

Weoley Hill & Weoley Castle Church News



May 2020

The Weoley Hill and Weoley Castle church newsletters have been combined for the time being.

From the Minister's study—

Dear Friends,

I hope we all manage to keep our spirits up—most of the time—although I do hear words like “weary” and “frustrated” and “sad” to describe how we feel at times. Being in lockdown is not easy but we know we have to, to stop the spread of Covid-19, to save lives and to protect the NHS. And so we all try to spend our time at home in creative and productive ways to make most of each day. Usually I spend the morning in my study (and behind my laptop) praying, reading, reflecting, writing and answering emails, making telephone calls, etc., while later, in the afternoon, I go into the garden (if sunny weather) after which Michael and I go for our daily walk, and in the evening I usually relax watching a movie and/or reading a book.

The book I am presently reading is apparently a favourite of pope Francis whose reference to it recently made me pick it up again. The book is *I Promessi Sposi* or *The Betrothed*, written by Alessandro Manzoni and published in 1827. It is a classic of Italian literature and it is set in the 17th century during the plague in Milan (and Lombardy) of 1630. Not surprising then that the book is receiving much interest these days as it masterfully describes the plague and the reaction of the people at that time.

To give you a summary of the plot: Renzo and Lucia are betrothed, engaged to be married, but the local overlord Don Rodrigo has set his eyes on Lucia and threatens the priest Don Abbondio, not to celebrate the wedding. Renzo and Lucia are forced to flee their homes and the story follows them as their unwavering love for each other is tested by all kinds of challenges they have to overcome, including the outbreak of the plague. But in the end they get together again and happily ever after they live!

There are some remarkable parallels in the description of the plague and the current corona pandemic, such as that the plague came from abroad and that the authorities were slow to react. The waiting

facilitated the spread of the plague and people first denied or ignored the plague, then they became suspicious of foreigners and finally they panicked. Family and friends were abandoned because of fear of infection and soon the *lazaretto*—a large “field hospital”—was filled with 16,000 patients. And the equivalent of the dedicated and heroic doctors and nurses in today’s pandemic were at that time mainly monks, Capuchin friars, who looked after the sick and the dying. Many of them died in the plague, as does Fra Cristoforo who helps Renzo and Lucia and bravely speaks truth to power.

It is at the *lazaretto* that Renzo and Lucia meet each other again, both having recovered from the plague and therefore immune to the disease. One of the friars ministering among the plague victims is Fra Felice, who addresses Renzo and a wider audience of convalescents: *“Let us remember those who have gone forth to the grave. Let us look at the thousands who remain here, uncertain of their destiny; Let us look at ourselves! ... That we may be deeply sensible that life is a gift, that we may value it accordingly, and employ it in works which he will approve. That the remembrance of our sufferings may render us compassionate and actively benevolent towards others.... Let us begin from this moment, from the first step we shall take into the world, a life of charity! Let those who have regained their former strength lend a fraternal arm to the feeble; Let the young sustain the old ... and thus your sorrows will be softened, and your lives will be acceptable to God.”*

The story ends, with life returning to normal after the plague, as *“shops were opened, people returned to their houses, quarantine was hardly spoken of and there remained of the pestilence but a few scattered traces.”* Let us take heart, the corona pandemic will end too, sooner or later! So, courage and keep well!

With all best wishes, *Leonora*

As an afterword I quote Pope Francis, who in his Easter Vigil Mass said: *Tonight we acquire a fundamental right that can never be taken away from us: the right to hope. It is a new and living hope that comes from God. It is not mere optimism; it is not a pat on the back or an empty word of encouragement, with a passing smile. No. It is a gift from heaven, which we could not have earned on our own. Over these weeks, we have kept repeating, "All will be well", clinging to the beauty of our humanity and allowing words of encouragement to rise up from our hearts. But as the days go by and fears grow, even the boldest hope can dissipate. Jesus' hope is different. He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave he brings life.*

If, on your journey, you feel weak and frail, or fall, do not be afraid, God holds out a helping hand and says to you: "Courage!". You might say, as did Don Abbondio (in Manzoni's novel), "Courage is not something you can give yourself" (I Promessi Sposi, XXV). True, you cannot give it to yourself, but you can receive it as a gift. All you have to do is open your heart in prayer and roll away, however slightly, that stone placed at the entrance to your heart so that Jesus' light can enter. You only need to ask him: "Jesus, come to me amid my fears and tell me too: Courage!" With you, Lord, we will be tested but not shaken. And, whatever sadness may dwell in us, we will be strengthened in hope, since with you the cross leads to the resurrection, because you are with us in the darkness of our nights; you are certainty amid our uncertainties, the word that speaks in our silence, and nothing can ever rob us of the love you have for us.

This is the Easter message, a message of hope.

Notice

The Funeral Service of Ernest Cruchley took place on the 17th of April at Rowley Regis Crematorium with 10 members of the family allowed to be present. The service was live streamed so that Kathleen in Lupal House and Peter and Lena in Singapore could watch the service, which

was led by Leonora on behalf of Peter ,whose words of faith and hope were a beautiful tribute to his father.

This is a painful day that echoes another painful day when mourners gathered at a city graveyard full of love for the one they had lost. They came even to stand at the graveside and instead were met by angels who said to them: 'why are you looking for the living among the dead?' And then they were filled with peace and joy on realising that their friend and Lord had risen from the dead.

So we have come, to this city's graveyard. We come with love for Ernest and with our loss of him. We cannot expect to meet angels, but still their words speak to us. Why are you looking for the living among the dead?' So, let us take peace from these words, and from the hope that the Ernest we have known and loved is not amongst the dead, but with the living.

The recording of the service will be available to view online from Tuesday 28 April until 3 June. To access it, first enter the address:

www.obitus.com in your browser.

At the top right of the page you will see: username & password for username you enter: rowley3077 (lower case) and for password: 507120

Donations in memory of Ernest can be made to Welcome Group Halesowen and sent to Mrs E Lacon, 27 Belbroughton Rd, Halesowen B63 4ND or by bank transfer to Sort Code: 30.93.75 Account Number: 01248428.



Personalia

Please remember all who are ill, recovering, or undergoing treatment, as well as family and friends.

Bournville: Ruth Eaton & Jim Garrow, who is in hospital.

Weoley Castle: Min Elson. Weoley Hill: Marilyn Raw, Kath & Dave Upton.

Sincere condolences to the family and friends of the Revd Ernest Cruchley, former minister of Weoley Castle Community Church, who died on 21 March.

The wedding of the Thornett's younger daughter Sarah and Jason Evans has been postponed until conditions permit.



Christian Aid Week May 10-16

There is no house-to-house collection this year.

If you wish to make a donation to Christian Aid, you can do so online at caweek.org/payin or by sending a cheque made payable to Christian Aid to Emlyn Evans, who will send it on. You may also know of neighbours who normally support Christian Aid, so perhaps you could pass this information on.

There is also a quiz to raise funds (TV programs—cryptic clues). Please contact Emlyn Evans if you would like a copy (by e-mail). A paper copy is also available and can be delivered to you.

Emlyn Evans

Weoley Castle news

I understand that both the big users of our building: Elite Dance & Karate are carrying on to a certain extent online, but of course looking forward to returning as soon as possible. The members of the Monday & Friday Day Centres are being kept in touch with by telephone and are feeling rather bored. The volunteers of the Tuesday Friends (Junior) Club are keeping their spirits up via a WhatsApp group. Leonora is delivering copies of the Sunday worship to those not able to receive them online. Some daily exercise is being spent doing odd jobs in the Church & Manse garden (both otherwise unoccupied).

Ernest's Funeral was conducted on Friday by Leonora on behalf of Peter Cruchley who is stuck out in Singapore at present. He hopes to return later in the year and to arrange a memorial service when conditions permit. Kathleen (being cared for in Lapal House) & Peter were able to watch a live-stream of Ernest's funeral, which was held in Rowley Regis, as they permit more attendees than the 6 at Lodge Hill.

See Leonora's letter for how to view it online.

Ted Forgan



The Price of Happiness.

I bought a book called: 'How to be Happy'
It cost a hundred quid!
I followed its strictures faithfully
Everything writ, I did.
Didn't make a ha'pence of difference,
That sad, uninspiring read -
The book shop wouldn't take it back;
Now I'm very unhappy indeed.

Robert Mundell



Running the distance

to support those affected by brain tumours

"Wow! Thank you all so much from the bottom of our hearts!!
This is so very kind of you all. This means so much to my mum,
my family and Gail's family. Please say a massive thank you from
Gail and I, and our families to everyone at the Weoley Hill United
reformed Church. Xx"

Sally Wainhouse (Marilyn's daughter)

<https://givealittle.co.nz/fundraiser/running-for-those-affected-by-brain-tumours/updates#4ba9804d-ccd2-4787-a831-aba80093d113>

I have paid NZ\$515 into Sally Raw's appeal. We collected £245 in total. I think one or two people paid directly themselves.

David Marlow

A YEAR OF WONDERS?

Almost exactly 2 years ago the book group discussed the Geraldine Brooks novel 'A Year of Wonders', a fictionalised telling of the story of the village of Eyam in Derbyshire, ravaged by plague in 1665/6. This has been much in my mind during our present 'plague' and being confined to barracks for the foreseeable future.

How different things were for those villagers 355 years ago: although they were able to surmise that the infection was introduced in bolts of cloth from London infested with fleas, they didn't have the scientific means of proving this, they had no modern medicine, no doctors, no vaccines, no knowledge of the science behind such a disaster, just herbal remedies. But they did have the strength of will and the faith to spare the other villages of the Hope Valley by cutting themselves off completely, isolating themselves in their village for much of the 14 months that the disease ravaged their lives. We don't know the exact numbers of those who died, although the local church records 273 deaths from a population of around 360, but this is disputed and it is thought the population was nearer 900. Their vicar, the Reverend William Mompesson and the Puritan minister Thomas Stanley led the decision to quarantine the whole village. They held their church services outdoors to assist in 'social distancing'. Each family was responsible for burying their own dead.

As we live out our lockdown, we are bombarded with news, with frightening figures, with heart-rending stories of victims of Covid-19 and their families, with politics, blame, distrust of the decision-makers. Thankfully we also have wonderful news such as 99 year-old Captain Tom Moore's amazing feat of walking 100 lengths of his garden and raising upwards of £27 million for NHS charities, and we hear of the selfless dedication of frontline health and care workers risking their lives as they continue to nurse the sick.

What faith and fortitude those seventeenth century Derbyshire folk had! Let us pray that we can be as strong and that we can trust in the Lord to

bring us through these times. For most of us the comfortable homes and gardens we are confined to bear no resemblance to the stone cottages of Eyam as they would have been then. For many of us there is little suffering involved in 'sitting it out' at home for several weeks, or even months. Most of all, because of the wonders of modern science we can have hope, of treatments, possibly of a vaccine, and of superb healthcare. Let us pray for all those for whom the coronavirus has brought grief and fear and exhaustion. Let us also pray for scientists and politicians who must make life-changing decisions for us all.

On a lighter note, do, if you get the chance, visit Eyam. It is a lovely village. I first went there when my cousin was married in the parish church over 50 years ago. I have never forgotten the beauty of the trees overhanging the narrow lanes making green tunnels, the riot of summer flowers in the gardens and the mellow stone of lovely Eyam Hall – built just 6 years after the plague and now a National Trust property. We revisited Eyam 5 years ago when we were staying nearby, at which time we rambled around the beautiful gardens of the Hall and wound our way around the churchyard trying to decipher the ancient gravestones. I hope we get the chance to go again before too long.

Chris Marlow



ZAMBIA ORPHANS AID

There are 1.2 m orphans in Zambia, and around 700,000 children miss out on school. This leaves them in danger of abuse, child labour and exploitation.

Zambia Orphans Aid (ZOA) is a UK charity which works with local partners in Zambia to help disadvantaged and vulnerable children to access education. This is vitally important work in a country like Zambia, where 58% of people live in poverty.

Web site : zoa.org.uk

Emlyn Evans

A Teacher in Lockdown.

Many of you will know that I often enjoy counting down the days until the next school holiday. I do love my job but I also love the opportunity to do other things, spend time with the family and visit other places. This lockdown is different though.

We have just had two weeks of holiday but before that we were all coming to terms with school without the school!

I've had to learn quickly how to use various bits of technology including Zoom and Screencast to help provide explanations for students as well as enabling me to produce the Good Friday service. I'm afraid that in many subjects, and maths, in particular, I can't just tell students to read certain pages and then do the questions. They need to have things modelled for them and they need me to tell them where their mistake is in their calculations. My new writing tablet has helped with that, I can now write into a document and record a video of it and send it in an email to the students—trying to type mathematical calculations is a nightmare. More learning for me but it seems to have worked up to a point. So far I have used the time to facilitate some revision of previously learned topics but the challenge is about to come when I have to try and introduce new material; we can't go on revising for ever.

The students have also had to adjust; it takes much more self-discipline to study under these conditions than it does in a classroom with the teacher breathing down your neck. It also depends on their having all the required technology themselves, not always the case and certainly not free access to a computer whenever they need it. We ourselves are struggling a little on that front; since our burglary in January we have not yet replaced the laptops that were stolen and so are having to manage with my and Lydia's work computers, which is fine most of the time but does mean that the kids can't always have access exactly when they need it.

This level in inequality is not only seen in terms of the study but, whilst my kids actively look forward to their time away from school, for many

school is their haven, their time of normality, their opportunity to eat hot food and spend time with their friends. There are many youngsters out there who dread the holidays and for whom this lockdown must be even worse. Each week I and several of my colleagues have been involved in delivering supplies to several of our families; not only their entitlement to free school meals but also additional supplies to help them make it through the week. Some of them rely on foodbanks but can't get out to them under these conditions, we even have one student whose mother goes for dialysis several times a week and needs to be cared for while this is happening. We have been very fortunate in that many of us have been happy to buy a little more than we may need and donate it but our biggest help has been FareShare, a charity who ensure that food which can no longer be sold because it's close to, or just past its best before date but is perfectly useable makes its way to those who most need it. They have been generous in their support for our efforts, as they are for many organisations.

The smiles and expressions of gratitude we receive are indeed humbling. When I bemoan the lack of flour in the shops which prevents me from baking (another) cake I remind myself of those for whom the tin of beans we have just delivered will be the highlight of their day.

I have certainly had much time to reflect on my normally busy life during these last few weeks and I give thanks to God every day for what he has done for me, but more than that I am reminded of what we are called to do as Christians: to be more Christ-like.

Captain Tom Moore and his amazing fund raiser (£22million as I write), the generosity of many individuals and companies both with their money and their time, the Clap for Carers, the fact that we, as a congregation are making more of an effort to stay in touch by whatever means are all positives from this situation, they are evidence that truly in life:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13:13)

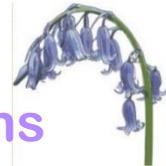
Please continue to pray for all those for whom this is a time of even greater inequality than normal, pray that they may know God's love.

And now I need to produce a video about solving a variable acceleration problem for one of my A level students.

Alan Cotgreave



Retiring Collections



In case you wish to donate separately to the organisations missed out due to the coronavirus, contact details for online donations are listed below. If you are not a taxpayer, you may prefer to wait until we can meet again, as per David Marlow's note below, and make a loose cash donation which will count towards Gift Aid.

March: Alzheimer's Society <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/make-donation>

April: Permission to Smile campaign
<https://permissiontosmile.org/donate/>

May: Orphans from Zimbabwe (Christian Aid) zoa.org.uk (And see Emlyn's article.)

Cheryl Thornett

As it is not easy for people to contribute to retiring collections at this time I suggest that we wait until we can meet again and we have separate collection boxes set out for the charities we have missed. People can fill out Gift Aid envelopes in the usual way.

David Marlow

WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

PRAYER DIARY

We put our hope in the Lord; he is our protector and our help. We are glad because of him; we trust in his holy name. May your constant love be with us, Lord as we put our hope in you.

Ps 33:20-22

	Church members & local streets	Other topics
Wk 1: 3rd -9th May	Sam & Alex Lukwago David & Christine Marlow <i>Ramsden Close</i> <i>Corvedale Rd</i> <i>Eymore, Dowles & Lovell</i> <i>Closes</i>	God, thank you for your promise that you will never leave or forsake your people. Help us to trust you & to be a blessing to others by being patient & kind at this time.
Wk 2: 10th - 16th May	Jose Marsland Rob & Anna McManus, Ieuan, Ciaran <i>Chedworth Close</i> <i>Guiting Rd</i>	The work of Christian Aid; that funds will be raised to continue its projects despite no usual door-to-door collection this month.
Wk 3: 17th - 23rd May	Deborah Moriaty Bob Mundell <i>Radford Rd, Hornbeam &</i> <i>Tredington Closes</i>	Remember with gratefulness all those who are working hard to help us through difficult times.
Wk 4: 24th - 30th May	Audrey Nganwa & family <i>Clover Rd</i> <i>Naunton Close</i>	Countries without the health infrastructure that we have as they face Covid-19.
Wk 5: 31st May 6th June	Nancy Nicholls Marilyn Raw <i>Black Haynes Rd</i> <i>Wierbrook Close</i>	Several states in India have adopted anti-conversion laws. These are frequently used to disrupt services & harass Christians. Converts are often shunned by families and communities.

NOTE: As always, please feel free to send any feedback on the 'Prayer Diary' and specific prayer requests that you would like to include in future lists to Sue Beeby

Calendar for May 2020

Our normal calendars have been suspended because of Covid-19.

Please use the online worship available, or the worship and prayer sheets you receive, and we will worship together in this way.

The next issue of Weoley Hill Church News will be available on or around 1 June. Please remember to inform the Church Secretary, Cheryl Thornett, of any events, with details of dates and times. Please share any online resources you come across.



M&M Payment to Church House

I am able to share some good news with you for a change.

As you are aware the church pays a substantial sum each month to Church House in London. We were fortunate to have this reduced this year to £2,634.00 per month.

Due to the strange situation the Covid-19 outbreak has caused the West Midlands Synod has made the generous gesture of paying 50% of this charge for 3 months, April, May and June. This means our payment will reduce to £1,317.00 saving us a total of £3,951.00 over the three months.

David Marlow

Weoley Hill United Reformed Church Weoley Castle Community Church

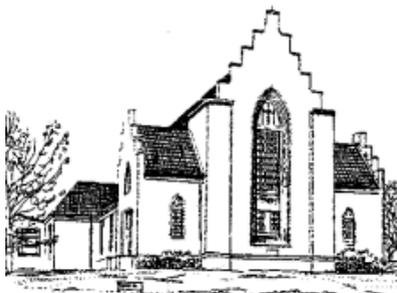
Covid-19 cancellations:

All worship has been suspended in for the time being, but worship materials and prayers are being circulated by email or printed sheet.

Recorded worship is available via the URC Daily Devotions or YouTube.

All groups which normally meet in the churches have ceased meeting.

Please check the websites for further news and any changes.



Church Office: 244 6711

Minister: the Revd Leonora Jagessar

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Treasurer: David Marlow 475 4028

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