



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

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

7 March

Welcome to our weekly newsletter

Sunday Service – 7th March

Worship Online at 10:30 a.m.

Led by Tina Wilson

Reflection by Rev. Caroline Vodden

Zoom meeting: 934 7935 2201

Passcode: 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.

Photo by Stephen Rapkin of the Abbey Lane Pulpit Fall this week



Schools Return: a Step out of Lockdown, but it's not straightforward suggests

Elfreda Tealby-Watson.

On Monday many children will be returning to school for the first time since before Christmas. I know from

speaking to my own child and other parents that the cries of, "Phew, end of home schooling!" being presented through the media rather simplify the issue. Each family has different concerns and will react in different ways. Alongside relief about seeing friends, having easier access to teachers & materials there is anxiety about risks, the process of regular testing and even simple things like having school uniform ready and books for the day in your bag. A similar mix of reactions will likely be found in every step out of not just lockdown but the pandemic itself, including the steps for churches.

Caroline received a letter to Essex Faith Groups from the Rt. Rev. Roger Colchester, commenting on the most recent guidance from Public Health for Essex for churches. Bishop Colchester is the Chair of the Faith & Communities Tactical Co-ordination Group. He writes: "I want to thank you... we are all hugely grateful for the sacrifices you have made in order to keep people safe and ease the pressure on our hospitals." He continues by saying that "You do not have to open yet – and

neither should you need to rush to open." The advice simply says you may open "once you feel safe and confident to do so." In finding that confidence we will need patience, because just like people in our schools on Monday there will be mixed feelings about what lies ahead.

Our own URC Equalities Commission has made a statement on that dilemma of when the restrictions ease: "For almost 12 months it has been impossible to make future plans with any level of certainty and that uncertainty continues today and will do for some time. When restrictions start to be lifted it is essential to recognise that people are in different places on their own journey out of lockdown...For some the wounds of the pandemic will take a long time to, or may never, heal. We must continue to support and love everyone for who they are and their own individual situations." But despite our individual situations what each of us has in common as a Christian is that we journey with God and share this special time of Lent. That's why I was so grateful to receive the picture of the new Pulpit Fall at Abbey Lane made for us by Mary Duxbury who writes about it here:

Last year I had an idea for a pulpit fall for Palm Sunday that I would like to make.

I had no idea if it would be acceptable or if I could achieve it, I just wanted to make it. It was of waving palm fronds but with the shadow of the cross looming. I made it so that the palm fronds were stitched to black net, which hung loose and could be removed so that it would just be the cross for Good Friday. In the Episcopal tradition, if they use pulpit falls or altar cloths during Lent, then they are made of hessian or something similar: rough, unbleached, plain. I found a background fabric that had those qualities though it wasn't hessian. I felt that the cross shouldn't be beautifully embroidered but rough, so I made it from layers of torn black net.

Last week, Caroline suggested that the pulpit fall should be hung in church for Lent, with just the cross but veiled. So, a quick reorganisation of the net and I could take it to the church. Embroideries and hangings are made for the setting where they will be displayed; for most of us that is our homes or other domestic places. This means they will be seen close to and fine details are visible and important. A hanging for a

| Ministers | |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Rev. Caroline Vodden | 01799 524 416 |
| Rev. Roy Fowler | 01279 814 809 |
| Church Secretary | |
| Val Bowtle | 01799 526 271 |
| Vestry/ Church Contact | 01799 528 325 |

| Elders | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| John Ford | 07969 850 109 |
| John Luke | c/o vestry phone |
| Stephen Rapkin | 07730 393 603 |
| Karen Start | 01799 522 096 |
| Elfreda Tealby-Watson | 01799 530 175 |



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

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

7 March

church is different; it has to read well from a distance and fit well with other features. This can be a challenge, so I was grateful to Stephen for his comments when I tried various options before hanging the pulpit fall last Saturday.

Reminders for your Diary

4th March – World Book Day is funded by publishers & booksellers in the UK and Ireland, giving £1 tokens to pupils with £1 titles available to buy.



5th March – World Day of Prayer Alison Jiggins will lead a short service for WDP, including a video about Vanuatu. The Zoom will open at 6.45pm. Meeting ID: 999 9674 6472 Passcode: freechurch

After my story last week about the pianist who didn't know the National Anthem, here is an account of something which happened to me. I was playing for a funeral, not at Abbey Lane, but at another Church not a thousand miles away. All had gone well. The congregation had sung the first two hymns with enthusiasm, so I just had the closing hymn and the concluding voluntary to do. The closing hymn was "Jerusalem", so I had pulled out every available stop in order to make a rousing sound. The minister began to speak. I thought he was going to introduce the hymn, but he said "Before we sing "Jerusalem", I'd like you to spend a short time thinking about your memories of Joe Smith, and while you do so, the organist will play "God be in my head".

At this point my world fell apart. A quick glance at the printed Order of Service confirmed that it wasn't on the programme. There was no question of finding a hymn book and looking it up. Also, I had to ram most of the stops back to the "off" position, in order to reduce the volume to an acceptable level.

The first line is easy. The first three notes are all the same, and then you jump to a high note, then fall down one step. So I managed "God be in my head and in my understanding". I was reasonably accurate with "God be in my eyes and in my looking". Then there were ten bars which I had to make up. It was a sort of original composition. After this, memory returned, and I was able to finish correctly with "God be at my end and at my departing". This sort of thing ages you. I'm normally a bit apprehensive about playing "Jerusalem", but I really enjoyed it on that occasion.



Proverbs 31:26

"When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness."

8th March – International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the achievements of women, calling for gender equality & supporting women's charities. It

originated in 1911 as part of the campaign for Votes for Women; charities supported include the Girl Guides and Scouts. <https://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk>

11th March – God In Love Unites Us: Discussion meeting by Zoom. Frieda Wilson, Methodist Circuit secretary invites us to join this event discussing The Report of the Marriage & Relationships Task Group 2019, set up to revisit the 'definition' of marriage. The group reported to the 2019 Conference but were unable to conclude consultations due to Covid-19. This circuit discussion is being held to inform future consideration at the District Synod in April. The discussion from 7.30pm before the circuit meeting. Meeting ID: 890 2644 4417 Passcode:727174

An online study guide about the report is available at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/14704/marriage-and-relationships-study-guide-colour.pdf> or by post from <https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk>

14th March – Mother's Day: it may be hard to make last minute plans just now so look ahead... Let's also remember in prayers those for whom this year may be poignant because of loss or separation.

Almost Caught Out (John Evans)

Census Time

(Stephen Rapkin)

As the ten-year national census approaches, we might reflect on the history of this process whereby authorities count and keep tabs on us.

Well, it's not new. In fact, we can read about censuses in the Bible.

Censuses played a crucial role at three distinct stages of the biblical narrative.

The fourth book of the Bible, Numbers, even takes its name from two censuses. A census was taken at the beginning and again at the end of the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness. In each case the Lord spoke to Moses and, as the people entered the





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

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

7 March

promised land, the census was used to help with the apportionment of land to each of the tribes. God initiated this census, and its purpose was the good ordering of society: we might call this a benign census at a time when all events, good and bad, were attributed to the divine.

But, later in the historical narrative, we find another census. There are two accounts, parallel reports, in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. Divine agency remains central but now with much ambivalence. The 2 Samuel narrative tells us that God, in anger, incited David to hold a census. The tension in the narrative is palpable. And when we turn to a different account of the same event in 1 Chronicles, we're told that it was *Satan* who incited David to hold a census. For Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad, this account preserves contemporary opposition to military matters planned, and then executed, by David. David wanted to know what his war potential was, he wanted to have figures available. But conscription of those obliged to do military service ran absolutely counter to the essence of the holy war, which was that Jahweh himself had assumed the responsibility for the defence of Israel. The king was 'playing god' and God did not approve.

And then, of course, there's the census which springs to mind more readily for most of us. In the New Testament, Luke tells us how a decree went out from Caesar Augustus 'that all the world should be registered'. This census is no longer instigated by God but by a Roman emperor, and it's no longer a count of God's people, the Israelites, but of everyone.

Superficially it seems that God is no longer at the centre of the world, but a pagan man in Rome. Yet, as New Testament scholar, G.B.Caird, observed, 'the point in the story that especially captured Luke's fancy was not just that Jesus was born in Bethlehem according to the old prediction, but that this promise of God came true because of an enactment of the Roman government. God was working his purpose out not only through the hesitancy of Zechariah, the exuberance of Elizabeth, and the quiet faith of Mary; Caesar Augustus too, like Cyrus in earlier days, had become the unwitting coadjutor of salvation which would one day encompass his whole empire'.

More information about completing the Census on 21 March can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91GPhO5aIl.s> and at <https://www.census.gov.uk>

Did you know? The USA held a Census last year (2020), during which the international women's Christian group Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters worked to encourage participation in the Census. They too referred to the biblical examples of Census saying, "a full, accurate count is needed ... to make sure everyone in our community is counted so that we all have the resources we need" but they noted that in the early years of the USA census, African Americans were only counted as 3/5 people and Native Americans were not included at all; the Sisters understood that for some communities a census might seem threatening.

This is their **Census Prayer**:

God of all Peoples, Please help everyone in our communities to be counted in the Census. You know our fears, our challenges and questions about taking part in this census. Help us to have the courage, strength and insight to participate so that every person is counted in this important event in our country. We make this prayer in a God who loves and cares for each of us. Amen.

Church Family



Karen Start has shared this photo of the beautiful daffodils at Abbey Lane planted by Pat Barker and his team. We thank him for such a joyous display. Please think of Marion and Pat in your prayers as he waits in hospital for treatment.



and from WhatsApp



Lucinda, Esme & Clara's bunny enjoying some spring sun and two lovely views from Ruth Fothergill; a sunset caused by Saharan dust and mist at Wimpole Hall



Roy Fowler's Letter for Sunday 7th March 2021

Dear Friends

I have been following the daily devotions for Lent that the Norwich diocese of the Church of England have been sending by email each morning. It is still not too late to subscribe at this link:

<https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/resource/40-words-for-40-days/>



Each day, Canon Susanna Gunner provides a picture and a meditation that includes a reference to scripture.

Last Thursday's meditation was based on a photograph of rocky ground with camomile flowers growing in between the stones. She comments on how, in Spring, the Judean desert suddenly springs to life with flowers growing up and blossoming. The Winter rains trigger this new growth each year. A couple of days previously, I had seen daffodils flowering on a piece of previously disturbed ground. She then went on to quote from Isaiah: "The desert and the dry lands will rejoice: flowers will bloom in the wilderness" (Is 35: 6b). The wilderness holds within it the promise of renewal. A promise that we particularly need this Lent.

It is hard to believe that we are coming up to the anniversary of the last Sunday we were able to hold worship before we locked down because of the Covid 19 virus. We were already being encouraged to maintain social distancing, and some of you chose not to attend church that Sunday. It has been a roller coaster ride since then with three lockdowns and various degrees of restriction at other times. We now have a potential roadmap that promises us a future with at least the virus controlled, if not eradicated. Let's pray for our schools, our children, their teachers and other support staff as schools return on Monday. Let's also pray for our university students and their lecturers with the uncertainties they still face. But let's pray that this is the first step to a safer opening up of our individual lives and that of the whole country.

The great sign of hope is the vaccination programme that is going so well in this country. Over 20 million first doses have been accepted and administered with a very high take up. I got mine last week. Individually, the vaccine significantly reduces the risk of hospitalisation and death. While communally, the further the vaccination programme spreads, the better chance we have of controlling the virus, even if it means a further top-up later in the year to combat the new variants. Give thanks for those who have developed and are now delivering the vaccine to us. But let's go on doing all we can to co-operate with all we need to do to let the road before us open up. There is still hard work to be done. So let's pray for the inner resources of faith to support us – renewed strength and hope. Remember the flowers blossoming in the wilderness.

A future safe world, even for those of us in the UK where vaccinations are fast being rolled out will be one where everyone, wherever they are in the world has been vaccinated. It is good to see our Government actively participating in the Covax programme to get vaccines to countries that are not able buy their own in sufficient quantities to make a real difference. Let's also pray for and support vaccine justice.

God be with us and bless us,