

The Month on Social Media

With no Bus rides, what has made me think this month?

The Virtual May Day Celebration at Magdalen College Oxford was well produced, with multi-tracked singing of their Hymnus Eucharisticus and Morley's madrigal 'Now is the month of Maying'. Not much scope for 'fa-la-lahing' when each lad with his bonny lass is social distanced on the grass.

450 years ago, the top Tudor multi-tracker was Thomas Tallis. His 40-part Motet 'Spem in alium' (nothing to do with onions) was given a stunning performance on YouTube by Stille Antico.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfnEbwcLq0E>

Having neither sung nor heard it before, it was a glorious revelation, and, in translation, so relevant to our time:-

**I have never put my hope
in any other but in You, God of Israel,
who will be angry and yet become again gracious,
and who in suffering forgives all the sins of humanity.
Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth,
look upon our lowliness/humility.**

On a smaller scale, if you love Anglican Chant like I do, try some of the 40-odd mini-Psalms produced by <https://twitter.com/benvonbergclark>

Bishops have had hard times with criticism on twitter, but Nick McKinnell led an excellent VE-Day online Service from Plymouth Hoe, and Bishop Robert's latest Ad Clerum gives signs of hope that Churches may be able to re-open for private prayer and eventually limited Services.

It's a joy to follow the thoughtful Rural Ministry & Prayer walks of Revd Christopher aka <https://twitter.com/CurateDurrant>

The Virtual Rogation by Fr Nigel & Richard Parker on our Facebook account was much appreciated, as are the Plainsong Propers that Tasha has started to sing.

Clergy have started broadcasting prayers, still solo, from our Churches. It was a double joy on Wed 20th May to have Fr Nigel say Regina Coeli & Matins in front of the statue of Our Lady in St Michael's and then play Bach's Chorale Prelude 'Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier' (Dearest Jesu, we are here) on the pipe Organ.

But it's not just closed Churches. CofE Statements have been like that Fawltly Towers episode, "Don't mention the Sacraments" - and perhaps people won't notice we've had to suspend them all too.

But people have noticed, and not just the elderly as suggested by one cleric interviewed in the Church Times. Not everyone wants pumped-up music & preaching, though it obviously works for some.

Many thoughtful, intelligent young Christians are doing Compline, and quietly lamenting & longing for the Incarnational Theology of the Mass & Benediction. But they go unnoticed by the hierarchy.

Of course, for a whole variety of reasons, many people have found 'doing Church at Home' liberating. A priest & poet, Ruth Wells, put this post up on twitter (along with 'ducks for cover'). Perhaps because people were trying to calm the storm by this stage, it got plenty of approval:-

God snuck home.

No longer bound by the expectations of a 'consecrated' building

She's concentrated her efforts on breaking out.

Now in the comfort of a well worn dining table she shares some bread, with some friends.

And she laughs. And she weeps. In the sacred space of home.

Cleverly put, I thought. But perhaps too cosy & domesticated. As well as 'households for one', it's not many where all will feel able to pray together; not all in the house may be believers, nor all used to the same flavour of Church – each may need to stream a different Service.

As C.S.Lewis said of Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia, 'He's not a tame Lion.' Or as 1970s Folk Group Parchment put it, 'You can tie him to a Cross or an easy chair; 3 days later and he won't be there'. Should you want to relive or discover the whole iconic 'Light up the Fire' Album this Pentecost, a link is:-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kru_kctvm38

Just as God never has been bound by our buildings, I suspect He'd soon tire of the dining room. Church is for the awkward too, those who don't easily fit in. So I think:-

God snuck out the back-door, walking down the road.

Pub still closed, so head for the Allotments.

Share a broken biscuit & mug of tea with other gardeners

And ascend like a beanstalk into the clouds.

Ascension Day offered two good and contrasting Services online. Exeter Diocese had Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth, leading from the heights of St Michael's Brentor, with music from Lee Abbey which included a new hymn he had written. I have to say it is rather good. Both the imagery used, ending with a perichoresis, dancing Trinity Doxology, and the tune with a modulation where the words turned upward, were well above your average worship song. More here:-

<https://exeter.anglican.org/new-covid-19-ascension-hymn-for-devon/>

However they were rather upstaged by James Mustard, Cathedral Precentor celebrating the Eucharist atop the North Tower of Exeter Cathedral, possibly for the first time in its 900 year history.

Somehow this broad, diverse Church of England needs to reflect on the blessings and disappointments emerging during Lockdown, and create, not a narrow uniformity, but more inclusive and hopeful communities of Churches with fuzzy edges.

Or as Rev Alison put it in her Easter 7 Address. Christ prays that they/we may all be one, but Unity does not mean becoming mindless clones of one another. Rather, it means being our true, full selves, whilst embracing and respecting differences...and working together.

<https://youtu.be/br7zJXmC-Rw>



Richard Barnes – 24/05/20.

P.S. Peregrine Status. Unprecedented times? At 36 days after the 3rd egg was laid, it's looking unlikely that we will get a chick this year, for the first time since breeding started in 1997. With an old female and inexperienced young male, the eggs may be infertile. This may trigger a battle for the site, as happened a dozen years ago when the current female ousted the previous one.