things in terms of paradox – what can it really mean to be 'fools for Christ's sake'? Only this week, we were grappling with the idea that



we gain true freedom by becoming slaves to Christ (see 1 Corinthians Chapter 7:22)

Could Humpty Dumpty have a point when he says to an incredulous Alice, “When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.” Gabelman engages with various mainstream theologians – Kierkegaard



‘wants to separate the faith from the language of probability, seeing this thirst for assurance as a barrier to religious belief’. Hugo Meynell tells us that ‘the true scandal of faith is its insistence that man should surrender his illusion of self-sufficiency’. The conclusion seems to be that this is the mystery of faith. The book ends by quoting Kierkegaard again, ‘when the believer has faith, the absurd is not the absurd – faith transforms it. The passion of faith is the only thing which masters the absurd’.

Children’s Mental Health Week

Promoted by HRH the Duchess of Cambridge, 1st - 7th February marks Children’s Mental Health Week. Reports suggests 1 in 6 children may suffer mental health problems. Roy’s letter this week reflects on how hard during the continuing pandemic it is for us to stay positive and faithful. For CMHW the BBC Children’s Newsround website have posted tips for good mental well-being, suggested by their young viewers..



Children’s Newsround website have posted tips for good mental well-being, suggested by their young viewers..

- Keep a routine - structure in your day can help break things up. School pupils say home learning is easier when they stick to the regular school schedule.
- Plan something to look forward to – not big plans, just something that will put a smile on your face; baking some treats or watching your favourite TV show?
- Stay in touch – chatting with friends & family is hugely important, for you and for them too.
- Screen breaks - remember there is still a life outside of the internet, video calls and devices. Take time out.
- Stay busy - keeping your mind and body occupied is one of the best things for being happy. Think for new ways to do old activities [Zoom Church?! - ed.]

When thinking about mental well-being this extract seemed helpful – from the Prayer in URC Daily Devotions, February 1st

Lord Jesus, help us to see You when we are afraid. Your purposes are beyond our imagination, but we know that you are with us. Jesus, come now and give us peace. Amen

Every Little Helps George Mills has again donated a large book of postage stamps, towards the cost of sending out newsletters in print. On his note with the stamps to Gill Howe he commented that he had been very flattered when wife Marion said she'd donate his brain to science, only to be put down somewhat when she continued that 'every little helps'... We want George & Marion to know that as far as the stamps go their generosity certainly does help.

and from WhatsApp...



More original artwork from Gill Howe – glad I’m not alone taking care with the groceries!



A regular visitor to Freda Clarke’s garden.

Amazing coloured branches, photographed by Mary Duxbury.



Roy Fowler's Letter for Sunday 7th February 2021



Dear Friends,

The prophetic voice in Isaiah chapters 40 to 55 addresses God's people in exile in Babylon. By the time the unknown prophet begins his ministry, the people have been in exile for about 50 years. The prophesy is shot through with words of hope. For the prophet knows that the world is changing. Cyrus has led a successful revolt in Persia and had gone on to conquer the Median empire. So successful is Cyrus, that it is clear that the Babylonian Empire will be next to fall. The prophet can see this is about to happen and joyfully proclaims that God's people will soon be returning home and will be allowed to rebuild both the city of Jerusalem and the temple that lie in ruins. (See Isaiah 40: 3 – 5; 41: 2; 44: 26; 45: 1; 55: 11 and plenty of other references throughout chapters 40 – 55.) The prophet sees these events as an act of God's providence not just to God's people but to all who will experience a similar freedom under Cyrus's rule. The return from exile is never as straight forward as the prophesy suggests. Not everyone returned; it was a struggle to rebuild; and Judah was never an independent nation again. Still, God's people would be free to worship God and to follow their own way of life.

How are you feeling nearly a year into the pandemic? I guess tired, bored or frustrated. Christine and I very much feel like we are back in the one day at a time mode. Imagine what it must have been like to have been in exile for half a century. Can we still lift up our heads and see the future? We all pray that as the vaccination programme spreads further and further into the population and as all the other measures we are taking begin to halt the transmission of the virus that we can begin to see a hope of a freer future. It will take time. For the exiles, there was a time lag between the rise of Cyrus and their return home. As I read from Isaiah this morning, I found this verse:

For a long time I have held my peace,

I have kept still and restrained myself;

now I will cry out like a woman in labour,

I will gasp and pant. (Isaiah 42: 14)

Can we trust in the strength of God to keep us through the onward slog of the coming days believing that God is with us as do all that is needful to work towards the future? A fairly recent theological understanding of the cross is to see as being like a woman in labour, gasping and panting, to give birth God's future as new life. Is our present lit by the hope of the resurrection?

Meanwhile look for the signs of hope. A museum of the future is being built in Dubai. All around it, there are signs of nature renewing herself. Snowdrops are out. There are catkins on the trees. The hellebores are flowering. A lone daffodil bud in our garden struggles to bloom.

God bless and sustain you all,

