

A photograph of a waterfall cascading down a rocky cliff. The water is white and frothy as it falls, creating a misty spray at the bottom. The surrounding area is lush with green vegetation, including ferns and other plants. In the background, there are more rocky hills and mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene is serene and natural.

Liturgy in a Dangerous Time

#7

Sunday 31 May 2020

Hi friends,

As things stand the UK is preparing to exit lockdown, slowly, and re-enter “normal life” of one sort or another.

What will that look like? We don't know yet, but it brings, at least, a spark of hope with it, not that things will simply go back to how they were, because things weren't perfect the way that they were before. Rather that our present difficulties will one day be a distant memory, that they will be something we remember, rather than live through.

And this comes as we remember, or celebrate Pentecost too – and there's something about that which seems particularly apposite – the extraordinary in the ordinary. This edition has been produced with that in mind, and also with the word 'risk' somewhere near the front of our thinking. The risk of going to the supermarket perhaps, or maybe a more profound risk.

As always, I will leave you to decide what you make of things, and how, my only recommendation is that together we stop, look, listen and think. That way, we may make a dent in the darkness together.

Peace and love,

Simon



An opening

Be still for a moment
rest for a little while
pause by the stream
dip your fingers in the water
feel it trickle past
soothing and supple
powerful in its insistence.

Pick up a pebble
feel it's smoothness
it's old jagged edges
worn down to a polished finish
by that trickle
that powerful insistence.

Close your eyes
sense once again
the gentle insistence of love
fall into the flow
that wears away your corners
and leaves you smoothed
and soothed.

You are not alone
you are loved
your value does not depend on
your abilities
your activities
or what others think of you.

A risk

The last two months of media have used the language of risk a lot. We clap for those who take the risks of working daily among COVID patients, and when we stop to imagine their work, or read or see a piece about the life of those working inside a care home or an ICU we are drawn to marvel at the boldness, bravery of these risk-takers. Some of them tell us that they are ‘only doing the job.’ Amazing.

We calculate all the time the risks we are taking: is it risky to go out? To meet this or that person? To work without a face mask? To take a bus? Risk assessment is part of ‘the science’ which we are all asked to follow – even more closely than the government does.

Christian spirituality has always shown that the practice of faith is a risk. We give ourselves to God not because of proof and certainty, but by choice, voluntarily and freely. We find God by taking the flimsy bridge or

running to the grave, in hope, but not certainty.

It is a temptation, I think, to exaggerate Christian conviction into certainty. Faith is faith, it isn’t knowledge. And faith is more than words or talk, as St Paul says: it is action. It is taking the risk. As we live in current circumstances more alert than we have needed to be in the past, the risk of faith is worth noticing. Choosing to follow Christ, to hold on to hope, to believe in love is a risk. So try this creed, where the trust and faith of the believer is consciously named as risk.

Do you believe and take the risk of life in God the Father,
source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All: We believe in God. We take the risk.

Do you believe and take the risk of trusting in God the Son,
who took our human nature,

died for us and rose again?

All: We believe in God. We take the risk.

Do you believe and risk your life on God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

All: We believe in God. We take the risk.

This is the risk of the Church.

All: This is our risk.

We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(Lat Blaylock)

A verse

He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

(Matthew 14: 29 (ESV))



(Liz Chart)

A moment

Close your eyes, and focus on your breath as it becomes regular.

Imagine a place you know, somewhere familiar that you visit reasonably often. Perhaps a street, perhaps a building, perhaps even a place of worship. Remember the smells, the textures, the sounds.

Now imagine one change that you could be part of, which would make that place kinder, friendlier, gentler, more loving, more welcoming, a better place to be.

Dwell with that change awhile.

A recognition

What Is.

God, this is what is.
Lamenting and labelling.
Deprived,
disadvantaged,
downtrodden,
developing,
and our guilty relief that doesn't mean
us.

This is what is.
Coronavirus,
locusts,
coronavirus,
corruption,
coronavirus,
cyclones,
flooding,
the brutal unfairness of your peoples'
burdens
going viral
all too unvirtually.

This is what is.
Recession warnings,
refugee camp despair,

cities breathing again,
cherishing the slow and quiet,
businesses going under,
birdsong heard above.

This is what is.
Vulnerability,
interdependence,
who is my neighbour?
Love one another.

God, help us to pray with what is.
Rage of the powerless,
responsibility of the privileged,
rawness of the bereft,
dreams shattered
among dreams coming true.

God, you are
with
what
is.

[*\(Jo Love\)*](#)

A reading

John 7:37-39

[\(Click here to see a version\)](#)



(© [Andy Campbell](#))

A reflection (John 7:37-39)

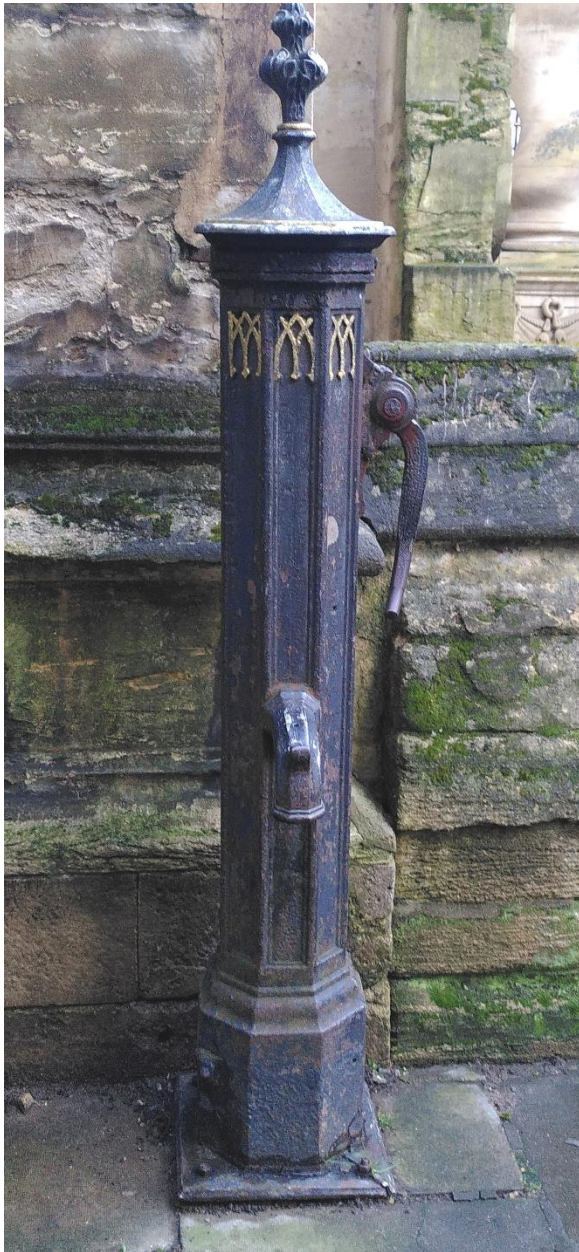
Christ the Well of Life

“I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants” Isaiah 44:3

It's the Feast of the Tabernacles; a harvest feast of thanksgiving for the people of Israel. They gather to remember God's provision in the wilderness: manna from the sky and water from the rock.

Each day of the festival, a pitcher of water is carried to the Temple in Jerusalem and poured out at the altar – the waters of life that God provides. And, on the last day of this feast of thanksgiving and hope for God's outpoured blessing, Jesus does what he should not: despite threats of arrest and death, he draws attention to himself in the Temple, announcing that it is He who is the source of living water, so much so that *anyone* who believes in Him will be a source of this water themselves. The crowd cannot help but hear the implication. *This man*

is God's outpoured provision? Is he a prophet? Is he the Messiah?



This is not the first time in John's Gospel that Jesus has promised living water. Just a few chapters earlier, Jesus does what he should not: He travels to Samaria, a place where the people do not worship at the Temple – a place

where God's blessing could not possibly be outpoured. The story of the Samaritans and Jews is the story of a broken family, split over their religious scriptures, birth lines, and the location of their worship. Again, he does what he should not: He asks a woman for a drink. He treats her as a conversation partner. He tells her to ask for living water – tells her she will never be thirsty again. Living water? How can water quench thirst forever? How can water beat death? She pushes Him – but where should God's people worship? And He tells her that one day, God's people will not worship in the Temple or on Mountains, but in the Spirit.

The incarnate son of God, a Jewish man, shares a drink with a Samaritan woman at a well in the noon day sun. The living water on offer is a water of reconciliation. A Jew and a Samaritan drinking the same water was a one-off act of reconciliation, against the social and religious grain. But Jesus offers His living water in a Samaritan village

and in the Jerusalem Temple. The writer of John's Gospel hears in Jesus' words the promise found in the Book of Isaiah: that water and Spirit will be poured out on God's people. Anyone who believes will receive it and pour it out themselves. *Anyone*. Christ's water of life comes to reconcile all of us – to God, to each other, to the world.

Around a year after his encounter in Samaria and his declaration in the Temple, Jesus once again declares his thirst as he hangs on a cross, his head exposed in the noon day sun. In the incarnation, Jesus learns what it is to be thirsty so that he can offer us the water of life. In the crucifixion, Jesus thirsts so that we might never be thirsty again. In his death, water flows from his side, the living rock, broken open for us. And at Pentecost, when God's Spirit is poured out like rivers of life, we do not just receive this living water: we become its source. We are given a spirit of reconciliation ourselves.

When we gather again as God's people, I wonder whether we will recall this lockdown as one of bitterness and division, or one of God's Spirit poured out in streams of living water. We celebrate Pentecost at a time when people demand to know where God can be found. And it is the outpoured Spirit that assures of the answer: God has been amongst us, is amongst us, will be amongst us. The living water tabernacles with us, dwelling alongside us in the wilderness. Each of us is offered the living water – powerful enough to reconcile us to God, strong enough to quench our resentments, plentiful enough to drown out our fears, and pure enough to cleanse us of our sin. And in turn, we receive the mysterious promise – and command – to become sources of living water ourselves. If you are thirsty, come to the one who offers living water. Approach the well of life, and drink from the streams of reconciliation.

[\(Hannah Malcolm\)](#)

A tune

Take a moment to listen (perhaps more than once) to this gorgeous rendition of ‘To be a pilgrim’ by folk guitarist Ian Barnett.

[Click here to listen.](#)

[\(Ian Barnett\)](#)

A poem

Those who call for sober clarity
are still called drunkards
seekers of compassion, naive idealists
and we who dare declare freedom in
God's Kingdom
will always bear the shackles of
resistance and tradition.
But the Spirit is incessantly decanted
In each age, to all who hold
themselves ready
And G_d calls us to see possibility
where we are shown only limit
Concern where we are told not to
care
And salvation where prisons scream
captivity.

[\(Andy Campbell\)](#)

A stroll



“...We walk on along the ridge. The sand and gravel path leads past rounded humps, where Bronze-age inhabitants buried their dead 3,000 years ago. Down the centuries, there have been a succession of peoples living on the Hill.

“In the early 14th century, church builders came and built St. Catherine’s chapel here, to serve the now abandoned village of Richesdon, lower down the hill. Was it abandoned, like so many English villages, in the time of plague? The Black Death, rather than Coronavirus?

“The Chapel site has been thoroughly excavated and bits of roof and floor

tile, fragments of mediaeval pottery and stained glass, are now in the local museum. All that remains is an open grass-covered site, amidst the gorse, heather, and invading silver birch. It is said that if you stand in this grassy space, at dusk on a summer evening, the voices of nuns singing, can be heard. (I made that bit up.)

“Further along, the path becomes more difficult. Exposed tree-roots constitute a trip hazard. We pass an ancient fir tree grown oddly with three trunks from ground-level; a personal land-mark we have named the Trinity Tree. We pick our way carefully, among the tangles of tree roots and eventually, after a steep but short climb reach a concrete Trig Point. We pause to take in the view. It is a clear day. The River Avon snakes towards the sea, silver in the sunlight. Sternly, Christchurch Priory, three miles away, frowns on the town. To the south east, the Isle to Wight and the Needles are visible.

“At the Trig Point we check the time, It is about half-an-hour since we

started and about half-way on our roughly, very roughly, circular, morning walk. So, now downhill to join a popular lower path, popular as there are fewer gradients.

“Descending the hill on a previous occasion, whilst studying the path for tree roots, (health and safety), I came across a half-buried, corroded Dog identity-disc. At home, I cleaned it up and read: *Lucan Tel. 01202 123456*.

“I dialled the number and a slightly quavering voice replied. I asked him if he wanted the disc returned.

‘No thank-you,’ he replied. ‘Lucan... is...no longer with us.’

“Bronze-Agers, Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Normans – and Lucan, have all left their mark on St. Catherine’s Hill.

“The lower path I have tended to think of as an unremarkable part of the route, today we stop and look; it can be quite captivating in its own rights.”

(Eric Johnson)

A colouring



When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

(Emma Major)

A thought

Pandemics openly display the fault lines in our societies. They expose the gaps that blatantly exist between the powerful and the powerless, between the rich and the poor, between the black and white, between men and women. The virus can hit anyone, and our Prime Ministers hospitalisation showed that, but the real socio-economic impacts between different communities couldn't be more obvious. The poorer you are, the more exposed you are to overcrowded housing; the more likely you are to be in low paid 'key worker' professions; the health of your community and the resources available to your community all affect your chances of survival.

Another world is possible. A greener, fairer world is not just a fantasy - we could have it. People could fly less, could cycle more. Nature could heal itself if we stopped bugging it all up. The lockdown has exposed in our

minds the possibilities of a new world to come. We cannot pretend we are anywhere near that yet, or that capitalism will not relentlessly go back to business as usual as soon as it can (and indeed, looking at the logging rates in Brazil, will actually try to do its worst even during a pandemic) but we are finally exposed to the reality that the world can be different.

Liberation theologians and all progressive people must hold on to those possibilities and work to make them a reality.

Liberation Theology points out those inequalities, and shouts out 'that is not what God wants!' 'This not how it is meant to be. In the Kingdom of God, no community is left behind. God's abundance is designed for all.

[\(Chris Howson\)](#)

A question

What aspects of your lockdown experience have seemed like a better world, and how could they be continued?

A closing

Do we dare to take the risk, to notice
the unfamiliar in the ordinary, to hear
the lark over the field, to step out of
the boat of our understanding?

When God appears it is in the
extraordinary-ordinary. In flames, in
water, in food and drink, in the stable,
in the street.

Dare to stop, look around, there is
much to see.

A blessing

Pentecost people
Receive the holy spirit
Share with everyone

(Emma Major)

This series is curated by [Andy Campbell](#) and [Simon Cross](#). This edition features contributions from:

Ian Barnett (guitarist, teacher & grandfather), ***Lat Blaylock*** (*RE nut*), ***Andy Campbell*** (*life coach & poet*), ***Liz Chart*** (*observer, sense-tester & way finder*), ***Simon Cross*** (*writer*), ***Chris Howson*** (*liberation theologian*), ***Eric Johnson*** (*writer & retired lecturer*), ***Jo Love*** (*deacon, teacher & beach comber*), ***Emma Major*** (*lay pioneer minister & poet*), ***Hannah Malcolm*** (*ordinand, PhD student & campaigner*).