

February 2021 Edition 61

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. (Psalm 25:4)

During the first few weeks of the New Year, as we have once again become accustomed to a national lockdown, I have found myself recalling the beginning of Lent last year. On Ash Wednesday we were able to hold our usual services. We even began our Lent course, with two sessions about prayer. Week by week, and then day by day, the news became increasingly ominous. We stopped administering the chalice at Holy Communion, and then by Mothering Sunday, the church was open, but worship was not permitted. The following day, the Prime Minister announced the first lockdown.

It is extraordinary to realise just how unusual this last year has been. And yet I have found the church year to be a great reassurance in these troubled times, because, once again, on 17th February, we will find ourselves at Ash Wednesday.

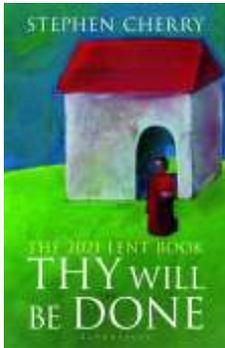
This year our services will be different. There will continue to

be online provision and the past year has taught us not to make any assumptions about public worship. Nevertheless, what we know now that we did not know then, is that, as a church community, we can continue to thrive and flourish even in the most unexpected circumstances.

Details of all that will be on offer during Lent have yet to be finalised and will be shared in weekly bulletins. However, I have put together a “course” based on the parables. This will be available in paper format; will be emailed out; and I also intend to run weekly sessions on Zoom. Much of the material has been drawn from a book by Paula Gooder called “The Parables”. This goes into far more detail than I will be able to cover, as well as exploring an enormous number of parables. If you find yourself wanting to discover more, I can recommend the book as a source of wisdom and expertise.

Rev Theresa Ricketts

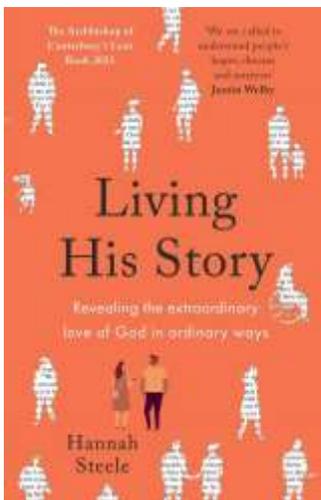
Lent Reading



For those of you interested to consider some extra reading during Lent, I have read two of this year's Lent offerings. "Thy Will be Done" by Stephen Cherry is the Bloomsbury Lent book. It is based on the Lord's Prayer, and offers wisdom and insight into the prayer's meaning and relevance. The book is divided into six sections, one for each week during Lent, and each chapter is divided into six, giving the opportunity to read a chapter per day, excluding Sunday.

The book takes a deeper look at the Lord's Prayer, with each section exploring a significant theme from the prayer, working through the prayer from the beginning. Whether or not you have read other explorations of the Lord's Prayer, this will undoubtedly have something to offer. I found the consideration of forgiveness particularly thought-provoking.

For those of us who have found our lives considerably disrupted by the pandemic, there is something deeply reassuring about returning to the familiarity of the Lord's Prayer. At times when we really don't know what to pray, it is always a good place to start. So this opportunity to delve a little deeper into the familiar is very welcome this Lent.



The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book is Living His Story by Hannah Steele. The theme of this book is evangelism, which may not at first glance seem a particularly obvious topic for a Lent study. The book has seven chapters, each of which could be explored for a week during Lent, and there are a few quite broad questions at the end of each chapter which could form the basis of a group discussion.

Where I thought that this book had something particularly significant to say was in the sixth chapter, "Finding the echoes of the story of

Jesus in our world today.” The author encourages us to consider the books we read and the films and programmes we watch just a little more carefully, recognising how they might reflect – or divert from – the messages of our faith. Steele suggests that an important part of our faith is the way it explores key questions: who are we; what is wrong (with the world/humanity); what’s the solution; what’s the future. If reading this book helps us to delve a little into these questions and our responses to them, it will surely have been beneficial.

Personally I would suggest that the strengths of this book lie in the way it encourages us to think a little more about our own personal story of faith. This kind of self-reflection can be a significant aspect of our Lenten devotions. Where I found myself wanting to be more cautious is its implicit assumption that we should all be more interested in converting people to faith than building genuine friendships. Steele is at pains to point out how important it is to build friendships, and listen as well as talking – things that I believe are second nature to many people at St Mary’s and therefore don’t require labouring.

If you are going to read the book, here are a few questions you might like to consider.

Is it helpful to take the idea of stages towards conversion too seriously? I wonder whether it is more important to build genuine relationships, shaped by both parties, than to seek to find a way to take someone to the next stage in their faith journey (whatever we mean by that.)

How much has your own faith been influenced by conversations with others, those of faith and those with none? I wonder whether we might want to remember how much we have to learn from others, rather than seeing evangelism as a one-way process of sharing something we know with those who don’t yet know.

Does evangelism have a specific purpose? I wonder how important it is to bring people to a point of conversion. Do conversations – implicit or explicit - about the good news of God’s love need to have an endgame?

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At the funeral of one of the much loved members of our congregation last year, one of the mourners said to me after the service: "We knew that she was a person of deep faith, and it shaped everything she said and did. But I always appreciated the fact that she didn't ram it in our faces." Surely this is a reminder to all of us that there is more than one way of sharing the good news in our lives.

February Services and Events

Although we are now in Lockdown 3, services are allowed to take place in church, with restricted numbers to maintain social distancing. All services in this diary will take place in church unless otherwise stated. Please contact the Vicar on 020 8337 4914 to book a place or to obtain the Zoom login code.

Sunday 7	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Holy Communion
	11.00	Sunday Club on Zoom
Sunday 14	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Holy Communion
Wednesday 17	10.00	Ash Wednesday Holy Communion
	20.00	Ash Wednesday Holy Communion
Sunday 21	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Holy Communion
	11.00	Sunday Club on Zoom
Wednesday 24	20.00	PCC on Zoom
Sunday 28	08.00	Holy Communion
	09.30	Holy Communion

Morning Prayer is said every weekday morning at 9am

All are very welcome - use Zoom code 909 037 180