

St Mary's News

April 2021

(coming out of Coronavirus lockdown)



Includes

The Good News of Jesus Christ – **Tony Rindl**

Reflection on a Year of Lockdowns – **Josh Brocklesby**

Who is this Jesus? Who is Jesus to you? – **Cath Da Costa**

Psalm of Lament – **King Connect Group**

.... and much more!

The Good News of Jesus Christ



One of the many casualties of this pandemic has been the performing arts with countless plays, concerts and other performances having to be cancelled as it would be impossible to stage them whilst complying with social distancing. This has included the Oberammergau Passion Play which is performed every ten years

and draws crowds in their thousands from all around the world. It is perhaps just one example of how significant this pandemic has been from an historical point of view. The Oberammergau Passion Play has been performed every ten years since 1634 and rarely has this cycle of performances been disrupted. The play is rescheduled for May 2022, and by then we would hope such things will be possible.

The great thing about Oberammergau and other Passion Plays (including, York, Trafalgar Square – Wintershall Estate) is they invite the audience to participate, to move with the action and to be part of the drama. My understanding of Passion Plays is historically they happen in the marketplace; they interrupt and enter into everyday life. In the case of Oberammergau, it involves the whole village, whether as actors or technical support, scenery construction, costume design or hospitality - everyone has a part to play. I think this is really important when it comes to hearing and receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ, we all have a part to play.

You will have heard me say this before; we are not only called to share the Good News, we are called to live out the Good News and indeed to be the Good News. We can all read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We can all make up our own minds whether what they say about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is credible. We can all conclude that the extraordinary claim that Jesus is none other than the Son of God is true. Certainly, what they write presents both compelling and credible evidence, which has convinced many thousands of Christians throughout the centuries. If we merely agree the Gospels to be true and yet it doesn't make the slightest difference to the way we live our lives, what is the good of that?

One key aspect of living the Good News is being part of the Christian community, in belonging to a church. Most of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances occur when the disciples are all together. We read in St. John's Gospel of the disciples being together in a locked room when Jesus appears in front of them. On that occasion Thomas is absent and misses out on the joy of encountering the Risen Jesus. He will have to wait until another occasion when the disciples are together, and of course this time Thomas being present does encounter the risen Jesus. Rarely in the New Testament does Jesus appear to someone who is alone, the notable exception being St. Paul on the road to Damascus and even then, he is not travelling alone and after his dramatic conversion goes at once to Ananias and joins the small Christian community living in Damascus at the time.

At Pentecost the disciples are once again all in the same room when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Later on in the Book of Acts, we get several insights of the Early Church meeting together in each other's homes. It is worth reading the following found at the end of Acts chapter 2. *"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."* Acts 2:42-end.

We also read the following in Chapter 4 *"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of*



encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” Acts 4:32-end

Since then, the Church has grown exponentially, dividing into many different denominations and today we are part of a truly worldwide Church. I think an integral part of living the Good News and being Good News is what we give back to God, giving proportionately according to the gifts and talents and material wealth we possess. Barnabas is singled out as someone who clearly gave generously to the cause and is seen as an encouragement to others. His actions in giving generously reflect a sense of Good News and joy.

In the recent Lent Course ‘The Great Return’ we have reflected on the current experience of lockdown resulting from the pandemic. We had acknowledged our struggles and the challenges we have faced, but we have also considered how God has been present throughout. There is much we have learnt during this time of lockdown. We have made many discoveries and re-discoveries, not least in terms of our relationship with God. There are a number of pressing issues that have come into focus during this time such as climate change, Black Lives Matter, the election in America, the way poorer communities have suffered disproportionately in this pandemic, further evidenced in the rollout of the vaccination programme. I think these are just few examples of why our sense of being called to be Good News and live Good News has been reawakened in each of us. We have dreamt of a better world post-pandemic, and the rebuilding of a better community in Watford, and the part St. Mary’s can play both locally and globally. We have dared to dream about St. Mary’s as a flourishing church located right in the



centre of Watford. We have a renewed sense of what is being asked of us as a church and how we might contribute as individuals.

The principles remain the same and the questions we each have to ask is: what can I give, how can I contribute, what is

God asking of me? How has God blessed me so that I can be a blessing to others? Can I be more generous in sharing what I have? What gifts has God

given me which I am called to share with others? (in one group discussion it was suggested that exercising our gifts should fill us with a sense of joy).

You will have read in recent PCC reports and elsewhere in St. Mary's News that we are projecting a sizeable deficit in our finances this year. It is true that in recent years we have faced similar challenges, and these have largely been met thanks to your generosity. I think the budget or projections that have been set reflect all that we hope to achieve this year and I don't think we have been reckless or extravagant in our approach. I commend to you to Roger Courtney's reflections on this matter, and ask you to prayerfully consider your response, in the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ this Easter.

The Revd Tony Rindl



Reflection on a year of lockdowns

So, we finally find ourselves past the point of the one-year anniversary of that first lockdown. An event which oddly manages to feel both a long time ago and yet also very recent! Indeed, it was an interesting twist of fate that the timing of that first lockdown meant it was somewhat tied into the Christian calendar coinciding with Lent and then of course Easter as it did. I don't believe I have ever or hopefully will ever have to give up more over Lent than I did last year!

But one year on I realise how we may end up being guilty of merging a lot of our memories over the past year into one, including Easter. Most of us just had an Easter quite similar to the last with the majority of it celebrated from home. And so perhaps in time our memories of this Easter and last Easter will blend into one. However, I think if we allow this, we can miss all



the change that has actually occurred this year both around us and in ourselves. Now, I'm aware that for some of us there will have been painful changes this year whether through our own illness or the loss or suffering of a loved one. And it is important not to forget the reality of the struggle of this

past year. It must and should be something we remember as we move forwards. But there also comes a time, perhaps now for some of us, when we look to find more positive changes which may have occurred too. And so, although this Easter perhaps felt similar to last year I think when we dig a little deeper we find they were really quite different.

On a national level this Easter we celebrated the resurrection in the light and knowledge that the vaccine program is in full swing and that around half the adult population have already received their first jabs. It means that there is much hope for the future and the summer. We are of course by no means out of the woods just yet and so must continue to follow restrictions to protect and show love to those around us. But, it does mean that we are in a very different position to last year when the outlook was not so hopeful and there was much more uncertainty, fear and pain.

Furthermore, when we look closer at our country, we have this year had to confront many important issues and questions about ourselves. Now, we have not even slightly answered or resolved these but there is progress in having had these issues brought to light. And so, whereas last year we were still dominated by Brexit, something which will continue to impact us, we are now in a place where other issues can be looked at and where we can seek to find healing and reconciliation for our divisions. The shared experiences we have had as a nation will help us as we journey into the future together.

When I think about St Mary's I also see how much has changed during this year. Our building has silently changed while we have been absent with a new roof, flooring and paint job in the Church Centre. But as we have learnt so well this year the church is not the building it is the church family. Last year we were still getting to grips with worship from home and all the new technology we were having to implement and use. But now it feels we have learnt how to, not only, worship together when we are all in different places but even seek to incorporate some in church too with a form of mixed-mode service. I don't think it should be underestimated the impact that this learning of new technology will have for us as a church family and the doors it will open for us post-pandemic. We now have new and exciting ways of connecting and reaching people in our church family who would before have remained and felt quite isolated.

And there are also the personal changes we will have been through over this past year. I know that I have changed greatly since last Easter through the experiences and also struggles of what followed. The most obvious change being that whereas last Easter I celebrated as a Deacon, this year I celebrated as a Priest. And so, I have had the joys this year of learning a new role and position within the church. But there has also been change through the struggle and pain. The many hours spent in the hospital through the pandemic with those ill or dying has deeply impacted me. As too has exploring what it is to be church during a pandemic and how we worship together when we have no building to use. The experiences



and lessons of this last year will continue to impact myself and my ministry for many, many years into the future.

The past year has been one like no other for all of us and I hope that you too can look back on the year and see change. Not just painful change but change where there might be the seeds of growth and new life. One of the many lessons of Easter is that even in what might appear the bleakest of situations that God is able to bring hope. However we reflect on the past year of the pandemic and lockdowns and whatever we have been through, I pray that you might see signs of change, growth and hope in the past year. And that when we remember Easter of 2021 it does not blend into 2020 but stands as a marker and beacon of transition. A moment when we reflected on the past in order to be prepared, ready and excited for the future!

God bless,

Josh



The Revd Joshua Brocklesby



Charlie Mackesy

A reflection in words
on the last year –
what would your word(s) be?



Who is this Jesus? Who is Jesus to you?

Happy Palm Sunday!
A day to celebrate,
just as it was 2000 years ago.
And what a celebration it was!
Can you imagine being on the streets of Jerusalem that day.
The crowd gathering – anticipation rippling through them.
You hear fragments of excited chatter –
He is coming! At last! Can it really be him!

You have heard of this Jesus!
Maybe you have listened to one of his compelling talks,
Maybe you witnessed one of his many miracles:
Turning water into wine
Feeding the 5000 people with just 5 small loaves and 2 fish
The many people healed,
And a couple of days ago he raised Lazarus from the dead!
Who is this Jesus?

A roar goes up.
He is here!
People around you start to dance and cheer and shout:
“Hosana!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
The king of Israel!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”
The king is coming...
Excitedly you shout and scream with the rest of them,
You take off your cloak and put it on the ground for a donkey to walk over,
And wave palm leaves you have cut from the nearby trees.
But who is this king?
Who is this Jesus?

For generations amongst the Israelites there had been talk of a messiah

Someone who would come and save them.
It had been this hope that the Israelites had held onto during the dark days
of Exile to Babylon,
and in the return when things still felt broken.
In fact, much of the anxiety we see in Jesus' time,
In the religious leaders and others,
Was due to the trauma
the people of Israel had experienced during the exile.
They feared being ripped away from their homelands again,
The thought of watching their temple destroyed again brought great horror.
We observe how the Pharisees and Sadducees used the law of the Torah
To rule over every minutia of their lives
In the hopes of appeasing what they saw as a wrathful God.
Then their greatest fear happens
Rome takes them over,
Once again they become an oppressed people
And ruled by a foreign power.
Many started to put their hope in the promised saviour
And in response
many messiahs came out of the woodwork.

But one teacher began to make a name for himself -
Jesus of Nazareth
He was different.
He was charismatic and spoke with authority,
His miracles were real healings and wonders not mere magic trickery,
And he spoke alluringly of the coming of a new kingdom.
Many started to follow him,
to travel miles to listen to him,
captivated by his message of hope and love.
Many started praying that this was the 'One' -
The one THEY had been waiting for.
And so, on that day, that first Palm Sunday 2000 years ago
People massed to see their king!
They wanted an earthly king,
A strong and might warrior king

Just Like David.

A king to crush their enemies,

A king to overthrow the Romans,

A king to protect their way of life.

A king to make them proud and the envy of the world.

Who was this Jesus?

Imagine their horror

when Jesus went into the temple

And literally overthrew their 'marketplace'.

Imagine their fear when Jesus spoke of his immanent death.

Imagine their disappointment when,

instead of walking into the palace and taking the crown,

Jesus tied a towel around his waist and washed their feet.

As a servant!

Imagine watching your saviour,

This man you thought would become a mighty military leader,

Being captured in a garden.

Betrayed by the kiss of one of his own followers,

Disserted and disowned by his own friends,

Beaten until he was unrecognisable and his body broken.

Taunted, humiliated, spat on and made to wear a crown of thorns,

Then forced to carry his own cross

To Golgotha

Where he was crucified like a common criminal

By those same Roman overlords he was supposed to save us from.

Who is this Jesus?

It would seem Jesus had come to turn the world on its head.

When Jesus was put on trial

in front of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate,

He asked Jesus: Are you the king of the Jews?

Jesus responded by showing that he was not that sort of king.

Jesus was not who many of the people expected,

Or were hoping for.

And they would turn on him,

Before they knew that he was what they needed.
Instead of vengeance,
Jesus spoke about love and reconciliation.
He spoke of their revengeful distant God
As Abba Father – daddy.
He told a people who felt worthless,
That through him they could become God’s children.
They could claim their birth right!
Instead of using force and power to reinforce the old-world order,
Where we are constantly striving to fulfil our own shellfish wants,
Jesus called us to work together,
To ensure all people are valued and all needs are met.
Instead of allowing prejudice and inequality to separate us,
He called us to welcome each person we meet with love,
To serve each other as if we are serving God himself.
He called us to give our very lives up to God,
And by living in this new way
We are renewed,
Our lives gain purpose as we worship God through all that we do,
And together we call a new world into being,
A world where there is no pain or suffering or death.
Who is this Jesus?

Jesus came to pay the price for you.
Only one man has ever managed to walk this earth without sin,
That man was Jesus.
Since Adam and Eve
We have all fallen short and failed to obey God.
Jesus came so many things would come to pass,
But the greatest of these was to reconcile us back to God.

Once God created a beautiful world
And his dream for this world
Was to have a people who would walk in the cool of the evening with Him,
In communion and relationship with Him.
But for this to happen

They had to be obedient.
Sadly, they were unable to do this.
There, in the Garden of Eden
Adam and Eve disobeyed God.
They turned away from God and hid.
But even so God never abandoned them.
For all generations since we have been trying to regain that place
We yearn even when we do not know it.
For the love and conversation and relationship
With God.

God understood these people He had made.
He gave them ways in which to turn back to Him.
He gave them sacrifice,
And laws,
But it was never enough to fully bring them back.
Nor did it pay the price for what they had done wrong.
So, he sent a sacrifice which would be enough to pay for all of our sins.
Once and for all.
And in the process would reveal himself - in the form of Jesus.
Someone to model to us how we should live,
To finally teach us about true love -
that unconditional unimaginably deep love that comes from God.
Someone to walk beside us so that we can find our way back to God.
Jesus paid the ultimate price.
Giving up his life on the cross.
But it was in the Garden of Gethsemane,
That Jesus broke that chain of behaviour set in motion by Adam and Eve.
Filled with agonizing fear,
knowing what was to come,
Jesus chose to obey.
And in doing so He reconciled us back to God.
Who is Jesus?

Do you know Jesus?
Do you know the real Jesus?

Do you see him in those you meet...

In the needy?

In those that others despise?

In the marginalised?

In the hungry, powerless, sick, weak, broken, lost?

In your neighbour?

In me?

In you?

Do you yearn for your kingdom / your image of God to be established,

Like many of those who stood in that crowd at Palm Sunday

Who then found themselves in a crowd a few days later,

Screaming for Jesus to be crucified.

Or do you yearn for the kingdom which Jesus spoke about:

A kingdom in our hearts,

A kingdom we could make real on earth if we but had the courage,

A kingdom of fairness and equality and peace and joy,

God's kingdom on earth

Where there is no pain or sacrifice or death.

Today let us raise our voice up to cry hosannah!

To our one TRUE king

A king who stands with his hands scarred with the marks of nails,

Yet opened in welcome,

holding out forgiveness and healing,

Acceptance and love.

Are we ready to accept Jesus Christ into our lives?

As our king?

Who is Jesus to you?

God Bless

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PCC Report – March

Meeting on 22nd March – by Zoom

Financial Situation and Appeal to Congregation The Council resumed discussion of the church's prospective end-year deficit in the light of the financial report for the first two months of the year which showed a cumulative loss of around £3,000. While this was less than might be expected from the forecast end-year deficit of some £38000, it still indicated that unless there was an increase in congregational giving there would be a substantial and unsustainable deficit at the end of the year.

The Council went on to consider the timing and nature of an Appeal to the congregation. It was reported that most giving came through around 40 monthly Standing Orders ranging from around £10 to some £00s. In normal circumstances, attendance at Sunday services was well over 100 and so there was clearly scope for increasing the number of Standing Orders; this should be an aim of the appeal. In addition, members who contributed in this way should be asked to increase their giving, bearing in mind that everyone's circumstances were different. While we might not be able to eliminate the deficit in one year, the target should be to cut it very substantially.

The Vicar stressed that the financial appeal should be set within the broader context of support for the church. It was very important, because without the right level of giving the mission of St Mary's could not be fulfilled. But commitment to membership also meant being prepared to devote time and skills to church activities and to helping to manage the organisation. These were all aspects that members needed prayerfully to consider as we returned to more normal patterns of living and church life.

It was agreed that the next few newsletters and April's St Mary's News would make clear the urgent need for increased giving with the main appeal being made between Easter and the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, which would be on Sunday 25th April.

Buildings Roger Courtney reported that redecoration of the Church Centre was now in progress and obsolete parts of the fire alarm system had been replaced. The safety design on the sliding door had been applied to the glass.

Some concern was expressed at the meeting about the door movement and a service visit would be arranged. Providing a safe means of access to the clock gearboxes was still a subject of discussion with our architect and the Tower Master.

Pre-School Alison Saunders reported that the Pre-School Committee was developing plans for the promotion of the Pre-School with particular emphasis on its Christian basis. They would bring these to the next PCC meeting.

Vicar's Report Tony drew attention to the next Connect Together which would be on 7th April. This would be an opportunity to reflect and share thoughts on the lessons from the Lent Course sessions and on what we had learned about our future mission. It would be important for everyone to participate on that evening. He also reported that he had had an approach from someone who when he had first met was a young man with a troubled past but who had put his life back together and was heading a charity operation in Uganda that produced coffee. He suggested that when we could again serve coffee in church, it might be sourced from this charity as a demonstration of our commitment to working with others to promote God's Kingdom. The PCC agreed with this proposal.

Roger Courtney

Annual Parochial Church Meeting

Sunday 25th April in person and via Zoom

To elect Churchwardens for the coming year

To elect members for the Parochial Church Council

To receive the Report for the Year to 31st December 2020
including Finances

For further details see Tony's weekly emails or contact one of the leadership team

The Church's Finances – a challenge to us all

Anyone who has read Tony's recent newsletters, or my reports in St Mary's News of the last couple of PCC meetings, will know that the financial position of St Mary's is anything but healthy. While of course there are considerable uncertainties stemming from Covid-19, the best estimate at the moment is that the cost of running the church in 2021 will exceed income by a large sum, perhaps by more than £30,000. While we might be able to cover this sort of loss for one year, this is clearly not a situation that can continue.

Restoring our finances to health will be a challenge for us all, particularly in the light of the impact of the pandemic on personal incomes. Everyone's individual response will be a matter for prayer, and in gratitude for the love that God has for each one of us.

As you will see from my report of the March PCC meeting, there will be an appeal to the congregation after Easter – that great time of celebration when we remember and rejoice in God's greatest gift, victory over death through the resurrection of his Son. The appeal will set out all the details of our finances but as a preliminary, as you think about what your response to the appeal might be, this note sets out some of the background.

The first thing to say is that this situation has not come out of the blue – it has been building up for some years. In the past ten years, the PCC has more often than not been faced with a prospective deficit. Thanks to the generosity of the congregation, the end-year position has normally been better than forecast but even so we have had a number of deficit years and each time our reserves have been reduced.

One reason for these deficits is that we have a smaller congregation than in the past. When I became a member of St Mary's, the Electoral Roll stood at over 400; it is now under 200. So the cost of running the church falls on fewer people and the responsibility of each of us to give at an appropriate level is therefore all the greater. While of course our mission is not about money, expanding our congregation through mission is essential if we are not to be faced with repeated financial challenges.

But why has this come to a head this year in particular? Actually, the writing was on the wall last year. The prospective deficit at the start of 2020 was much the same, but then two events altered the picture. First, we

received a very generous donation – entirely unexpected and of a scale that really improved the situation. Secondly, lock-down meant that expenditures went down because we were not opening the church and some costs were offset by the furlough scheme, but thankfully income from the congregation did not drop in the same way. And an important third element in the end-year result was that the Pre-School had a healthy surplus of income over expenditure. In combination, these meant that we ended the year with a positive balance.

But we hope and pray that we will not need to furlough staff this year, and we cannot plan on the basis of receiving very generous donations, however much we are grateful to God and the donors for them. In addition, fewer children are attending the Pre-School this year, so that there is unlikely to be a financial surplus. (The Preschool Committee are working on ways of increasing numbers, but these may not have significant impact in 2021.) So the responsibility falls on each one of us to provide the resources that will sustain our mission to and in Watford.

I hope this note has been helpful in setting out the background to the appeal. Let us all, in prayer, consider what our response should be.

Roger Courtney



Current Affairs Connect: **The Social Care Crisis**

Last month the Current Affairs Group discussed

The social care crisis: How can society and the Church care better for our elderly?

Older people are living longer but are requiring more support and yet the percentage of younger working people to fund it and provide it is decreasing. Successive governments have looked at the issue but failed to come up with workable solutions. The Prime Minister promised to tackle the problem but nothing has yet been forthcoming. What would a Christian policy for care for the elderly look like and is it affordable?

Background

At present local authorities provide adult social care: support with day-to-day tasks like washing, dressing and medication either in a care home or in someone's own home. To be eligible you have to show you have a significant need for help and in England you have to have savings and assets of less than £23,250.

The ageing population means more people need help as they live longer with more complex conditions. The recorded prevalence for people aged 65 years and over with dementia was 4.3% in December 2019 and there are currently around 850,000 people so afflicted in the UK, projected to reach 1.6 million by 2040. The total cost of care for people with dementia is £34.7 billion and will rise to £94.1 billion by 2040.

In England, councils spend about £15bn a year from their own budgets on adult social care. They receive money from the NHS and many of those who qualify for council care have to make contributions to the cost. This brings the total amount local authorities spend on care services to around £21 billion.

In 2018, 10% of the population was aged 75 or more but this is projected to increase by two thirds to 17% by 2050. At the same time the working age population will drop from 77% of the total to 71%. Yet since 2010, councils in England have had the money they receive from central government cut by nearly half as part of the government's austerity

measures. Some of that loss has been offset by increasing local taxes, but the amount they can spend on all the services they provide, from fixing potholes to libraries to social care, has been cut by almost 30% during that time. Some of the country's largest care homes providers have closed or sold off homes amid plunging occupancy caused by Covid and falling fees from councils. A recent National Audit Office report revealed 94% of councils expect to reduce service budgets in 2021-22, with authorities planning reviews of social care packages and increased user charges.

Governments of all colours have failed to take action. In 2017, Teresa May proposed a floor of £100,000 for social care costs and was warned by Health Secretary Matt Hancock that this would cost billions and lead to significant tax rises. She persisted with the policy during the election that year and was forced into a U turn as people feared they would lose their homes, something that in fact is already happening in many situations. Last month, Danny Mortimer, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said: "Decades of delay and inertia have left the social care system chronically underfunded and in desperate need of reform. The Health Foundation and the Institute for Fiscal Studies projected that even without taking account of the effects of the pandemic, 458,000 additional full time equivalent social care staff would be needed in England alone by 2033-4.

The Commons Select Committee on Health & Social Care has recommended spending £7 billion (2-3p in every £ on income tax) on social care.

A recent Health for Care survey of 96 cross-party MPs and 520 councillors in England found that two-thirds believe an even greater sum - £14 billion (3-4p in every £ on income tax) - is necessary to protect pensioners and rescue the sector.

In his very first speech as Prime Minister, Johnson promised to "fix the crisis in social care once and for all." Yet social care does not form part of Hancock's NHS reorganisation nor did the Chancellor announce any additional spending during his Budget speech.

Age UK has called for a care system that:

- joins up health and care services
- increases support for unpaid carers

- has an independent, nationally agreed eligibility and assessment process that enables those in need to access it
- is funded through taxation
- provides support for working age, sick and disabled adults as well as older people
- invests in care workers to ensure high quality care.

Many people would agree in principle. The problem is how to fund this and what “funding through taxation” means. Political parties broadly agree that support should continue to be offered to people so they can be cared for at home. The main difference is on funding residential care.

The Conservatives have committed to achieving a consensus that will consider a range of options. However, they have laid down the condition that nobody needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it. A recent Conservative Home article favoured policies that are less expensive for the taxpayer and enhanced independence – essentially incentivising people to move into sheltered accommodation or to be cared for by their children in those children’s homes. And during an interview in January, Jeremy Hunt, the former Health Secretary, said, “The fact that we treat people with dementia so differently to people with cancer is so immoral...It doesn’t mean you have to pay for it in the same way you do the NHS” suggesting any new system should be more of a safety net.

Labour’s policy to introduce free personal care for people over the age of 65, includes residential care. The entire package would cost £6bn a year, equivalent to a third of local authorities’ current gross expenditure on adult social care.

What does the Bible say?

Scripture gives a number of important principles regarding the elderly. We are told to honour and revere our parents (Exodus 20.12, Leviticus 19.3, Deuteronomy 5.16). The spiritual strength of the elderly is recognised (Luke 2.25-38) but so is their frailty, lack of independence and need for care (1 Kings 1.1-4, John 21.18).

We are instructed to provide for our own family (1 Timothy 5.8). Indeed, Jesus assumes that the young will provide for the old (Matthew 15.1-6) which he exemplifies on the cross when he commits his mother into the

where conversely interdependence is not valued, even at the end of life. Consequently, one heard older people saying that they do not want to be a burden on their offspring. Society makes them feel they are not entitled to be cared for at the vulnerable end stages of life. Yet they had cared for their once young, vulnerable children so why should they not now be looked after? While not disputing this principle, some of us noted that there were differences between caring for children and caring for the elderly. Children become more able as they age while the elderly become less able; and people normally choose to have, and care for, children whereas caring for the elderly is imposed upon them by the situation.

We also noted that planning laws and much tax policy discourage interdependent living.

We discussed what ideally we would want as we grow older. We agreed we want to live independently for as long as we can. We then want to be supported in our own homes for as long as we can. Finally, we want the security of knowing that if we need full time professional care in a residential home, that this will be provided.

As a nation we take pride that through the NHS, the financial consequences of illness have been enormously reduced, yet that is not true for the consequences of aging. As Jeremy Hunt had observed, why should dementia be treated differently to cancer?

We discussed how social care should be equitably and justly funded. It could be excluded from being funded from taxation and funded instead from a government loan that is repaid when we die through the sale of our home. We felt this was not likely to be just because the circumstances of families differed widely. It was one thing, in principle, for a person who lives alone to sell their house to pay for their care and quite another if their children are living in the family home because they cannot afford to rent or buy. Indeed, as high housing costs mean that one has to earn 6-7 times one's salary to obtain a mortgage (as against three times 30 years ago), several of us wanted to be able to leave our homes to our children, not by way of inheritance as such, but so they had somewhere to live. It was concerns such as these that had sunk May's 2017 election campaign.

Alternatively, care could be funded by the taxpayer in line with longstanding policy that pays for the NHS: raising current taxes or through a

new hypothecated tax. This, we observed, was also unpopular but it was progressive since the more we earn, the more tax we pay.

We considered governments of all shades needed to be more honest with the electorate about such funding.

We observed how much the funding for social care was being driven by policies that inflate the UK housing market and that it is time to separate housing from social care by moving away from policies which treat houses as ever increasing assets rather than places to live and thrive.

On a practical level, one member said that the Wednesday lunches once held at St Mary's were a lifeline to her mother. There are currently not enough people to make this viable but it is something that we should aspire to and try to reinstate for the future.

Next meeting: The Current Affairs Connect Group meets next on Zoom at 8pm on 9 April for *An audience with Dean Russell, MP for Watford*. Look out for details in the Vicar's Mailchimp.

The Current Affairs Group

Coping with demented parents

What is it like to cope with a loved one who is suffering with dementia?

I first noticed my mother, Mary, was not right on Christmas Day 2010 when I made the kind of joke that would normally have made her laugh and bite back at me. Instead, she was in floods of tears. Slowly she forgot who people were at church and ended up smiling at everyone in case she knew them. Dementia doesn't make people stupid. They're aware something's wrong and they try to cover it up.

Mary's husband, Ron, was going blind at this point, but was doing more and more of her personal care, trying hard to keep a promise not to put her into a home, even though it was clear to us he could not manage. In

2013 she started having hallucinations about insects crawling all over the floor, or birds hitting the car windscreen and Ron simply could not cope with her. As he was a Freemason, he was able to put her into Prince Michael of Kent Court in Nascot Wood where she was exceptionally well cared for. She was subsidised by the Masons and lived there until she died in 2018 – so she had eight years of dementia.

Ron visited her daily until 2014 when he died. I visited her weekly until I retired when my aim was to visit twice a week. But as she went downhill, there was less and less of her left. At first, we could still have simple conversations, then only a paragraph, then only a sentence and then, most often, nothing at all.

In the earlier days, she was anxious and used to ‘time travel’ as I called it. In her mind, she was often working at the nursery during the War and would ask me to let her mother know she’d be late home. Or she’d tell me she had to get back home to look after the children – my sister and me. She often didn’t know who I was. Sometimes after Ron had died she’d ask where he was.

What do you do? You just go along with them. So I said I’d pop in to her mother’s on the way home or that she’d see Ron later. It’s no good telling a person with dementia that their spouse is dead as they go through the grief all over again which causes more anxiety. When I left her, I had to say that I was coming back “later” otherwise she got upset. Hospital appointments were a nightmare because she didn’t understand what was going on, would physically resist doctors who tried to examine her and shout unpleasant things at them. In the end we decided as a family she was refusing treatment, as was her right, and just had to limit care to medication.

There were days when I simply could not bring myself to visit. And other days when I told myself very firmly it wasn’t about me but about her and that she would benefit simply from holding my hand. Indeed, in many ways, it was less painful once she’d died.

In the last few months, the Council stepped in to pay as her finances had fallen to the £23,250 floor. I was just grateful that Kent Court looked after her so well because I simply could not have given her the level of professional care she needed. Nor, I suspect, would I have had the patience.

Caroline’s father, John, had a stroke in 2007 and was never the same after that. He coped for a while until 2011 when he went to live with

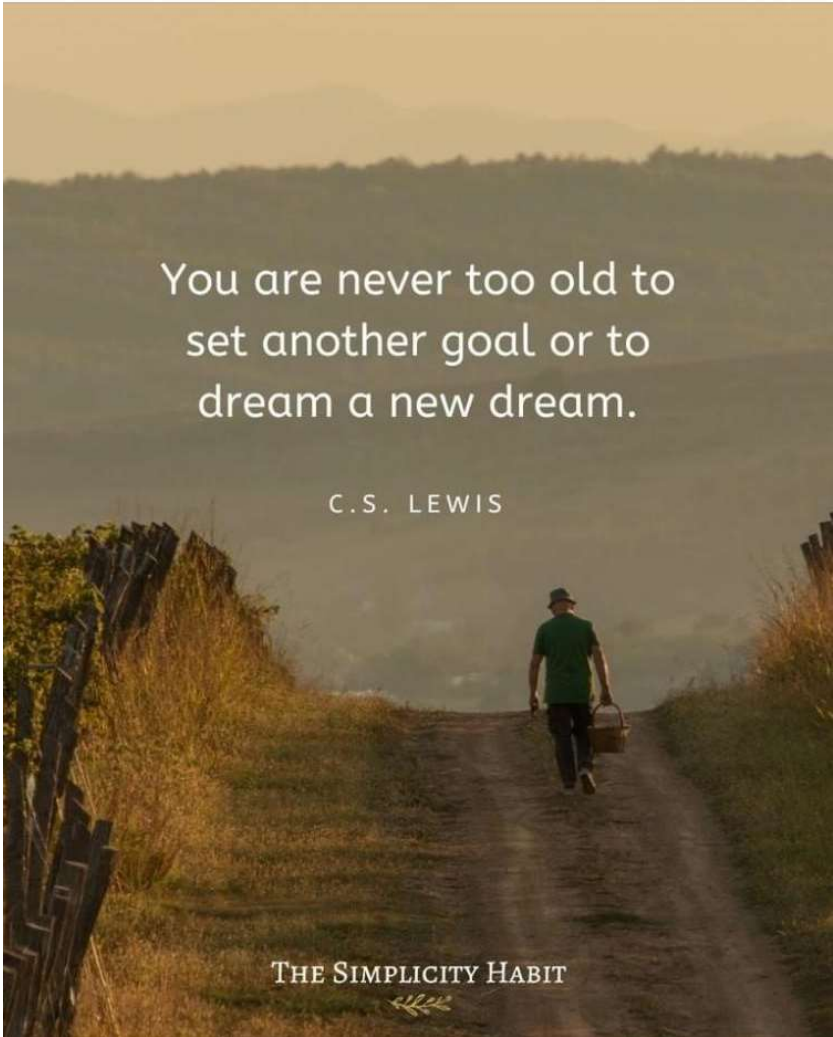
Caroline's brother, Richard, for six years, dying in 2017. It took a heavy toll on Caroline's brother who had a collapse at one point. By way of respite care, Caroline would take John out for the day or we used to have him to stay with us for a few days every so often. Like my mother he was frequently anxious but unlike her, he never lost his personality and always knew us. But it was very wearing because he kept asking the same questions: "Where are we going? Are we going home now? When do I go home to Richard?". We had to lock the front door to stop him wandering. He would endlessly watch the news channel. In his last couple of years he simply could not manage outside Richard's home because he couldn't remember where he was.

Friends have had similar experiences and I am struck by several things:

1. Dealing with dementia in a loved one is incredibly difficult.
2. We're reluctant to put our relatives into care and often wait until it is way past the point where they have ceased to cope.
3. Dementia is different in every case. The only rule is do whatever it takes to stop them being anxious and to visit and, if possible, take them out as much as you can. Their brains and bodies still benefit from the stimulation of conversation, touch and being somewhere else even if it is immediately forgotten.
4. Remarkably, demented people do not seem to entirely lose their spirituality. John still recalled the Anglican liturgy and hymns when he had forgotten so much else. Mary would often respond in some positive way to Tony, John Way and Jane Carter bringing her communion when she would respond to little else.

Marcus Jones



A photograph of a person walking away on a dirt road in a rural landscape. The person is wearing a green shirt and dark pants, carrying a basket. The road is flanked by a wooden fence on the left and tall grass on the right. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a hazy, golden sky.

You are never too old to
set another goal or to
dream a new dream.

C. S. LEWIS

THE SIMPLICITY HABIT



KING CONNECT GROUP PSALM OF LAMENT

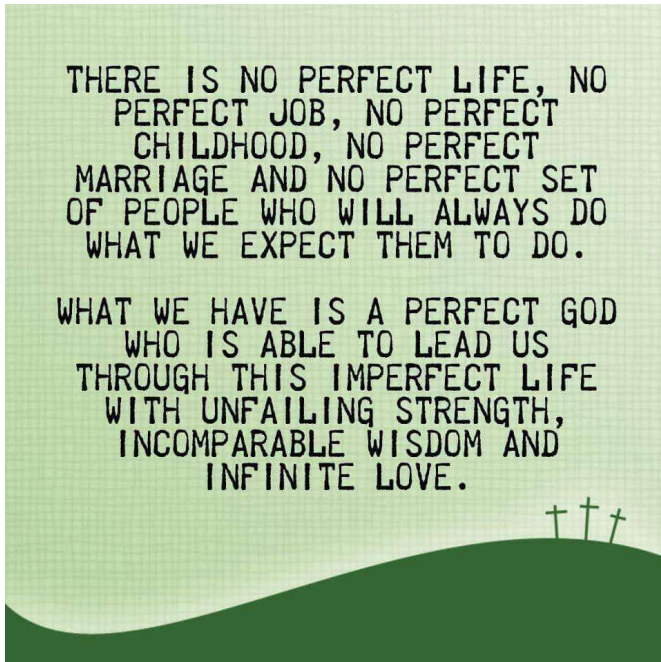
This was compiled from contributions emailed by members of the group following week one of the Lent course.

Verses 10 – 18 are responses to verses 1-9

- 1 I cry out to God because the path ahead is confused; it is overgrown with doubts and uncertainties.
- 2 I cry out to God because I am longing for our family to be together.
- 3 I cry out to God because of the anger I feel for not being able to properly mourn the loss of my brother-in-law last year.
- 4 I cry out to God because of the arrogance I know is within me.
- 5 I cry out to God when I hear so much suffering and hopelessness in the world.
- 6 I cry out to God because so many seek freedom from oppressive regimes that wish to have total control over thoughts and beliefs, but they are ignored or attacked.
- 7a I cry out to God because I care for the millions who are suffering bewildering grief.
- 7b I cry out to God because of the millions of health professionals and carers who are totally exhausted both physically and emotionally.
- 8 I cry out to God because stress and anxiety fills my mind.
- 9 I cry out to God because I long for human touch.

- 10 But I know God can see ahead; He knows the way and will guide me according to my need.
- 11 But I know God holds my family in his hands and will bring us back together.
- 12 But I know that God will lead me through to a more contented life.
- 13 But I know God knows my every innermost thoughts yet still loves me as his child.
- 14 But I know God is sovereign over all things and will restore light and hope in the world.

- 15 But I know God will be with them to inspire, strengthen and console them in their struggles, and that one day his Kingdom of peace and righteousness will come.
- 16a & b But I pray that God will support and comfort them by sending His Holy Spirit to sustain and bless them.
- 17 But I know God will give me peace.
- 18 But I know God will give me comfort.



Services

The Church is open
on Wednesdays and Fridays each week
between 12.00noon and 2.00pm
for Private Prayer

Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service in church and via Zoom;
(*in church for those not able to access online*)
4.00 pm KidsChurch via Zoom;
5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection in church
followed by Holy Communion
Reflection also available via Facebook

Monday to Saturday

Morning Prayer via the Church website

Please keep up to date with what is on offer
via our Facebook page
or the website www.stmaryswatford.org

Who's Who at St Mary's

(They all continue to be available via the phone or online)

Vicar

The Revd Tony Rindl | 01923 225189 / 07792 505480
tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Curate

The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596
jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Churchwardens

Alison Saunders | 01923 244390
Peter Dean | 07876 154387

Children & Families Worker

Cath Da Costa | 07961 564385
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Office

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currently only open on a Monday morning

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