

St Mary's News

August 2020

(as Coronavirus lockdown continues to ease)



“Tis grace’ - the Revd Tony Rindl

‘What is God inspiring us to do?’ - Cath Da Costa

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“Tis Grace ...’



The lyrics from that great hymn Amazing Grace include the words ‘Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far And Grace will lead me home.’ These words not only reflect my faith and trust in God but are the foundation of what I consider is meant by Christian hope. All of us

go through difficult times in our lives. We can all experience that feeling of everything seemingly going wrong at the same time. It is the middle winter and the boiler packs up. The car breaks down the day before you are due to go on holiday. Despite looking everywhere, you can’t find your car keys and you are miles from home and panic sets in. Exams are looming and despite your best efforts you feel you haven’t done enough revision. You have an appointment at the dentist for a tooth extraction. In fact, the list is endless and at times feels relentless. But such things pass and often or not we can look back with a sense of relief when such ordeals are over.

If we are people of faith, we can often feel a sense of enormous gratitude that somehow God has guided us and sustained us through these difficult periods. Of course, other things in life are much more difficult such as bereavement, or a divorce, or serious illness or some other form of trauma. Sometimes we have to face a very different future from the one we had been planning and we have to adapt. Sometimes we have to learn to carry the pain with us. Yet still there is the sense of God being in the midst of our struggles helping us to overcome our difficulties. The words ‘Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far And Grace will lead me home’ remain true for many of us and provide both hope and comfort. The psalmist writes ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.’ The

psalm finishes with the great hope and promise that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Shortly after the pandemic hit our shores my mother, then aged 90, confidently said: “This will pass”. Now she is not old enough to have been around during the Spanish flu epidemic, but her parents would have remembered it only too well and may well have been wary of its return. Of course, my mother has lived through many traumatic world events, most notably the Second World War, and has experienced a number of personal tragedies and hardships. She knows from experience that eventually these things pass or are overcome, and so for her, and many others, the words of that great hymn still ring true: “Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far And Grace will lead me home.’



Ultimately as Christians our hope lies in what the Bible teaches us – the words of the Bible help us to understand the very nature of God and reveals his purposes and promise. Yet it is our own life experience, resonating with what we read in Scripture, that builds our faith and awareness of God’s presence in our lives so that we not only gain confidence in God’s loving purposes, but leads us to believe his promises are trustworthy and true. It is what the German theologian Paul Tillich describes as the method of correlation. The Christian writer W.H. Vanstone explains this process very well in the preface of his book ‘The Stature of Waiting’: “The method implies that there is a dialectical relationship between divine revelation and human perception: that what we are ‘told’ in revelation is only understood in the light of our perception of the world around us, while at the same time our perception of the world is itself illuminated by the light of revelation.”



Although I would say faith is primarily a gift, it is something that is very often tried and tested through the challenges of life. St Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have

gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”.

“Faith”, the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes, “is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hope in this context should not be confused with wishful thinking, as in ‘I hope something will happen.’ This is not what the Bible means by hope. The biblical definition of hope is "confident expectation." In Romans 8:24-25 we read “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” Indeed, hope is fundamental to our faith and gives meaning to our lives. Our hope has substance, not only born out of our personal experience but because it correlates with what the Bible says.

The foundation of our hope is in the person of Jesus Christ and on actual historical events. There is probably more evidence to suggest that Jesus was a real historical person living in 1st Century Palestine than there is for any other historical figure of that period. The testimony of the four Gospel writers is compelling. The claim that Jesus rose from the dead has been examined and re-examined many times over the centuries and has not been discredited. It has led

millions to proclaim at the heart of their faith that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. This truth is also confirmed in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which not only signifies the fulfilment of Easter but acts as a pledge for what is to come.



St. Mary's church has stood in the heart of Watford for many centuries. It is testimony to the faith of Christians of many generations and bears witness to the great hope we have in Christ. As a Christian community we are called to be a beacon of hope to our town. Rarely has this been more

critical than now. There remains a great deal of uncertainty over the long term impact of the covid-19 pandemic - our town centre will have a very different feel with the demise of several of our high street retailers, and to cap it all the football club has been relegated. It is one thing to have a long-term perspective and say these things will pass just as the sunshine follows the rain. It is another thing to say, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." For it is only in the cross of Jesus, bringing the forgiveness of sins and the promise of new life, that we together with that great hymn writer John Newton can confidently proclaim 'Tis Grace hath brought me safe thus far And Grace will lead me home.'

The Revd Tony Rindl



PCC Report – Meeting on 20th July

The PCC met for the first time since March, with members logging onto Zoom. Amongst the subjects considered at the meeting were:

Annual Report and Accounts Approval of the 2019 Annual Report and Accounts had been delayed by the coronavirus. It was hoped that the PCC would be able to approve them at the meeting but shortly before the meeting the Treasurer received further comments on the Accounts from the Independent Examiner. Approval of the Report and Accounts was therefore deferred to a future meeting.

Reopening of the Church The Vicar outlined the future stages in reopening the church for prayer and worship, emphasising that this would be done gradually and cautiously, and following all the guidance provided by the diocese and the government. Thanks to the efforts of the Churchwardens, it was open twice a week for private prayer. This would be supplemented at the end of July by showing in the church the on-line mid-week Reflection service and possibly in due course the on-line service on Sunday evening service also. The first service to be reinstated in the church, perhaps from September, would probably be the mid-week communion since this was entirely spoken and the absence of hymns would not alter its character. His view was that the Zoom service on Sunday mornings provided a better worship experience than a socially distanced service in the church with no music. He saw that continuing for the foreseeable future, while recognising that not all could participate in it.

Buildings Roger Courtney summarised progress with the Church Centre roof, which should be completed by mid-August. The motorised sliding door in the west porch should be fitted during August also. He alerted the Council to the need to replace the main

church boiler owing to the failure of its heat exchanger. This would be a significant cost and options were being investigated.

Pre-School Alison Saunders said that the intention was that the Pre-School would re-start on 2nd September but this would depend on a risk-assessment. It was possible that it would need to be the sole user of the ground floor of the Church Centre for at least an initial period.

Finance Peter Dean presented the financial report up to the end of June. Giving through collections and lettings income had reduced but it was encouraging that some people had started regular giving through bank transfer. The overall position was difficult to judge because while expenditures during lock-down had reduced, some costs might only have been deferred and not avoided completely.

Vicar's report Tony expressed his thanks to everyone who had contributed to the maintenance of worship and keeping the St Mary's community in touch with each other in the period of lock-down. He particularly mentioned Josh for his work on the Website and on-line services, Cath for all she had done for children and families, Marcus for his mastery of Zoom and the Churchwardens for all their efforts and their willingness to go to the church to check on matters. The 'named nurses' had performed a very valuable service in keeping in touch with the more vulnerable members of the community. So many people had contributed and he was grateful to them all.

Roger Courtney



What is God inspiring us to do?



This past week we have been doing a virtual holiday club. We have run a summer holiday club at St Mary's for the past couple of years and it seemed sad what with everything else our children have missed out on this year that they should forego

the club too. As needs must in these unusual times, I decided to run it virtually. I will be honest it was not the same, but it worked and worked surprisingly well. We had a wonderful week pretending to be secret agents and following the clues to learn more about who Jesus really was. I designed the sessions around those activities that we generally include e.g. a warm-up exercise slot, stories, action songs, fun games and crafts (I emailed instructions for a series of things to make and a couple experiments which the children could do using scrap materials and other common items that can be found in the home). A huge thank you to Daniella and Jenny L. who supported the sessions – I hope you enjoyed watching the dance Jenny taught us as much as the children enjoyed doing it. While I missed the energy, interaction with the kids and teamwork which go into more traditional holiday clubs, it was immense fun and the children certainly seemed to enjoy the sessions. While I knew the children would learn from the experience, I worried about whether they would miss out on the spiritual insights that so often accompany such events. Of course, there was no need! Yet again God showed me how I need to stop trying to box Him in into the smallness of my own understanding and trust Him in every adversity.

The children so often awe me with their insights – how they can nonchalantly get at the deeper meanings of things which so often take me time and effort. My favourite quote from the week was when we were learning about Zacchaeus. I had asked the children 'In what way

was Zacchaeus lost?” - one of those questions one throws in hoping it will stretch the older children present and make them think a bit. Thinking I wasn’t going to get an answer I made to move on, when one of the six year olds stopped me politely and firmly: “Wait I have an answer to your question”, she says with a deeply thoughtful look on her face. “Zacchaeus was lost in his life...he had lost love for others. He forgot how to care for others and lost his friends. Jesus taught him how to love again”. It is certainly not the first time nor will it be the last that a child’s insight floored and enlightened me. It is one of the things I love about working with children – their unique insight into faith and understanding of God.

Jesus understood this too – when faced with his own disciples’ struggle with pride and self-importance, he pointed to the ‘simple’ attitude and trust shown in the faith of the children. We have the beautiful story of Jesus and the children in Mark 10. 14-15: Parents had brought their children to Jesus to be blessed, but the disciples saw them as getting in the way of the what they felt was really important – the adults and their own reflected greatness in the role they played in helping people gain access to Jesus. “When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” Older texts often use the words “suffer the little children” – in this instance the word ‘suffer’ means to tolerate – in other words accept even when it means putting yourself out. One of the things I love the most about working at St Mary’s Watford is the space we create for our children and youth which not only values them and fosters their spiritual growth, but that deeper understanding we can learn from them. Even with my background in education, it is not often I come across six-



year-olds who can express themselves with such insight and confidence – she is a credit to her parents that is true, but it also shows that we as a church are doing something profound – we are place in which children feel accepted enough and safe enough to delve deeply and explore their beliefs; a place where they feel confident and comfortable enough to express their views.

Following Tony’s invitation to our next Connect Together (on Wednesday 5th August from 7.30 to 8.45pm – hope to see you there!), I have been reflecting on this time of lockdown – pondering the insights and lessons God has been teaching me. I have come to realise just how much it has taught me so far – about myself and what my needs truly are, what I value most, what I fear; about the strength of my faith and my trust in God; how easily I can get distracted from the simple, deep truths God has called me to embrace and speak about and instead how often I have found myself down the path of pride and self-importance.

Before lockdown I was frantically busy – I had this great idea of prayer stations as a vehicle for people to experience the Easter story – I had worked with a couple of schools creating items to be used in these stations and a number of school groups were booked in for visits. I am not saying that what I was putting together was not of merit, but when I turned to God in disappointment of all my plans falling to dust in my hands, His answer was clear: my child what is truly important?



When I was training to be a teacher, I was taught to focus on one single simple point of learning – what was the one thing I wanted my students to walk away with from the lesson? There is nothing wrong with big creative ideas – our creator God created us in His image and so we

should use our creativity – in fact so often it is in being creative that I often feel closest to God. What God was reminding me was that while being a part of big events etc can be gratifying, we should never take our eye off what is really important: to hold true to the simple truths of our faith and in all things glorify God. By ‘simple’ I do not mean childish, unformed ideas, but rather a truth so fundamental, so beautiful and complete in itself that anyone who approaches it humbly and honestly can appreciate it. In fact, we can actually obscure these truths by trying to over adorn them; just as we can so easily twist things for our own glory rather than focussing on the author of these truths, God Himself.

As I reflect on those events and ideas that have flourished and which have not, it is easy to see which had God’s fingerprints on and which, while maybe put forward with the best of intentions, did not. The ‘Discovering Christmas’ event is a good example of something that was a success – while the event felt big and complicated and even flashy at times, at the heart of it was the simple beautiful truth – that God loves us so much that Jesus came to live amongst us – and we held true to this truth in how we created space for people to hear and engage with that truth through the Nativity story. By listening carefully and discerningly to God, we could walk forward in confidence that we were doing God’s will and this helped us through the struggles and uncertainties. By partnering with God, we could tap into those gifts and talents God has provided in each of us – we surprised ourselves in how easy it was to speak to others about our faith and God’s truths.



This has been a time of reflection and learning, but it is also a time of being prepared, because COVID19 will not last forever and God has work for us to do. Let us remember the lessons He has taught us as we

look and plan for the future – what is God inspiring us to do? What great plans does He have for us? Things may seem bleak at the moment, but God’s promise, like sunlight breaking through a thunderstorm and creating the resulting rainbow, is that He will never leave us but instead is holding out an exciting, lifegiving future in partnership with Him.

God Bless



Cath

(07961564382 /

familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com)



Happy Birthday Olive - 98 years young on 28 July! She is missing her St. Mary's family very much and is looking forward to the time - as we all are! - when we can meet together again to worship in our lovely church building.





4 STEPS TO CONTROL THE VIRUS

Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy

Frances Novillo, Lead Chaplain of Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy, shares her experience navigating through 2020:

2020 has been a year of surprises, and mostly they haven't been nice ones.

Enduring the COVID-19 outbreak has been described as weathering a storm. In his extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* blessing on 27th March <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/urbi-et-orbi-pope-coronavirus-prayer-blessing.html>, Pope Francis preached on the experience of the disciples caught in a storm and fearing for their lives as Jesus slept on in the boat, until the disciples awoke him and he calmed the storm and revealed to them his mighty power (Mark 4:35-41). Closer to home, Helen Roberts from the Wellspring church preached on the same topic to reassure and encourage her congregation through troubled times, and the Chaplain to the Speaker

of the House of Commons, Revd Tricia Hillas, directed non-Christians seeking consolation during lockdown to the School of Life website curated by atheist Alain de Botton, and his blog post Thoughts for a Storm <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/thoughts-for-a-storm/>



The Stilling of the Tempest

Monika Liu Ho Peh

Find out more about this artist here:

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1193298/print-liu-ho-peh/>

Many people have shown great courage, self-discipline, self-sacrifice and humility by staying at home to save lives during the virus outbreak. But others have been called by virtue of their vocation - in essential employment, as NHS and emergency workers, for example - to stand up and step out of the boat, to face the storm, even when this has seemed terrifying, or impossible.

Another Gospel story on the sea, the account of Jesus calling Peter to walk on water in Matthew 14:22-33 has inspired Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy this year. Once lockdown was announced, it was impossible for us to continue providing face-to-face services, and we feared losing touch with the many people in Watford town centre we support in person, because we don't tend to collect people's contact details when we meet. Our first challenge, therefore, was to map contact details for businesses across the town, a task undertaken by

volunteers from St Mary's researching business websites, so chaplaincy volunteers could be proactive calling and emailing them to remind them chaplaincy support continued to be available to their staff, even while working from home, or furloughed. This has been accessed through 07483 178582 or frances@watfordtcc.org

Another challenge was training volunteers to take on the storm as in its fury it took its toll on those people we seek to support. We prepared our volunteers to support people remotely, which requires different skills to face-to-face pastoral conversations, and to understand the impact of trauma and bereavement. As you can imagine, this training was necessary but not pleasant, and I was grateful to have myself recently received trauma response training organised by Herts County Council Public Health department just prior to lockdown so I had the most up-to-date guidance to pass on to the team. Our traumatic bereavement course has been repeated a further three times, reaching staff from our town centre businesses, church workers locally and further afield, and volunteers from similar projects nationwide including Late Night Listeners, Street Pastors, and Chaplains from different contexts.

As lockdown eased, significant organisations in our town – Watford BID, Herts Police, Watford Borough Council – started to ask us when our volunteers would be back on the streets providing support in person. Again it felt as if we were being asked to walk into a storm, with the threat of catching or transmitting the virus still very real. In consultation with similar projects, reading available Government guidance, and investing in additional resources to promote volunteer safety, we produced new policies and procedures so our Street Angels and Chaplains could return to their activities as Watford returned to work, shopping and socialising.

And we have been much needed and much appreciated. Our Street Chaplains, who were out in the town centre on Thursday, Friday, and

Saturday afternoons throughout June as the non-essential retailers reopened, spoke to 670 individuals about topics as varied as parking, giving directions, homelessness, relationships, pregnancy, health, the weather, difficult customers, discerning vocation, the end times, prayer, self-employment, football, computer games, and Father's Day.



Peter Walking on Water

Katherine Roundtree

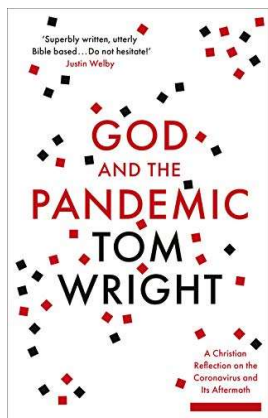
Find out more about this artist here:

<https://www.saatchiart.com/katherineroundtreeart>

Like the disciples in the boat in Matthew 14:22-33, during these last few months, we have at times felt alone, a long way away from the safety of familiar shores, “beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them” (v.24). It hasn’t always been easy to recognise Christ in these changed and troubling circumstances, just as the disciples didn’t initially recognise Jesus walking towards them on the water (v.26); at times, our anxiety has obscured our perception of Christ’s presence. But thankfully, we have heard Jesus’ reassuring words: “Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.” (v.27). We have challenged Christ, like Peter (v.28), wanting to get closer to our beloved Lord, even in circumstances where that seemed impossible, and we have heard Jesus call us towards him, saying simply: “Come” (v.29). But even as we have set out in each new evolution of Chaplaincy activities – offering remote support during lockdown, proactively contacting the businesses, recruiting new volunteers to join the team providing street chaplaincy, resuming daytime chaplaincy, then night-time Street Angels as the hospitality venues reopened – there have been moments when the storm has threatened us again, when like Peter, we have

been distracted by fear of the wind around us knocking us off balance, and have felt ourselves sinking (v.30). Yet Jesus has held on to us, and led us to worship him, saying “Truly you are the Son of God” (v.33). Thank you for your prayers, donations, and time volunteering for Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy throughout these challenging months. If you would like to give to us, please donate through the website www.watfordtcc.org or contact Pam at office@watfordtcc.org for more information. Likewise, please get in touch if you would like to receive our monthly prayer diary. If you would like to volunteer as a Street Angel or daytime Chaplain, please fill in the application form available from www.watfordtcc.org/volunteer

Book Review: ‘God and the Pandemic’ by Tom Wright



Panic, pandemic, pangolin, pandemonium – it sounds like an irregular Greek verb but actually it’s an irregular virus. In this way, Tom Wright, former Bishop of Durham and well-known theologian and writer, starts his latest book, a slim volume (76 pages) of reflections on the Christian approach to the coronavirus.

Is the virus some form of punishment for human wrong? Wright considers what the Old Testament has to say. The book of Lamentations is indeed a poem about the plight of the people of Israel because they have not followed God’s ways. But the psalms provide another perspective. He points to Psalm 44: ‘All this has come upon us, although we have not forgotten you or been false to your covenant’ (v17) or Psalm 88, which he describes as particularly harrowing: ‘O Lord, why have you cast me off, why do you hide your face from me?’ (v14). And then there is the book of Job, whose tribulations are nothing to do with his lifestyle or

actions, a reminder for Wright that there are powers that we don't understand and events that have nothing to do with anything that we or anyone else has done. There is also the example of Jesus when faced with the distress of Martha and Mary at the death of their brother Lazarus (John 11). He did not blame this on anyone's sins, but wept. Lament for all the suffering is the appropriate response.

So is the virus a sign from God, a precursor of the 'end times'? Wright turns to the Gospels and firmly rejects the suggestion. Jesus was and is the sign that God will one day redeem the world – the parable of the tenants of the vineyard (Mark 12) shows that very clearly and there will be no more signs after him. He gave his followers a prayer that includes the words 'Thy kingdom come on earth...' to be prayed not after special events but every day. He demonstrated the kingdom at work in healing the sick and restoring sight to the blind. This was showing how God was in control, not in world-shattering events but in the actions that make for a better world. The death of Lazarus provides a further guide to our response; Jesus wept, but he then took action - he restored Lazarus to life.

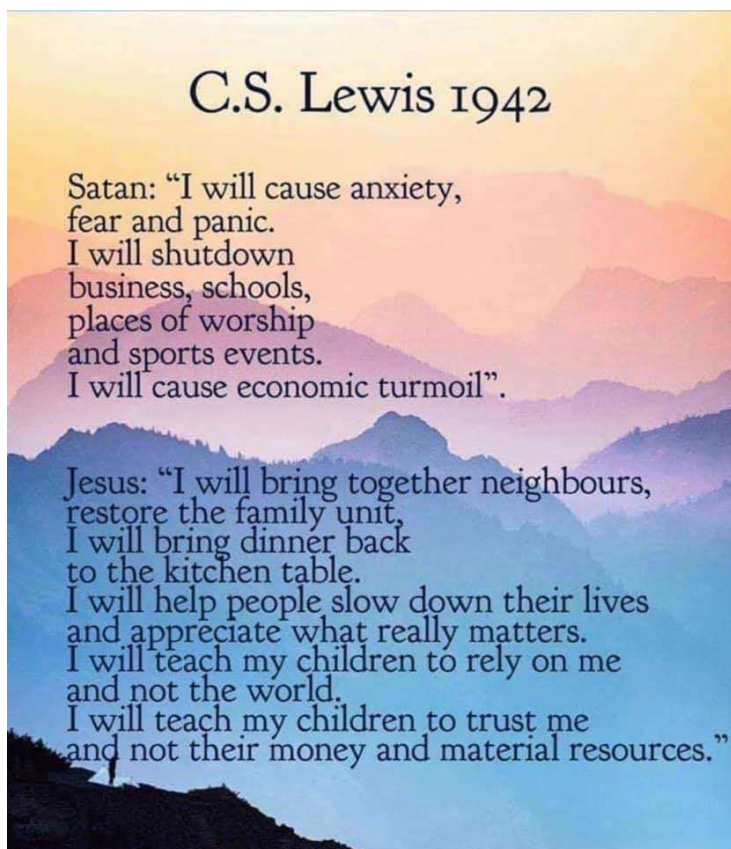
Christians are therefore called not only to weep but also to act. Wright comments that the early church made converts because when cities were racked with plague the followers of Christ were prepared to stay and assist not just their families but everyone, rather than fleeing to safety. It marked a completely different approach to life and was a compelling demonstration of their willingness to follow the example of the one who died for all. Not everyone is able to be on the front line, but all can contribute to the preservation of life and community and to the debate about how our society might change for the better as a consequence of the virus.

There is much else in the book - many lessons on what the coming of Christ means for us today and how this is expressed in the New Testament. Tom Wright manages to compress years of thinking and

praying into these few pages which can be read at one sitting. As Archbishop Justin Welby comments, the pages are ‘superbly written, utterly Bible-based and leave one satisfied at having learned and yet wanting to know more’. Highly recommended, not just for its topicality but for what it says that is of permanent value as we seek to build God’s kingdom on earth.

Roger Courtney

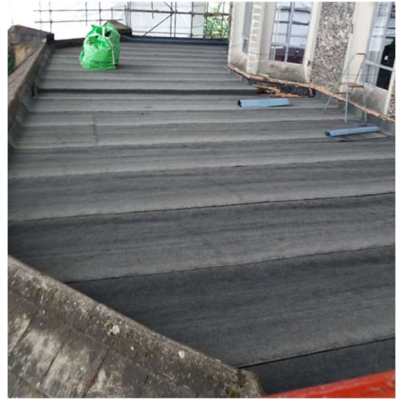
‘God and the Pandemic’ by Tom Wright (SPCK, £7.99)



Church Centre Roof



7th July – the roofing materials arrive



Within a day the first layer is down on the lounge roof

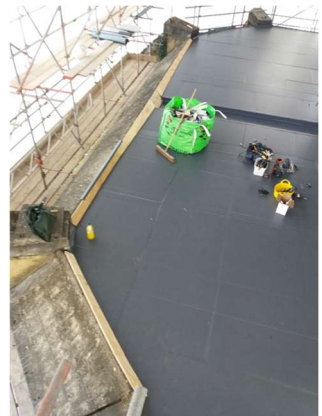


Extra insulation is being added and this is also allowing a slight slope to be added to the surfaces to help rainwater to run into the drainage troughs.



22nd July

Less obvious progress now that the work required is finishing detail.



29th July

Peter Dean

A Very Different Bike 'n Hike

12th September 2020

You will know that the Beds & Herts Historic Churches' Trust Bike 'n Hike is the most important fundraiser for the Trust and key to enabling it to continue to give grants for the care and repair of churches and chapels. Half of the sponsorship money goes to churches with participants and, this year, with the churches closed for so long, it is even more important. Churches have lost income from services and other fundraising events and buildings deteriorate when not in use.

So they are going ahead with the Bike 'n Hike this year
BUT IT WILL BE DIFFERENT to keep everyone safe.

CAN YOU HELP RAISE FUNDS?

The Bike 'n Hike is open to everyone, whether church-goer or not, bikers, hikers and other visitors, whether by car, mobility scooter or horse.

More details from Pam E mail pam.stmaryswatford@gmail.com



BE THE CHURCH

Protect the environment.

Care for the poor.

FORGIVE OFTEN.

REJECT RACISM.

Fight for the powerless.

Share earthly and spiritual resources.

EMBRACE DIVERSITY.

LOVE GOD.

Enjoy this life.

Services

We are sorry that due to the Government restrictions the church building will remain closed for most of the week but it will be open for

Private Prayer

Wednesdays and Saturdays
12.00noon to 2.00pm
(but times may change)

We will continue to pray, worship and care for each other from our homes during this difficult time.

Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service via Zoom
4.00 pm KidsChurch via Zoom
5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook Live!

Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection via Facebook Live!

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:

(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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