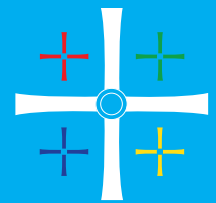


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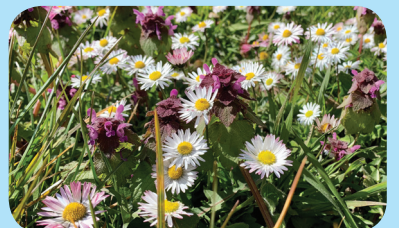
MAY 2020

"Our local wildlife"

"Photos by local photographer Liz Dack
- see her Walk to Dunston churchyard inside"



"photos taken by
churchwarden Lia Day -
see Spring didn't know inside"



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Over Easter weekend I was listening again on and off to the BBC radio commentary of the amazing Headingley test match against Australia. It's one of several games last year which you might call the Ben Stokes match. We obviously don't have the rights to show you the final moments of that amazing game, but here is a photo from a dramatic reconstruction we staged in the back garden of the Vicarage. You can see a bit more of it on our Youtube channel which I mention below. It is one of those games where we will always say to each other, where were you? I know where I was as the game reached its climax. I was sitting outside a café in Wales, concentrating on my wife and children whom I was on holiday with, and definitely not being distracted by the game. You can tell from the other picture, can't you?

I remember heading out from the holiday cottage pretty despondent that England were down to their last batsman, and still 73 from victory. Everything said that it was over, and that Australia were about to win. It was a matter of time. And then came the first stirrings of hope, as Stokes started to hit six, after six, after six. Jack Leach at the other end did his valiant bit, but was reduced to a spectator for long periods. Unbelievably, he did it. Stokes got England over the line, the crowd and the nation erupted, and at one point BBC correspondent Jonathan Agnew cried, "It is an incredible day."

On Easter Sunday, we remember something that so many of us have heard time and again. And for me, no matter how often I hear that Jesus is alive, I find myself as thrilled as if it is the first time. It is wonderful and new. I think of this story of a man conquering death, and sin, and hell, and I recognise that if it were not true, you just couldn't invent it. It is so incredible, but so good. What Jesus did for us, what he won for us, is so good.

Because that's how we feel, isn't it? We won. Jesus did it, he did it all, but we won. Forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, won for us. On that day, last summer, most of us could only sit and listen. Most of the rest of the England team could only sit and watch. Ben Stokes did it. One man. But we won. That's a message for this Easter isn't it? Jesus has won, so we have won. It is not what we did, but what he did for us... what we couldn't do. Only Jesus could win the battle over darkness and hell and fear and death. And for all of us, as long as we believe and say yes, Jesus did that for me, there is light, and eternity, and hope and life. It is not for one summer or one Easter, but for eternity. One incredible day after another, forever, through Jesus. Happy Easter everyone.

We'd love you to keep connecting with us as we meet with Jesus through the lockdown. You can watch some video clips we have made on Youtube, and there is lots on Facebook too – just search both for "Venta group of churches". We are meeting every morning to pray, on Wednesday evenings to look at the bible together, and on Sundays at 10.30am to worship, all on Zoom. You can join in if you have a device connected to the internet, or by phone if you haven't. Our Facebook has regular reminders like our website, www.venta-group.org, or you can call Rob on 492305 or 07855 774384.

There is more information about other help we and others in the village are offering on page 5.

Keep taking care, God bless, Rob

VICAR OF THE VENTA GROUP

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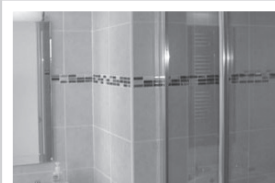
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A walk from Stoke Holy Cross to Dunston Churchyard.

Whilst taking exercise during this difficult time, I decided to walk to Dunston Churchyard very early. It was a lovely sunny morning and the birds were all coming out to feed and sing. On my way a Heron and two Cormorants flew overhead at Stoke Mill where the Heron landed alongside another.

I love this time of the year when all the birds are in their breeding plumage and the cocks are displaying to the hens to find a mate and pair up. As I got closer to the path leading to the church, two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming loudly on dead trees they seemed to be echoing each other.

The church yard was alive with birds singing. The Nuthatch song caught my attention, after a few moments of searching I spotted it in the Yew trees flitting around from tree to tree. Then my ears picked up the calling of the Chiffchaff as it sang its song being its name!! The first one I have seen and photographed this year. Other birds I saw there included a Green Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Red legged Partridge and Long-tailed Tits. As I sat and rested a while thinking how bright and cheery the Lesser Celandine wild flowers were, a Peacock butterfly landed in a sunny spot.

Looking all around I saw a Buzzard sitting in a tree across on the golf course alongside a flock of Fieldfare and Red wings which will probably be leaving our shores soon. On the way back a stoat was running up the side of the road. As I lifted my camera, he spotted me and dived into the bank. I waited a while hoping it would come back out and pose for me!! Not so, it must have been camera shy!!



As I stood by the mill scanning the river and stream to see if there was a Kingfisher or anything around I spotted a yellow flash, followed by another. I was well chuffed to see two of Grey Wagtails. Beautiful birds and as there was a pair of them I am hoping they may be nesting there. It's the perfect place for them.

As I walked across the playing field, nearly home, I was surprised to see a Lucistic Jackdaw hopping around with other Jackdaws. (It means the bird has a faulty gene or lack of something in its diet as a nestling which affects the colour of the feathers several of them being white) It was a lovely walk with lots to see and hear with a good resting place at the half way stage. Hope you all stay well, keep safe and enjoy the beauty we have here around us.

Liz Dack Wildlife Photographer

How can we help? A message from Rob

Amidst the uncertainty and worry surrounding the coronavirus, all of us in the parish churches want to try and offer any support that would be safe and appropriate for everyone. We are so grateful that people from around the villages have already got in touch to offer what help they can.

If you would appreciate some help with things like getting a bag of shopping or medication delivered, letters posted and so on, then we want to help, so please get in touch. There is a network of people around the villages willing to help so we can make sure that your essential needs are met really promptly. We have a quantity of non-perishable food which people have donated to our foodbanks which we would be happy to deliver to you or for you to collect from the Vicarage, if you are running short.

One thing that might become a big issue, is loneliness. There are plenty of us in the villages who would be more than happy to give you a ring, so please take us up on this. One of the great things, of course, if you have a smartphone, tablet or computer, is that you can send and receive video calls via Whatsapp, Facetime or Skype. If you would like some help setting this up, please let us know. If you know people who would like us to keep in contact, but who might not see this message, then please pass on their details if they are happy for you to do so, or get them to ring the Vicarage and leave a message: 01508 492305 or 07855 774384.

Of course, there are many of you who may not feel at risk yourselves, and who want to help in one of the ways mentioned above, and we would like to help coordinate this if we can. If you could send us a message explaining what help you can offer, together with your email address and mobile number, we can start setting up an email list and a Whatsapp group. We will only use them for this specific purpose.

Of course there are many of you who may not feel at risk yourselves, and who want to help in one of the ways mentioned above. You may be aware of the network of people around the village who have offered their services in this way, but if you have not and would like to be added, please contact Rob. But please do just be looking out for vulnerable neighbours informally as well.

Finally, all of us in the churches are praying for the villages. As we are unable to meet together, we are finding other ways to stay connected and support one another.

Here is a prayer you might like to use

God of compassion,
have mercy on this nation and our world
in this time of
fear and confusion:
We bring before you those who are
suffering and who tend
to their needs:
May those in isolation know your comfort
and company
and may neighbours show your love
through care,
kindness and prayer;
We pray for the National Health Service
and everyone working
in scientific research
and we pray too for those with the
great responsibility of leadership, that in
everything they say and do they may hear
your voice leading them;
the yoke of leadership rests,
that in their conversation and
communication
your still small voice may be heard;
We ask this in the power of the Holy Spirit,
in the name of your risen Son
Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen

A prayer for anyone who is ill or isolated

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing can
separate me
from your love revealed in Jesus Christ
our Lord.
Amen

And a prayer for the Christian community

(adapted from a prayer by the President
of the Methodist Conference)

We are not people of fear;
we are people of courage
We are not people who protect our own
safety;
we are people who hope to protect our
neighbours' safety
We do not want to be people of greed;
we hope to be people of generosity
We are your people of God
trying to be giving and loving
Wherever we are
Whatever it costs
For as long as it takes and
Wherever you call us.
Amen

Spring didn't know...

I'm finding it hard at times to comprehend the scale of what is happening, and I am struggling with everything being cancelled and closed.

I am of Dutch origin and grew up with bikes, and I find it helps to go out for a ride and see the signs of spring. I took photographs of the flowers and trees I saw along the way, to remind me of the fact that life goes on.

Then, when I returned, I found this beautiful poem that seemed to say exactly what I was feeling.

We will come through this time, and we will have learned new things about life, hope and each other.

Lia Day, spring 2020.

Spring didn't know...

It was March 2020...
The streets were empty
stores closed
people couldn't go out anymore.
But spring didn't know.
and the flowers began to bloom.
The sun was shining
The birds were singing
Swallows were coming soon.
The sky was blue
Morning was coming early.

It was March 2020...
Young people had to study online
and find jobs at home
People couldn't shop anymore
or go to the hairdresser
Soon there would be no room in
hospitals
and people continued to get sick.

But spring didn't know.
Time to be in the garden was
coming
The grass was growing.

It was March 2020...
People had been put on lockdown,
To protect grandparents and
children.
No more reunion or meal, family
party.
Fear had become real
and the days looked alike.
But spring didn't know.
Apple trees and cherry trees
bloomed
and the leaves grew.

People started reading
playing with family,
learning a language
singing on the balcony
by inviting neighbours to do the
same.
They learned a new language
they learned to be supportive
and focused on other values.
People realised the importance of
health
of the suffering of this world that
had stopped
of the economy that fell down.

But spring didn't know.
The flowers left their place for fruits
the birds made their nest,
swallows had arrived.

Then release day came
People found out on TV the virus
had lost!
People went down the street
singing, crying,
Hugging their neighbours
without masks or gloves.

And that's when summer came,
because spring didn't know.
He continued to be there
despite everything,
despite the virus, fear and death.

Because spring didn't know
it taught people the power of life.

*Translated and amended from:
'Ma la primavera non sapeva nulla'
Irene Vella, March 11 2020.*

MOUNT KILIMANJARO DIOCESE TANZANIA UPDATE FOR STOKE HOLY CROSS

We are delighted to have received an update from the Bishop of Mount Kilimanjaro, Dr Stanley Hotay, who has sent his sincere appreciation and thanks for our support for his parishioners through the Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP). The five churches that are implementing the CCMP project now are the reference to the rest of churches in the Diocese.

10 Self Help Groups have started in the area which are places where people can come together for support and encouragement. In March training sessions for Church and Community Mobilisation Process facilitators, and those chosen to help resource their communities were planned. The volunteers are an integral part of the work happening around the Diocese. The facilitators, who are trained to lead the process in their communities, have so far led people through two stages of training. Within their churches, they lead studies helping people discover what the Bible says about God's purpose for humankind. They discuss the needs of those around them, and what resources they already have that could address some of these needs. They then begin planning ways to take action combining their knowledge about what has happened before, where they (as a community) are now, and what life might look like in the future. The teams then move into the third and fourth stages of the process which help to provide communities with the data they need to understand the issues they are facing in more detail. We are asked to continue praying for diocese and future plans for the Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP). They want to roll out the process in more churches, so that transformation can be realised all over the diocese. We are also asked to pray for Rev Eliah who coordinates the project for the diocese - and for field officer Rev Elinuru and his family, as he makes sure all planned activities are done on time. Please continue praying for the Self Help Groups who are continuing to form, that the members are able build strong relationships bringing positive changes within their communities.



FROM GRIEF TO GROWTH

This is the personal story of one person we have called Janeth. Janeth had been a housewife for more than 20 years when her husband died. Getting enough food for their children was a huge struggle and Janeth had to seek help from family members and friends, who in abject poverty themselves, were unable to offer as much as they might have liked.

Then Janeth got involved with the Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP) at her local church. As part of the meetings, the congregation studied the Bible together and discussed resources. Which got Janeth thinking about a resource she hadn't been using. She had an acre of land situated on some slopes. A plot which sometimes produced crops, but sometimes didn't produce anything at all. When the church invited someone to speak about a type of agriculture that would help conserve the land, while also improving crops, it seemed like it might be just the right thing for Janeth's plot. She began trying out the new techniques they'd mentioned straight away. She began by shaping the land into contours which stopped soil and water running off the plot and added manure to the field, making the soil richer. She planted maize her family are now harvesting up to 1.8 tonnes of maize each year and selling the surplus. Janeth sowed grass too which prevented soil loss while also acting as feed for the cows. She now has more milk than she needs so she can sell any excess to raise more money.



Janeth says "I thank God for bringing this project to our church. It is as if the project was meant for my children and me. I used to go around and asking for help to my family members to get at least a single meal per day. Now I am able to help those in need around me. People are coming to my house and are interested to know what has changed my life. I promise before God to help my community with the skills and knowledge I have been acquiring through CCMP project.

We are delight that we have signed up to support the self-help training project for the poor people in this northern are of Tanzania. If you would like to be involved there is a form on our venta-group.org website with details of how to perhaps donate a small sum each month as part of our 3 year commitment.

Beech Cottage stop and collect plant sale is open again.

We are restarting our "Plants at the gate" sales for the Church Buildings' Fund, but intend to give 20% of the money to a different charity.

Our son Mark, who was born at 51 Norwich Rd where we still live went to school in the village then Framingham Earl High School then the Hewett. He went to

Medical school at UCL in London and now works as a consultant in the Intensive Care Unit at the Royal Free Hospital in London.

Mark is hoping to take part in a fund raising cycle ride (100 miles around London) to raise money for the hospital.

They hope to be able to provide accommodation for families of very seriously ill patients to stay close to their loved ones.

So that's why we will give 20% of our plants sales to this cause plus any donations of course.

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"But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

I love this verse. It has been such an encouragement to me in challenging seasons of life. I love its imagery and the invitation to set our gaze back on God.

As we look around at our world right now, there is so much that can cause our hearts to be overwhelmed with sorrow. The word 'hope' in this verse is 'qavah' in Hebrew. It means to expect and to eagerly long for. This waiting on the Lord isn't a passive waiting, it's active and full of faith that God can move.

There is a brilliant African proverb that says, 'It is not wise to accept the offer of a shirt from a naked man'. In other words, if something is so good, the person offering it to you should be using it too.

This Psalm is an invitation from a man who knew hardship and difficulty, but he also knew what it meant to run to and wait on the Lord. So no matter the situation, let's take this invitation to eagerly and expectantly look to him.

Father,

We come to you honestly with all that is difficult, broken and hard in the world around us. May it not drive us away from you but towards you. We look eagerly towards you to move, to heal our land and to restore. Amen.

Dr Lisa Adjei

Lisa is Project Manager of The Justice Conference UK.

Some jokes to enjoy (sent in by Chris Lawn)

It has been nice seeing many of you online as we have gathered on Zoom for morning prayers and services. This self isolating is not much fun is it? I sit here with 2 coats 2 jumpers a scarf and a hat on. I'm self insulating!

After that terrible joke I have a few more here that maybe could go in the FFA if desperation sets in.

Panic buying is ridiculous. I've just paid £15 for two oxo cubes. The stock market's gone crazy

I'm over 60 years old and never used essential oils which makes me wonder how essential they really are.

I'm thinking of switching my energy provider..... from Red Bull to Lucozade

I used to be a big Robbie Williams fan but all that changed when I discovered geometry and found that far more interesting..... I'm loving angles instead.

The bad news is that I have some more of these! So you might get a few more next month!

Hoping to see you soon.
God Bless.

Chris

After Easter wordsearch

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E S E M M S A U D Q J I D C Q
L S P L N U B S V I L L A G E
E L K E I T S S T S U A M M E
A Y C N I L U P E T E R O H S
N S R N A S A H A N D S T E N
A Q G A E H C G R O A D R O L
C F H J M O T F I S H T E E F

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BREAD	FEET	MESSIAH	ROAD
BREAKFAST	FISH	NAIL	SCRIPTURES
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CLEOPAS	HANDS	NAZARENE	SONS
DIDYMUS	JERUSALEM	NAZARETH	THANKS
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