

## Dear Friend



Today we've all been out gardening - Kate, Robin and Liz in the newly replanted polytunnel as you can see. We hope you too can enjoy at least a little of the glorious spring weather.

Maundy Thursday today, when the queen traditionally gives out symbolic 'maundy money' and at one time monarchs used to wash poor people's feet. In memory of Jesus' washing his disciples. We sometimes wash each other's feet here too on this day.

But how strange: now physical contact like that with anybody outside our own household - unless we're professionally caring for them, hopefully with adequate PPE - is a no-no. This goes deeply against the grain, doesn't it?

How much more consciously - once it's all over - we may value the sincere handshake, the welcome hug, the gentle shoulder massage. All too often I know I've taken these for granted. Not fully registering the significance of mutual touch that is deep, deep down in our heritage as mammals, let alone humans.

So when we're free to approach each other again, I'm hoping not to hang back in British reserve when my instinct is to reach out. But also not to fall into the automatic "everybody hugs each other here" or the merely formal peck on the cheek. I think we may appreciate the varied warmth of human contact as never before.

## Locked Down in Passiontide

That's the title of the sonnet below, which **Nigel Thomas** has been moved to write. You may know Nigel and his wife **Nickie Fidgin** as facilitators of labyrinth events at Othona. "Nickie and I laid an outdoor labyrinth in white stone in our local church grounds last week which is getting good use - we get the feedback."

And so begins the changing of our ways,  
The locking down of schools and village halls,

The slowing up of hours and of days,  
The staring out of windows and at walls.  
Silenced now, the singing in the chapel,  
So quietly it came to steal our breath,  
Confining to their homes those less able,  
Who, whispering the ancient prayers of faith,  
Watch and wait listening for the summons,  
The Word who comes to call us out of doors;  
He speaks words of power, casts out demons,  
Stills the storm, calms our fears, revives, restores.  
The day we rise, step out and church bells ring,  
The breath of God will help us all to sing.

### ***Your Poem***

We're not all sonneteers, but we all have our own way with words. Othona regular **Sue Antell** suggests this little exercise for fun and creativity. Set out to write *something*, poetry or prose, where all the important words begin with your own initials. Last month on a solitary retreat she wrote this (initials S and A):

#### Senses

Alone, all alone and silent;  
senses awaken in such solitude.  
Alert to smells, sights, sounds, sensations,  
all the savours - sour, sharp, salty and acidic,  
sweet and spicy- satisfying appetite.  
See songthrush seeking apple and sultanas.  
and sneaky squirrel stealing sunflower seeds.  
Sounds of silence. Songbirds. Sirens.  
Schoolchildren shrilly shouting. Strident scream of saw and shredder -  
sudden stench of acrid smoke.  
Smells of stables, sheep and slurry,  
and the sweet and subtle spring scents.  
Soft sensation of sun on skin,  
then sleet and squally showers.  
All is soaking, soggy, sodden;  
saturated soil squelches,  
streams are in spate.

Have a try? Enjoy! Of course if your name happens to be Xavier Quigley... cheat!

### **Another Frontline Despatch**

Last time **Ian Todd** described his walks ("wild garlic and young nettles leaves have gone into my soup pot"). Today he gives us a box-by-box account of a Bridport foodbank.

"The front-row Victorian pews at medieval St Mary's recently housed keen, mid-level Anglican churchy types, sitting to pray, standing to sing; and decades before they

were home to the pious bottoms of Bridport's ropemakers and other wealthy merchants. But in April 2020 these same benches host entirely different occupants.

"In a scene that could have been written by John Wyndham or Nevil Shute or John Christopher the pews of this mostly empty and locked parish church now display a motley collection of cardboard boxes, various packets, tins and cans. This is Cupboard Love foodbank and Holy Week and the Easter that never was.

"Pride of place in the front-row – because every foodbank user will receive these – are bags of sugar and teabags, jars of instant coffee, Weetabix, instant porridge and packs of the ubiquitous and awful yet scarce UHT milk. As we move towards the back on one pew sit the meat products: Fray Bentos pies and tins of spam not much corned beef though, perhaps people are keeping that staple for themselves.

"Behind the meat is an amazing display of canned fish. Sardines (of course) but also tuna, salmon and even smoked oysters. Bringing up the rear is a pew groaning under the weight of baked beans and spaghetti hoops.

"Then we have the goodies bench. Biscuits, Curly Wurlies, Easter eggs and bars of Aero and Cadbury's Dairy Milk. As we make up the paper sacks (for singles) and cardboard boxes (for families) each gets a goody alongside the basics.

"One of my foodbank co-workers was front of house manager at a well known Bridport cafe until it was forced to close - many of these basic food packs are heading towards those who have lost their jobs and income and wait, skint, in the Universal Credit queue. PS. Huge thanks to all those who donate, particularly Morrisons!"

### **Feet again**

Returning briefly to the washing of feet, here's a thought for today from **Colin Hodgetts** (as mentioned last time)

"Jesus is teaching Peter how to be a leader. The leader has to serve. Gandhi comes to mind. He insisted that everyone living in the South African ashram had to clean the toilets, and he set the example. These were not flush loos, they were chamber pots and buckets that had to be emptied and scrubbed.

"His wife resisted. "I don't want to clean the latrines, it's the work of the Untouchables," she retorted. "All work in this community is sacred," Gandhi said, "and none is more sacred than to devote ourselves to make the ashram pure by cleaning the latrines. It is an act of worship," (Email [colin@colinhodgetts.co.uk](mailto:colin@colinhodgetts.co.uk) if you'd like to receive his other 'sermonettes'.)

In all honesty I should admit in my experience it's usually us men who take fewer turns at loo cleaning.

**And finally...**

There's a poem "Our Heroes" going round on the internet, written by a **Matt Kelly**, which I know a number of us have seen. Then Othona member **Sally Spencer** sent me [this moving video with Christopher Eccleston reading it](#).

May we all find the everyday heroism we need. I shall write again to wish you a Happy Easter.

Tony - on behalf of all of us isolating at Othona: Robin, Liz, Kate, Gavin and Sean

P.S. I send this out with lots of nice white space between paragraphs etc. but I know some of you find it downloads all squeezed up. As far as I know there's nowt I can do about that - sorry.