

IT'S LIFE, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT!

I do so hope that this letter finds you all in good health and 'Covid' free.

It has been a very challenging few months for all of us and will continue to be so for some time to come I think. Everything has changed, the world has been turned upside down and the way we live our life will change too and we will have to adapt to whatever that is.

Quite a few years ago there was a hit record called 'Star Trekkin' and one of the lines in the song was; "It's life Jim but not as we know it, not as we know it, not as we know it"

I guess that just about sums up where we are now, in that nothing is the same, it is not the life I once had. I miss singing in the choir I belong to. I miss going to my drama group at Warmley Players. I miss going to watch Bristol City and Gloucestershire cricket. I miss having friends round to our house. I miss feeling safe enough to catch a bus! I miss going to the theatre and cinema. I miss socialising in church, sharing a coffee and a good old natter. But, most of all I miss being able to hug my grandchildren and those I love and hold dear.. It does not seem natural to be so distant from them all., it is so hard to bear. It is life, but not as I knew it.

We also had to witness the murder of George Floyd in America. Murdered by policemen, people who were supposed to protect him!. It was without doubt one of the most distressing things I have ever seen. His death has given rise to the Black lives Matter movement and here in the UK we have to face up to the fact that there is racial prejudice and injustice in our society too and in our institutions.

So, as Christians where do we stand in all of this? When Jesus was here on earth, he turned the world upside down. His teaching was all about challenging the established way of life. Jesus was ushering in a new order, a new way of living. A way of life founded on love, love for God and love for one another. A Christian life is not a passive life, it is a very proactive way of living. Jesus wants us to be first in line to protect the poor, the weak, the sick and the persecuted. As Christians we cannot stand on the sidelines, we have to do what is right.

So, first of all we have to embrace this new way of living within the constraints of Covid19, look at the positives and not just the negatives. Such as clearer skies, less pollution, appreciation of our key workers, community spirit and much more. Be inventive as to how we can enhance things. Secondly, we must stand up against injustice, we must make our voices heard in the fight for racial equality. Challenge racism, and all other forms of discrimination, head on whenever and wherever we encounter it. It is not just what Jesus would want us to do, it is what he would expect us to do.

God bless you all

John Sibley
Lay Minister

WARMLEY WARBLINGS

We remember in our regular prayers, those of our church family who have been unwell, thinking in particular of Mervyn and Lil Little, Martin Pullin, Margaret Hill, Beryl Holder, Roger and Pauline Newman, we wish them all well.

As usual, we remember all of our friends who are in residential or nursing homes at this time, Grace Watson, Eileen Penny, John Short, Marjory Cox and Rita Jones.

Many of us have been fortunate enough to enjoy or even participate in our online services, while sadly, they have not been available to everyone because they do not have access to the technology, they have been of value to those that can and have at least enabled people to join in, albeit, in their own homes. in church worship. Others have been sent the Pew News which attempts to keep people informed while also showing the readings for that particular service.

I make no apology though for emphasising the importance for all of us who are able, to pick up the phone and make regular contact with our church family, especially, those who live on their own. That friendly, familiar voice may be the only contact that person has had with anyone all day and can make a tremendous difference to their mental wellbeing and that feeling that someone cares how they are. Even better, now that some restrictions have been lifted, visiting someone if they have a garden you can access and sharing in a cup of tea or coffee? Those of us who are able can make a really important contribution at this difficult time so let's all get involved and support each other.

Our thanks to Muriel Allen for her reflections on 'life in lockdown' last month, its likely to go on in some form for some time to come yet and it would be really good to hear from other people about their experience of lockdown and who would be happy to have it published in or magazine. Just contact me on 07976 568069 or email me at bwddraper@yahoo.co.uk

Brian Draper



"Looks like no one was available to fill in for the vicar's annual holiday again."

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

Count your blessings instead of your crosses;

Count your gains instead of your losses.

Count your joys instead of your woes

Count your friends instead of your foes.

Count your courage instead of your fears;

Count your laughs instead of your tears.

Count your full years instead of your lean;

Count your kind deeds instead of your mean

Count your health instead of your wealth

Count on God instead of yourself

THE STORY BEHIND THE HYMN 'JUST AS I AM'

The hymn 'Just As I Am' must be one of the most famous in the world. It has been sung by tens of millions of Christians at Billy Graham Crusades the world over, just for starters! Yet it was not written by a professional who was 'aiming' at a specific market, as many songs seem to be written today. Instead, it was written by an artist in Victorian times. Her name was Charlotte Elliott, and she was born in Clapham in 1789. She grew up in a well to do home, and became a portrait artist and also a writer of humorous verse. All was well until Charlotte fell ill in her early 30s, and slid into a black depression. A minister, Dr Caesar Malan of Switzerland, came to visit her. Instead of sympathising, he asked her an unexpected question: did she have peace with God? Charlotte deeply resented the question and told him to mind his own business.

But after he left, his question haunted her. *Did* she have peace with God? She knew that she did not, that she had done some very wrong things. So, she invited Dr Malan to return. She told him that she would like to become a Christian, but would have to sort out her life first.

Dr Malan again said the unexpected: "Come just as you are." The words were a revelation to Charlotte. She had assumed that she would have to put her life in order before she could hope to be accepted by God. Instead, she realised that Jesus wanted her just as she was – and He would take care of the sin. Charlotte became a Christian that day.

14 years later, in 1836, Charlotte wrote some verses that summed up how it had been between her and Jesus that day. They ran:

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bids't me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

*Just as I am, tho tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fightings within, and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

Charlotte could not have dreamed that 150 years into the future, her verses would be sung by millions of people all over the world, as they responded to the Gospel presented at many great Billy Graham crusades, and made their way forward to do just as the hymn describes – to come to Jesus Christ, despite sin and fear and doubts, to come 'just as I am.'

ALL IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST

It was:

250 years ago, on 22nd August 1770 that British explorer Captain James Cook discovered eastern Australia, named it New South Wales, and claimed it for Britain.

150 years ago, on 4th August 1870 that the British Red Cross Society was founded.

125 years ago, on 10th August 1895 that the Proms (Promenade Concerts) began in London.

100 years ago, on 21st August 1920 that Christopher Robin Milne was born. He was son of the author A. A. Milne, and he appeared as a character in his father's Winnie-the-Pooh stories. (Died 1996.)

90 years ago, from 16th to 23rd August 1930 that the first British Empire Games (now the Commonwealth Games) were held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

80 years ago, on 13th August 1940 that the main phase of the Battle of Britain began. The German Luftwaffe launched raids on RAF airfields and radar installations. On 29th August Winston Churchill paid tribute to the Royal Air Force in a famous House of Commons speech, saying, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

75 years ago, on 9th August 1945 that the US Army Air Forces dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. The centre of the city was totally destroyed, and 80,000 people were killed immediately. A further 60,000 died by the end of the year. It was the first city in history to be hit by a nuclear weapon.

Also 75 years ago, on 9th August 1945 that the US Army Air Forces dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki, Japan. 40,000 people died immediately and about 33,000 more by the end of the year. It was the second (and last) city to experience a nuclear attack.

70 years ago, on 15th August 1950 that Princess Anne, the Princess Royal, was born. She is the only daughter of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip.

60 years ago, on 8th August 1960 that the pop song *Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polkadot Bikini* by Brian Hyland became a worldwide hit. The record had been released in June.

40 years ago, on 14th August 1980 that Lech Walesa led a strike by shipyard workers in Gdansk, Poland, to protest against the dismissal of a trade union activist. On 30th August the striking workers won the right to establish independent trade unions. This led to the formation of the Solidarity movement.

30 years ago, from 2nd August 1990 to 28th February 1991 the Gulf War took place. On 2nd August Iraq invaded Kuwait. The United Nations Security Council then ordered a global trade embargo against Iraq. On 7th August the USA launched Operation Desert Shield, and then Operation Desert Storm, to prevent Iraq from invading Saudi Arabia. Coalition victory.

20 years ago, on 5th August 2000 that Sir Alec Guinness, British stage and film actor (*The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Doctor Zhivago*, *A Passage to India*, *Star Wars*, etc) died.

15 years ago, from 23rd to 31st August, Hurricane Katrina hit the Bahamas, Cuba and the southern US states. New Orleans was badly affected when the levee system failed, and 80% of the city was under water for weeks. Florida and Mississippi were also badly hit. More than 1,800 people died. It was the costliest natural disaster in US history.

10 years ago, on 5th August 2010 a cave-in at the San Jose copper and gold mine near Copiapo in northern Chile trapped 33 workers 700 metres underground. An international rescue operation was launched, and they were brought to the surface on 13th October after being trapped for 69 days. Around one billion people watched the rescue on TV.

6th AUGUST – THE TRANSFIGURATION A GLIMPSE OF JESUS' FUTURE GLORY

The story is told in Matthew (17:1-9), Mark (9:1-9) and Luke (9:28-36). It was a time when Jesus' ministry was popular, when people were seeking Him out.

But on this day, He made time to take Peter, James and John, His closest disciples, up a high mountain. In the fourth century, Cyrillic of Jerusalem identified it as Mount Tabor (and there is a great church up there today), but others believe it more likely to have been one of the three spurs of Mount Hermon, which rise to about 9,000 feet, and overlook Caesarea Philippi.

High up on the mountain, Jesus was suddenly transfigured before His friends. His face began to shine as the sun, His garments became white and dazzling. Elijah and Moses, of all people, suddenly appeared, and talked with Him. A bright cloud overshadowed the disciples.

Peter was staggered, but, enthusiast that he was – immediately suggested building three tabernacles on that holy place, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. But God's 'tabernacling', God's dwelling with mankind, does not any longer depend upon building a shrine. It depends on the presence of Jesus, instead. And so, a cloud covered them, and a Voice spoke out of the cloud, saying that Jesus was His beloved Son, whom the disciple should 'hear'. God's dwelling with mankind depends upon our listening to Jesus.

Then, just as suddenly, it is all over. What did it mean? Why Moses and Elijah? Well, these two men represent the Law and the Prophets of the Old Covenant, or Old Testament. But now they are handing on the baton, if you like: for both the Law and the Prophets found their true and final fulfilment in Jesus, the Messiah.

Why on top of a mountain? In Exodus we read that Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the sacred covenant from Yahweh in the form of the Ten Commandments. Now Jesus goes up and is told about the 'sealing' of the New Covenant, or New Testament of God with man, which will be accomplished by His coming death in Jerusalem.

That day made a lifelong impact on the disciples. Peter mentions it in his second letter, 2 Peter 1:16-19, invariably the reading for this day.

The Eastern Churches have long held the Transfiguration as a feast as important as Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension and Pentecost. But it took a long time for the West to observe the Transfiguration. The feast starts appearing from the 11th and 12th centuries, and the Prayer Book included it among the calendar dates, but there was no liturgical provision for it until the 19th century.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL CHARITY SHOPS

Are you feeling the financial squeeze just now, but still enjoy shopping? Why not visit some of your local charity shops?

Never have charity shops needed you so much. Coronavirus has meant a huge drop in donations, and many charities face huge financial shortfalls.

The good news is that charity shops are well worth visiting this summer. Vast amounts of clothes and household items were donated following the lockdown this Spring. Grounded at home, people decided to declutter and clear-out!

The result is that, as a spokeswoman for Oxfam says: "People can expect to find some really great treasures to buy."

It should be very safe to shop, for as Julie Byard of Cancer Research UK, explains, the charity shops put all donated items into isolation before putting them on the shelves. She adds: "We're grateful for all donations and to everyone who volunteers and shops with us."

WE MUST BE DETERMINED TO BE 'ANTI-RACIST'

George Floyd is the latest in a long line of black people who, in recent years, have died at the hands of the police in America. This has led to a global outcry against racism, demanding fairness and equality in interpersonal relationships. But more than this, justice requires us to root out and re-order any system, structure, or narrative which privileges white people over people of colour and their cultures, norms, and perspectives.

Many consider racism against black people to be an American problem, but Britain's imperial history has given us our own particular brand. While many white people would publicly denounce overtly racist behaviour, many of our systems are inherently racist and some people remain willing and conscious participants in them.

That's why it's not enough to check our unconscious biases. We must be determined to be 'anti-racist', to work against the *status quo* wherever it disadvantages black people. This is fundamentally theological: affirming the inherent dignity of all people created in God's image.

In the UK, recent research demonstrates that black children are twice as likely to live in poverty than white children. Black people face discrimination in employment and health care. They are more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, to get sentenced to prison time and to be given longer sentences than white people. As a country, we have our own stories of excessive force and of the deaths of black people in police custody. Stories that do not end with justice.

These realities are well-known by black people in the UK, including black Christians. Black Brits share the pain of African-Americans suffering under the weight of the same sin and injustice, the same racism.

Yet, the lack of solidarity displayed by many white Christians and leaders has deepened this pain. The unity and witness of the church – as an institution and through its members in society – depend not just on shared faith, but also on shared love and shared burdens. The racial inequities of our churches often fail to speak prophetically to the world – this is a week for lament and repentance.

For those moved to compassion, it's also a time to listen, learn, and practise solidarity with your black brothers and sisters. Action is the way we bring about a new world. A world that cares, principally, for the 'least of these'.

A LITTLE HUMOUR

Who's right for which job?

Does your company struggle with the problem of properly fitting people to jobs? Here is a handy way to decide.... Take the prospective employees you are trying to place and put them in a room with only a table and two chairs. Leave them alone for two hours, without any instruction. At the end of that time, go back and see what they are doing.

If they have taken the table apart in that time, put them in engineering.

If they are counting the cracks in the floor assign them to finance.

If they are screaming and waving their arms, send them to manufacturing.

If they are talking to the chairs, personnel is a good place for them.

If they are sleeping, they are management material.

If they are writing up the experience, send them to technical publications.

If they don't even look up when you enter the room, assign them to security.

If they try to tell you it's not as bad as it looks, send them to marketing.

And if they've left early, put them in sales.

Sick of preaching

Our new vicar had just been prescribed bifocals. The reading portion of the glasses improved his vision considerably, but the top portion of the glasses didn't work so well. In fact, he was experiencing dizziness every time he looked through them. He tried to explain this to the congregation on Sunday: "I hope you will excuse my continually removing my glasses. You see, when I look down, I can see fine, but when I look at you all, it makes me feel sick."

What am I?

A teacher gave her young class a lesson on Zoom. It was about the magnet, and what it does. The next day in a short test, she included this question: "My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I am strong and attractive. I pick up lots of things. What am I?"

When the answers were sent in, the teacher was astonished to find that more than half her students had answered the question with the word: "Mother."

WHAT IS LURKING IN YOUR GARDEN?

Is there something alien in your garden which is beginning to worry you? Something that is growing too fast, spreading too fast, for you to keep up with?

Gardeners across the country are being asked by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) and the University of Coventry to find – and report – the next Japanese knotweed before it ‘jumps the garden fence’ and causes havoc.

Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam both began innocently, as pretty ornamental garden plants. Then they escaped and have since marched across the UK like something out of War of the Worlds, causing immense damage to homes and waterways.

So now the question is: can you help a citizen science project to identify the next plant which could become a similar menace? The project is called Plant Alert. It offers you an easy way to report any ornamental plants in your garden that you suspect are becoming aggressive. Just go to: <https://bsbi.org/plant-alert>

Scientists say to look out for: vigorous growth, prolific self-seeding, longer flowering periods. Plants which are logged on the Plant Alert app will be studied by botanists, and potentially restricted from sale.

Kevin Walker, head of science at BSBI, says: “Bitter experience has shown that species that are invasive in gardens are also the ones that are likely to ‘jump the fence’ and cause problems in the wild.”

MARY SUMNER – FOUNDER OF THE MOTHERS’ UNION

The Mothers’ Union is now nearly 145 years old. It has accomplished a staggering amount in that time, and nowadays numbers more than four million members, doing good work in 83 countries. That is a far cry from the modest circle of prayer for mothers who cared about family life, which is how it all began with a rector’s wife, Mary Sumner.

Mary was born in late 1828 in Swinton, near Manchester. When she was four, her family moved to Herefordshire. Mary’s father, Thomas Heywood, was a banker and historian. Her mother has been described as a woman of “faith, charm and sympathy” – qualities which Mary certainly inherited. Mrs Heywood also held informal ‘mothers’ meetings’ at her home, to encourage local women. Those meetings may well have inspired Mary’s later work.

Mary was educated at home, spoke three foreign languages, and sang well. While in her late teens, on a visit to Rome she met George Sumner, a son of the Bishop of Winchester. It was a well-connected family: George’s uncle became Archbishop of Canterbury, and his second cousin was William Wilberforce. Mary and George married in July 1848, soon after his ordination. They moved to Old Alresford in 1851 and had three children: Margaret, Louise and George. Mary dedicated herself to raising her children and supporting her husband’s ministry by providing music and Bible classes.

When in 1876 Mary’s eldest daughter Margaret, gave birth, Mary was reminded how difficult she had found the burden of motherhood. Soon she decided to hold a meeting to which she invited the local women not only of her own class, but also all the village mothers. Her aim was to find out if women could be brought together to offer each other prayer and mutual support in their roles as wives and mothers. That meeting at Old Alresford Rectory was the inaugural meeting of the Mothers’ Union.

For 11 years, the Mothers' Union was limited to Old Alresford. Then in 1885 the Bishop of Newcastle invited Mary to address the women churchgoers of the Portsmouth Church Congress, some 20 miles away. Mary gave a passionate speech about the poor state of national morality, and the vital need for women to use their vocation as mothers to change the nation for the better. A number of the women present went back to their parishes to found mothers' meetings on Sumner's pattern. Soon, the Mothers' Union spread to the dioceses of Ely, Exeter, Hereford, Lichfield and Newcastle.

By 1892, there were already 60,000 members in 28 dioceses, and by 1900 there were 169,000 members. By the time Mary died in 1921, she had seen MU cross the seas and become an international organisation of prayer and good purpose.

CARERS WHO ARE OVER 70 YEARS OF AGE

Many people over 70 in this country are becoming desperate. They have been the sole carers for their loved one since lockdown, and they are struggling. In order to cope, large numbers of them have turned to antidepressants.

The figures are eye-watering: during the pandemic this Spring, more than 1.4 million people aged over 70 were sole carers for someone who was sick, disabled and often also over 70. A reduction in support from paid carers made the situation even worse.

In a poll commissioned by Carers UK, 70 per cent of these unpaid carers said that the negative impact of caring on their own physical and mental health was one of the biggest challenges they faced.