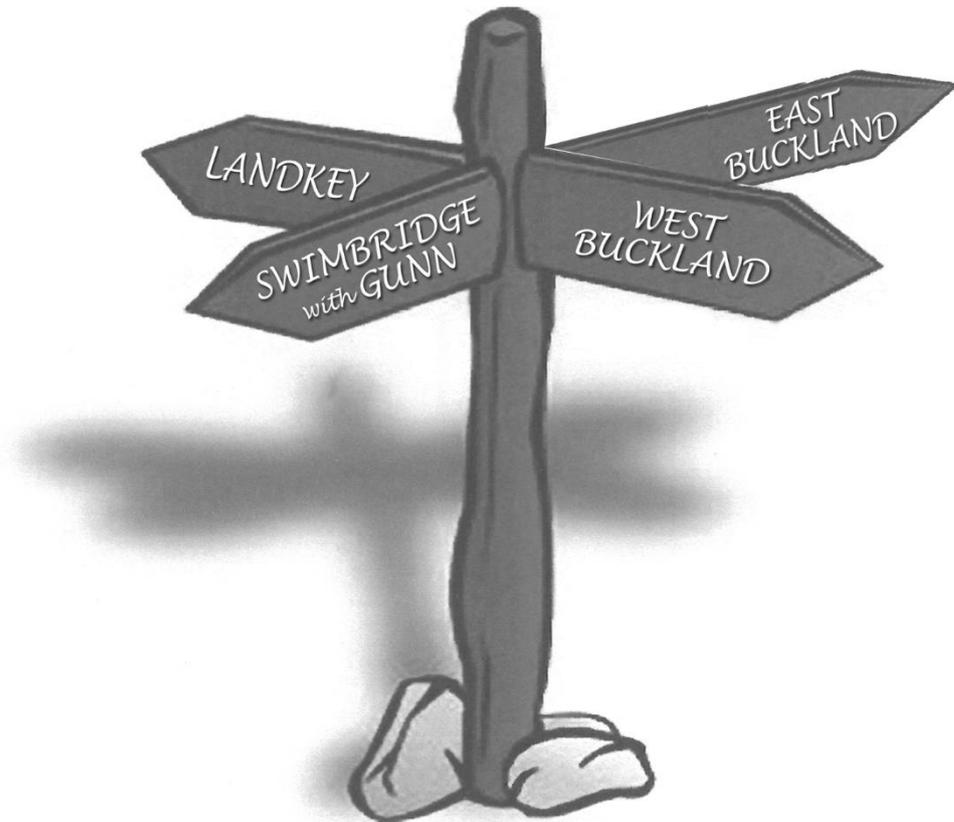


Parish Magazine

for

The Four Ways Mission Community

St Paul, Landkey, St James the Apostle, Swimbridge with The Holy Name, Gunn, St Peter, West Buckland & St Michael, East Buckland



July 2020

**The Mission Community of St. James, Swimbridge with the Chapel of the Holy Name, Gunn,
St. Peter, West Buckland, St Michael, East Buckland and St. Paul, Landkey**
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Please Note

Material for the Magazine should be submitted to the Editor by the **1st of the preceding month**

July Newsletter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to our magazine and a great big thank you to all who join in and contribute your wonderful letters and observations. I am so grateful to each of you. Your insights and stories always bring me thoughtful contemplation and on many occasions a good laugh and a huge thank you to Maureen who gives so much of her time and effort to correlate, edit and get it to all of us.

Our churches have been given permission to open for private prayer which is wonderfully good news. However, we are not open for public worship in any sense at the moment. Even though we are going to be permitted to open for private prayer we have to ensure public safety and indeed be mindful of the safety of those who will be cleaning after us and locking and unlocking the churches, so a discussion with the PCC and agreement has to be formed.

The House of Bishops says opening is not an urgent matter at the moment and we should ensure all risk assessments have been done and published on our web sites, and that social distancing plans of one way systems are marked on the floors with two metre distancing and all are in place plus cleaning rotas. So, lots to do and if you are interested in being part of that process please let myself and wardens know.

As churches we are still just about keeping our heads above water. Many have not and may fall by the wayside so I thank you all for your continuing financial support. Your continued giving is just about securing our ability to be in a position to open and when we finally get back to full worship we will have lots to do to fund our future. We have always been on the edge so it won't come as too much of a shock knowing that.

When we do get back into full participation we will have to look at what we do to access the larger community and look at new ways to do worship alongside what we normally do. I must emphasise **alongside** what we do. We live in varied and diverse communities and we should cater for everyone; something the church has struggled with for years. During lockdown the church has proclaimed that the church has not been shut, only the buildings and this is true.

Clergy, including myself, have been striving to reach out to our communities in new ways and it has proved to be a success. At our morning prayer we are reaching around sixty people, sometimes well over one hundred, something that if offered in church may only draw two or three to our Sunday services. On Sunday we have reached three hundred. It has opened up evangelism to those who are always housebound and can no longer come and to many who don't come at all but watch at a time they feel they can.

Evangelism is a church's main reason for being, to reach out the word of God to as many people as we can and to bring them into the Kingdom. That is the first and primary focus of a priest and the congregation so I will be exploring how we can continue to do this in our Sunday services by live streaming them and I hope that you will all support this. We cannot let down the people who have stepped out to join us in worship in this media. With hope in our hearts that the experience will lead them into churches and to grow into a fuller worship commitment. We are blessed by God that in this sadness and tragedy He has touched peoples' hearts and minds and we should continue to reach out to those on the fringe of faith commitment. Our work in our communities should now be focused on a loving and giving church for all; a place where all are valued even if we have to provide different forms of worship.

When we return I hope to set up real bible workshops, fling open our churches to all and make them places of joy that people flock to, and open up opportunities to people who wish to take part in the running of worship. We are so gifted with our three readers, Chris, David and now Josie and they are full of energy and filled with the Spirit and have a passion for serving God. We will use our gifts and our preaching and worship skills as never before. PCC's focus will be all about mission and evangelism and serving the whole community, and most importantly I want you all to be part of it. We need your thoughts, your experience and your energy to push further than we have ever pushed before, and if you see something you don't think will work then bring with it something that will. When we return we will be starting afresh. We will never be the same when we return to our work and begin to serve God with joy in our communities. We have as our example the servant King; He who came to serve not to be served and we are His body on earth right now.

Dear God, help us to emerge from this lock down, this pandemic, focused on your example, to serve you in newness of life.

To remember those precious souls we have lost and to give thanks for those who are left.

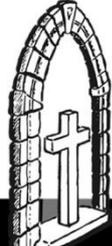
May your promises of eternal life in your Kingdom hold us fast and give us the power of your Spirit to be who you wish us to be.

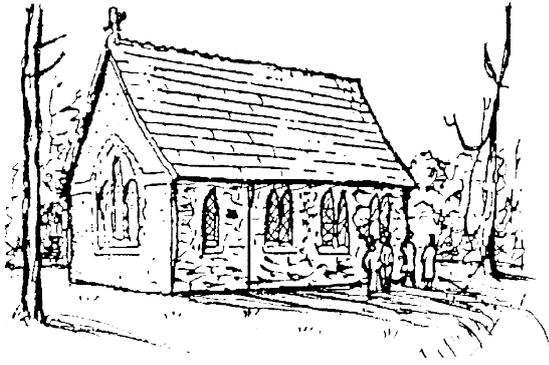
Help us look through our own prejudices and wants to be the servant people who put your will and grace before our own.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Fr Shaun

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Musings with a Theme

My musings of the month reflect back to the happenings in June, reflecting on the two most awful and unnecessary murders in America of George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks - the results of these killings sparked anger and riots around the world. The riots in America beggared believe, in England we had demonstrations with slogans proclaiming that Black Lives Matter, of course they do, all lives matter irrespective of the colour of the skin. Unfortunately our peaceful demonstrations were taken over by thugs, rent a mob and mindless morons bent on serious trouble who changed the focus to slavery hundreds of years ago and proceeded to wreck statues, desecrate memorials and persuade authorities to change street names and area names.

We cannot change history, well we can, but then we live yet another lie, what happened hundreds of years ago was abhorrent and should not have happened, but. rampaging through our cities, wrecking and desecrating doesn't put things right, nor does it help Messrs Floyd and Brooks and all those people gone before them who suffered and are suffering at the hands of the most appalling members of society throughout our world.

Slavery has, I'm sad to say, unfortunately been going on almost from the creation of man, we cannot do anything about that, although I would love to see those disruptive factions try- I doubt that the police in the distant lands would be so accommodating as ours.

However, my main thoughts are should we not be focusing on modern day slavery in 2020 and beyond? Should we not stop, think, and consider the rampant slavery being practiced right now, the estimated 40 million people in

slavery and bondage being trafficked around the world with at least 25% of that total being children? Is this not a worthwhile cause? Rather than dwell on the mistakes of the past, which we cannot do anything about - this we can, by trying to get to grips with this massive problem.

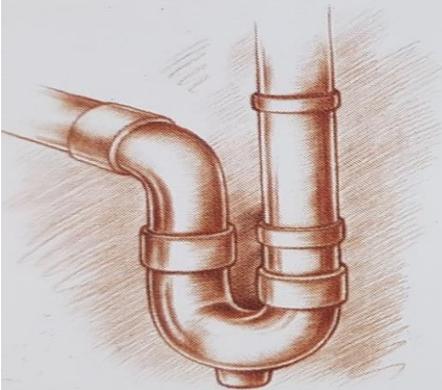
However it may not be possible as in reality there may not be the mind to stop it, which I fear, as nothing changes over time, money and greed being the ruling factor in a totally abhorrent operation.

Gunn Summer Events

It's so sad that all our events for this summer, have like so many others, fallen foul of the dreaded Covid-19 virus. It has cost us dearly in so many ways and I'm so sorry that we have been unable to mix and enjoy each others company with all the pleasantries associated with our social gatherings.

I thank those of you who volunteered your gardens and houses and hopefully we can be back on track next year. There may be an opportunity around September to arrange an event before the summer ends. Any ideas or suggestions would be gratefully received. A sincere wish that you all stay well and stay fit through these troubled times.

Bryan



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News from St Peter's West Buckland



Another month of restriction in spite of encouraging noises from the Government via newspapers and the TV about things 'opening up' for business and Churches being open for Private Prayer. The devil, as always is 'in the detail'. Full details will be available when all the reams of paperwork have been read and analysed for which items relate to Churches like West Buckland.

It may be that only one Church in the Mission Community will be able to be open at designated times, and then locked again - no free daily access or meeting in a group, especially if the cleaning regime is too onerous.

The Post Office is still going from strength to strength with, on a Tuesday, a steady stream of customers both here and a session at Swimbridge Church. With many thanks to Heather who oversees all with a great regard for everyone's welfare. The Church is kept locked before the session and locked up until the following week afterwards.

If we cannot welcome you into Church yet, you are always welcome to come into the Churchyard and admire the handiwork of a band of helpers who have mown the grass, and weeded around the outside; thank you so much all of you.

I am sure that once this current virus epidemic is over the Government will need to raise large sums of money to pay for it. Here are some interesting ideas from the past, none of them were very popular.

1797 to 1798 a tax was levied on the possession of clocks and watches.

1796 to 1882 a tax was imposed on owning dogs.

1785 to 1792 a tax imposed on households employing female servants.

1795 to 1798 a duty on people using hair powder and a licence was needed.

1784 to 1874 a tax was levied on the possession of horses.

1662 to 1689 a hearth tax was introduced with the Parish Constable compiling lists of householders and the number of hearths and gave these to the Justice of the Peace who collected the tax at Ladyday and Michaelmas at 2 shillings per hearth. Those in receipt of Poor Relief and with a house worth less than 20 shillings a year were exempt.

A window tax replaced the hearth tax in 1696 to help meet the cost of re-minting the damaged coinage. After 1792 houses with between 7 and 9 windows were taxed at 2 shillings and from 10 to 19 windows at 4 shillings. In 1825 houses with less than 8 windows were exempt and it was abolished in 1851. This tax could be avoided by filling in excess windows and these can still be seen today.

In 1836 tithes could be commuted to a Rent charged on the prevailing price of corn. Hence the reason for each Parish to have a detailed tithe map. In 1925 the Tithe Act abolished the Rent Charge and in 1936 tithes were extinguished altogether.

All these charges seem pretty minor by today's prices. In 1790 a day labourer, if work could be found, received 16 to 18 old pence per day to keep a family. By 1850 this had gone up to £20 per annum and by 1906 was 17 shillings and 6 old pence per week.

July 2nd. Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth while pregnant with the Infant Jesus as recorded in the Gospel according to Luke (1. 39 to 56)

July 3rd. Thomas the Apostle full name Didymos Judas Thomas. One of the 12 Apostles nicknamed Doubting Thomas as he doubted Jesus' Resurrection when first told and asked to see the Crucifixion wounds - when he believed. He was born in Galilee and is buried in the Simthome Cathedral Basilica, Chennai, India.

July 30th, a day to remember William Wilberforce, Olaudah Equiano and Thomas Clarkson. Anti-slavery Campaigners very relevant at the moment after events in America and strong feelings aroused here.

Pat Witheridge.

News from St Michael's East Buckland



NOT BLACK OR WHITE

Work started in early April on repairs to the west wall of St Michael's by contractor Nick Avery. He removed the old cement plaster to replace it with a new lime render. The removal of the old plaster turned out to be more difficult than was first envisaged in challenging weather conditions. To complete this project a marvellous new window is to be installed and we all look forward to its inauguration.

Matt Bluge's contribution to last month's magazine was very interesting, real and insightful as always. His remarks about HQ Exeter were spot on. On the 30th of March I received a joint email from Bishop Robert Exon, Neil Williams Director of Finance and Giles Frampton Chair of Board of Finance, who asked that all parishes keep money coming in to their churches to be able to meet not only their own needs but to meet the burden of common fund. It also highlighted that in excess of £900,000 a month was needed to cover clergy stipend and staff payroll elements. This came at a time when many people were being furloughed or tragically losing their jobs. The common fund contribution from St. Michael's amounts to £250 a year which is staggeringly less than that of St. James Swimbridge but a considerable amount to find from a small regular congregation. Matt's remarks that the church belongs to all those who reside in the village and so it falls on each and every one of them to help with its responsibility, is totally accurate but I get the feeling that most parishioners do love their church buildings and are fearful of them going into decline and decay and might possibly want to help financially, but not so keen to fund something that they may regard as a luxury that they can't afford.

Congratulations to Shaun on his continued online morning worship. It has been hugely successful according to the feedback I have received.

Commuting regularly recently between East and West Buckland, I would like to commend those that keep our villages looking so neat and tidy, e.g. EB crossroads, the approaches into WB village and especially WB churchyard. Many thanks to you all, what pride.

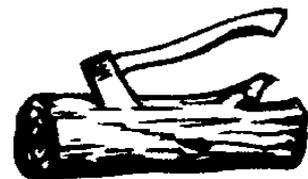
Equality for all. Black lives matter. I take a knee.

Support for #George Floyd

Roger Ridd

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The New Norm

When I hear people – young and elderly – say that they ‘want their lives to go back to - normal’ I fear that I have one thing to tell them: ‘Our lives will not return to as we knew it. There will be a NEW NORM’. Life will not go back to as it was!

Already journalists and academics are speculating what that new norm will be like. We know that life will be different – but how different?

Well, may I give a few thoughts? I have to begin by recognizing that while the pandemic continues to turn the world upside down, new realizations are beginning to dawn on us and even by the time you read this Parish Magazine other aspects of our life will have changed. I hear each day that this and that is back as it was – but I am very sure that after such a worldwide event (and it is not yet over – Africa is only just now beginning to be hit) the world will never be the same.

But, it may be a great deal ‘better’. In many ways our planet and our individual lives may blossom as a result of the pandemic. OK it’ll be a very long time before we can have a pint in a crowded pub or enjoy a meal in a busy restaurant. But look at the positive side.

Take family life – that might be greatly appreciated much more. We talk so much about how we miss grandchildren and all relations. Now, after the huge worldwide storm of the Covid-19 pandemic it is very likely that we shall find ways to bring families closer together as they were a hundred years ago.

A little over 100 years ago we all dreaded TB and Scarlet Fever and other deadly diseases when it was the norm that so many young children and teenagers died. Today we have the very great advantage of remarkable strides in health, a brilliant Health Service and remarkable standards of living. As well as that, with all the amazing communications systems that we all have we are more likely to work from home (or at least nearer to our homes) and long-distance commuting will be a thing of the past. What a relief – I know that for almost twenty years I drove some four hours a day ‘...to get to and from work’.

That was madness, but there did not seem to be an alternative; we are likely to generally appreciate not only our NHS but many of the people and jobs that are done locally.

And what about further afield. Where do I start? Well, first there is bad news - airlines and foreign holidays! Forget them, Iata says airlines will have to raise prices by 50% or go bust if Covid-19 rules are enforced for many years to come. So, foreign holidays will be too costly and flying will be mainly for business reasons. The idea of the low cost holiday flight has passed and that is a very severe fact to take in. For millions of us, young and old alike a summer holiday (or two) has been the Norm. I fear that that is no more. Yes, fuel will be very cheap (have you bought any domestic oil – currently about 28p a litre) and you can be sure that every airline will be busting a gut to keep fares down. But the reality is that if an aircraft can hold only half what they used to then fares will be much higher.

So, what about rail? I am sure that one will be able to travel by rail – Eurostar but of course journeys will be very different. A trip to the Costa del Sol will take a long time and be slow.

So, what about prices in the High Street, we shall use the shops that are there (and there may not be many) far far less than we did before. And I suspect that cash is on the way out. Cards will rule everywhere and we shall all use the internet for buying.

One of my great delights was, on an evening, to enjoy a dinner at Giovanni's in Barnstaple and then to mingle with a good crowd, maybe three or four hundred people for a concert in the Queens Theatre. Now, too much has changed and I know that that will not happen again. If it does it will not be for at least another five or maybe ten years. The theatre is firmly closed; there is no technical staff; no readily available performers; no management; no box office staff and I guess that the stalls are shrouded with dust sheets.

THE NEW NORM that rises out of the Pandemic – has pressed the fast-forward button on history. Suddenly, changes that would in pre-Covid-19 times have generated years of debate, dissent, hesitation, opposition and delay; now such changes are turning out to be possible overnight. Just look around you.

Apart from millions likely to work from home consider the way governments are already deploying or considering more and more surveillance technology of such intrusiveness that it would have caused outrage and furious protests even a couple of months ago.

And there are signs of dramatic changes everywhere – even in GP surgeries. “We’re basically witnessing ten years of change in one week,” one GP told the paper. “It used to be that 95% of patient contact was face-to-face: you go to see your doctor, as it has been for decades or indeed centuries”. But that has changed completely.” Before the virus, telephone or video appointments made up only 1% of annual appointments with our doctors and other practice staff. But, said one doctor the new Norm will see surgeries all over the country switching to remote consultations when the doctor assesses and advises and then the chemist becomes the main calling point.

That seems fine but I fear that many of us elderly people will be on the wrong side – we who are probably most in need will get the worst service – no one’s fault, it is just progress! As has always been the case. While it’s true that not being on a high speed online suddenly puts many of us at a real disadvantage, community volunteers up and down the country are realizing that there is still a serious divide: and on the wrong side of it are many elderly people – who are the most at risk from the virus.

We are heading into a cautious, rather than a brave, new world – with 1984 overtones. I wonder what Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*) would have made of that.

Paul Ellis

VENUS

(sometimes called the Morning or Evening Star)

If you do, as I did, at 3.30 in the morning, look to the south (not too high in the sky) you will see the brightest ‘star’ of the moment – that is Venus. Find a night when there are no clouds and it shines bright in all its glory.

It will be at its very brightest in early July and on a clear night you cannot (honestly) miss it.

In our tiny solar system, just nine planets of the billions that are part of our galaxy (the Milky Way), Venus stands proud as the second planet from the sun – remember it goes Mercury, Venus, Earth, Jupiter, Saturn etc etc – but because they are all different sizes and move at different speeds and each have further to travel to move round the sun, it is very rare that the planets are in line. That I suppose is the beauty of our solar system, when they are all travelling round the sun it is a real challenge to find each one!

Now, a few facts about Venus. It spins from left to right while we (and all the other planets) pivot right to left. It is almost the same size as Earth but sadly we cannot ever really see the surface as it is shrouded in a very very thick layer of cloud comprising largely of sulphuric acid.

That cloud hides - as we have learned from four Russian satellites which have explored Venus before overheating and burning up – a surface with an average temperature of 480C. It is quite flat except for two huge mountains that are more than twice the height of Everest). The planet turns very slowly and in fact takes 243 Earth days for one full rotation: ours is 24 hours)

There can be no life (as we know it); the sky is a pale yellow and it is almost 36 million miles away. So take a glance – the chances of you, or anyone else, visiting Venus is remote but it is worth enjoying.

Next month Mercury and the annual Perseids Meteor shower.

Paul

News from St Paul's Landkey



Open for Private Prayer

Once again, I pass on my greetings to all who are reading this, our third email version of the Mission Community magazine. I hope you are keeping well and are managing to adapt to a life which seems now to change almost from day to day as the lockdown eases.

As the deadline for this magazine approaches, we have just taken the decision to open the church twice per week for private prayer. Anyone is now welcome to visit the church on Wednesdays between 2pm and 4pm as well as on Sundays between 10am and noon. Please be aware, though, that social distancing and hygiene rules will apply.

For this month's article, I have returned to my Making Sense of the Bible series to continue the examination of the Gospel of Thomas – and other lesser-known Gospels.

Keeping in touch

We would like to make readers aware that, although we are still not able to hold services, we will continue to use the internet and telephone to keep in touch with congregation members. News is being regularly posted on the church website (www.landkeyparishchurch.org) and includes links to online services. Revd Shaun is holding a service of Morning Prayer each weekday at 10am which he posts on Facebook. He also live-streams a Sunday service in the same way. A link to his Facebook page is available on the website. Shaun has also been sending out a weekly letter to congregation members and if anyone has not

been receiving this but would like to, please let me know on cerwaldron@gmail.com and I will include them in the mailing list. Similarly, if you are aware of someone who would appreciate a telephone call, let me or any church officer know using any of the telephone numbers given at the beginning of this magazine.

The Christian Calendar – Ordinary Time

On Trinity Sunday (7th June), the week after Pentecost, we celebrated the three key aspects of our Christian faith, being God as the Father, God as the Son (Jesus) and as The Holy Spirit. This date also marked the start of what we refer to in the church as "Ordinary Time". With Easter having officially ended with the marking of Pentecost, there are no major festivals in the Christian calendar until All Saints' Day at the beginning of November. Sundays until then are denoted according to the number of weeks since Trinity Sunday.

The Bible readings for each Sunday are published on the website.

Making Sense of the Bible: The Gospel of Thomas

Readers may recall that last month's article ended with the Dutch religious historian, Professor Gilles Quispel, realising with astonishment that ancient texts found in the Egyptian desert included the Gospel of Thomas. What did this Gospel say, though, and why doesn't it form part of the Bible?

Firstly, it might be worth considering whether the document is genuine and what it was that inspired Professor Quispel to embark on its trail. It seems that rumours of the existence of a Gospel of Thomas had begun circulating after the discovery in the 1890s of a fragment of a document on which the Greek wording appeared to be the opening words of the Gospel of Thomas. Professor Quispel was not entirely working in the dark, then, when he heard that an Egyptian peasant farmer had made an unusual find and would have realised that this was likely to be genuine material. The Thomas in question was the disciple of Jesus who we know familiarly as "Doubting Thomas."

The Gospel itself is a collection of 114 sayings, apparently attributed to Jesus. Unlike the four Gospels of the Bible, they appear one after another, rather like a list, and are not placed in any context. Sayings in the Biblical Gospels, by contrast, are often accompanied by an explanation by Jesus. For example, the Gospel of Thomas includes the Parable of the Sower and it is quoted almost as

Matthew 13:1-9 relates it. However, in Matthew 13:18-23, Jesus goes on to explain the meaning behind the parable to his disciples.

As with the Parable of the Sower, many of the other sayings in the Gospel of Thomas would be familiar to anyone who has some knowledge of the Biblical Gospels. Saying 20 refers to the mustard seed growing into a tree (cf. Matthew 13: 31-32) while Saying 86 mentions Jesus' words, "Foxes have holes.." (cf. Matthew 8:20).

Jesus' words in Matthew 22:15-22 in which he answers the Pharisees' question about paying taxes to the Roman rulers appear in the Gospel of Thomas as, "Caesar's men demand taxes from us." He said to them, "Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, give God what belongs to God, and give me what is mine." Matthew (nor Mark and Luke) makes no mention of "Give me what is mine," though.

The text is not especially long, as I found when I downloaded a copy for the purpose of this research, filling just a little over 11 pages of the pdf file. It is, therefore, relatively easy to read through all 114 sayings. As I did so, I was able to identify those which appear in the Biblical Gospels, but it was apparent that there are others which do not, and which seem to give an alternative interpretation of Jesus' teachings.

In Saying 13, for example, Jesus invites his disciples to say what he is like: "Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like." Thomas replies, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying who you are like," to which Jesus responds, "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have been intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out." This theme seems to reappear in Saying 108 with Jesus apparently uttering, "He who will drink from my mouth will become like me, I myself shall become he and the things that are hidden will be revealed in him."

A further quote, from Saying 70, perhaps gives a further clue as to the interpretation of Christianity that the writer has in mind: "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

There is some debate about when this Gospel was written but there is little disagreement that the manuscripts themselves date from around c.A.D. 350-400. This is known from the datable papyrus used to thicken the leather binders and

from the fact that they were written in Coptic script, a language that flourished from the second century AD until the 13th century. There is uncertainty about when the original text, in Greek, was written, though. Professor Quispel suggested that the Gospel was written around AD140, a little after the four Biblical Gospels which are believed to have been written between AD60 and AD110. Other scholars disagree, suggesting that it was written at the same time as the other Gospels. It was unlikely, though, to have been written after around AD180 as Bishop Irenaeus began to take a firm line on Biblical writings from that time. More on that at a later date.

Why am I taking time to establish the date when this Gospel was written? For two reasons. Firstly, if it was written around AD140, as Professor Quispel estimates, then clearly Thomas himself could not have been the author as this would have been over a century after the death of Jesus. It is just possible that he could have written this text if the earlier dates are correct, but it is more likely that someone else wrote this Gospel and attributed it to Thomas.

The second reason is that, during the first and part of the second centuries, a belief system called Gnosticism flourished among or on the margins of Christianity. Gnosticism, from the Greek, “having knowledge,” holds that the path to salvation is attained through gaining a knowledge of one’s spiritual self. According to this belief, Jesus is a guide who opens access to spiritual understanding. When the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master as the two have become equal. In this, there are echoes of eastern faiths such as Buddhism. By tradition, Thomas went to the East and there are Christian churches in southern India to this day who claim descent from him.

The Biblical account of Thomas is radically different, though. John 20:24-28 relates that Thomas, who said that he would not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead unless he saw his wounds says, “My Lord and My God,” when he recognises Jesus. This is a quite different account from that in the Gospel of Thomas which also makes no mention of Jesus’ central message of salvation through repentance for sin and belief in and love for God.

All of this is becoming a little heavy, so maybe now is an opportune moment to pay another visit to our friend, Muhammad ‘Alí al-Sammán (to give him his full name), the Egyptian peasant farmer who discovered the manuscripts. In the 1970s, some thirty years or so after the fateful day on which he and his brother

came across the mysterious earthenware jar, he gave an interview in which he explained what happened. At a more mature age now and, presumably, not preoccupied with family blood feuds, he broke a silence on this matter which he had held until then. The gist of his story was related at the start of last month's article but it is significant to add here that, despite his admission that he and his family had destroyed some of the manuscripts, what remained was truly astonishing: fifty-two texts from the early Christian era.

It wasn't just the Gospel of Thomas that was discovered at Naj Hammadi. There was also a collection of previously unknown Gospels including the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Truth and the Gospel of the Egyptians. Another group of texts consisted of writings attributed to Jesus' followers, such as the Secret Book of James and the Apocalypse of Paul. Taken together with the Gospel of Mary Magdalene which was discovered along with the fragment of the Gospel of Thomas in the 1890s, these "Gnostic" Gospels comprise a substantial body of work. They have even formed the basis of literary work as readers of Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code" may be aware.

So, why were they not included in the Bible? Earlier, it was explained that these writings seem to espouse a Gnostic view that salvation is achieved through knowledge of one's own spiritual self which is at odds with Jesus' message of salvation through repentance for sin. Other sayings go as far as to criticise common Christian beliefs, such as the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection, as naive misunderstandings. These would appear to be pretty significant grounds for disqualification from being considered part of "mainstream" Christian belief. But who decided that they shouldn't be included? That will have to wait for another time!

References: The Gnostic Gospels by Elaine Pagels; Wikipedia and others for cross-referencing

St Paul's website: www.landkeyparishchurch.org

Charles Waldron

CHINA

It seems that a huge number of things we buy these days are marked, 'made in China'. Should we be seriously questioning our dependence on Chinese products, just because they are often cheaper?

Both the U.S. and Australia are moving in that direction and so should we. I was amazed when the government approved Huawei for the 5G project, although it seems that they are now having a re-think, maybe because they have realised the integral links between the company and the Chinese Communist Government. (CCG).

We cannot afford to be gullible to the aims of the CCG for world domination and control.

Covid-19 came from China (so did the killer flu epidemic of 1917), and their handling of its control has been appalling. Information withheld and delayed, lab technicians silenced or disappeared, failure to contain it within China, the list goes on.

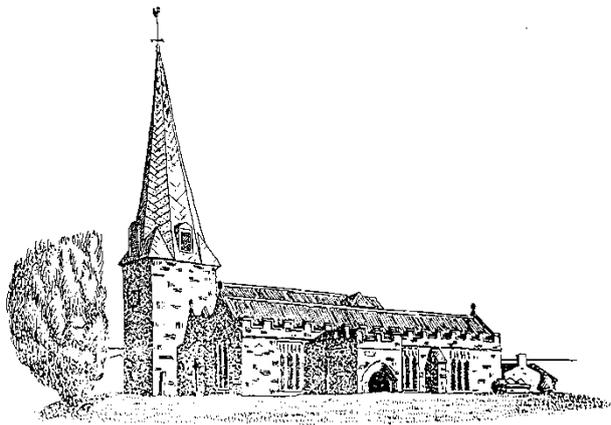
Australia pressed the CCG to allow an independent scientific investigation into Covid's origins, which would involve the Wuhan lab and its data. Instead of a responsible agreement, the CCG pathetically responded with threats to stop Australian imports. This is typical of the bullying we have come to expect from the CCG over matters such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the incarceration of Moslems for 're-education'.

This virus is still something of a mystery, but a growing number of responsible labs throughout the world are apparently reaching the consensus that rather than originating in animals, it was laboratory manufactured.

We are not likely to get the truth from the CCG but in the bigger picture, our government needs to safeguard the health, economy and integrity of the British people by distancing ourselves from China.

Rev John Ewington

News from St James Swimbridge



A Fresh Cunning Plan Breaks Cover From Exeter

Reassuring or not, back in mid-May the House of Bishops issued a fresh nine page blueprint about the phased easing out of lock-down, all be it in a very skeletal form, since they were still very much in the dark, as indeed is everybody else from the PM downwards, in a sort of guessing game of who is actually holding the reins or passing the parcel in case it all goes wrong and the inevitable accusations start flying between the medical advisors and business advisors that haven't left already for Zurich on a one way ticket. Oh, not forgetting a certain political advisor on extended eyesight forays. (Should have had a note from a responsible adult or probation officer)

Yes it is clear that political clarity is a concept like political truth, a work of fiction variously defined as spin, propaganda and outrageous lies. My theory is that newly fledged MP's are issued with a booklet before their maiden speech, by their whips explaining the skill expected of them in the subterfuge of deflecting simplistic questions into shaggy-dog stories that put the listener into a sort of trance that erases the original question, or by sycophantic compliments to members of the NHS for example, or resorting to broadsides of political clichés to confuse and confound the general public/non Eton- riff-raff .

I used to be a cynic, but now I'm saved, or was it the bottle I saved?

Where was I, as my feet once again make contact with terra firma. Yes this blueprint in its present form is unworkable on many levels:-

For example, no singing, deep cleaning the church after each service, service sheets taken home with you for destruction to support the paper industry? No Vicars over seventy especially with underlying health problems.

As for social distancing, we in Swimbridge have at last struck a positive note with the directive about social distancing, as over the years there has been an established habit of occupying or colonizing pews as far distant from others as possible no matter how few the congregation that day.

If it hadn't been for that blasted virus, I had hoped to launch a lucrative venture hiring out ear trumpets and opera glasses, thus ensuring that none of our flock became lost souls on my watch. "Excuse me, come in number thirteen, snoring is verboten!"

Father Shaun O'Rourke to his credit, came up with a wafer dispenser to avoid unnecessary human contact. Alas the main spring malfunctioned and he shot three recipients before we could stop him. His case is due to be heard in September.

Good News section. The weekly Post office is gradually gaining more local support and is a worthwhile contribution our church offers to our village. A fact brought home by the pandemic, saving people from travelling further afield to transfer funds, withdraw cash and pay bills as well as the full range of other postal services and at a much reduced health risk.

To those who support this service, a big thank you, but please do encourage your friends to do likewise in the hope that we can save our village post office well beyond the pandemic.

Shaun is getting a good response to his daily morning service in addition to his Sunday service, all commencing at 10am on Facebook.

Finally I should like to mention that behind the scenes there are a gallant few who never stop working to renovate, repair and improve our church during this extended lockdown, which is affecting every facet of our lives, and are deserving of your support when required. At the moment much is being held up until businesses can again be contacted, so please be patient and continue to look after one another.

At present we are unable to collect your weekly collection envelopes so please continue to put them in a safe place for now. They are incredibly important since we have no other way of fundraising. Thank you.

Maciej Blüge (Churchwarden of Swimbridge)