

Brookfield News

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Easter Thoughts in a Churchyard by David Winter

It's a yearly paradox. You've brought some flowers to the churchyard to lay on the grave of a loved one. All around you are graves and headstones, reminders of the inevitable end of life's earthly journey. But it's Easter Day, and from within the church you can hear the singing: 'Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!' Perhaps then you notice a few other things. You're standing among the fresh daffodils and the grass that's suddenly green and growing again. For a moment you pause and reflect on the reverse of an old saying. In the midst of death we are in life.

That essentially is what Easter is about - an annual reminder that death is not the end of the story.

A few years ago I lived for a while in Cookham, in Berkshire, which was once the home of the great twentieth century painter, Stanley Spencer. Perhaps his most famous painting is 'Resurrection in Cookham Churchyard', which depicts local residents - many of them recognisable village characters - rising up out of their graves to be greeted by the risen Jesus, standing in the church porch. It's a glorious, vivid, shocking reminder of a great assertion. The graveyard is not a terminus, but a junction.

The resurrection of Jesus (and hence our resurrections, too) is the defining claim of Christianity. Christians don't follow the teaching of a prophet who died many

centuries ago, or of a holy man whose life is an example to follow, excellent as that may be. They put their trust in a Saviour whom they believe is alive and with them now, and they also believe that through Him they too will move through the junction of death to the journey that lies beyond - a journey he talked about to His followers.

I spoke of an annual paradox. It lies in the inescapable fact of death, indelibly represented by those graves and headstones, and in the equally inescapable fact that - in apparent defiance of all logic - human beings down the ages have clung to the belief that death is not the end. Every culture has its story of the life beyond - the Elysian fields,

This Month.....All we like sheep.....Page 10

Services

Sundays

11.00am Sung Eucharist

"Sunday Supplement" the children's activity takes place every Sunday in the sacristy during the service

Weekday Services

Said Eucharist

Tuesday 7.30pm

Wednesday 9.30am

Friday 7.30am

Saints' & Holy Days

Thursday April 2nd Maundy Thursday

7.30 Mass of the Last Supper and Vigil till Midnight

Friday 3rd April Good Friday

10.00am Stations of the Cross

2.00pm The Liturgy of Good Friday

Saturday April 4th Holy Saturday

7.30pm The Easter Vigil renewal of baptismal vows and First Mass of Easter

Sunday 5th April Easter Day

11.00am Choral Mass for Easter Day

Clergy Day off: Fr. Guy is off duty on Monday but don't hesitate to call him in emergencies.

The Vicar is usually available in the Vicarage, 85 Dartmouth Park Road, from 8:00pm until 9:00pm on Tuesdays for the purpose of interviews, arranging Baptisms, reading of Banns and Weddings etc. he is also available to hear confessions then or by appointment.

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Valhalla, Nirvana, Abraham's bosom. But only with the coming of Jesus, and the witnessed events of that first Easter morning, has our instinctive belief been given wings. The paradox is the heart of everything. Death is a fact, but life is greater than death. 'Because I live', said Jesus, 'you will also live'.

Two's company^o

For our honeymoon my fiancée and I chose a fashionable hotel known for its luxurious suites. When I called to make reservations, the desk clerk inquired, "Is this for a special occasion?"

"Yes," I replied. "It's our honeymoon."

"And how many adults will there be?" she asked.

The General Election: The Bishops' Pastoral Letter - Introductory Statement by the Bishop of Norwich

We have known the date of the next General Election, May 7th, for a long time as a result of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act. In this context the House of Bishops has had an opportunity to reflect on some of the social, political and spiritual challenges facing our nation today.

This Pastoral Letter is addressed to members of the Church of England. It does not indicate preference for any single political party or program. It encourages Christians to engage positively in our political processes, to use their vote and to value hard won democratic freedoms. More specifically it reminds Anglicans of some important features of Christian belief, namely that God's creation is good, that human beings are made in God's image and likeness, that Jesus Christ came to live alongside us, and that we are called to follow His teaching to love one another as He has loved us.

Christians engage in acts of service to the wider community as a natural consequence of their faith. In recent years the food banks which have sprung up all over the country have largely been established by Christians of all denominations and traditions. Equally people in the Church of England and other churches have supported the homeless, the unemployed, those affected by drug and alcohol misuse and many other social issues. In another field the Church of England has employed many more youth workers in the past decade whilst such workers paid from public funding have diminished considerably. These things

are not done to criticise lack of provision by government, whether national or local, but because there are needs which should be recognised and met. Such active service means the Church of England has first-hand local experience of the challenges in our communities throughout the country.

Our society needs intermediate institutions such as our churches which serve the common good and build strong community life. Everything cannot be left to government. Yet we often seem to assume governments are omni-competent. As we approach a General Election Christians should not place upon any government wholly unrealistic expectations.

We recognise every government is imperfect. Christians are not put off politics by that. We believe the world is good and created by God but disordered by human sin. Christians can therefore cope with defective institutions. Viewed in simply human terms the Church is herself far from perfect. Yet Christians are always inspired by the vision of the Kingdom of God which, in the Lord's Prayer, we pray will one day come "on earth as it is in heaven". It is that vision of peace and unity which means that in this Pastoral Letter we warn that we must not become a "society of strangers" to one another but that, in our diversity, we should be a "community of communities". In many parts of England, congregations in the Church of England are increasingly multi-ethnic, reflecting the international character of the Church and also that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek,

neither male nor female, neither slave nor free". (Galatians 3.28)

The danger of demonising racial or religious groups is considerable, especially at a time when international terrorism is a destabilising factor among the community of nations. We have to resist this, and there are many examples from the past to guide us, not least in my own city of Norwich. When French Huguenots were expelled from their country in the 16th century, many settled in Norwich. One of my predecessors gave them the chapel of the Bishop's Palace as their place of worship. It was a bold gesture but it sprang from the same Christian ethic which inspires this Pastoral Letter.

~ (Good evidence of this work may be found in the recent Church in Action report from the Church Urban Fund network: <http://www.cuf.org.uk/sites/default/files/PDFs/Research/Church-in-Action...>)

Out West

A devout cowboy lost his Bible while he was mending fences out on the range. Three weeks later a cow walked up carrying the Bible in its mouth. The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes. He took the book out of the cow's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward, and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"

"Not really," said the cow. "Your name was written inside the cover."

The Ultimate Offer to the Human Race

The Ven John Barton considers Easter amid the evil all around us...

This Easter the media will rightly remind us of the carnage in Syria, Northern Iraq, Ukraine and Afghanistan. For as we celebrate this great Festival, commemorating Christ's victory over evil, we are confronted with death, barbarity and terror in the world. Unless we choose to live in fantasyland, we have to relate the two.

First, Jesus Christ did not escape death. Nor did He promise His followers a trouble-free world. Actually, they themselves can expect an above average share of suffering.

Secondly, we believe that Christ's death was no accident, no mistake. It was typical of the evil deeds that human beings mete out to each other. Innocent suffering did not begin in Jerusalem and will not end there. But the crucifixion was a calculated risk: God's costly and unexpected intervention in human affairs. The Christian claim that

God's Son was put to death is deeply offensive to religious groups who cannot believe that the remote and all-powerful God to whom human beings should submit, has Himself submitted to our brutality. Yet it is in this way that God enlists in His creation without violating it.

Thirdly, Christ's way of sacrifice, forgiveness and reconciliation is God's ultimate offer to the human race. We are going to learn it, if necessary the hard way, however long it takes. But the world is populated by former enemies: ask the French or the Spanish or the Americans about the British, if you doubt that.

The first reaction of the people who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ was fear. Incredulity, too, but fear. And no wonder: they were seeing the King of Kings.

In the last book of the Bible, the Risen Christ is described like this: "I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with

a golden sash across His chest. His head and His hair were white as white wool, white as snow; His eyes were like a flame of fire, His feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters..... When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead."

That is the proper first response of reverence and respect to a vision of God. Only then can we hear the words spoken by this terrifying figure:

"Do not be afraid: I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of death and the world of the dead."

God's rule over the world – the world at its worst and the world at its best – was reasserted at the first Easter. This is no domestic, ecclesiastical event. It is God's glorious yet solemn challenge to His rebellious creation: the grip of evil and death is terminally weakened. Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

No education is neutral, says Church of England's Chief Education Officer

There is no such thing as a neutral education - every school's values and underpinning assumptions will be implicit or explicit, but they will always be there, said the CofE's Chief Education Officer, Rev Nigel Genders, in a recent blog.

"The debate about schools with a religious character can give the impression that those who are opposed think that there is some ideal neutral narrative for education and that what they like to call 'faith schools' offer a distortion of that

neutrality by adding elements on to it or discriminating in specific ways."

He added: "In this wider debate about the role of religion in British society, it needs to be understood that England has an Established Church and that, whilst we are a liberal democracy, we are not a secular democracy. We believe that this distinction is one that is valued strongly by many faith communities apart from Christians. "Secular" is not the same as "neutral" – secularism is itself a

belief position. Part of the role of the Church of England as the Established Church is (as Her Majesty the Queen put it recently) to secure and defend the contribution of all the faith communities to the life of the public square."

Thought for the Day

The biggest lie I tell myself is "I don't need to write that down, I'll remember it."

“Dear Friends...”

From the Bishop of London’s Desk

Week of Prayer 18 ± 23 May 2015

Dear Friends,

Over 100 years ago in the Azusa Street Revivals in Los Angeles, many churches began to hold ‘Tarrying Meetings’. These sprang out of Jesus’ words to his disciples just before his ascension: “but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” (Luke XXIV.29) The disciples were to wait prayerfully for that first Day of Pentecost and many of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters can trace their origins to some of those early ‘tarrying’ meetings for prayer in Los Angeles.

Whatever our church tradition, we know that authentic prayer - listening deeply and responding obediently - takes time. Our busy city life will eat up all available hours and it is a good discipline to remind each other of the importance of prayer by having deliberate seasons of waiting upon God.

So in May we will hold our third Week of Prayer in preparation for the great Feast of Pentecost, praying that we may be strengthened in our inner being with power through his Spirit. (Eph. III.16)

As we continue to pursue Capital Vision 2020, there is much for which to give thanks to God: many thousands not only in London but across the globe have downloaded the PrayerMate App over the past

year; 10,000 now have ‘pray for seven’ bookmarks, and are praying specially for friends, family and colleagues. As Peter reminds us: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (I Peter III.15)

This year our prayer theme is one of journeys:

- Praying for and giving thanks for those we encounter in our daily personal journeys as well as those who have inspired us as we look back on our faith journey.

- Reflecting on the diversity of London - the hopes and needs of those who live, study, work, travel here, visit or hope to make a new life here - we will pray for local, national and global needs.

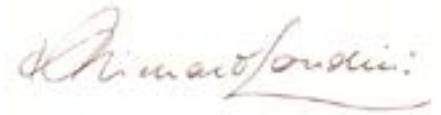
I hope that once again many of you will come to St Paul’s Cathedral to pray during this week. As well as the Cathedral’s regular pattern of worship there will be dedicated space in the Chapel of St Michael and St George to support your prayer journey over the week in creative and different ways.

I am grateful to 24-7 Prayer for setting up and hosting the prayer space within the Cathedral and to give us that sense of prayer without ceasing, they are providing the on-line booking facility for one-hour sessions, either in the Cathedral (during the day), or for local prayer or private prayer across the Diocese throughout the day and

night. If you would like to draw on the material being used at St Paul’s for your local vigil, please request resources by email.

In whatever ways you are able, join us in prayer between Ascension and Pentecost, for I am convinced that there is nothing that is impossible for a Church that is confident, compassionate and creative in the power of the Spirit and in union with Jesus Christ our Lord.

With thanks for our partnership in the Gospel.



St Mary's Annual meeting

Each year we hold a meeting for all the parishioners to elect Churchwardens and members of the Parochial Church Council.

This will take place on Sunday 19th April after church at 12.15pm and last approximately an hour. It is a very important occasion as the leadership of the parish take on significant roles in the life of the church. This year we will be electing four members of the PCC. This is also your chance to have a good look at the accounts of the church to ensure that we are using your donations wisely.

Please do come along if you possibly can.

'We must speak out for religious freedom' ± Welby condemns silence

The Archbishop of Canterbury has called on politicians, the church and the media to speak out against the 'creeping climate of fear and animosity' at the launch of a new partnership to address the growing problem of violence against Christians worldwide.

The Religious Liberty Commission (RLC), recently launched at Westminster, is calling on the British government to intervene to prevent religious cleansing and violent persecution.

In his keynote address, Justin Welby highlighted the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, as well as attacks against Jews in Europe and the firebombing of mosques. He told an audience of parliamentarians and church leaders:

"That quiet creeping removals of freedom that create a climate of fear and animosity is why we must speak out. We must speak out in solidarity. Silence is not an option. Treasuring the dignity of each and every human must mean that we treasure their right to religious belief – even when we profoundly

disagree with them."

The RLC is pressing the Department for International Development to make religious freedom a strategic priority. It is calling for a special envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to report back on persecution worldwide. It also wants the FCO to produce an annual report to demonstrate the steps taken by the UK Government to promote religious freedom.

The RLC is a Commission of the Evangelical Alliance, comprising Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors UK and Release International. These groups, which have been working for decades to raise awareness of persecution issues, will be collaborating under the banner 'One voice for the persecuted Church.'

"A staggering 76 per cent of the world's population live in countries with high restrictions on religious freedom," said Mervyn Thomas, the CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide. "The vast majority of those facing persecution are Christians. Our purpose is to amplify the

cries of the persecuted so the world can no longer ignore them."

According to the RLC, Christians are subject to violence, intimidation and discrimination in more than 50 countries. Some are murdered because of their faith. "In the very birthplace of Christianity, the Middle East, the Christian faith is in danger of extinction," said Mervyn Thomas.

A victim of persecution in Eritrea, one of the world's most repressive regimes, described the attacks there against Christians. The Rev Dr Berhane Ashmelash said: "Today in Eritrea, Christians are imprisoned and regularly subjected to starvation, heavy labour and solitary confinement. Prison could be an underground pit or a metal shipping container. Torture is frequent. People are tied by both hands and legs and hanged on trees for hours or days. One form of hanging is the "Jesus Christ" which looks like a crucifix."

The Archbishop of Canterbury welcomed the coordination of voices speaking out against persecution under the one banner of the RLC.

For the love of chocolate

Are you going to indulge in Easter chocolate this year? Ever wonder where it first came from? We have the Aztecs of equatorial Central America to thank: it was they who discovered that a certain tree, later named Theobroma Cacao, was well worth cultivating. The Aztecs considered chocolate the 'drink of the gods' (Theo means God, broma means

drink; hence the name). The Aztecs credited chocolate for everything from spiritual wisdom to sexual prowess; Emperor Montezuma is reported to have drunk more than 50 flagons of the stuff each day.

The Spanish explorer Cortes also called it 'the divine drink', and the conquistadors brought chocolate back to Spain. From there it trav-

elled north, and reached England about 1849. It was first served as a drink, until during the Industrial Revolution it caught the attention of several leading Quaker families, (including the Cadburys, the Frys, the Rowntress and the Terrys. It was the Fry family who created the first 'eating' chocolate... and the rest, as they say, is history. Today the world eats about 600,000 tons a year. Enjoy your Easter egg!

Coptic beheadings reveal IS religious cleansing agenda

Religious liberty organisation Release international has condemned the recent beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts as the clearest indication yet of the policy of brutal religious cleansing of Christians by Islamic State militants.

A video posted by Libya jihadists loyal to Islamic State shows the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians on a beach.

The video states the Egyptian labourers were targeted because they were Christians. The title of the video is 'A message signed with blood to the nation of the cross.' And a caption describes the victims as 'people of the cross, followers of the hostile Egyptian church.'

The 21 Copts were among the thousands of Egyptian labourers who seek work in Libya. They were kidnapped between December and January from the Libyan coastal town of Sirte.

"Our prayers are with their families," says Paul Robinson, the CEO

of the British-based religious liberty group Release International. "Those they loved were kidnapped and slaughtered simply because of their Christian faith."

On the video, an Islamic State fighter pledges to fight the 'Crusaders' until Jesus returns at the end of days. The spokesman also pledges to capture their target across the water from Libya – Rome. Rome is home to the Vatican and in the eyes of IS fighters is the foremost symbol of Christianity in Europe.

The cover of the October edition of the Islamic State magazine, Dabiq, depicts an Islamic State flag flying over the Vatican. A writer explains:

'Rome in the Arabic tongue of the Prophet... refers to the Christians of Europe... Indeed, Allah will grant the Muslims the conquest of Rome... We fight here, while our goal is Rome.'

The unnamed writer continues: 'We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of

Allah, the Exalted... If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market.'

Meanwhile, a statement from Al-Azhar, the Cairo-based seat of Islamic learning, has denounced the killings. 'Al-Azhar stresses that such barbaric action has nothing to do with any religion or human values.'

"Release welcomes the voices of Muslim scholars that have been raised in condemnation of this latest wave of killings," says Paul Robinson. "It is vital that Muslims of learning and

goodwill speak up in defence of freedom of faith and religion."

Through its international network of missions Release serves persecuted Christians in more than 30 countries, by supporting pastors and Christian prisoners, and their families; supplying Christian literature and Bibles; and working for justice.

Social action TMcore to heart and mission of Church of England, national survey shows

Loneliness and isolation are the most widespread social problems affecting English communities, regardless of income or social class, according to the findings of a survey of vicars recently published by Church Urban Fund (CUF) and the Church of England.

In a national online study of social action by Anglican churches, social isolation was described as a major or significant problem in their area

by 64% of Church of England clergy, up from 58% three years ago.

The survey showed loneliness was the only issue to be cited by clergy as a significant problem in the majority of wealthier areas as well as deprived communities. Social isolation was listed as a more common problem than unemployment, homelessness and poor housing by the 1,812 clergy who completed the questionnaire.

The report, Church in Action, showed nearly half, or 46%, of churches are running organised activities to tackle social isolation through programmes such as youth groups, parent-toddler groups or lunch clubs.

Dial

They have Dial-a-Prayer for atheists now.

You call up and it rings and rings but nobody answers.

Ss Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice ± martyrs of the Early Persecuted Church

In the month of Christ's ultimate sacrifice of himself for us, the martyrdoms of Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice are well worth remembering. What they said as they died could be said by the many thousands of Christians who are facing persecution all over the world today.

Carpus, Papyrus and Agathonice lived in Pergamum (Asia Minor) in the late second century. Carpus was a bishop, Papyrus was a deacon, and Agathonice was his sister. Trouble began when the proconsul Optimus ordered them to sacrifice in the name of the emperor.

Carpus refused, saying: "I am a Christian and because of my faith

and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I cannot become one of you." He was hung up and tortured by iron claws.

Papyrus was a wealthy citizen, but he had also led many people to faith in Christ. As he suffered the same fate as Carpus, he said: "I feel no pain because I have someone to comfort me; one whom you do not see suffers within me." Both men were then burnt alive.

Finally, it was his sister's turn. She too refused to sacrifice to demons. "If I am worthy," went on, "I desire to follow the footsteps of my teachers." On being urged to have pity on her children, she replied: "My children have God, who watches

over them; but I will not obey your commands." As she was consigned to the flames, she cried out three times: "Lord Jesus Christ, help me because I am enduring this for you." She died soon after.

Terrible deaths, but also, triumphant ones. These three Christians loved Jesus so much that the only thing they could NOT bear was to deny him. Sadly the persecution goes on today, in countries where Jesus Christ is still bitterly hated. Pray for the Christians who live in these countries, that they too may have courage and endurance – to the end.

Feast day 13th April

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On why you should never encourage your congregation

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

There are times when I indulge you too much; why I ever let you run your course “Taking Responsibility for your Church” among our congregation, I am now unable to understand. I had hopes that it might encourage a few more people to volunteer for the flower rota, or to give occasional help mowing the churchyard. I even had a vague fantasy that someone might turn detective, and discover who was eating the chocolate biscuits between Sundays, condemning the rest of us to munch on Rich Tea after Services.

Unfortunately, your course turned out to be inspirational, and has fired up our members to take on all sorts of new initiatives. Enthusiasm in a congregation can be a

very dangerous thing, especially if people start making decisions on their own.

Those who formed a welcoming group are admittedly well-meaning – although it was more than a little traumatic for those coming through the door the next Sunday to be greeted with frenzied handshakes, big toothy smiles, and even hymnbooks. That is unheard of in this church – we always ignore people and leave them to find hymnbooks – if they can.

Naturally, all those offering to take the prayers, produce new orders of Service and even to give the occasional sermon have been booked on the appropriate training courses. By the time they have been completed, I can only hope they will have gone off the idea.

But it was the group which decided to “beautify” the church who have

proved the most tiresome. Hanging the Christmas tree lights round the altar made it look as if I was standing behind a fairground stall, waiting to invite people to throw hoops round teddy bears – although I would have rather enjoyed making winners sit for the rest of the Service holding a polythene bag containing a goldfish.

Our pulpit has also been given a makeover, with the various panels painted in contrasting colours; I am sure the sixteenth century Flemish woodcarvers would be delighted with the result, although the next time any medieval historians come to view it, I shall take the day off – probably travelling abroad.

My dear Darren, your course took the stopper out of the bottle; would you please run another to put it back?

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

The UK's churches and chapels are much loved national assets, new opinion poll shows

A poll for the National Churches Trust by ComRes, designed to measure attitudes to church buildings, shows that four in five (79%) British people think that churches and chapels are an important part of the UK's heritage and history.

Three quarters of British people (74%) say that church buildings play an important role for society by providing a space for community activities, such as playgroups, cultural and social events and meetings. This view is held among British adults of all religions and none with more than three in five

British adults of non-Christian religions (67%) and of no religion (64%) agreeing that church buildings play an important role for society by providing a space for community activities.

The ComRes poll also shows that more than two in five (45%) British adults have visited a church or chapel over the past year. Religious services are the primary reason (28%), followed by visits made as tourists or visitors (19%) and visits made to take part in non-religious community activities (13%) including playgroups, cultural and

social events and meetings.

A major part of the work of the National Churches Trust, the only UK-wide independent charity dedicated to promoting and supporting church buildings of historic, architectural and community value, is providing grants to pay for the repair and restoration of churches and the provision of modern facilities such as toilets and kitchens. The ComRes poll found that three quarters (75%) of British adults agree that it is important that churches and chapels have good access and modern facilities such as toilets to make it easier for people to use them.

'O happy band of pilgrims' ± visiting the 'thin places' of the world

Christians in the Celtic Church lived with the strong belief that the material and spiritual worlds, the visible and the invisible were one. There was a connecting thread that linked the two, and certain places manifested that reality. They were called 'thin places,' and there is a story of a monastery at Landevennec in Brittany, an area of great beauty which was protected from the Atlantic storms. But in that blessed place none of the monks could die: they were weighed down by old age, longing to leave this world, but never able to do so. The abbot had a dream where he was shown that the monastery on earth was out of line with the monastery in heaven. He exhorted his fellow monks to pull down the buildings and move them a little nearer to the shore. When that was done, the alignment in that 'thin place' of heaven and earth was put right, and it was now possible from the monks to embrace death and leave this world.

We could also call such places 'touching places,' and a few years ago the Radio 4 programme 'Sunday' asked its listeners to choose their top ten touching places. It included the pilgrim sites of Lindisfarne, Iona, and Walsingham. We might extend that list of places blessed by God and hallowed by prayer to include the Holy Land, Rome, Compostela and the shrines of our Lady. In the first of these articles we looked at why we go on pilgrimage. This month we focus not on the why, but on the where: the pilgrim sites around the world, those thin places that draw hundreds and thousands of people to find healing and holiness, faith

and fellowship.

Charles Péguy wrote that although the pilgrim may well come alone to such a place, he or she 'nonetheless participates in a flux which has elected that holy place.' That flux might include a particular saint who lived there or a vision or the tomb of a holy one: all in their own ways witnessing to the fact that holiness dwells there. As tangible as the air we breathe, such holiness links heaven and earth and infuses those places with grace and goodness. It is those qualities and that history that draw the pilgrim to tread where the saints of old have trod. John Martin wrote of the Holy Land, 'Often the pilgrim is aware that he is standing where the Lord once actually stood or walks where His feet have actually trod. Such is our experience when we walk by the hill road from Bethany over the top of the Mount of Olives and down the other side to Gethsemane and the Kedron Valley.'

For the pilgrim these places are 'thin places' – we sense the thread linking the earth beneath to heaven above. They are 'touching places' for there we also sense and feel the blessing of God in our lives. Just as the story of our redemption begins with that thin place of Nazareth, where a girl in her early teens was called by God's messenger for a special purpose. From that willing response of Mary a child was born: time and eternity met, the visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual. We journey today to such hallowed places of pilgrimage that God may touch our lives. And we journey with the prayer that all places may be the touching places of God's love in human life.

Largest volcanic eruption ± ever

The largest volcanic eruption in recorded history – Mount Tambora in Indonesia – began 200 years ago this month, on 5th April 1815.

Ash in the atmosphere lowered global temperatures for two years, and an estimated minimum of 70,000 people died. The explosion was heard 1600 miles away, and ash fell at least 800 miles away.

The eruption column reached the stratosphere, an altitude of more than 27 miles. Fine ash particles stayed in the atmosphere for many months, spread around the globe by longitudinal winds, creating brilliantly coloured sunsets and twilights in London and influencing painters such as Turner.

In the spring and summer of 1815, a persistent "dry fog" was observed in the north-eastern United States. The fog reddened and dimmed the sunlight, so that sunspots were visible to the naked eye. In 1816, known as the Year Without a Summer, countries in the Northern Hemisphere suffered extreme weather conditions.

Cool temperatures and heavy rains resulted in failed harvests in Britain and Ireland. Famine was prevalent in Wales and north and south-west Ireland, following the failure of wheat, oat and potato harvests.

Tambora's explosion was 10 times bigger than Krakatoa and more than 100 times bigger than Vesuvius or Mount St Helens.

Hymns and Readings

5th April Easter Day

Readings Acts 10: 34-43
Psalm 118
1 Corinthians 15: 1-11
John 20: 1-18
Hymns 124 Ye choirs of new jerusalem
117 The day of resurrection
120 Thine be the glory
110 Jesus Christ is risen today

Sidesperson: Mark Williams
Readers: Stephen Nicoll, Ian MacGregor
Intercessions: Nicky Pittam

12th April Easter 2

Readings Acts 4: 32-35
Psalm 133
1 John 1:1-2:2
John 20: 19-end
Hymns 106 Come ye faithful raise the strain
113 Christ the Lord is risen today
173 Blessed Thomas doubt no longer
104 At the Lambs high feast we sing

Sidesperson: Nick Bethune
Readers: Ruth Godwin, Bill Saunders
Intercessions: Carol Kenning

The Unburied Treasure of Easter!

It's amazing what people can unearth with metal detectors! At the end of last year an amateur treasure hunter uncovered 5,251 silver coins in Buckinghamshire. It was one of the largest hoards of Anglo Saxon coins ever found in Britain and worth £1million! Of course, treasure is only valuable when it's no longer buried! At Easter, we celebrate Jesus and His resurrection as the greatest unburied treasure we can discover.

The Apostle Peter reminds us that God 'has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.' (1 Peter 1: 3,4). What does he say about this treasure?

On the one hand, it is the reason for hope in our lives. Peter was writing to Christians in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) who faced persecution under the Emperor Nero. In an uncertain world we know that Jesus suffered, but by His resurrection has secured eternal life for us. This inheritance not only guarantees life now, but also for eternity, as it 'is kept in heaven for you' (4). Do we share this confidence in

19th April Easter 3

Readings: Acts 3: 12-19
Psalm: 4
1 John 3: 1-7
Luke 24: 36b-48
Hymns 119 The strife is o'er
118 The Lord is risen indeed
103 Alleluia alleluia hearts to heaven
and voices raise
470 To the name that brings salvation

Sidesperson: Janet O'Carroll
Readers: Denis Sealy, Jenny Kauntze
Intercession: Ian MacGregor

26th April Easter 4

Readings: Acts 4: 5-12
Psalm: 23
1 John 3: 16-end
John 10: 11-18
Hymns 206 Christ is our cornerstone
77 The God of love my shepherd is
337 I will sing the wondrous story HON
107 Good Christian men rejoice and sing

Sidesperson: Elizabeth Oyedemi
Readers: Joe McKenzie, Carol Kenning
Intercessions: Bill Saunders

our lives? D.L. Moody, the 19th Century American evangelist spoke of the time when people would read about his death in the newspapers, 'Don't believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now'.

On the other hand, this treasure is a source of joy to us. This unburied treasure fills us 'with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.' (8,9). We face all kinds of trials in our lives, but God uses them to refine our faith and character, 'These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.' (7). We reflect the treasure itself, by developing the character of Jesus and becoming more holy, obedient and loving.

This Easter, let's not miss out on the best unburied treasure we can find! In the days of Communist Russia, an Orthodox priest was given five minutes to reply to somebody who had set out to discredit the resurrection of Jesus. 'Five seconds is all I require!' He turned to the audience and said: 'Christ is risen' and with a deafening roar the reply came back, 'He is risen indeed!'

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For your prayers

PRAYER CALENDAR FOR MONTH OF APRIL 2015

5th College Lane
12th Croftdown Road
19th Dartmouth Park Avenue
26th Dartmouth Park Hill

SAINTS & HOLY DAYS

2nd Maundy Thursday
3rd Good Friday
4th Holy Saturday
5th Easter Day
12th Easter 2

19th Easter 3
21st St Anselm
23rd St George
24th St Mellitus
25th St Mark
26th Easter 4
29th St Catherine of Siena

Close your eyes

Lost the car keys? Shut your eyes. It is the best way to recall memories. Some scientists explain that the reason is that vision takes up a lot of the brain's processing power. So, next time you need to really concentrate and remember something – shut your eyes.