

The Vicar Writes...

Dear Friends

My letter this month is taken from a book called "Rivers in the Desert" by Rowland Croucher. Does God care? Does God feel for me when I hurt? Is God touched by my pain?

There are no simple answers to questions like these. Some early Christians believed in God's impassibility. He was transcendent, beyond humiliation and suffering. There was a belief that if God felt pain this would contradict his omnipotence. The Christian God is one who, through Jesus' death on the cross, enters into the experience of our Godforsakenness. The Easter event doesn't only have to do with redemption from sin and the gift of eternal life. It's about my suffering, today. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it "Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering".

No pain that we bear,
But he has felt its smart;
All forms of human grief and care
Have pierced that tender heart.

Father Damien, living among his lepers, stood up one day to address them and began, "we lepers". He, too, had become a leper. We have to be careful though neither to glorify suffering, on the one hand, nor stoicism on the other. God is both immanent, he is with us in our struggles, and transcendent, beyond and above us. God feels pain and conquers pain. His heart beats in tune with our griefs and sufferings. Jesus wept, more than once, he understands and cares. We can know a God who knows us. He suffers with the sufferer.

See from his head, his hands, his feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Andrew

ST. DAVID'S DAY (1st March)

On 1st March Wales celebrates its patron saint, David – or, in Welsh, Dewi or Dafydd. He is indisputably British, and is revered wherever Welsh people have settled. As with most figures from the so-called 'Dark Ages' (he lived in the sixth century), reliable details about his life are scarce, but there are enough for us to form a picture of a formidably austere, disciplined and charismatic leader, who led the Church in Wales through turbulent years and fought tenaciously for the faith.

It's likely that he was strengthened in his ministry by time spent in Ireland, where the Church was stronger and more confident. Early records tell of a meeting of Irish church leaders with three 'Britons', as they were described, among them 'bishop David'. His mother, Non, is also celebrated as a saint in Wales, where a number of churches are dedicated in her name.

That he founded a monastery at Menevia, in Pembrokeshire, seems beyond doubt. It later became the site of St David's cathedral and the settlement which is now the smallest city in the United Kingdom. From Menevia David embarked on preaching and teaching missions across Wales, and probably beyond. His eloquence was legendary.

At a famous Synod of the Church, held at a Carmarthenshire village called Brefi, he preached passionately against the Arian heresy – indeed, so passionately that he was (according to some accounts) immediately named as archbishop of Wales. The village is now known as Llandewi Brefi – *brefi* in Welsh is a hillock, and legend claims that it appeared miraculously in order to provide the eloquent bishop with a pulpit.

His monks avoided wine and beer, drinking only water. Indeed, he and they lived lives of rigorous austerity and constant prayer, in the manner of the Desert Fathers of the Eastern Church. The date of David's death is disputed – either 589 or 601. It wasn't until the twelfth century that he was generally accepted as the patron saint of Wales, and pilgrimages to St David's were highly regarded in the following centuries – including two made by English kings, William I and Henry II.

It's traditional for Welsh people to wear daffodils on St David's Day (*Gwyl Dewi Sant* in Welsh) – but there seems no particular reason for it, beyond the fact that they tend to make their early Spring appearance round about his day – oh, and they look nice!

THE BONUS YEARS

Our days may come to 70 years, or 80, if our strength endures.' Psalm 90:10

I have known this verse most of my life, but only this month has it become reality for me. Yes, I have transitioned into my 70s and am now a septuagenarian. It is a strange feeling as I realise that I am now in my bonus years. With 25,550 days of my life already gone, each new day is to be welcomed as a gift and enjoyed to the full.

Life expectancy in the UK is currently 79.2 years for men and 82.9 years for women, so hopefully there are still a few years ahead of me. However, we cannot take our health for granted, nor that of our loved ones. This is the period when the fact of our mortality – and that of those around us – will become increasingly real.

Psalm 90 was written by Moses who lived to the grand old age of 120, and who stayed in remarkable health – his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone (Deuteronomy 34:7). Growing old is not too bad when you have good health and adequate resources, but for many of us that may not be the case. Indeed, Moses – with a touch of realism (or pessimism?) – also says about our years that ‘the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away’ (v10).

All the more reason, then to remember that God, the One who is from everlasting to everlasting, can be our dwelling-place (v1). He can be our refuge, and our fortress, the One in whom we place our trust. Whatever our later years may bring, we can dwell safely in the shelter of the Most High and rest securely in the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1-2).

Tony Horsfall

PSALM 84 - A HEART FOR PILGRIMAGE

This psalm is appropriate to think about during Lent, as it was used by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. It speaks of the journey to find the presence of God in our lives. Where is our heart with God?

A Heart for God’s Presence: ‘How lovely is your dwelling-place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.’(v1,2). For the psalmist, the Temple is the focus of God’s presence and the place where he longs to be. How much do we long to know God’s presence ourselves? Lent is a time to seek Him through the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, fasting, silence and solitude.

A Heart set on Pilgrimage: 'Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools.' (5,6). Lent reminds us that the Christian life is a journey of faith, which is not always easy. We pass through the valley of Baka, which is the dry desert place in our experience. Here God can seem remote and silent. However, it also the season when we are refreshed by the Holy Spirit filling our lives.

A Heart that's Undivided: 'Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.' (10). We will find a home in God's presence only with an undivided heart, as we maintain our focus on God and trust him for all we need.

'Most of Scripture speaks to us; the Psalms speak FOR us.' (St Athanasius).

The Rev'd Canon Paul Hardingham

Science and Faith

In Part 1 and 2 we have looked at how science and theology both look at nature, but look at them in different ways – put simply, Science – the 'Book of nature' asks *how* but faith – the 'book of scripture' asks *why*. In this, the third part of the talk on Science and Faith the author starts to look at some of the common arguments of the 'new atheists' about science.

Tom

Part 3

So studying the Book of Nature rightly fills us with awe, and the more so the deeper we look. But by doing so, are we explaining why everything exists, and eliminating the need for God?

That is the claim of the "new atheists" like Hawking and Dawkins. This has long been known as the "God of the Gaps" theory, or fallacy. Humans first explained everything around them as the work of gods, then as science cast light on more and more areas of understanding, so God can only be used to explain the shrinking gaps in our current understanding. This 'god's' realm constantly shrinks as the gaps in scientific knowledge shrink.

But this is false! This has never been the way Christians think.

The Oxford mathematician Charles Coulson said "*Either God is in the whole of Nature, with no gaps, or He's not there at all*", and Galileo may be famous for clashing with the Church, but he also said that "*the Book of Nature is about God*". And so says our Psalm, in seeing Nature as everywhere declaring the Glory of God. So Christians do not believe in a God of the Gaps; please don't buy that fallacy.

The new atheists attack such a God, as Dawkins does viciously and totally irrationally, or they think he is harmless but redundant because Stephen Hawking can explain everything including the Big Bang (he has not, but more of that another time!)

But for all their science, these and many others are only attacking a 'God of the Gaps', which I would be just as glad to see demolished as they would. Such a false God might

well be accidentally destroyed in a cosmic war between witches and angels, as in Philip Pullman's Dark Materials (are you watching that? Sorry if I this is a plot spoiler!)

No, we believe in a God of the whole of Nature, and in understanding Nature better we are gaining a better understanding of God. God is not in retreat from Science, he loves Nature, and our awe of him grows as we understand nature better. He loves us to understand what He has made, which we learn through science, because in the process we understand His nature and the way He works more and more.

But God also loves us to understand why He made it; why it is this way and not any other way, what His purpose is in creating the Universe, space and time, and ourselves.

Science is silent on that subject, or says there is no purpose, all is just chance and blind scientific laws. The answers to the big why questions are not to be found in the Book of Nature, but in the Book of Scripture to which the Psalmist next turns our little mirror.

The Bible dares to ask why the universe exists, what purpose there is in it, and it gives us a place to turn to for answers: God! But just as we have to follow the scientific method in studying Nature, so we have to use an appropriate method to study Scripture. None of Scripture, particularly not the early chapters of Genesis, gives a *scientific* description.

The Bible is a very diverse collection of books and letters, collected over a very long period. And each part of it was written by different writers, in different languages, in a different cultural context, to different people, for different purposes.

There is poetry, there is song, there is prophecy, there is teaching material, there is history, and there is much more.

And we believe that the common thread is that it is all inspired by God, and therefore exists for the purpose of teaching us to know God better and to live better. To understand a piece of Scripture, we must realise what sort of writing we are looking at, and take all these different factors into account.

So if we read the Genesis account of creation as literally taking just days rather than billions of years, we are taking a poetic liturgical text for temple dedication quite wrongly as presenting scientific facts about the process of creation.

Or if we read the accounts of oral tradition of ancient forebears as a historically accurate timetable of events since Adam, and add up ages of ancient mythical figures, and we conclude that the world was created 6000 years ago, then we mix many types of text in different cultures and misread them all to reach a conclusion which scientists rightly ridicule.

Such misreadings create a fake battleground in which neither side can ever win: their supporters insist that you must believe these things if you are a Christian, because the Bible is "literally true"; and their detractors know that all the evidence from nature points to a different account of creation, so Christianity and God must be ridiculous delusions.

The writer of our Psalm sees the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture as two sides of one coin, both sides revealing the image of God. He would tear his hair out at such misuse of both books to create a fake battle which

benefits nobody. Both sides take a rather fundamentalist approach, which brooks no rational argument.

The “new atheists” are perhaps misnamed, they are really anti-theists, vehemently insisting that their belief system is clearly true, and infidels are idiots. One of their favourite ploys is to take one bit of Scripture that they don’t understand, and use it to mock the entire body of Scripture and Christianity.

Part of the battle is, as usual, based on misunderstandings. Many Christians do not understand the methods of Science, and many Scientists do not understand the methods of Scripture.

St Augustine of Hippo is credited with answering the question of what God was doing before the Creation with “*He was preparing Hell for doubters*”. But he actually says in his Confessions that

*“I do **not** say, like some who make a joke of this question, That He was preparing Hell for doubters. Instead I would rather say that I know not what I know not, than gain praise as one who answers with falsehood”*

Discussion could be raised to a higher level if scientists followed the same idea, and avoid commenting or posing as authorities in areas where they have no knowledge.



CALENDAR FOR MARCH

LENT 1

Sun	1	8.00 am 10.30 am 6.00 pm	Holy Communion Parish Communion Evening Prayer
Wed	4	10.30 am 5.00 pm	Holy Communion <i>at St. Nicolas</i> Lent Devotion <i>in church</i>
Thurs	5	10.00 am	Parish Art Group
Fri	6	10.30 am 5.00 pm	Coffee Morning in hall Lent Devotion <i>in church</i>

LENT 2

Sun	8	8.00 am 10.30 am 6.00 pm	Holy Communion Matins (<i>Sunday Club in hall</i>) Evening Prayer
Wed	11	10.30 am 5.00 pm	Holy Communion <i>at St. Nicolas</i> Lent Devotion <i>in church</i>
Fri	13	9.30 am 5.00 pm	Baby Group Lent Devotion <i>in church</i>

LENT 3

Sun	15	8.00 am 9.30 am 10.30 am 6.00 pm	Holy Communion NO FAMILY SERVICE Parish Communion Evening Prayer
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Wed 18 10.30 am
5.00 pm
Thurs 19 10.00 am
Fri 20 10.30 am
5.00 pm

Holy Communion *at St. Nicolas*
Lent Devotion *in church*
Parish Art Group
Coffee Morning in hall
Lent Devotion *in church*

MOTHERING SUNDAY

Sun 22 8.00 am
10.30 am
6.00 pm

Holy Communion
Parish Communion for
Mothering Sunday
Evening Prayer

Tues 24 10.00 am
Wed 25 10.30 am
5.00 pm
Thurs 26 3.30 pm
Fri 27 9.30 am
5.00 pm

Craft Group *in hall*
Holy Communion *at St. Nicolas*
Lent Devotion *in church*
Magazine collation
Baby Group *in hall*
Lent Devotion *in church*

LENT 5

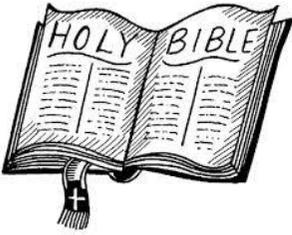
Sun 29 8.00 am
10.30 am
6.00 pm

Holy Communion
Matins (*Sunday Club in hall*)
Churches Together Choral
Evensong at The Church of
the Transfiguration

APRIL

Wed 1 10.30 am
5.00 pm
Thurs 2 10.00 am
Fri 3 10.30 am
5.00 pm
Sat 4 11.00 am

Holy Communion *at St. Nicolas*
Lent Devotion *in church*
Parish Art Group
Coffee Morning in hall
Lent Devotion *in church*
**Annual Parochial Church
Meeting in hall**



SUNDAY READINGS IN **MARCH**

Sunday 1st March – LENT 1

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7

God places man and later woman in the Garden of Eden, forbidding them to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil but they disobey.

NEW TESTAMENT: Romans 5.12-19

Paul speaks about the sin that came through one man, Adam, but that new life comes through and in Christ.

GOSPEL: Matthew 4.1-11

The conflict between Jesus and Satan is presented as the symbol of our struggle to choose between life and death.

Sunday 8th March – LENT 2

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 12.1-4

The Lord tells Abram to leave his country and his people for a land God will show him and blessing will follow. Abram obeyed the Lord.

NEW TESTAMENT: John 3.1-17

Nicodemus came to Jesus who told him he must be born a second time of the Holy Spirit. Through the same Spirit, God's son gives eternal life.

Sunday 15th March - LENT 3

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 17.1-7

In the wilderness the Israelites are very thirsty and rail against Moses. Moses cries to the Lord who tells him to strike the rock with his rod.

NEW TESTAMENT: Romans 5.1-11

Paul speaks of rejoicing in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance. We have been justified by Christ who gives us hope and joy in believing.

GOSPEL: John 4.5-42

Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman about the kind of worshippers God seeks. Many Samaritans also listen to Jesus and become believers.

Sunday 22nd March - MOTHERING SUNDAY

GOSPEL: Luke 2.33-40

Jesus is presented in the temple.

Sunday 29th March - LENT 5

OLD TESTAMENT: Ezekiel 37.1-14

The dry bones represent a disheartened Israel. Ezekiel's prophecies that its people must hear the Lord's word, receive the Spirit and live.

NEW TESTAMENT: John 11.17-45

Jesus comforts Martha and Mary and then raises Lazarus from the dead.

ON HOW TO RUN A CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING

Happily, the Church of England still retains some singular parish clergy. Take the parish of St James-the-Least in the county of C- for example. Here the elderly Anglo-Catholic vicar, Eustace, continues his correspondence to Darren, his nephew, a low-church curate recently ordained...

The Rectory
St. James the Least of All



My dear Nephew Darren

Clearly, the sight of your Vicar running out of the room half way through your last church council meeting, saying he should have stayed as a traffic warden, where he was universally liked, has unnerved you. It would have unnerved me too, since a universally popular traffic warden is an exceptional creature.

But perhaps it is necessary to give you some advice for the day when you do chair your first church council meeting.

1. Consider every agenda issue carefully beforehand and decide what you would like to do. Then, at the meeting, consult widely, listen to every opinion, weigh all the arguments, and then do precisely what you had decided before the meeting ever took place.
2. Never, ever, let council members discuss hymns, which avoids getting blood on the carpets.
3. Arrange the seating in rows, all facing the front, so that everyone has to respond directly to you. The last thing you want is for council members to be able to discuss matters

freely with one another.

4. Start smoking a pipe. At those times when you are faced with an issue when you really are unsure of how to respond, taking out your pipe, dismantling it, searching for a pipe cleaner, squinting down the stem to see if it is clean, mopping out the goo in the bowl, searching for your tobacco pouch, filling the pipe, tamping it down, asking if you can borrow matches and attempting to light it several times over, will give you more than sufficient time to formulate a reply. Once you have perfected the routine, the silence will have been so protracted, that most of the committee will have long forgotten what the question was anyway.

5. If someone is talking too long, consult your diary, noisily and obsessively, about next month's appointments, or write a note to a committee member who is at the back of the room and get it passed to him. The speaker should soon get the message.

These are the simpler techniques of committee management. The advanced procedures must wait until you are strong enough to bear them.

Your loving uncle,
Eustace

Church Magazine Bloomers

You know what they meant, but what they said was..

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

The senior choir invites any member of the congregation who enjoys sinning to see the organist after the service.

DO YOU NEED A DACHSHUND?

Never mind Cockerpoos and French bulldogs – the latest 'must have' dog is rapidly becoming the dachshund.

The number of dachshund puppies registered in the UK has risen by 112 per cent in just the last five years. In 2013, 4,887 dachshund puppies were registered with the Kennel Club. By 2018, this had risen to 10,377.

As a Kennel Club spokesman said: "It isn't surprising, especially as trends towards smaller homes and busy lifestyles grow. The breed has become 'Insta-famous', with thousands of social media fans. Many celebrities own one, and there is no doubt these dogs have the cute factor."



But he went on to warn: "Although dachshunds are fun, friendly characters, they are also strong-willed and take time and commitment. We urge people to make sure they understand their preferred breed and its characteristics before making a decision to buy a dog."

(We can vouch for the "strong-willed" bit! We got Tilly before the craze and she's not very "up market" as she's from Rotherham! Andrew)

200 YEARS OF ASTRONOMY

The Royal Astronomical Society was founded 200 years ago, on 10th March 1820.

Originally called the Astronomical Society of London, it had been opposed by Sir Joseph Banks, president of the Royal Society, who persuaded the Duke of Somerset to withdraw his agreement to be the first president. But it survived with William Herschel as president, though he never actually took the chair at a meeting.

The idea was simply to promote astronomy. At the outset there were very few professional astronomers, but this soon changed. A Royal Charter was signed by William IV in 1831, and the name of the Society was altered. Since then every monarch has been a patron.

The Society was closed to women at first, and women were not admitted to fellowship until 1916, although Caroline Herschel was awarded a gold medal as early as 1828 and elected an honorary member, with Mary Somerville, in 1835.

Currently the Society, with more than 4000 members, has three main functions: maintaining a library, organising scientific meetings – geophysics is now part of its remit – and publishing journals.

A prominent 21st century fellow is Professor David Wilkinson, a theoretical astrophysicist and lecturer in theology, who is working on the dialogue between science and religion.

FELIX OF BURGUNDY - APOSTLE to EAST ANGLIA (8th March)

East Anglia is blessed with a rich Christian heritage. Just two examples: at more than 650, Norfolk has the greatest concentration of ancient churches in the world, and at 500, Suffolk has the second greatest density of medieval churches. And that is not to mention all the churches in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire...

And it all began with one man, back in 630 A.D., a bishop named Felix. His name in Latin means 'successful' and 'happy' – an excellent description of someone who brought great good and stability to this beautiful corner of England. Felix came from Burgundy in France. At some point he was consecrated bishop, and went to Canterbury, to see Honorius, the Archbishop of Canterbury. In 630 the Christian king Sigebert returned from exile in Gaul to rule the East Angles, and Honorius sent Felix along with him, to evangelise the people. According to local legend, Felix went by boat, and arrived at Bablingley in Norfolk.

Felix may well have known Sigebert back in Gaul, for the two men worked exceptionally well together. Sigebert settled Felix in Dunwich, which became the centre of his diocesan 'see'. Then, with the support of Sigebert, Felix set up the first-ever school in East Anglia. He brought teachers up from Canterbury to staff it, and the school became, according to Bede, the place "where boys could be taught letters".

Felix had a fruitful ministry to the Anglo Saxons for 17 years. He preached Christianity, encouraged the school to grow, and did a lot of other good. All in all, Felix brought the love of God, the good news of Jesus, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, delivering "all the province of East Anglia

from long-standing unrighteousness and unhappiness," according to Bede. Certainly, the people came to love Felix. When Felix finally died on 8th March 647 or 648, he left the Christian faith firmly embedded in East Anglia. Six ancient English churches are dedicated to Felix, and Felixstowe bears his patronage.

Our new defibrillator!

Following on from our fundraiser in December, we have now bought a defibrillator for the church and hall. On 6th February about twelve of us learned what to do and how to use the machine. Hopefully if anybody now collapses with a heart attack we will not rush around in panic, but will have some idea on how to proceed.

The person running the morning's tuition was very engaging and I think everybody who took part went away with greater knowledge as to their response if such an event took place.

I think the most interesting point was, of course, that you would ring 999 and then proceed with CPR. I think many of us thought that now we had a machine we would just connect it and go off and have a cup of tea. In fact, you have to keep doing CPR until the ambulance arrives. We had the opportunity to practice on a dummy and I feel that hopefully the experience has equipped us to deal with any emergency of this kind.

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sunday 1st March No flowers (Lent)
Sunday 8th March No flowers (Lent)
Sunday 15th March No flowers (Lent)
Sunday 22nd March: Mothering Sunday Susanne King
Sunday 29th March No flowers (Lent)

MAGAZINE DEADLINE

The deadline for the April issue of the
Church magazine is
Friday 20th March