

On going to press (10th July), the situation is that we are opening St Michael's for private prayer 9.00 am – 5.00 pm Sundays and Wednesdays. There will be public services of Holy Communion at 9.30 am Sundays & Wednesdays at Cuxton and 11.00 am Sundays & 9.30 am at Halling. There will be no other regular services in either church or the Jubilee Hall. Christenings, weddings and funerals can be arranged with the Rector, but we must follow the COVID 19 rules. Currently, we are not allowed to sing together, but I've included the hymns we would have had because some people like to sing them at home.

Please use hand sanitizer as you come into the building. We are not allowed to sing, though there may be music played (but not instruments which are blown). The choir and congregation will sit in the nave facing forward. We must sit and keep 2m (79") from other people who are not in our bubble. It is best if we bring our own prayerbooks and bibles. We must not share books. If you do choose to use the church's books, we'll keep them at least 72 hours before they are given out again. We are not allowed to pass the Peace or otherwise to touch one another. The collection plate will not be passed round, but left out near the entrance for offerings of money. The wardens will then deal with this in a sanitized manner. When we come to Communion, please come up the centre aisle 2m apart and remain standing at the chancel step and I will give you the bread (with sanitized hands), but only I shall receive the wine. Please then turn right and return to your place by the side aisle. We'll keep a record of who attends in case the NHS need to track & trace. In the unlikely event of so many people turning up that we can't all fit in with social distancing, I'm sorry to say we shall not be able to let everyone in. If the weather is fine, we could move out to the churchyard in that unlikely event.

Please pass on this news that we are re-opening to as many people as possible.

Not everybody may be ready to come back to church at this time. I'll continue with weekly newsletters and I'll put the week's sermon on my webpage cuxtonandhall.org.uk for the time being. Please all keep in touch with me and with one another. Let me know if there is anything I can do for you. Let me have any prayer requests. I'm continuing with daily Morning and Evening Prayer at the Rectory.

This is a very fluid situation and things may change. If they do, I'll do my best to let you know. Roger.

What do we pray for? That God will take away this plague. People in authority who have very grave decisions to take. Those who advise them. Those who have to enforce regulations. Wisdom for all of us as we respond to advice, instruction & regulation. Medical staff & other people who are caring for the sick and the vulnerable and those who ensure that we all receive the goods and services we need. Agriculture, industry and commerce producing what we need and also the threat to people's livelihoods posed by the crisis. The unemployed. Those in poor quality housing or homeless. Those who are lonely. Those living with violent or abusive people. Those suffering from the virus. Those with other conditions whose treatment is affected by the measures taken against COVID 19. The bereaved. Schoolteachers, pupils & parents. Those in other countries which have fewer resources to deal with pandemic sickness. All those other topics for prayer which may be neglected as we focus on this one issue: peace at home and abroad; release from oppression; the administration of justice and the treatment of offenders; good government for every nation; dealing with chronic poverty and sudden emergencies such as natural disasters; the healing of broken relationships between individuals, communities & nations; responding to diseases other than COVID; education & enlightenment for all people throughout the world; the proclamation of the Gospel to every nation. Pray also for the Church, for Christian people everywhere, and for our leaders as we seek to respond to the COVID 19 crisis as God would have us respond.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who alone workest great marvels; Send down upon our Bishops, and Curates, and all Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

By all means forward this magazine by email to anyone you know who would be interested. You are also free to print it off and share it if you wish. Copy date for September is 14th August 8.30 am at the Rectory.

Services @ St John the Baptist Halling (If there are any services at the Jubilee Hall, notice will be given.)			
2 nd August Trinity 8	11.00 Holy Communion	Genesis 32 vv 22-31 p36 Romans 9 vv 1-5 p1135 Matthew 14 vv 13-21 p981	SoF 148 Guide Me O 54 Servant Song Psalm 145 43 Bind Us Together 50 Break Thou the Bread 111 For I'm Building
9 th August Trinity 9	11.00 Holy Communion	I Kings 19 vv 9-18 p361 Romans 10 vv 5-15 p1137 Matthew 14 vv 22-33 p981	EH 466 Thou Whose Almighty 469 To Mercy, Pity, Peace & 353 Dear Lord & Father 495 God is Working His 354 Eternal Father
16 th August Trinity 10	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 56 v 1-8 p742 Romans 11 vv 1-32 p1137 Matthew 15 vv 21-28 p982	MP 5 All Hail the Power 248 To God be the Glory Psalm 67 21 Bind Us Together 217 The Church's One Foundation 50 For I'm Building a
23 rd August Trinity 11	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 51 vv 1-6 p738 Romans 12 vv 1-8 p1139 Matthew 16 vv 13-20 p983	SoF 530 The God of Abraham 488 Rock of Ages 541 Therefore the Redeemed 362 Shine Jesus Shine 599 Trust & Obey 381 Make Me a Channel
30 th August Trinity 12	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 15 vv 15-21 p774 Romans 12 vv 9-21 p 1139 Matthew 16 vv 21-28 p984	SoF 555 Thou Didst Leave Thy 399 My Peace I Give Unto You Psalm 26 54 Brother Let Me Be 205 I Cannot Tell 381 Make Me a Channel
Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
2 nd August Trinity 8	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 32 vv 22-31 p36 Romans 9 vv 1-5 p1135 Matthew 14 vv 13-21 p981	SoF 530 vv 1-4 The God of Abraham 12 All Over the World 144 Great is the Lord 22 A New Commandment 530 vv 5-9 There Dwells the 301 Jesus Shall Reign
9 th August Trinity 9	9.30 Holy Communion	I Kings 19 vv 9-18 p361 Romans 10 vv 5-15 p1137 Matthew 14 vv 22-33 p981	<i>Choir please choose five hymns.</i>
16 th August Trinity 10	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 56 v 1-8 p742 Romans 11 vv 1-32 p1137 Matthew 15 vv 21-28 p982	A&M 172 Glorious Things of Thee 179 God of Mercy 137 There is a Green Hill 132 Son of God, Eternal 139 Rejoice the Lord is King
23 rd August Trinity 11	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 51 vv 1-6 p738 Romans 12 vv 1-8 p1139 Matthew 16 vv 13-20 p983	A&M 101 O Worship the King Psalm 138 154 Gracious Spirit 131 Love Divine 219 Soldiers of Christ

30 th August Trinity 12	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 15 vv 15-21 p774 Romans 12 vv 9-21 p 1139 Matthew 16 vv 21-28 p984	SoF 555 Thou Didst Leave Thy 399 My Peace I Give Unto You Psalm 26 54 Brother Let Me Be 205 I Cannot Tell 381 Make Me a Channel
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Holy Communion Wednesdays 9.30 am Cuxton		Holy Communion Thursdays 9.30 am Halling	
5 th August	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-7 Matthew 15 vv 21-28	6 th August The Transfiguration	II Peter 1 vv 16-19 Luke 9 vv 28-36
12 th August	Ezekiel 9 vv 1-22 Matthew 18 vv 15-20	13 th August	Ezekiel 12 vv 1-12 Matthew 18 v21 – 19 v1
19 th August	Ezekiel 34 vv 1-11 Matthew 20 vv 1-16	20 th August	Ezekiel 36 vv 23-28 Matthew 22 vv 1-14
26 th August	II Thessalonians 3 vv 6-18 Matthew 23 vv 27-32	27 th August	I Corinthians 1 vv 1-9 Matthew 24 vv 42-51



Perplexed of Cuxton and Halling

I've been struggling to make sense of the COVID 19 plague in lots of ways. Try to make sense of things is what we humans do. It's why we do science and maths. Making sense of things underlies the arts and the

narratives of our own lives. We want to know why and how things happen and what we ought to do about them and what they mean. Our sense that things ultimately do make sense is tightly bound up with out faith. We believe that everything there is, everything that happens is the work of the omnipotent God, Who is infinitely wise, just and merciful. So much is this true that some people who don't believe in God say that human beings invented God because we so much need an ultimate of explanation of why things are and why things happen the way they do. So I've been struggling to make sense of the COVID crisis for myself and for my parishioners. It's quite hard to talk about with people because it elicits strong emotional responses and it is easy to get hurt or angry when we discuss issues that we really care deeply about.

The first obvious perplexity for a Christian preacher is how can bad things like COVID 19 happen if the universe is controlled by God Who is both all-powerful and love? Why are there pain and suffering in the world? That's a very good question, which many people ask. People in the Bible asked it and people ask it today. Why should there be suffering in a world created by the all-powerful God Who is love? There are lots of answers given – all of them partial.

Some pain is good. People who don't experience pain (such as sufferers from Hansen's Disease, sometimes called leprosy) repeatedly injure themselves because they don't recoil from touching hot surfaces or sharp blades.

Some people suffer as a result of their own wickedness or folly. They might be said to deserve what they get, though it's not for us to judge. Only God has the right to judge people.

But many innocent people suffer because of the wickedness or folly of other people. That hardly seems fair! Either way, a good deal of the suffering on earth is a result of the abuse of human freedom. God gives us the freedom to choose between right and wrong. The fact that we choose wrong results in pain and suffering. Presumably, God's calculation is that the blessing of freedom outweighs the pain and death which follow from its abuse. Better to be a human being who can make mistakes and even deliberately choose to to do evil and to suffer for it (or cause suffering to others) than a robot which can do no wrong.

It has been said that the natural forces which are intrinsic to the world God has made inevitably have the potential for good or ill. Floods deposit fertile soil. So do erupting volcanoes (in some cases). People live near volcanoes and on flood plains because the farming is so good. Yet, they are then exposed to the risks of fire and water. Perhaps sin comes into this too as the poor are often the ones who live most exposed to the risks whereas the rich who derive most profit from them live on the higher ground and farther away from the crater. Possibly it is the case that a

Nature which can sustain trees and flowers, animals and people, inevitably also sustains bacteria and viruses. Maybe it cannot be helped that the processes which promote healthy growth in us can also produce cancer.

We should be thankful that God applies the natural laws consistently for at least most of the time. If He sometimes switched off gravity when a tile slipped off a roof in the direction of a baby's pram, where should we be?

Another consideration is that it is all sorted out in the next world when we do all get what we deserve, whether reward or punishment, for the way we have lived on earth, but, by God's standards, we all deserve punishment and depend on God's mercy to forgive us, not His justice to give us our just desserts.

And then there is the thought that, in Jesus Christ, God shares our pain and thereby upholds us.

None of these answers is a complete answer to the question "why are there pain and suffering in the world?" In Romans 5¹, Paul doesn't seek to explain suffering. What he does is to describe how God helps us in our pain. He is with us. We are with Him. We talk to Him in prayer. He answers our prayers whether to take away our pain or to enable us to bear it. We experience God and His care for us. Enduring suffering and sharing it with God, builds our Christian character. We learn patience. We endure. We experience. All these things teach us hope, which is not ashamed, because God's love is shed abroad in our hearts, and we couldn't ask for more proof of that than the fact that Jesus died for us on the Cross.

Making points like the above is called Theodicy. Theodicy is justifying the ways of God to human

beings. But, when you come to think about it, that is both presumptuous and arrogant. God is God and we are what we are. Who are we to demand that God justify Himself to us? I'm currently reading the Book of Job. Job has 42 chapters which can possibly be summarised like this. Job has a perfect life in both senses. He is a good man and he has everything he could possibly want. He is well off. He has a large family. He enjoys the respect of the community. Then Satan challenges God with regard to Job. "Of course Job is a good man," the devil argues. "He has everything he wants in life. Take away all these good things. Make him suffer. Then let's see if he is still such a good man." God then allows Satan to deprive Job of his wealth, his family and his health. Job refuses to *curse God and die* as his wife urges him to do. Three (later four) comforters arrive to sympathise with him. Job vehemently and bitterly insists that he has done nothing to deserve his sufferings. He laments his plight. He wishes he had never been born. He demands the right to answer God and to demand that God account for Job's undeserved suffering. The four comforters insist that, as God is just, Job must deserve all these terrible things which have happened to him. At the end of the Book of Job, God reminds Job of the wonders of the world. Essentially, the One Who created heaven and earth is beyond our understanding, incomprehensible, inscrutable, ineffable. He is not accountable to us. We are accountable to Him. But Job is commended at the end because, despite his anguished questioning of God, he clung on to his integrity and the honesty of his perplexed friendship with God, whereas the so-called comforters are called to repent of their presumption and uncharitableness.

There is one very popular Theodicy which I think is fatal to Christian faith, the Theodicy which avoids the paradox of evil in a universe created by omnipotent Goodness by asserting that God does not involve Himself in the day to day running of the world. This is untrue to the Bible, to the faith of the Church and to our experience of prayer. Jesus is the ultimate Theodicy, the One Who justifies the ways of God to humanity. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us!

That was tough. What other questions have I found perplexing with regard to COVID 19? Whereas the Church has rather dodged the issue of whether COVID 19 is a punishment for sin, other

¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

6For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

groups have been less restrained. Many environmentalists (including some members of the royal family) have, at least in part, blamed our sins against the environment for the origin and spread of the corona virus. A growing and hungry human population has turned to species not normally eaten as a source of food. An authoritarian government tried to hide what was going on, leading to delay in the world's response to the developing pandemic. The virus was spread by mass air travel and extended supply chains which environmentalists have been arguing against for years because of the pollution they generate. The effects of COVID 19 on our lungs are worse than they might have been because we have all been breathing polluted air for so long.

Similarly, animal rights campaigners have pointed out that the virus originated in the so-called wet markets of China, where welfare standards and hygiene are neglected. Vegans and vegetarians would say that we should not be eating meat anyway. Most doctors would say that we eat too much meat. I think most people would agree with me that the meat we eat should be produced in decent conditions which take proper care of the animals and maintain high standards of cleanliness. There is a cultural cringe factor when we think about people eating species we wouldn't eat like bat and snake, but it has to be admitted that some of that cringe factor is just prejudice. Some of us feel the same about the French, who eat horses and snails and frogs whereas, for others, to do so is a sign of sophistication. It is true, however, that when mankind has domesticated or eaten a previously unfamiliar species, disease has often followed. Thousands of years ago, we caught measles from goats when we first farmed them. Goats no longer get measles. Presumably, the measles virus prefers us as a host.

Sins against the environment and animal welfare are not the whole explanation, however. There were many worse plagues than COVID 19 centuries before the Industrial Revolution, extended supply chains or the development of industrialised farming. It can be argued that it is the prosperity which industry, commerce and modern agriculture have brought us that supports a science base capable of finding the means to treat, cure and prevent infectious diseases. It is also true though that earlier plagues have often been spread by the sins of war, the ruthless

exploitation of indigenous peoples by imperial powers and the sordid behaviour of troops and merchants.

But coming back to justice, if COVID 19 is the earth punishing us for our degradation of the environment, the punishment is not being administered fairly. COVID 19 was spread by the jet set, especially by those skiing at expensive resorts last winter. Extended supply chains more obviously benefit employers than they do the "left behind" in this country whose jobs are farmed out to countries where people have no choice but to put up with much poorer pay and conditions than would be acceptable here. Thousands of well off international students and well-heeled businessmen played their part in the spread of the disease. But it is the poor in overcrowded accommodation, already in generally worse health, in badly paid, insecure jobs, who have suffered most, both from catching the disease and from the consequences of lockdown.

It is also true that the disease more adversely affects old people than young, men more than women, people of certain blood groups and BAME people, which raises questions about whether it is fair to lock down and ruin the prospects of those who are unlikely to die of COVID 19 in order to protect those who are most vulnerable and why BAME people seem to be more susceptible. To the last question, there are several plausible answers, some of which we can do something about and some we can't. One is that a lot of BAME people do live in the poor over-crowded accommodation described above and receive low wages. A lot of BAME people also work in the NHS (including many of our top doctors and nurses) and care homes. So they are more likely to be exposed to the virus. The vitamin D which sunlight on our skin enables us to synthesise protects against the virus, but, the darker your skin colour, the less well this process works. (On the other hand, the darker your skin, the less likely you are to get skin cancer.) It also seems to be true that blood cell types which are more common in BAME people are more attractive to the corona virus than other types of blood cell. Although not BAME, I do have one of the blood types which is more conducive to contracting the disease, but I can't help that, anymore than I can help being a man or over 50, which are other risk factors.

I am also perplexed by the science, not merely that I'm not smart enough to understand epidemiology, virology and micro-biology. What scientists tell us isn't entirely consistent. That's not necessarily their fault. It's a new virus and it will take a lot of research to understand it. Some seem to be very hopeful of developing an effective vaccine soon, while others say that this will be a long time in the future or might never happen. Various treatments are advanced as possibly effective and then doubt is cast on whether or not they really are. There is disagreement among experts about the efficacy of face masks and how much social distancing is necessary. As I understand it, non-medical masks make the wearer slightly more likely to catch COVID (as he can't help fiddling with it with fingers which might have picked up the virus from contaminated surfaces) but offer some protection to other people if the mask wearer has the disease already. Some claim that it is difficult to catch the disease out of doors. Others are not so sure. I've seen claims that people who have the virus but no symptoms are at very little risk of spreading the disease and I have also seen it stated that these asymptomatic people are the most dangerous carriers. There doesn't seem to be much certainty whether having had the disease and survived it confers some or complete immunity. There is good evidence that sunlight and high temperatures destroy the virus, but the disease has been rife in such hot, sunny countries as Italy and Iran and it is spreading in Africa and South America.

I'm also perplexed by the response of governments. If they were really guided by the science, we should expect the same policies to be applied all over the world. In fact they are not, partly because, as we have seen above, the science is uncertain, and partly because there are political decisions to be taken as well as scientific. There is no perfect degree of lockdown which ensures us complete safety without doing any harm to the economy or to people's personal lives. It is a matter of balance and judgment. How many cases and how many deaths are we prepared to put up with? How far are we prepared to give up our personal freedoms for our own safety or for the safety of others? How big an economic hit should the country be prepared to take? I don't envy those in government who have to make these decisions with insufficient data and surrounded, it seems, by commentators and opposition

politicians who are just waiting to pounce on every mistake.

Having said that, however, there has been a lot of confusion. Ministerial advice, instructions from government and the actual law of the land are not necessarily the same thing and only the last is enforceable. Why could we go for one hour long walk, but not for two half hour walks? Why can your cleaner come into your house but not your mother, unless your mother happens to be your cleaner? Why must couples getting married sanitize before holding hands? (It has even been suggested that they should wear masks in bed!) Some of the rules have seemed illogical and inconsistent. In a food shop I can pick up a packet of cheese, decide I don't want it and put it back in the fridge, where the low temperature will allow the virus to survive longer, but if I pick up and handle a book in a bookshop or church, it must be quarantined for 72 hours. Does that make sense?

In particular, why are the rules different in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland? Do the devolved administrations have genuine reasons for distrusting the policies the UK government has adopted for England or are they just playing politics, having found an issue on which to assert their independence?

A couple of people have said to me that they think that the government is exaggerating the risks of COVID 19 in order to accrue more power over us: ID cards, mobile phone apps which track our whereabouts, a cashless society in which government knows exactly where every penny you have comes from and how you spend it. I don't think that government is exaggerating the crisis, but I do think that people in power are perfectly capable of using something like this as an excuse to gain even more power. ID cards were introduced for the Second World War, but it took till 1952 to get rid of them. Shortly after the passing of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act in 2000, which gave local authorities, among other public bodies, powers of surveillance over ordinary citizens ostensibly to protect us against terrorism and other very serious crime, a council used it to spy on a perfectly ordinary, decent family whom it suspected of sending a toddler to a nursery in the wrong catchment area. I'm with David Cameron on this. Britain is not the sort of country in which a functionary of the state can

stop you as you go about your ordinary business and demand to see your papers. COVID 19 mustn't be allowed to become a pretext for creating that kind of authoritarian state here. When we entrust the powers that be with greater power, we must never forget how power corrupts.

If the virus is still with us in a year or two's time and there is no safe, effective vaccine available, shall we continue to live in the half life of the so-called new normal or shall we just give up on the precautions and take our chance and revert to the old normal – as thousands already seem to have done?

Another perplexity is the right of the individual to be free to make personal choices. Shouldn't it be my choice how much risk I am prepared to take with my own life? But what if I catch the virus through my own negligence and then infect others or tie up NHS resources treating me? What is the right balance between freedom and responsibility, between the individual and the common good?

Then there is the question of the environment. I have believed for decades that our materialistic, consumer society is destroying our planet and bad for our own physical, mental and spiritual health, as well as the well-being of all the other species with which we share this terrestrial globe. Millions, only a few months ago, were demonstrating with Greta Thunberg on green issues. Then the first days of lockdown swiftly demonstrated what a difference we could achieve in a very short time, how much better the world was with hardly any planes in the sky, much less road traffic and industry wound down. The air was so much fresher. You could see the stars and hear the birds sing. We started talking about making these improvements permanent – driving less, working from home, going out less to places of entertainment, taking fewer foreign trips, buying less stuff, enjoying locally produced food, shopping in our village shops, and so on and so forth. I was all in favour as I would have been at any time in the last fifty years. And now it has become clear how many thousands of jobs and livelihoods depend on things like overseas travel, entertainment, our purchase of goods and services that we really don't need. And I'm not in favour of mass unemployment, poverty and hardship. So, I'm perplexed about this too. Bring back the consumer society and trash the world or save the

world at the expense of the economic well-being of millions of its human inhabitants?

According to the "Times", road traffic "kills 1,700 people a year in this country directly, and somewhere between 28,000 and 36,000 a year through the pollution it causes, as well as being the single biggest contributor to climate change." Why do we feel uneasy about relaxing lockdown in case it causes a spike in deaths from corona virus, but we are quite blasé about the deaths caused by traffic?

Perhaps my greatest perplexity was at the response of our bishops and archbishops. I was stunned by the rapidity with which they gave in and closed us down. I felt personally insulted by the threat to use the egregious Clergy Discipline Measure against any vicars or rectors who failed to comply, especially as it turned out that the bishops had exceeded their authority when they told us that we might not enter our own churches to pray. I'm afraid that, when they said we could go into church to check that the building was OK but not to pray, they seemed to confirm my worst suspicions about the priorities of the C21 Church of England. This is only the second time ever that all English churches have been closed and the last time was over 800 years ago because of a dispute between King John and the pope. There have been many worse things that have happened in that time than COVID 19 and we have never before just given up. It felt like our bishops and archbishops were equating public worship with playing sport or going to the pub, among the inessentials. Daily exercise and food shopping were acknowledged by the government to be essential, but not worship and the Church hierarchy seemed to agree, despite the fact that S Paul said, "bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," and Jesus said, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." Why was it essential to be able to buy bread from the Co-op, but not to receive Holy Communion? Over the last two thousand years and in many parts of the world today, Christians have risked persecution and martyrdom, rather than forsake the assembling of themselves together. Priests have risked much more

dangerous diseases than this corona virus in order to minister to the sick, the bereaved and the dying, but we were forbidden from doing so. Had it been up to me, I should probably have carried on with public worship and my ministry as best I could with sensible precautions (such as meeting in the open air) with anyone who cared to join me. I don't think the danger would have been great here in this parish and any of us who caught the virus and died of it would simply have been martyrs and begun our membership of the heavenly choirs somewhat earlier than might have been anticipated.

But then, I could have been wrong! Maybe we wouldn't only have put ourselves at risk. We might have infected many other people some of whom don't share our *sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life* and caused big problems for the local NHS. Maybe it was a good thing that the decision was taken out of my hands.

And, to be fair, our archbishops, bishops, archdeacons and many other cathedral and diocesan staff have put in a tremendous effort in this very difficult time. They have exhibited great compassion and sensitivity and worked extremely hard to do their best despite the constraints imposed by the government and the constraints they have imposed on themselves. Frustrated I might have been by what seemed to me the pusillanimity of the hierarchy, but I cannot speak too highly of my respect for their Christian commitment and love.

And so much has been done. Christians have joined people of all faiths and none in volunteering to care for individuals and the whole community in all sorts of ways. And we have prayed.

So much effort has gone into providing written, broadcast and online resources for prayer, pastoral

Psalm 46. *Deus noster refugium*

GOD is our hope and strength : a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved : and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof rage and swell : and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God : the holy place of the tabernacle of the most Highest. God is in the midst of her, therefore shall she not be removed : God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen make much ado, and the kingdoms are moved : but God hath shewed his voice, and the earth shall melt away. The Lord of hosts is with us : the God of Jacob is our refuge. O come hither, and behold the works of the Lord : what destruction he hath brought upon the earth. He maketh wars to cease in all the world : he breaketh the bow, and knappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire. Be still then, and know that I am God : I will be exalted among the heathen, and I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us : the God of Jacob is our refuge. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

care and public worship. Four times as many people have been tuning into broadcast and online worship as normally attend Church every Sunday. What are we to make of this exciting development? I can't imagine that we would want to give up on meeting together physically, but what can we do to serve those who have wanted to join in with these broadcast and online services during the emergency? I haven't yet conducted an online service. I don't think I have the equipment and I'd probably be useless at using it if I had, but perhaps I should try. Would that be a way of serving people in Cuxton and Halling who, for whatever reason, don't attend Church? Or ought we to be encouraging people to gather together in Christ's Name, in the real world as well as the virtual? Yet more questions to perplex us.

I have, however, found peace in my perplexity. Lockdown has been a kind of Sabbath or retreat – little stress, plenty of time for relaxation, for thinking and meditation. Saying daily Morning and Evening Prayer alone in the garden and celebrating Holy Communion alone in the kitchen are different experiences. In the long run, it would be unhealthy to become a hermit and not to engage with other Christians in fellowship, but for now, this solitariness is a change; it puts a new perspective on things. I have found a new depth in saying the prayers provided for us in our prayer books. I have discovered in the Bible a multitude of angles on life which doesn't answer all my questions, but does cast great light on them. There are so many perspectives in the Bible. Being alone has led me to think again about what we are doing in Holy Communion and so has the effort of trying to think of all of you in the same fellowship spiritually, but physically distant. I have found a deeper peace and a growing understanding, a fresher awareness that, whatever happens in the world, we dwell in the love of God. Roger.

From the Registers

Funerals:

11th June
17th June

Pamela Dorothea Morris
Colin Cyril Martin

Station Approach
Primrose Road

Peter David Silver RIP

We were all very sorry to hear of the death of Peter Silver on 2nd July. Peter lived all his life in Halling and took a close interest in the affairs of the village and its history. He was a dedicated servant of the Church, hardly missing a service and acting as server, sacristan and vergier. He was also something of a student of English country customs and of the lives of the saints, including some of the less well-known ones. Peter was a keen bell ringer so long as he was able and maintained a keen interest in bell ring all his life. We hope to ring in his honour when current COVID restrictions are lifted. He will be very much missed.

St Michael's Draw July: £10 to Mrs Morren (19), £5 each to Mrs Beaney (5) & Mr Haselden (9).

Kemsing to Otford

At this time, I am amazed and saddened that the dreadful corona virus is still impacting so severely on our lives. The restrictions seem endless and the fear of further outbreaks is real and scary. In spite of these worrying times I am pleased and relieved that the wonderful Kent countryside remains a dear and safe 'friend'.



My walk takes me along a section of the North Downs Way beginning at Kemsing. This village, in the civil parish of Sevenoaks, is

situated on the scarp face of the North Downs. Kemsing was the birthplace of Saint Edith of Wilton

her. According to legend, her saintly presence has given the water healing properties. The well is set in a colourful garden which includes a war memorial of 1921 and is surrounded by a group of picturesque cottages and St Edith Hall which was used as a hospital during WW1.

I leave the village centre and walk up through the car park to the parish church which is Saxon in origin and dedicated to St Mary the Virgin. Sadly this building is temporarily closed, even for private prayer, but it has a well maintained church yard.

Leaving the church I retrace my steps to the car park and join a tarmac footpath, heading north, passing beside the village school up to Pilgrims Way. I cross over the road and go through two kissing gates as I follow the way-markers. In front of me is an enormous hill. It takes some energy to walk up this hill and I am tempted to stop off at the halfway seat but knowing that there is another seat at the top

spurs me on to complete the climb and then stop to admire (and photograph) the marvellous view.



At this point I am on the North Downs Way and I head west. I travel along a well frequented footpath which has amazing views all the way along.



who was a daughter of the Anglo-Saxon, King Edgar 1. At the village centre is a well which is dedicated to



The North Downs Way is well signed. My footsteps journey along sections of open land, woodland, enclosed

pathways and involve crossing narrow lanes. Along the route there are information boards, sponsored by the Kent Wildlife Trust, explaining the type of environment, eg, chalk grassland, and showing the various wildlife species of mammals, birds, butterflies and flowers. Indeed, it seems that all this area is teeming with wildlife and each one is on display today. One good point about being up on the Downs is the noise of nature and the quietness of man! There are some very welcome wooden benches at strategic places. My route eventually leads down to the village of Otford.

Otford is an award winning village, again in the civil parish of Sevenoaks, with a delightful pond at its

centre. It has a long history of occupation including Iron Age farmers and Romans.

The parish church is dedicated to St Bartholomew and is open for private prayer every day. The church seems highly organised with hand sanitizers, an arrowed route, roped off areas, automatic door openers, identified availability of pews with markers for and after use as well as 'Welcome' posters and a rather thoughtful prayer in the entrance;

'In the name of Jesus Christ we welcome you to our church:

Here in the quiet you may speak to God:

Here you may give thanks:

Here you may cast your burden upon Him:

Here you may seek strength for the present and courage for the future, then go on your way rejoicing:

And may God bless you and grant you His peace evermore'

A tough up hill climb to begin the day but amazing views and two outstanding villages. A great day out. Holly Croft.

Tommy's Talking Points

This picture was taken of me in Surrey, but some years ago, not today! The relevance of that comment will become apparent.



Towards the end of these lovely, long summer days, Master and I sometimes enjoy sitting on the seat on the patio before it becomes quite dark. The Book of Genesis refers to the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. It is a lovely image, but the garden in this case is the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve are hiding from God because they know that they have done wrong. God seeks them out, spells out the consequences of what they have done, provides for their needs despite their folly and so begins the long story of our redemption. The cool of the day which we enjoy in our garden is to Master a time of deep peace and

relaxation and to me an opportunity to check out what the local cats, foxes and badgers are up to and whether they need chasing back into the woods. Master loves the way the colours of the flowers subtly change as the light fades, but before it is entirely gone. The deep reds of the roses and the deep pink of neighbour's hydrangeas become deeper still. The yellow of the Hypericum turns to gold. The white flowers of the mock orange and the white roses become whiter still, almost shining. There are the scents of the evening also – the Buddleia or butterfly bush, the honeysuckle or woodbine, the heavenly fragrance of Phlox, and he's particularly fond of privet too. Perhaps he sees privet flowers as mildly transgressive. In an ordered garden, the privet is kept cut back too short to flower. We have some golden privet, which gradually lapses towards green when shaded by overgrowing trees and then shines forth as gold again when he performs the necessary pruning on the sycamores. There are other olfactory sensations too which he can't smell and are of much more interest to me.

Last Sunday seemed strange. I have been used to having him around most of the time and, on Sundays, singing hymns in the garden and celebrating Holy Communion at our kitchen table, but last Sunday he disappeared for the whole morning. Services have resumed in church on Sundays at 9.30 at Cuxton and

11.00 at Halling. He came back very happy. Those who were able to come were so pleased to see one another. Although they weren't allowed to sing, there was some music played. Social distancing wasn't too awful and those who were ready to do so were able to receive Holy Communion, albeit only the consecrated bread. Master says that the technical term is Communion in one kind and that you do receive Christ in just the bread as surely as you would receive Him if you received both the bread and the wine. The numbers were quite good too, he reported. I also should like to have met my old friends. He says that, had he realised, how much time there would be to spare because of what had to be left out, he would probably have brought me with him at least to Cuxton. So, here's hoping.

Another sign of the return to something like normality was that we planned to meet Master's friend for a country walk. Shuffling around our time off because of lockdown, we arranged to meet today (Tuesday). Because there are all sorts of reasons for avoiding public transport these days, it was decided that both parties would drive separately and meet at Leith Hill in Surrey. They would also have a picnic because it was not certain whether it would be possible or prudent to eat in a pub or restaurant. The day started very well. We got up early and went for a two hour run so that we should both have stretched our legs before being confined in a hot, metal box for what should have been just over an hour. It was a bit chilly, but a beautifully fresh morning. It was so quiet. We saw no-one about except one man with a child and a dog. The sun was shining and the birds were singing. For the first time for ages, we saw rabbits (or maybe the same rabbit twice, once going, once coming back) at the bottom of Dean Valley. We arrived back home safely and went through the rest of our morning routine briskly – breakfast, Morning Prayer, wash (just him), check emails (just him) – and off we set in the car. He was a bit apprehensive because Leith Hill features on none of his road maps (as far as he had been able to ascertain last night) and he's been lost before on long journeys, including twice in Surrey. It was in Surrey that I caused him to fall into the River Mole and lose his glasses and have to make our way home by train without his being able to read the information boards. Still, he had printed off the AA suggested route from the internet. Come off the M25 at junction 8. Follow the A217 and the A25 through Dorking to the Deepdene roundabout. That sounded good. We caught the train to Deepdene once for another of our walks. Follow the A25. Turn left into Hollow Lane and there we would be. The implication was that Hollow Lane was soon after the roundabout. Well we did what we were told (as he always does) and we carried on down the A25. No Hollow Lane, though we carried on for miles, as far as Bletchingley, where, very unlike him, we asked directions of someone who unsurprisingly was both very nice and unable to help us much. So we drove up and down the A25 a few more times, annoying other drivers with our slow speed and Master getting more and more anxious. Eventually we gave up and came home which is how I come to be writing this here and now, rather than enjoying a lovely walk. As Master's friend was providing the picnic, Master had to fry up some fish and chips for his dinner when we got back. He's now spread out a big map on the study floor and realised that he turned left at Deepdene where he should have turned right, taking the wrong exit off the roundabout, and that everything else that went wrong followed from that mistake. I don't know which is worse really – being too stupid to find a well-known popular beauty spot in the home counties or allowing his friend to plan a day on the assumption that he isn't, despite all the evidence that he is just that stupid. His excuse is that someone with only two eyes can't be expected to watch the traffic, look at road signs and read a map at the same time. In his own defence, Master also remarks that his friend has now told him that lots of people he met at Leith Hill were hanging about waiting for others who couldn't find it because the signposting is so poor!

On Wednesday morning, I was taken back to church at St Michael's after so many weeks without. I met a number of friends I haven't see for three months! Some of them had rather more hair than I remembered. I shed mine when it reaches a certain length. You, it appears, have to have it cut. I was always a bit sceptical when Master said that his hair had shrunk in the shower. Actually, I saw a family member within our bubble transform him from Tarzan to Yul Brenner in minutes, which reminds him of a joke. A teenager was looking forward to a great night out and wanted a trendy haircut, but the only barber in town was an old boy who'd been in business since his grandfather was a lad. Hopefully the boy asked him if he could give him a Tony Curtis. The barber thought he could do that and started snipping. Chatting while he worked, he startled his customer by remarking, "Wasn't he good as the King of Siam in 'The King and I!'". Tommy

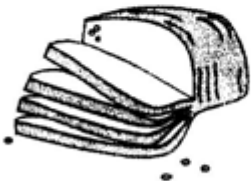
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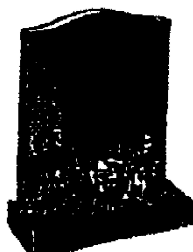
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