



**ST ANDREW'S UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
WALTON-ON-THAMES**

NEWSLETTER

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"Make your faith larger than your fears and your dreams bigger than your doubts."

Robin Sharma

From The Manse

June 2020



Dear friends

The current Covid restrictions are tentatively beginning to be lifted and the obvious question arises about when we shall be able to reopen our buildings and to resume public worship. To be honest, the answer to that is quite difficult and so I thought I would like to take this opportunity to share some thoughts and feelings with you.

I genuinely have no idea when we shall be able to reopen the premises. The Government has indicated it might be possible to reopen churches in July, though this is not definite, and we would also need the green light from the URC and the Wessex Trust. Obviously, we are all very much looking forward to reopening as soon as it is safe to do so, and to worshipping together again.

As you know, I'm always a "glass half full" person but even I have to acknowledge there is quite a lot to plan. The buildings will need some preparation and we need to have worked out how we can best help people to feel safe when they come. This will require a bit of time, and some hard thinking, taking account of the Government and URC advice. We don't, for example, have onsite cleaning teams ready to dash round with sanitiser every few minutes - or even after every group.

We also want to make sure that when the church reopens we can offer a positive experience. This means being able to involve a reasonably high proportion of our congregations. Some of our people are among those who have received letters from the Government putting them in the shielded group who have been told to stay at home until at least the end of June, and it seems likely that they will have to continue to take great care. Many in our congregations are over 70 and currently being advised to minimise social contact. That raises the practical questions about whether we could immediately open both churches and how many would actually come if we did? It's also entirely possible that a number of people might not want come at this point, even if we were open, because they simply didn't feel safe going out, particularly to an enclosed space with a number of other people present.

Then we have to face the question of who would lead worship? Some of those who do so when I am not there fall into one of these vulnerable groups. Also, we need to think about what sort of services we can have - the Germans have been told not to sing hymns, as singing together can spread Covid-19. Social distancing will almost certainly still be in place. Would we really want to come to church and be socially distanced, dotted around the building which may well create an atmosphere that feels cold and, frankly, unwelcoming. Would that be a terribly helpful experience?

So whilst we all look forward to resuming our collective activities, getting to the point where we can reopen and welcome our congregations back may take a bit of time. We have, however, faced a number of things as a pastorate, supporting each other and working together. We may be able to do that here, too.

And for as long as it takes, I plan to continue offer the Zoom services and Thought for the Day, until we are able to resume our normal worship together.

With all good wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Cad", followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Pentecost Acts 2 verses 1-13

Last week, we began by reflecting on how, just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he told the disciples that they were to return to Jerusalem and wait. They would be clothed with power from on high and then they were to move forward in that strength. Today, we celebrate the arrival of that gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit, coming down on the heads of the disciples and we celebrate the birthday of the church too. This year it's a birthday celebrated in lockdown, which feels rather odd, but the more I think about it the more I can't help thinking that perhaps this year we've quite a lot to celebrate.

The last services in UK churches were on the 15th March. I don't know when we shall be able to reopen but round the world churches are finding new ways of worshipping and of being church. Hopefully we're getting better at it too. If anybody had told me in January that by Pentecost I'd be leading worship over the internet to a congregation in different countries around the world, I simply wouldn't have believed them. That's what's happened though. Woking are currently drawing a global congregation of over a 1,000 a week to their streamed service. Having received the Holy Spirit, the disciples ran out into the streets, speaking as the Spirit led them. Over the last couple of months, we've run out into the streets of the internet which, let's face it, are where many people are to be found today.

We've also been sending out a "Thought for the day" and a prayer for each Sunday by post and email. Again, I'm currently sending out to a few who are not part of our regular congregation but who have heard about it and asked to be included. So, as we celebrate the church's birthday, yes, things may be rather strange but this year the church is working in all sorts of new ways and making lots of exciting discoveries along the way. If nothing else we've also shown that the church is not a building but it's people, and when we gather, to quote a contemporary hymn, there's still singing and preaching and praying. There's still Bible reading and there's still laughter and crying too.

Our church premises currently feel very strange to walk through. They are silent when they'd normally be busy. You don't need ear-plugs to go into the hall at Weybridge and at St Andrew's the cleaner has been working through the place which now gleams and smells of polish. The thing is, they don't feel like closed churches- they feel like places in readiness. I've been in closed churches and they always feel rather sad. I remember how there was a subtle change to the feeling in Clyro URC after it closed and we were emptying it prior to selling it. It had a final air about it. St Andrew's and Weybridge don't feel like that. They feel poised in readiness for the day we can open the doors and let people in again though I hope that we don't go back only to squander what we've learnt because I could think that we've some positives to draw on.

So, Pentecost may feel rather different this year as the church celebrates its birthday in lockdown, but what is inescapable is that the church is very much alive. It's adapting, and evolving in remarkable ways. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has grabbed the church by the scruff of its neck and pulled it forward. Who knows but in years to come we may actually look back on this as being a pivotal moment of renewal and revival, opening all sorts of new doors, rather than closing them.



Almighty God, at this time you did teach the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Grant us, by the same Spirit, to have a right judgement in all things and to rejoice in that strength, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

With all good wishes,

Handwritten signature in blue ink.

THE STATEMENT OF NATURE, FAITH AND ORDER OF THE URC

Our exploration of the Statement of Nature, Faith and Order of the URC continues, and this month we look at how, in the URC, we regard creeds and other faith statements, both historic and more contemporary.

We accept with thanksgiving to God
the witness to the catholic faith in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.
We acknowledge the declarations made in our own tradition
by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Church of Christ
in which they stated the faith and sought to make its implications clear.

**Faith alive and active:
Gift of an eternal source,
Renewed for every generation.**

This is the section which always makes me smile a little because there's quite a lot of our tradition behind this. Firstly though, sometimes people are a little confused by the word "catholic". It's spelt with a small "c" here; in other words we are talking about something that is universal and relating to everyone, not the Roman Catholic Church.

The Apostles and Nicene creeds are the two creeds in most common usage today from the early church which were formulated to maintain standards of orthodoxy. The Apostles' Creed dates back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Nicene Creed dating back to the Councils of Constantinople (381) and the Council of Chalcedon (451). The Nicene Creed was basically written to establish orthodoxy following heretical teaching about the Holy Spirit (The Arian Controversy in case you're interested) and so if you compare the Apostles' and Nicene creeds you will see that the main difference between them is that the latter says much more about the Holy Spirit.

As for the "declarations in our own traditions"- well, going back to the Reformation our forebears made statements about their understanding of faith, of Christian teaching and the role of the church. From the Presbyterian Church we're basically talking about the Westminster Confession of 1646. From the Congregation side we're talking about the Savoy Declaration of 1658 and from the Churches of Christ tradition it's the Declaration and Address of Thomas Campbell (1809). More recently, as part of the process which led to the 1972 union, the Presbyterian Church of England accepted a new statement of Christian faith for "this present time" in 1956 and the Congregation Church of England and Wales adopted a new statement of faith in 1967. If anyone has a burning desire to read any of these I do have copies of them all, most of which make superb cures for insomnia!

At its formation in 1972 a new statement of faith was adopted by the URC which, like the previous statements, was written in traditional language with masculine terminology being taken to include women. Obviously in more recent decades this has become increasingly inappropriate and so revisions have been made to the Statement of Nature faith and Order and to the 1972 Statement of Faith to respect the use of inclusive language. I'll say a bit more about this as part of next month's letter suffice it to say here that whilst holding to our traditional faith we also recognise that it must be expressed in ways which are appropriate to contemporary standards, rather than the language and style of the 17th century, or even the 1950s and '60s.

So, that's a bit about what we're actually talking about and referring to in this section of the statement of our Nature, Faith and Order. Basically, it's about respecting and valuing our forebears whilst realising that expressing our faith cannot be allowed to become trapped in the past but must be allowed to speak contemporarily.

More on that next month!

With all good wishes,



WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP WITHIN THE PASTORATE AT THE MOMENT

Just a reminder that

- 1) A "Thought for the Day" and a prayer for each Sunday is being sent out to everyone via email or by post so if you're not receiving this, please let me know.
- 2) Every Sunday at 11.30am there is our "Zoom Worship" - a short "on line" service for the pastorate. You can join in using the internet or the telephone. Details are sent round each week to everyone. Again, if you're not receiving them, please let me know.
- 3) Every Sunday at about noon this is: "After Church Chat". This follows on from the Zoom service and is a chance to catch up on friends, share good news stories and, perhaps, share things to give us all a smile, or even a laugh. An informal time together.

Some points to ponder

Obviously the time is coming when we shall come out of lockdown and our churches can re-open. So, as we can begin to plan for the future let me ask you a couple of good questions - well, I think they are good questions even if nobody else does. Whilst we've not been able to get to our church buildings:

- 1) What have you missed?
- 2) What have you not missed?

In the light of the lockdown experience:

- 1) What might our priorities be for the future?
- 2) How might our priorities have changed or else need reconsidering?
- 3) What have we been doing that's simply not worth the energy required?

The future could be quite exciting,¹ so let's have a prayerful consideration about our direction now because our feelings may well have changed in response to so different an experience.

Michael Hodgson

CHURCH MEETING

Both our churches are due Church Meetings now; however, I think that it's fairly obvious that they are not going to be taking place any time soon. Questions about Church Meeting have been raised in the URC Ministers' Forum and at this stage I shall be taking the lead given by Michel Hopkins, who is also the Clerk to the General Assembly. He feels that it is difficult to see that a Church Meeting could safely be held that included everyone. The functions of Church Meeting as set out in the Manual are generally not urgent matters. Under the provisions of the Basis of Union, Church Meetings are to be held at least four times a year. However, given the extraordinary situation, both the URC and the Charity Commissioners realise that this is unlikely to be possible at this time. What's more important is that that people are protected and kept safe during the Covid pandemic.

For your information, both sets of Elders are meeting via Zoom and are dealing with any management issues as well as pastoral concerns.

Michael Hodgson

You may remember we encountered Zoom problems during our service on 10 May.

ZOOM DOWN: APP SUFFERS OUTAGE AS USERS REPORT AUDIO AND VIDEO PROBLEMS

Outage monitor records thousands of reports of issues

The tech company has not yet acknowledged the outage, which came as churches attempted to hold their Sunday services on the site, prompting one Twitter user to joke: "Looks like the church broke the internet."

Jean Rigden has sent in this heart-warming story about her brother, David.

"Seven weeks ago, my brother David fell and broke his hip. We had three harrowing weeks when I was phoned by three doctors trying to force me into putting a DNR on him and, when I refused, they put one on him without my consent. He was tested twice for Covid -19, both tests negative. No visitors were allowed in the hospital and he must have been very frightened. David has a severe learning disability with no speech - he is a lovely, gentle man. He came home with a three-week beard and had lost a lot of weight.

Since his return to his home in Midway, I had been phoning the home every day and they told me he was doing well. On 9 May, after his release from hospital, I had a surprise visit when one of his lovely carers took him for a walk in his chair and brought him to my front gate. It was a very emotional moment and I wanted greet him with a hug and a kiss but it wasn't possible as we had to practise social distance.

To see him and see how well he looks was quite amazing - all smiles, and a cup of tea and bag of crisps were consumed. He is walking well around the house and the carers are, as usual, doing a fantastic job. God bless them all.

My brother and I love each other dearly and I can't wait to get back to our old ways when life is normal again."



EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING

Musing on the current lockdown, one of the benefits I've been enjoying over the last few months is being able to spend more time in the garden. Life in the Manse is always busy but, as you know, I love being able to spend time in the garden and find great relaxation in general "pottering". There's always something to do and I am really pleased with how it's coming on. The big herbaceous border, for example, is becoming nicely established and doesn't need any annuals now to fill in gaps. Despite the problems I've managed to get things into most of the tubs and pots on the patio. Really, it's only a couple of hanging baskets which are looking a bit underwhelming. What's made the last few months so special, however, is the glorious weather and having time to spend time just sitting in the garden, enjoying it whilst reading or musing or just observing.

I've become aware that a blue tit is nesting in the cavity of my neighbour's house, gaining entry via a disused overflow pipe hole. Moss removal from my lawn is being done for me by a variety of remarkably tame and most assiduous birds looking for nesting material. I've also been much more aware of how the garden changes on a daily basis as flowers fade and new ones come to take their place. The new border I created last year is coming on nicely as well. Facing North, it only gets sun first thing in the morning from the East and in the evening from the West. I did buy a Wisteria to go along the back fence, but other than that the bed is planted with things I've been able to split from clumps in other parts of the garden. It's a vast improvement on when it was the last of the plain laurel bushes which thankfully have all now gone from the back.

You can see from the photos below how far we have come with the Manse garden. I may never get the chance to spend this much time just sitting in this garden again and I think that I shall always see this opportunity as have been a very special gift in a time of crisis.

Michael Hodgson



July 2017



May 2020



75TH ANNIVERSARY OF VE DAY



The 75th Anniversary of VE Day fell on Friday 8 May and was celebrated with a Friday Bank Holiday rather than on the usual Monday. Normally, there would have been a plethora of street parties and lots of stalls popping up on commons and riversides thronging with people, but we had to be content with celebrating on a much smaller scale.

The German High Command was told to issue orders to all German military, naval and air authorities and to all forces under German control to cease active operations at 23.01 hours Central European time on 8 May 1945. (German Instrument of Surrender Article 2)

More than one million people took to the streets throughout the UK to celebrate to mark the end of the European part of the War. In London, crowds thronged Trafalgar Square and up the Mall to Buckingham Palace, where King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by their daughters and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, appeared on the balcony of the palace before the cheering crowds. Later, the then Princess Elizabeth, now our Queen, and her sister Princess Margaret were allowed to wander incognito among the crowds and take part in the celebrations. Most of us will have enjoyed the excellent television coverage with footage taken 75 years ago well as in modern times.

After our service on Sunday 10 May, Michael asked us to share our personal memories of VE Day and here they are.

Nancy Hampton was coming up to 16. Her mother had saved rations and put some of them towards a huge steak pie.

Roy Bones, a youngster of 12 at the time, has memories of his minister, who was also head warden, making announcements, one particularly affecting one being, "Take down your blackouts and let your light shine." Later that day, the family had gone to church.

Beryl Brown says:

"Our 1945 street party was in Stuart Avenue, Walton-on-Thames. I have a photo of it and I'm in a high chair at one end of the long table. My two brothers, Philip aged two, and Leslie aged six either side of me. There must have been party games/dancing as there is a piano in the road as well. My granddaughters were fascinated to see the picture as they both learned about VE Day for their on line school work. I was too young to have actual memories of it!

(Apologies, Beryl, for calling you by your maiden name, Watson, in the last Newsletter! Ed)

Jean Rigden recalls:

"Our family lived at 81 Cottimore Avenue sharing with the Howard family while our fathers were away in the Army. Beryl has said she lived in Stuart Avenue which is the next road. We had a street party but I was too young to remember it. Strange that Beryl and I were confirmed at St Andrew's on the same Sunday! Then the doodle bugs were coming over. Dad, who was in the Royal Artillery, was on the guns on the coast. He wrote to Mum and said to get the kids up to Scotland. So off we went and stayed with our mother's family in Scotia Street, Motherwell. When I came home no-one could understand me with my strong Motherwell accent!"

Margaret Faultless remembers being sad they couldn't get into the kitchen at their Glasgow home. She had slept in the shelter with her big brother.

Anne Fitzgerald, then living in Edinburgh where celebrations took place, remembers fear and terror at the noise that has stuck with her to this day.

Anna Crawford was not even a twinkle in her parents' eye on VE Day. However, she does recall at some point her mother saying that, although she was happy that the war in Europe was over it was with mixed feelings, as Anna's father, who was with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, was still serving in India. **Alan** was living in Greenock but has no memories of what it was like on VE Day.

Holms Carlile was in London but can't remember anything specific.

Anne Lewis was living in Inverness with grandmother and recalls that there were a lot of people around.

Jim Sommerville was 8 and in Dunoon on holiday with his aunt. On the first night, a convoy sailed across the Tail of the Bank and all the ships were brightly illuminated.

Jan de Kok, then in Holland, recalled people enjoying food for the first time in a year, sent over by the UK and Canada, following a period of acute food shortage as a result of Nazi impositions.

Norma (aka Ed), a toddler in Glasgow at the time, has no recollection of any celebrations but does remember stories coming down the family of her mother having driven an ambulance during the War and her father, in the bakery business and too old to be called up, being busy making biscuits for the troops. She and the neighbours celebrated the 75th Anniversary with a modest street party in Putney with singing (including, of course, 'We'll meet again'), dancing the Macarena and generally chatting to one another while raising a glass or two - all - it goes without saying - with social distancing the order of the day!



Putney celebrations



Irene and Izabela enjoying a glass of Prosecco at home in Sunbury

Thanks to Ghislaine Stevenson for sending in this recipe. Alas, publication date did not allow for you to have it before VE Day but I am sure you will want to give it a go! Ed

VE Day Ration Cake



Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup water
- 1/4 cup cocoa
- margarine/butter or lard

Method:

1. Heat your oven at 160°C (fan oven)/180°C.
2. Use the margarine/butter or lard to grease your pan.
3. Mix the flour, sugar, cocoa, baking soda and salt in a bowl.
4. Then add the white vinegar, vegetable oil, vanilla extract and water to the mixture. Mix in well.
5. Pour into your cake tin or baking tray and put in the oven for 30 minutes.
6. Take out and enjoy your ration cake!



FRIENDS REMEMBERED



Leonie Georgina Miller

It was with sadness that we learnt of the death of Leonie Miller on 17th April, 2020. Leonie was one of the group of residents who come to St Andrew's with their carers from Midway. Of strong Scottish ancestry Leonie had lived in Surrey for a number of years, her parents realising that she needed to settle somewhere that her special needs could be met. That she lived to be 80 is tribute to the care and support she received and I know that Jean Rigden has a store of wonderful stories she can tell.

Brought up within the Scottish Presbyterian traditions, Leonie loved coming to St Andrew's and she particularly loved the music and the hymns. At her funeral service in Hanworth Crematorium there were the maximum number of mourners allowed at this time and the simple service began with the much loved Scottish Baptismal hymn "By cool Siloam's shady rill". A nephew read the 23rd Psalm from Leonie's own Bible and her niece gave a short tribute. Funerals are particularly difficult at this time but Leonie was remembered with much love in a short, simple service which felt "right".

We send our condolences and love to Leonie's family and friends.

Michael Hodgson

Jean Rigden, who knew Leonie well, writes:

Leonie was a very well spoken lady. Full of humour, she had a keyboard she loved to play. She shared a home with 5 other residents including my brother. A real character, she was often heard to say in a very posh accent "call the police someone has stolen my handbag". Leonie enjoyed a very good quality of life and is very missed by the other residents and staff. Like many residents that lived in Botley's Park, the church played an important part in her life.

A POEM *by Haroon Rashid*

We fell asleep in one world and woke up in another.
Suddenly Disney is out of magic.
Paris is no longer romantic.
New York doesn't stand up any more.
The Chinese Wall is no longer a fortress
And Mecca is empty.
Hugs and kisses suddenly become weapons, and not visiting parents and friends become an act of love,
Suddenly you realise that power, beauty, money are worthless
and you can't get you the oxygen you are fighting for.
The world continues its life and is beautiful.
It only puts humans in cages.
I think it is sending us a message.
"You are not necessary. The air, earth, water and sky without you are fine.
When you come back, remember that you are my guests.
Not my master."

GARDEN TALK: It has been many months since I last tended the church garden. The ground was compacted by heavy rain earlier in the year and baked hard by the current long hot spell. Weeds were flourishing everywhere and the whole site frankly looked a mess, filling me with dread at the considerable amount of work needed to return it to an acceptable condition. It was with considerable relief, therefore, when James and Annie answered my call for help.



Susan's support in filling the 2 garden bins with garden waste was also a boon. The task took 3 mornings of hard work with more to come. All the inner garden shrubs have grown like topsy and need shaping. We so desperately need days of heavy rain and it is pointless putting in more



plants. Nature had certainly taken over - the long fence at the rear of hall is now peppered with lovely poppies seeded from someone's garden. St Andrew's should be grateful to James and Annie as they both worked extremely hard in sweltering conditions. It was nice to stop for a chat /coffee, socially distanced of course!

Thanks to their efforts, our garden now looks more like its old self. Passers-by often stop for a chat and say how much pleasure the garden gives them. Last Thursday was no exception when a couple in their late seventies I guess stopped for a chat. I thought I recognised a familiar Scots accent and on enquiring discovered that the husband



although born in India, was brought up in Aberdeen. His wife amazingly came from Boddam (below) a small village 2-3 miles from Peterhead and

went to the same school as me. The beam from its famous lighthouse used to fleetingly flash into my bedroom window when



dense sea haar moved in blotting out the landscape - the loud moaning tortuous sound from its foghorn echoed for miles around. I have often thought our garden - especially the inner section, is a very underutilised asset. Many older people have downsized and like those in small flats may have no garden to enjoy – such an asset in these seeming endless days of lock down. It is a pity it could not be put to perhaps the Community's use as it lies empty for most of the week, sadly like our church sanctuary. Something for us all to think about perhaps.

Johnston Simpson

PUZZLE CORNER

RANDOM WORDS



Any one bored enough to fancy of game of random hymn words? The rules are really very simple. Below is a list of random words, each of which are taken from different hymns. Which hymn though? They may, of course, appear in more than one. The first 14 are all taken from the version of that hymn in Rejoice and Sing.

(1) Glassy (2) Wayside (3) Landscape (4) Inextinguishable (5) Secretly
(6) Vouchsafe (7) Dry-shod (8) Ineffable (9) Fiercest (10) Sloth (11) Hobgoblin (12)
Lance (13) Moor (14) Commonwealth.

If they were too easy for you, here's a few which may be a bit more challenging. Some are from hymns not in Rejoice and Sing but which may be remembered from the past. Some are in R&S but I'm quoting from an older version of the hymn which R&S changed.

(15) Supernal (16) Wert (17) Raiment (18) Wormwood (19) Consubstantial (20)
Quiver.

Answers next month

A BIBLE TEASER

25 Books of the Bible are hidden in the text below, can you find them? They can be found in the middle of words, at the end, at the beginning - all sorts of places. An example (**A**mos) is provided.

This is **A MOST** remarkable puzzle. Someone found it in the sear pocket on a flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu keeping himself occupied for hours. One man from Illinois worked on this while fishing from his johnboat, Roy Clark studied it while playing his banjo, Elaine Vinets mentioned it in her column once. One woman judges the job to be so involving, she brews a cup of tea to calm her nerves. There will be some names that are really easy to spot ... that's a fact. Some people will soon find themselves in a jam especially since the book names are not necessarily capitalised. The truth is, from answers we get, we are forced to admit it usually takes a Minister or scholar to see some of them at the worst. Something in our genes is responsible for the difficulty we have. Those able to find all of them will hear great lamentations from those who have to be shown. One revelation may help, books like Timothy and Samuel may occur without their numbers. And punctuation or spaces in the middle are normal. A chipper attitude will help you compete. Remember there are 25 books of the Bible lurking somewhere in this paragraph. (*Apologies, I do not have the answers! Ed*)



COVID – 19. A perspective from a Zimbabwean friend: WHEN THE SUN RISES.

It is the onset of our winter. Life around us took a sudden turn, not that we did not see it coming, but because we were complacent enough to believe this is something happening to others and not us. When news of COVID 19 arrived, most of us thought we were immune. Reality hit when we went into lockdown.

I had just celebrated my birthday and had no idea what awaited us. I continued to work because I am part of essential services. I was

ill so unable to return to work two days into the first week of lockdown. On the third day I set off to the bus stop. I was there by six am. I finally got onto a bus around 9am. We spent more than 45 minutes at the first roadblock before arriving in town.

I had given my day to God as I woke up, unsure and a little intimidated by the prospects of the day ahead of me. As Providence would have it, my mind was made up that I would go to my nearest works branch and get a physical printed letter that would allow me to move around. As I approached the branch, I was stopped by council police who demanded I show them my letter. I told them I had it on my phone, but they were having none of it. One officer much younger than my first-born child called out to me amidst the verbal abuse that I should run until I got to the branch. I jogged as fast as my weakened knees would carry me. I was almost at the door of our branch when riot police called for me to stop. I was asked again about my letter. This time I was surrounded by a crowd of both riot and council police shouting over and at me. I was afraid but felt that God was protecting me. One armour clad riot policeman pulled me to one side and asked me what my story was. I explained to him that I had not managed to get a printed letter because I was ill. I showed him the letter on my phone, and he set me free from the madding crowd.

One man next to me when I was near the door at the town branch was not so lucky. As I was being talked down by the riot and council police, he was being made to empty the contents of his bags one by one and place them on the pavement. He was carrying a sack of maize which cob by cob was emptied on the road. I learnt that he was later beaten. He had no ID on him, but maize and garden tools were deemed as weapons when the purpose is convenient.

This set the tone for the first twenty one days of lockdown... the police, spot checks, roadblocks, dismounting vehicles for document checks, waking up at 4am to catch a bus that only arrived at 9:30 sometimes 10am to get to work at 11am only to leave at 3pm. Some days we were lucky. The buses which took us back home would be docked at the bus terminus and in no time we would be back home before dark. Other days fortune shied away, and we would wait for hours before any bus came. Most days, I would fall asleep soon after supper in mid conversation because I was so tired. I have never had an experience of war, but it most certainly felt like a war was raging and winter was assuredly creeping in.

I persistently have had to tell myself that all this is for the greater good. I have continually tried to correct myself when hatred and disdain arise in me at roadblocks and security checks. Although the uniformed forces are emotionally violent, they too are doing their jobs. We all could do with a lot less violence though.

I often passed through Harare Gardens Recreational Park on my way to meet my mother after work. A prayer was always on my lips. I realized that I had not seen this side of the gardens since I was a child. It was clean and quiet and quite honestly flourishing without human littering and interference. On that day as I walked through the park taking in the scenery, a prayer was answered. I had been asking God what the lesson in all this pandemonium was for me. In the view of the greenery and the birds singing so loudly it was as if God was saying "remember!" I remembered how life was basic and the happiest memories were formed there. My happiest

memories were formed in natural surroundings playing and swinging off trees, playing hide and seek and the delightful family meals and family trips. I remembered when life was basic, and the most important things were not tangible like our cellphones and fancy cars and houses so big and fully furnished but devoid of love and laughter. Maybe I have it wrong. Less was definitely more and there was a time when love healed everything.

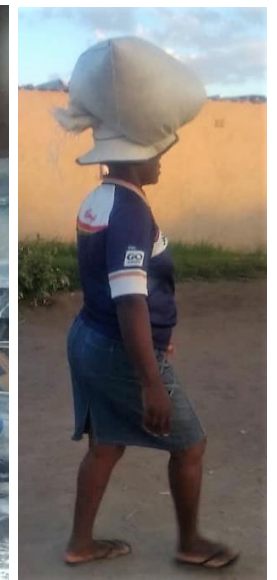
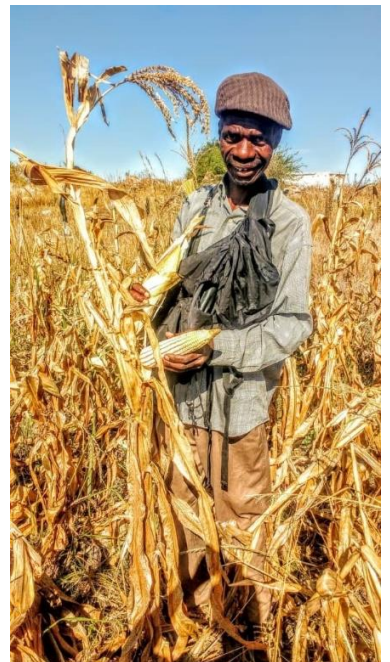
It isn't easy watching the levels of poverty rising and desolation and mental illness creeping slowly into our communities. It's not easy talking to people whose light is dimming but no solution or alternative can be offered them. As I face yet another day, I ask for strength and strength is given me. I look at those around me who used to live hand to mouth and are now locked down, without income. I remember to give thanks for the big things and the little things. At times I fear because I know that this is likely our new reality for a long time to come but of this I am certain....*the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases and His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning for great is His faithfulness...*

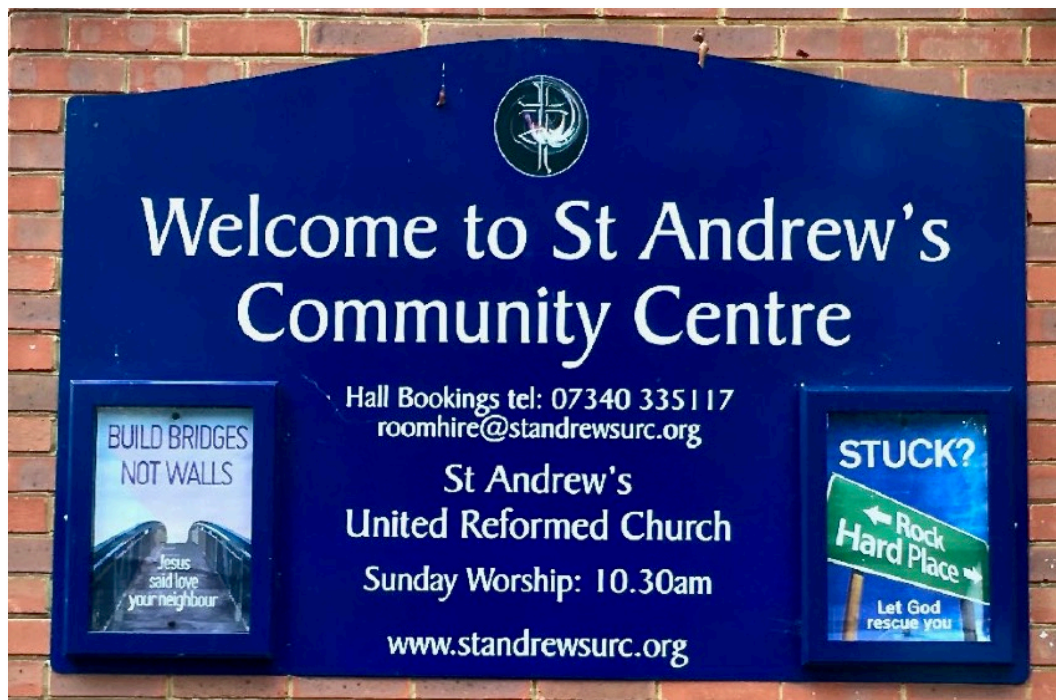
When the sun rises, my spirit rises too. I know Who is on my side.

Name withheld

ARTPEACE AND FRIENDS

DIRE is the only word to describe our friends' situation. No sales and the odd donation coupled with lockdown means that they are having a particularly difficult time. Day after day there have been crowds of desperate people clamouring for food, unable to stay at home because their families are hungry. There have been numerous reports of people being beaten by soldiers and police for violating lockdown which culminated in Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights making an urgent application to the High Court to get the beatings stopped. The artists like many others receive no support from the State. They receive nothing from charities like Christian Aid. Their harvest was poorer than usual due to drought and later some worm infestation. Photo right of Fortune with his crop and below, Lovemore and his family breaking up the cobs to be taken to the mill to be ground into mealie meal. However, many artists cannot even afford the miller's 10\$ fee. Three artists now face eviction from their homes. The only good news is that the Coronavirus spread in Zimbabwe appears under control. I hesitated to write up this article as there is enough gloom around, but our friends simply do not know which way to turn. They are terrified that the virus may escalate knowing how ill - prepared their hospitals are in terms of equipment. They are envious of all the support in Europe and elsewhere. Their future looks bleak and my communication with them is fading fast. **JS**





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Please note that, at the moment, in keeping with Government policy due to the Covid 19 virus pandemic, the church building is closed. However, we are holding services every Sunday with Zoom at the later time of 11.30 am. A weekly "Thought for the Day" and a prayer are also available by post or email. Please contact the Minister for inclusion.

Anyone who wishes to take part. In the Zoom service should contact the minister, who will be able to send them a link to enable easy participation.

You are all most welcome to join us!

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

1 Peter 4 vv 8-10