

Weekly Newsletter (57)

by and for the Christ Church and Pagham URC families

4th April 2021

Musings from the Manse

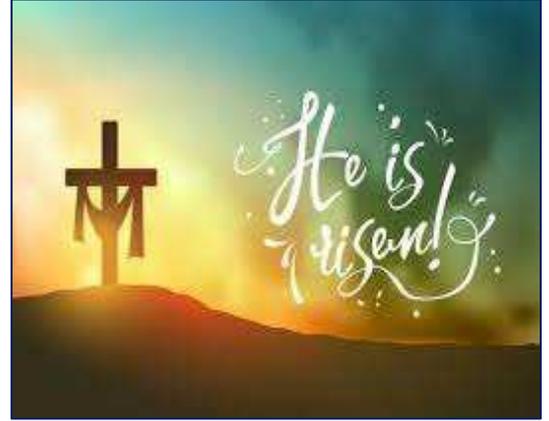
Dear Friends,

Today is Easter Day – the dark days of Holy Week are behind us – but how did you spend your week? In the multitude of resources that we can choose from to reflect on the final days of Jesus' earthly life, it's easy to be overwhelmed. Still, I hope that, whatever you chose to follow, read, watch or contemplate upon, you will enjoy today as a day of celebration!

German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, is said to have expressed the span from Good Friday to Easter Day in a single sentence: *'God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him.'*

Whether that day is today or at some point in the future, laughter is always good therapy – so make your Easter Day a day to smile, laugh, and celebrate that Jesus is alive!

A short time ago I came across a contemporary reflection for Easter Sunday, by Sheila Walker, which made me smile – so I thought I would share it with you.....It's called 'Sunflowers'...



'Last year our lodger took a handful of birdseed and lit the town with sunflowers. Put away your pale primroses, snowdrops and shrinking violets: let Easter be for ever sunflowers! Just when you think they can't possibly grow any more – hey, three days - and they've shot up another few feet, heading for heaven, and nothing will stop them. Just when you think that great dinner plate of a flower couldn't possibly be any bigger or yellower, or shout any louder – hey, three days - and it's broken all bounds.

Glorious, impossible plant! You must have been planned by God, especially for Easter. Shame we don't celebrate Easter in sunflower season or sunflower style; we've a lot to learn about celebration, about escaping from pagan feasts and teaching the world a thing or two about raising the roof.

Can you begin to imagine how heaven erupted that first Easter day? And, as far as I know, not a football scarf in sight ... but music to make you laugh and weep and dance for joy, for a people that hung in the balance has been reprieved. The dark night of the soul of the world has ended: believe me, the world need never, ever be the same again.

And there they dance, the sunflowers, cheering God and man with a burst of 'hallelujahs:' an object lesson in celebration. How can three metres of wild growth and extravagant colour and texture be squeezed into that tiny, pale, dry seed? Wondering, I place one on my tongue and taste the amazing power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Maybe we should concede defeat in the battle for Christmas and resurrect Easter. Christmas day may be when the seed was delivered but, unless that grain of wheat (that Son or sunflower) fell into the ground and died only to break through and soar up, and up into radiant new life – why, Jesus would be only a teacher like any other, a good man but no more and our faith would be vain.

A world held to ransom; at Christmas the agent is sent in, an unlikely choice and, therefore, largely ignored. But at Easter the whole operation is blown sky-high: his hostages rescued, death meets his master; alone, among all the great faiths, we worship a living Lord.

Glorious, impossible plan! You must have been planted by God especially to make us an Easter people.

Just when we think we can't possibly take any more, when we face death in one of his many disguises – death by drudgery, death by disappointment, death by depression, death by despair, death of my marriage, death of my health, death of my business, death of my dreams – hey, three days - and the power that raised Christ from the dead has seeded itself in the soil of my soul; can it really grow in blazing defiance of the world's sorrow, brimming with joyful, crazy confidence that the night is practically ended; tomorrow will dawn with a new sun's light?

This year I was to follow my lodger's lead, take my handful of birdseed, taste the power that raised Christ from the dead and see my life and the life of my town lit with sunflowers. Celebrate Easter every day because, every day, the sun rises.

My prayer today is that you will smile, laugh and celebrate, so that - not only when the sunflowers appear - you will remember the day that Christ defeated death, the Son rose, and the first laugh and the last laugh were God's!

Yours in Christ, Helen <><

Word for today John 20: 1-18 or Mark 16: 1-8

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So, she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple - the one whom Jesus loved - and said to them, *'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'* (John 20: 1,2)

Meditation of Mary Magdalene

We thought he'd gone for ever - that he'd been taken from us never to return. We'd seen Jesus breathe his last – watched as they hauled him from the cross and laid him in the tomb.

He was dead – no doubt about it – and we were all devastated, overwhelmed by a tide of despair, like ships at sea without an anchor.

What would have become of us, I wonder? Perhaps we'd have drifted back to our old way of life, carried on as best we could; but I'm not sure we'd have managed it, for we were broken, empty, the void too big to fill.

Thankfully, it didn't come to that for, when we reached the tomb, we didn't find a lifeless corpse, but the stone rolled away – the grave clothes lying there, but no body!

He was risen, alive!

We thought he'd gone, and so he **had**, but not as we imagined. He'd gone **ahead** of us - a light for our path and lamp to our feet. He'd faced the darkness of death and opened the way to life.

Seen or unseen, we know now that he's always there, ahead of us still, leading us safely forward, in this world and the next, to our journey's end.

Prayer

Living God,

we praise you that the gospel speaks. not just of what you've **done**,
but, also, of what you're **doing**,
not simply of the resurrection of Jesus long ago,
but, equally, and all the more so, of his risen life now
and the new life he offers to us in turn.

Thank you for the way, through him,
you are able to transform every moment,
bringing joy out of sorrow and hope out of despair.

And thank you for the knowledge that,
whatever life may bring,
you are with us, through your Spirit,
to lead us forward from darkness into light.

Teach us to put our trust wholly in you,
confident that, come wind or rain, sunshine or shadow,
you will be there by our side,
now and always.

Amen.

adapted from 'A most amazing Man' by Nick Fawcett

Gathered for Prayer....

Gathered for Prayer continues to meet at **9 am and 7 pm each Wednesday**. All are welcome!

Here's the link....

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5742722693?pwd=R3BEQ3pPV0ZJNndRWVKeWdvdand6QT09>

Meeting ID: 574 272 2693 Passcode: xsX5UM

Other news....

I have been asked to post this in our Newsletter – can you help? (Helen <><)

Do you have any Wrens in your family?

*I'm not referring to the tiny, feathered variety in the garden
but the indomitable ladies who joined the Women's Royal Naval Service -
specifically, ladies who **joined up between 1946 and 1981 and did their basic training at
Training Depot Burghfield/HMTE Burghfield/HMTE Dauntless/HMS Dauntless/Reading.***

***Dauntless Divisional Photos** is a nationwide project,
in collaboration with the Association of Wrens,
to gather divisional photographs and memories from those training days
but also to reunite ladies with old friends, share anecdotes and relive exciting moments.*

*So, if you, your mum, granny, aunt, godmother - or even next-door neighbour -
donned a blue suit and aimed for a life on the ocean wave,*

please get in touch on either

ddpwrens@gmail.com or 07765 435295 0771 990 9844.



The poster features a central circular portrait of Helen Howe, a woman with short grey hair, smiling. The background is dark blue with a wavy pattern at the bottom. Text is in white and orange. The Christian Aid logo is in the top left. The main title 'COMMITMENT FOR LIFE PRESENTS' is in large orange letters. The date and time '21ST APRIL 11AM' are in white. The name 'MEET Helen Howe' is in large orange letters. Her title 'National Church Liaison Officer at Christian Aid' is in white. A call to action 'Come and learn more about me, Christian Aid Week and life in Kenya' is in orange. Contact information for Suzanne is in white at the bottom right.

christian aid

COMMITMENT FOR LIFE PRESENTS

21ST APRIL 11AM

MEET Helen Howe

National Church Liaison Officer
at Christian Aid

*Come and learn more about me, Christian Aid Week
and life in Kenya*

Contact Suzanne for ZOOM link
suzanne.pearson@urc.org.uk

A Joyful Song from Ed Martin

(the music and audio file are attached with the newsletter)

“I picked up on a thread that ran through today's service (21 March)—thankfulness for the redemption that God achieved for us at the immense cost of the offering and death of our Lord. It brought to mind a short chorus I wrote on the same theme back in 2012. Here are the words:

I am redeemed. I am redeemed.
I've been set free from my slavery to sin.
I am redeemed. I am redeemed --
Purchased by the blood of the Lamb.
My sins are gone. They're all forgiv'n.
I'm justified in God's sight from now on.
I am redeemed. I am redeemed --
Purchased by the blood of the Lamb.

I used to live my life for myself.
I had no time for the Lord.
Now that I've given my life to him
My fellowship with God's been restored.
The Spirit helps me to work for Jesus
As I press on to my heav'nly reward.

It draws on these scriptures: Psalm 13:5; Romans 6:18; 1 Peter 1:18,19; Ephesians 1:7,8; Romans 5:1,2; Philippians 3:12-14.”