From the Vicar

Lost and Found

When I wrote last week's letter, I already had in mind what I was going to write this week. I left a clue for the eagle-eyed in the last two words of my letter: Enduring Melody.

Many of you will know that The Enduring Melody was Michael Mayne's last book, published in the year he died (2006). But his first book has been with me for nearly all of my ministry: A Year Lost and Found (1987). It tells the painful, moving, and ultimately life-giving story of Michael's last year as Vicar of Great St Mary's in which he endured his own version of lockdown, suffering from the then much-misunderstood condition of myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). My beloved training incumbent also had ME, so, even though I
had not then met Michael, I felt a close connection. Carolynn Pritchard and I were talking last week how much this book means to us, and we have both just reread it.

It has much to teach us about a God who, to quote Michael in the book, 'stops you dead in your tracks and sets you groping for answers'. It is a short book, 82 pages, and every page has nuggets of gold, profound truths that require slow, careful, prayerful consideration. It is a masterpiece.

I was very struck by one passage, quite early on, in which Michael quotes John Donne:

As sickness is the greatest misery, so the greatest misery of sickness is solitude . . . solitude is a torment which is not threatened in Hell itself.

Michael then comments:

You do feel cut off, and you do need reassuring. And the best and most effective way of achieving both is by touch and by prayer . . I believe that most of us, when we are sick, need physical contact and the spoken assurance of God's love.

As I read those words again recently, I found my heart missing a beat as I remembered the cruel stories of Covid-related deaths where physical touch was prohibited. I am suddenly weeping as those stories come back to mind, and thank God that that seems no longer to be the case.

But what Michael writes about the sick and dying is true for us all - the importance of touch. Many are deprived of touch now, and many have shared with me how painful that is. We long for the days when we can touch, hug, hold again, and we pray they will be soon.

But Michael wrote not only of touch, but of prayer. I found it hugely comforting to know that this spiritual hero of mine found that there were times he could not pray. His advice?

I let others do the praying . . I fell back with relief on the truth of St Paul's words about the body of Christ. In a perfectly real and valid sense others were doing for me what I found hard to do.

When Michael could pray, it was often with the Psalms, where Michael found that the God who is

unimaginable in his power and majesty, is also in the heart of every one of us, drawing us to himself with a love we cannot yet grasp.

Michael wanted his lost year to be redeemed. It was - but not as he had expected. He found himself in his journey. And the grace of God.

Adrian

Lucy in Lockdown

Adrian is giving an online lecture for his college on Wednesday next week (May
Worship

This Sunday, Andrew leads our service of Mattins at 9.30am, with a sermon from Adrian. Join us on Facebook at facebook.com/greatstmarys/live to take part. You'll find the service book on our website. Sunday services are posted to our website and YouTube by lunchtime.

After the morning service, do join us for Zoom coffee hour at zoom.us/j/91808611088 (Meeting ID: 918 0861 1088). The password is 1205. It's lovely to all chat together, but please remember to not ask personal or pastoral questions of others when we're all online together. Of course, you're always welcome to share your own news!

Speaking of Zoom, please remember to update Zoom to version 5.0 this week — you'll find instructions on how to update at this link.

There will be a service for children and families live-streamed on the Facebook page at 11am each Sunday.

You'll find the whole of last week's Eucharist, recorded at Great St Mary's, on YouTube at https://youtu.be/BjR9gUmebsc. Here's Helen's sermon from this past Sunday:
Ascension Day

God is gone up! Alleluia!

Next Thursday (May 21st) is Ascension Day. Although we will not be able to have our usual ceremonies on the tower in the early morning, Devin is going to lead Morning Prayer (weather permitting) from the top of the tower! So join him online on Facebook at 9am.

At 6pm you are invited to join the community of Christ Church Oxford where Adrian is preaching for the Cathedral's Ascension Day evening service, which will be posted at this page: https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/oxford-cathedral/chapel-and-term-card

The text of the sermon will be available on our website afterwards.

Children's Ministry

“Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:2-3)

This was our family's Bible memory verse last week, and it has reminded of one of the many benefits of teaching our children to obey. In the list of the ten commandments, "honor your father and mother" actually comes with a promise of blessing. We want what's best for our children, and God says that obeying is what's best for them, not simply what will keep them safe or what's most convenient for us (though those things are true as well). Discipline done well, and keeping consistency with discipline, is one of the most difficult things for us to do as parents, but the benefits are so worthy! We are helping things "go well" for our kids by avoiding negative consequences (which will only get worse as they get older, so let's help them learn to obey while they're young). And hopefully, obedience to parents will lead to obeying God as adults, not only for the blessings, but ultimately out of love for their good Father.

There will be an online Bible study for mums starting next Wed., May 20th. It will be every Wed. from 7:45-9:20pm, and we will be going through the book "A Gospel-centered Life." Any questions or interest in joining, contact rebekahperez21@gmail.com.

Christian Aid Week

Christian Aid week comes to an end this Saturday, and Great St Mary's is joining with churches around the world in supporting Christian Aid. We're passing the virtual collection
**Pastoral Care**

In case of a pastoral emergency when you need to reach a clergyperson right away, the pastoral emergency phone number is **01223 747277**

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**Eco Church Silver Award**

This week the church received some very good news. We have been awarded our Eco Church Silver Award. The award demonstrates Great St Mary’s’ expression of care for God’s world in our worship and teaching; in how we look after our buildings and land; in how we engage with our local community and in global campaigns, and in the personal lifestyles of our congregation.

The awarding body (A Rocha UK) made special reference to our solar panels and the biodiversity surveys we have done on our church land. A comment from A Rocha representative Sara Kandiah, “I had a look at your March e-Mag and loved the story shared by Dr Joanne Johnson and her work with British Antarctica, although it is quite disheartening to read about the visible evidence of the cracks and fractures in the ice, it is a call to action for us all to keep doing all that we can for God’s beautiful creation”.

The Eco Church Award programme is run by A Rocha UK (ARUK), a Christian charity working for the protection and restoration of the natural world and committed to mobilising Christians and churches in the UK to care for the environment.

This week’s Eco Tip….following the suggestion for ‘No Mow May’ why not discover the names of the flowers and trees in your garden. It is also an educational and fun activity for children. Load the free app PlantNet onto your phone. Simply take a photo on your phone and upload to the PlantNet app. If you haven’t got a garden, use it when you are out for a walk.
Online survey: How are you feeling during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Dr Franziska Knolle is a Research Associate at Lucy Cavendish College. Here she explains new research she is undertaking on our response to the lockdown. Do please read it, and, if you can help Franziska, do follow the link.

We, a team of researchers from the Technical University Munich and the University of Cambridge, wish to understand the impact of governmentally enforced regularities and restrictions (i.e. curfew and social distancing) as well as the general stress associated with a state of emergency on mental health. Previous research has shown that people who are affected by mental health disorders are more strongly affected by viral diseases, while also showing a worsening of symptoms due to isolation and social deprivation. As pandemics are becoming more likely in a globalised world, we need to understand how procedures that cause substantial societal change impact our mental health in general. This is necessary in order to shape future regulations and inform intervention services tailored to assist people vulnerable for mental disorders during a state of emergency like the one we are currently facing.

We have set up a 30-min online survey (available in English and German) to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental and physical health.

PLEASE PARTICIPATE in our study & FORWARD the email to colleagues, family and friends:

https://evasys.zv.tum.de/evasys/online.php?p=MH_covid19

Thank you,

Franziska Knolle & Graham Murray

O Lord, from whom all good things do come: Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Easter (Rogation Sunday)
Collects from the BCP

Rogationtide, the days before the Ascension, is the counterpart of Harvest Thanksgiving. It originates in a pre-Christian tradition of praying for the rising crops, that they might grow and be free from mildew, surviving to be reaped later in the year. The later Christian processions around the parish, with blessing of the fields, were the only ones not to be abolished in the Reformation, and the emphasis in the prayers during these processions was on the increase of the crops and God’s abundance.

In this Rogationtide collect, ‘good things’ applies especially to our food, the fruits of the earth. We also meet ‘good things’ in the collects for the 6th and 7th Sundays after Trinity. The phrase in the collects can sound complacent in a world where so many people are short of good things, unless we understand these gifts in the context of scripture. The Magnificat uses the phrase prophetically of the coming kingdom of God in which the hungry will have been filled with good things, and the miraculous feeding of the 5000 seems to demonstrate how God’s abundance can reach everyone, without being exhausted. Rogation means ‘asking’, and the gospel for today in the Prayer Book reminds us that we should ask for God’s gifts (John 16. 23-4) – with the urgency that is needed for the hungry to be fed and, in the Epistle’s definition of ‘pure religion’, for the widows and fatherless to be provided for (James 1. 27).

This imperative, to pray for the whole world to be fed, but also to distribute God’s gifts equitably, is a specific example of the collect’s petition that we might both have good intentions and put them into effect, a particularly apt example in Christian Aid Week.

The Revd Margaret Widdess

Worship by Telephone

A free national phone line, produced by the Church of England and called Daily HOPE is available to all, particularly those who don’t have access to the internet:

0800 804 8044

Callers hear a special greeting from the Archbishop of Canterbury and can choose from a range of audio worship services. A section called Hymn Line will also offer callers a small selection of hymns, updated daily.

Can you share with those who might not have internet access?

A Prayer

O God,
it is your will to hold both heaven and earth
in a single peace.
Let the design of your great love
shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows,
and give peace to your Church,
peace among nations,
peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts.
Amen.

A Prayer for Peace
A New Zealand Prayer Book