

Brookfield News

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The story behind 'Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son'

Here is a hymn that is so well known and loved that it has simply burst the bounds of Easter, and gets sung regularly at other times of the year. It has two stories behind it.

First, the music. The rousing music did not start out as a hymn, but was written by Handel for his opera 'Judas Maccabeus', first performed in 1746. Originally the words ran 'See the conquering hero comes', for Handel's opera tells the story (found in the Apocrypha) of the leader of the Jews, Judas Maccabeus, who led an army against the Syrians and restored worship at the Temple. With its triumphant refrain after each verse, the music is easy to learn and sing, and can

be (and has been!) played to great effect either by the trumpets, on an organ in a large resonant church, or even on guitars (!).

Secondly, the words. They were not written until 1884 – 138 years after the music. We owe them to the Rev Raymond Budry, a Swiss pastor from Lausanne. Ordained in the Free Evangelical Church in Vaud, he spent 35 years as the pastor of Vevey on Lake Geneva. Budry wrote the hymn in French ('A Toi La Gloire!') to console himself after the death of his first wife, and a year later (1885) it was published in Chants Evangeliques.

Soon it found its way into English – translated by a Baptist minister

from Kingston-upon-Thames, Richard Hoyle. By 1904 it had made the YMCA Hymn Book, and was being translated into other languages.

It is not clear who first had the happy idea of teaming words and music, but when they did, the hymn really took off. The theme of 'battle' is never far from this hymn, whether it was the battle of Judas Maccabeus, or the battle over sin which was won by Christ on the cross and in rising from the tomb. Easter, of course, marked the biggest victory over the biggest enemies of all time: sin and death.

What would Handel make of it, if he could know that his battle music

This Month..... Woodbine Willie.....Page 4

Services

Sundays

11.00am Sung Eucharist

"Sunday Supplement" the children's activity takes place every Sunday in the sacristy during the service

Weekday Services

Said Eucharist

Tuesday 7.30pm

Wednesday 9.30am

Friday 7.30am

Saints' & Holy Days

Thursday 29th May Ascension Day

7.30pm Sung Eucharist

Saturday 31st May The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

5.00pm Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral. Preacher Fr. Guy

Clergy Day off: Fr. Guy is off duty on Monday but don't hesitate to call him in emergencies.

The Vicar is usually available in the Vicarage, 85 Dartmouth Park Road, from 8:00pm until 9:00pm on Tuesdays for the purpose of interviews, arranging Baptisms, reading of Banns and Weddings etc. he is also available to hear confessions then or by appointment.

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had become one of the world's most popular and well-known Easter hymns? He was a devout man, working for the poor, praying twice each day, and attending St Pauls' Cathedral. So it seems pretty certain that he would be delighted.

100 Club Winners

Draw for March 2014

1st prize: Carol Kenning

2nd prize: George Dann

3rd prize: Monica Sarpong

4th prize: Tom Welsh

Congratulations to you all and thanks for your support each month.

If you would like to purchase a number in this monthly draw please do make enquiries of the Mr Mark Williams.

Our Church of England in 140 Characters: @OurCofE

The Church of England has launched a year-long project on Twitter to tell the story of the Church of England through the eyes of its people, providing a daily insight into modern faith in action.

The Project - @OurCofE - was launched on 3rd March, where over the course of a year, bishops, clergy, chaplains, youth workers and churchgoers from around the country will be given a week each to tweet about their life inside the Church of England.

The project is inspired by similar twitter accounts such as @sweden which was set up by the Swedish tourist board who invited people to take turns in tweeting their life in Sweden for a week, each with their own unique view of the country.

Followers of the account will be given an insight into all the work that goes on into the day to day running of a church community from schools to chaplaincies to cathedrals. Followers will be able to peek behind the scenes as they get a feel for daily life in parishes. Tweets will come from a diverse group of people including bishops, vicars, volunteers, youth workers, chaplains and worshipers from across the Church.

Speaking ahead of the launch Claire Diaz-Ortiz, Head of Social Innovation at Twitter, said:

“The incredible engagement levels we see on religious tweets the world over prove the power of 140 characters to convey hope, motivation, and inspiration. The @OurCofE

Twitter account will build on this by telling the story of the Church of England through the eyes of its people, providing a fascinating insight into modern faith in action. Spanning great cathedrals to tiny parishes, it will provide real-time glimpses into the workings of the church for followers across the world, 140 characters at a time.”

The Revd. Jeremy Fletcher, one of the 52 weekly tweeters for the year, and the Vicar of Beverley Minster said: “Being a parish priest is one of the most varied jobs anyone could have. From one hour to the next you can be with people in their best and worst experiences. No two days are the same. I want to tweet about it to let people know what it’s like doing what I do, and about the fantastic people and organisations who welcome the church’s involvement.”

The Revd. Kate Bottley, a vicar and FE college chaplain from North Nottinghamshire, another of the weekly tweeters said: “I’m really excited to be asked to be part of the Church of England’s @OurCofE twitter project. The project provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate the rich diversity of life in the Church of England. It’s great to think that these tweets might paint a colourful picture of the day to day runnings of the Church of England. From Morning Prayer to afternoon tea, Our Fathers to Mother Unions, from food festivals to food banks, this Twitter project gives a glimpse at the glorious diversity that is the life of the Church of England, will 140 characters be enough? I can’t wait to get started.”

Talitha Proud, Digital Media Officer for the Archbishops’ Council adds “Social media is a great way of sharing stories and @OurCofE is our way of celebrating the Christian faith in action in communities across the country.”

The Revd. Arun Arora, Director of Communications for the Archbishops’ Council said: “Social media is an ideal platform to provide a flavour of the myriad of daily activity and service that the Church undertakes each day. We are delighted with the support and engagement we have had from Twitter in establishing the project. From assemblies to funerals, prisons to hospitals, workplaces to cathedrals, Parliament to parish, the Church of England is at work daily to show the love of God to the people of England.”

Is your dawicki on your floordrobe? Oh well, YOLO!

Slang is alive and well – and spreading in Britain across all the social groups. Linguistic researchers have found hundreds of new words creeping into the language, from ‘dawicki’ for remote control to ‘gruds’ for underpants, ‘grooglums’ for the bits of good left in the sink after washing the dishes, and ‘floordrobe’ for the place where clothes are stored in a teenager’s bedroom. Bill Lucas, professor of learning at the University of Winchester, said that a lot of the words “are inspired by the sound or the look of a thing, or are driven by an emotional response to it.” And don’t forget the new abbreviations: YOLO – you only live once; and TBDL: too boring, didn’t listen.

Having now completed our look at St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians we will have a complete change and look at extracts from the Book of Revelation, whose complex symbols and numerology have fascinated and baffled generations.

Rowan Williams described the book as being written in two scripts – one, “written with clear and haunting authority”, the other “page after page of paranoid fantasy and malice”. It has been misread by many in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a guide to how and when the world will come to an end (all such theories have been proved wrong so far).

The Church in the East at first refused to accept that it should form part of the Bible, though it has always been accepted by the church in the West. We will be seeking to understand as far as possible how its author originally intended it to be understood.

In three sessions, we will look at:
(a) The Prologue, the letters to the churches and John's vision of the heavenly court (extracts from chapters 1 – 5);

(b) John's visions of judgment, and of God's people in conflict with evil (extracts from chapters 6 – 16)

(c) Babylon and the New Jerusalem (extracts from chapters 17 – 22)”

The sessions will begin on Sunday 25th May in the Vicarage at 12.30pm followed by a soup and cheese lunch. Do join us for this hour long investigation into one of the most intriguing books of the Bible

WW1: Woodbine Willie

The Rev George Anketell Studdert Kennedy was the son of a parson who followed in his father's calling and in 1914 became vicar of St Paul's, Worcester. Within a few weeks the Great War began and George, like many other young clergy, immediately volunteered as an army chaplain and soon found himself on the western front, right in the middle of the ‘war to end all wars’. By the time the war was over he had achieved an odd new name, a Military Cross for ‘exceptional bravery’ and an honoured place in its annals. The young chaplain had become ‘Woodbine Willie’ - a nickname given him by the soldiers in the trenches, but which stuck with him for the rest of his life.

People under fifty probably won't have any idea what a ‘Woodbine’ was, but for my generation it was the cheapest way into the forbidden joys of smoking. ‘Woodbines’ - small cigarettes - were available in packets of five (rather than ten or twenty) and so even pocket money could buy them. During the Great War they were the standard popular ‘fag’ in an era when almost all men smoked. Indeed, my father, tending wounded and even dying men as an army medic, would routinely light a cigarette and place it between their lips.

‘Woodbine Willie’ carried a permanent supply of Woodbines in his pockets along with his Bible - hence the nickname. He gave men a ‘fag’ and at the same time, in the most natural way, offered them encouragement, sympathy and prayer. He insisted on sharing all their experiences, including going into No Man's Land to minister to the injured and dying - allies or

enemies.

The chaplains serving on the battle-field won the universal respect of the troops. They insisted on sharing the life of the trenches and getting to know the soldiers personally. This led many chaplains, including Studdert Kennedy, radically to alter their approach and even their theology. They quickly realised how remote the average soldier was from formal church services and the language of the Bible and the Prayer Book. They came back after the War determined to change things in church, but it wasn't easy.

Studdert Kennedy moved from being a typical Edwardian parson, who thought that the main object of a war was to win it - he once joined the troops for bayonet practice - to being a convinced pacifist who thought the best thing to do with wars was to end them.

After the war he became a vicar in the City of London, a published poet and in the early days of radio a popular broadcaster. When he died in 1929 it was reported that crowds lined the pavements as his funeral procession made its way through the streets. Food for the Fed-up was the title of a book he wrote principally for the soldiers in the trenches. It was the Creed explained in their language. The Unutterable Beauty was the title of his Collected Poems, many of them based on his experience of the western front. He did indeed find a mysterious beauty in the grim humour, honest fear and raw courage of the men with whom he had so often shared a fag and a prayer.

“Dear Friends....”

From the Vicars Desk

As many of you will have seen on TV, and the National and Local press the Bishops have once again created a very difficult situation within the church.

On the very last day of the General Synod meeting in February they produced guidance for the clergy on how to deal with the new situation of same sex marriage as these became legal at the end of March. The Church of England is exempt from the provision so there is no possibility of marrying same sex couples in church for the foreseeable future. However there are already requests in some Parishes and Cathedrals for services of blessing after a civil marriage. Again the Bishops have said that we must not conduct such services as they would be publicly acknowledging the validity of same sex marriage, which the church continues to deny is possible. However they go on to say that private prayers may be said with couples after we have explained that we do not believe what they are doing is valid in a Christian context.

Now that seems to me to make any prayers we might say somewhat fascicle as having told them they are naughty we then go on to pray that they will be happy together! According to the Archbishop of Canterbury this is to maintain pastoral care yet it is creating a nonsense situation which is only likely to create more confusion among the public as to what we believe and understand marriage to be.

There is a further twist to the story as there is now a call from the Bishops to retain Civil Partnerships as a viable alternative to marriage. However five or so years ago they declared that civil partnerships were wrong and should be opposed. So what has suddenly changed?

Sadly it then gets worse as they further declare that clergy may not enter into same sex marriages and sanctions will be taken against those who do. Whether we agree or not with the principal of same sex marriage it seems to me very dubious that the church can deny its clergy a right enshrined in the law of the land. And what sort of sanctions are being considered? If the Bishops believe that they could deprive someone of their living I think they would have very great difficulty under employment law. It was suggested to me that a possible alternative would be to demote someone to a curacy. However as we are all legally self employed as incumbents, and the priest involved could not be directed to another parish without resigning their current living resulting in major removal costs etc. it seems to me to be pretty pointless. Apart from telling the priest that they would be unlikely to ever be considered for other parishes there seems little future in the threat. So the Bishops are making threats that they cannot enforce again making them look foolish.

In trying to maintain a line on marriage to appease traditionalists I fear that the Bishops have pleased

no one and will be forced to think again very soon. The public perception of where the church stands is now so confused that there will have to be much more debate and consideration given to changes in the guidance. I fear that this issue is one that is going to see even greater disagreement within the church both in this country and world wide, than the Women Bishops issue. We are told the line has been set to protect vulnerable Christians in African countries where communities could be attacked if it was understood that the church they belonged to supported homosexuality. While this may have some credibility, that is accepting that Muslim extremists can dictate to us our beliefs and practices something we should reject wholeheartedly.

So where does this leave us? Perhaps we should use this Easter season to pray earnestly for our Church and Bishops that they may be enabled to perceive a way forward that will be credible and sustainable as well as pastorally sensitive to the needs of all for whom we care.

Your Parish Priest

Shiver ± the new diet?

If you want to lose a few pounds, here's an unusual tip: keep your house cool enough to shiver in. It seems that when we shiver, we release a hormone that helps our body produce heat to maintain its core temperature. The hormone, irisin, is the same one that is produced when muscles are exercised. Irisin helps fat cells burn more energy and release more heat. The study was carried out by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases in the US.

How to Read the Bible in Public

By Richard Bewes

But is this a necessary topic? I'm afraid so. I have heard the British actor David Suchet declare that he has been up and down churches everywhere... and that the dull and listless public reading of the Scriptures is generally a disgrace to the power of the Bible.

"The music was wonderful today"... "That was a great talk!"... "I loved the worship!" Hardly ever do I hear gratitude expressed for a Scripture reading. Let this be the background to that occasion when you find yourself called upon to read from the Scriptures in a public gathering.

We are not simply pronouncing words when we stand at the front. Unhurried preliminary prayer is vital to the task. What is this passage all about? Why is it here in the Bible? What is its main point? I need to ask myself which words - as I read them - could do with a slight emphasis, a mental underlining, a raised or lowered inflexion?

Yet others should not be thinking, 'What a great reader,' but rather 'My goodness, that passage was speaking to me!' The voice must be naturally your own. Do normal people speak with 'holy' churchy affectation? Did Jesus, when telling his parables?

We are to keep the voice natural, yet with an underlying awareness that - without straining - we need to project. True - there may be a microphone - but be not deceived! It is only there to impart a slight 'lift' to the voice; it simply cannot do the job for you.

Across the years I have recognized various unfortunate 'Categories' of reader. Be warned! One could be named after an early English king, unfortunately known as Ethelred the Unready. Such a reader turns up, but has clearly not thought the passage through at all; the reading is an utter non-event.

By contrast we have sometimes been subjected to The Thespian.

Here a well-intentioned reader is so intent on 'acting' the passage with ham-fisted phony 'accents' that it is truly cringe-worthy. Public Scripture reading can be truly supernatural in power - without it ever becoming unnatural in delivery. Have you sometimes heard The Dollard give the reading? It is delivered in a flat monotone throughout; it could have been a recitation of shares on the stock market.

Then there is what may be called The Queen's Speech, immaculate; beautifully spoken and with perfect diction. But somehow the reading lacked 'Soul' - was it a communication from heaven and a life of prayer, or a performance from the local dramatic society?

Give yourself some practice sessions! Try Luke 15:11-24 as an obvious 'story', and then, by contrast, Ephesians 2:1-10; then 1 Kings 18:20-39.

Treat public Bible reading as an honour. For centuries the Bible has been described in the British Coronation Service as The most precious thing that this world affords. We are to treat it like that!

Launch of joint Anglican-RC initiative against modern slavery and human trafficking

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Pope Francis have given their backing to a ground-breaking ecumenical initiative to combat modern slavery and human trafficking, which is reckoned to affect up to 29million people.

In a statement the Archbishop of Canterbury said: "Anglicans and Roman Catholics have, since 1966, been in serious and prayerful

dialogue with each other, to seek the unity that Christ wills for his church in the world.

"We are now being challenged ... into a deeper unity on the side of the poor and in the cause of the justice and righteousness of God. For this reason, the new Global Freedom Network is being created to join the struggle against modern slavery and human trafficking from a faith base, so that we might

witness to God's compassion and act for the benefit of those who are abducted, enslaved and abused in this terrible crime.

"We are struggling against evil in secret places and in deeply entrenched networks of malice and cruelty. No one of us is strong enough, but together we are ready for the challenge God is placing before us today, and we know that he will strengthen us so that all people may live in freedom and dignity."

The Way I See It : An attitude of gratitude

I remember as a young student of English listening with fascination to the process by which the bus conductor sold tickets to the passengers. (I should explain, for readers of a younger generation, that once upon a time buses often had a staff of two, a driver who actually steered the vehicle, and a conductor who sold the tickets.)

What intrigued me was the ubiquitous usage of the phrase 'thank you'. It was 'thank you' to let you know that you had to buy a ticket, then 'thank you' again as you handed over the fare, and finally a third 'thank you' from the passenger on receipt of the ticket and the change. At three 'thank you's' to each transaction, and with perhaps thirty people on the bus, that made no less than ninety 'thank you's'

every half hour or so, adding up to nearly six hundred of them in the course of the conductor's working day. Perhaps as his or her head hit the pillow at night there might be one final 'thank you' to mark the close of day.

'Say thank-you to grandma', children are told - and learning to say it is part of becoming a nice polite person. 'It costs nothing to say thank you', I remember being told. And that's the problem, really. Saying thank you and actually meaning it are two very different things - a difference we can all detect. True gratitude shows itself in the eye, in the voice, in the body language. It does cost something, because true gratitude actually alters our relationship with the one we thank.

I grew up in an era when many families habitually said 'grace' before meals. The same criteria apply. The two longest graces I ever heard were one in Latin at an Oxford college, gabbled so fast that even Vergil would have had a job understanding it, and another at a Christian guest house where a long and rambling grace preceded a meal which was no longer hot. The shortest, incidentally, was 'Ta, Pa', a sort of ungracious grace. A genuine grace comes from a grateful heart, which recognises that all we have, including the food on the plate before us, is a gift.

An attitude of gratitude, rather than an assumption of entitlement, is a true conversion of heart. It transforms mere politeness into a genuine blessing. It's so much more than saying words. It's actually meaning them.

God uses sameness: David must have found the monotony of keeping his father's sheep quite difficult, knowing that he was the anointed king. However, it was in the routine of life that he learned the valuable lesson of faithfulness. David applied himself to giving his best during the mundane times of life. As a result it was evident that 'the Lord is with him', as God the sameness of his life to shape David for bigger things.

We are also called to keep faithful in the small things in our lives, especially in our workplace and with friends and family. As we live consistently for Jesus on a daily basis, God will bring us into those places and relationships where we can be effective witnesses for him. 'All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.' (Gandalf in 'The Lord of the Rings')

Growing a Servant's Heart

We have seen how David was anointed to be the next king of Israel. God used the madness of Saul to help train the shepherd boy for his role as king (1 Samuel 16:18-19). God uses the same tools to grow us, so that he can use us as his servants in our church, workplace and community.

God uses solitude: It was on the hills with his sheep that David learned how to be alone with God and himself (19). Away from distractions, David learned how to hear the voice of God and discern his purpose for his life.

We shouldn't fear times of solitude, as they are vital if we are to hear his voice and walk with him. We need time to be alone with God and

find a place where you can hear his voice without the distractions of life clamouring for our attention. God uses secrecy: David also learned the lessons of servanthood in obscurity, before he was called to public office (18). He learned 'how to play the harp', so that at the right time he would be called into Saul's service. In his experience of protecting his sheep against lions and bears (cf 17: 34, 35), David learned the art of being 'a brave man and a warrior'.

We should never despise the days of obscurity, when we can feel we are not being used much by God. He knows where we are and in his time, he will use us when, where and to the extent he chooses.

Mary, the Blessed Virgin, visits Elizabeth

May 31

Mary – the virgin mother of Jesus. For centuries the eastern and western churches have considered her pre-eminent among all the saints.

In the gospels, Mary makes her first appearance as a teenager. Nothing is known of her childhood, and what we do know of her is found mostly in Matthew 1 – 2 and in Luke 1 – 2. If you read both accounts, you'll notice that Luke's account seems to give the story from Mary's standpoint, whereas Matthew concentrates more on Joseph's side of things. In both accounts the virginal conception of Christ is clearly stated. Mary's quiet devotion to God and her total accep-

ance of his will shine forth.

Her visit to Elizabeth, when both were pregnant, is a moving and poignant account of two humble, ordinary women, suddenly caught up in a great event which would shape world history. Their trusting faith in God and acceptance of his will, shine through.



After Jesus is born, Mary fades into the background, and makes few appearances: when the family visits Jerusalem and she loses her son on the way home; when she urges him to help the wedding party in Cana with its wine problem; and when Jesus gives her into the keeping

of the beloved disciple when he is dying on the cross. Mary's last appearance is in Acts chapter one, just before Pentecost.

Mary obviously joined the early Church, but her role was never one of teaching and preaching, and indeed she remained so much in the background that nothing more about her is known for certain. Both Ephesus and Jerusalem have claimed to be the place of her death.

Mary, chosen to be the mother of Jesus Christ, one who is both God and Man, holds a unique place in the history of mankind. Down the centuries that have followed, the Church has paid special honour to Mary – and well deserved it is. "All generations shall call me blessed..."

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On the perils of building a kitchen in church

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

It never fails to amaze me how in church life, an issue can suddenly become an Issue. In the last month, we have acquired an Issue: a proposal to convert a space at the back of church into a kitchen. Inevitably, battle lines have been drawn and trenches dug. Attendance at church council meetings have soared and unofficial sub-committees meet in the car park after Services. It's obvious that feelings are running high, because people have become remarkably polite to one another.

Some who are wildly in favour see it as an opportunity of being able to leave the pews ten minutes early in order to get ready for the rush for weak coffee and damp biscuits. I can already hear in my mind the final hymn being drowned by kettles being filled, biscuit tins opened, cups thunderingly placed on saucers, while the volunteers discuss the dress sense of others in the congregation in deafening whispers.

I was a little surprised to hear that Colonel Wainwright was all in favour – until I realised that it would give him a place to totter into to read his newspaper once he got bored with my sermon, which usually seems to happen in the first minute. Naturally, smaller turf wars have broken out alongside the major battle. There is conflict about whether we should get new crockery, what colour carpeting tiles would look right – and most

importantly of all, who will take charge of the coffee rota.

Others are totally against the project: the treasurer dreads the thought of signing yet more cheques, the churchwardens worry about removing pews which have quietly hidden the dry rot, and the theologically angst-ridden agonise about the fact that St. Paul never mentioned coffee after Sabbath worship.

Naturally, I encourage all sides, especially if it will bring any possibility of progress to a halt. I proposed bringing in flasks of coffee, thus stopping anyone being able to escape before the end of the Service; I suggested drinks being brought to people in the pews, thus ruining the Colonel's hopes of finding a safe haven; I organised a group to study High Priestly attitudes to refreshments in the Temple in Jerusalem in Leviticus.

I am sure that by the time all these groups have come up with their conclusions, we will have safely moved on to fight the next Issue.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

For sale

Classified Ad: Wedding dress for sale. Worn once by mistake. Call Stephanie.

Cats

A Cheshire vicar has two cats. Their names are Ancient and Modern – because they are both him.

James the Less ± Apostle

One thing for sure: the apostles were not self-obsessed. In fact, many a church historian has wished that they had left us just a few more personal details about themselves in the New Testament. James the Less is an excellent example. This is the name we give to James the son of Alphaeus, but – beyond that, who was he? Sometimes he is identified as the James whose mother stood by Christ on the cross. Sometimes he is thought to be the James who was 'brother of the Lord'. Sometimes he is thought to be the James who saw the risen Christ. He has also, and often, been called the first bishop of Jerusalem. And finally, sometimes James the Less has been thought of as the author of the Epistle of James.

But – who knows? If none of these identifications are correct, we know practically nothing about James the Less. So perhaps on this day we can simply recall 'all' of the James' above, and thank God for the mother who stood by the cross, the brother that supported Jesus, the apostle who saw his risen Lord and gave his life to proclaiming the truth, the first bishop of Jerusalem, and the author of the marvellous epistle of James. Whether it was one James or several, they were all faithful to Jesus, and proclaimed him as the Messiah. So perhaps that should make them James the More!

James the Less has been given an unusual iconographic emblem: a fuller's club. Tradition has it that he was beaten to death with one, after being sentenced by the Sanhedrin in AD62. In England there are only 26 churches which are dedicated to James the Less.

Remembering the poets John Betjeman and John Clare

The death of two of our most loved poets is remembered this month. John Betjeman who lived in Lissenden Gardens and then Highgate West Hill as a child, died 30 years ago: he was the poet laureate who everyone knew, because his verses are accessible and memorable. Who can forget those “friendly bombs” that he invited to fall on Slough? Or the enigmatic but lovely tennis player, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn?

Betjeman was a practising Anglican who, unlike many, was honest about his doubts. One of his best known poems, Christmas, combines undeniable wonder with the repeated “And is it true?”

A traditionalist at heart, he really wants it all to be true – and this is something many of his fellow-countrymen respond to. All right, he failed Divinity (twice) at Oxford and he couldn’t stand C S Lewis, but he had a masterly sense of irresistible rhythm, and he remains a likeable, easy fellow.

The same could hardly be said of John Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant poet, who died 150 years ago. While his poetry was popular at first, it lost support and had to be rediscovered; meanwhile he suffered greatly from both poverty and what we would today call mental health issues.

Like Betjeman, he looked backward

rather than forward, bemoaning the disappearance of ancient countryside practices – “the green life of change” – with the destructive advent of the industrial revolution and, perhaps more importantly, land enclosures. This too strikes a chord today.

His interpretations of the natural world are full of inspiration, vision and a deep if sometimes unconventional belief in the supernatural. He loved traditional forms of worship, but it was the beauty of God’s creation that inspired him, as in these compelling lines from Autumn:

“Burning hot is the ground, liquid gold is the air;

Whoever looks round sees Eternity there.”

Why didn't the Romans and Jews see the Risen Jesus?

“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him” (John 14:21)

Following Easter, we may wonder – as one of Jesus’ disciples did (v.27) – why the risen Lord was never seen by the outside world; by Pontius Pilate or Caiaphas the high priest; by those who had been responsible for his arrest and death. Would that not have been a wonderful way of launching the despised faith at a very public level? Surely the Man of Galilee had only to announce “You thought you were rid of me; here I am after all!”

But the answer is that Christ reveals himself only to his lovers. Here, in John chapter 14, Jesus is pouring in words of assurance

to the disciples shortly before his death, as he speaks of the love relationship between himself and those who follow him.

“It would sound odd for a man to say he loved a god,” wrote the Greek thinker, Aristotle, 24 centuries ago. Such could well be admitted by adherents of modern religions today. Yet in the words of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, “A believer is surely a lover, yea of all lovers the most in love.”

From time to time we meet with great lovers of Jesus. We know that they are such, because we cannot imagine them doing or saying anything that would contravene their discipleship. Sometimes, when we meet them, we almost feel that we are speaking with Jesus himself! The practical obedience, generosity

and purity of living that pour out of the lives of Christ’s lovers in no way resembles the grudging servitude that a slave would give to a feared tyrant; theirs is the grateful response of love that has been awakened by a yet greater love still. The Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon once declared, “Obedience must have love for its mother, nurse and food.”

Is there a reward for such obedience? There is. The reward is more of Jesus; a greater awareness of His presence and companionship with us, by day and night. Indeed, Jesus elaborates further when he adds, “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). As an old hymn put it:

To turn aside from thee is hell,
To walk with thee is heaven

Hymns and Readings

4th May Easter 3

Readings Acts 2: 14a & 36-41

Psalm 116 vv 1-3 7 10-17

1 Peter 1: 17-23

Luke 24: 13-35

Hymns 345 Christ is the king

118 The Lord is risen indeed

443 Rejoice the Lord is King

486 We have a gospel to proclaim

Sidesperson: Irada Fracassi

Readers: Jenny Kauntze, Stephen Nicoll

Intercessions: Lucy Boyd

11th May Easter 4

Readings Acts 2: 42-end

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2: 19-end

John 10: 1-10

Hymns 390 Jesus where ere thy people meet

282 Faithful shepherd feed me

128 Ye choirs of new Jerusalem

106 Come ye faithful raise the strain

Sidesperson: Rob Nesbitt

Readers: Carol Kenning, Nick Bethune

Intercessions: Nicky Pittam

18th May Easter 5

Readings: Acts 7: 55-end

Psalm: 31 vv 1-5 & 15-16

1 Peter 2: 2-10

John 14: 1-14

Hymns 102 A brighter dawn

464 Thou art the way by thee alone

484 The churches one foundation

477 Ye that know the Lord is gracious

Sidesperson: Janet O'Carroll

Readers: Nicky Pittam, Ian MacGregor

Intercessions: Carol Kenning

25th May Easter 6

Readings: Acts 17: 22-31

Psalm: 66 vv 7-18

1 Peter 3:13-end

John 14: 15-21

Hymns 416 O God of Bethel by who's hand

341 Blest are the pure in heart

103 Alleluia alleluia hearts to heaven
and voices raise

Our blest redeemer ere he breathed

Sidesperson: Elizabeth Oyedemi

Readers: Ruth Godwin, Rob Nesbitt

Intercessions: Ian MacGregor

29th May Ascension Day

Readings Acts 1: 1-11

Psalm 47

Ephesians 1: 15-end

Luke 24: 44-end

Hymns 130 Hail the day that sees him rise

128 Eternal Monarch, King most high

134 The hear that once was crowned
with thorns

443 Rejoice the Lord is King

Sidesperson: Bill Saunders:

Readers: Stephen Nicoll, Jenny Kauntze

Intercessions: Nicky Pittam

The Church of England stands #WithSyria

As the conflict in Syria recently entered its fourth year, the Church of England joined together with human rights and humanitarian organisations from across the world to organise a global vigil for Syria which was intended to be the largest public mobilisation on Syria so far.

The Bishop of Coventry, the Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth, who led the House of Lords in a debate in November 2013 on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Syria issued the following statement in support of #WithSyria:

“The scenes of destruction and suffering from Syria point to an apocalyptic disaster and yet the massacre in Syria continues unchecked. How many more harrowing scenes of exhausted families crossing the borders from Syria must we bear witness to before world leaders take the necessary steps to resolve this conflict?

“We can remain silent no more. ... the Church stands with others in shining a light in solidarity with the people of Syria and as a demonstration to our own government, and others, that they must intensify their efforts to end the bloodshed and to get aid to all those in need.”

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For your prayers

PRAYER CALENDAR FOR MONTH OF MAY 2014

4th Chetwynd Road
 11th Churchill Road
 18th College Lane
 25th Croftdown Road

SAINTS & HOLY DAYS

2nd St Athanasius
 3rd St Philip & St James
4th Easter 3
 8th Julian of Norwich

11th Easter 4
 14th St Matthias
18th Easter 5
 19th St Dunstan
 20th Alcuin of York
 21st St Helena
25th Easter 6
 26th St Augustine of Canterbury
29th Ascension day
 31st The visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary