

St. Nicholas and the Benefice

Our church buildings are not yet ready to be opened. Preparation work continues and we look forward to welcoming you soon. The building may be closed but there is much still going on in the churches around the Benefice, and public worship continues online. You can stay in touch with us and with what is going on through the Hardenhuish church website, and the St. Paul's Facebook and YouTube pages. We offer daily thoughts (Mon-Fri) around 10am and a live, weekly Sunday Morning Service from 0955. All of these are on St Paul's Church Chippenham's Facebook page and are uploaded to St Paul's YouTube channel soon after.

Do join us, we would love to connect with you. We also offer support for those who may need assistance with shopping or just someone to talk to.

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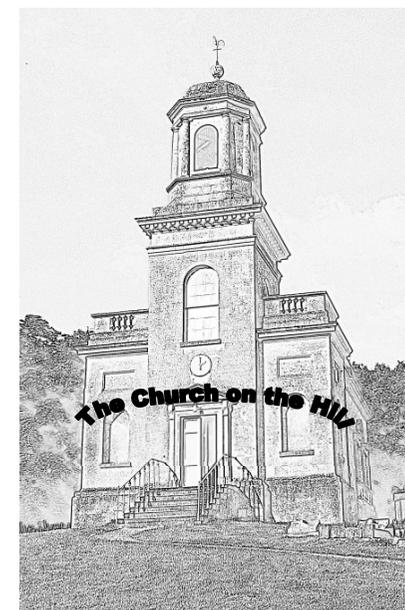
Greenways Group of Churches

St. Nicholas News July 2020

The Rt Rev Maurice Wood (1916-2007)

Bishop Maurice Wood prayer seems appropriate for Hardenhuish:

“Make us like a city set on a hill whose light cannot be hidden; so that men and women and children may find Christ as the light of the world, and his church as the family of the redeemed, and eternal life as the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord”



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Ministry Musings

Have you ever felt that you might be living in the middle of a science fiction movie? Who would have dreamt that this year we would be living in such strange circumstances. And not only us, but the whole world living in lockdown and uncertain when it will all end so that life can get back to 'normal'.

During this enforced time of staying at home we have been given the chance to draw back from the busyness of life and look at the world around us with fresh eyes. We have time to live in and savour the moment. If we are fortunate enough to have a garden, we can spend time simply being in it. We can watch the leaves as they blow in the wind, inspect the intricate design of a flower, and listen to the sound of birds going about their daily lives. Even if we don't have a garden, we can open the window and watch the formation of clouds, watch the birds and listen to the sounds of wildlife around us.

Before you think I must have completely "gone off my rocker" as I wax lyrical about the natural world, bear with me. We might be living in strange uncertain times but as I watch the blackbirds and robins (plus more, but I won't bore you with that) going about their daily lives in my garden, life is going on as normal – they are building nests, feeding young, etc just as they always have. We have a pair of pheasants who visit us every day, to see what the smaller birds have left. (I must admit to occasionally thinking of roast pheasant when they start digging up my plants) They are beautiful, fascinating birds. Now and then a mouse scurries across the garden, pursued by my cat! None of these creatures are affected by Covid 19, life goes on as normal. Flowers continue to grow, vegetable seeds continue to produce a crop of tasty veggies.

And I am reminded of that lovely old hymn –

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changes not, Thy compassions they fail not,
As Thou hast been Thou forever will be.*

*Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided –
Great is Thy faithfulness Lord, unto me.*

Often known as "the book of tears", the book of Lamentations is filled with sorrow and lament. The author (thought to be Jeremiah) was broken hearted over the fallen city of Jerusalem, brought about by the people's selfishness and sin. As God's heart was broken, so was Jeremiah's. And yet in the middle of the doom and gloom we find a few verses in chapter three that sing out (vv 22 – 26). "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness". As we come to Him, our God is a loving, forgiving, faithful God.

God's steadfast love and mercy are greater than anything we can imagine. A favourite Psalm of mine is Psalm 121. It is packed with promises from God. When you have a moment, take time to read and meditate upon it. As we slowly come out of lockdown, we may be anxious and fearful about another spike across the country, and wonder whenever it will all end, but hang in there, keep trusting. His faithfulness towards us gives hope. He is our Rock and our Hope for the future and He will never let us down.

God bless,

Veronica

The Complexity of the season – Bishop Lee writes ...

First published on: 30th June 2020

Little did I know that when I first wrote about my cycling accident and began reflecting on it in the light of the opening to Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 - To everything there is a season - how that season would develop and be subsumed into the Covid-19 pandemic.

As I write, I am on the threshold of being formally signed 'back on'; sufficiently healed in body for a phased return to my duties in the diocese. In mid-March, x-rays showed that my bones had healed well enough to begin weight-bearing and since then I have made slow but steady progress to be able to walk again.

I know that self-discipline in relation to a multitude of exercises prescribed by my physiotherapist has been fundamental to this. That said, I have also been acutely aware of being held in prayer by so many over such a protracted period. I am truly grateful to you for this, and it has made all the difference.

Without saying too much at this point, I have really struggled with my personal season. As I outlined in a previous posting, the wise counsel of two people in particular helped me to 'lean in' to my need simply to rest – and I did this. They encouraged me to see this season as one of 'lying fallow'.

Yet as someone with a natural tendency to look on the positive side, I have also had to own that lying fallow has often felt like being in the wilderness and struggled to find any sense of gift in it. Nevertheless, the conviction I had as I was being treated by the paramedics, that God would use what had happened to bless, has been coming back into my consciousness.

I have sensed that my experience of being confined to a single room for over two months offers some insights which may resonate with others and perhaps serve them in these testing times. I now need to turn these into bite-sized reflections and hope this piece will not only act as an introduction to those but a driver for me delivering them. The first piece will be entitled 'Sacred space'.

Bishop Lee

Bishop Lee; Sacred Space

First published on: 23rd June 2020

I am not sure whether finding or going to your personal 'happy place' was referred to often before the Lockdown, but I have certainly become more conscious of it in recent days. Helping people to restore a lost sense of peace, security or joy is certainly welcome in these days of Covid-19.

Retreating to our happy place is more about knowing how to recover our emotional, mental, or spiritual keel than going to a physical location, but that does not mean this is unimportant. Being in a particular place or locality may be very significant indeed for calming our souls and restoring serenity.

Following my accident in January, I lost the ability to go physically to what some would call my happy place. At home I have two of them. In my office are three tub chairs, but only one of them functions in this way. The other is a bench in the garden which comes into play when the weather brightens.

These are places which I head for to quiet my being; to be still, seeking the presence of God and listening for the whisper of the Spirit. I go there expecting to meet the person of Jesus through the Christian Scriptures and to pray for the needs of people and situations. These are the places where I journal and reflect on what is going on inside me as much as outside.

Although my wife Liz and the family had created a lovely physical environment for my convalescence, I missed that tub chair and bench which were no longer accessible. The bed I was confined to for most of the day needed to be become a sacred space for part of it. Two things in particular helped that to happen - an App on my smart phone, and the radio - but I will write more about this in a later piece.

Despite appearances to the contrary, the Christian faith is not constrained by a requirement to pray or worship in buildings set aside for this purpose. Anywhere can become a sacred place, for a moment, or for many lifetimes. Having particular places where we find ourselves restored and our souls enriched seems to be a feature of our humanity. Yet there are times and circumstances when we are dislocated from those and have to find, or more often create, fresh ones.

That is what is happening for many – including Christian ministers and regular worshippers - whose churches have become off-limits during the pandemic Lockdown. Perhaps Covid-19 is reminding us here in the UK to create sacred space

within our homes before looking elsewhere. And those who have identified a happy place where they live may just discover there is more that can happen in that place of retreat than they ever imagined.

Bishop Lee

Bishop Lee; How long O Lord

First published on: 23rd June 2020

In my last piece – Sacred Space – I said I would write more about the significance of an App and the radio in journeying through a prolonged confinement.

In recent years the CofE has invested in producing digital resources for prayer. This began with an App to use for Morning, Evening and Night Prayer but has since expanded greatly. There is now a treasury of resources to draw upon, with the CofE being one provider among many.

Physically I was not far from my lowest point as Lent began and looking forward to using the App provided for that season on the theme of Care for Creation. As yet unaware that I was at the beginning of a ‘Wilderness experience’ I found the material dry and arid.

Having persevered with it for a week or so, I turned to another online resource ‘Pray as you Go’, one I frequently use when travelling at an early hour. What immediately spoke into my personal wilderness was the music setting the scene for contemplation on a passage from the Bible. Specifically, it was the music of Lament.

The Psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures – the Old Testament for Christians – are rich with songs lamenting what is going on in the nation or in the writer’s personal experience. I made sure I kept a record of the music and later searched online, using Spotify as a starting place, to find and explore the music which had touched me deep within, enabling me to pray with emotional connection as well as intellectual awareness.

This was happening for me well before Covid-19 wrapped its deadly cloak around the globe. The music of Lament has since become significant for all of us, individually and collectively, as many cry out “How long”?

So what place did the radio play? Unable to join services of Christian Worship physically, I had to find new ways of participating. As I write this, several weeks into the Lockdown, churches have found a variety of ways of connecting with those confined to their homes. Sometimes by delivering written material, but where possible, also through the use of digital platforms and streaming services.

For me, in January and February, as well as the thousands across the UK for whom physically joining a Church service is impossible, there was Sunday Worship at 8.10am on BBC Radio 4. This became – and continued to be as I emerged from my wilderness journey – a significant source of participation in worship during Lockdown. Despite distance and isolation, I have felt connected with others across the length and breadth of the land, and with God the Holy Trinity.

The service on 29 March, the one known as Passion Sunday, particularly spoke to me. The preacher was based at Duke University, the very place I had been scheduled to go for my Study Leave at the beginning of February. As you can imagine, this fact drew me closer. The theme he chose to preach on was divided into three parts: Lament, Hope and Witness. It felt as though it had been written especially for me.

Although the theme was earthed in the oppression faced by the people of El Salvador when Oscar Romero was Archbishop, through the work of God’s Spirit listeners like me caught the power of Lament to release hearts weighed down by seemingly insoluble troubles. Emotional connections were made which fanned the flames of hope and trust in Christ. Lament was not a road down into a pit of despair but the sculpting of a path through the most barren and threatening of landscapes and finding the courage to keep on it.

Footnote: *I found the Album ‘Work Songs: The Porter’s Gate’, Tree in a Storm by Jodi Penner, and ‘Lament and Hope, Vol 1’ by Bifrost Arts all contained music for Lament which blessed me?*

Bishop Lee

Racial justice and the work to be done

First published on: 23rd June 2020

A message from Rt Revd Vivienne Faull, Bishop of Bristol, about racial justice and the work to be done.

Alongside our response to COVID-19 and the easing of the lockdown we have seen a crying out for racial justice across the world. The Black Lives Matter protests locally in Swindon and nationally had a particular focus in Bristol when on 7th June the 19th century statue of Edward Colston was toppled.

As many of you will be aware, on 8 June I made a series of public commitments as Bishop of Bristol highlighting what I think we need to do in Bristol Diocese to tackle racial injustice, namely:

- **Acknowledge and repent of the Church's past involvement in and benefit from the slave trade;**
- **Challenge and address institutional racism, listening to and learning from the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people;**
- **Recruit and support more Black, Asian and minority ethnic clergy, staff and volunteers;**
- **Make our churches truly welcoming to everyone, taking responsibility for the need for profound cultural change in our Church.**
- **Work with others in the Diocese of Bristol and the Church of England to bring these things about**

Our record in this area in the Church of England is not good and I begin by acknowledging past failures in this Diocese to implement Church of England initiatives requiring us to make changes. This has simply not been a priority. For me, racial justice (alongside care for our planet and care for those who are poor) goes to the very heart of the gospel. Jesus died on the cross for all. If we limit God's love, fail to be a church for everyone, we betray the gospel. It is that simple.

So, I want you to know that working for racial justice is at the very top of my agenda, and that of my Staff Team. We will move quickly where we can (for

example appointing a Bishop's Advisor for Racial Justice, embedding unconscious bias training, working hard to increase the diversity of our clergy and staff teams). You will have seen some of the changes made already with the removal of 19th century references to Colston at Bristol Cathedral and St Mary Redcliffe.

But this is a long-term commitment in which we will need to look more carefully at our history, admit our past failures, and examine ourselves individually and institutionally in a spirit of repentance, trusting in God's forgiveness and promise of new life in Christ who draws all people to himself. I will share further and more detailed plans when we have them.

The changes which are happening are deeply unsettling to many. I am committed to listening to all voices and communities, especially those on the margins of society or who are feeling ignored.

Bishop Vivienne