

Stranton and Burbank Community Church

SIGNPOST



**Rooted in God's love
Growing together with Jesus
Branching out in the
Power of the Holy Spirit**

June/July 2020

Relief, Recovery, Restoration

Organisations that deal with major emergencies like a Tsunami or an earthquake talk about responding to any disaster in 3 phases. First is the relief phase. In this period the priority is to provide emergency food, water and clothing and so on. Second is the recovery phase, helping things get back to feeling more normal. Third is restoration phase, a time for rebuilding and even starting new things. In a big disaster the first phase lasts a matter of weeks, the second several months, perhaps into years and the third will definitely take 1-3 years.

We are currently going through a major disaster as a country, and clearly our country in this context is affected by the Covid pandemic across the world. Thankfully the relief phase is now drawing to a close. In the week or so after our church buildings were shut there was a flurry of activity: we started doing services on line, notice sheets were distributed electronically and by hand and we tried to contact all our members by telephone. Three months into the crisis I would like to thank everyone who has made a contribution to this effort.

The effects of what has happened are still with us. The clergy have been privileged to lead a good number of funerals, but those funerals have felt very strange and many families still want other ways to grieve. Key workers have been very stretched while other workers we know have barely left the house for weeks. We all long to reconnect with people who are special to us. Emotions for many of us remain raw and difficult to cope with. Issues like this will remain with us as we move into the recovery phase.

As I write we are looking forward to opening the church for private prayer next week. At Stranton this will be between 9.30am and 11.30am on Sundays. We have had to introduce various precautions because of the Covid virus. Sterilising your hands at the door, keeping your 'social distance' and following the one-way system will all be part of a Church visit in the near future. When coming in and leaving the Church please respect those moving in the other direction.

The next step will be planning to open for funerals. Small baptisms and weddings are likely to follow in early July and at some stage 'public worship' will restart. But what this will look like and what we will be allowed to do is not clear. For example we already know that hymn singing at funerals is discouraged, the same is likely when we begin to gather for worship.

Different members of our church community will feel able to join us at different rates. That means for the time being we will continue to stream some services and try to ensure that all members of our community are included. I do also feel that we need to begin to think of meeting together for fellowship and mutual encouragement but how we do this is yet to become clear. One cell group at St Luke's is really enjoying meeting on line using zoom, but I realise for some that last remark might sound like a foreign language.

To think how we can best move forward in the recovery phase I will be working with various groups of people. The first key group are the church officers and particularly the Church Wardens. They are the ones who have helped with the initial risk assessments to re-open church. Looking further ahead I will be working with the new Shared Ministry Development Team and the Standing Committee, as well as the PCC. The recovery and then restoration (should we say resurrection) is going to take some time. Sometimes it will feel very slow. But may God lead us and direct us into a better future, filled with hope, faith and love.

Every blessing **Norman**

Mothers Union

As I write this it is drizzling, strong winds too – with a forecast of more to come, plus thunder and lightning! I've been on the beach with Ember (my Labrador dog) who always gets soaked by the sea, no matter what the weather. As I look at her, she is a good example of our situation at the moment. We are being sheltered in our homes but going outside we are in danger of being immersed by perils outside of our control. I'm in isolation, but still manage to walk on the beach with a friend and her dog. My friend is unable to walk in a straight line, I am aware of this and constantly have to switch sides or drop back away from her. It can become more of a dance than a walk!

Like me, some of you will have taken the lockdown to have the 'big clear-out' that has been promised for years. Only trouble is, I can't find things that I suddenly need. A friend has the solution, she has transformed her loft into a storage area, with colour coded boxes and index cards to guide her to the items she needs. Meanwhile I discover anew treasures forgotten or even lost, whilst searching for more mundane items.

Please prayer for the members of our branch, All Saints Stranton and also for St Luke's members, plus for our Durham Diocese, our part of the country, for all members and leaders in the UK and throughout the world. Do use your Families Worldwide Prayer Diary. This is prepared very much ahead of time, but can be spot on when read at the specified time, for example the week of the 7th-13th June – celebrating volunteers. I am awaiting delivery of Families Worldwide July-December and will get them out to you as soon as possible.

Looking for a hymn with which to finish, I found this one – 531 in Sing Glory hymn book

"I do not know tomorrow's way,
If dark or bright its hours may be;
But I know Christ, and come what may,
I know that he abides with me.

I do not know what may befall
Of grief or gladness, peace or pain;
But I know Christ, and through it all
I know his presence will sustain.

I do not know when evening falls,
If soon or late earth's day grows dim;
But I know Christ, and when he calls,
I know he'll call me home to him."

God Bless

With Love

Ann Courtenay

PS I have already had to put in orders for 2021 diaries and calendars!

From the Home Front

These are unprecedented times we have been living through and unexpected events have unfolded with links to the corona virus. The last couple of weeks, since the death of George Floyd in America as a result of excessive police aggression, we have seen an outpouring of emotions from not only the black communities but also other racial communities.

I have found that events in the United States, the United Kingdom and in Australasia, plus many other countries have made me look inside myself, to re-examine my core feelings and how I behave.

As a teenager my parents went to live in Trinidad in the West Indies and I used to travel alone to visit them during school holidays. I had seen very few non-white people in West Hartlepool as I grew up. My only experiences of non-white people was on television and in films. As a youngster my parents and adult relatives had never passed any negative comments regarding race and I had never considered differences in skin. However from my first arrival on Trinidadian soil I was made aware of discrimination, when I was targeted by a Trinidadian customs officer who reduced me, a terrified 13 year old girl to tears with his unexpected bullying and demands. I was subjected to horrid racial name calling by the local children in the residential area where my parents lived, because I was a very pale white girl who spoke differently. My parents were later caught up in the Black Power uprising on the island, but my Dad told me stories of how all the residents – no matter their colour or race banded together to defend their homes and families.

I studied history at “A” Level and at College – a great deal of it social history. I read a widely about the slave trade and Britain’s Imperial past. I was aware of the murky foundations that many fortunes institutions and governments were built on. I continue to be appalled by the treatment of nations, races, faiths and minority groups in countries across the globe in the twentieth and ongoing into the twenty-first century. Having recently read both Barack and Michelle Obama’s autobiographies my eyes have been opened to the institutionalised racism in the USA and here in Britain, which is ongoing and still suppressing the life chances of so many non-whites.

What happened during my teenage years and continuing through my adult life has shaped my feelings and understanding about the injustice and inhumanity of discrimination whether on grounds of colour, gender, age, sexuality or beliefs. Becoming a Christian gave depth to how I come alongside everyone I meet in my walk with God – God loves us all equally, we are all His beloved children. I have tried to stand up to racists, challenge the discriminators through actions and words, but the news highlights there is still a long way to go.

I pray for the hearts and minds of all those who think themselves ‘superior’ to others – I pray that they will learn to treat others as they would want to be treated, that they would see the people, not the colour of skin, gender or creed. Jesus gave a simple commandment for living in peace and harmony – ‘Love One Another’. Black lives matter, All lives matter! So in the words of Michelle Obama “When they go low, we go high.”

J.A.R.

Patrick Hutchinson saves far right protestor



God is at work, even when our church buildings are closed

GOD'S PEOPLE ON THE MOVE TOGETHER –

A brief theological reflection on the Coronavirus Crisis

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Over the past 18 months facilitated by the Waymark process, we have found ourselves drawn together to see ourselves much more clearly as God's people, travelling together alongside one another as God's pilgrim people. God's people on the move across the Diocese.

God, it appears, has been preparing us for this present crisis as well as for the longer term. We have made discoveries about ourselves. The crisis and its attendant restrictions have shown us that we can be fleet of foot; we can change, and change rapidly. We have had highlighted the centrality for us of our life of prayer and worship, personally and corporately, and our enduring commitment to caring for the poorest and most vulnerable people. We have been made to re-think what it is we value about one another, our church buildings and our worship. We have been accelerated into behaving, operating and thinking differently.

This has led many of us, including the Bishop's Leadership Team, to ask questions on what God might be saying to us at this particular point in our lives together. Here are a few different images to help us reflect on what has been happening, and what this might mean God is saying to us as we continue to develop the outcomes from the Waymark process. Please prayerfully ponder these. We would welcome your thoughts and reflections by email so that this might be a conversation amongst us.

(Email Bishop Paul bishop.of.durham@durham.anglican.org or Bishop Sarah bishop.of.jarrow@durham.anglican.org)

EXODUS & WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

For some, the image of God's pilgrim people journeying through the wilderness offers a powerful image for us at present. God's people were led by the cloud and pillar of fire. They were provided for day by day with manna. God's people worship in a movable yet resplendent tent. They move in response to God's leading, always travelling together. Though the story is also full of struggle, conflict, failure, God is always present with them. God keeps leading the people forward. God's purposes will not be thwarted. (Numbers 9.15-23)

EXILE

For others, a later period of God's people's history that speaks is that of the exile into Babylon. There was such loss. The Temple was destroyed, Jerusalem was laid waste, and many were taken into exile. The exiles had to find new ways of being God's people in a strange land. This is where the synagogue and the significance of written Scripture strongly emerged. They had to discover how to gather, worship and learn differently. New worshipping communities were planted and emerged in Babylon. Those left behind in Israel, the poorest, also had to live under occupation and with great hardship. They had to learn to gather in new ways. Everyone did not experience exile equally.

Here we recall that Bishop Paul's closing reflections at Waymark were based on Jeremiah's letter to those in exile (Jeremiah 29) where they were called to '*Seek the welfare of the city and pray for it.*' Bishop's Council has been using this passage for its Dwelling in the Word this year. As God's exiled people we are to bless the communities in which we are set.

DISPERSION

A third image that helps is that of the early church being scattered across the known world so that they became the people of the dispersion. As they were dispersed, they shared the good news of God in Jesus and new communities of hope and life emerged. The dispersed people of God, the living stones, being built together though scattered apart, were those through whom the light of God's love would shine. Peter's first letter brings these themes together. He outlines the good news (1 Peter 1.3-12). He outlines living holy lives, that includes sharing the good news with others (1 Peter 1.13 onwards). He describes the kind of leadership needed for such a dispersed community (1 Peter 5.1-4). Throughout, he sees the baptised followers of Jesus as the dispersed pilgrim people of God. He is hopeful, confident that God holds the future, even in the face of opposition, suffering and difficulty.

In all three images, the home/family in its extended form were crucial to how the faith was passed on through the generations and lived out.

Finally, in addition to these 3 images, a theological reflection was offered, at our request, to the Bishop's Leadership Team by Canon Simon Oliver. Simon entitled this 'Theological Reflection on the Coronavirus Pandemic; The Isolation of Illness and the Body of Christ'. This was an immensely rich and thought-provoking reflection that we believe should be read more widely.

CONCLUSION

We dare to think that in many ways God was preparing us for this time through the Waymark process. As we now take forward the Waymark process we have to include all we are learning through this unexpected major change. We had begun to discern that the task ahead was to be God's pilgrim people on the move. We knew it would challenge us all in how we are church in our communities. We knew it would include planting new churches and discovering new ways together. What this crisis has done is to make it clear that the changes will have to be greater than we had perhaps imagined and will come more swiftly than we thought. Yet we are still absolutely the praying, worshipping, serving people called to display the glory of God into all corners of our Diocese and our World. In following this call of God we will be a people without great financial reserves, dependent on God for our daily supplies. We are God's pilgrim people, travelling alongside one another. We are God's people on the move together blessing our communities in Jesus' name for the transformation of us all.

+Paul & +Sarah

Strantonians' Memories of Joyce Pidd 1935 to 2020



Memories from Alan & Kath Harkness and Family

As children my sisters and I had many more aunts and uncles than my parents' sisters and brothers. Every friend of my parents was called Auntie or Uncle, so we lived in a very large family! Of course, some of these relationships were more significant than others and my parents' close and long-standing friendship with Joyce and Eric Pidd meant that our two families spent a lot of time together, especially during the summer when we were all down on the beach at the Staincliffe every sunny day, and some not so sunny. My mother and Joyce were provided with shelter between rocks and by a carefully positioned windbreak, while all of us children were busy playing in the sand or the sea or in a game of cricket organised by Uncle Eric and my father. As time went on we ventured further afield; first of all we had days out travelling all together in the Pidd's VW Beetle. It's difficult to imagine now that four adults would consider it perfectly acceptable, although not terribly comfortable, to travel with 6 children from Hartlepool to the Sheep Wash at Osmotherly or other local beauty spots for a picnic complete with rugs, windbreak and mallet, flasks and sandwiches and sometimes my mother's homemade lemonade or flapjack. All in one small car! Later still we had family holidays together in Cornwall and I think all of us who were children then look back and value the relationships we had with our "extended family."

Eric Pidd and my father, Alan Harkness, were both old boys of Hartlepool Grammar School. Eric was a couple of years older than my father and already working at the school and married to Joyce when my father also joined the teaching staff and shortly afterwards married my mother, Kath. The two couples became very close friends and met together every Sunday evening from my earliest childhood for supper, chat and a game of cards or scrabble with a ritual drink, until Eric's death. As a young child I recognised Auntie Joyce's distinctive bottle of Tia Maria and in later years Eric and my father had a special bottle of single malt they drank only on those Sunday evenings. Both my sister and I remember that Joyce seemed quite sophisticated to us when we were children because she always took care of her hands and often wore bright nail polish and drank such a special drink! Over the years of their long friendship I am sure the four of them shared the joys and difficulties of family life together on those evenings. Eric's good sense and wisdom was particularly valued by both my parents. Both couples enjoyed annual holidays together travelling in Europe,

walking in Swaledale and later having more leisurely holidays in different parts of the UK.

My mother and Joyce had a friendship which lasted from the earliest days of my parents' marriage until Joyce's death. Joyce was a very keen and accomplished knitter and started a weekly knit and natter. Through that group my mother was encouraged to knit more complicated garments like the three Arran jumpers which she knitted for us three girls. Joyce often gave knitted items for gifts,



among them a beautiful first size cardi for my first baby, which I can still picture. It was through her relationship with Joyce that my mother started working in the school library service as she looked for term time work when my sisters and I were all at school. The friendships formed in that knitting group continued with birthday gatherings until all those women were in their eighties! One of Joyce's strengths was developing and maintaining relationships; she had a very wide circle of friends and was involved in organising reunions of groups of friends, even school friends, until quite recently. She

was careful to include everyone and I remember her kindness to my mother in law as Eva declined in health until she was no longer able to be involved in the literature group. The last time my parents saw Joyce was just before the lockdown when she went with Helen to visit my mother in her care home and it is typical of Joyce that when she was very frail herself she was thinking of visiting and supporting others.



As I remember Joyce I am grateful for the fun we all had together. Yes, as children playing with the rabbit in the garden or eating fish and chips on the beach, but also more recently when Joyce and Eric organised games for our church family social at the yacht club. I am grateful for Joyce's thoughtfulness and sense of humour, she always remembered my birthday with a

specially chosen and often humorous card. She and Eric gave us an example of consistent friendship which enriched our family life.

Memories from Hilary Harkness

I already knew Joyce (and Eric) through family connections but it was when we retired from work that we really spent time together and Joyce and I became friends.

Joyce and I often attended the same Church services at Stranton but we socialised together too and more recently have kept in touch with each other by phone.

Joyce was good company - she was approachable, interested in people and very much appreciated the arts.

- I remember enjoying regular coffee mornings with Joyce and other retired friends from across the town. They took place in people's homes once a month and led to lively, interesting conversations with people from a variety of backgrounds. Good times shared.

- Many will recall that Joyce was very fond of the theatre and alongside trips with friends to theatre productions of Shakespeare and others, Joyce and Eric set up 'Curtain Call', a group to enable like-minded friends and Church members to enjoy companionship and an outing to the theatre with others. After my husband Ronnie died, I went regularly with Joyce and Eric and remember what a nice couple they were together - and as friends towards me.

- We shared an interest in music too. Ronnie and I were (and I still am) faithful patrons of the annual Classical Music Seasons at Middlesbrough Town Hall. Over several years, Joyce and Eric took part in enjoyable evening outings with us, listening to renowned international classical orchestras. In later years, when on my own, Joyce and Eric invited me along to jazz afternoons held in Darlington several times a year, along with other friends from church which made for good company and good fun, connecting with my favourite music from teenage years (shared back then with friend and fellow jazz enthusiast Frank Rogers- Andrew's dad)...

I hold good memories of Joyce and am thankful for our friendship over the years.

Memories from Jacqui Rogers

When Jenny Gilbertson set up the Book Club many years ago for people from churches in town and anyone connected who wanted to join – Joyce was there from the first meeting.

She loved books and had read incredibly widely. She knew about and researched authors and book reviews and always had interesting insights into storylines or meanings within the texts. Joyce was interested in everyone within the group and made time to catch up on news and family events. Our meetings were full of fellowship, food, drink and fun – plus discussions about our chosen book!

I was able to give Joyce lifts to and from our meetings and our journeys were full of interesting talk and her wealth of amusing events and anecdotes. She was always such easy company and a caring friend to all.

She will be missed, but her memory will live on in so many hearts.

Memories from Patricia Vaughan

I met Joyce when we moved to Hartlepool and I joined Stranton Church, she was so friendly and welcoming, she was a truly lovely, genuine lady, she seemed always pleased to see me and never failed to ask after my family, she had a knack of making me feel special.

One of my first memories of Joyce is going to the Last Night of the Proms with Curtain Call, we sang with gusto and waved our Union Jacks, it was so much fun, and patriotic.

My last memory of her was the last time Helen (bless her) brought Joyce to Coffee Cake and Company in St Matthew's Community Centre, although she wasn't well, she didn't have to say much, but we hugged and the look of love she showed me was enough. Goodbye Joyce.

Memories from Trish Playfor

I have known Joyce Pidd for a lot of years. What can I say about Joyce? She was a special caring lady who had a very big heart.

Joyce & Dorothy Jones used to come into the office every month and help with the Signpost magazine. Joyce did all of the proofreading and helped with the folding and putting it together. Those two ladies were my little angels I couldn't have done it without them. But Joyce was always there for me if I needed help in any way, she would always be supportive. I used to love our little chats and she was always genuinely interested in me and my family and always asking about them.

One of the things I used to look forward to every month was Joyce's Florentine biscuits, that lady's Florentines were the best I ever tasted. Every month she came in with her box of Florentines. If there were any left I always got to take them home for the girls. They were definitely no good for the diet LOL.

Happy Memories of Joyce from Dorothy Jones.

Members of Stranton congregation will remember Joyce and Eric with much affection, as do Tim and I.

Joyce and Eric lived quite close to us when I was a teenager. They would be have been a young married couple at that time. I can remember seeing Eric as he passed our house on his way to West Hartlepool Grammar School, where he taught. Tim knew Eric because he used to teach him chemistry as well as being in the school orchestra together.

When Maurice Jennett became vicar, Tim and I joined Stranton Church together with our two young daughters, as we had recently moved into the area. Although I knew Joyce, I didn't come across her much at church in those days as we attended different services, but I got to know her well when we served on the same school staff at West Park Primary School. Actually, we both retired at the same time. I well remember sitting next to her in the staffroom during our last week at school before the summer break. The headmaster addressed everyone about what he wanted the staff to do after the summer break during the new school year, starting in September. Rather mischievously Joyce nudged me and said *sotto voce*, "What are **you** going to do next term?" I responded, "I think I'll learn to swim". She said, "Right, you are on", and that is what we did during September, whilst the rest of the staff were wrestling with the National Curriculum.

We spent several weeks at Mill House Pool at classes and we still couldn't get our feet off the tiles, but we had plenty of laughs in the process. Eventually, we came to the conclusion that this wasn't working, so decided that we would go on a "Learn to swim" holiday and take our husbands with us. We found a course for the terrified and went to an hotel in Shropshire for a week. We had intensive morning and afternoon swimming sessions, involving wearing nose clips and goggles, which were most becoming. The terms of this holiday were that if, after the week, we hadn't learned to swim a breadth of the pool, the swimming part of our holiday, but not the food and accommodation, would be refunded. We all were middle aged or older. Some of us just hadn't learned to swim as children, some had been involved in near drownings and some wanted to swim so they could go to the water with their grandchildren.

Nobody thought they could actually do it, but bit by bit we all relaxed and by the end of the week, it had worked. Everyone could do the necessary breadth and we all went home very proudly with a certificate to prove that we could swim.

Joyce and Eric used to go abroad on holiday to Italy during the summer with a party of friends, so we were all sworn to secrecy about her new skill, as she wanted to surprise them all. She said it was the highlight of her holiday when she got into the pool and she saw the amazement on her friends' faces as she swam a length, no doubt to a round of applause from them all!

At this time, Stephen Taylor was vicar at Stranton and it was then, after we had both retired from teaching, that Joyce and I started to go into the church office to help Trish when she was putting the magazine together and in due course we took on distribution too. Trish will remember that the three of us greatly enjoyed our sessions at The Vicarage, although there was a fair bit of work to do. Mike Gilbertson became vicar after Stephen. He had a nice gentle sense of humour too and we all got on very well.

We were so sad to hear of Joyce's passing and especially that it happened during this time of lockdown, when it was impossible for her family to have her funeral in her beloved church as she would have wished and also when her friends were unable to visit her at home during her last few months. Once these long days are over, hopefully we can all come together to give Joyce the celebration of her life that she would have wanted, safe in the knowledge that she is with her Heavenly Father.

Memories from Pamela and Michael Thompson

We arrived in Hartlepool from Lincoln in January 1974. Our new home we discovered was in Stranton Parish.

We were welcomed at the 8:30am service, which is where we met Joyce and Eric. Joyce was a kind and generous person, very much part of the Stranton Church Community.

I saw Joyce at West Park School where she taught. I visited her class on one occasion to collect a pupil for her violin lesson. I remember Joyce in her jovial was calling to the pupil, ".Get off to your violin lesson!"

Her good humour prevailed even after several setbacks due to illness.

Joyce had a real love of theatre and arranged for groups to attend productions at local theatres. Latterly Helen has been bringing Joyce in her wheelchair to church for communion and we would see her there. When Joyce was asked how she was, Joyce always said "I'm fine"! We all really miss her....

Memories from Elspeth Craig

I first met Joyce, as a colleague, at West Park Primary School when I arrived in Hartlepool in 1982. Joyce was a member of a warm, caring staff who scooped me up, giving me support, not only as the "newbie", but also the "baby" of the staff by quite a few years. The head teacher, Joe Westmoreland, used to joke,

"Listen to all your mams!" he would say - and my goodness, that was Joyce! She discovered that I had been at the same College as her daughter Helen and that

sealed the connection! She gave a constant flow of warm encouragement and a lot of teasing. – Do you remember the mid-calf swishy skirts and clogs fashion of the 70s & 80s? My clogs had no peace at all when Joyce was in the staff room - even though they were my smartest pair!

Joyce taught with passion and great care for the children. Years later she would reminisce about them and be delighted if she met them or heard news of how they were doing. “He/She was one of mine,” she would say proudly, even decades later. For me, two abiding memories of Joyce’s classroom will always be avocado plants and incubators full of eggs! Each year Joyce and her class would monitor, nurture and watch over hens’ (and occasionally ducks’) eggs. Oh the excitement which rippled through the whole school on hatching day. Children and staff alike would find their way to Joyce’s room to delight, with her, in the cheeping, downy bundles, to discuss incubator temperatures and chick feeding routines.

Growing avocados was another of Joyce’s hands-on Science projects. Somehow she enabled entire classes to germinate and grow these - an astonishing feat from my viewpoint, as I have been trying and failing to do so for nearly 40 years! I remember the joy of her sunny, south facing classroom windowsill covered in avocado plants – at least one for every child plus spares in case of disaster. One year, Joyce organised her class to write to the well-known professional gardener and TV / radio presenter, Geoffrey Smith. He wrote a letter back, offering advice and encouragement, he added that if they could keep the avocado seedlings alive and growing for four years, he would exchange jobs with Joyce!

Warm hospitality was another of Joyce and Eric’s gifts, not just for Andrew and myself, but our entire family. When Emma and Ewan were tiny, Joyce and Eric would make us all welcome, entertain the children with excitements like Christmas trees, nut crackers and then, when they were thoroughly excited, Joyce would firmly tell me to stop fussing when I tried to rein them in! – No wonder the children never wanted to leave to go home! Years later, when our children had become adults and left home, they still loved the annual trip to deliver a Christmas present and to catch Joyce up to date with their news.

So many memories - Joyce’s great love of her family, her firm faith, her interest in and care for friends and people she met, her passion for books, theatre, Shakespeare with trips to Stratford ... but I will end with a symbol of hope and new life that relates back to the early years of my knowing Joyce. Finally after all the years of following her advice (frequently given) about how to grow an avocado, I discovered yesterday that one which I planted just after Joyce died has germinated - a tiny root now visible. I am quite sure that Joyce is safe with Jesus, cheering me (and the avocado) on.

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Lockdown Reading by Pam Stockton

Over the last 2 or 3 years I have been making my way sporadically and very slowly through the Old Testament. Having always found the New Testament easier to read and understand, I had long been telling myself that I should give the Old Testament a bit more attention. As lockdown dawned, I was in the middle of Ezekiel (where I had been stationary for some time) – so, as they say, a double whammy. However, I used the extra time now available to continue on my long journey and eventually, several weeks into lockdown I finally reached the end.

As luck would have it, I had also set myself another challenge that I had been meaning to tackle but had kept putting off, which was to read some of Charles Dickens' many novels. Having read several in my long lost youth as an English Literature student, many of his books remained unread – and time was running out! So, again, as lockdown started, I embarked on 'The Old Curiosity Shop'. This too did not prove easy – Dickens' sentences are sometimes so long that by the time you get to the end you can't remember the beginning and his writing style is of the, why use one word when you can use 20 variety (although this is also part of his charm). The ending wasn't great either for the main character, Little Nell (she died). However, I persevered and finished this task at about the same time as my biblical challenge.

After this, I headed straight for the glorious Book of Acts (which coincidentally meant I was in the right place at the right time for Pentecost) and a little light, modern fiction.

By now, you are probably wondering, like me, where this is going ...

I think the point is that this doesn't mean that I am not going to read more Dickens or that I am not going to delve back into the Old Testament (though maybe not Ezekiel!), because they were both well worth the effort and there were many high points along the way. There were memorable characters, wonderful story telling, beautiful writing, wise reflections and, in the case of the Bible, the word of God.

The many writers of the Bible, like Dickens, give historical insight into the past, but their work is also relevant to life today. We just have to be careful to remember the context in which they were written and not judge them by today's standards.

So much of it is comparable to the modern world – wars, evil despots, family disputes, man's general inhumanity to man – and we never seem to learn. There is a wonderful phrase which is used many times throughout the history of the Israelites, who forget God's promises to them and their promises to Him and keep going back to their old, idolatrous ways, as "stiff-necked people". I was getting as annoyed with them as God was, but then we can probably all be "stiff-necked" when we don't like what we are hearing.

In Exodus, the Israelites are instructed, "Do not ill-treat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt." The need to treat strangers or people from foreign lands with kindness is a recurring theme in the Old Testament and one which is also very relevant today.

I think the greatest benefit I take away from reading the Bible in this way (ie sequentially, rather than adopting the "Bible in a year" method) is that it has given me an overview of the history of the Jewish people and of the events preceding

and culminating in the birth of Christ. There are prophecies, in many of the books of the Old Testament, of the coming of Christ, which are often quoted in the New Testament. These threads running through the Bible provide continuity between the Old and New Testaments and have made me realise how important the Old Testament is in understanding the New. It is amazing that prophets such as Isaiah spoke about the coming of Christ hundreds of years before it happened and then we hear their words again, echoed down the ages by Christ himself.

At the end of Malachi (the last book of the Old Testament), God promises, “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come.”

This conveniently sets the scene for the gospels which follow. However, after my marathon read, I chose the Book of Acts because it is one of my favourite books of the Bible (and I can very smugly say that now because I have read them all!). I love the way the amazing events in this account of the early Christian church are told in a simple, narrative style with its down to earthness and immediacy, written by and about so-called “unschooled, ordinary men” (eg people like Paul, Peter and John!). But, when I read it this time, I found that it actually follows on quite nicely from the Old Testament, because it explains, in the words of people like Peter and Stephen how Christ fits into the history of the nation into which He was born. The accounts of what happened are so personal and real that it feels like you are there. One of my favourite verses is very easy to miss because it’s about the interior décor (!): “There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting.” I read that and I can see that room.

So, what have I done during lockdown? I have done some spring cleaning, painted a fence, sorted out my garden, made lots of phone calls, read a classic novel, finished my biblical trek, tried (increasingly unsuccessfully) to take back control of my lockdown hair and written an article for Signpost.

As I come to the end of this last item, I feel like I should conclude with some wise, universal truth. Well, it has taken me some time to find it, but, dear reader, I think this is it and it’s been staring me in the face. Books have always been my passion and so I have read quite a few of them, but there aren’t many books that I have read more than once. I can read and re-read the Bible, however, an infinite number of times and still find something new and rewarding, because it is a manual for life and, if you look hard enough, you can usually find the answers to life’s many problems.

I’m not the only one who’s been reading the Bible during lockdown – I know of at least 2 esteemed members of the congregation who have read **the whole thing** (!) in a few weeks. If yours is looking a little dusty, maybe it’s time to dust it off and set off on your own journey. Meanwhile, I am preparing to enter the as yet mysterious world of Oliver Twist.

Virtual Sunday Club Update!

Our virtual Sunday club members have been very busy completing lots of different activities about a variety of bible stories. This month we have looked at stories of great faith including David and Goliath, Noah's Ark, the story of Joseph, the story of Jonah and some of Jesus' parables. We have also enjoyed VE day activities, mental health awareness week and a home sports day.

Some of the children have written below what they have enjoyed so far in our Sunday club emails:

"We have enjoyed completing the different activities for Sunday club. Our favourite was when we built a blanket fort to represent the fruit of the spirit. We have also enjoyed learning about God." – **Arjeta and Daniella**



"I have enjoyed doing the different activities for Sunday Club. My favourite was reading the story of Jonah. He did not listen to what God was asking him to do because he was afraid of what his people would think. God told him be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Jonah went to Nineveh and did what God asked him to do." –

Tyler

"I have enjoyed doing the different activities for Sunday Club. My favourite is the story of Joseph. I like watching the film and put on a cloak to sing all the songs. The best bit is when Joseph comes back to his family." - **Lorelai**



And finally, a letter to Stranton Church written by Arjeta from the Sunday club:

Dear Stranton Church,

I am writing this to you because I wanted to tell you that I miss every one of you. Ever since lockdown my favourite thing about church has always been sitting next to one of you and praying to God. I hope once the coronavirus is over and we will be allowed to go back to church I hope we will be allowed to do those things again. During lockdown I have been thinking about each and every one of you nonstop because it feels like it's been years.

I hope you are all keeping safe and healthy.

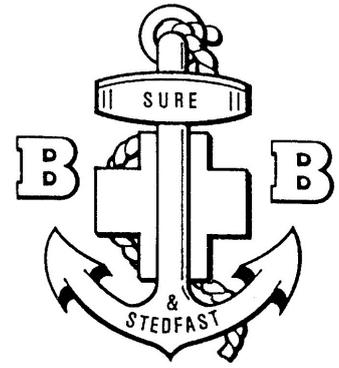
Yours faithfully

Arjeta

Kate Lawson



Boys Brigade News



Due to the pandemic and the closure of Boys Brigade meetings in March we are home delivering our tuck shop and Easter Eggs (donated by Morrison's) - before they run out of date!

Unfortunately we have had to cancel this year's planned camp. We have returned each Lad's camp deposit and received our deposit back on the minibus we had booked. Hopefully we will be able to run a camp next year.

Long term we are starting to think about socially distanced activities for the different groups, as they are likely to be needed (a new challenge to overcome, enjoy and add to our future programme of activities) when Boys Brigade Headquarters allow us to meet again.

Take Care

George Bainbridge

Hymns for different occupations/situations

Groom	Ab(r)ide with me
Stone mason	Rock of ages
Linguist	O for a thousand tongues to sing
Insurance Agent	Blessed Assurance
Optician	Be thou my vision
Surgeon	Mine eyes have seen the <i>gory</i>
Tree surgeon	The holly and the ivy
Electrician	This little light of mine
Boxer	Fight the good fight
Sleeping children	Silent night
Teachers	Teach me thy way
Wedding recept'n	Fight the good fight!
3.30pm at school	The day thou gavest Lord is ended

Collected by Jeff Parsons© 2020



Lockdown Reading by David Craig

When lockdown started, one thing I thought I would do was more reading, which in fact has meant revisiting a novel - "Gilead" by the American author, Marilynne Robinson - which my brother Andrew gave me as a Christmas present some years ago.

This book is unusual in having no real plot, or action, or even chapters, being in the form of a journal of the memories, thoughts and reflections of an elderly pastor, Reverend John Ames, on his own life and the lives of his father and grandfather. Set in the 1950's, the Reverend is suffering from heart failure and knows he will not live to see his young son grow up, so the narrative of the book is framed as a testament for his much younger wife to pass on to his son as he grows up.

"Gilead" addresses pretty much all of the human difficulties that people face: struggling to make ends meet, experiencing strained and broken personal relationships with those who ought to be closest, tragic untimely death of loved ones, personal inadequacies, failures and doubts, guilt over his natural human feelings, particularly towards his godson, the son of his closest friend, whom he mistrusts. I know this may not sound like a bundle of laughs or even a recommendation for others to read!

But over all of this honest facing - up to the harshness of the human condition the book is gentle and soothing - the title references the '...Balm of Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul' (The title of a well-known spiritual song). It is suffused with the Grace of God. Its language is at the same time simple to read and profound, much of with deep scriptural resonance. John Ames' love and concern for his young, second, wife speaks of the Love of God for us, and we are left knowing that Trust in God's Grace is all sufficient.

The book won the (secular) Pulitzer Prize for fiction, in America, in 2005 and the 2009 Orange Prize for fiction in the UK and was acclaimed as an international literary masterpiece. The author worships and sometimes preaches at the Congregationalist Church in Iowa City. President Obama quoted her as his friend: "What...the writer Marilynne Robinson, calls 'that reservoir of goodness, beyond, and of another kind, that we are able to do (to) each other in the ordinary cause of things.'" In November 2015, the New York Review of Books published a two-part conversation between them covering topics in American history and the role of faith in society. The fact that such dialogues continue in the USA and here gives me hope for our polarised and increasingly divided society.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has described Robinson as "one of the world's most compelling English-speaking novelists", adding that "Robinson's is a voice we urgently need to attend to in both Church and society here [in the UK]."

Lock Down Quiz 2

- L Who L was Jacob's uncle? _____
- O Which O is a story teller? _____
- C Which C commanded a 100 men? _____
- K Which K is a chess piece? _____
- D Which D survived the lions den? _____
- O Which O is a Dicken's character who has a birthday in the workhouse? _____
- W Which W of Nain's son was brought back to life by Jesus? _____
- N Which N was Ruth's mother in law? _____

Answers on page 22



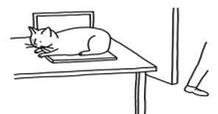
LIVESTREAMING THE SERVICE



THE DIRECTOR'S CUT



OPENING CREDITS



INTERVAL



A BIT OF SHUT-EYE



THE REALISATION THAT THIS WAS LAST WEEK'S EPISODE



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE VIEWING

THE ONLINE SERVICE

HOW TO MAKE IT FEEL LIKE NORMAL



ARRIVE A FEW MINUTES LATE, CARRYING COFFEE



SCOWL AT THE PERSON SITTING IN YOUR SEAT



WHISPERED DISCIPLINING OF CHILDREN (UNSUCCESSFUL)



USE YOUR PHONE TO 'READ THE BIBLE'



STAND UP AT ENTIRELY THE WRONG POINT



SHARE A PLATE OF STALE BISCUITS

Communities of Hope

In the next few weeks, (by the end of June) we should know whether the Diocesan bid to the National Church has been successful. All being well we plan to advertise three roles in early July. The interviews will be in August and appointments made for September or soon after. The roles for which we will be advertising are a Team Leader, a Children and Families Worker and a Community Worker/Evangelist. The first part of the project will be to grow Christian community at St Aidan's kitchen and in and through St Matthew's Community Centre. If anyone is interested in the roles please do have a chat with me (01429 233609 or 07985 148034) or Mother Gemma (07780 675322).

Norman

Shared Ministry Development Team (SMDT)

The delayed process for reforming our SMDT has now been completed. The purpose of the SMDT is to work with the clergy to develop the mission and ministry of the Church in our Parish. As we plan for the present and the future there are going to be many challenges on the way, so I am really grateful to the people who have agreed to be part of this team. Do hold members of the SMDT in your prayers. We are starting work now but at some stage in the future I do hope there will be a commissioning service.

Members of the SMDT:

Angela Craig, Michelle Delves, Diane Greenwood, Angela Hall, Clive Hall, Kate Lawson, Mike Peacock, Natalie Proffitt, Jacqui Rogers, Norman Shave, Pam Stockton, and Mary Tones.

Norman

Lock Down Quiz 2 Answers

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| L Which L was Jacob's uncle? | Laban |
| O Which O is a story teller? | Orator |
| C Which C commanded a 100 men? | Centurion |
| K Which K is a chess piece? | Knight |
| D Which D survived the lion's den? | Daniel |
| O Which O is a Dicken's character who has a birthday in the workhouse? | Oliver |
| W Which W of Nain's son was brought back to life by Jesus? | Widow |
| N Which N was Ruth's mother in law? | Naomi |

Lessons from Cycling

Dont's

- Don't choose the hottest day to go on the hilliest ride!
- Don't presume your cycle partner can hear you above the traffic
- Don't look too far ahead it makes you want to give up.
- Don't stop half way up a hill, it's really hard to get started back up again!
- Don't peddle with your mouth open it's just an invitation for the bugs to have a party in your mouth!!

Do

- Do ride with a thoughtful caring cycle partner.
- Do stay close to said partner.
- Do stop for drink breaks.
- Do have a destination in mind, it gives you hope.
- Do wear sunglasses to shield you from sun and bugs.
- Do use all your gears especially up hills!
- Do whoop at the top of your voice when you free wheel down hills it's exhilarating!!

So the Rev and I have mucked out the garage to get to our bikes!

We started going on short rides and built it up slowly - and mostly I am loving it! The Rev is very patient and thoughtful, often to the risk of his life!! He turns his neck to see if I'm still behind him and has risked been knocked down by a passing lorry, but as he turns, his bike moves and he wobbles nearly falling off!! If I ride in front I often feel like stopping as the hills look too steep, but if Clive rides in front I feel motivated to keep up and I pedal faster!

It got me thinking about my journey with Jesus - if I 'Fix my eyes on Jesus' I am on track, when I get inside my head I think this is too hard and I want to give up!

If I needed Clive to hear me I had to get close to Him so I could hear his reply! You know where I'm going with this! I need to stay close to Jesus so we can talk with one another.

I've realised through cycle rides that it's not all free-wheeling down long hills, you have to put in the hard work before you get to see lovely views!

One night we chased a sunset, boy it was hard work pedalling and the pain in my legs were screaming 'This sunset better be worth it!' - It was.

Through lock down we have felt our own pain and held other's hearts as they experience their own pain.

In the midst of pain you can't see any of the beauty, that comes much further down life's path.

Please don't give up keep pedalling! Just know you are not alone.

Let Jesus be your hope.

Angela Hall



New Zealand Afghan Biscuit

New Zealanders have a real soft spot for the chocolate and cornflake Afghan biscuit. The biscuit, also known as a "cookie," is topped with chocolate icing and walnuts or flaked almonds. While the origin of the name is uncertain, there is one thing for sure; the biscuits are delicious and really easy to make. Just remember that it's important to use unsweetened cornflakes. Otherwise, the biscuits will be too sweet. I use the Kellogg's brand.

A tip on the cookie dough -- you really need to roll and press the dough firmly into a ball because the cornflakes can make the dough a little crumbly.

The biscuits, unique to New Zealand, are known for its dark brown colour. Contrary to how it sounds, the biscuits have no ties to Afghanistan. In fact, the Kiwis -- a nickname for New Zealanders -- regard these tasty treats as one of their most favourite national foods. But don't wait to visit New Zealand to try these sweet treats, which can easily be created with very inexpensive ingredients.

Ingredients

- 200 grams butter (at room temperature)
- ½ cup caster sugar
- 1 ½ cups plain flour
- 3 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 ½ cups unsweetened corn flakes

icing:

- 1 cup icing sugar
- 2 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3 tbsp. water

Optional: ¼ cup flaked almonds



Steps to Make

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F (180C). Line a baking sheet with baking paper. Set aside.
2. Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy.
3. Sift together the flour and cocoa powder and mix into butter mixture with a wooden spoon. Fold in cornflakes and don't worry if they crumble.
4. Roll or press 1 ½ teaspoons of the dough into balls and flatten them slightly. Place them about 2 inches apart on the baking sheet.
5. Bake in the oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from oven, and cool on a wire rack.
6. Prepare the icing by combining the icing sugar, unsweetened cocoa powder, and water in a bowl. Mix well until the mixture is free of lumps and of a creamy consistency.
7. Spoon a little icing on each cookie, and decorate with flaked almonds.

Joyce Pidd's FAMOUS FLORENTINES

Makes 24

45g lightly salted butter

5 tablespoons double cream

60g caster sugar

30g each of hazelnuts and flaked almonds

45g mixed peel and chopped glace cherries, mixed

30g plain flour

Pinch salt

60g each of plain and white chocolate for topping

Melt the butter, cream and sugar together in a saucepan and slowly bring to boiling point. Remove pan from the heat and add the nuts, mixed peel and glace cherries. When well mixed in, stir in the flour and salt.

Drop rounded teaspoons of the mixture 7cm (3ins) apart on to two flat baking sheets that have been greased. Flatten with a wet fork.

Bake in an oven preheated to 350F/180C/Gas 4 for about 10 mins, or until edges are golden brown. Leave the biscuits to cool on the baking sheets for five minutes until firm, then carefully remove to a wire rack to cool completely.

Melt the chocolates for the topping separately. Spread the undersides of the biscuits with one of the chocolates and leave to set, chocolate-side up, on a wire rack. Before the chocolate has fully set, mark wavy lines on it with a fork. Drizzle lines of leftover chocolate over the biscuits.



Services for July

Details of Church opening times and access arrangements, plus a rota of on-line services are available on the weekly Notice Sheet which can be found on:

The parish website <http://www.stranton-church.org.uk/> or it can be emailed to you or delivered to your door by contacting David Craig via the Church Office on 07305 550009 or email admin@stranton-church.org.uk

Services can be accessed via:

Church Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/allsaintsstranton/> pages

A Prayer of Blessing for Hartlepool



We ask you oh loving Father of the fatherless
to pour out your Blessing on Hartlepool.
To bring Hope to the hopeless
Healing to the hurt
and Your Joy to those in despair.

We Bless the homes of Hartlepool
And the land upon which they stand.
We Bless the families Lord, young and old
and call down your peace upon them.

We speak reconciliation and revitalisation
into the minds of the people of Hartlepool.
We speak Understanding, Honour and Love
Into their hearts and over their lives.

We Bless their emotions, their minds
and their finances.
We Bless their children and their loved ones.
We speak Good Health and wellbeing over them,
as we lift them to you
and pray that you would touch their spirits
bringing home the Prodigals.

We Thank You for your Eternal Love and Grace
In Jesus Precious name we pray.

Amen



Who's Who

Church Office	St Matthew's Community Centre Arncliffe Gardens TS26 9JF
Administrator	Trish Playfor "Tues- Fri, 9.00 to 11.00am" 07305 550009 E-Mail: admin@stranton-church.org.uk Web Site: www.stranton-church.org.uk

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E-Mail: nshave1@btinternet.com

Curate

Revd Michelle Delves 40 Browning Avenue 723461

Burbank Community Church Worker & Curate

Revd Clive Hall 10 Clarkson Court 278504

Readers

Mary Tones 40a Blakelock Road 265625

Churches Together in Hartlepool

Secretary Susan Atkinson,
St Mary's RC

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Music Group	Julie Shave 34A Westbourne Road 233609
PCC Secretary	Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Treasurer	David Craig 57 Claremont Drive 234279
Asst. Treasurer	Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Loyalty Treasurer	Peter Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Notice Sheet	The Office (Notices by the preceding Wednesday)
Signpost Editorial	Jacqui Rogers 19 Trentbrooke Avenue 265527
Signpost Advertising	Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
Signpost Subscription	Maureen Anderson 22 Thetford Road 871266
St Matthew's Booking	Trish Playfor Church Office 894006

