

The Christian Community

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

Newsletter for Sunday, 5th July, 2020

What is happening at The Christian Community?

From Sunday, 5th July, our services are open to the congregation. All other events are suspended for the time being. More details about the measures we need to take to open the church are in the letter below.

The Act of Consecration of Man is celebrated at 9am on Thursdays and Fridays and 10am on Sundays.

The church is open for private prayer, Tuesday to Friday 10am-noon.

Dear congregation,

We are delighted that the church can reopen this weekend. Hallelujah! After these months in which we have all been aware of the services, some of us assisting them as servers, some lighting a candle far away – now at last we can worship together again.

The government guidelines which are aimed at preventing further spreading of the virus mean that we cannot yet share out communion, even though it would be our deepest wish to offer this healing medicine after these weeks of uncertainty and grief. Such a sacrifice, which is imposed from outside, always presents us with an opportunity. Every year in the midnight service, we experience what can happen when we focus solely on the congregational communion that takes place with and through the priest, with the words that are repeated three times: 'I take the bread...'; 'I take the cup...'. Through the course of the Act of Consecration of Man, we may come to feel that we are included in the 'I' that is speaking here. Our challenge now is to feel the whole congregation with us as we commune together with the priest: those present, those unable to attend, and those who have died. We would also like to draw your attention once more to the Sacramental Consultation. In this sacrament, the space is created for us to express the deepest concerns of our hearts and open ourselves for what streams towards us from the spiritual world. This is a way of preparing ourselves to receive the communion as a kind of answer to the questions we have brought.

We ask you please to respect the changes that we have made in line with the guidelines. If you have been diagnosed with Covid-19 or suspect you may have symptoms, or if you are 'shielded', we ask that you don't attend church at the moment. We need to be aware of physical distancing in the entrance lobby and foyer, and when using the lavatories. We will enter the church space as usual and leave through the left-hand side door. To maintain physical distancing, we have created more rows of chairs. One chair is left free at each end of alternating rows; in the row in between, one chair is free in the middle of the row. People in one household may of course sit closer together, using chairs next to those left free on the ends of rows. Notices indicate which chairs should be left free. There is space for approximately 27 people in the church, and we would encourage you to think of supporting the weekday services so that we don't need to turn anyone away on Sundays. At the moment there will be no tea and coffee after the service and we would ask you please to leave the building straight away. You are welcome to use the garden in line with the physical distancing guidelines.

- Luke Barr and Tom Ravetz

On a personal note: I am still shielding Deborah, whose illness means she would be at grave risk if she caught Covid-19. For this reason I will start my holiday as planned on 4th July. I very much look forward to seeing you all in August.

- Tom

From Father to Spirit

Luke Barr

The seasonal prayers provide the framework of the Act of Consecration. They are at the beginning and end of the service. Inserted prayers are usually

found after the Creed. They too are seasonal. The two exceptions are at Christmas and St John's which do not follow the Creed, but the Offertory.

The St. John's prayers are primarily about the Father God (and his connection with John).

The trinity of Father God festivals are in fact in Winter, and at their heart is Christmas (Advent-Christmas-Epiphany).

The trinity of Spirit-God festivals stretch over the Summer (Whitsun - St John's - Michaelmas). At their heart is St. John's. Christmas and St John's are exactly 6 months apart, and mirror each other.

One could see in St John an earthly image of the rather masculine 'Father God'. It is an enigmatic Summer picture. In the Winter, 'Father God' forces are transformed from the Summer picture, and appear as a babe, a child.

What connects the Winter festivals of Father to the Summer festivals of Spirit? It is Christ - and his Trinity of festivals (Lent-Easter- Ascension).

One might say that Christ is the transforming agent that changes the Father to the Spirit. He is the eye of the needle through which the Father passes in order to become Spirit.

The Father is too fixed an image. It is too rigid. In earthly terms it appears like bearded John Baptist, clothed in the elements ('The Father spirit around his body'). This rigid picture 'must decrease', and 'He must increase' (John 3:30). Christ's increasing leads to something new: the Spirit - not anymore like a Father (creed) - but like a dove (Mark 1:10).

Diving into the stream of life

Tom Ravetz

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C S Lewis wrote a beautiful allegory of baptism. Eustace has fallen asleep thinking angry, greedy thoughts in a dragon's lair. He has tried to safeguard one piece of treasure for himself, by wedging a great lord's wrist band high up his arm. Unbeknownst to him, the old dragon has died in the night and when he awakes, he discovers to his dismay that he has turned into a dragon. The wrist band is biting painfully into the flesh of his great dragon foreleg.

Discovering that his inner dragon nature has transformed his outer existence gives Eustace the chance to change his attitudes. He notices the value of friendship and community for the first time, and he tries to be helpful to his comrades, once he's found out how to reassure them that he is a friendly dragon.

One night, Aslan, the lion who in Narnia is the embodiment of Christ, calls him to follow him to a pool. Eustace longs to bathe his leg in the cool water. Aslan tells him that he has to undress first. Scratching and clawing at himself, Eustace desperately tries to shed his scales like a snake skin.

He sheds three skins, only to notice each time that there is another one beneath. He starts to be frightened that he will never be rid of the scales. Aslan's voice says to him, 'You will have to let me undress you,' and he tears the dragon skin from him, picks him up, and drops him into the pool. As Eustace washes, he realizes that his arm is no longer in pain because he has turned back into a boy.

Baptism is not just a moment in time – our calling as Christians is to recognise that the dragon-nature within us needs constantly to be recognised and that we need help in removing the scaly skin. I am always amazed how quickly I can adopt fixed positions; how a fleeting angry thought becomes an unexamined conviction or a prejudice; how on the other hand the desire for a quiet life leads me to deny or neglect the difficult experiences of others. All of this and more makes up a scaly dragon's skin that constantly needs to be shed.

This is the world of Saint John, which speaks to us today just as it did to those who streamed out to him in the Judean desert. What we can do in quiet inner reflection, aided by the sacrament of re-baptism, the Sacramental Consultation, can happen as well in every Act of Consecration of Man. The forces that hinder us, which are named at the beginning of the Offering as denial, strayings and weaknesses, are dragon skins. Shedding them and taking part in the rest of the service with true openness can lead us to the kind of renewal and the new discoveries that Eustace experienced in the pool.

Newsletter

We have enjoyed creating the Newsletter over the past months, and the echoes and contributions from the congregation have been very inspiring. We are very grateful to Evelyne and her team for distributing the printed version of the Newsletter. It has also been exciting to see how our email list has grown.

Now that we are able to open the church again, we need to take stock and reassess what is needed and also how best to use our resources, which are rather stretched. For the coming weeks, we will send out our normal weekly update. As we go into the autumn, we will explore how we might possibly add to that with more material again.