

*An all age community ... on a shared journey of faith ... making the edge the centre
so that Jesus can be known*

Registered Charity 1132925

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Items for **>imprint<** no. 128: **Mon. 30th September 2024**, please, by email at editor@ccstalbans.org.uk. *Peter Young (Ed.)*

July 2024 PCC meeting

The minutes of the 22nd July PCC meeting are scheduled for PCC review and approval at their 9th September meeting, hence after the publication date of this edition of **>imprint<**, so it has been agreed to postpone inclusion of a summary of the July meeting until the next edition, no.128.

DOES GOD EVER “DO LATE”? -- *Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi*

God is never in a hurry, and he’s never late. He’s always on time. God’s timing is perfect, even when we can’t understand it. And we will never understand it, because God operates on a different wavelength. **He has a different view of time because he is timeless. “Due time” is God’s time, when God knows we’re ready, not when we think we’re ready.** The sooner we understand and accept that, the sooner we will be in tune with God’s plan for our lives.

I still recall my waiting experience before my late mother came to a living faith in Jesus from Islam. I prayed for more than twenty-three years before witnessing a transformation in her life and a testimony to her belief in Christ. Those were long twenty-three years. Even though I remained consistent in my prayers, it was becoming more and more of a challenge to my faith. There were times I tried to figure out how God would eventually do it, but I was wrong. Very wrong. The way and manner He brought it about, (a story for another time), was beyond my wildest dreams, but God did it before my Mum died at a ripe old age of more than 100 years. “But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is to bring Christ down from above) or “Who will descend into the abyss?’ “(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). NKJV.

The tendency to want to know about everything that's going on can be a draw back to our Christian walk. When God asked Abraham to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice,

he didn't ask, "O God, how am I going to become the father of many nations if I offer my only son as a sacrifice?" He left that to God. The faith that is pleasing to the Lord is one that accepts, believes and endorses God's Word as absolute truth.

But when you're willing to say: "God, I can't figure this out, but I'm going to trust You to give me your peace that will set me free," then you can be comfortable in spite of not knowing. Trusting God often requires not knowing how God is going to accomplish what needs to be done and not knowing when He will do it. We often say God is never late, but generally He isn't early either. Why? Because He uses times of waiting to stretch our faith in Him and to bring about change and growth in our lives.

But is this really that simple? You believe God is going to do something which, at times, is time-specific, then you wait and wait and time seems to be running out. The prayer point may be a relational issue, it could be a health issue, it could be a prayer for your children, or it could be for a right job after many years of waiting, or promotion, or ... The reality is that in some seasons of our life, we are in God's waiting room expecting when God will "open the door" to us. At times it may seem as though God has forgotten us there. Really?

With God, a waiting season is never a wasted season. A good illustration is found in John chapter 11 – the story of the two sisters and Jesus, their family friend. John goes on to tell us that Lazarus was ill. That's an understatement – he was near the point of death. Mary and Martha sent for Jesus to come at once.

Jesus was laying low when he got the message. He'd had a run-in with the Pharisees in Jerusalem. They had threatened to stone him or have him arrested. (John 10:31, 39-40). Nevertheless, he got the message: "He for whom you have great affection is sick."

Can you hear the urgency? It's a plea for help. Given that, you'd think Jesus would've dropped everything and rushed back to Bethany. But, no, John says, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore he heard that he was sick, he stayed two days in the place where he was." (John 11:5-6). Is that what we expect from a close friend?

This is our first clue. Who is Jesus? He's the Lord of life. He's not bound by time and space. Disease and death pose no threat to him. This comes out in what he told the disciples. He said, "**This sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, that God's Son may be glorified by it.**" (John 11:4). Just as a man's blindness gave Jesus an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God to give sight to the blind (John 9:1-41), so Lazarus' death will give Jesus an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God to raise the dead to new life.

When Jesus eventually reached their home, Martha rushed out to greet him. She said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." (John 11:21) **Hear the subtle anger. "If only you'd gotten here sooner ... What took you so long?!" Jesus You are late!**

Don't be too hard on Martha. When tragedy strikes ... when a loved one dies ... when you experience disappointment and loss first-hand, it's only natural to lash out. Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will rise again." (John 11:23). Martha took this to mean that Lazarus would rise again at the resurrection on the last day. This was a standard belief among many Jews. But that's not what Jesus meant. He said, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

Martha went back to the house and got Mary. Mary came out to greet Jesus. She said

the same thing, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn’t have died.” Jesus, you are late- four days late! This time, Jesus reacted differently. John says, “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews weeping who came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’” (John 11:34). They took him to the tomb where Lazarus was buried, and, in the shortest verse of the Bible, John says, “Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

When Jesus was confronted with the death of a close friend, he wept, and so can we. John goes on to say that Jesus went to the tomb. When he got there, he asked that the stone be taken away. Martha objected. She said, “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.” (John 11:39). Jesus said, “Didn’t I tell you that if you believed, you would see God’s glory?” (John 11:40). God is never late.

They rolled the stone away. Jesus looked to God and prayed. Then he called out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43) Lazarus came out. His body was still wrapped in burial cloths. Jesus said, “Free him, and let him go.” (John 11:44). It was a miracle and a clear display of God’s power. It was also an unmistakable sign that Jesus was the Christ. The question was how to respond.

God causes things or allows them to happen at exactly the right time! Your job is not to figure out when, but to make up your mind that you won't give up until you cross the finish line and are living in the radical, outrageous blessings of God! The more you trust Jesus and keep your eyes focused on Him, the more life you'll have. Trusting God brings life. Believing brings rest. So stop trying to figure everything out, and let God be God in your life. **If God always meets your expectations, He will never have an opportunity to exceed them.**

Pastimes: a daytime Connect group – *Meriel Dixon*

For our Connect Groups item this month, Meriel Dixon shares views from the Pastimes Group which she co-ordinates.

The Pastimes title is built from its real purpose, a time to pray and share together.

Prayer

And

Share

Together **t**imes

It is a small, informal, day-time Connect Group who meet together once a month in the Garden Room on a Tuesday afternoon, 2pm to 4pm.

There is usually a short look at a Bible passage, sharing of hopes, needs and concerns, and prayer support for each other. Light refreshments conclude the time together.

Shared comments from the group:

“I have only recently joined this group but I was immediately made to feel very welcome and at ease.”

“A very friendly group...we talk a lot...and laugh a lot.... and I always enjoy it. We look after each other and we look out for each other between our times together“

“I appreciate knowing each other well enough be able to share whatever we want and to know there is support and encouragement.“

“I just love coming.....I look forward to it.”

“I enjoy this group, just being with like-minded people....a chance to pray together and discuss a short Bible passage“

Pastimes is an open group with a welcome for any who might like to try a daytime support group. I see my role in this group very much as a facilitator, we learn together and from each other.

John Truscott acts as the Christ Church Connect Groups Co-ordinator and would love to hear from you if you would like to join a new group we are setting up this month. He would especially like you to contact him if you received a letter from him over the summer period. See him at church, ring 01727 568325 or email him at john@john-truscott.co.uk. Don't put it off – you are missing out on so much!

An invitation from Mission Direct – Susie Ryan

“We have some wonderful news to share with you! As we continue to celebrate 20 years of Mission Direct, we are thrilled to announce that St Albans Cathedral will host a special evensong service celebrating God’s work through Mission Direct. This service will take place on the evening of Thursday, 17th October, and we would love for you to join us.

Special Evensong at St Albans Cathedral

- **Date:** Thursday, 17th October
- **Location:** St Albans Cathedral
- **Time:** 5pm



“This is a wonderful opportunity to come together in gratitude, reflecting on two decades of service, and to thank God for His provision and guidance. ... The evensong is of course free for all, but if you plan on coming, please let me [<wil.horwood@missiondirect.org>](mailto:wil.horwood@missiondirect.org) know ... so we can have a rough idea of numbers. It will be a great encouragement to know that you are coming.”

See also the invitation to the Mission Direct 20th Birthday Party in Bedford on Saturday 16th November, which Susie Ryan posted in the Christ Church e-newsletter from 31st August (go to <https://missiondirect.org/20-years-of-mission-direct/> for details)

Sermons at Christ Church

A new sermon series will be starting in October, about which hopefully there will be more information in the next issue of *>imprint<*.

In the meantime, during September there will be a mix of sermons, including on passages in Mark's gospel and we will have two visitors, including, on 29th September, a representative from Mission Direct who is coming to our intergenerational service, and on 8th Steve Hughes will be preaching at the first Sunday of our Creationtide events. See further information on Steve in the Caring for Creation section below.

Do catch up, either if you miss a sermon, or need to refresh your memory for any Connect Group sessions that might be using a sermon theme. Go to <https://www.ccstalbans.org.uk/sermons> to listen to audio recordings (dates, themes, sermon titles and readings are clearly marked) or for more visual and audio experiences and complete services visit the YouTube channel. Each sermon posting on our website (link above) also provides a link to the relevant YouTube service, or you can go to <https://www.youtube.com/@christchurchstalbans360> to select what you want to watch.



Caring for Creation

Christ Church Caring for Creation (C4) September meeting

C4's latest meeting was on Monday 2nd September instead of the usual third Monday of the month, in order to finalise arrangements for our Creationtide (1st Sept - 4th October) events. Rather than give a summary of what was discussed, the following section gives a flavour of what decisions were made and so what you can expect during the month. Remember, any church member would be welcome to join C4 meetings (details will be in our weekly e-newsletter).

Creationtide (or Season of Creation in the CofE calendar)

On **Sunday 8th September** we will have an invited speaker at our morning service. While CC Families will be engaged in their own activities, **Steve Hughes** will be preaching on the theological basis and imperative for creation care. Here's a bit more information about Steve:

Steve Hughes was the CEO and then Chair of A Rocha UK for 13 years from 2006 and continues as a volunteer speaker for them. More recently he has been Chair of Trustees of London School of Theology where he studied for a year from 2005. Prior to that Steve was for another thirty years in International HR roles living in the UK, Africa, the Middle East and Singapore. Steve is married to Jean and they have two adult children and four grandchildren. They worship at Christchurch Baptist Church at Welwyn Garden City where amongst other roles Steve chairs the Green Team and they are currently a Silver Eco Church with aspirations to a Gold award.

Although this won't be an intergenerational service or talk, it is hoped that adults and carers involved in CC Families will be able to catch up on what Steve has to say using the recording on our website and/or our YouTube channel after the service (see links in the previous item above).

Creation Care Afternoon, Sunday 22nd September, 12.30 - 3pm

'The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it' Psalm 24:1

This will be a chance to explore our grounds and learn more about nature and God's world.

The afternoon will include a communal bring-your-own picnic lunch - although some food (e.g. seasonal soup) as well as refreshments will also be available. This will be followed by a range of outside activities including crafts, a scavenger hunt, using household recycled items to make bird feeders, restoring the church's bug hotel and making campfire bread.

In the event of rain, we would bring some activities inside but there would still be some outdoor activities, so please bring waterproofs.

Everyone is welcome. If you are able to help on the day, please inform a member of C4.

A Rocha Blog

There has been one further blog posted since the last *>imprint<*, no.126. This blog (https://blog.arocha.org/en/on-nutrients-and-renewal/?mc_cid=82519349f9&mc_eid=c45bdbd801) was posted on 4th September and is entitled 'On nutrients and renewal', authored by **Robert Sluka** who leads A Rocha's Marine Conservation Programme. Based in Florida, his research focuses on marine biodiversity conservation, plastics pollution and fisheries, particularly marine protected areas, elements of which he gives examples and discusses in his blog. He reflects on the book of Ecclesiastes which reminds us of the 'temporality in this world and the flow of life (nutrients) through time and space' and concludes with an encouragement "to get out there and learn, love, serve and enjoy" in our own neighbourhoods.

Click the link above or go to <https://blog.arocha.org/> to read the A Rocha blogs.

Field Notes Podcasts

There has also been one further podcast to date since the last *>imprint<*.

Episode 44, posted on 4th September, features **Dorothea Seeger** from Bremen, north-west Germany, who works for BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany) in their Marine Protection Office. She has a scientific background in coastal ecology and founded 'Hope for People and Nature', a member of A Rocha Friends network, in 2022 with the goal of building up an A Rocha presence in Germany. This podcast is entitled 'Marine Biology and Motherhood' where she discusses her experiences with Jo Swinney and Nick Faw, including the environmental changes she's noticed over the years, the development of her marine conservation work and links with A Rocha; and the effects that becoming a mother recently have had on her life and work and view of the world.

To listen to Field Notes Podcasts go to <https://arocha.org/en/field-notes-podcast/> or from wherever you get your podcasts.