
THE MINISTER WRITES ...



Dear Friends,

In John 20:19–31 we find the disciples gathered behind locked doors, fearful and uncertain. John tells us they are hiding from the authorities, anxious that what happened to Jesus may well happen to them. Just imagine the atmosphere in that room: grief still raw, hopes dashed, and a future that feels suddenly fragile. In many ways, their experience mirrors the pressures faced by the early Christian communities for whom this Gospel was written - communities negotiating tension with their local synagogues and learning how to hold onto faith in the midst of misunderstanding and exclusion. Into that fearful space, Jesus comes.

Not by breaking down the door, not by demanding courage from those who have none, but simply by standing among them and speaking peace. His presence is enough to breathe life back into a traumatised group of friends. The locked doors remain, but the fear inside them begins to loosen.

Thomas, of course, is missing. His reaction when he returns is not stubbornness so much as honesty. Throughout John's Gospel he is the one who asks the questions others keep to themselves. His refusal to accept second-hand reassurance is not a failure of faith but a deeply human response to loss. Perhaps Thomas, too, has locked doors - inner ones this time - protecting himself from further hurt.

What is striking is that the other disciples do not try to argue him into belief. They do not shame him or pressure him. They simply remain together, and a week later Jesus meets Thomas in the same gentle way he met the others. The risen Christ does not scold him for needing more; instead, he offers what Thomas needs in order to move from guarded scepticism to open-hearted trust. Thomas' great declaration, "My Lord and my God", is not the triumph of certainty over doubt, but his response to encountering compassion.

For John's Gospel, this sequence matters. Mary Magdalene's witness, the disciples' encounter, Thomas' journey from questioning to recognition, together they form the foundation of Easter faith. Not a faith built on uniform experience, but on a tapestry of stories; some immediate, some hesitant, some full of wonder, some full of questions.

For us today, this passage offers a gentle reminder that faith is rarely linear. Many of us know what it is to live behind locked doors - doors of fear, grief, exhaustion, or simple self-protection. Many of us know what it is to long for reassurance, or to struggle with belief when life feels overwhelming. Thomas gives us permission to bring our questions into the room. Jesus' response shows us that God meets us not with impatience, but with peace. And perhaps this is the good news for our own communities: that the risen Christ continues to come to us in the places where we feel most vulnerable, breathing courage into our fear and hope into our uncertainty. Easter faith is not about having all the answers. It is about discovering, again and again, that locked doors, whether physical or emotional, are no barrier to the Love that seeks us out.

Every blessing,

Neil

PASTORAL NEWS

As our young people return to university, we pray that they will enjoy their courses and have examination success.

We thank God for those recovering from surgery and those who are waiting for further treatment.

We remember those currently in hospital and their families.

We have many within the church family with ongoing problems, we pray for them and give thanks for the care shown by our visitors.

JUNIOR CHURCH

During Lent, Junior Church learnt about Lent and Easter customs from around the world.

We made peace placards like people in Australia, where it's become a tradition since the 1970s to hold peace marches on Palm Sunday, remembering how Jesus came on a donkey to bring peace and justice.

We made also made kites, like the families in Bermuda who gather on Good Friday to fly homemade kites to remember Christ's Ascension.

Our favourite activity was decorating the path outside with chalk like the people in Ouro Preto in Brazil, who prepare for the Easter Sunday procession by decorating the parade floor with a "flower carpet" of bright patterns and images. We were very pleased with our work - we hope you like it too.



PRAYERS FOR MAY

3rd May (Extract from Pope's recent prayer for peace)

Grant us your peace, and send forth your Spirit,
the breath that gives life and reconciles,

that turns adversaries and enemies into brothers and sisters.

May the madness of war cease, and the Earth be cared for and cultivated by those who still
know how to bring forth, protect and love life.

Hear us, Lord of life!

10th May

We pray for Saturday's Christian Aid Celebration, that there will be a great sense of community as we work together on the various stalls and activities, that passers-by will be drawn in, and learn more about Christian Aid and our church, and that there will be a good fundraising result for the charity.

17th May

We pray for our new caretaker as he settles into this role, that he may feel welcome amongst us and well supported as part of the church family.

24th May

Today is Pentecost when we focus on the coming of the Holy Spirit. May he renew our hearts and minds and fill us with a new zeal to serve and follow God both in this church and in the wider world.

31st May

We thank God for the beautiful flowers we see in church each week. We are grateful for those who provide them, arrange them, distribute them and we especially pray for those in our fellowship who are recipients of flowers each week, at a time of need, or sadness or loneliness or a time of celebration.

CHRISTIAN AID WEEK CELEBRATION SATURDAY



Our Christian Aid Celebration will take place on Saturday 16th May from 10.30am to 2pm.



We will be holding a plant sale on the front lawn, so if you have any plants for the sale, please bring them down to the church by 10.30am Saturday morning.



The church will be open for cakes and refreshments. Cakes for the cake stall will be most welcome.



There will be a barbecue outside on the lawn at lunch time between 12pm and 2pm.

We look forward to seeing you.

Church Life Committee

ECO-CHURCH CREATION CARE

Greener finances

Maybe it is something about being British, but we tend to be very reticent about talking about money. But how we save, invest and spend our money – both as a church and as individuals - is part of our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation.

So I was happy to attend an online training session recently given to a meeting of BUEN (the Baptist Union Environmental Network) by the JustMoney Movement. “We have” they say, “a vision of a world where money is used to shape a fairer, greener future”, and they aim to help Christians explore ethical issues surrounding their finances.

Do we actually know how our banks are using our money?

We probably should. In the 10 years since the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change, the world’s top 60 private-sector banks poured \$7.9 trillion into the fossil fuel industry as well as financing companies involved in deforestation and plastic pollution that are damaging nature and contributing to the climate crisis – but are we, their customers, aware of that? JustMoney offer resources which give us the opportunity to compare the high street banks with which, no doubt, many of us bank, in terms of their ethical and environmental credentials. (Bank.Green, for example, easily found online, gives helpful rankings.) Do explore the JustMoney Movement website for more information.

And then there is the question of how we spend our money. Greener purchasing is not just about what we buy, but how much we buy, and includes a commitment to reduce waste. Do we all know the mantra by now? Refuse, Reduce, Re-use, Repair, Recycle. And when we do need to buy something, do we think about the potential environmental or human cost of its production or how long it is likely to last? This is undoubtedly difficult in the reality of our retail environment, where obsolescence is sometimes built into household appliances or tech products and finding the lowest price is often (understandably for many) the most important thing to consumers. I noticed this week a certain high street store in Ipswich selling a good, cotton T-shirt for a mere £3. This cannot possibly reflect the true cost of the production of this item – materials, labour, transport, environmental effect - but certainly makes it a very appealing buy. Indeed, one could be tempted to buy two! Walter Brueggemann, theologian, said, “Money and possessions belong to God and are held in trust by human persons in community. Money and possessions must be managed in the practice of justice, that is, for the good of the entire community.”

Eco-Tip for May: If you can afford to leave some of your lawn unmown for the next few months, it will be of great benefit to many invertebrates including beetles, worms, caterpillars, moths, butterflies and bees – and the birds who might feed on them.



I’ve been looking back to the early days of Thursday Forum. It was born out of Open Church, started in 1984, which itself emerged from an idea during the ecumenical Lent Lectures. It was re-branded in 2007 as Thursday Forum and, although the key leaders are no longer with us, quite a few regular attenders have been there since that beginning.

Numerically, Forum reached its maximum in 2011 when Richard Austing gave a talk on: ‘Now where did I put those keys?’ and 75 people squashed into the Langston Hall. Covid stopped us in our tracks, but 15 years later we’re in the Christ Church Hall with lots of space and our meals are more varied and more substantial. We’re proud of attracting between 30 and 40 people each week, and providing space for friendships to develop, and for horizons to be widened.

There are only 3 talks in May: we learn about the Anglia Care Trust; we delve into the history of the Ipswich Society, and we hear from a Hospital Chaplain. However, make sure you save the date of 1st October; speakers are standing by already.

To bridge the gap between May and October we are offering two outings for friends of Forum (which can be any of you, and definitely includes everyone who comes regularly on a Thursday).

On **Thursday 25th June** we go to Landguard Fort, Felixstowe. A guided tour will be booked but some may prefer to use the audio guide so they can take their own time and possibly reduce the amount of walking. We need drivers to help transport people particularly, although please just sign up if you want to come and need a lift. It is also possible to go by bus (route 77) to the Fort. See Ann and sign the sheet at the back of the church if you cannot make it to Forum between now and the end of May. The cost is about £7.80 with £5 for the tour. See full details on the information sheet.

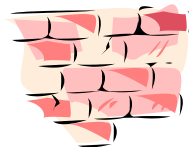


On **Thursday 3rd September** we have booked the room at the Key, St Margarets Street for a 2-course lunch starting at 12 noon. See Neil to book this event. Menus will be available later. The cost is £15.

We will also be advertising Holiday at Home to our guests and hope they are interested.

OVER THE GARDEN WALL

... from our neighbours at St Pancras



Dear Friends,

I'm writing this on the weekend before you will read it; we've had a reprieve from the endless dire news of conflicts as we approach the centenary of the birth of our dear departed Queen. Although I'm not much of a TV addict, I've enjoyed programmes looking back over her life. As I watched previously un-broadcast photographs, some of the Queen's early life reminded me of being told, in 1947, that I had a baby sister. That was fairly hazy, but the much clearer memory was in 1952, when I was at primary school. We were in the school hall, with a radio playing music for some activity. Suddenly, the music stopped, and there was an announcement, 'The King is dead'. A young woman's life was changed forever, as she flew back from the East Africa I know so well, to a long life of service.

That commitment to service was, I'm sure, in mind as this year's Maundy Service was broadcast today, a few weeks late. That also jolted my memory. When the service was, years ago, at Bury St Edmunds, two people from St Mary's, Woodbridge Road, were rewarded for their service: Peter Hardy and Barbara Beaumont. I knew them both very well, both well deserved. Barbara left all her money to various charities, including my work on Africa. We had a special message from her solicitor: her nephew had requested her Maundy money. Fortunately we all agreed, otherwise it would have had to be sold and the funds added to her estate.

Over the last week, Pope Leo has been in some of the most dangerous parts of Africa, still finding time to comment on current warfare. I particularly envied his visit to Hippo in Algeria. As an Augustinian priest it was a perfectly natural choice! I've been several times to Carthage in Tunisia where St Augustine (of Hippo) spent his

earlier years. One place I remember well, where Monica, his mother, prayed and wept as her wayward son departed for Italy. Her prayers were answered as he sat in a garden in Milan and a voice told him, 'Tolle legge' that is, 'Take and read'. The Scripture he read, from Romans, led to a life of service, as a priest then a bishop, and author of numerous books, with plenty for Christians of all persuasions. Let us thank God for our Queen, and others, now in a better place, who have given us examples of service.

Your Catholic friend,

Jean

BMS WORLD MISSION

736,514 people's lives impacted through BMS World Mission. No, not hit, but this number of people received some form of assistance through the work of BMS World Mission

Missionary societies trying to explain how well the work is going are increasingly using "impact reports" to show the effectiveness of the work they are doing. The BMS has just published its impact report for 2025 which shows that the lives of a total of 736,514 people were improved in one way or another during the twelve months because of BMS World Mission. Some of the work was done by staff of BMS World Mission in different places around the world, other work was done by their partners, receiving funding for their work from Didcot.

BMS World Mission has a heart for the Gospel, and people are coming to faith in countries where the state does not favour Christianity, like Bangladesh, India, Cambodia and Thailand, and across the mainly Muslim North African countries, where sharing the gospel can be dangerous and much fellowship has to happen in secret. BMS funded 185 evangelists, disciple makers or church planters in Asia, 12 in North Africa, trained 37,023 in church planting and evangelism in Asia, 191 in North Africa, and planted 24,695 small-group fellowships in Asia, 33 new fellowships in North Africa,

The Hope for the World strand of BMS's work seeks to alleviate poverty, suffering and injustice in the world's poorest countries. 63,546 people received these services – 29,708 medical care, 5675 education, 15,982 legal support and 850 professional skills training. The Church and Community Mobilisation process, in which local churches are trained to provide hope in their local area.

There are three stages for a refugee from their home country – life in the home country, life in transit, and starting a new life in a new country. BMS gives Help for the Journey to those forced to flee their homelands. BMS funded ministry training for 20 church leaders so that people aren't forced to leave, and helped 6472 in transit with food clothing, legal advocacy, language learning and job skills support. A further 2593 were impacted by help given to churches in the destination country, both existing and new ex-patriot churches.

BMS has supported disaster recovery over many years, and in 2025 there were six major disasters, natural and man-made. The total number assisted after a disaster came to 603,556 people.

Training Christians to serve in mission benefitted 11,940 people through training hubs in India, Ghana, Peru, Ireland and the Netherlands. There is also a People Pool, where BMS connects needs with experts able to meet those needs.

BMS has changed greatly to work in today's world, compared to when I first encountered it over 50 years ago, but its reach is still huge, and worthy of support.

SERVICES FOR MAY

All Services will be led by our Minister, Revd Neil Coulson unless otherwise stated.

Sunday 3rd May

10.45am Family Workshop with Holy Communion

Sunday 10th May

10.45am Family Worship

Sunday 17th May

10.45am All-age Parade Service

Sunday 24th May

10.45am Family Worship

Sunday 31st May

10.45am Family Worship led by *Revd Martin Camroux*
Martin is a retired URC Minister

Sunday 7th June

10.45am Family Workshop with Holy Communion