

The NET

The congregational newsletter of
Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, St Andrews

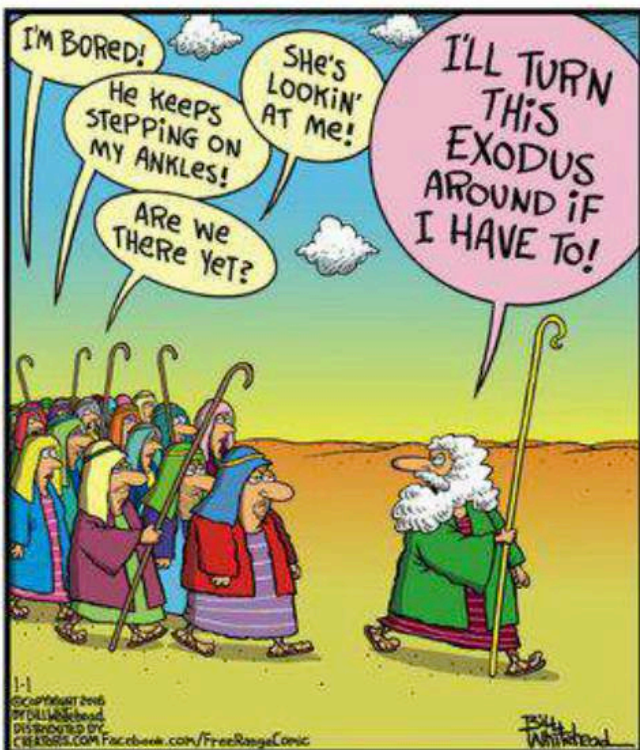


4th September 2020

A letter from the Rectory

What exactly, I wonder, were we expecting? How had we pictured it in our mind's eye? And would we now do a U-turn (since those seem to be the order of the day at present) and go back if we could?

When God, through Moses, led the people of Israel out from their long period of enslavement in Egypt, there must have been all sorts of excitement in the air. Quite apart from the prospect of no longer having to endure long shifts building pyramids, there was the excitement of the 'exodus' itself which, like a major international sports fixture or the reopening of pubs and schools during lockdown was 'on', and then 'off,' and then 'on' again, as Pharaoh wavered and changed his mind like a Prime Minister unsure which scientific reports or experts, if any, he should listen to. And, when Moses finally lost patience with the prospect of one more Government U-turn and led the people out by night into the desert and in the direction of Canaan, there was the



excitement of the chase to the banks of the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's elite National Guard bearing down on them in hot pursuit, and not a single ferry in sight! It was exciting all right. But what were they expecting once the excitement subsided, once they were on the other side, once the 'fleshpots of Egypt' were well and truly behind them?

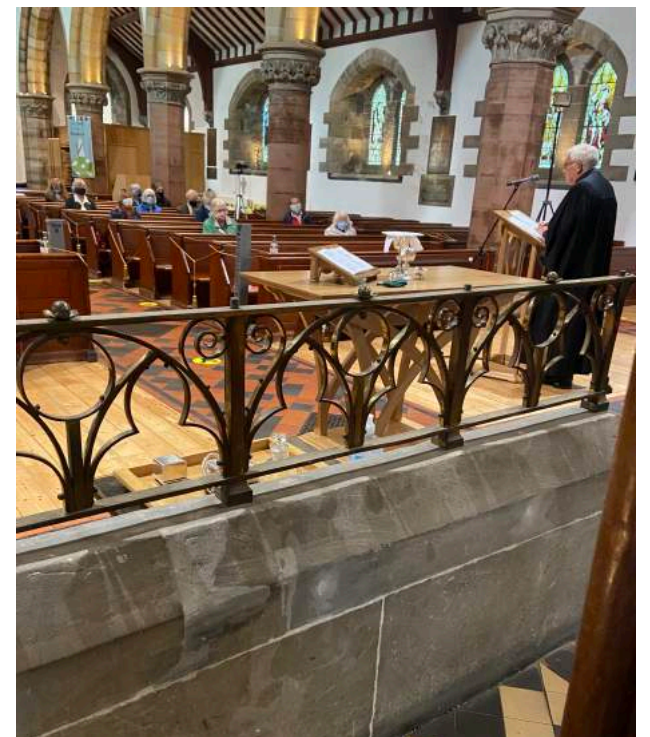
In one of the more humorous and yet

most profound moments of the story, they have not been in the wilderness more than five minutes when they take a good look around them and realize that liberation from slavery is maybe not going to be quite what they had imagined. And they soon begin to grumble, and to moan, and to chatter among themselves about Moses and his daft scheme to leave Egypt behind and drag them out instead into the misery of uncivilized existence, with no decent food outlets, no mobile phone signal, no basic facilities of any sort in fact. And then the criticisms start to percolate up to the surface and reach the ears of Moses and Aaron (who have done all the organizing): 'If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for *you* have brought us out into this wilderness to kill us with hunger!' (Exodus 16:3). Moses tries to remind them that (1) it was the LORD, and not him, who had orchestrated the end of their enforced lockdown and (2) it might just be worth giving things a while to settle down while new systems are put in place, rather than jumping impulsively to conclusions. But, their disappointment still weighing heavy on their tired shoulders, they are in absolutely no mood to listen.

I would be surprised if most of us don't currently have a certain sympathy with those newly liberated Israelites. Maybe we have even had a quiet grumble to ourselves. Just *maybe* we have found ourselves hankering after the fleshpots of Egypt and wishing we could go back there... The shift from five months of sharing in Zoom services together to the much more fragmented experience of returning to our 're-opened' church building or to reliance on the rather different livestream experience now available has, for all of us I suspect, been disappointing and disillusioning in all sorts of ways. For those attending church in person there is the oddity of a sparsely populated building, a 'sterile' atmosphere in more senses than one, a truncated form of service, and our inability to see one another face-to-face – the very thing we had been able to do so well on Zoom! For those choosing not to attend, the loss has probably been even more pronounced,

the current livestream being merely a matter of viewing what is happening (or has already happened) somewhere else, with little sense of active participation and no opportunity even for the sort of virtual fellowship that Zoom had permitted.

So, should we call a halt now, before we travel any further, and set the Sat-Nav for Cairo? Well, of course, we can't. We need to keep moving forward, even when doing so brings less attractive circumstances to deal with. We need to trust that the God who calls us to move forward moves with us, and that by going back we should only discover that what now appears to us as the golden age of 'Zoom'



is no longer where God is to be found, even though it once was. We have to keep moving forward, and trust that as we do so, God moves ahead of us and is with us. And if things are less to our liking, then so be it. Of course, we should at least give it time for changes to settle in and new systems to settle down and be calibrated, rather than making harsh comparisons (let alone impulsive judgments). But in the final analysis church isn't about having things the way we would choose to have them. It's about being obedient to God's call even when we don't like what that seems likely to involve, and trusting God to provide for us and sustain us through whatever discomfort we may have to put up with.

Having said all that (to myself as much as to other readers of The NET), new systems *are* still being put in place, tweaked, calibrated and recalibrated, and we are currently giving careful consideration to how we might be able to recapture and sustain some of the sense of community and shared participation that Sunday morning Zoom services certainly helped to engender. To some extent there is trial and error involved in this. There is much that is good about being back in our building (for those of us who are), and those good things will, I'm sure, continue to unfold and

develop as we press on together. But there are ways in which, without going backwards, we can seek new opportunities for the sustaining of community and face-to-face contact with one another. So, bear with us, and watch this space.

Observant readers of The NET will have noticed that what they are reading is indeed once again The NET rather than NOT The NET! Actually, all that has really changed after a few weeks on furlough is the name, the dimensions and certain other aspects of the thing being much the same as during lockdown. After all,

as someone once asked, 'What's in a name?' It's unlikely that this news sheet will return to being a weekly publication, the time involved in that being too great to sustain for very long. But for the time being it may appear more frequently than its former, monthly edition. Communication and community go together, as the overlap between the words themselves suggests. So, do keep checking your email feed or your doormat to see what might have landed there.

~ Trevor

Lockdown, Lament and Lammas

Richard Bauckham looks back, and forward...



"It will all be over by Christmas!" Well, no, it won't. (Parallels with wartime continue.) When lockdown measures began to be eased in the UK and the further easing of lockdown was expected before long, many people did think we were reaching at least the beginning of the end. But it rapidly became clear that this is, at most, the end of the beginning. Admittedly, trying to follow the progress of the pandemic, even just in this one country, by means of the various statistics that measure this and that, is apt to set the head spinning. Have we ever been so deluged with statistics? But it is clear that the virus is not going away. In Scotland (where I wrote this) severe lockdown measures were only recently re-introduced in the city of Aberdeen, which was in effect cordoned off from the rest of the country. (This kind of sealing off of cities was the way people often coped with plague in earlier centuries.) Similar local lockdowns have happened and will doubtless continue to happen in England too. In some of these places, the virus remained more prevalent all along. In others, it is now spreading especially among young people, most of whom will not get ill themselves. But it is then bound to reach more vulnerable people again. In Preston the message to young people has been: "Don't kill grannie!" (It ought to be, "Don't kill grandpa!," since men are statistically more likely to get and die from the disease than women.)

The sheer nastiness of this virus is becoming clear in other ways too, as we learn that many people suffer from a variety of effects long after initially recovering from Covid-19. Some people who seemed to have it only mildly and recovered quickly have gone on to get very debilitating symptoms later. It seems quite possible that there will be permanent effects for some people. We have come a long way from the earlier misconception that this virus is much like influenza. Something else we were often told – that the virus would retreat when the warm summer weather arrives – also seems not to be true. The future remains very uncertain.

When I took the train to Scotland, it was the first time for four months that I had travelled more than walking distance from my home in Cambridge. That must be unique for me in my lifetime, but it is interesting to reflect that it would not have been unusual for the greater part of the population in medieval times or even more recently, before there was public transport



or even bicycles. Of course, people were used to walking very long distances (as they were also in biblical times and places). One reason many did, from time to time, was to go to fairs held in market towns. A major such fair was regularly held in many places in early August on or around Lammas Day (1st August). In St Andrews, of course, the Lammas Fair still happens and is said to be the oldest surviving mediaeval street fair in the country, established by royal charter in the 13th century. It would be happening just now, but Unsurprisingly this year it was cancelled. (I have heard that, since it happens by royal charter, it can only be cancelled by the Queen. If so, I suppose she must have cancelled it.) I have to say that, even apart from the pandemic, many residents will not be sorry. Nowadays it is primarily a fun fair, with big merry-go-rounds and flying rides and suchlike filling three of the central streets of the town. It is very noisy. When I had an office on the second floor of St Mary's College, looking over South Street, there would be screaming people flying past my window all the time. I was obliged to WFH, as we now say.

Lammas happens to be something that links St Andrews, where I lived for fifteen years, and Newnham (Cambridge), where I have now lived for twelve years. There is no longer a Lammas Fair in Cambridge, but the name survives in Lammas Land, the name of the park near my home. During the latter part of the full lockdown, I was very grateful for the outdoor café on Lammas Land, where one could meet friends for coffee (at a safe distance) before this was possible anywhere else. I

remember having there the first coffee that I had not made myself in six weeks. Such were the exciting events by which we marked the progression of time in lockdown. Sometimes a few of us gathered for coffee there after the St Mark's Church Sunday morning service on Zoom, when in the pre-lockdown era we would have had coffee at church. It was one of the ways people in St Mark's (my own congregation now) have tried to keep together the broken fragments of fellowship during this time of separation. But it still makes me long for the time when all of us who wish can get together after church for something as simple as coffee and chat, which we used to just take for granted. The longer such things are not possible, the more important it is that we do what we can by way of alternatives. Good as Zoom has proved to be (I didn't expect zoom services would work as well as they do), a church cannot live by Zoom alone. I see so many faces on a Sunday morning of people I have hardly spoken with since March, and I realise that matters. (Then there are also the people who don't Zoom.) I keep up with those I know best, but not the others. I find that praying for everyone in the congregation that I can think of, from time to time, is one way of maintaining the sense of being "one in Christ," a community of believers who belong together and need each other's support to continue following Christ in a time of difficulty and change.

But I was intending to write about Lammas. It derives from "Loaf mass" (not "Lamb mass" as I used to think). People would bring into church a loaf made from the freshly harvested wheat. It was a way of thanking God for the earliest harvest and at the same time an act of trust in God for the as yet unharvested crops. In this respect it was very like the festival of first fruits in biblical Israel, when farmers would take or send the first sheaf or the first bunch harvested of various crops and offer them to God in the Temple. It was an act of thanksgiving to God for the provision that was beginning to be received from God's hand and an act of trust in his continuing provision. British Lammas and Israelite first fruits were one of the ways in which the life of an agricultural society, where most people made their living from the land and everyone depended on the locally farmed crops, was kept in close connexion with God. In today's world it is very difficult to do anything quite as meaningful.

Can we give thanks to God during a pandemic? I am well aware that for some people, especially the bereaved and others whose lives have been very seriously affected by the disease or by the lockdown, thanking God may not make much sense. I am also well aware that I myself have had, as it were, a "good lockdown"(another parallel with wartime). In Tom Wright's excellent little book, *God and the Pandemic*, he stresses the importance and the relevance of the biblical theme of "lament." The psalms of lament (some of them one could appropriately call psalms of complaint) are there for those who are walking a very dark path and cry out to God from their distress. They are psalms that others can also pray as a means of prayerful solidarity with those who are on that path. Almost all the psalms of lament end with thanksgiving, though it is important to know that there is one (Psalm 88) that does not. It is a prayer for those who cannot yet see any light at the end of the tunnel. But in other psalms the psalmist moves from lament to deliverance and thanksgiving. They help us to see that the path through the shadow of death will, in God's grace, lead to a place of thanksgiving, even if we cannot yet glimpse it.



Many of us, however, as we look back over our own lives and those of people close to us during lockdown, can find much for which to thank God. God has helped us through, but, more than that, God has positively blessed us in many ways. I do not need to elaborate. You can begin making your own mental lists, which will be different for each of us. You might be surprised. And don't forget that God's grace often works in the world by limiting evils: we have not had food shortages, civil unrest, a collapse of the health service. Things have not been so bad, and there have been good things along with the bad, not least the ways in which so many people have responded to the needs of others. But what Lammas and first fruits can perhaps give us is something more than thanksgiving for what God has given. They also show us that from thanksgiving comes trust in God's provision for the future. In true thanksgiving we dedicate to God all that we have reason to be thankful for. Offering the first sheaf of the harvest enables us to go on working in the fields with thanksgiving, dedication and hope.

In conclusion, purely as a matter of historical interest (not for imitation), I cull this from Wikipedia, which notes that there was a

Lammas day sport common among Scottish farmers near Edinburgh. [William Hone, writing in 1838] says that they "build towers...leaving a hole for a flag-pole in the centre so that they may raise their colours." When the flags over the many peat-constructed towers were raised, farmers would go to others' towers and attempt to "level them to the ground." A successful attempt would bring great praise. However, people were allowed to defend their towers, and so everyone was provided with a "tooting-horn" to alert nearby country folk of the impending attack and the battle would turn into a "brawl." [In one report], more than four people died at this festival and many more were injured.

I don't think this would be allowed under current lockdown restrictions.

~ Richard

A message from the Vestry Clerk

During what seemed like an endless lockdown we were blessed with a splendid Zoom service at 10.30 each Sunday morning and a remarkable 'Evensinging' service at 5 in the afternoon – also thanks to Zoom. It is right to be grateful for the availability of Zoom, but we all owe a huge debt of gratitude to the people who worked so hard to make these services such a success – notably Trevor, Karen, Jane and Richard.

'Evensinging' continues on Zoom, but the instructions issued by both the Scottish Government and our own Province have enabled us to move back into the church and resume Holy Communion, albeit in a rather restricted way. Of course we are not 'back to normal', but we all hope that we are cautiously moving towards a resumption of full communal eucharist, with all of us together in the church again complete with our choir and organ in full voice. We are not there yet!

It is so tempting to have a chat, either on arrival at church or after leaving. We all miss catching up on one another's news, shaking hands or even indulging in a hug, but that is the way it has to be until we are allowed to relax more. Everyone is very disciplined about the use of face coverings and hand gels and, most of the time, about maintaining social distancing at all times within the church curtilage, i.e. once inside the church gates. On arrival, everyone seems to be content to stay a couple of metres apart and be guided to a place (not the "usual" seat perhaps, but in a manner aimed at avoiding folks doing anything other than following the marked one way system and minimising the chances of folks milling about in the aisles).

Leaving the church is not quite so disciplined, and we still need to tighten up on that so that we depart in a way that mirrors the arrival process – rear seats first and then gradually departing pew by pew until the seats at the front of the church are empty. In spite of the incredible temptation, please do not linger or cluster together to chat along the way. Leave the church and its grounds, and by all means have a chat outside the church gates – always observing social distancing.

We all hope that we will be able to have truly 'normal' services before too long and by following our internal rules we are doing our small part in the much wider efforts to minimise the spread of Covid-19. The return of large numbers of students to town is worrisome since it is not impossible that a small minority may not take current restrictions seriously. Hopefully we will not have to face another lockdown but, if we have to, Zoom is there waiting to provide us with what has become a familiar way of worshiping together.

If you have any questions at any time, please speak to Trevor (or me, or any Vestry member or welcomer).

~ John



'Sanctus'

We gather as his Church on God's good earth
And listen to the Requiem's intense,
Long, love-laden keening, calling forth
Echoes of Eden, blessing every sense
With brimming blisses, every death with birth,
Until all passion passes into praise.
I bless this day, distinct amidst our days,
I bless the light, the music-laden air,
I bless the interweaving of our ways,
The lifting of the burdens that we bear,
I bless the broken body that we share.
Sanctus the heart, sanctus the spirit cries,
Sanctus the flesh in every touch replies.

(Malcolm Guite)

