

Dear friends,

Probably the best thing that happened to me during the lockdown was that I used it, together with Louise of course, to lose two and a half stones in weight. Part of the “new normal” for us was walking much further than we had ever done before and it is very noticeable just how better you feel in your mind when your body is healthier and fitter. Yoga is also now a fixture in our lives and while it is a constant struggle to keep the pounds off nowadays ( a few pounds have been gained recently) my experience is that a healthy body aids a healthy mind which in turn helps maintain a healthy spirit – at least in my case.

**The Sun** was shining on Sunday on a beautiful crisp day so after the morning service we went to Newton Poppleford for a change and walked from there through Harpford to the Bowd Inn. The woods there are lovely, but we arrived at the Bowd to find that it was “closed until further notice”. Good news for our waistlines but a bit of a worry – I hope that is only temporary!

SALVATION ARMY CONCERT AT ST PETER'S ON Saturday 25th March at 6.30pm. More details to follow.

## **Sunday 12th February – 2 before Lent.**

I will be presiding at both morning services at St. Peter's on Sunday and at our choral evensong service at 6pm. Our marvellous choir are going to be joined this evening by the choir from Woodbury church so a massive choir this evening of perhaps potentially up to 35 people. This is also the second outing for our “funfaith” children's church initiative at the 10am service so a busy day. Archdeacon Trevor Jones will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11.00 respectively.

**Genesis 1.1 – 2:3.** The whole sweep of creation is covered in our opening reading this morning. This is not a scientific textbook – the important point is that EVERYTHING has its source in God so the world is an interconnected web of relationships and everything has a common source and is connected to God. EVERYTHING is good except humanity which is deemed VERY GOOD. Creation is an outpouring of God's creative spirit into physicality and so creation (the whole universe) is the first incarnation. Jesus then, who we habitually call “the incarnation” is God's second incarnation.

**Romans 8: 18 – 25.** This lovely piece of creation theology has Paul writing that creation is itself waiting for redemption from decay and is to be saved. This is an important point because we often become trapped into thinking about “my” salvation, or how Jesus died to save me from “my” sins when salvation actually covers the whole universe because as we heard already in the reading from Genesis, God made everything, and everything is GOOD. We are used to hearing about “original sin” but less used to hearing about “original blessing” which preceded it.

**Matthew 6: 25 – 34.** One of the most famous bits of the sermon on the mount, which builds on God’s creative role in the world and sets humanity into that context. While everything has its place and is loved by God, nevertheless humanity is qualitatively different because we have free will and the ability to make moral choices far exceeding that of any other life form. This brings with it many associated problems like doubt and worry and insecurity. Jesus tells us to “consider the lillies” and the “birds of the air” to set our doubts, fears and anxieties into the much greater context of a loving and caring God.

## Lent course

There will be a four session Lent course starting in March, not always on the same night every week – a mixture of Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The course is based on Richard Rohr’s book “The Universal Christ”. Fr. Richard comes from a radical Mystical and contemplative school of catholic theology in the same vein and stable as Julian of Norwich, William Blake and Thomas Merton and while you don’t need to have necessarily read the book, it would give a solid background to the course and is £9.55 for a paperback copy or under a Fiver for a Kindle version. The dates are as follows.

### **Lent Course. – The Universal Christ**

#### **Everything is sacred**

4 session course. All sessions start at 7pm.

**Tuesday 14th March** – The four worldviews

**Wednesday 22nd March** – Spiritual transformation.

**Tuesday 28th March** – Christ is everywhere

**Wednesday 5th April** – Contemplation

## Thought for the day

For all you lovers out there – don't forget that the 14th February is St. Valentine's day. I looked up the definition of Romance and this is what it turned up.

1. a feeling of excitement and mystery associated with love.

"I had a thirst for romance"

2.

a quality or feeling of mystery, excitement, and remoteness from everyday life.

"the romance of the sea"

These, when you see the definitions spelled out like that are actually religious impulses. God is love and therefore when we engage with Love we are inevitably engaged in a romantic encounter – a feeling of “excitement and mystery”. The second definition also touches on the transcendent quality that comes when we “make contact” or achieve some measure of communion with God. Genuine religious feelings are pretty romantic when expressed in worship. Holy Communion is communion with all things - with God at the centre of everything, the source and goal of all life. At my cursillo weekend (a catholic renewal course that propelled me into ministry) Fr. Jacques derossiers inspired us with a monumental talk on the Eucharist and with the message that at the altar rail God was saying to you directly “I'll meet you there”. It is the only time, at that wonderful service at Aylesford Priory that I have taken communion with tears in my eyes. At its best, the Eucharist is a focussed point of meeting between time and eternity, spirit and matter, where heaven and earth meets. There is nothing more romantic than that.

## The Prayer for Today

**Praised Be**

**Living God,  
have mercy on us,  
for the times we forget  
that we belong to each other.  
You call us to be still,  
to hear the whisper of our Sister Wind,  
to feel the radiance of our Brother Sun,**

**and to be nourished by our Mother Earth.  
Renew us in your healing love.  
Inspire us to water the earth,  
and nurture one another,  
so all may flourish.  
Together, as one family,  
may we always sing your praise.  
Through Christ our Lord,  
Amen.**

*Rachel McCarthy/CAFOD*

Love and peace,  
Martin