

NEWCASTLE READER

ISSUE 16



CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET BY JACOPO TINTORETTO, TYNE AND WEAR ARCHIVES AND MUSEUM.

In this issue...

CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET

Gloria Bryant reflects on a painting by Tintoretto.

ALSO

JUST A SEC, THE FAMILY, MUSIC VERSUS MUZAK, AN EASTER MEDITATION, CHRIST THE ULTIMATE ARTWORK, PAST SPEAKS TO PRESENT, AN INTERVIEW WITH CYNTHIA WOOD, READERS AS CHAPLAINS

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DESIGN: Jon Kirkwood

EDITORIAL



GLORIA BRYANT

“The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men/Gang aft agley’. Robert Burns’ poem ‘To a Mouse’ might well have been written for me: like the mouse, I too know what it is like to be turned out of a house - three times for me in the last nine months!

Not of course by a careless ploughman, but as a consequence of the joyous chaos following my marriage to Richard Bryant last May. We sold our respective houses, borrowed the home of a friend for six weeks and then on Christmas Eve settled at last in our new home. More chaos, as anyone who has ever bought a new home on a building site will understand.

The worst part was probably the lack of broadband for a month. There are only so many times one can visit John Lewis’ coffee shop to check one’s emails! I write this to explain why the magazine has not been printed for well over a year. I intended – my ‘scheme’ – was that it would be printed and distributed by the middle of last year, but too much else got in the way. So, many apologies to all of you for my failings; I hope now to get the magazine back on track with two editions every year.

In this edition you will detect a theme: the role of literature, art and music in enriching our faith and deepening an awareness of ourselves. We have not usually pursued ‘themes’, so I will be interested to hear whether or not you like the idea and also, if you do, to receive suggestions of other ‘themes’ we might pursue in subsequent editions. Some material which was sent to me last year has not been used, mainly because it was time-sensitive and would not have been relevant in this edition. So, a second apology to those who submitted articles which do not appear this time. Please do not stop writing them, however.

I have included the interview with Cynthia Wood, though it would have been better had it appeared in 2019 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the admission of women to the office of Reader. I have also included the second part of Past Meets Present, the correspondence between Bishop Mark and Thomas Sparke, Bishop of Berwick, alias Professor Alec Ryrie. In the last edition they introduced themselves and compared and contrasted their experiences as Bishops of Berwick in the Church of England, both living through times of great change in church and state.

The correspondence ended with a last comment from Bishop Thomas to Bishop Mark: “Sir, as you write, life is lived at great speed, I await your reply with all eagerness.” Well, apologies to both Bishops for not living up to Bishop Thomas’ trust in modern speediness! If you still have your copy of edition 15, the first three letters are worth reading again before you embark on the conclusion of the correspondence in this edition.

Finally, I hope that you will enjoy this edition of Newcastle Reader and, perhaps, be inspired to write something for later editions. My email address remains: gcadman@sky.com

I wish you a blessed and joyful Eastertide and hope that you are all well and will remain so during this very challenging time.

JUST A SEC



Just before everyone had to stop physical gatherings because of the Coronavirus, folk from the Bible study group at Monkseaton, St Peter were studying Psalm 32 together as part of our Lent discipline.

We found that it was a psalm that held content both to challenge and to encourage us. There had been 'signs and portents in the media, however we didn't fully realise then how much we were going to remember those verses and need them, as the corona virus spread around the world. In the psalm God says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye upon you." The psalm concludes "steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Many of you are now are now doing this 'shouting' by finding ways to communicate without physical contact. You are using the internet and social media to exchange creative ideas to spread the Good News and stream worship services and to download various helpful Apps. I know there are some of you who do not have access to the technology. In fact the systems are under strain because of high demand and we were actually without broadband for a day earlier this week (and it is still much slower than usual) In that situation we still have the Psalms, where as Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York designate, has written: "every human need and every human emotion can be found" adding that the Psalms "tell of God who is everywhere dancing in every particle of Creation."

In these difficult times Newcastle Readers are inspirational. Gloria Bryant, our editor, has had a very eventful year and has nevertheless worked very hard to ensure this magazine reaches you. She told me she wants "to bring you cheer" when so many Readers are under "house arrest." We are very grateful for her efforts. When you have read this edition you might consider answering Gloria's frequent requests to us all for articles ready for

future magazines. Emily Tsholofolo stayed up until three in the morning putting together and posting a Covid prayer book on Facebook. Bishop Mark, our Warden is, as ever, praying for the work of Newcastle readers and encouraging us to bring our various gifts to the task of sharing the love of Christ and the life of the kingdom of God in these "different days".

On the Church of England Website, our own diocesan website and on the various parish hubs there are many great resources to enable Bible study, prayer and worship. In addition, one of my favourites sites belongs to the academic, poet, priest and singer-songwriter Malcolm Guite- just Google his name. One may sign up to his Blog, read his work and hear him read his poetry and on YouTube there are inspiring lectures, sermons, meditations and singing sessions. His "All things in Christ" meditation on Colossians 1:15-20 is a moving example: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=malcom+guite+colossians

Wild Goose Publications, the publishing house of the Iona Community, <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=wild+goose+publications>

are allowing free use of their liturgy material on-line during the emergency but ask us to credit the source if we do share it. They also always have a set of e- postcards that one may send free and a message from the "Growing hope" section might be an apt one to send to friends at this time. One of these from the late founder of the Iona Community, George McLeod includes the words: "Christ is a person to be trusted, not a principle to be tested. The Church is a movement not a meeting house." Though we cannot go to our meeting houses we remain part of that movement and if we cannot leave home our waves of pray are not confined by the walls. Another of the postcards contains a beautiful illustration and a prayer-poem by Kate McIlhagga reminding us that God will not leave us bereft and He is with us through everything.

As Bishop Mark said in his recent message to us all do not hesitate to contact the Readers executive if there is anything, we may do to help you. (landline **0191 253 0407** mobile **07805112728**)

I hope that we will be able to gather together again soon and when we may do so let us trust that, as Charles Dickens wrote in Nicholas Nickleby, "the pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again."

JAN PORTER IS A READER AT THE CHURCH OF ST PETER MONKSEATON AND SECRETARY OF THE READERS' EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

THE FAMILY

Matthew 12.46-50



Another dry day, dust catching at our throats,
Unflavouring our bread. Our mission gathered
And he, bright as the sun, cool as the river,
Taught and talked to us – as crowds gathered –
Making that the only place in the world
We'd want to be. Since I left the town
And my dirty, shameful, lonely life in it,
I have wanted nothing but to be near him
And to touch the hem of his coat and hear him speak.
I see light from his eyes catch fire in the others,
And I pray, lighten me, my Lord, oh lighten me,
And let me stay near you till I'm ablaze.

While he was speaking, warning us we were evil –
As if we didn't know – telling us stories, teaching
With such compassion and such love for us
That our hearts melted once again to him,
I saw a woman and some young men come up
And stand, stock still, in the corner of the field.
So, as was our custom, I went to welcome them,
And I held out my hand to the woman
and offered her water;
They were dusty and tired, and I thought
they must have come
A distance, so I asked her. 'Yes,' she said,
'From Nazareth in Galilee,' and I saw
A glimmer in her eye as I caught my breath –
'Did you know him, then, when he was growing up?'
The young men laughed and her glimmer
became a twinkle;
'We did; I am his mother, these his brothers,'
She said, and I caught my breath again.
'I'll tell him you're here,' I said, 'he'll be so glad
'To see you,' and I ran to where he was,
Thinking all the time how much I should like
To have brothers and a mother just like his;
A family who would come so far to see me –
and a mother
With such a twinkle in her eye for me.
'Master!' I cried, 'Look!' Here is your mother
'And your brothers, waiting to see you!' – and he held
My gaze, and I swelled with joy and pride
That I had brought this news.

Then he said,

'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?'
And he turned from me and them and waved his hand
To indicate my companions, and he said,
'Here is my mother, and here are my brothers.
For those who do the will of my father in heaven –
'They are my brother, my sister, and my mother.'

I staggered back. I stared at him in shame.
I could not understand what he had said.
If I had had a mother and tall brothers,
I would not leave them at the edge of things.

I would hold them close, and love and laugh with them.
I turned and walked back to where his mother was,
Ashamed to tell my message, ashamed of him
Whom I was following.

I told what he's said

And she sighed a long, sad sigh, her shoulders slumped.
His brothers were angry and said they should go home,
But she said, 'No, I want to wait,' and they
Sat down to listen, and I sat with them.

We sat and listened, but I could not hear
The balm and comfort in his voice, I saw
Only a far-off figure, so proud and strange
That he preferred a straggling band of strangers
To tall brothers and a mother with sparkling eyes.
At last I wept, my head in my knees, rocking,
Sobbing, trying to keep silent; - and she,
His mother, put her hand on mine. I turned
And wept into her shoulder, while she held me
And we rocked together, clouding dust around us.

HILARY ELDER IS A READER AT BEDLINGTON
ST CUTHBERT

CHRIST WASHING THE FEET OF HIS DISCIPLES

BY TINTORETTO



CHRIST WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET BY JACOPO TINTORETTO, TYNE AND WEAR ARCHIVES AND MUSEUM.

Have you ever visited the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead? If not, please consider having a look at their collection. Most prominent among the paintings displayed there is a Tintoretto painting, which occupies an entire wall.

Jacopo Robusti, aka Tintoretto, is better known by his nickname, which means 'little dyer'. Born in Venice in 1518, he was apprenticed to Titian, from whom he acquired his skill with colour – hence the nickname. During his lifetime (he died in 1594), Tintoretto accepted numerous commissions to depict biblical stories for church interiors, but the story of Christ washing his disciples' feet was one of his favourite subjects and so he painted several versions. There is, for example, an entirely different rendition of the subject from the one in the Shipley in the National Gallery in London. However, there are in existence two identical versions of the painting in the Shipley, one hangs in the Prado in Madrid and the other in the church of St Marcuola in Venice, the church for which the painting was originally commissioned. This in itself makes the painting interesting – more of which anon. One of the first things one notices about the painting

in the Shipley is that Christ is not where one might expect him to be, that is, at the centre of it. Instead, as one looks at it, Christ is at the far right, where he is shown washing the feet of St Peter. Tintoretto decided to do this because the painting was to be positioned on the south wall of St Marcuola's Church. Most worshippers and visitors to the church would enter by the west door and, if they turned their head slightly to the right, the first figure they would notice would be Jesus - Jesus kneeling, his outer clothing cast off, a towel tied at his waist, his sleeves rolled up; Christ is a servant, not a king. But it is only when one looks at the painting square on, as most visitors to the Shipley will do, that one realises how complex Tintoretto's painting is, with many characters in a variety of poses. There is almost a comic element to the scene as various disciples struggle with boots and footwear in readiness for the washing of their feet. Perhaps an argument has been going on about who merits being next in line to Peter.

The foot-washing recorded in John's Gospel, as we all know, was one of the most radical things Jesus ever did, because in Jewish society foot-washing was a task reserved for slaves, or women and children, and no free man ever washed the feet of others. Furthermore, a Jewish male slave could never be asked to perform a task which



would make him impure. That is why Peter is so appalled at the idea that Jesus intends to wash his feet. In the painting, the washing has begun but Peter still holds his hand up as if he cannot quite believe what is happening. Jesus is not merely demonstrating extreme humility; instead, he is descending to the level of those who counted for nothing at all in the society of the day: women, children and male Gentile slaves. Peter objects not just because Jesus is prepared to undress in order to clean from the feet of the disciples the filth and dust gathered on the walk from Bethany to Jerusalem; it is that in doing so he abases himself. Peter is appeased only when he realises that to refuse to allow Jesus to wash his feet will alienate him from his master and the mission his master has prepared for him.

When one turns one's attention from Jesus and Peter to the other disciples in the painting, it is far from easy to identify who is who. It is generally accepted that St John is the figure in the background, seated and leaning against a pillar. Perhaps so secure in the knowledge of his master's love for him he does not need to scramble to be second to Peter in having his feet washed. Or, perhaps Tintoretto seeks to portray John as the deep thinker among the twelve, the future theologian, who really needs space to ponder the implications of all that is happening around him, to be sure that everything he is witnessing is absorbed into his memory. The only other disciple to be identified is Judas, the figure on the extreme left of the painting, a powerfully-built man dressed in bright red clothing, symbolic of the blood of his master he will be responsible for shedding.

Perhaps this was the moment Judas realised he could easily betray Jesus, because he was not the kind of Messiah he wanted: one who behaved like a common slave was not a leader he could follow. Judas stands alone, sure in his conviction that Jesus cannot be the Messiah who has been sent by God to free Israel from its captivity. That we are unsure of the identity of the remaining figures is, in my opinion, beneficial to the viewer: we can give rein to our imaginations and enter into the painting more freely. We can imagine who is Andrew, James, Bartholomew and so on. We can test our own feelings about the foot-washing: do we share Peter's shock, or do we feel embarrassed and uncomfortable, or are we brought to a sharp realisation of what it means to be a disciple of Christ? And we can wonder who volunteered to hold to hold the pitcher of water.

A final detail of the painting, which is worth mentioning, is Tintoretto's inclusion of a dog, a creature of no value in either the Old or New

Testaments. But by the late sixteenth century, certainly in Western Europe where the image was painted, dogs were much more likely to be treated as the valued companions of humans because they had a reputation for faithfulness. So, a hound lies still, gaze focused on Jesus, a sharp contrast to Judas, treacherous and in the painting self-absorbed as he prepares to commit a terrible act of betrayal. It is all too easy to be like Judas, marred by ambition, doubt and self-interest, but the painting reminds us that friendship with Christ is not about exercising power, not about being top dog; it is about being faithful, like the dog in the painting, and accepting our call to self-effacing, self-sacrificing service.

As a footnote, there is something of a mystery surrounding the three identical versions of Christ washing his disciples' feet. Art historians are in agreement that the version which currently hangs in St Marcuola's Church in Venice is not the original. What is known is that the original became part of the extensive collection of Charles I. When Charles was executed in 1649, his collection was dispersed, and for many years, art historians believed that the original was the version in the Prado's collection in Madrid. It was held that the version in the Shipley, along with a similar though slightly different version in The National Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, was the work of one of the many artists who worked in Tintoretto's studio, including his elder son Domenico.

More recently, however, some art historians have come to the conclusion that the version owned by the Shipley is the work of the master himself, that is, the original commissioned for the church in Venice. The problem is that little is known about the whereabouts of the Shipley version until 1814, when it was sold to the Ridley family of Blagdon Hall. In 1818, the family gave the painting to St Nicholas' Church in Newcastle, now our cathedral. It hung there for many years. In 1980, the diocese loaned the picture to the Tyne Wear Museum Service and in 1986 sold it, so that it could be permanently displayed at the Shipley. So, a visit to the Shipley is worth the effort, not only because the painting is a wonderful representation of a beautiful moment in Christ's earthly ministry, which we recall every Maundy Thursday, but also because the painting which once was thought to be 'from the school of Tintoretto' is quite possibly a genuine Tintoretto, from the hand of the 'little dyer' himself.

**GLORIA BRYANT IS A READER WITH PTO AT
NEWCASTLE ST FRANCIS.**

MUZAK VERSUS MUSIC IN CHURCH



I'm going through a bit of a phase. I've started paying attention to 'muzak'. Muzak is the background music that shops and businesses use – the music that's piped into aisles, waiting rooms and lifts.

If you're still not sure what I mean and would like to listen to about half an hour of muzak uninterrupted I can highly recommend calling your car insurance company with a query about your policy! Muzak is compiled by experts in a blend calculated to be innocuous, insipid and inoffensive. What's more, playing the right kind of music can apparently convince shoppers to move more quickly through the supermarket, or make diners hungrier.

That music can have such a powerful subconscious effect is fascinating so I've taken up listening to the music people play to influence me, mainly because I'm curious to what they choose. It's so easy to just let the music wash over us and not think about it. I fear that the same could be true in our churches. So much church music has been written. God has been praised in music of every discernible style and instrument, from the ancient plainsong melodies that monks memorised to animate their worship, to the drunken wassailing of peasants on Twelfth Night, to the Victorians' expansive revival of organs and robed choirs and all the creativity it unleashed, to the modern praise bands seeking to worship God in a contemporary idiom today. So much music has been written, and yet no one church or occasion can indulge in all of it. No church has the musicians to play the variety of music we could hear, and indeed, even if I could do it, I think most congregations would take some time to become accustomed to me using Tuvan Throat Singing to deliver the liturgy.

So perhaps because there is so much choice of what we could sing and hear we stick with what we already know, what is safe and secure, and don't worry too much about it. Everyone has always liked what we do, why mess with a good thing? There's nothing wrong with thinking that I suppose, turn the page and go, make yourself

a cup of tea and worry no more! But music has such power to unleash people's creativity, to unite them in song, to inspire and to bring parts of our emotional lives we did not know were there to the fore. It seems a shame just to carry on doing what we are doing and let the music wash over us like the muzak in the shops. Instead, what I am trying to do at least, is be more conscious about the way we use music in church (different pieces, different styles and so on). What are we trying to do with the music and how might we do it better?

It is here that I think the church can do so much better than muzak, and I think three points are worthy of reflection:

1. Church music can be participative not manipulative. Shops might use music to manipulate and subconsciously nudge us into buying more. On the whole, church music attempts to work at a more conscious level; we are meant to participate in it. Music before and after a service may be there to provide a certain atmosphere, be it quiet and mysterious, warm and welcoming, or triumphant and celebratory, but, hopefully at least, we are meant to listen to it, it is meant to inspire us to prayer.

What's more, most of the music in Church is not simply played and listened to. In most of the music we hear in Church we are invited to sing and join in. This is one of the marks of how effective our music is. To what extent does it allow as many people as possible to participate in it, whether in an official way as part of the choir or music group, or as members of the congregation. Does it enable us to use our musical abilities, however feeble, to give voice to our worship? For some this may be as much by our listening as our performing. Music draws us into worship in a new way, allowing us to engage our bodies and our emotions in the wonder of the mystery we are celebrating, in a way that reading the words out of the book does not.

2. Church music does not have to be innocuous and inoffensive. Many people have quite established musical tastes (guilty as charged), and aren't keen on exploring new musical

styles – it just sounds like noise after all! Muzak is therefore chosen to be as insipid, innocuous and inoffensive as possible. It quietly gets on with its work, doesn't draw attention to itself, and doesn't put anyone off. Since worship music can be such a battleground in so many churches, and since we want to be as attractive to as many people as possible, there is a temptation for us to do the same. We don't want to push ourselves to try new things, or learn to like new music, and so we stick with what's safe and familiar. Or likewise, we might worry that people might not like the music we currently have and so, even though it is precious to us, we might try to replace it with songs we do not sing well.


I think there is a middle ground for communities to find here. Clearly unthinkingly regurgitating what has gone before doesn't allow for congregations for participate in discovering new things creatively. But there is also great value in having a deep knowledge of our tradition (whatever it may be), and holding onto the way in which music helps form something of our identity.

Perhaps then, if we are to discover new things, to find a fresh expression of our worship, our starting place has to be where we are now. If music in your church has always been accompanied, say, by an organ, then a guitar-led, soft-rock music group might not be a destination for where your community should go, let alone a first step. There are, however, new hymns that can be learnt, or singing old words to new tunes, Taizé chants can be incorporated. The aim of church music should not be to choose hymns that no one will get upset about, but to inspire and allow us to use our creativity and musicianship, however great or slight, to the glory of God.

3. Church music actually says something. It is this meditating on Scripture which is perhaps at the heart of what liturgical music is trying to do. Our music in church is not for its own sake, to keep us from being bored or cover up background noise. Church music seeks to do something more than that. We have talked of how Church music is participative, but it invites us not just to participate in singing a jolly song, but to participate in the words of scripture. Much of our church music recites, quotes and alludes to the Biblical texts, which, especially as Church of England Christians, form the basis of all of our liturgy. By singing the words they come alive in a new way, they both sink in to us and we in a sense sink in to them; we begin to participate in them. As we sing 'Hosanna' on Palm Sunday are we not there with the crowds welcoming the Lord among us? As we sing 'Holy, holy, holy' in the Eucharistic prayer are we not truly

joining the angelic chorus in the eternal song of heaven? When we sing the liturgy, and sing music that truly enhances the liturgy, we find ourselves participating more deeply in the mysteries we celebrate.

One example of a way the Church can do this better is with the use of the psalter. After the Parish Communion movement, when parishes restored the Eucharist as the principal act of worship on Sundays instead of Matins, psalms became less and less heard. The Common Worship encourages us to hear the psalm after the first reading, but this is an invitation relatively few parishes have taken up. It seems to me a great loss that such a great number of Christians no longer sing regularly from Jesus' own hymn book. There are many ways that perfectly ordinary parishes can achieve this.



Perhaps then, if we are to discover new things, to find a fresh expression of our worship, our starting place has to be where we are now.

There is a multiplicity of sources of responsorial psalms which can be led by a cantor or small group of singers. Even if there are no singers to lead this, there are also many fine sources of Metrical Psalms that can be sung to popular hymn tunes. Singing the psalm is one way we can once again respond to Scripture in the words of Scripture, participating in God's words rather than simply having it read at us. Music is a great gift of God to humanity and to the Church. For all that it can be hard to do well, or contentious, it is also something that almost all can enjoy or be involved in regardless of ability, and can bring people together. God's glory knows no end of the telling, so Christians of all traditions must not conclude that Church music hit its zenith in one form or in one moment of history, but must continue singing and writing and composing, to tell of his wonderful works.

THE REVEREND JONATHAN COOPER IS CURRENTLY CURATE AT THE CHURCH OF ST FRANCIS NEWCASTLE. Jon, pictured above, is shown serving tea at St Francis' annual wagonway event.

An Eastertide Meditation on Stanley Spencer's Resurrection, Cookham (1923-27) and 1 Corinthians 15: 1-10

MEDITATION

Verse 1

Was Cookham like Corinth, people all shapes and sizes?
Were there murders and sex crimes and nasty surprises?
Were there families and fall outs, parties and pain?
Did the sun shine, the wind blow the snow fall, the rain?
Were there silvery dawns, skies as dark as the grave?
Was the Gospel shared freely by none but the brave?
Were there beautiful flowers grown from a brown seed?
Was there kindness and love and hatred and greed?

Verse 2

I look at the painting and these things I see
The people, the places, I see you, I see me
On the mossy Church wall there are saints, Moses too
Like ordinary people, like someone we knew
Just around the corner, maybe next- door -but- one
Behaving as usual as they'd always done
Wearing the clothes, they'd worn throughout life
Still a brother, a sister, a husband a wife.

Verse 3

There's the artist's wife Hilda in her favourite dress
He still loves her though in life he caused her distress
The tough times forgiven yes, all couples row
A future enfolding from the here and the now.
The dead are arising reading, what's on their stones
Remembering Christ - the one who atones
Remembering old Adam, his nature we share
Remembering God's promise, his love and his care

Verse 4

Was the Garden of Eden in Cookham's High Street?
Did Jesus walk down there with nails in his feet?
Was creator and creation embodied right through
As me resting in God means He's resting in you?
Was the artist young Adam and wife, Hilda his Eve?
Is God's grace given freely to those who believe?
The figures lounge fearless, receive the water of life
God's mysterious economy – a gift without price.

Verse 5

This grace in abundance in which we can share
A grace to embody, a cross we help bear
No enslavement to sin as Christ takes the load
He's our strength in our weakness- helps us find the right road.
Recognising our sin as Christ pays the bill
A bridge to the father with a cross on a hill
But listen, hear St Paul so humble and lowly?
When we sin, and do wrong we are not being holy

Verse 6

See the dead brush off soil- cleaning up is a must
I hear ashes to ashes, and red dust to red dust.
Mix with the spirit to give a body so new
Christ- like and spiritual for me and for you
The spirit within us working for all that is good
Social justice, forgiveness but well understood
A newness and freshness in what is already here
Our essence preserved and what we hold dear

Verse 7

And what is life like in this pale, brave new dawn?
Is it joyful yet sad like the first Easter morn?
Spencer's fresh, lavender morning painted silvery blue
Brown trees, twisting ivy, evergreen, ever new
With people departing on familiar seas
And praying to God upon bended knees
Not the body we know but an imperishable mode
A new dawn, a loud trumpet for a heavenly abode.

Verse 8

Can the people in Cookham help us to see?
Can we see ourselves there – yes, you and yes, me?
Ordinary yet sacred, God's love in each part
Just like circumcision but that of the heart
People greeting each other, renewing their love
Crawling from tombs thanking God up above
Like a barrel of flour without any leaven
This Cookham, this place, this village in Heaven

Verse 9

So, look right at the centre, surrounded by flowers
Father, Spirit through Christ, not in ivory towers
But down here amongst us the end times are here No
one is hurrying, there's nothing to fear.
Christ, nursing three babies – humanity new
From the old seed of Adam, magnificence grew
A new second Adam sent from the father above
Working downwards to us – an action of love
Father, son and the spirit join our human race
God's intimate closeness, God's infinite grace

Verse 10

Christ in the archway – grey Easter tide stones
God's life-bringing breath to a stack of dry bones
Just like with Adam formed with dust made to clay
We sleep then we greet a new age, a new day
Death is defeated – from the first Easter morn
As Jesus' last breath, the temple curtain was torn
Heralding closeness for all, in a time God will set
A heaven right here, yes, right now but not yet.

LIZ HAWKINS IS A
READER AT HEBRON
ST CUTHBERT



THE RESURRECTION, COOKHAM,
1924-1927, SIR STANLEY SPENCER
(1891-1959), TATE BRITAIN
PHOTO CREDIT: PHOTO@TATE

CHRIST THE ULTIMATE ARTWORK



As I write this, the country is in lockdown and we are all finding new ways to worship, support each other and Be Church.

At the beginning of February – which seems like a different world – I was delighted to be asked by Lindisfarne College of Theology to lead their annual Readers-in-Training retreat. The theme of the weekend was Prayer through Looking and Listening. We spent the weekend in contemplation of some great art and music and thinking about creativity as a form of prayer. The final session was spent in open prayer reflecting on some of the paintings we had looked at – I hope everyone else found it as moving as I did.

I was then asked to preach at the final Eucharist and thought that my sermon might also contribute to this time of uncertainty and, not but, our trust in an ever-loving God who shows himself to us in the most surprising ways. The text was Matthew 5: 13-20 and the sermon is below:

'As you came in, you'll have found a little sachet of salt on your chair. I know there has been a lot of jokes flying around this weekend about liver salts, but this is common or garden table salt. These little packets speak far louder than their size suggests. What do they suggest to us? Fish and chips? They point to the anticipation of a lovely meal: they mean far more than they first appear to. The little paper packet that we can see and hold leads us to the imagined and invisible plate of chips.

The meditation we've returned to over and over again this weekend is Purcell's setting of these words: Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto thee. In these twelve little words we have the distillation of what it means to have faith. A plea, a trust, a hope, a faith that he to whom we pray is there hearing us, receiving our cries, he is real, we can communicate with him and be heard.

Our faith leads us to accept that the world we can see and hear comes from the creation of God. The word, the language – the tangible form we use to communicate – points to the meaning greater than itself, the meaning we cannot see or touch, but that we have faith exists. As the sachet of salt points to the anticipated chips, the letter to the Hebrews says 'By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.' (Hebrews 11:3) We see the salt and think of the imagined meal. Faith allows us to use the tangible to point to the intangible, the visible to point to the invisible, the flesh to point to the word.



Our faith that everything, seen and unseen, was made by God is embodied in the person of Christ, the Word, who himself points to God.

Purcell's setting of those twelve little words that we heard earlier – and, yes, incredibly the emotion, tension and yearning in that piece of music are wrung out from just those twelve little words – is a really good example of what I mean here. The twelve little words- Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto thee – the bit we can see and read and understand, have been used to point to an experience of far greater emotional resonance, of yearning, of worship. We can't see or read or understand this. It is transient – we hear it wash across us, we experience it collectively, and then we are left with just the twelve little words to remind us of what they point to, of what they communicate, what they mean. Purcell takes twelve words and five parts and weaves them into something immeasurably greater than the sum of those parts.

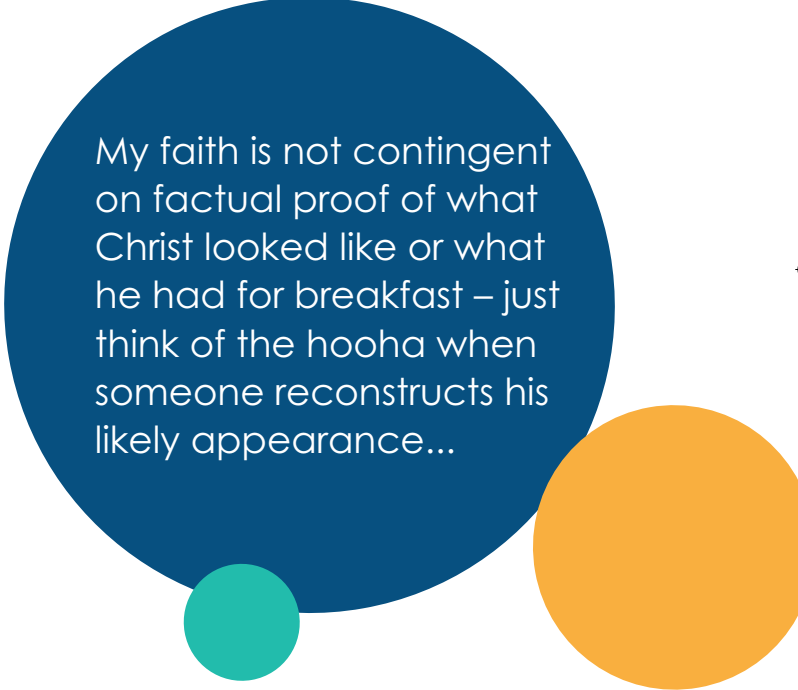
Of course, all great art is a form of communicating something bigger than itself – Stanley Spencer memorably said that painting was his way of saying 'Ta' to God. Painting, poetry, music all use something tangible in this world to point to something bigger that we can't see but that we know we can experience. In this sense perhaps Christ, the word made flesh, is the ultimate great artwork – made incarnate so we can experience him in our terms, our language, and acting as the signpost to the God we can't see or touch but can experience.

My faith is not contingent on factual proof of what Christ looked like or what he had for breakfast – just think of the hoocha when someone reconstructs his likely appearance, a bit like the Cheddar Man, and it's not how we want him to look. Of course, St John at one point does actually tell us what he had for breakfast – barbecued fish for those of you interested – but this doesn't make Christ any more believable to me. For me, this approach is equivalent to reducing a great painting to an analysis of the chemicals placed together to create it. If instead we think of Christ the man as the artwork – the poem, the painting, the song that we can see, hold, read, listen to – that points to a greater meaning beyond our means of communication, this doesn't make him any less real, it just highlights the limitations of our human communication and understanding.

So, our clumsy attempts to bring the intangible back to the tangible, to capture and pin the butterfly and in doing so to lose what makes it a butterfly, speak loudly of our lack of faith and

unwillingness to live with awesome uncertainty. God loves us so much that he gave us Christ to live and die amongst us so that we could see and touch and understand in our own language, and what did we do? We captured him, we pinned him to a cross.

As we journey in Christ, our quest to accept the unknowing, to have faith to trust that God has given us the tools of communication to understand all that we need to. And in the acceptance of unknowingness we prove our capacity to learn to know more – we acknowledge the never-ending quest to learn, for to think we know everything is to close our minds and to fall into fundamentalism. As we journey with Christ to the cross, we remember that all this – his life and his death – was God's gift to us, his word made flesh that we might experience his love and that, in his passion and death, God loves us so much that he experiences our own limitations, our cruelties, our sin, alongside us.



My faith is not contingent on factual proof of what Christ looked like or what he had for breakfast – just think of the hoocha when someone reconstructs his likely appearance...

Christ the poem, the painting, the song, reaches out to us and gives us a glimmer of understanding of the greater glories of the kingdom of God. Christ the ultimate artwork points us, in a language we can understand, to the glory of God. He became flesh so that we might begin to understand the word. Amen.'

[If you are unfamiliar with the Purcell work mentioned above, may I refer you to a beautiful recording of it by VOCE8 on YouTube]

CE HOLMES IS A READER AT THE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS SOUTH GOSFORTH.

PAST MEETS PRESENT, PART 2

Dear Bishop Thomas,

Please forgive my delayed reply. It is something of an irony that greater speed and technical innovation leads us to a life of greater busyness rather than greater leisure. I have had to pop down to Lambeth, which is much expanded but still recognisable from its sixteenth century form. I thought of you as I sat and prayed in the room overlooking the chapel in which Archbishop Cranmer is said to have written the Book of Common Prayer.

It is interesting to reflect on the development of the role of Bishops Suffragan over the last half-millennium. There are, I confess, still some elements of 'episcopal curacy' to the role, but it has become far more substantial and defined as the church has sought greater 'efficiency' (and possibly 'efficacy') over the years. Clergy numbers have dropped dramatically, with many rural priests serving upwards of five parishes single-handedly. There are, as you surmise, many churches in Newcastle, although sadly only a small percentage of the population are regular in their worship. This means that one of our primary emphases is on 'mission' as we seek to engage people with the life and hope we find in Christ. In terms of the faith of the people, today's society has more in common with that of St Aidan or St Cuthbert than it does with what I understand of your day. One of my key tasks is the leadership of this missional element in our work.

The other episcopal tasks which shape much of my time is appointing and licencing clergy; and confirming new believers. Both of these give me the opportunity to spend time in parishes ministering alongside clergy with whom we still share the 'cure of souls'.

I am glad to say that we are no longer at war with the Scots. Since 1603 we have shared a monarch (I hesitate to tell you that James VI of Scotland became James I of England when he inherited the crown on the death of Queen Elizabeth, whom we call Queen Elizabeth I as our current monarch is Elizabeth II), and the nations have been formally united by act of Parliament since 1707. Interestingly, there is now some thought that Scotland might become independent once again. The challenges we face today are manifold, but quite different and the role of the Bishops centres on being a focal point for mission, worship and unity within the church, and a leading witness for Christ in our increasingly secular society.

This is an urgent task, and one in which I am privileged to share; but it is not one that I can do alone. Not only is the task shared with Priests, Deacons, and Church Wardens, but we also have a growing focus on the ministry of the whole 'laos' or people of God both within the church and more widely in the world. Like you, we too live in times when the church is being forced to ask profound questions about our nature and existence.

Please continue to hold us in your prayers as we seek to remain faithful to Christ in rapidly changing times,

Yours,
+MARK BERWICK

This is an urgent task,
and one in which
I am privileged to
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MARK BERWICK

ALEC RYRIE

Dear Bishop Mark,

Your letter leaves me in doubt which of us ought more to envy the other. It seems plain to me that your age has received many blessings unlooked-for: in the happy union of the British realms, for which so many earnest prayers were said and so much Christian blood shed in my times, news for which I give hearty thanks; and in the flourishing of the city and of the North beyond what I might have imagined. Yet as is ever the case, God sends us trials as well as gifts. It grieves me to learn that so many have in your day fallen away from the faith. I confess it does not surprise me: for peace and prosperity is oftentimes matched by an insensible apostasy.

Even so, I take heart from this: from all you say, the Church you serve is readying herself for the task she faces. Albeit you have a sniff of the Puritan about you, yet your invocation of blessed Aidan and Cuthbert makes me think the better of you, and gives me the more hope that, as in earlier days, God will raise up men and indeed women fitted to the times and to the task.

I take heart too from the light manner in which you describe your 'pop' to Lambeth. What manner of travel a 'pop' might be, I confess I cannot imagine. But this much I know: had I ever been summoned by my lord of Canterbury, I should have expected to linger in his dungeons rather than soon to have returned. Perhaps in your day, my lord – or my lady – of Canterbury is more truly become what the pope of Rome was long said to be: the servant of the servants of God.

Yet I have prattled enough: and I have higher matters before me than this correspondence. I will take my leave of you with a morsel of counsel, with a promise and with the begging of a favour.

If I may be so bold as to advise you from my own peculiar perspective: remember eternity is long. Whatever you may conceive the providence of God has in store for you, you are surely mistaken. I have a fancy that when another four centuries have passed, a bishop of Berwick in the reign of Queen Elizabeth III will look back on your times as you have on mine, from a world which has once again changed beyond expectation.

My promise to you is simpler: to disturb your labours no more with idle words, but to bear them up in my prayers, as you and your people are borne up by the prayers of the whole Church of Christ, militant, suffering and triumphant. May the God to whom we both offer our service bless your endeavours, more so, perhaps, than he did mine.

And my request: that you, too, might remember my poor soul. Perhaps you share the scruples of many with regard to prayers for the dead, but I do not wish to bandy doctrines with you: rather, to lean on your charity towards all Christian souls and especially to the cloud of witnesses which surrounds you and grows ever fuller. We do not forget you: forget you not us.

And so, until we meet at the last day, I remain your humble bedesman,

+ THOMAS BERWICENSIS

WITH THANKS TO THOMAS SPARKE, ALIAS PROFESSOR ALEC RYRIE (READER AT SHOTLEY ST JOHN), AND THE RIGHT REVEREND MARK TANNER, BISHOP OF BERWICK AND WARDEN OF READERS

A YEAR TO CELEBRATE 50 YEARS OF WOMEN BEING READERS IN NEWCASTLE DIOCESE



Bishop Martyn, Chair of the Central Readers' Council's message in a recent edition of the National Reader Magazine, I am sure, struck a chord with many Readers.

He referred to all baptised Christians who are involved in ministry as amateurs. An amateur is literally one who loves what they are doing. Bishop Martyn went on to state, "However we have a problem in the Church today. We have so professionalised ministry that we think that only those with the proper training and qualifications can be involved". Yes, Reader ministry is not professional, but it encompasses the width and breadth of Christian ministry. In 2019, we celebrated 50 years of women being licensed as Readers, it is perhaps good to hear two very different voices from women Readers from the early beginnings of this ministry and it is also pertinent to hear a voice of how male Readers viewed this transition.

Amongst the first of many women to be licensed were Margaret Temple, Esther Hamilton, Cynthia Wood and Mary Gill (who later became ordained). With the exception of Cynthia all are now deceased. Cynthia had readily agreed to answer questions about her long and fulfilling years as a Reader. Together with Olwyn and Ron Black we spent an enthralling two hours hearing Cynthia's experiences of being a Reader. Cynthia lives alone in Riding Mill, with her cat Sheba.

For those who have never encountered Cynthia, expect to be entertained by a 93 year old. She is modest about her ministry, has a very sharp mind and a ready sense of humour. When asked when she first felt called to Reader ministry, Cynthia told us that, although she already was deeply involved in the life of the church at St Peter's Bywell and St John's Stocksfield, as a Sunday School teacher, Churchwarden, later on Deanery Synod and eventually on Diocesan Synod, it was her vicar who suggested her going forward for Reader training. This was in the 1970's.

Several times during our conversations, with Cynthia, she continually emphasised the importance of the empowerment of the laity and that it is as important now as it was when she first began her training. Referring to Reader ministry she stated "We should be a bridge between the laity and the clergy".



1. Cynthia had also resisted the idea of ordination, believing that her role was the encouragement of the laity. Cynthia felt that people were more inclined to respond to those believers in the pew, rather than those in Holy Orders. She emphatically stated "I believe in Christianity not Churchianity"! Asked how she felt when preaching her first sermon the response was "B.....y terrified"! But Cynthia modestly acknowledged "the Vicar was very encouraging". Asked if she had ever experienced any opposition to being a woman Reader, she only ever had had one woman who refused to take the reserved sacrament from her hand.

Cynthia went on to share other views: Academic people were not necessarily good communicators; she felt that women were more spiritual than men, men having difficulty in believing in anything that can't be proved! The female psyche was much more spiritual than that of the male. Today Cynthia felt that there was an increasing bias towards women. Perhaps the pendulum had swung too far the other way.

During her years of ministry as a Reader, Cynthia had experienced five interregnums, one scandal and one heart attack and funerals too many to mention! However, Cynthia believes that the struggle still goes on. The challenge of the Church today is the absence of young people in many churches. "We have to make the Church somewhere where all people feel welcome".

Perhaps one of Cynthia's greatest assets is her voice. This is not the voice of a tremulous old lady; this is the voice of a resolute lady with valuable opinions and many years of experience. Yes, she acknowledges wisdom can come with old age. But she also acknowledged she is not always right! Cynthia had once given up for Lent 'Being always right' - she admitted she found this very difficult! Yet another facet to Cynthia's character is her resolute belief in meditation, beginning with the emptying and stilling of the mind. Asked where she thought Readers Ministry was today the response was, "The Church was trying to make Reader Ministry into minor clergy instead of empowering lay people".

In complete contrast, we needed to hear how a woman Reader carried out their ministry in an inner-city parish. Margaret Temple (deceased) carried out a wide-ranging ministry in the parish of St Martin's Walker and it was through the kindness of Tom Cowen (Reader at Christ Church Walker), giving his time, who remembered Margaret well, and was able to give us an insight into her ministry in that parish. Margaret had a very fulfilling ministry being a Hospital Chaplain at the General Hospital;

2. she took many funerals; had great strength in pastoral ministry and during the period when each deanery had a contact person for requesting Reader cover for non-Eucharistic services, Margaret carried out this task with great enthusiasm. Margaret Temple will also always be remembered for her constant maintenance of fellowship groups and fellowship sharing. In an inner-city parish where there were invariable pastoral and financial needs Margaret carried out her ministry of caring with great sensitivity. However, for those who knew Margaret well I believe the expression is "you got what you saw"! If Margaret didn't agree with the actions of others (lay and clergy) she would soon tell them!!

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to mention briefly how male Readers reacted to women being licensed. Again, Tom Cowen gave a very fair overview from his perspective: "Some men found the advent of women in this role initially very difficult nevertheless others welcomed it". He acknowledged that women in Reader ministry was another reflection at that time of what was taking place in gender roles within society in general. He felt that in the past, it was a hard time for both men and women Readers being accepted in some parishes. However, it was a boost for all Readers when Bishop Alec Graham made the statement that Readers were 'lay theologians'.

I began this article by quoting Bishop Martyn's Message which stated that 'Christian disciples are indeed amateurs – we are people who seek to love God and love our neighbours, and we love learning more about what this means'. Cynthia Wood may well be 93 years old and now retired from public ministry, the late Margaret Temple will be remembered by many for her work in her parish and beyond. These were/are women who encapsulate(d) the true religious amateur.

Thank you, Cynthia, for giving us the time to have these conversations with you – and thank you Tom for giving us an insight into the late Margaret Temple's ministry. Bishop Martyn wrote 'the origin of the word amateur lies in the Latin verb 'to love'. What a fitting label to all Readers male and female - amateurs - literally one who loves what they're doing.

MARJORIE WOOD IS A READER EMERITUS AND WORSHIPS AT THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS.

WHAT'S A PADRE? ON BEING A CHAPLAIN TO RAF CADETS

One of the greatest joys, privileges and challenges I have is of acting as Chaplain to a Squadron of the Air Training Corps (now RAF Air Cadets).

I was asked to do this by my predecessor when he retired ill, and had some good handover information from him, and found more online, but our boss' illness has perhaps delayed my wider induction and training!

Our Squadron is one of the oldest in the country, and lost several Cadets on active service during the Second World War. Funds are limited, facilities shared, and a packed schedule of sports, learning, parades, fun (and there's no such thing as enough flying!) is sustained by a huge amount of work from small numbers of volunteers who never seem to have time off, supported by an overworked central administration... Sound familiar at all?

Every Squadron's different, and ours changes a lot as different groups and staff move in or on; we have a vast range of pastoral need, and sometimes all I can do is be a listening ear, keep myself as well informed as I can, try to signpost better support, do my best to care, and pray like mad!

I've bored some Cadets with Powerpoint, but it's so hard to predict what works - they've been inspired by the maniple (can't remember why I mentioned it!), the Coronation Address, the fact that St George isn't English... you name it! The rapt silences are so precious, and the quiet "thank you"'s... I once collated Kingdom references from St Matthew, laminated the summary and "gave" the Cadets the Kingdom of God, saying "it belongs to you - my job is to not stop you going in" - you could have heard a pin drop!

We're blessed with a choir at church for the annual carol service, and their beautiful music has helped create space for so many to come forward with



prayers - I'm overwhelmed each year by the torrent of young prayer, and the weight of cares that so many people carry during "childhood".

I'm frustrated that big events can often sideline the next generation, and key opportunities are missed for engaging this critical teenage group - sometimes my serving includes apologising for the Church! I try to support staff and families, and to offer a "ministry of biscuits" amid the busy Adjutant's office - and to keep my finger on the pulse during volunteers' "fresh air" breaks ;) In the pub with staff, I'm often the only minister (and perhaps the only Christian) most people have ever met - I hope the Spirit can do something with that responsibility that's far too much for me!

Like the rest of ministry, this has ups and downs amid my many imperfections, but I feel blessed with a fabulously supportive Squadron who forgive me a lot, "give me marks for trying", hopefully know I care, and look after me, as if to say "well, he might be an idiot, but he's OUR idiot!"

I massively recommend this incredible ministry to anyone who gets the chance - there's usually vacancies in an Army, Navy or Air Force unit near you; work's not too militaristic, and you needn't be too preachy! It's such a rare privilege to walk with people at this critical stage of life when so many are (often understandably!) turned off the Church. It's also the closest I've come to seeing and living some lovely advice from a Bishop's obituary "rejoice, pray, and don't take yourself too seriously!"

Please keep all units and Padres in your prayers, together with our base at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre at Ampert near Andover, Hants, as it considers its future - and if anyone wants to buy a 36-bed stately home for only £1.8M...? Going there is like getting a thank-you hug from England.

MALCOLM TOFT IS A READER AT NEWCASTLE ST ANDREW AND NEWCASTLE ST LUKE. HE IS ALSO DEPUTY WING PADRE FOR ALL 35 DURHAM AND NORTHUMBERLAND SQUADRONS.

ON BEING A CHAPLAIN AT THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS

So far this 'door' has led to a satisfying role and I am happy to continue with it – but who knows, other than God, what the future holds!

Throughout my career in life and as a Reader I have found that with God, when one door closes, another one will open; you've just got to go on pushing doors until one of them gives!

When I moved to Newcastle from Acomb and the parish of St John Lee in 2012, for various reasons there was not a role for me as a Reader in my new parish of Christ the King. So, I started pushing doors – and one which seemed possible was Police Chaplaincy and, after several conversations and some visits, I was sent on a Police Chaplaincy course at Swanwick, Derbyshire, and duly passed, along with nine others. But then - nothing seemed to materialise for quite some time, with no suggestions as to where I might serve.

However, I was then approached by the Reverend Glyn Evans who asked if I would be interested in joining his team as City Centre Chaplain and, because of my training, suggested I assist him as chaplain at the Market Street police station and offices. I was happy to do so. However, I did not find this completely satisfying as the officers were constantly changing, particularly as the new headquarters at Forth Banks was being developed, so there was little continuity and no opportunity to build up a relationship with any of them, although I was able, with Glyn, to convey some of their concerns about their new working conditions at the new headquarters to a higher authority.

About then, I saw an invitation to consider chaplaincy at Newcastle Cathedral and this seemed to tick several boxes for me. Another door opened! We are all retired clergy or Readers with PTOs and most of us stick to certain days on a regular basis. I do most Tuesday mornings from 10.15 to 1pm, unless I have other commitments.

We wear a cassock and have a badge denoting us as 'Duty Chaplain'. For much of the time we have the opportunity to wander about in the Cathedral and talk to the many visitors who come from all parts of the world – even some from Newcastle and Gateshead! The majority of the overseas visitors arrive from the Amsterdam/North Shields ferry and so are Dutch or German. There are leaflets available in several languages to explain the main aspects of the building and they are welcomed with pleasant surprise, especially by those who have little knowledge of English. Much of the conversation with these visitors is about the fabric and the history but occasionally people want to talk about the faith and this might come about as a result of the hourly short prayer sessions from the pulpit, for which we are responsible.

However, one of our main purposes is to be available if someone comes into the cathedral with a problem which they want to chew over with someone who is prepared to listen and, because of the uniform, seems to represent 'the Church' – and we are that 'someone'. So, we find a quiet corner and become a 'listening ear'. Some of the tales are quite tragic and all we can offer them is some sympathy and prayer, but often that is all they need to go away more at peace than when they came in. Sometimes, visitors ask for money, which we cannot give. They will be offered, as everyone is, our 'listening ear' and prayer and they will usually be offered of a cup of tea or coffee with a biscuit, if we have any. In addition, occasionally someone who has been sleeping rough will come into the cathedral to get warm or have a short sleep and sometimes we get a chance to talk to them, give them some Christian literature and pray with them.

So far this 'door' has led to a satisfying role and I am happy to continue with it – but who knows, other than God, what the future holds!

CHRISTOPHER SAYERS

[Chris wrote this article before major work began inside St. Nicholas' Cathedral. However, the work of the chaplains continued until the Covid 19 lockdown.]