



The Green
Christian Way of
Life Community
– Finding our
Path and
Walking Gently
Together

MONTHLY LETTER TO COMPANIONS AND EXPLORERS – July 2020

Dear Companions and Explorers,

How long is it now? What sort of difficulties and/or opportunities has the Covid19 lockdown presented to you?

I'm very fortunate to be living very near to the Peak District and so Ross and I have been able, in recent days anyway, to get out and enjoy the glory of creation's gifts.

As John Muir wrote, "I went out to find I was really going in". After 24 hours in hospital as a result of a couple of mini strokes, let me be quick to say that all is well - the NHS worked its amazing care on me. I have now been signed off and there are zero consequences, except a few more tablets and the instruction to calm down!

So I have drawn back from a number of obligations and found the time to read. I'm reading books that I have had for years and should have read before and also I'm finding new books. One I must recommend: 'Diary of a Young Naturalist' by Dara McAnulty, a fifteen year old.

He describes his family in his introduction, "Not only is our family bound together by blood, we are all autistic, all except Dad – he's the odd one out, and he's also the one we rely on to deconstruct the mysteries of not just the natural world but the human one too."

The book is made up of diary entries from March through to the following February. They are full of the gratitude, joy and exhilaration of immersion in the natural world. One more quote: "We're told that childishness is wrong, bad almost. I mourn a world without such feelings, a joyless world, a disconnected one".

The diary entries are full of the gratitude, joy and exhilaration of immersion in the natural world. It is a book which will thrill you and encourage you, now that the lock-down is easing, to get out there. Or as John Muir said, "I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay until sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in". (The Wilderness World of John Muir, p.311).

I hope that by mid October it will be possible for the Green Christian Retreat to be held at Ringsfield Hall, Suffolk, where, most of you will know, Ross and I spent nearly 20 years of our working ministry. I mention this because I want to share with you all a description of a very special experience of immersion in the natural world. It was written a couple of years ago by one of the outdoor education staff, Nicola, who always made it clear that she was

not “religious or spiritual”. She had given me permission to explain that and to share her writing.

I had an actual religious experience at work today.

We made miniature nature trails in the woods. One very small, quiet boy, eight years old, (let's call him Peter) offered to guide me through his.

*"We have to pray" he said (which was the first surprise).
"It's easier if you hold a stick".*

He took me on a journey of such astounding beauty, bowing his head and saying a lyrical prayer of consciousness for each item he'd marked.

*"We pray to the stick, fallen from a tree, which is part of the earth and part of the sky. Part of nature, and us, and everything, and love.
Now dirt.*

Now we pray to dirt, part of the land which gives us life.

We cannot live without it.

The soil, and the earth.

Even where there's concrete, the land is still there, underneath".

This wasn't a game. He was utterly sincere, serious without performance or pretension, absolutely living the words he said - softly, solemnly and without hesitation.

I've never experienced anything like it, fighting back tears at a beauty so fierce it hurt. Reeling from the intensity of emotion, I told him I would never forget it. I told him he's a poet. And thought - please, please can the world not crush this child, his gentle, profound, astonishing soul.

So remember - trees are part of love, and the land is always there, under the concrete. And if there arises in Suffolk a guru, a visionary, a spiritual leader of awesome ability - I won't be surprised if he's called Peter, and has freckles, and skips now and then when he walks.

So let us all remember to listen to the earth and her friends and, lockdown or no lockdown, to continue to dedicate our lives, prayers and energy to live, act and pray a renewed green earth into existence

There is an inscription on a church wall in Sussex England c. 1730. It reads

“A vision without a task is but a dream.

A task without a vision is drudgery.

A vision and a task are the hope of the world.”

We have the vision of the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 22.1.5), we know the task to live **as if** the Kin-dom of God is here now, what ever the consequences, so we can be the hope of the world.

Most of you will know the prayers of Bruce Sanguin in his Book “If Darwin Prayed, Prayers for Evolutionary Mystics” (if you don't know them here's another book to own!). Sanguin

actively encourages readers to use any of the prayers when and however we like and even to alter them as we see fit which is why I end this letter with one of his prayers.

My blessings and prayers to you all.

Chris

(Luke 15:11-32)

O Holy One,
We are an impetuous lot,
demanding that our every whim be catered to
and allowing desire to lead us down the path of indignity.

We walk upon Earth as the prodigal species,
taking the inheritance of a fourteen-billion-year-old universe
and a five-billion-year-old planet,
and squandering it in dissolute living.

Now, O Source of All Inheritance,
we come to our senses.
Now, O Compassionate One,
we see the error of our ways.
Now, O Forgiver of Foolishness,
We seek to make amends.

Awaken us to a wonder that issues in humility
and drops us to our knees.
Transform our desire into a burning willingness
to reconcile ourselves one with another.
to heal our relationships with other species.
to see life as pure gift,
and to return with an offering of humility
to your waiting arms.
Amen.