

Vicarage Viewpoint ²³

20th June. Trinity 3



The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills, except for a valley dip at one end, which can act like a funnel for the wind. This means that the water can go from glassy calm to choppy white horses very quickly, as the wind whips up the water. As seasoned fishermen on this large freshwater lake, this will not have been the first time that the disciples have experienced this phenomenon, but this time it was particularly severe. Their complaint to Jesus is about the apparent mismatch between their peril and his continuing nap: they do not cry, 'Help!' or 'Do something!', they question whether he cares. This is not a theoretical argument about whether he could (or should) intervene miraculously; it is not like the moment when the synagogue leaders stand at the sidelines to see whether he will heal someone on the sabbath. This is not a theoretical question about power at all. It is a cry from the heart, an exasperated rebuke from friends who feel abandoned: 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' Perhaps all they expect is another pair of hands to join in bailing out water from the boat. Instead, Jesus changes the vast space of the inland sea simply by speaking. Jesus' questions to them - 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' - underline that they still only have a sketchy picture of who he is. The miracle affects the disciples more than the storm did. Something for us to ponder as we weather the storms of life.

With love and prayers,
Mark.

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Father's Day.

We give our thanks, Creator God, for the fathers in our lives. Fatherhood does not come with a manual, and reality teaches us that some fathers excel while others fail. We ask for your blessings for them all – and forgiveness where it is needed. This Father's Day we remember the many sacrifices fathers make for their children and families, and the ways – both big and small – they lift children to achieve dreams thought beyond reach.

So too, we remember all those who have helped fill the void when fathers die early or are absent – grandfathers and uncles, brothers and cousins, teachers, foster parents – and the women of our families.

For those who are fathers, we ask for wisdom and humility in the face of the task of parenting. Give them the strength to do well by their children and by you. Amen.

A small boy stunned his parents when he began to empty his pockets of coins. Finally his mother asked him where he had got all that money. "At church," the boy nonchalantly replied. "They have bowls of it there."

A Time to Pray.

In the light of the extension of restrictions, we remember in prayer today: those whose businesses are sinking...

those drowning in debt...

those going under with stress...

We pray for those embroiled in stormy and violent relationships, among and within nations, communities, and families...

those played out on the world's stage...

those hidden behind closed doors...

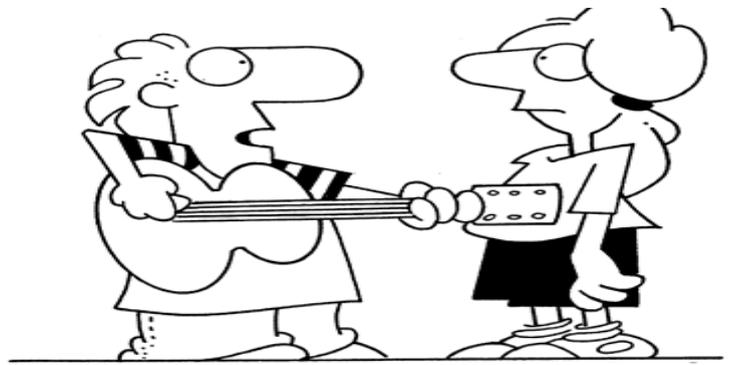
We pray for those whose cries go unheard, especially those tortured and executed by brutal regimes...

for those whose questions go unanswered, especially those searching for justice...

for those whose pleas go unheeded, especially those on the edge unable to access mental health services...

for those whose needs go unmet...

We pray for the church as it seeks to address and answer big questions, questions about life and death, about gender and sexuality, about faith and finance, about race and responsibilities, about integrity and healing...



"Writing hymns is harder than I thought!
I can't think of anything that rhymes with
'Hallelujah' except 'glad I knew ya'
and 'we'll tattoo ya!'"

Beware Japanese knotweed this Summer.

This month (June) could see a sudden bumper appearance of the notorious garden pest, Japanese knotweed.

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) experts have warned that the April frosts either delayed or killed other plants who would have helped keep it in check. Unfortunately, the pest is very hardy, and will not have been killed off.

The plant grows up to 2.1 metres (7ft) tall and can destroy the foundations of houses and run riot in gardens. It can even devalue property, and lead to the refusal of mortgages on the land.



Mark 4: 35 - 41

When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Job 38: 1 - 11

The LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

'Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb? – when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped"?'

2 Corinthians 6: 1 - 13

As we work together with Christ, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.

God our saviour, look on this wounded world in pity and in power; hold us fast to your promises of peace won for us by your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Britain's first Christian martyr.

Alban was the very first Christian martyr in Britain – or at least the first we know of. A 'martyr' is someone who has died for the faith – the word literally means 'witness'. He was probably killed during the persecution under the emperor Diocletian in the early years of the fourth century, in the late stages of the Roman occupation of Britain. His martyrdom took place in the amphitheatre outside the Roman city of Verulamium, which is now St Albans, in Hertfordshire.

The church historian Bede, writing six hundred years after Alban's death, records that Alban was a Roman citizen (possibly a soldier) who gave shelter to a priest who was being hunted by the Romans. During the priest's stay in his home, Alban was converted to the Christian faith. When the soldiers eventually tracked the priest down, they arrived at Alban's house and insisted on searching it. What they found was Alban dressed in the priest's clothes, while their real prey escaped. They arrested Alban and demanded that he make a sacrifice to the Emperor – a common test of loyalty. He refused. He was then condemned to death and taken into the amphitheatre, which still stands in the fields below St Alban's Abbey, to be put to death. One of his executioners was converted, Bede claims, but the other one took a sword and beheaded him.

He was buried nearby, on a site where a shrine was later erected. In the early fifth century two Continental bishops, Germanus of Auxerre and Lupus of Troyes, were sent to Britain and record that they visited the shrine of Alban at Verulamium. The date of their visit was given as 429.

The martyrdom of Alban is a reminder that Christianity was planted first in these islands during the Roman occupation, though it was all but extinguished in England in the dark centuries that followed, until people like David, Cuthbert and the other Celtic missionaries restored the faith in many parts of the land.

Not a great deal is known about Alban apart from the story of his martyrdom, but what we do know is probably enough to give him a substantial claim to be the patron saint of England ahead of St George.



Wonders of the Living World

What are the best metaphors we could use to describe biological things? You might be used to hearing phrases like "your genetic blueprint" or "survival of the fittest", but are they helpful or even accurate? Some of these words fail to capture the wonder and joy of understanding something new about the nature of living organisms.

One researcher has used the phrase 'The Snuggle for Existence' as a way to convey the idea, familiar to biologists, that cooperation is at the heart of the living world. For example, every cell more complex than a bacterium contains minute energy factories, each one containing their own piece of DNA – which makes them a sort of miniature cell, hidden away inside the larger host cell. These 'mitochondria', as biologists call them, turn raw materials from the host into chemical energy. In this way, everyone benefits: the mitochondria now have a safe a place to live, and the host receives the energy it needs. There are many more examples of organisms working together to produce something that is more than the sum of its parts, where often the individual parts could not survive on their own.

'The Map of Life' is a way of describing the regularities seen in biological processes. Eyes, legs and wings have emerged in the living world again and again, and why not? If the properties of light and gravity remain constant, we should expect living things to find the same solutions to seeing or getting around. When we look at these organisms' family trees, we see they share a common ancestor that had no eyes, or no wings. These structures have developed completely independently, or you could say that the paths of the living world have converged on the same solution. That's not to say they had a conscious goal, but that the world has certain properties, and those properties have channelled biological processes in certain directions.

None of these stories give us definite evidence for God. Science simply provides data, which can often be interpreted in several different ways. Perhaps the world just happens to be full of mathematical regularities, maybe there's an overarching physical law we don't yet understand, or perhaps there are multiple universes and ours happens to be the one in which life has arisen. However, the observations scientists make about the living world are compatible with the existence of the God described by Christian faith.

More at wondersofthelivingworld.org.