



The Taizé Pentecost Window

A candle in....

THE WINDOW

News and Views from the Parish of Abingdon-on-Thames



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Christian Aid Week, 10-16th May 2021

Mary Anderson

The theme for this year's Christian Aid Week is climate justice, focussing on the water crisis in Kenya.

As we have seen recently on our television screens, torrential rain in low-lying countries like Bangladesh brings in its wake the loss of homes and of arable land. Drought is equally destructive, causing starvation and population movements. I know from my own experience in Nigeria that many cattle-herders (the Fulani people whose name features in my email address) have been forced southwards from the Sahel in the constant search for water.

When the coronavirus pandemic is added into the mix, we have a recipe for immediate disaster on top of the insidious long-term threats posed by climate change. Calls for constant hand-washing fall on deaf ears when water is scarce and is desperately needed to quench the thirst of people, animals and crops.

Without a reliable water source, staple crops like maize and beans are damaged and destroyed. People have to walk further and further to find a dependable source. Cows, sheep and goats become weak without access to water, and they can't produce milk or be sold. People are struggling to cope; lives are at risk.

Christian Aid is at the forefront of initiatives to alleviate the water crisis in many countries. I have personally seen an earth dam in Mali, west Africa, that provided irrigation for crops, a fishing livelihood for local people, as well as drastically reducing the time and effort needed to collect the everyday water of life.

Here is a poignant and hope-filled story about Onesmus, a 15-year-old Kenyan boy whose community has been helped by the building of an earth dam funded by Christian Aid. (I imagine that his name is a local adaptation of the Biblical name Onesimus, friend of Paul and Philemon.) What I love about the story of Onesmus is that it links Christian Aid's work on climate change to literacy and education. Once people have access to the written word, they more easily receive spiritual encouragement through the Scriptures and their local churches. They no longer have to sign their name with a thumb mark, and they gain the respect of their community. They have access to information and their voice can be heard in advocacy groups, thus helping the cause of social justice.

Continued over the page

The story of Onesmus



- Onesmus, 15, loves school. He hopes to be a teacher when he grows up. Every day after school, he walks for half an hour to collect water from the nearby earth dam for his family.
- ‘Before the earth dam, we had to walk to a river far away,’ he says. ‘It took three hours to walk there. I didn’t have enough time to do my homework. Now I am happier we have the earth dam.’
- Now, Onesmus can spend more time learning at school because he doesn’t have to walk so far to collect water. He also uses water from the dam to grow tasty fruit at home, like avocados and pineapples. Onesmus takes great care to water his plants.
- Sadly, because of climate change, many plants in Kenya don’t get enough rainwater and can’t grow. ‘It hasn’t rained properly for a long time,’ he explains. ‘When it rains, I will feel happy.’
- Christian Aid is supporting all the children in Onesmus’ village to plant trees. Onesmus is teaching his little nephew, Michael, how to plant a tree sapling and water it every day, so it can grow tall, strong and green.
- Imagine how the trees will grow, bringing joy as they help restore the village into a green and fertile place to live.
- Onesmus’ teacher is happy to see him watering his plants and doing well at school. ‘The dam has made a big change,’ she says. ‘The children are able to concentrate, because they have water. Water is life.’

The mantra for this year’s Christian Aid Week is “Together we can stop the climate crisis.” So let us:

- **Pray** Join in with our powerful prayer movement at caid.org.uk/prayerchain.
- **Act** Take action at [caid.org.uk/ climatejusticepetition](https://caid.org.uk/climatejusticepetition)
- **Give** Regular giving helps Christian Aid to plan long-term support for more people, wherever the need is greatest. To see how you could leave a legacy to Christian Aid, see <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/give/gifts-in-wills>

Here in Abingdon, we will have a Christian Aid stall in the marketplace from 10-12 on Saturday 15th May – please do come and join us. There will be information stands and an opportunity to donate in person. We have also created our own e-envelope, which makes online donations very, very easy: just visit <https://envelope.christianaid.org.uk/envelope/abingdon-christian-aid-group> Thank you.

For more information, please speak to me or to Rob King, or visit the Christian Aid website <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/>

A Prayer:

Spirit of God
who hovered over the waters,
harness your power in us
to live faithfully and in harmony
with the rhythms of righteousness,
for the restoration of creation
and the glory of your name.
Amen.

Ascension Day

Paul Sheppy

I suspect that we all know the story, but our familiarity with it has led us to accept it without question – which is a shame...

Following the pattern of Luke-Acts, we link Ascension Day with Pentecost while keeping a calendrical difference. In the Fourth Gospel there is no separation; the Spirit is given at the Ascension. Much of our thinking sees the two elements (the Lord's departure and the gift of Spirit) as linked in some kind of compensatory way. It's as though Uncle Colin is emigrating and gives us a keepsake to remember him by. And, of course, there is much in the New Testament to support this kind of thinking – but that is only part of the story.

We like to have things cut and dried. "What does the ascension mean?" we ask, and we get a neatly packaged answer. Jesus has gone to heaven following his resurrection and, while he prays for us there, the Spirit is sent to us so that we may live in the energy of God who raised Jesus from the dead. Now that we have got our answer (which we may or may not understand), we can stop worrying about the matter and get on with daily life ("real life"). What a relief that we don't have to be theologians – who seem to spend their time making simple things complicated!

The problem with neat answers is that they are usually too small to meet our big questions. There isn't one solitary explanation of the Ascension. It's not just about Jesus going away and giving us a goodbye present. There are other ways of thinking about this extraordinary event. Let me offer you a couple. First, there are two ascension stories in the Old Testament which we know but often forget. The prophet Elijah is taken up into heaven as his disciple Elisha looks on. Elisha asks for a double share (the oldest son's portion) of Elijah's spirit, which Elijah doesn't guarantee but suggests that it may be possible subject to certain conditions. There is a sort of pre-echo here of the story of Jesus' departure.

In the early chapters of Genesis we read of Enoch who was a friend of God. Enoch didn't die, he was – in the words of the King James Version – "translated". God walked with Enoch, we are told; and (as one preacher put it) while Enoch was out for a walk one day with God the evening drew on and God said to Enoch, "Look, it's nearer my place than yours, why don't you come back with me?" Enoch is taken up into heaven. Here is another pre-echo of Jesus' return to the Father's house. And beyond this, there is more.

In the anonymous New Testament letter to the Hebrews, the author says that our High Priest has been tested in all points as we are. So he sympathises with our weakness. Here is the other great lesson we can take from Ascension Day. Jesus takes the fulness of our human experience back into the heart of God, so that it becomes God's first-hand experience.

What this means is that we can never properly say to God, "But you don't understand." Our human predicament is no longer something that God looks on from a distance; it is deep in God's heart. God is not a puppet-master who pulls our strings. In the life of Jesus we see what it is to be human in the image of God, and the sending of the Spirit is the new creation of which St Paul speaks. Our dust and clay become alive in God once more. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation in the making.
Bonne fête!

Pentecost

Gwen Bevington

It was a visiting preacher who did it. My (then) teenage daughter said it was the best sermon she'd ever experienced. (She always preferred actions to words.) I did copy/adapt it and use it once myself in a country church. It's not, however, the kind of sermon that I'd feel comfortable to deliver here. I'll describe it and you'll perhaps see why not.

The speaker explained that he was trained in catering and could make a good cake. He produced a large mixing bowl and some bags of pre-weighed ingredients. He had a wooden spoon to cream the Butter and Sugar (which strangely begin with the same letters as Baptism and Scripture). He beat in the Eggs (Eucharist). And with a large metal spoon he folded in the Flour (Faith). You could add a pinch of Salt (Smellsnbells) or Cinnamon (Charismata) or other flavourings, but the basic mixture is fine. He showed it to us and said, isn't that a lovely Cake (Christian life)?

We had to say, no. It was only raw mixture. Some of us would have had half a spoonful, or scraped the bowl, but essentially it wasn't edible in that form. To be a Cake, it needed cooking: power, a source of heat, a real spark. Something invisible from outside that would act on the ingredients and make them tasty, nourishing and in a way beautiful.

All analogies break down. It's not just that the sermon risks being Messy; it's a start, but it's too simplistic for me to want to preach it again. I miss the Plums (dried fruit?), as Prayer is not optional in the Christian life. Cakes, even with power applied, don't produce their own fruits. Even more importantly: since humans discovered fire, we've mostly been able to manage and control, to some degree, the heating and cooking of food. But the wind blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it and don't know where it's come from or where it's going. You can wait and wait to see a kingfisher and, when that flash of speed and energy darts by, it's sheer gift: uncontrollable, uncatchable, unmanageable.

All breaks down again, because the oven is separate from the Cake, the kingfisher is separate from the bird-watcher, and the wind from the listener. But Pentecost tells us that the Spirit of God is inside as well as outside. A seed to be nurtured for the wonderful fruits? Or the river of living water that flows out from within, to bless and heal? John V Taylor's great Go-Between? We can think of the Spirit as the mighty wind or the gentle breath; as the moderate oven or the blowtorch or forest fire; as refreshing rain or torrential flood. Any which way, it's the Spirit who gives life – and real love, joy, peace. The Spirit is worth waiting for, listening for, begging for. For the Spirit, it's worth staying up all night and dancing in the rain, even if that too is not very parish-of-Abingdon.



Pablo Picasso:
Ronde de la Jeunesse

The Ministry of Lay people

One of our readers thought it would be a good idea to have a series of articles about the roles that Lay people can play in the church. To begin, Tony Richmond has offered us his reflections and, to follow, John Barton writes about the importance of reading the bible in church.

Licensed Lay Ministry (Readers) and Ministry v Discipleship

Tony Richmond

The Church of England has 10,000 Readers (known in these parts as Licensed Lay Ministers or LLMs). Not long ago we had four at St Nicolas but now, as far as I know, we have only one Reader (Gwen Bevington) in the three churches of our parish of Abingdon-on-Thames.

All Christians are called to serve God's mission by making disciples, baptising them and teaching them (the "Great Commission" – Matthew 28.19-20). Every member of the church has her or his special way of obeying this command, be it in church work, helping others, praying or offering hospitality.

The word "ministry" crops up when a person's particular work of "discipleship" becomes recognised by the church, takes place in public and is subject to the church's oversight and accountability. Recognised church ministries include pastoral care, administering the sacraments and teaching. The church's "ministers" have different levels of responsibility, but all relate to these three tasks of mission, and lay or ordained they all have a full and equal ministry, looking to Jesus Christ as the source of all ministry.

The lay office of Reader goes back 150 years. Formally, an LLM may preach and conduct Morning and Evening Prayer (but must say "us" instead of "you" in the prayer for the Absolution of sins, after the General Confession). An LLM may help at Holy Communion (but may not conduct the Eucharistic Prayer, when the bread and wine are consecrated). She or he may take consecrated Communion to the housebound, visit the sick and pray with them, teach in the Junior Church and conduct funerals (but not baptisms or weddings).

Recent years have seen big changes in lay and ordained ministry. Many LLMs operate mainly in the local congregation, but others reach out into the wider community, making contact with the unchurched and those on the fringes. New forms of ordained or licensed ministry also do this. It is not always clear just what is distinctive about the role of Reader in this wider outreach. I saw my own role as LLM as being rooted in the worshipping community, a stop-gap, an encourager, a sort of baffle between secular and sacred, between continuity and change. I feel very blessed to have had this privilege.

In April 2014, as requested by the Team Vicar, I presented a report on "Vision Ministry" to St Nicolas DCC. (*Copies available from tony.richmond@tiscali.co.uk*.)

I asked: What is the difference between authorised ministry and the discipleship of every Christian in service of God's mission? And how important is the quality of the coffee we serve? The replies to a questionnaire reflected the bewilderment reported in the wider church.

Most of us had not addressed the broader subject of ministry seriously. Some saw ministers as only those conducting services. Others thought the treasurer, cleaner, flower arrangers, etc, were also ministers in their own way. There was little recognition of some ministries already offered in the parish, such as preparation for Baptism and Marriage, healing ministry and spiritual development groups such as Face2Face, the Faith Forum and Desiring Life. There was little engagement with developments in wider ministry, such as Messy Church, Saturday football clubs, Street Pastors, youth work, foodbanks, credit unions, etc.

Responses showed that most thought we did well at pastoral ministry, welcome and hospitality, although we confessed slightly bashfully that we cared well for our friends but not well enough for the difficult

ones, strangers, and quiet ones whom we hardly noticed.

“St Paul spoke of the Church being like a body where, working together, each part plays its particular and essential role. If we followed that image, rather than seeing leadership as the preserve of the few, we might see the multi-talented people of God working together for everyone’s good.” (*The Revd Dr Michael Beasley, Director of Mission, Oxford Diocese [now Bishop of Hertford] Stable Door, Diocese of Oxford, January 2014*)

The Church of England Partners in Mission consultation 1981 concluded that: “We are still dominated by the false view that the ministry of the Church is confined to Bishops, Priests and Deacons. The whole pilgrim people of God share in ministry, and clergy and laity must be trained for this shared ministry.” – *“To a Rebellious House?” Report of the Church of England’s Partners in Mission Consultation of 1981, Church House, London 1981*

American priest the Revd Barbara Brown Taylor writes that as a minister of God you, indeed any, baptised person can “practise your ministry just where you are – as a cook or housekeeper, as a carer, a driver, a parent, a friend, a charity supporter, a shopper, a business person, a musician, a schoolgirl or boy. Whatever you do, you do it as God’s person, for God’s sake, in God’s name. You have a ministry.” She blurs the line between ordained ministry and discipleship in service. God’s sacraments will show us holiness “lurking inside a green leaf, a china mug, a sheet of A4 paper, a freshly sawn plank of wood.” And again: “A gardener’s altar may be her garden, an artist’s altar may be his easel, a secretary’s altar may be her computer, a grandfather’s altar may be his lap – places where ministry is offered and God’s grace is received.” (*“The Preaching Life”, Cowley Publications, 1993*)

But there is still the nagging question which hangs over every Christian: “What’s your ministry? What are you doing for the church?” The focus of attention so easily turns from discipleship in worship, prayer, the Bible, the sacraments and witness, to a preoccupation with “ministries”.

Bishop Robert Paterson wrote in 2014: “While churches have ‘ministries’ for welcoming, hospitality, prayer, worship, music, children, youth, healing, and everything else, fewer people out there in society want to belong. Why? Because what’s inside is not what it says on the tin. On the label the church advertises what God and his people offer to the world; on the inside, it’s about keeping the church going! No wonder so many younger people find this unattractive.”

Of discipleship, the bishop wrote: “All are disciples of Christ by baptism . . . on Monday morning, John is in the factory, Jane is in the hospital, Joe is in school, Arun is visiting a client, Maria is opening her shop, Clare is looking for a job, and so on: that’s what the body of Christ looks like for almost all the week. The church is, for most of the time, turned outwards, explosively diverse in her mission, witness and discipleship . . . the equipping of disciples for Christian witness in all the places to which God calls us is more important to God’s mission than strategies for ministry.” (*“It’s just a comma!” by Bishop Robert Paterson, Bishop of Sodor and Man and chairman of the Central Readers Council, The Reader, Spring 2014*)

So, ministry or discipleship? Let’s hear it from the gardeners, the flower arrangers, the treasurers, and those who serve the best coffee as part of their “ministry”.

Reading the Bible in church

John Barton

Rightly or wrongly the Church of England allows only priests to preside at the Eucharist/Holy Communion, but laypeople can take the lead in all other parts of our services. A lot of care is taken over training people to administer the chalice, and to lead the prayers of intercession. Reading from the Bible, however, can be the poor relation. In many churches (not St Helen's) this is treated as a thing anyone can do, and there is no special preparation or training for it. I'd like to suggest that this is a mistake. Reading the 'lessons', as we still call them, requires skill, biblical knowledge, and a real understanding of the passage in question—the mere ability to read audibly is not enough. Lesson-readers have an important ministry in the church, which is often undervalued.

Reading extensive passages from the Bible in church is an important part of our worship. The Church of England nearly lost this in earlier times. In the time of Queen Elizabeth I there was a group of churchmen (later to become the 'Puritans') who would have preferred no Scripture to be read in the service except the text of the sermon, because the 'bare reading' of the Bible could not nourish the congregation. One still hears this said today. Of course it is true that we often need more information than we sometimes have in order to understand the readings fully—sometimes a brief introduction would be useful. But those who defended the use of long Scripture readings even without a sermon on them put forward two reasons.

One was that Scripture, read carefully and well, can be itself a kind of preaching. What we call the 'ministry of the Word' doesn't consist only of the sermon, but includes the Bible readings, which put us in touch with our Christian past and keep our faith rooted in what has been believed in the Church. Read well, a biblical 'lesson' can be informative and inspiring. This does not necessarily mean that the reader must be incredibly learned: some of the best readings I have heard have been by children. But it requires close attention to the meaning and drift, which with some passages from St Paul, for example, can demand real engagement with the text. Our readers are in a sense preaching, not just mouthing the words.

The other point was made by the great Richard Hooker (1554-1600) in his defence of the Book of Common Prayer. Puritans allowed Scripture to be read before the service began, rather as some churches now have worship songs, but they were convinced it should not be read in the service itself except in subordination to the sermon. Hooker argued instead that 'with us the reading of Scripture in the church is a part of our church liturgy, *a special portion of the service which we do to God*, and not an exercise to spend the time, when one do wait for another's coming.' Reading the lessons is actually a form of worship, giving back to God the words he has given us in the Bible. It deserves to have a high profile among lay ministries in the church.

John Barton is a Senior Research Fellow of Campion Hall, Oxford, and an Honorary Assistant priest in the parish.

On Richard Hooker, see Charles Miller's *Richard Hooker and the Vision of God: Exploring the Origins of 'Anglicanism'*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2013.



Memories of HRH Prince Philip

Peter Penfold

Seven o'clock on an already hot March morning, not a cloud in the sky, the Royal Yacht Britannia sailed through the glistening waters of the Sir Francis Drake channel and anchored off the island of Tortola. On board His Royal Highness, the Prince Philip, paying an official visit to the British Virgin Islands, where I was currently serving as Her Majesty's Governor.

HRH had previously visited the BVI in 1966 and 1977 when he had accompanied Her Majesty The Queen but this time, in 1993, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was on his own as part of a tour of all five of the British overseas territories in the Caribbean – Montserrat, Anguilla, BVI, Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Kitted out in my full gubernatorial uniform, starched white with gleaming gold buttons and epaulettes, boots and sword and pith helmet bedecked with swan's feathers, I went out in our one police launch to greet the Duke on board the Royal Yacht. We then embarked the Britannia's royal barge and made our way to the Road Town jetty where I introduced HRH to the Chief Minister of the BVI, the Hon Hamilton Lavety Stoutt, who then proceeded to formally welcome Prince Philip to the territory and introduce the assembled members of his government waiting on the quayside. At the time Lavety was the longest serving politician in the Caribbean and famed for often being irascible and cantankerous but today, looking splendid in his Saville Row suit, he was on his best behaviour.



The British Virgin Islands comprise 36 tiny islands, half of them inhabited, with a total population of around 17,000. (I constantly had to remind myself that I was governing a country with fewer people than my hometown of Abingdon!). Boasting some of the finest beaches in the world, thanks to its up-market tourism and off-shore finance sector (most of the world's top companies are registered there), the BVI is the third richest country, on a per capita basis, in the Caribbean.

We had devised a very full programme of activities for HRH who was accompanied by just one Private Secretary and one Protection Officer. This included addressing the Legislative Assembly, opening the newly built Government Administration complex, unveiling a plaque at the BVI Community College, plus a tour around the island meeting and greeting many of the inhabitants.

At Government House we held an MBE presentation ceremony to two of the BVI's stalwart ladies for serving the community in their respective fields. This was followed by a reception in the gardens before my wife and I hosted a lunch for a smaller select group. Given that the BVI has some of the finest hotels in the world, Celia arranged for three of them to help prepare each course of the lunch, insisting that everything must be locally caught or grown, a fact much appreciated by HRH.

An unexpected heavy downpour meant that we had to move the reception in from the gardens at the last moment. I had told Ronnie, the 'butler' at Government House, that he must ensure that as soon as the reception started he should bring a drink for the Duke. As I went around introducing HRH to the different

groups of assembled guests, I noticed that they all had drinks but not HRH. I caught Ronnie's eye. 'Where's the Duke's drink?' Reply: 'I gave it to him'. Puzzled as Ronnie points to HRH's Private Secretary standing in a corner, obviously bemused why he was given a drink before anyone else. (Lesson - don't assume everyone knows what the Duke of Edinburgh looks like!) But this did not phase Prince Philip, nor the constant demand for photos with each and every guest. He remained relaxed, unflappable and good humoured throughout.

Relaxing after the lunch he related with great amusement an incident that had occurred the previous day on Anguilla. Anguilla is a very small island. Finding enough to do for a whole day stretched the resources of my colleague there. Whilst driving around the island, and running ahead of time, the Prince spotted a sign on a building saying 'police post'. He stopped the convoy and strode into the shack much to the surprise of the one policeman on duty. Spotting a door behind the officer's desk, he opened it to see staring at him inside this broom cupboard a live pig. 'What's this?' he asked the policeman. Standing to attention and saluting, 'Evidence Sir, evidence', came the reply. 'Well don't eat it. Carry on. Goodbye', and the Duke left to the great amusement of all around.



Throughout his time with us he continued to display his famous ability to talk to everybody at every level and put them at their ease. Maybe sometimes people could not appreciate his style of humour. In the afternoon we took him on our police launch to the neighbouring island of Virgin Gorda, noted for its marine protection areas. He also visited the local school where in the domestic science class the young girls were demonstrating their ironing skills. Holding up a newly ironed tea towel he noticed a number of stains on it. He asked the tongue-tied teacher, 'Gosh what soap powder do you use here?'

In the evening we were invited to dinner on board the Royal Yacht, which was followed by a reception for over a hundred guests. One of the guests was Foxy, our noted Rasta calypsonian. Foxy ran a beach bar on one of our other islands, Jost van Dyke, which famously Time Magazine once said was one of only three places in the world to see in the New Year, along with Times Square New York and Trafalgar Square London. Foxy was well known for never wearing shoes even when going to the US to visit his friend Senator Kennedy. Lavity, the Chief Minister, did not want to include Foxy on the guest list for fear of embarrassment. But I insisted and Foxy duly appeared, shoeless, on the Royal Yacht much to the amusement of Prince Philip who engaged him in an animated discussion on the merits of reggae music.

The evening concluded with the Royal Marines on board 'beating the retreat'. A perfect end to a perfect day. We disembarked shortly before midnight and the Britannia sailed away into the darkness. Celia and I were exhausted and yet Prince Philip, who even then was in his 70s, would be doing it all again the next day in the Cayman Islands. What a remarkable man! In my personal tribute posted on the royal website I referred to his indefatigable energy and good humour. I said that he was the inspiration and shining example to all who serve Her Majesty, the Country and the Commonwealth. I cherish these memories of Prince Philip's visit to the BVI. (In later years I would join him as a fellow Paramount Chief of Sierra Leone). I mourn his loss, but give thanks for his extraordinary life. RIP

His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh *'Man of Service, Man of Faith'*

Fr Paul Smith

It is a coincidence that the publication of this edition of 'A Candle in the Window' should fall exactly one month following the death of Prince Philip. This article is my personal tribute to him. While it underlines some of the things others may have said, my aim is to draw attention to what I have learned about Prince Philip since his death, not least about his faith.

Prince Philip's long marriage to the Queen was marked by exemplary service to Crown, Country and Commonwealth. During her long reign, Prince Philip's first priority was his support of the Queen. We know that by the time he retired from public life in 2017, he had carried out 22,000 'solo' engagements. Additionally, he accompanied and supported the Queen and other members of the royal family at countless engagements over seven decades. It is not surprising then that Her Majesty should have referred to her husband as 'my strength and stay'.

But, Prince Philip was often misunderstood. This was largely through the unhelpful work of the press and the media, with whom, it has to be said, he didn't have the best of relationships! It seems that more coverage was given to his inclination towards making 'gaffes', than his many qualities which far outweighed such moments.

The biographer Ingrid Seward, in her recently published book, *Prince Philip Revealed: A Man of His Century*, has given us a wonderful insight into His Royal Highness' wide-ranging interests, personality, and life. While he was always 'two steps behind' the Queen, his own interests in conservation, philosophy, religion, sport, art and design, contributed to the remarkable man he was and what he offered in service to so many.

Prince Philip was a man of great intelligence. He enjoyed debate and lively discussion and loved a good argument, although he confessed to never enjoying losing one! This certainly featured in his interest as a religious thinker. Unlike the Queen, little has been said of Prince Philip's faith. Seward, however, tells us: 'Philip described himself as an ordinary Christian, going to church on Sundays.' (p240). It seems that he did not enjoy church services in the same way the Queen does, and he was clear about his view on sermons! He had little patience with them and dictated that visiting preacher should not preach more than twelve minutes. Prince Philip struggled with sermons because, as he sat and listened, there was no opportunity to argue about them!

Seward underlines the Prince's relationship with sermons by telling us that 'he is reported to have said, "The mind cannot absorb what the backside cannot endure". (p240).' She goes on in the same passage to recount an incident in 1957 when Prince Philip gave a speech to the annual dinner of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department and said this: "The tables are turned with a vengeance this evening. I cannot think how many hours I have spent at your mercy. Now it is my turn although I would admit that the sitting is not quite the same".

Despite his view on preaching Prince Philip often had good relationships with the Deans of Windsor and not least the current incumbent David Conner who officiated at the Prince's funeral and with whom he was good friends. Seward tells us Prince Philip had a particular rapport with Michael Mann, who was appointed dean in 1976. As a preacher, Mann was on very good terms with Prince Philip because Mann's 'style of preaching (meant) he limited his sermons to seven minutes in the belief that if he could not get his point over in that time he never would.' (Seward, p242). But their relationship went further when, in 1982, they collaborated in publishing together a book 'A Question of Balance'. This was a selection of lectures which Prince Philip gave to general audiences on what might be called his philosophical views. This was just one of his publications; a slightly later one, 'A Windsor Correspondence' (1984), led him to be described by Dean Launcelot Fleming as having the 'frank and

able response of a sympathetic theologian’.

Whatever Prince Philip meant by being ‘an ordinary Christian’, it could be argued was seen in his dedicated service. Speculation has been made of what his retirement in Sandringham was like. Some assumed that he went into a decline, not least mentally. I don’t think that can be true. Since he died we have learned that the last years of his life gave him the time to do the things he enjoyed. He had time to read more, to enjoy the outdoors – and not least his carriage driving – it was only in the last months of his life, when he became very ill, that these pleasures would have been curtailed. Lockdown and self-isolating in Windsor together with the Queen, could be looked upon as a gift to them both. With the exception of his period of hospitalization in London a few weeks before he died, self-isolating was the longest time they had spent together uninterrupted throughout their seventy-three year marriage, freed from relentless engagements. And, they had that time together until he died peacefully in the home which meant so much to them both.

I think we glimpsed the depth of this ‘ordinary Christian’s’ life at the funeral service he wanted and which he asked to be ‘without fuss’. Prince Philip had paid particular attention to the music and content of his funeral service. It was a more private and quieter occasion than it would have been if we were not in a pandemic. It was the celebration of ‘a life begun and ended well’ (Archbishop Justin Welby). It was a liturgy that shone with the glory of God, pointing not to ‘self’, but to faith and to the Creator not least in its references to the sea, with its one hymn, *Eternal Father, strong to save*, and in that unusual, but beautiful choice of first reading from Ecclesiasticus. It pointed to the Redeemer also in the second reading from John’s gospel where Jesus says: ‘I am the resurrection and the life’. It was both poignant and moving for its combined simplicity and dignity. Furthermore, it meant the world shared in the grief of a family who happened to be the institution of the monarchy. The fact that the Queen had to sit alone, separated from members of her family, bearing her sorrow with typical courage, heard again the enduring melody of her reign, that even at her beloved husband’s funeral, she was the servant of her subjects. Her Majesty and her family were doing what so many other families had done over the past year when saying farewell to a loved one.

His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, man of service, man of faith, leaves us a legacy for which we must always be grateful and from which we can learn so much.

‘Give rest, O Christ, to thy servant, Philip, with thy Saints: where sorrow and pain are no more; Thou only art immortal, the Creator and Maker of man:All we go down to the dust; and, weeping, o’er the grave, we make our song: Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.’

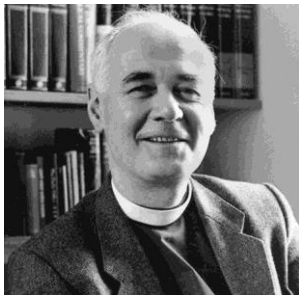
Words from the Anthem: *Russian Kontakion of the Departed*, sung at Prince Philip’s Funeral, Saturday 17 April, 2021



The recent loss of two great theologians – John Polkinghorne and Hans Küng.

Roderick Smith

You may remember that in our Faith Forum series a couple of years ago several people gave talks on Christian thinkers who had influenced their own faith and thought. There were two general remarks made at the time. One was that all six subjects were male. That gender imbalance was put right with our ‘Women, Theology and the Church’ series last autumn. The other point was that all except one of the subjects was dead. The only living thinker was the one I spoke on – the mathematical physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne. Sadly, that exception is no longer the case – John Polkinghorne died aged 90 in March this year.



Obituaries and articles of appreciation for John Polkinghorne were nearly all in the academic and church media. I think that only *The Times* amongst the secular newspapers marked his death. In the [Church Times obituary](#) the Revd Prof. David Wilkinson says, “it is difficult to underestimate the part Polkinghorne played in the world-wide interest in the engagement of science and theology.” Wilkinson goes on to review the many aspects of Polkinghorne’s writing which brought clarity and new avenues of thought: his advocacy of ‘critical realism’ in theology and science, the human aspects of the pursuit of science, the value of ‘bottom-up’ modes of thinking in science

and theology, and the view that indeterminacy and unpredictability both at the quantum and large-scale levels of reality meant that many processes in creation were genuinely open to both human and divine agency and action. This short article can’t hope to cover the extent and depth of what Polkinghorne wrote and spoke about – my 40-minute Faith Forum talk (handout and slides still available from me) struggled to include everything.

During my talk I said in reply to a question that John Polkinghorne did not convert me to Christianity. His writings were, however, highly influential during the development and maturing of my faith. If there was any one book which converted me, or at least made me take Christianity seriously, it was ‘On Being a Christian’ by Hans Küng. This book was recommended to me, just after its English translation was published, by a friend with whom I had been discussing Christianity when I had become dissatisfied with my teenage atheism. Reading Küng was a revelation – never before had I been presented with an account of the Christian faith which was so comprehensive in scope and rationally argued. Sadly, Hans Küng died in April just four weeks after John Polkinghorne. Obituaries for Küng were far more numerous, not least because his radicalism led to his crossing swords frequently with the institutional hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church. Küng was a prodigious author on a wide range of theological topics and it would be impossible to review his work here. The [obituary in the Church Times](#) is a good place to start if you are interested.



Polkinghorne and Küng were very different characters and the near coincidence of their respective deaths has made me reflect on why they both had such a large impact on me. Firstly, they both wrote with academic rigour but in a fluent style which engaged the intelligent layperson. But perhaps the deeper reason was how they argued and thought. Polkinghorne did his thinking from the ‘bottom-up’, preferring to begin with specific scientific insights into the world rather than philosophical frameworks inherited from the Greeks or Church Fathers. Similarly Küng was famous for expounding his Christology ‘from below’, beginning with the Jesus of the gospels “who meets us today, within the horizon of the world”.

Two great theologians. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

John Stott Centenary

Bishop Henry Scriven

On Tuesday 27th April John Stott would have been 100. He was born within months of the Duke of Edinburgh. He probably would not have approved of any celebrations but a number of the organisations he founded decided we would get together and plan a series of events.

The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion, of which I am General Secretary and which Uncle John (as he was known to many around the world) started in 1961, organised a service at All Souls Church where John served for over 50 years. We tried to cover as much of the world as possible and as many organisations connected to John as possible. So, we had speakers, mostly on video, from Australia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Ghana, UK, Costa Rica, Mexico and the USA (!). Some were short 3-minute reflections and three presentations were longer.

There were many extraordinary things about Uncle John. He was an incredibly disciplined and hard worker. He rose early for prayer, wrote over 50 books, spoke at countless university missions and mission conferences, started the Lausanne movement with Billy Graham, and yet had time for people across racial, cultural and age barriers.

One story, told by his daughter, was of a Mexican teenager who read Basic Christianity in Spanish and wrote to the author. John's dedicated secretary replied that Uncle John was coming to speak in Mexico City and, though he didn't speak Spanish, he would love to meet this young man. So, without the permission of his parents, Saul hitched rides to the city which took 9 hours. He was so tired that he fell asleep in the talk and did not get to talk to Uncle John because of the crowds. Dispirited he sat outside the meeting hall and waited for the speaker to come out. A car stopped by him and Uncle John and the couple with whom he was staying invited him to spend the night. In the morning he found his very well-worn shoes cleaned and shining outside his room. Uncle John had cleaned them. That started a lifelong friendship which ended when Saul died quite young but his daughter, Eidi, was present at the bedside of Uncle John when he died in 2011.

In our EFAC service we had speakers who expounded Scripture, who talked about mutual belonging and respect despite vastly different backgrounds and who advocated for the care of creation, for grappling with contemporary issues of justice and peace, who talked about the importance of truth in an age of social media and fake news.

The legacy and influence of this one man who lived a simple lifestyle in a tiny flat and gave away all the royalties from his books was truly lasting and far reaching.



A service of celebration for the life and legacy of

JOHN STOTT
PASTOR, LEADER
AND FRIEND

The link to the YouTube video of the whole service is [here](#).



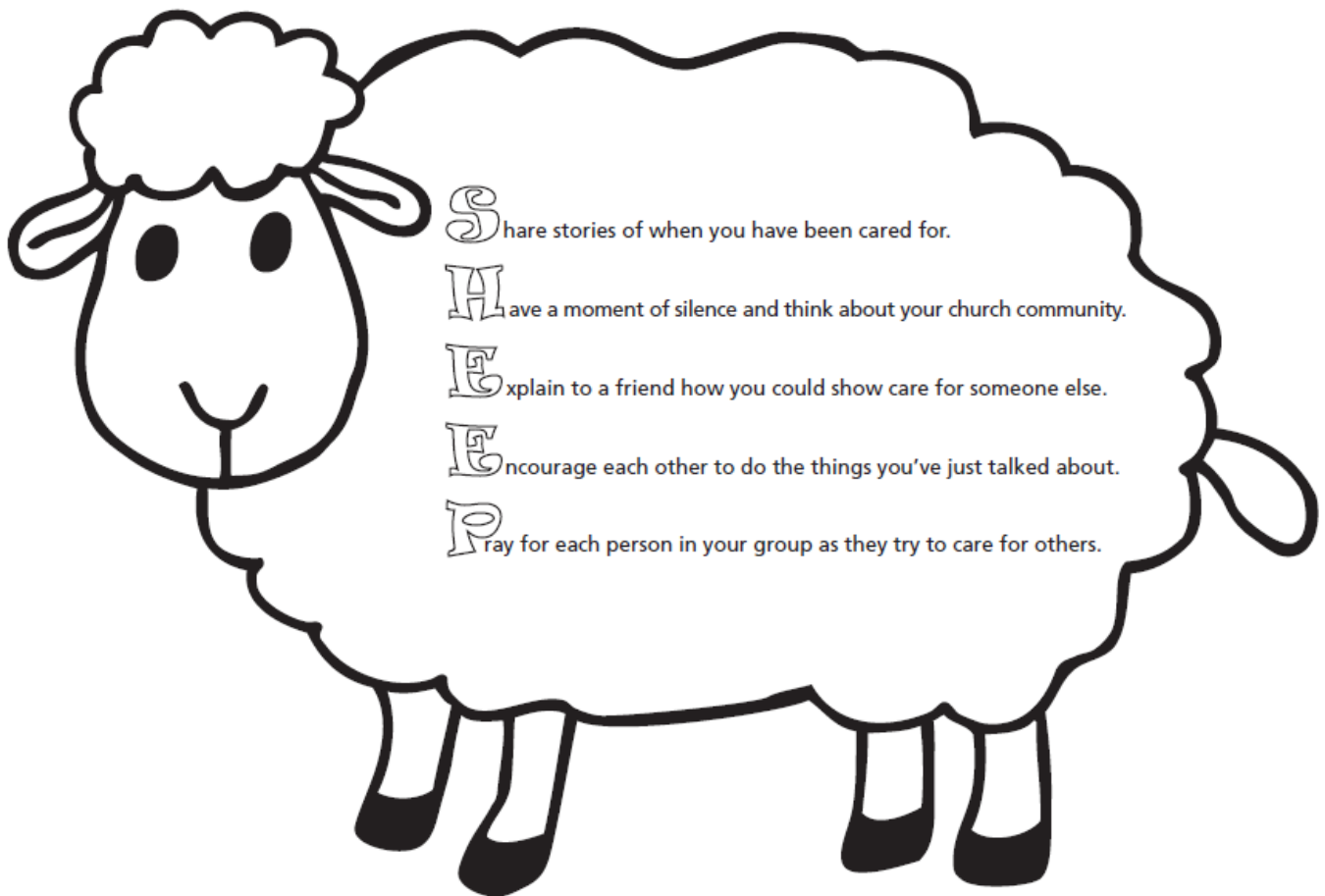
Junior Church

Sue Pemberton on behalf of the Junior Church leadership team.

For the second year Junior Church were unable to have the customary Easter egg hunt on Easter Sunday. However, all children and young people received an Easter card from the Rector and a small bag of Easter eggs. It was good to see some families in Church on Easter Sunday, but for those at home the story of Easter Sunday was on our Facebook page with some suggested activities.

For the next two Sundays we explored Resurrection stories – ‘Doubting Thomas’ and the story where Jesus joined the disciples and ate fish with them. Themes included how we come to believe and how the disciples began to understand what Jesus had taught them.

On the last Sunday in April, while St Helen’s was celebrating St Mark’s day, Junior Church focussed on Good Shepherd Sunday – we love sheep! The theme was about caring for each other and looking after each other. We used the ‘Prayer sheep’ provided by Roots to think about caring and to pray for each other.



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Hopefully it won't be too much longer before we can meet in person again.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

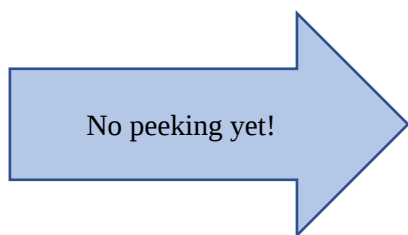
Kryptonite

Answers to the quiz are all names of common garden plants. Some of the clues are factual, some are cryptic, some are just plain silly.

1. Nonsense
2. Carton or fight
3. Ointmentia
4. Drinking vessel for dairy product
5. Reynard's paw-warmer
6. Sounds like he needs darkness to tell the truth
7. A prissy bloom
8. We hear this stylish big cat is unwelcome on lawns
9. Whoopsie _ _ _ _ _
10. The wisest plant in the garden
11. Mrs Sharples follows a part of speech
12. I hear this also thickens sauces
13. These belong in a Kent Cathedral's towers
14. Popeye's baby
15. Tiny Tim asks us to tiptoe through these
16. Sounds as if a nappy brand grows in the lawn
17. Azure clanger
18. Famous Bucket keeps up appearances
19. Runs Fawlty Towers
20. O sheep follows Homer's missus
21. Artemis is cut short – so
22. *Twelfth Night* heroine
23. Son of Grossmiths's Pooter
24. One of Pop Larkin's twin daughters (Z)
25. One of Pop Larkin's twin daughters (P)
26. Big Ben sounds this out across London
27. Sounds like a lot of birds
28. The orderly universe
29. Nearly a Pennsylvanian city (we replace the last two letters)
30. Carroll's heroine heard with addition



Answers to garden quiz:



21. Dianthus
22. Viola
23. Lupin
24. Zinnia
25. Petunia
26. Thyme
27. Phlox
28. Cosmos
29. Philadelphus
30. Alyssum

11. Verbena
12. Cornflower
13. Canterbury Bells
14. Sweet Pea
15. Tulips
16. Pampas Grass
17. Bluebell
18. Hyacinth
19. Basil
20. Marjoram

1. Rhubarb
2. Box
3. Salvia
4. Buttercup
5. Foxglove
6. Dahlia
7. Primrose
8. Dandelion
9. Daisy
10. Sage

Are you looking to support children and young people and learn new skills?



Here at TrinityLearning we are planning to restart regular volunteering projects in Abingdon schools. Our **Thinking Books project** involves mentoring young children through shared reading and discussion of carefully chosen books. This project helps children to develop empathy by reflecting on their own and other people's feelings. Our **Kingfisher Singing Group** visit Kingfisher School one morning a week in term-time to sing simple songs and nursery rhymes.

We hope to be able to restart both projects from September 2021, with training in the summer term to prepare volunteers.

How can I get involved?

Please pray for TrinityLearning, that we might find the right people to support children through these projects. If you are interested in helping out with either of these rewarding projects you need to be over 18, willing to volunteer regularly - usually on a weekly basis in term time, preferably have some experience of working with children and be willing to undertake a DBS.

For more information or an informal chat, please contact Nicola at nic.trinitylearning@gmail.com

Looking to the Future

Eluned Hallas

Over 50 parishioners were able to join our Annual Parochial Church meeting this year (held on Zoom as are most things these days). We welcomed two new (or not so new) Churchwardens – Louise Heffernan (St M) and Eluned Hallas (St N) and gave grateful thanks to our retiring wardens Peter Squire (St M) and Paul Rast-Lindsell and Andrew Coker (St N). Welcome, too, to Susan Read (St H) and Gwyneth Lewis (St N) as elected members of the PCC, and welcome back to John Clare (St M). We welcome Susan as Parish Treasurer. She will coordinate the work of the church treasurers and provide some central services.

In his 'Oral Report' the Rector looked back over the past year, and forward to the year to come and concluded: 'What we have discovered by way of strengths and weakness since the pandemic began we must now, I propose, bring to bear in creative ways for the sake of one another, for our parish and for the wider community in which we're set and to which we are sent as sharers in Christ's continuing apostolate to all the nations.'

Members of the PCC, and the congregations, look forward in sharing in this task.

The full text of the Rector's Report is available on the Parish websites

Easter Garden

Sue Pemberton

In the last issue, I wrote about the Easter Garden project in the West Porch of St Helen's Church which, at the time of writing, was about to begin. Here's an update on how it went.

The garden was open for part each day between Palm Sunday and the Wednesday after Easter – thanks are due to everyone who stewarded, sometimes in rather chilly weather. We gave out almost three hundred bags containing palm crosses, a leaflet about the Easter story, a cross trail round Abingdon and some mini Easter eggs. On Easter Sunday the garden was transformed - the stone was rolled away from the tomb, revealing the grave clothes inside and a light glowed from the tomb. We added a colourful poster to the table proclaiming 'He is Risen'. After the porch display closed, we moved the garden inside the church for the Sunday after Easter.

As at Christmas, this initiative was very well received by people passing by. Many conversations took place, some people spent time reading the Easter story display and enjoying the garden, and even those who didn't wish to linger seemed to appreciate a friendly greeting. Although this wasn't a fund-raising exercise, we had a collecting box available for Embrace the Middle East <https://embraceme.org/> and almost £100 was raised.

This Easter project, following the successful Christmas venture, confirmed that the West Porch is a good space for connecting with people, and that people really appreciate the Church reaching out to them. Although both these projects were a response to Covid restrictions, it seems a good idea to continue this in 'normal' time. The organising group met recently to reflect on the Easter experience and to think about what comes next – Harvest/Creationtide?



Fritillaries

Rob Rutherford



A fortnight ago Rosalind and I set out by bike for Iffley Meadows. This sweep of floodplain meadows on the banks of the Thames sits just a stone's-throw from the centre of Oxford, but is a peaceful haven for wildlife. Each year Iffley Meadows plays host to an incredible wildlife spectacle, as thousands of Oxfordshire's iconic flower, the snake's head fritillary, cloak the meadows in purple.

Useful Weblinks:

Services: for the latest news see the church websites:

<https://www.abingdon-st-helens.org.uk/>

<https://www.stmichaels-abingdon.org.uk/>

<https://www.stnicolasabingdon.org.uk/>

Page for Church of England links: services, daily readings etc

<https://www.churchofengland.org/>

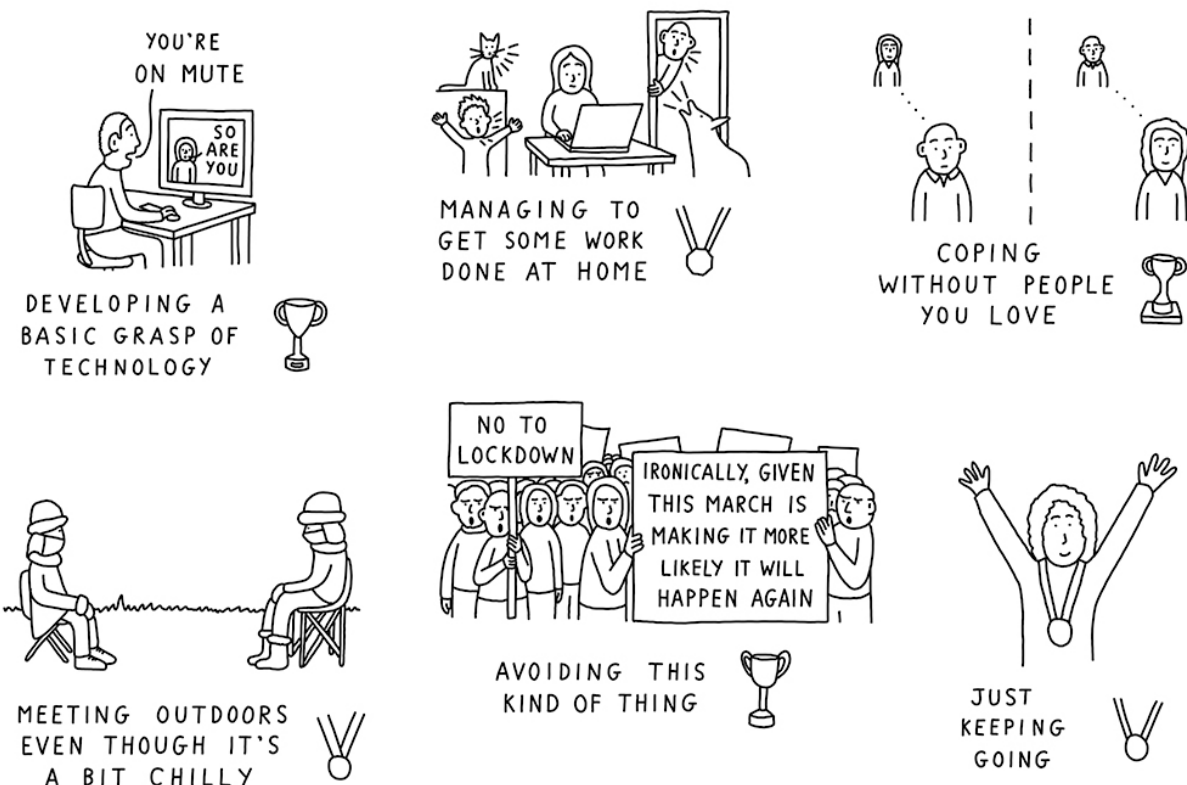
FOOD BANK. The Abingdon Foodbank is still very busy and anxious to keep up the support. **Northcourt Road (Christ Church) is open to receive donations on Tuesday and Friday mornings between 9.30 am and 1.00 pm.** Their main long-term needs are:

Long life milk (not soya), sugar, fruit squash, tinned meat and vegetables. They also give out a lot of washing up liquid, bleach and toilet rolls. You can also make donations by sending a cheque made out to *North Abingdon PCC Christ Church*, clearly marked 'for Food Bank'. You can also donate via the Foodbank website <https://abingdon.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money/> or the Parish office have details if you want to donate via online banking.

And finally, from Dave Walker of Cartoon Church:

MEDALS AND TROPHIES

THAT YOU'VE DESERVED THIS YEAR



Thank you to all contributors and to you, the readers.

The next issue will be published on June 6th. Please get thinking about 'Exploration' and email ideas and contributions to Candle@abingdonparish.org.uk

We would also welcome responses to any articles published here or in previous issues.