

THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

A Member of the Anglican Communion

ELIE:

ST. MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS:

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PITTENWEEM:

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

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Sunday services: St Michael's 9.45am; St John's 11.30am

From our priest

Dear friends,

Already the weeks of summer have sped by, and I've had a chance to take stock and realise that our move to the East Neuk has actually come about. Thank you again for your many welcomes. As with any move, the panoply of new environments and experiences takes a while to 'shake down', so I have been wondering if there is one element that stands out when I think about arriving here.

Although I lived and worked in Leith for many years, immediately across the Forth, the coastal context here is qualitatively different. There's an immediacy to the presence of the sea that lends a definite perspective to each day. As people have always done, I am compelled to wonder about the nature of this. It is as though every thought has a place in a wider context, and is therefore imbued with a truer sense of proportion in the great scheme of things. I assume it's part of our evolutionary journey to associate the sea with the wideness of the world beyond us. John F Kennedy said: "It is an interesting biological fact that all of us have, in our veins, the exact same percentage of salt in our blood that exists in the ocean, and, therefore, we have salt in our blood, in our sweat, in our tears. We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch it we are going back from whence we came." I don't know if his physiological facts are accurate but there can be no doubting the power that the sea has over us.

The church is often described as a boat - an ark that is a temporary home to a wild assortment of creatures. It is tossed around with all the other vessels, at the mercy of the weather. None of us, I suspect, would ever have anticipated the power and length of the storm that has confined us to the harbour so completely this year. As I write, the storm clouds of the pandemic are gathering again and we are having to be reconciled to the reality that we will be battening down the hatches for a long time yet. We are fortunate that we have been able to resume weekly worship at St John's and (all being well) at St Michael's in the weeks ahead. The price we pay for this dispensation is to be thoroughly and demonstratively safety-conscious in our practice as a worshipping community. 'Distancing' from each other is contrary to all that we know and love about being the community of Christ, so our current calling is bear the burden of caring for one another with patience and generosity within the limitations that face us.

The eminently quotable Rainer Maria Rilke said, "When anxious, uneasy and bad thoughts come, I go to the sea, and the sea drowns them out with its great wide sounds, cleanses me with its noise, and imposes a rhythm upon everything in me that is bewildered and confused." This makes me think of the gift of our whole faith tradition. As we tentatively set sail again, we know that the rhythm of the liturgy, the reading of the scriptures, the saying of the prayers and of breaking bread together will heal, calm and challenge us in these days. There is much to be concerned about as winter approaches, when the health service and the economy will be under such pressure.

This season of *Creation Time*, when we try to celebrate and pray for the care of the Earth, reminds us that we cannot forget the rawness of the Earth. In the words of the Iona Community prayer book, at the approach to the Lord's table: *We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.*

Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment. We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground and the rootless, the earth and its weary people cry out for justice.

I must go down to the seas again.

Steve

Open doors at East Neuk Episcopal churches

Both St John's and St Michael's are now holding regular services once again. St John's led the way and here Chris Smout describes what it was like that first day, with photos by Anne-Marie Smout.

On August 30th we were able to gather again in St John's for Eucharist, led by our new priest-in-charge, Revd Stephen Butler. It was wonderful to welcome him, and to be back home in our church. It was necessarily a strange experience under Covid19 regulations - Janis as sides person showed us to our seats, each person or couple two metres apart, and we all wore masks. There was no hymn singing or organ: everything had to be recorded music, and there were hand sanitizers to use as we went in, before we took communion, and as we left. But the service followed the liturgy according to custom, including an excellent sermon from Steve. Communion was in one kind: we took the token as if it was both bread and wine.

Unfortunately it was not practicable to open St Michael's on the same Sunday, but we welcomed several of our sister congregation to the service. Steve had managed for most of it to be on line, so those in both churches who could not attend in person were able to receive it on their screens at home. We live in strange times, but it was a moving spiritual experience to be back.



Social distancing in operation; nevertheless we were 17 present



The Revd Stephen Butler and his wife Anne after the service chatting to Tony Lodge and Pamela Fraser

TREE OF LIFE

*Happy are those who find wisdom -
she is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her
(Proverbs 3 v13,18)*

Possibly like many people I have walked daily from my home and found several new pathways, some through the small copses and woods. For six months I have noticed many changes in nature on these walks and perhaps Covid isolation has enhanced the discoveries because I had decided each walk helps me to reflect the presence of God, although like my seated praying I can get much distracted! The trees that were bare are now full of leaf but the leaves are beginning dry out and fall; since Spring gales a number of trees have fallen – splayed across the ground, whole root systems exposed and bracken now growing in the space left. Fungi small specks and large plates extrude from the trunks – many green with lichen. I have learnt the names of white beam and wych elm and one tree, probably long fallen, reminiscent of a rhino in the African veld.



Rhino tree

I talk to the trees and I know others do – and we are told they ‘talk’ to each other. Thomas Hardy wrote - “To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature”.¹ A recent programme on BBC spoke of the Susurrations of Trees – “quivering poplars, aspens that sound like rain – whispering elms –” and they asked the question how do we react to them? It was said that there is an underground social network of communication between trees – and even Thomas Hardy wrote – “the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock.”² Another programme, which caught my attention, was about Hiroshima and despite the irradiation and heat emitted by the explosion of the Atom Bomb, burning all living things within about 3 Km of the centre, plants and trees underground were not directly damaged. Tomoko Watanabe, co-founder of Green Legacy Hiroshima Project described the horror, though a small child - “at the time there was no colour, only black, white or grey”. Trees looked like charcoal – but buds emerged – “green buds which made people think they would survive”. Watanabe said “trees have a magical power to tell each person what they need to hear, they speak to each human being as well as the whole of humankind across the world - ”.³ Her Project plants seedlings of these surviving trees that are sent to places under the nuclear umbrella.

Trees appear in many places in the Bible, the notable tree of life in the Garden of Eden was ‘in the

¹ Hardy, Thomas. Under the Greenwood Tree

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4dD47MJg8JyKzM21648IDNL/how-trees-are-talking-to-you-and-how-to-listen-to-them>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-52459140>

beginning'; the oaks of Mamre when the Lord appeared to Abraham (Gen18.1); the Burning Bush when Moses heard the voice of God (Ex3.2); Job in his desperate poem of the human condition - 'for there is hope for a tree if it is cut down, that it will sprout again' (Job 14:7) – trees prophesy! We read of the tamarisk, fig, palm, wild olive, sycamore and the cedars of Lebanon. The vision of Heaven with the river of water of life – flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb – on either side of the river is the tree of life – with its twelve kinds of fruit – and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev 11:1-2)

Acts reminds us of the notorious tree which has become the symbol for all Christians - - 'when they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb'. (Acts 13:29). The tree, the Cross, replaced the fish symbol of the early Church and in the 4th C Helena the mother of the Emperor Constantine made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and whilst overseeing excavations near the hill of Calvary it was said she found the original Cross of Christ. During the Medieval period people clung to the idea of it being real with many pieces of wood being kept as the 'true relic' and in art the Cross came to greater prominence and the Holy Cross being commemorated on 14th September. Thus from the allegorical tree in the Garden of Eden – to the Tree outside the City wall of Jerusalem we see, through the Bible, how much they have played their part – willingly or not.



During the Covid pandemic crisis much is being said and written about how Nature is helping many people as though this were new, but with the speed of life people often kept they now had time to walk in woods and in the Spring and early Summer would hear the birds in full chorus especially in the morning or the light evenings, with the blackbird and lark both distinctive in their songs. On 4th October we remember a much loved Saint Francis of Assisi. His *Canticle of the Sun* – a great song of praise to the Most High, all powerful, good Lord – for 'our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us and who produces various fruits, coloured flowers and herbs'. The Celtic Saints knew a lot about this and an Irish hermit wrote 'I have a hut in a wood: only my Lord knows it; an ash tree closes it on one side, and a hazel like a great tree by a rath on the other'.⁴

Today there are many books about God and Ecology. Denis Edwards in *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* writes of Jesus as the Wisdom of God the eternal Word made flesh 'the crucified and risen one who is the beginning of the transformation of

⁴ Allchin A.M. & de Waal, Esther. Threshold of Light. Darton Longman and Todd 1986 p12

the whole creation' – and that we, as disciples, must follow the way of wisdom which involves loving respect of all of God's creatures and he includes trees in this and states 'to live in wisdom, in the full



Christian sense, means seeing the whole of creation as coming forth from the dynamic abundance of the Trinity'.⁵

Thus we thank God for the beauty we behold – whether it is tiny flower or tall majestic tree – whether it is a sparrow or human being – all are in the heart of God and we are all held as infinitely precious. And recall – 'happy are those who find Wisdom – she is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her'.

Denise Herbert

An Anglian Cross



In late August we took our camper away to the Borders, and settled down for two nights at Newcastleton in Liddesdale. A few miles to the south, in Cumbria, we visited Bewcastle, where the church, miles from anywhere, stands in the remains of a Roman camp, with a large medieval castle crumbling beyond and the Roman wall a little to the south. A modern signpost on the sheep-grazed green outside helpfully indicates how many miles it is to Rome.

In the crowded church yard there stands a tall but slender pillar, just under fifteen feet high, the remains of an Anglian cross that has lost its top. Nikolaus Pevsner described this, and the contemporary Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire, as 'in art the greatest achievement of their date in the whole of Europe.' Of course, he was the historian of the English built environment, or he might have reflected also on the Lindesfarne gospels with which the crosses are approximately contemporary. All three of these wonders reflect the power and cultural achievements of the Northumbrian kingdom and church, and especially of the abbeys at Lindesfarne, Jarrow and Monkwearmouth. Its exact date is disputed, but it was probably carved in the early eighth century.

⁵ Edwards, Denis. Ecology at the Heart of Faith. Orbis Books 2011. pp.109-110

The carvings are on panels on all four sides, three of them not as seriously weathered as you might expect. The west front as you approach is unfortunately the most eroded. It has four panels, one showing St John the Baptist and one St John the Evangelist: between them stands Christ in glory, welcomed by mysterious beasts from Revelations. The remaining panel has runic inscriptions that have defied definitive interpretation, but appear to name a queen and to ask for prayers for her soul.



The other sides of the cross are of scroll work and block interlace, like the Lindesfarne gospels, and most strikingly the south face has a very elegant vine interlace with birds, a design of Syrian or Coptic origin. Even St John on the west face has his eagle on his arm, and it is supposed this might also have been influenced by Syrian pictures of falconry. The creators of this monument were aware of the entire Mediterranean world, and they were the beneficiaries of the travels of Benedict Biscop, founder of Monkwearmouth in 674 and of Jarrow in 681, who went three times to Rome and returned with books and pictures for his new churches. But they were absolute masters of their craft themselves, and it is humbling to see something so fine from so long ago.

Anyone from Scotland must also ask themselves how all this relates to our own Pictish stones like the cross at Nigg, or to the Celtic crosses of Islay and Iona which are in the Irish tradition. Northumbrian, Pictish and Irish art were all intertwined into what scholars now call Insular Art –the craftsmen learned from one another just as they learned from the Mediterranean. The Lindesfarne Gospels are paralleled by the Book of Kells, and we now know from excavations at Portmahomack in Easter Ross that the Picts also had facilities for making illuminated manuscripts, though not a trace has survived.

So a visit to Bewcastle is a trip to a very lonely and remote place. But it is also a visit to a very ancient joined-up world. In a world of clamouring self-importance we could do well to cherish that perspective ourselves.

Chris Smout

An early autumnal walk - Richard Ely

What lovely weather the last few days have been – warm and when the mist burns off – nice and clear. The autumn is closer than it appears at first look. The honking geese flying over in the characteristic V shapes were interrupted by the 'peep, peep, peep' of the sandpipers. A new sight for me: redshanks, sandpipers and turnstones sharing a rock with lapwings, narrowly avoiding being

washed away in the swell. The black-headed gulls are already in winter plumage and yet only one male Eider - where are they?

Nature's bounty is on show from shiny red haws and hips to blackberries and crab apples. There are few flowers still fully in season although all the more exciting when they are found. The



spectacular yellow field Sowthistles growing in the shingle with the reddish brown seaweed as back-drop know how to make the most of their appearance. Tansy is a little disappointing in my eyes with the flowers so tight they look as though a dandelion got shrunk in the wash. Common Michaelmas Daisies are concentrated almost right in to the car park in St Monans. Sea Milkwort is one of the few plants which looks really fresh as it pushes up between the small stones just above high water mark. Not sure if it is but there appears to be quite a lot of new wild carrot in bloom.

Seed heads are still impressive with a clump of Greater Willowherb giving an eerie feeling although the seed heads with the cerulean sky behind them look wintry.



To reassure, the "sparklers", although few and far between, are still to be found (plantains). Giant Bindweed is hanging on, literally, Red Campion has also been a star with a non-stop display since early spring.



To the relief of all romantics, the Gorse is flowering. The deer I have been watching have been moved on by the sheep who were previously clearing the cauliflower field. Shortening day length means that I would be a lot less likely to see them but the flip side of the coin: I have seen a few barn owls skimming the hedges as I have passed by early in the morning. My little book tells me that White Dead Nettle will carry on blooming until December so the Gorse will have a compatriot.

From the editor.

Warm thanks from Janet once more to this month's contributors for informing, entertaining and encouraging us all by your writing; and thereby helping keep this show on the road!

Please email contributions for the November issue to Janis Irvine davidirvine190@btinternet.com by Thursday 15 October.