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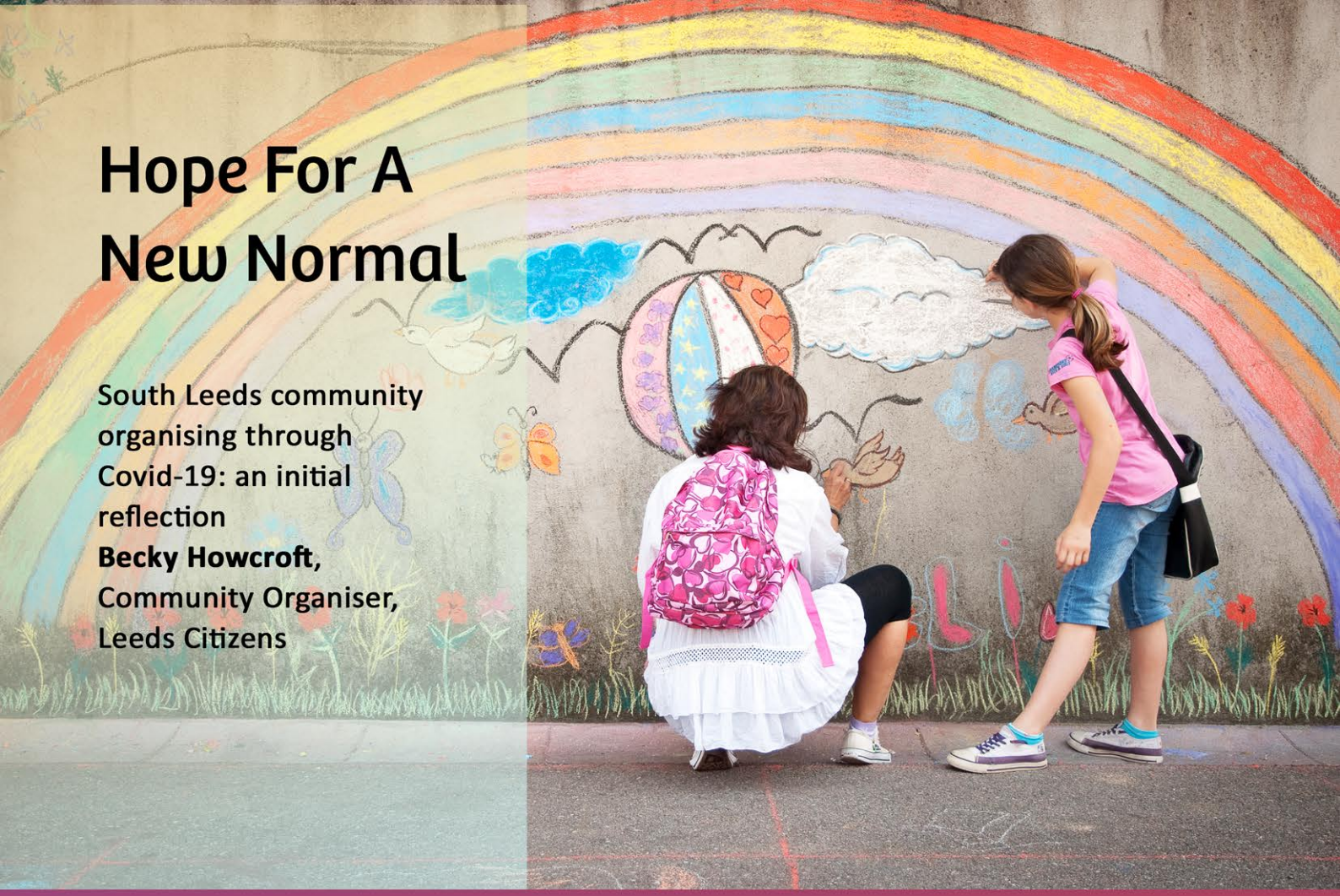
"Many leaders have begun to talk of the good things emerging, of a "new normal" which is more compassionate, co-operative and kind – where people are more willing to ask for help and others anxious to give it... Overall...fear is no longer dominant amongst community leaders. Instead, love is."

Becky Howcroft, asks whether there are signs of hope in the "new normal" brought about by COVID-19

Faith and Activism

Leo Joslin considers the place of religious protest in the age of BLACKLIVESMATTER.

Hope For A New Normal



South Leeds community organising through Covid-19: an initial reflection

Becky Howcroft,
Community Organiser,
Leeds Citizens

Leeds Citizens and Leeds Church Institute work together to employ Becky. This is our third year of partnership to build leadership in faith communities and support thinking around economic, spiritual, religious and social life in Leeds. In this article, Becky witnesses to some of the good things emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst also acknowledging the hard work needed to make it impossible to go back to old norms of competition and detachment from the concerns of our neighbours.

When the lockdown began, many of us entered into a "new normal." Community organising and the way civil society operates in South Leeds has been no exception. The once unthinkable idea of having one-to-one relational conversations over the phone or via the Internet, has now become an unavoidable reality. Moreover, given the fact that organising has continued successfully in South Leeds, this would suggest that the method around relational conversations is perhaps more adaptable than has been acknowledged by the community organising profession.

Following the lockdown, I conducted a rapid phone-based listening exercise with our local members in South Leeds, and also spoke to other local organisations. Similar themes emerged: people were in crisis mode supporting the people in the communities around them. Many were very reactive, doing the best they could to support their people, but struggling themselves to adapt to the Lockdown conditions in how they worked and communicated.

They feared for their communities. One manager, for example, spoke of her fear for her organisation's volunteers' mental health now they were confined to their homes, and shared concerns around safety for those they knew were in abusive relationships. Another community centre manager spoke of her fears for the elderly, after encountering an 80 year old woman crying in a supermarket because she couldn't buy basic food; a vicar spoke of his concerns about the impact of the lockdown on spiritual rhythms if his church didn't have the ability to physically gather together; a charity director shared his worries about vulnerable families being unable to cope if they had to stay at home with their children for long periods of time; and a vicar expressed his fears that people in his congregation may lose their jobs. Fear was predominant and the lockdown was overwhelmingly perceived through a negative lens.

However, with time, civil society's view on the situation has evolved and become more complex. Many leaders have begun to talk of the good things emerging, of a "new normal" which is more compassionate, co-operative and kind – where people are more willing to ask for help and others anxious to give it.

A vicar also expressed his hope that this lockdown was an opportunity to build new relationships with the local community given an unprecedented openness to faith with a number of people who he would never have expected to show an interest in faith attending online church services. The fears around increases in domestic abuse and the mental health and economic struggles of the community are still there, however, and are proving to be validated by the experiences of local people.

Overall, though, fear is no longer dominant amongst community leaders. Instead, love is.

This reminded me of a reflection on fear from the American pastor Nadia Bolz Weber. Looking at Matthew chapter 23, verse 37 where Jesus compares himself to a mother hen, and the people of Jerusalem as his chicks, Bolz Weber talks of the opposite of fear not being an absence of danger, but love. When convening COVID-19 response meetings of community centres, charities working with the elderly, schools, churches and a wide range of other civil society actors, I have seen this theological idea playing out in real life. The danger of COVID-19 is real and the fears of the social and economic impacts are still there, but there is a shared experience of seeing the mother hen's wings, of God incarnate, through the actions of love, care and service of civil society.

There has been widespread recognition of the spirit of collaboration and neighbourliness now present across communities, and a real hope that this will be sustained. There has been an embracing of working together for the common good in a way that we as organisers have not seen before. In the parable of the wineskins Jesus draws a stark contrast between the old and new eras, suggesting that trying to confine his followers to the old religious era would result in disaster. Jesus brought something new, an explosive exuberance that couldn't be confined to what had gone before. There is now the question of whether a parallel can be drawn to the spirit of collaboration and desire for the common good that appears to have been born in South Leeds – and across the country. It is too early to say whether the COVID-19 crisis and the Lockdown will create a "new wineskin" of lasting collaborative norms and concern for the common good, and make it impossible to go back to the old norms of competition and detachment from the concerns of our neighbours.

However, if there is to be even a hope of a new wineskin – it will need to be worked for and fought for; relationships need to be built and action taken to seek those structural changes that are for the common good of the city.

Ecumenical mission and city-wide engagement are central to Leeds Church Institute's work and hopes for the future; we look to celebrate and affirm such mission and engagement, as well as support and encourage them to develop. At the end of last year, Paul Lancaster on behalf of LCI, conducted interviews with leaders active in ecumenical mission in Sheffield to see what Leeds could learn and share. The plan was to look at York next, but the Covid 19 crisis has changed a lot of plans. Instead, we have started a series of conversations with church leaders in Leeds about responses to the crisis. We will be reporting back about the new approaches implemented and how change now can help build for a more positive future.

Faith and Activism:
Religious Protest in the age of BLACKLIVESMATTER

Leo Joslin, postgraduate student and member of staff at Leeds Church Institute, reflects on the role and purpose of faith in activism and protest today.

A protest movement in the 21st century, by its nature, must be areligious. Leeds is one of the most diverse cities in the UK, and like its post-modern urban counterparts across Western Europe and North America, any social movement has to appeal to an array of different nationalities, religions, races and ages. By rooting activism in any one particular faith, it risks alienating others in society from partaking.

No longer can a protest movement centre solely on a faith leader like Martin Luther King Jr. or Óscar Romero, or it risks becoming limited to practitioners of that faith alone.

Other faiths feel like it is not their cause; that the movement is not for them.

If that is the case, then what role does faith play in today's activism? Where does belief place itself in a secular protest? An immediate point, albeit one that may appear as slightly pessimistic, is that the positive voice of faith is needed to correct that of the negative. Often, leaders and prominent figures of conservative systems will appeal to religion as a means of legitimatising their position of supremacy. Take Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro as an example: the right-wing leader's evangelical Christian identity (he was born a Catholic) is a key part of his public image. This has proven key to his rise and popularity amongst Brazilian evangelicals, despite his social and economic reforms seeming to many to be in opposition to key tenets of Christianity. More recently, US president Donald Trump brandished a Bible in front of the fire-damaged St John's Episcopal Church in Washington, half an hour after

peaceful protestors were tear-gassed in front of it.

It is in ways like this that faith can be co-opted by leaders to try and quell protest, and why secular activism needs a religious element.

If religion remains silent, it simply offers up the table for counter-protest figures to monopolise the religious message. Instead of allowing the usurping of religious identity by those who wish to manipulate its message for gain, the faithful, both lay and clergy, need to be vocal in activism.

That is one way that faith is needed in activism, to negate its misuse. But it can be a more positive and constructive force as well. Last month, a tweet from the Bishop of Leeds, Nick Baines, was read by Sky News host Kay Burley to the government's Michael Gove. Gove's refusal to respond prompted both surprise and mockery across social media, and served as a damaging critique of the government's response to COVID-19. An example like this shows the positive force that religion can have in protest: in our society, like many others in Western Europe and North America, clergy are seen as a source of authority, both morally and politically. It is this position that allowed the Bishop to challenge the government. A more dramatic example would be Archbishop John Sentamu cutting his dog collar live on the BBC in protest over Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. Sentamu was given the platform to speak as an Archbishop, and he used it to provide a vivid act of protest and activism in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe.

But in light of current protests around the world, and including in Leeds, following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, maybe protest and activism needs to offer more than critique and calls for adjustment.

When a whole system is rife with oppression and division, maybe criticism, ultimately, does not do justice to the people in need of wholesale change.

In the US, people are offered a choice between Trump's 'shoot them in the heart' or Biden's 'just shoot them in the leg': both supress their citizens, one just tries to mask it as progress. There is no political route to true freedom from oppression within a society that offers no alternative. The UK, like the US, is a system built on the exploitation of others. It is perhaps more obvious in the US, given the militarisation of the police and a level of capitalism so extreme even the prison systems are privatised, but the UK is clearly similar. Our system is built on slavery and colonialism. Just because our country enslaved in other countries such as India and Kenya, rather than its home states, does not make our system any less reliant on exploitation. One just has to look at the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on the BAME community in the UK to see the very real life-and-death implications of this in 2020.

When a system is intrinsically based on some section of society being treated worse than others, and cannot survive without this, then there is a need for a new system. This new system has to be built with the perspectives of all involved.

Our current system was built from the perspective of the white person, and even if we might not recognise it all the time, this excludes and 'others' people by not representing them fully.

A system needs to be built that is influenced by the experiences of all in society equally. 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3.28, NRSV): one member in each of these pairs is one that has been historically oppressed. Paul lived in a system, like ours, that relied on the oppression of some to sustain itself. To truly end this, a new system is needed; one that represents everyone equally.

This is the role of faith in areligious activism and protest. It offers a path beyond the initial outburst of the oppressed and mistreated, showing a counter-society that recognises the need for equality and liberation. If a society is not built with the input of all, and representative of the diverse experience and worldviews of humanity, then it will be a system that is unbalanced. A new system is needed to replace the exploitative old, crafted from the point of view of all, and faith can help us in this.

In It Together

Hannah Stone, Poet in Virtual Residence at Leeds Church Institute, is writing a weekly reflective journal on the Covid 19 crisis. In this entry, Hannah reflects that we are no longer at a stage where Covid 19 is everything to us because other events and issues are impinging on our consciousness in lockdown.

Modern modes of communication include a lot of non-verbal signifiers, such as emoticons. With lockdown, a new one appeared, representing 'we are all in this together.' It looks like arms hugging a heart. Alongside this comforting message, there is also awareness that the pandemic we're living through affects different people in different ways; whilst we may aspire to the teaching of Galatians 3.28 (There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus), evidence shows that some members of our society (including the elderly, already unwell, poorer) are disproportionately vulnerable to the virus and its most serious effects. Members of BAME communities are also at risk.

We may be 'in it together,' but not suffering equally in the burden that it imposes.

Recently, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis shook us out of a focus on the pandemic, reigniting consciousness of a different manifestation of inequality affecting people of colour. All over the world, people congregated to raise awareness that Black Lives Matter. Besides this possibly paradigm-shifting, global public outcry at injustice and oppression, other recent much-publicised local infringements of lockdown protocol faded into insignificance.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of breaking lockdown in order to protest, there was a sense that people wanted to show unity with the oppressed.

I am proud that Leeds City Council supported the 8for8 event, inviting people at 8pm for 8 minutes to 'take the knee' or hold their hands in Namaste outside their house in a socially distanced manner (just as we corporately clapped for our carers), or if staying inside make any other gesture of peace and harmony. This gesture was perhaps no more powerful than a huggy emoticon, but it was a way of showing togetherness, and a desire to share and engender harmony between different people.

British-Syrian poet Amir Darwish's poetry collection *Don't Forget the Couscous* (Smokestack Books, 2015) is a poignant, tender, book about belonging to multiple cultures. The opening poem 'Sorry!' is a tongue-in-cheek 'apology from Muslims' for all the things their culture brought to western society:

Don't Forget the Couscous

Sorry for all the words we throw at you;
Amber, candy, chemistry, cotton, giraffe, hazard,
Jar, jasmine, jumper, lemon, lime, lilac ...

We are sorry for all the food we brought over:
From tuna to chicken tikka masala,
Hummus,
Falafel,
Apricot,
Doner kebab
Right up to the Shawarma roll.
And don't forget the couscous.

It is hard to know where to begin with addressing the global issues presented by the pandemic – financial, social, environmental. There is great uncertainty for us all. Because of lockdown, we're still tending to make more of our food at home than perhaps we did previously. Perhaps as we reach for a spice jar, or open the door to receive a delivery of pizza or curry, we might remember there is no east nor west in Christ; we are one human race. And we are all hungry for justice.

THE DEFINITION OF STRENGTH

Rachel Flint, a poet published in *And the Stones Fell Open* explains how she came to write a poem about her friend Gareth.

I have loved pro wrestling since I was a little girl, with its pageantry and colours masking a simple moral story in which the hero often won. It isn't just the glossy arena filling spectacles of the big American companies that draw me in; the little troops of local wrestlers who put on shows in sports clubs and working men's clubs have won me over too. It was at one of these shows that I met Gareth Thompson as his alter ego Gareth Angel.

After a particularly gruelling bout during which part of the ceiling fell in (!), Gareth went out of his way to talk to me. We bonded over a shared love of purple and Gareth explained how he incorporated his real life faith into his in-ring character. Over the next few years when I attended his shows not only did he remember me but he would envelop me in a warm hug.

Gareth has been open with me and many others about his early life which included parental alcoholism, homelessness and worst of all child sexual abuse. He is also open describing what a literal blessing Christians Against Poverty had been in his life. How they got him out of debt, introduced him to faith and gradually helped him to build a future by reconciling his past.

As part of this process Gareth prayed to forgive his abuser and this was answered by his abuser visiting the shop where he worked.

Now by this point Gareth had been training to be a wrestler for a couple of years. He could have easily hurt the man but instead Gareth rang his items through the till and as the man turned to go Gareth grabbed his hand and said, "I forgive you for what you did". That is the part of his story that has stayed with me and what inspired me to write the poem.

It took me a while to show Gareth the poem but he said it was beautiful. It does not go into exact details but focuses on the choice between instinct and restraint. He is happy for this poem to be published in CITYtheology.

The definition of strength

A prayer answered
In a call to serve
As the lord himself did
Fledgling faith asked the question
Can you be more human than he was?

There is strength at your disposal
Although the kind you choose
Will be between instinct and restraint
Finally he meets you face to face
You take a deep breath and with the words
'I forgive you'
Shake off your old life to become reborn

What is happening in a journey of forgiveness?

Dr Helen Reid responds to Gareth's story and Rachel's poem.

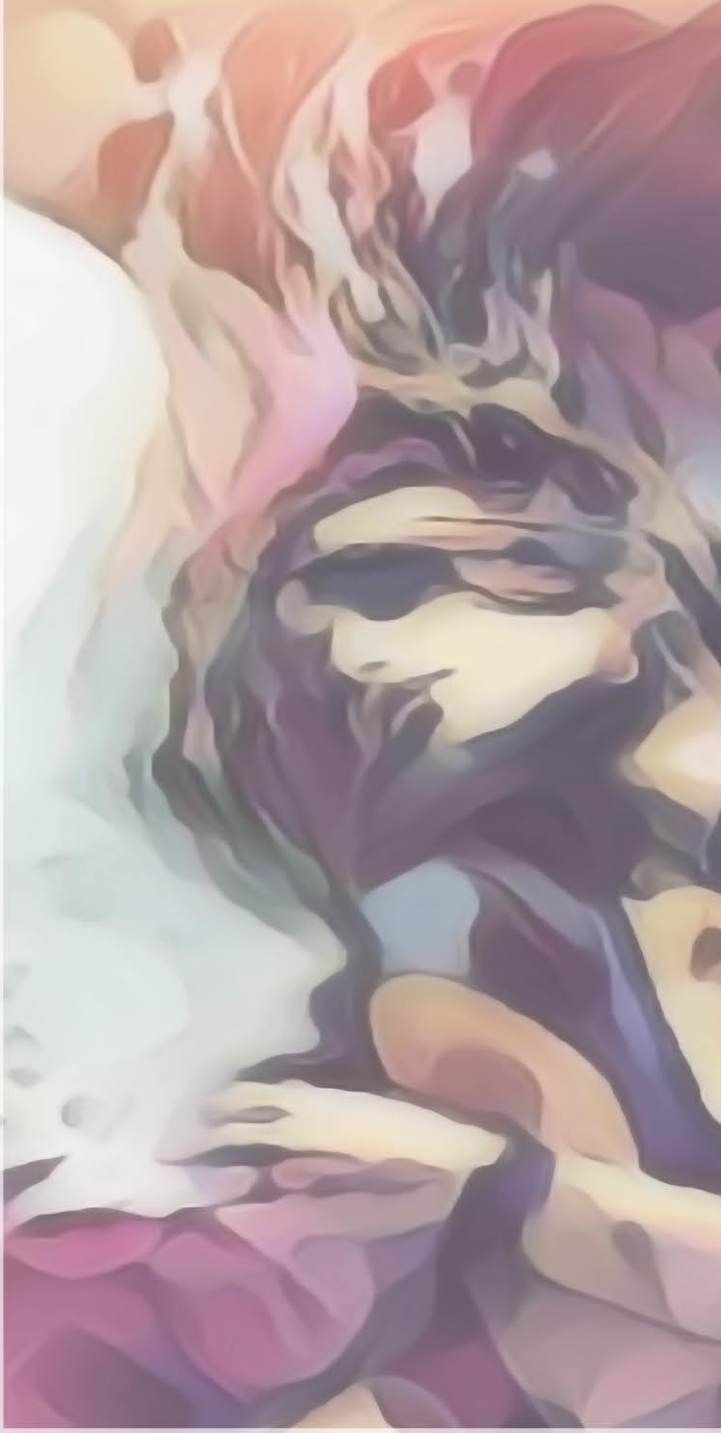
'Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive...'

CS Lewis said this as he acknowledged the problem of forgiveness after World War 2 and its atrocities. In practice, there is a world of difference between forgiving someone for being rude or late and forgiving deeply traumatic experiences of abuse. Yet, it all comes under the umbrella of forgiveness and forgiveness is seen as something Christians are called to do.

Stephen Cherry has written a whole book on the theology and experience of forgiveness following shattering experiences such as torture and bereavement through violence. Given the rather intimidating title, Healing Agony, it was on the bookshelf for quite a while before I read it. I was prompted to pick it up by a discussion at Leeds Church Institute on the church and sexual abuse. Some survivors of abuse have been taught that is it a Christian imperative that they forgive their abuser; and some have experienced this as alienating, humiliating, unjust and impossible. Hearing about these experiences posed the question whether we have to forgive others because we are forgiven, or even in order to be forgiven. Stephen Cherry addresses this is a chapter entitled 'A duty to forgive?' Spoiler alert – it isn't a duty.

Bishop Tom Wright teaches that we should move our focus from the ethics of forgiveness to the spirituality of forgiveness. For this, we need to be open to experiencing the receiving and giving forgiveness as part of the same process. In the same vein, Stephen Cherry writes

God's forgiving love draws us into a gracious, creative spiral of love and forgiveness. This spiral has transformative power and is a contrary dynamic to the downward spiral of vengeful violence in which each injustice is met with a matching or worse reprisal.



This spiral of love is not all sweetness and light, however, as anger, resentment, grudge and an ongoing pursuit of justice can be an intrinsic part of it. Within this spiral of love, an individual cannot but focus on the reality of having been wronged in the past; and the liberation that might be experienced through the spirituality of forgiving is not dependent on any response from the person who may be forgiven in the future.

Marian Partington, who I have written about in an earlier edition of CITYtheology, spent decades seeking a wholesome life through learning from Quaker and Buddhist spirituality. As part of this, she actively sought to forgive Rosemary West who, with her husband Fred West, had murdered and abducted her sister Lucy. It was after she had a particularly powerful experience of forgiveness that Marian wrote a letter to Rosemary West. She then held on to this letter for two years before sending it so that her experience of the liberation of forgiving would not be affected by any response she might receive from Rosemary West. In the end, Rosemary West's solicitor replied to the letter insisting that Marian never write to her again. For Marian, the experience of forgiving still resonated positively in her own life.

So it is clear that forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. In Gareth's story and in the poem, we do not hear about the abuser's response. In fact, that doesn't seem to be the point at all. Rather, it is the healing and hope for a better future while acknowledging the suffering that stands out. The poem is a testament to a journey of forgiveness, of healing agony.

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Recommended Reading

Stephen Cherry (2012) *Healing Agony* published by Continuum
Marian Partington (2012) *If you sit very still* published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers
N T Wright (2006) *Evil and the Justice of God* published by SPCK

Truths that connect across time:
Some current reflections on the 'Ancient Mariner'

Haddon Willmer, Professor Emeritus, reflects on how much he has enjoyed reading *Mariner: a voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* by the priest poet Malcolm Guite

Coleridge wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* when he was 25. The Mariner is Ancient, his voyage told in antique terms, but the telling came from Coleridge's imagination as a young man, living in the modern world as we are. When Coleridge's own life is put alongside the poem it turns from being a bit of charming entertainment into a redeeming word for our living today.

The Mariner and his mates sailed off with high hopes; they were blessed on their way, not least by an albatross who flew with them as they got to Cape Horn. Then the Ancient Mariner shot him, an act of inexplicable evil. He was cursed, his guilt - the dead albatross - hanging round his neck. All his shipmates die, cursing him. He finds he can neither live nor pray. Then 'some kind saint took pity on me' so that he looked on the water-snakes which earlier had horrified him, shining in the soft light of the moon:

O happy living things! No tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware...

The self-same moment I could pray,
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

This was not the end but the turning point. He came home living within the compulsion to tell his story of sin and loss, rescue and renewal, accosting people like the Wedding Guest, who hears the whole tale, and leaves 'a sadder and a wiser man'. Uncannily Coleridge's poem turns out to be an illuminating commentary on his life.

Coleridge was immensely gifted, full of hope at the beginning. He started on opium because he suffered from rheumatic pain but he became addicted. He became difficult to live with, weaknesses in his character were exacerbated and his marriage failed. He could work furiously at projects, then they fell apart. Instead of being carried on by ambitions befitting his gifts, he was burdened at the failure of his life as a whole.

He was a man of profound faith in God but in his despair, like the Mariner, he could not pray.

Coleridge was difficult to help but he had friends who did not give up on him. After a decade of descent into the depths, a good Dr Gilman and his wife took him into their home and managed his addiction until he was released from it, so that he lived fruitfully for 17 more years. Relations with his wife and children were repaired. He knew, like his Ancient Mariner, that he lived by the forgiving grace of God not by his own achievements.

Coleridge was a prophet for his time, acutely observing what was happening and pointing to the narrow but open ways to life.

Guite helps us to listen to Coleridge for ourselves today: "Coleridge was reading and thinking for his life – and for ours".

Three things stay with me. First the picture of Christian faith accompanying Coleridge on this voyage is focused on the Holy Spirit engaging with human beings, who sin, despair and come to death, where the dying God meets them and brings them to repentance and new life.

Second Coleridge saw that a modern instrumental view of nature was 'utterly deadening' and would ultimately crush any notion of 'soul'. It meant reducing persons to things, and limiting truth to 'facts', belittling imagination as groundless opinion. We feel the pressures today. We are caught in systems that only value people according to their usefulness to systems.

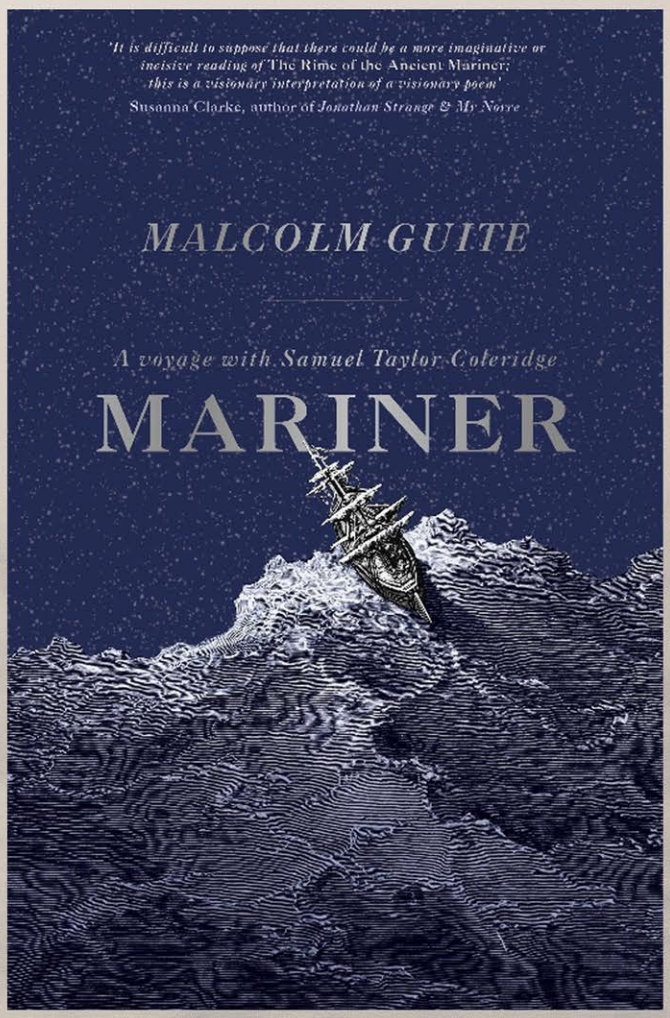
Third, Guite brings out how Coleridge speaks to the ecological crisis. The Ancient Mariner brought disaster to the ship and all who were sailing in her, when he shot the Albatross. It was a gross failure to respect the Albatross as a fellow-creature, in the wholeness of God's creation.

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

This points us beyond any environmental concern driven by worry about our survival. As Guite points out, the 'alls' in this stanza are significant. We need hearts purified from self-interest, to share in the love of God and to go along with it, so that we become free for all and with all.

This is a beautifully structured book taking each stanza in turn, easy to read a bit at a time. It would be rewarding as a book for daily reflection and prayer. The poem has spoken deeply to Guite our contemporary who hears it as a Christian thinker and shares with us what he has found. The book's partnering the poem with Coleridge's pilgrimage has the wind of the spirit in it to carry us along.

The Wedding Guest, hastening to get to the wedding on time, tried to get away from the old crazed looking Mariner. In the end he was not sorry that he had been compelled by the eye of the old man to stay and listen.



Recommended reading:

Malcolm Guite (2017) *Mariner. A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* published by Hodder and Stoughton
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner can be found:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834
https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/tag/the-ancient-mariner/

The home as sacred space: The Clapham Sect's legacy for lockdown

Reverend Professor Jane de Gay writes about her experiences of ministry during lockdown and reflects on other times when the home has served as sacred space.

The closure of churches during the COVID-19 pandemic has generated anxieties over preserving the sacred when worshipping or live-streaming services from home. 'Sacred' means both 'reserved for a particular purpose' and 'set apart and holy': definitions that suit churches consecrated for worship, but less so houses constructed for messy functions like sleeping, bathing, cleaning, cooking, and the raising of children. Viral images of services interrupted by dogs and phone calls and snide media comments about the décor of vicarages add to the impression that home is not the place for serious worship.

Like many clergy, I have been challenged by these questions. Although as a Self Supporting Minister I am used to saying the daily offices at home, I was dubious about how or whether to celebrate communion without a church building, a congregation, vestments and a communion set.

The Exile and first-century home-churches have been suggested as historical precedents for our situation, but these models are limited because today's believers cannot congregate.

A more helpful precedent is the Clapham Sect – a group of middle-class families, including the Venns, Wilberforces and Stephens, who made their homes sacred spaces and who spearheaded revival in England and mission abroad.

They were great philanthropists, so they can also help address another current concern: how to support the disadvantaged.

For Clapham, religious practice centred on the home, not the church.

The movement originated in the eighteenth century when Henry Venn, Vicar of Clapham, issued a wake-up call to a lackadaisical church in The Complete Duty of Man (1763), reaffirming doctrine and presenting a practical guide to family life. Venn saw parenthood as a holy calling with responsibility for children's salvation, and he started a tradition of family prayers by including homilies and litanies to be led by the father.

With the spread of industrialization, the home came to represent a refuge from the ruthless world of business, with conduct-manuals such as Sarah Stickney Ellis's The Women of England (c.1843) exhorting women to create moral safe havens for their menfolk. John Ruskin described home as 'a place of Peace … a sacred place' in Sesame and Lilies (1864). The home itself was divided into zones to ensure purity, with household labour being contained 'below stairs' and sex, childbirth, illness and death concealed in the bedroom. Wives presided over the drawing-room, while husbands could retreat to their studies to read, write and pray. In later generations, women also claimed spaces for retreat: in the 1890s Caroline Emelia Stephen set up home at The Porch, Cambridge, named as a portal to heaven, while her niece Virginia Woolf championed the importance of A Room of One's Own in her 1928 essay of that name.

Home continued to be described in religious terms even after devotional practice declined.

Though not a Christian, Woolf described her Sussex home, Monk's House, as 'a sanctuary; a nunnery', a place for 'religious retreat' where she could encounter a transcendent 'reality.'

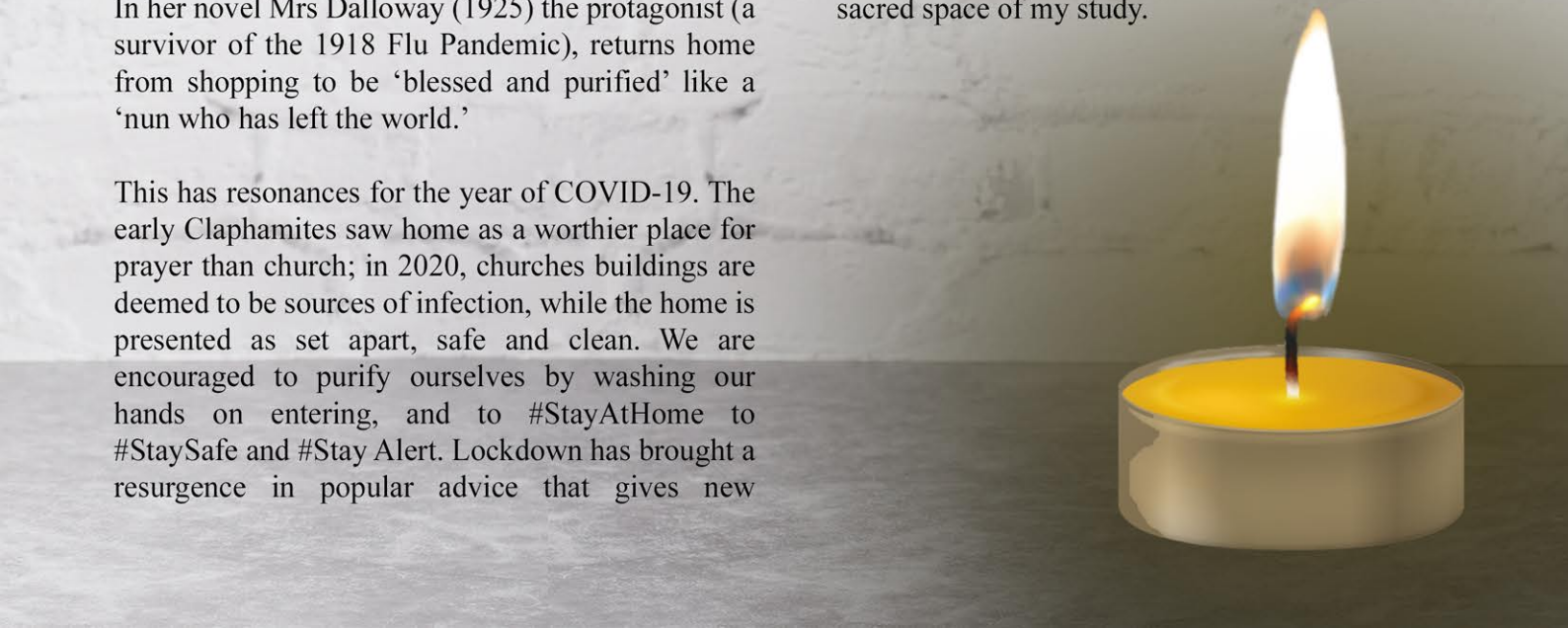
In her novel Mrs Dalloway (1925) the protagonist (a survivor of the 1918 Flu Pandemic), returns home from shopping to be 'blessed and purified' like a 'nun who has left the world.'

This has resonances for the year of COVID-19. The early Claphamites saw home as a worthier place for prayer than church; in 2020, churches buildings are deemed to be sources of infection, while the home is presented as set apart, safe and clean. We are encouraged to purify ourselves by washing our hands on entering, and to #StayAtHome to #StaySafe and #Stay Alert. Lockdown has brought a resurgence in popular advice that gives new importance to family life, parenting and home education, along with homely skills like cooking, crafts, and gardening. Guidance on home working recommends designating spaces for work (and, in the case of the clergy, for prayer).

The Clapham Sect made the home a springboard for philanthropy, for they waged campaigns, writing copious letters and books from their studies: the Wilberforces and Stephens fought to end slavery; Caroline Emelia Stephen improved the lot of female servants and provided social housing. They were evangelists and missionaries, but churches of all theological persuasions today have become missional by livestreaming services.

Worship recorded in one home to be received in another has the potential for a new mode of intimacy and candour, through which everyday spaces become sacred and consecrated to a new purpose.

During lockdown, I have developed a home-based ministry by keeping in touch with parishioners and students, but also by developing sacred spaces at my kitchen table (a focal point now that all meals are eaten at home) and in my study (where I write), sharing images of them on social media. I tweeted a picture of the kitchen table with a cross from a parishioner and a candle from a student, saying that I was praying for both communities. On Maundy Thursday, I set up a table in my study for the Watch, with cherry-blossom from my garden in place of lilies. I tweeted a line from each reading at intervals: noting 'likes' appearing synchronously, I realised that I had a virtual congregation. It was a natural step for the same table to become the altar for Easter Sunday Communion, as I consecrated the homely fare of bread on a saucer and wine in a glass in the sacred space of my study.



"This brilliant anthology is a celebration of Leeds, its cityscape, its people, its problems and potential, its shadow and its light. The poems here construct a vision for the city that helps us be truthful about what is but hopeful and unapologetic about what yet may be." Canon Mark Oakley

Last year, the Leeds Church Institute called for poems for a new anthology responding to themes in Canon Mark Oakley's 2019 Hook Lecture at Leeds Minster. The poets of Leeds were asked:

Who will speak truth to power?
Who would we describe as our prophets?
Whose voices are struggling to be heard?
What are the stories that aren't being told?
Can the voices of the past help us make our future?

Some answers to these questions are between the pages of this Anthology, from established and establishing writers, as well as poets appearing in print for the first time.

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