



Connection

Sunday 7th February 2021
Second Sunday before Lent



View from a Vicarage

Greetings and welcome to all our readers to the Bredon Hill Connection. It is good to share this bulletin with you as we continue to journey through the Lockdown. Perhaps not surprisingly, I feel that it is right and appropriate to start by sharing my condolences with millions of others across this country, and indeed around the world, on hearing last Tuesday the sad news of the death of Captain Sir Tom Moore. Captain Tom, as he has become affectionately known to all of us, embodied the stoic and wonderfully positive British spirit of so many of his generation, and who, without doubt, was an inspiration during the darkest days of the first Lockdown. In a time when many of us were feeling uncertain and fearful of an unknown virus, Captain Tom came and lit up our lives with his bravery, cheerfulness and indomitable attitude of seeing even the darkest of situations with hope.

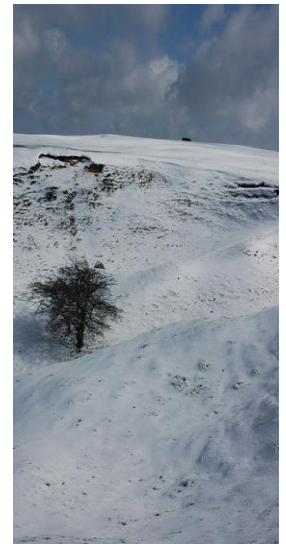
So much has been said about him in the news and press, as people have shared their collective grief over his death, and yet amidst all the sadness, what has again come through the message of condolences and reflections, is the joy and encouragement he gave to so many people, of always seeing hope for a better tomorrow and challenging people to be the best they can be, no matter what their personal circumstances. What an example of a life well lived, and what a wonderful gift of consolation to his family and those who knew him best, as they remember all he accomplished throughout life, especially in the last 10 months.

And it is perhaps in the light of how Captain Tom's life has impacted on so many others that I have been particularly struck by the word transformation. A strange link, you may think; But I am privileged to sit, as an ordained representative, on both the Bishops Council and the Strategic Programme Group, and this week have attended meetings for both groups.

The Bishops Council is a group of selected representatives of clergy and lay people from around the Diocese, whose discussions feed into the much larger group of Diocesan Synod, and their discussions, cover any area of Diocesan governance, finance, strategy or other national topics which are being discussed at the national Church of England level. The Strategic Programme Group's remit, however, focuses on three key projects being undertaken across the Diocese of Worcester, that of the two Resourcing Churches (Top Church in Dudley and All Saints church in Worcester) and The Calling Young Disciples project. These three projects receive national funding and have been agreed by the Diocese as priority areas for supporting growth of the Church.

The work taking place across the Diocese as part of the Transformation agenda, has been an important backdrop to the issues being discussed in both groups; And at the Bishops Council meeting, members were invited to watch a video presentation by the nominated lead for the Transformation agenda, Archdeacon Nicky Groake, and Rob Quarton, Deputy Diocesan Secretary, who updated The Council on progress made over the last twelve months. This video will soon be available on the Diocesan website and I encourage everyone to view it when they can.

However, the video highlighted that like the rest of the country, the pandemic has impacted on the way church communities within this Diocese have been able to flourish. Across the Hill, we like so many others, have suspended communal worship; We have not been able to meet each other through our normal fellowship activities; And most of our annual fundraising events have not been able to take place causing shortfalls in parish income. Yet amidst all these challenges, the Diocese has continued with its Transformation agenda, and one of the key successes has been the creation of the new Area Deaneries, which came into being on 1 February. In addition, work has continued taking forward the outputs from the Open Conversations held early last year. Further, progress is being made in assisting some local conversations to help review their church communities following changes in clergy levels. Additionally, Allison Maddocks has been appointed as Dean for Smaller Churches, and her role will involve talking to smaller church communities about where they see their future ministry and mission and what resources will be required to help facilitate this.



We already know the Bredon Hill Group will, in the short and medium term, only be served by two incumbent clergy, and what this means for us as churches as we go forwards when the restrictions are lifted, and when the second incumbent is appointed, very much plays into this picture of transformation. This journey will be a consultative and collaborative process, and the diocese feel strongly that this is not something they will force our churches into. It is however something we need to engage with and to think creatively about, and I am sure that when we can come together as church communities to discuss this in more detail, we will then be able to work both with Alison Maddocks and Sarah Dangerfield (as the new Area Dean) to find a model and way of being, that works for all of us.

It is with this idea of transformation that I was struck most particularly by the reading set for Morning Prayer on 2 February, that of Romans 12: 1 - 5. It is a well-known passage speaking of there being many members of the body of Christ, all with different functions, and all being intrinsically linked to the other members of the body.

As churches across the Hill, and indeed for the worldwide Church, we are all different, and each has its own individual characteristics and ways of doing things. Yet, despite these differences, we are all joined together, in, and through, Christ; And, one of the greatest joys I have witnessed throughout the pandemic, are the ways in which churches around the Hill are increasingly working together, under difficult and challenging circumstances, to be the presence of Christ in this place – worshipping together, praying together, and supporting each other in whatever ways are possible. This is surely the transformation we are all looking for in our churches for the future, and it is this journey of transformation, which needs our prayer as we move forwards together.

However, although our individual roles in this journey of transformation may not be immediately apparent, it is something to reflect on. For what the reading of St Paul to the church in Rome makes clear, is that each of its individual members has an important place in the work of the body of Christ; And no one, and no part of the body, is more important than any other. That is why although, during Lockdown, it may not seem as though the work of the Church is taking place, through each one of us, the Good News of Christ is being proclaimed, and we are each, in our own way, supporting the transformation of God's Church.

Therefore, as Captain Tom famously said, "*tomorrow will be a good day*", and so I encourage you to pray for this journey of transformation we are all on, as we look towards the season of Lent and Holy Week. In this I pray that God may bless you all in the week ahead.

Allison

Reverend Allison Davies

Vicar of Eckington, Defford with Besford and Associate Priest for the churches of the Bredon Hill Group

Service of Holy Communion for the Second Sunday before Lent

Collect

Almighty God,
give us reverence for all creation
and respect for every person,
that we may mirror your likeness
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Colossians 1: 15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ^{for} in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ^{and} through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him – provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

John 1: 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁱⁿ him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ^{who} were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.



Post Communion Prayer

God our creator, by your gift
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:
may we who have been nourished at your table on earth
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross
and enjoy the delights of eternity;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Reflection for the Third Sunday of Epiphany by Derek Potter



This week's Epistle and Gospel share a common theme with the Old Testament reading (Proverbs 8: 22-31) – three different ways to describe God and his relationship with the physical world we can see and increasingly explain and understand. But are we any nearer to knowing God, or is he by definition unknowable, at least in human terms?

In Proverbs, it is Wisdom who tells us “The Lord created me first of all, the first of his works long ago. I was made at the very beginning before the world began “(GNB translation). In John's Gospel, “Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God” and Paul is even more specific in Colossians, “Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God ... through him God created everything in heaven and on earth Christ existed before all things, and in union with him all things have their proper place.”

So Wisdom, the Word and Jesus Christ are all expressions of the same notion – the link between the Divinity and our humanity. We know that the Word became flesh – became Jesus – and lived and died amongst us before returning to God. But what became of wisdom? It would be comforting to think he (or she) has made his home amongst us too but the experience of the last 2000 years or more does not show clear evidence of mankind becoming wiser in biblical terms.

If the qualities of wisdom are those of God who created it, we should be doing all we can to seek to acquire those qualities. In Proverbs 8: 11 – 20 we read “I am Wisdom, I am better than jewels; nothing you want can compare with me. I am Wisdom and I have insight; I have knowledge and sound judgement. To honour the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil ways and false words. I make plans and carry them out. I have understanding and I am strong. I help kings to govern and rulers to make good laws. Every ruler on earth governs with my help, statesmen and noblemen alike. I love those who love me; whoever looks for me can find me. I have riches and honour to give, prosperity and success. What you get from me is better than the finest gold or the purest silver. I walk the way of righteousness; I follow the paths of justice giving wealth to those who love me, filling their houses with treasures”.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2, contrasts God's wisdom with worldly wisdom and he is dismissive of what the world considers to be wise. The incipient arguments over vaccine and who should get it first in this country, in Europe and around the world (those with the greatest need or those with the most money, power or influence) proves how much we need Divine Wisdom. If the latter shows us the nature of God, it must also be our nature as far as we are able to achieve it, and the rewards we can hope to receive are much more valuable and lasting than any amount of gold or silver.

In Graham Kendrick's marvellous words we need to let "Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible, love indestructible ... lift our humanity to the heights of His throne."

Prayers for the Third Sunday of Epiphany



Ever living God, our creator and redeemer, you love us and know us better than we know ourselves. With a word you created all things and so we pray that you will hear the words of your children as we pray; giving thanks to you for your church, the world and its peoples,

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

Mindful God, we pray for all those in authority, we pray that they might have the discernment to know right from wrong and the wisdom and integrity to act upon this knowledge for the good of all the people they serve that we may all look forward with confidence to better days ahead.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Mighty God, we pray for all those who provide inspiration to others to be the best that they can be. We particularly remember Captain Sir Tom Moore and his family and thank you for reminding us how one person's action can positively affect so many. May the memory of all that he did during his lifetime, his positivity and hope for a better tomorrow stand as a beacon to us all.

Lord in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Loving God, we pray for all those who are learning to adapt and gain new skills during these difficult times. We pray especially for all those who are missing the fellowship of coming together to worship but are finding comfort in the opportunity to come together online in a way that they would never have considered only a year ago. May they feel your abiding presence and strengthen their faith during this time of Pandemic. We also pray for all those who lead and inspire our worship, those who pray for the sick and bereaved and those who tend to our churches and churchyards to make them places of quiet sanctuary for others.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

Father God we pray for all the Bredon Hill Group communities, that each of us might make use of our individual talents enabling each church to flourish as a witness to your Word. Help us to spread the warmth of your love to everyone we meet whether in person or online.

Lord, in your mercy: **hear our prayer**

Requests for Prayers

If there is someone or something that you would like to pray for please email us at eckingtonvicarage@hotmail.com



Please continue to pray for the ill and isolated, frontline, hospital and medical staff and for all those who are in any kind of need. Pray for the strength to care for God's creation; forgive us when we abuse its beauty and damage its potential, and empower us, through your Spirit to nurture and love the world.

Those who are sick: We pray for all those who are sick everywhere and for those who have asked for our prayers and for their carers, Roy and Margaret Putnam, Christopher Frith, Edward Bunn, Brian Bolam and Don Dufty.

We continue to pray for: Percy and Sharon Blizzard, Jackie Pickford, Clive Hunt

Those in residential care: Sheila Bigland-Gibbons, Barbara Milton, Rita Sheppy

We pray for those who have died everywhere: For those who we know and for those whose anniversary of death falls at this time. Revd. Margie Schutte, Carol Newman, Michael Pilliner, Eileen Fincher, Stephen Jeenes, Michael Donnelly, Ronnie Compton, Anthony Greenwood, Betty Kirkpatrick and Phil Airdrie's Mum, Mrs Airdrie, Margaret Sutton, Liz Gough



Six New Area Deaneries Appointed

As many of you will know Bishop John consulted last summer on the simplification of the Deaneries within the Diocese from 13 to six to allow a broader canvas for mission planning and offer more flexibility in deploying ministry to better meet pastoral and mission needs.

The consultation exercise ended in December and over 80 responses were received which resulted in several amendments to the draft Bishop's Pastoral Order that had previously been circulated. The finalised Pastoral Order creating the new Deaneries came into effect on the 1st February 2021.

The Bredon Hill Group of Churches now comes within the new Pershore and Evesham Deanery. This is made up of the previously separate Pershore and Evesham Deaneries and the Benefice of Bowbrook which was previously in the Deanery of Droitwich. The new Deanery will belong to the Archdeaconry of Worcester and, as highlighted in last week's Connection, Sarah Dangerfield will be the Area Dean.

More information on the Simplification of the Deaneries can be found here:

<https://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/news/simplification-of-deaneries.php>

More information on the new Area Deans can be found here:

<https://www.cofe-worcester.org.uk/news/new-area-deans-appointed.php>

Church Services during Lockdown

Reverend Allison will be leading Morning Prayer via Zoom again this Sunday at 10.30am. Last Sunday saw the largest attendance at our service so far; this included someone who had lived in Eckington but now lives in Rye, and a young couple with the toddler daughter who are getting married this summer in Holy Trinity church in Eckington. So, if you would like to join us for worship and fellowship, do speak to Alison Khan (Contact: email acbhteam@gmail.com or telephone 07984 748059) and she will send you an invitation.



Engaging with Lent

We will be starting Lent on Ash Wednesday on 17 February, and to mark this we will be having a short service of worship with the Imposition of Ashes via Zoom. To assist this and if you would like to take part in this service, then please contact Alison Khan (details above) and let her know you will be attending, and also provide your home address so that we can send out to you some ashes through the post to be used during the service.

Services for Holy Week and Easter

Ash Wednesday 17th February - Zoom Service at 10.30am including imposition of ashes.

Lent Study Course – every Wednesday from 24th February until 24th March – led by Rev Roger Spiller via Zoom at 7.00pm. Contact Alison Khan for a link to the course before 24/2/21.

Palm Sunday 28th March – Zoom service of Morning Prayer at 10.30am.

Holy Week Monday 29th March-Thursday 1st April – Zoom compline and short reflection led by Bishop Michael/Rev Allison at 7.00pm each evening.

Good Friday 2nd April – there will be localised church services where possible. More details to follow.

Easter Sunday 4th April – 10.30am Service at Holy Trinity, Eckington led by Bishop Michael.

10.30am Service at St John the Baptist, Beckford led by Bishop Martin.

10.30am Service at St Giles', Bredon led by Revd Allison.

10.30am Service at St Mary's, Elmley Castle led by Revd Roger Spiller.

Please note that the timetable of services is subject to any changes in government regulations regarding local and national lockdown.



Please add more hearts to the tree in the Churchyard at Eckington – the ones that are already there are beautiful! We would also welcome prayers, hopes and wishes tied to the tree as we enter Lent – a time for pause and reflection.



Lent Studies 2021



Where is God, in this Coronavirus epidemic and how does he act, directly or through human agents? How is our faith faring in these bleak times? What of science, often thought to compete with faith: is the vaccine saving the world and, conversely what about the precariousness of human knowledge? As individuals, we're more conscious of the fragility and tragedy of the human condition and seek to build resilient patterns of human flourishing. As a nation and world, new divisions and injustices have been exposed, and our core values have been threatened even though, for a brief time, the whole world is in the same boat. Is this the time for a new moral and social reconfiguring of our national life? Then there's the Church, whose attendances are fast becoming unsustainable, whilst innovative forms of 'meeting' are drawing in churchhoppers.

God, Science, Individuals, Society and Church are the five themes for the 2021 Lent Zoom study. The 90 minute session will start with a 30-40 minute talk, drawing on biblical and other resources. There will be space for questions, work in groups using handouts, and a gathering together and closing prayers. The meetings will take place on **Wednesdays at 7pm from 24th February.**

If you would like to raise questions or issues now or at any time during the course, please email me at rogerspiller@btinternet.com, citing 'Lent'. **Canon Roger Spiller**

Used Postage Stamps for Mercy Ships UK

Mercy Ships is a faith-based international development organisation that deploys hospital ships to some of the poorest countries in the world, delivering vital, free healthcare to people in desperate need.

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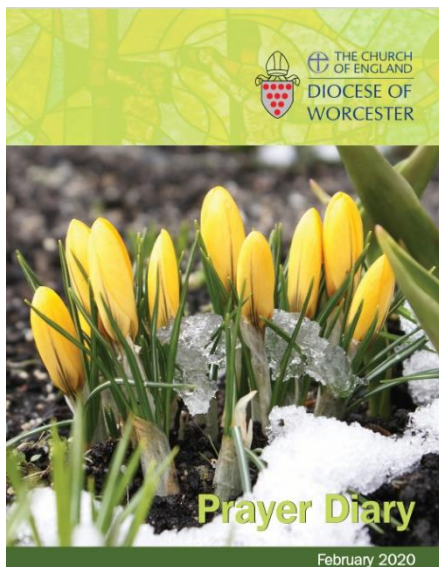


Additional Resources during Lockdown

Even though we are inviting everyone to join our weekly Zoom service at 10.30 on Sunday morning, please be aware that the Freephone Daily Hope programmes of worship services and prayers are still available by ringing 0800 804 8044. This includes a Church of England weekly service (select option 6) and traditional Morning/Evening Prayer (select option 7). This service will not cost the caller anything and provides worship material for those looking for additional services and prayer.



A free phoneline of hymns, reflections and prayers



News from the Diocese

Prayers and diocesan news can be found at www.cofe-worcester.org.uk



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