

Imagine!



Feb
2020

I imagine you are considering the state of your faith. Richard Harries' most recent book *Haunted by Christ* has led me to two Welsh poets from the last century, both named Thomas, who have left me pondering the present state of religious faith. I have also been prompted into this reflection by an article in the Guardian by Simon Jenkins, where he observes how our cathedrals are bucking the trend of declining church attendance. He thought it has something to do with cathedrals providing a quiet space where anyone can go, and within the beauty of both building and music, they can pursue their own spiritual quest.

So what about our two poets? Edward Thomas was a non-believer, whose experience of chapel services and Sunday school in late 19th century Wales had driven him away from holding the faith that had been shared with him, because he found it too bleak and dogmatic. His poetry has a wistful longing within it for something lost. His most well-known poem *Adlestrop* is a wistful remembrance of an unscheduled stop at a remote village railway station in Gloucestershire, conjuring up pictures of the scenery, trees, plants and haycocks, alongside the song of a blackbird and the fainter calls of other birds. I wonder how many people similarly remember religious faith as something half-recalled from the past.

R S Thomas was a Church in Wales priest who practised his faith and yet his poetry often expresses the illusiveness of our experience of God. In *The Bright Field*, he likens our religious experience to the flash of sunlight on a field, there for a moment and then gone. *The Blackbird* describes how he hears in the bird's song a note of joy, love and grief. In *The Empty Church*, he likens kneeling in prayer to throwing thoughts at a stone heart, hoping they will ignite and throw "the shadow of someone greater than I can understand".

I wonder for how many people their experience of God seems just as fleeting and illusive? At the end of the month, we shall be entering Lent, a spiritual season when, among other things, we recall Jesus' time in the wilderness. Maybe Edward Thomas and R S Thomas allow us to ponder our own spiritual wildernesses, where we can pursue our spiritual quest.

God be with you,



Care Time



We remember those who are or have been unwell, going through stressful times, or in pain, including Martin and Sylvia, Lorraine, Caroline and Paul. We pray for events taking place in our church and the other churches in Stansted, particularly Messy Church on 2nd February. We remember those who are separated from their families, especially the Syrian refugees in Stansted.

INK CARTRIDGES, STAMPS AND DENTAL PRODUCTS RECYCLING

Please bring your used ink cartridges and place in the boxes in the foyer and the hall. All makes (now including Epson) can be recycled, but they must be originals, not re-manufactured. Any money we receive goes towards the costs of Messy Church.

We are also collecting used postage stamps on behalf of Bishop's Stortford URC, and they can be placed in the box with the ink cartridges. Money goes to The Leprosy Mission.

Betty is collecting used toothbrushes, toothbrush heads, and toothpaste tubes for recycling on behalf of an organisation in Elsenham; money raised goes to Essex Air Ambulance. There is a separate box for these items near the ink cartridge box. Thank you.

Marion

Please email articles for **Imagine** to: news@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

Editors: Alan Wheeler and Mike & Marion Dyer

Copies of this and previous editions of Imagine can be found on our website www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

WHAT'S ON IN FEBRUARY

Worship at Stansted Free Church

2nd 10.30 am Nicola Grieves - New Directions
9th 10.30 am Mike Render
19th 10.30 am Rev'd Gill Hulme
23rd 10.30 am Rev'd Roy Fowler - Communion

Other Activities

Sun 2nd 3.30 pm Messy Church at St Mary's School
Sun 16th 11.30 am Fairtrade Goods on sale after the service
Wed 19th 2.30 pm Circuit Finance Meeting at 7 Blythwood Gardens
Thu 20th 9.30 am Church Oversight Group at 7 Blythwood Gardens
Tue 25th 7.00 pm Pancakes and Prayer in the Church



Pancakes and Prayer Shrove Tuesday 25th February in the church



Please come and join people from the other WEBS Churches for a pre-Lent feast of pancakes
For catering please call Betty if you are planning to come

Pancakes and coffee will be served from 7pm followed by a short time of prayer and reflection at 8 pm



STANSTED MESSY CHURCH

Sunday 2nd Feb 3.30 - 5 pm
St Mary's School, Foresthall Park



You can see photographs of our previous Messy Church events at www.stanstedchurches.com/messychurch. A very big thank you to all those who have helped or provided food at our previous events. Sue will be looking for people to provide sandwiches and cakes (please contact Sue if you can help).

For general information call Marion & Mike

Next Church Meeting: Saturday 7th March 10.00 am

Stansted Free Church (Methodist / URC)

www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

Part of the WEBS (West Essex & Bishop's Stortford) URC Pastorate
and the Bishop's Stortford Methodist Circuit

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Sunday Service

10.30 am Morning Worship.
Some months we hold *New Directions* which is an informal service

The Place on the Hill Drop-In (Everyone Welcome)

Monday, Wednesday and Friday (not Bank Holidays)

9.30 am - 12.30 pm

Tel Marion & Mike , Catherine or Fran

Email: theplace@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

