

“Have I Got Lent For You?”

My Lenten Journey



David Collins 2018

Foreword by Bishop Richard, Bishop of Monmouth

All proceeds to Christian Aid Week 2018

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce David's account of his Lent Journey to you.

David describes his journey from the very start of Lent through to the enormous events of Good Friday. It is a deeply personal account, sprinkled with numerous interesting references to the things which make up David's personality and underpin his faith.

I enjoyed his reflections on his experiences of different places of worship and the stories of his encounters with friends old and new. David explored the real meaning of Lent on his journey and his many observations and questions present a colourful and thoughtful collection of reflections. This is David's own story but I wonder how many of you will also recognise yourselves here and there in these pages?

David makes several references to his support for Christian Aid, which I know to be a cause dear to his heart. He has committed his thoughts to print in order to raise funds for their marvellous work. I am delighted to lend my support to his efforts.

*Bishop Richard
Bishop of Monmouth*

What is Lent for?

I heard a joke once.

It went something like..... a priest was walking the back streets of Paris, when he was set upon by a robber. "Giss yer wallet!" the assailant cried. But when he saw his victim reaching into his pocket, the baddie noticed the cleric's collar and immediately apologised. The relieved cleric offered the thief a cigar instead. "No thanks" said the robber. "I've given up smoking for Lent."

I'm not sure if the thief in that tale really quite grasped the whole Lent thing if I'm honest but then, who does? What is Lent for? Is it a minor inconvenience which causes us to give up candy or crumpets, or something deeper?

The writer Clarence Day commented that what his father gave up for Lent, was going to church. My eldest son stops drinking and gives his beer money to charity. For all the leanness of Lent, the Anglican Church adorns itself in bright purple. It starts with a cross being marked on the foreheads of the faithful, but some churches provide wet wipes on the way out. What is Lent for?

Some years ago, I abandoned the whole "Give Something Up for Lent" thing.

I decided that, if I wasn't going to replace the time I spent munching chocolate or drinking beer with something more constructive, then I may as well just stick to the booze and Quality Street.

So in recent years, I have striven instead to "Take Something Up for Lent."

This is less of a cop-out than it first sounds to be fair, and the days of February and March in recent years have seen me rock up at Bible study groups, Bishop's lectures and even Christian magic shows.

Following my (ultimately unsuccessful) quest to visit 12 football grounds over Christmas ("on the 1st Ground of Christmas.....a day out at Millwall FC!") I took a similar approach to Lent. "Let's see if I can manage six different churches during Lent," I thought.

But the anorak in me wasn't about to accept such an easy ride. Lent is meant to be hard, isn't it? I decided that I had to attend an actual service in different venues. After all, you wouldn't just stand outside the Old Trafford gift shop and claim that as a trip to Man United, would you? No, I had to get the whole "match day experience" so to speak.

I wanted to see how different churches spoke to me during Lent. I visited familiar venues on my doorstep where I have worshiped for years.....and some where I had never been at all. I walked to church. I drove to church. I sat amongst ancient 12th century surroundings and crossed the city to discuss the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a man I had never met before. I even snuck in a trip to a real football ground.

So what did I learn? How was my journey? *When* was my journey?

My well-thumbed little Eucharist book, reminds us that Lent lasts forty days and nights. Or does it? As I flicked through my diary, I encountered something called Quinquagesima, the 50th day before Easter. While this turns out to be mathematically correct, the related Sundays of Sexagesima and (wait for it....) Septuagesima are only approximations, the exact number of days being 57 and 64 respectively - not counting Sundays....unless using the Prayer Book calendar, apparently.

Just what had I started here? Clearly this would all need some planning on my part. It was only February. The resurrection was set ominously for April Fools' Day. It felt like a made up date set deep in the future.

As events transpired, it turned out to be a journey which spanned many stages. Years even. I saw things old and new. Sometimes I questioned them because I wondered why things were so. Why did God make Sikhs and Muslims, I mused. Sometimes though, I accepted things, because.....well, I just did. This is a story of one man's Lent. It is my own take on Lent. Lent, the One Man Show. My own account. I do not claim it is the authorized version.



DO YOU WANT TO FAST THIS LENT?

In the words of Pope Francis

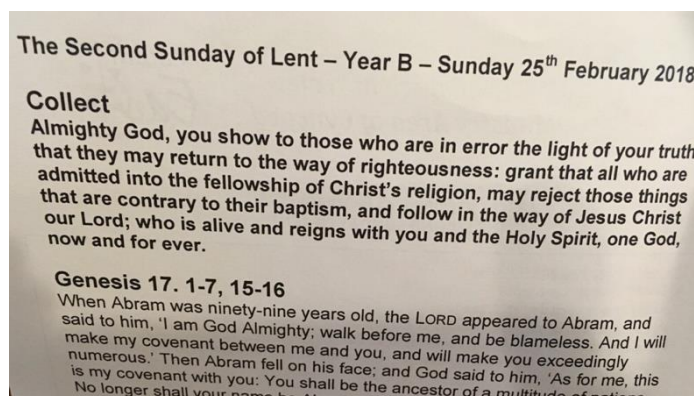
- Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
- Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.
- Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
- Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
- Fast from worries and have trust in God.
- Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
- Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
- Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
- Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.
- Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
- Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

pietrafitness.com



Early Doors

Having fasted throughout the daylight hours of Ash Wednesday, I was in need of instant nourishment. My first three outings therefore took me to local Anglican venues. Familiar faces in the pews. Familiar words. Hymns I knew. The loving fellowship of long standing friends. Family members in the congregation. New vicars. Old vicars. Purple in the pulpit and services at different times of the day, as each church juggled with itself to meet the needs of the people. Flower rotas updated and collection plates for your envelopes. Easy like a Sunday Morning. Jesus at the heart of it all. Strong [words here](#) from the Bishop of Monmouth about helping others. So far so good.



A Question of Sport

Despite the loving arms I felt around me in my first few weeks though, I knew that I also needed to stretch myself if Lent was to teach me anything.

Christians in Sport is an organisation I have studied from afar, and this Lent provided me with an opportunity to attend one of their Partner Evenings held at - as luck would have it - Cardiff City Football Club. Too good a chance for me to turn down?

I went along. I enjoyed it. I didn't know a soul but was welcomed eagerly. Trim, athletic youngsters spoke powerfully of their love for Christ. We looked at the international aspect of Christians in Sport and also their work here in Wales. Oh sure, it had a different feel to my usual outings at this venue, but the message was just as passionate. Very, very focussed on Christ, on spreading the Word, supporting other Christians and preaching the Gospel. Rest assured I will also doctor their Sports Quiz format during my forthcoming Christian Aid Week activities. No mention of sports fans though. Are they missing an opportunity here?

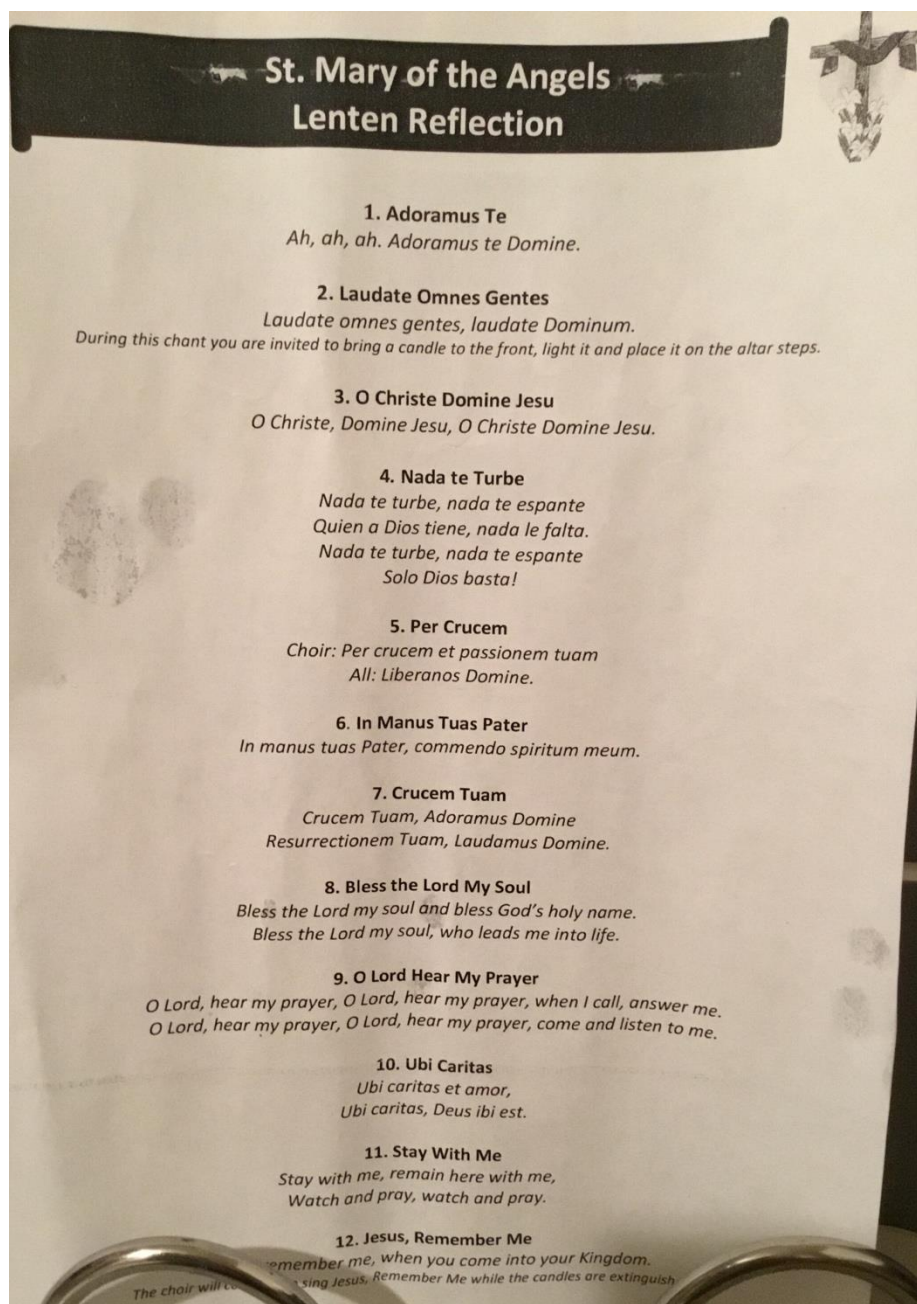
I know that a night at the Cardiff City Stadium joining Break Out sessions and workshops may not count as a "Church Service." But, as my anorak tightened, I felt nonetheless that it had been a useful addition to my journey.



Habeas Corpus

Church on a Thursday was always likely to throw up something different. I found myself abandoning the familiar surroundings of local churches and football grounds for my fourth church, to visit St Mary of the Angels Church in Canton. A vast, cathedral-like structure amidst the long Cardiff streets. Lent was taking me to a RC church this time.

My Latin is not great. There was little call for Latin in my Splott school but, supported by my friend Tim and the power of Google, I managed to soon follow this wonderful evening of Taize worship. Simple prayers preceded each chant. Subdued lighting and the glow of candlelight brought an intimate feel to this cavernous chamber. Yet amidst this palatial splendour and complex musical arrangements, the message really was a simple one. Whilst all the time, a giant crucifix looked down from the ceiling. "It's that man again," I thought. He's been at every one of these churches so far.



A Day of Listening

There is something about walking to church, isn't there? Images of country parsons spring to mind. Cycling midwives and Bring & Buy Sales. A calming comfort in a hectic world. This is one of the reasons why I often attend my most local church. It is minutes from my house and a welcome relief from the daily grind of traffic lights and road rage. No closure of the eastbound lane on this highway.

On Mother's Day, as I took my well-worn steps through the short lane behind my house, I studied my surroundings. A chemist. A doctor's surgery. A school, bus stops and playing fields. Pavement parking and the occasional dog walker. I could see the church ahead of me. I wondered, though, could the church see me? As I contemplated declining congregations and a growing secular world, I wondered how does "The Church" reach out to this community? How do we keep the integrity of the Word but still speak to the Instagram Generation?

A sign announcing parking restrictions hinted at tensions with neighbours, whilst an uncharacteristically small congregation of only 19 illustrated the challenges faced by many churches. But this was a robust gathering, with hymns sung lustily, Sunday Schools for the kids and news & announcements about the lives of the members of this loving family of worshipers. Easter would be here soon, but before that, the church AGM would meet to decide a way forward for this particular place of worship. What would the future bring? How could we grow?

This was a cue for Georgia.

Georgia is new to our neighbourhood. Along with her fellow soldier Sarah, she has arrived in the locality as part of an innovative new project.

Drawing on Franciscan traditions, Georgia and Sarah will commit to a lifestyle of contemplative activism, combining prayer and contemplation with an active response to the needs of the local community. In particular, their goal is to establish a new religious community for young adults to live, pray and serve the various communities that make up our area.

Georgia introduced herself to the welcoming congregation. I had met Georgia before. Georgia had also walked to church today. I been thinking about her a bit lately and wondered when she would pop up in this particular venue. Georgia on my mind, you might say. How strange that she should choose today, to offer me her glimpse of the future.

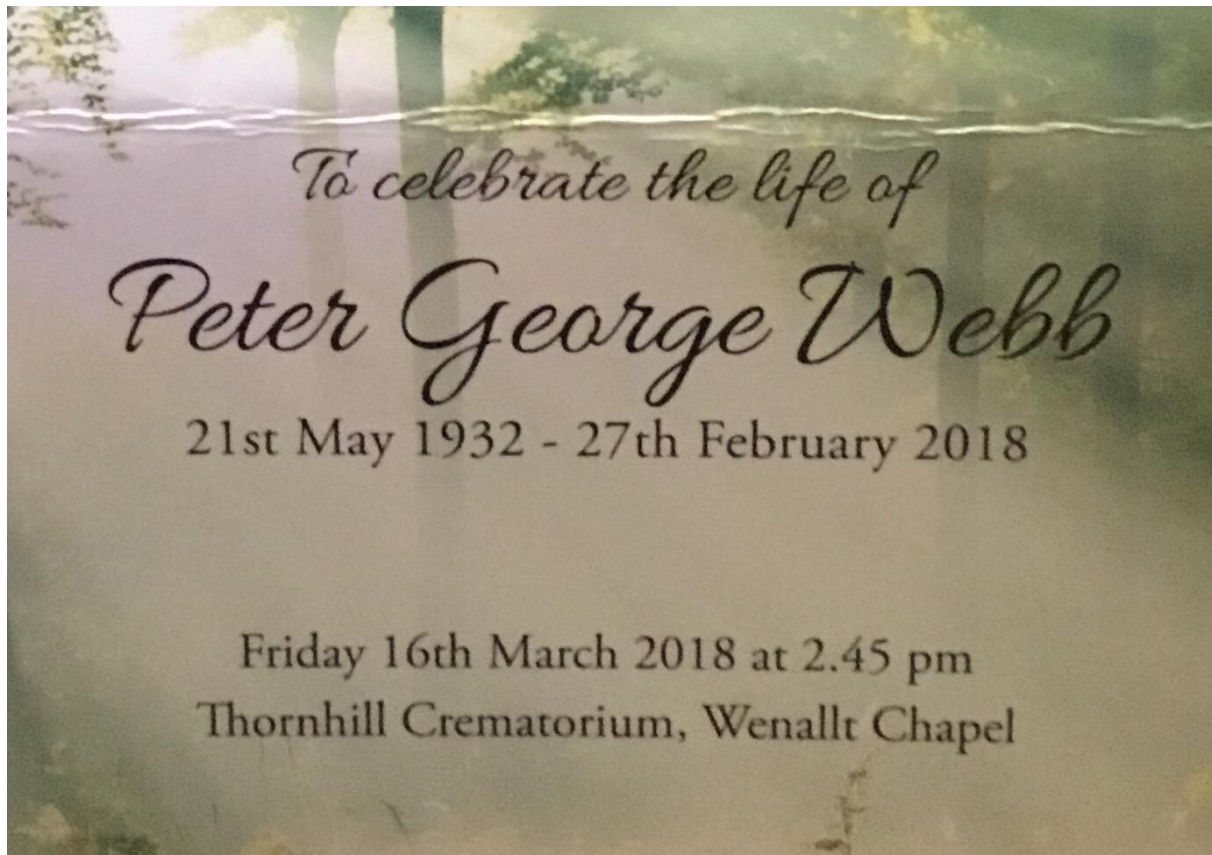


Funeral for a Friend

Have you ever attended a funeral during Lent? It's an interesting experience. On Friday 16 March, we said farewell to a long-standing family friend. A lifelong pal of my own late father. To us, he was "Uncle Peter" in the days when the world described families differently. A man I'd known my whole life.

Peter was a quiet man. Animated he was not. Religious he was probably not. The service reflected these traits. Matt Monro & Mwfanwy.... but no prayers. The "celebrant" spoke joyously of Peter's life; of his late wife and great-grandchildren. We heard all their names as "Bumpy" rested at the head of the Wenallt Chapel. No hymns. No Lord is my Shepherd. The celebrant described how Pete's journey was at its end.

"Does this count as church?" I wondered. Probably not. But behind the spot where Pete now, finally, rested, my eyes settled on the small, yet powerfully visible crucifix. Adorned with spring flowers, it was still there. Shining. Shine Jesus Shine. Reminding us that, ultimately, God *is* always there for us on our journey, if only we seek him.



Snow Day

My fifth Sunday, as things turned out, proved to be something of a “free hit.” I had already pencilled in a sixth, or was it a seventh, church for Good Friday, and so with the pressure off, I decided to once again walk to my local church, ready to put in my penny’s worth, at the AGM. But fate had other plans for me this morning.

Despite being only two weeks from Easter, I awoke again today to a fairly deep covering of snow. Deep, crisp and even. Well, maybe not deep, but enough to cause some congregations to review their plans. Some decided to open for fellowship in the absence of a snowbound vicar, some threw open their doors as a general “catch-all” to those churchgoers unable to attend their usual abode, and some, well, had a bit of a duvet day, I suppose.

After some hasty texting and other digital communication exchanges, we went for the first option. Armed with spade and strong boots, I helped clear a path for others to follow. Boldly I wrote the word “Open” in the snow to show the world we meant business. Not exactly “a path in the wilderness,” though I did feel strangely blessed as I helped open the church to welcome the clutch of hardy worshipers who had made it to morning worship that day. We boiled kettles and enjoyed fellowship. I led a loose discussion on how we could grow in the community and the youngest of our flock closed in prayer. “God bless us; and God bless you,” she concluded.

I was pleased that I had made it to church that day. Pleased to clear the paths, pleased to join others for fellowship and pleased that the world could see that a touch of winter weather wasn’t going to prevent us from our weekly work.

Most of all though, I knew, privately, that if I hadn’t clambered to church that day, chances were, I wouldn’t see a soul all day. On the face of it, my efforts today looked charitable. Altruistic. But Sundays are slow in my house. The world does other things all day. Why *do* I go to church each week? Was I really clearing snow just for myself? What gap does church fill in my life? Without church to fill the space between “Match of the Day” and Monday morning, whatever would I do with myself all day?



Having a Nose

I snuck in a cheeky visit to another venue later in March, as Social Media drew my attention to an event outside of my usual parish. A Baptist Church this time. A place I had visited in days gone by.

Today was the official opening of their new extension. Might be worth a nose, I thought.

It was lovely. Jolly, even. Cupcakes and face painting. Spring breaking out around us at last. A packed hall. A family united. One of them would be 100 next week. They let her cut the ribbon. A band of ageing rockers played hits from the 60s. Sweet Caroline.

Good times never seemed so good.

I sat quietly with my cup of tea and tiny cake. This church community looked relaxed. Happy. You might even say....comfortable.

The last time I had visited this particular church, in the affluent North Cardiff suburbs, had been to attend the funeral of a dear friend.

I thought about my late friend. Dearly missed. I recalled our years of friendship, remembering the tough time she had faced from her father many years ago when she began dating a lad of mixed race. Her future husband, as it goes.

I glanced around the happy, comfortable, faces in the new extension. There might have been 200 people in. I counted one black face.



Holy Contemplations, Batman!

As I contemplated my journey thus far, I began to lose track of how many churches I'd actually visited. 4? 6? Eventually I convinced myself that it wasn't really that important at the end of the day. The 92 club wouldn't be watching and, whilst I knew I couldn't count Cardiff City Football Club as church, I had certainly gained something from each venue I had visited and the people I had met. It really was proving to be more of an experience than I ever imagined. Surprisingly though....very few sermons. Strange. Maybe I was being asked to form my own opinions during my time in the wilderness?

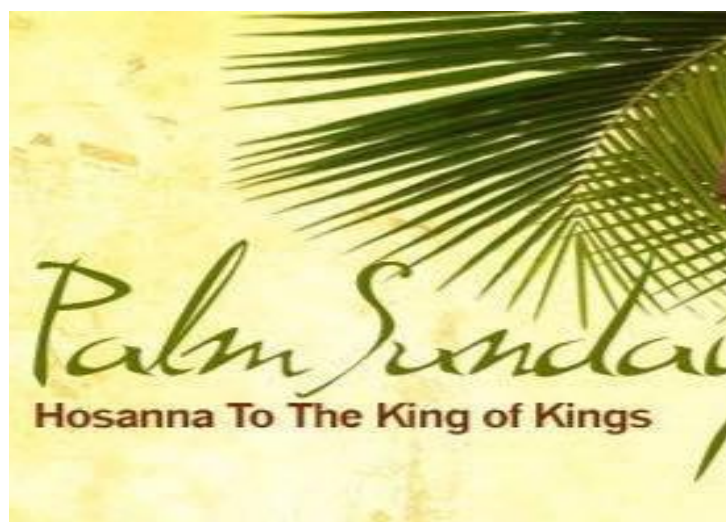
Anyway, there were still a few venues left on my "To Do" list. With just one week to go, I needed to plough on. Just one week to go. Holy Week. No pressure then, eh?

The week began, even by my own high standards of navel-gazing, thoughtfully. At yesterday's ribbon-cutting event, my eyes were drawn to the book table. Friendly faced old ladies smiled at me from beyond the trestle table. There were coins on a plate and no VAT Returns to fill out. Hard Sell, it was not. But one title drew me in.

"Conchie" was a critical analysis of the author's father's decision to declare himself a Conscientious Objector during the Second World War. Like his father before him, the author was a Baptist minister. The subtitle "What my father didn't do in the war" appealed to my mischievous love of word play. I had also heard my own late father talk disparagingly about "conchies" and had developed an interest in Remembrance Sunday over the years through my role working for a community council in Gwent – a difficult day for sermons I always imagine.

The sleeve notes described the author's quest to look for the man his father had been. Convinced that Christ's teachings forbade killing, Dad had reached a controversial yet convinced decision. But between the pages from the pulpit, we could also learn about Pre and Post War life in industrial South Wales.

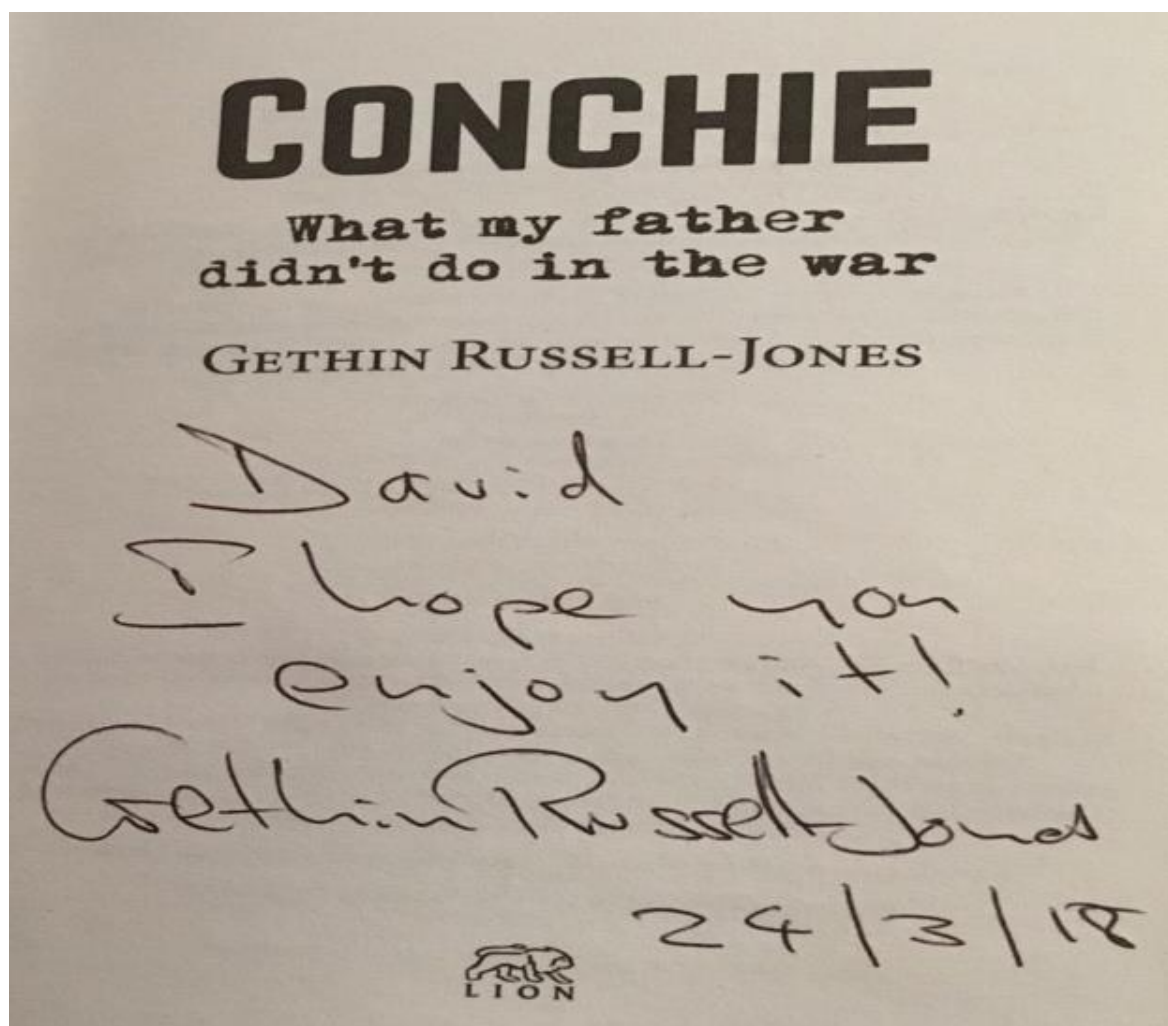
I was hooked. "That's my Holy Week reading sorted out," I thought, and negotiated the purchase price at a fiver. Bargain. My schoolboy maths told me I needed to read 30 pages a day if I was to finish it before the Resurrection.



Palm Sunday continued the theme with another thought-provoking episode, as I came upon "All Things Considered" on BBC Radio Wales. I used to be a regular listener before discovering Sky Sports. This week though, I tuned in. The weekly religious affairs programme had set itself the task of analysing Lent & Self Denial. "What was Lent for?" the panel debated. "How relevant is it to today." The eclectic group of panelists included a bishop and an environmentalist. They carefully navigated the place of Lent in a secular world. PC amongst the prayers. One speaker talked of how we could maybe "take something up for Lent." There's a thought eh?

My Palm Sunday church experience later that day included a real church procession and well chosen readings. Palms and Psalms on a busy Sunday. We even held the rescheduled AGM, where I asked questions of our skilled treasurer before we all speculated on our "vision" for the future of the church. I found myself using the word "unhypothesized" in an actual conversation about our financial balances. Our treasurer Jane was unmoved, and simply answered "Yes."

Conscientious Objectors, the true meaning of Lent and Earmarked Financial Reserves. That's a lot of contemplation in one go isn't it?



Maundy Matters

The rest of the week saw me hard at it with “Conchie.” The author’s clever arrangement of chapters and skilled plot development entertained me as he thoughtfully disclosed his father’s passage through life. Christ featured large in the story. Again. By Tuesday we he had commenced his subject’s path to ordination. Come Wednesday, Hitler had invaded Poland. I was halfway through the book by Thursday. Good progress I thought.

But this was to be no ordinary Thursday.

For non-Christians, Maundy Thursday probably holds little significance. It’s a kind of “Friday cum early,” I guess, as the secular world knocks off for three days of fun. Four even.

But for others, Maundy Thursday sets the scene for almost the entire compendium of the Christian faith. Known variously as Holy Thursday, Covenant Thursday, Great and Holy Thursday, Sheer Thursday and even Thursday of Mysteries, it is, arguably, the most important day of Lent. A day dripping in messages, with its themes of preparation & service to others. Images brought to life by Da Vinci illustrate how it is remembered as the occasion on which Christ shared a last supper with the 12. “Do this, in remembrance of me” we are instructed.

Further central doctrinal teachings also stem from this day of revelation. My limited knowledge of Latin (see Taize above) extends only to the fact that, somewhere along the line, I have become aware that “Maundy” derives from the Latin “mandatum,” as in “mandatory” or command: “A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another as I have loved you.”

I arrived home from work this day to find that Mr Postman had delivered my Christian Aid running vest, in preparation for a sponsored run for which I had registered later in the year. A training programme was included to help my preparation. “A day dripping in preparation and service to others?”



I had not forgotten my own odyssey though, and, having put my new vest to one side for now, headed off to an enormous Grade II listed building, which stood, almost defiantly, on a large corner plot on one of the many long streets of inner city Cardiff. This imposing Methodist structure overlooks hairdressing salons and fast food takeaways in the heart of Student Land. It seems to revel in the competition though, having firmly stood its ground there since the nineteenth century.

I was raised as a Methodist myself some 50 odd years ago, and still feel at home in such environments. But this was to be no cosy evening reflecting warmly on childhood memories. I had been invited to a performance by Cardiff Methodist Community Choir. They performed "Concept," which, I was given to understand, would examine the nature of the people in the Easter story within ourselves, making the story real today. Some of my real friends were in it.

It started well. Caitlin, she who had prayed "God Bless You" that snowy morning described above, played the part of the Holy Spirit. She moved across the waters. Effortlessly symbolising creation and the Word. We leapt past the Old Testament, to meet Mary, dressed, not in Da Vinci blue, but, like the 12, in solid black. They sang to her. "Mary did you know, that your Baby Boy would one day walk on water?"

It was minimalist and moving. We encountered Mary Magdalene and Judas. I think I spotted the Devil but I can't be sure. He's a cunning one, that one. The crucifixion scene was almost too powerful for words, as the Lord hung above us while the audience, or rather by now....the congregation, was invited to share communion beneath his broken bones. Broken for you. The Servant King, we sang. To cruel nails surrendered.

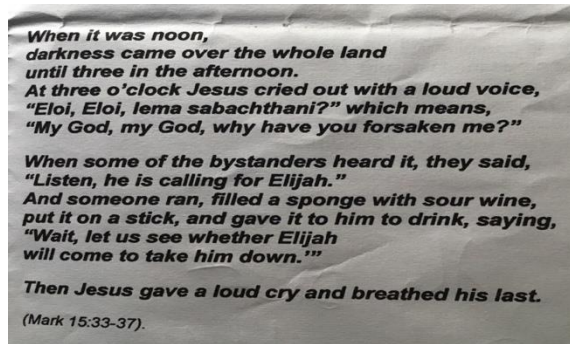
It was alarmingly powerful. The narrator interjected at regular intervals. "Is the love of God real in our lives?" she asked. "Or just a concept?"

I was shaking by now. The narrator reminded us of past mistakes. What if we could start again? What if we were forgiven? Hey Judas.....you listening? Freely, freely we had received, as the choir continued to belt out the hits. "Because we believeothers will know that I live."

Outside, after the performance, the dark night had descended. Rain glistened on city streets. Students shopped in takeaways. I wasn't sure where I'd parked. It had been emotional and I needed to take stock. At times tonight I felt like I'd been shown the picture on the puzzle box. Is *that* what He meant me to do? But I wanted to study the picture for longer. I still had missing pieces in my jigsaw. I think. I was a wreck by the end of it all. As though I'd been taken apart and put back together again, quicker than you'd thought possible.

Tomorrow would be no easier. Like Ebenezer Scrooge I knew what the final spirit would bring. It would be another long day for the heartstrings. A long Good Friday.





Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?

The playwright Alan Bennett is sceptical about scripture. He claims that the liturgy is best treated as if it's someone announcing the departure of trains.

With that in mind then, let's quickly dispense with the itinerary of this holiest of days:

- 10.00 am. Good Friday service. Christchurch United Free Church.
- 11.00 am. Good Friday procession. Follow the cross to.....
- 11.30 am. Ecumenical Act of Witness, Churches Together Shop.

As you might expect of course, this list of arrivals & departures barely scratches the surface of an enormous day. We heard the tale of woe. Betrayal. Denial. Redemption. Martyrdom? We wondered why our Sunday School Story had taken such a dark twist. We heard the familiar words from the cross. "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" But how many of us knew that these words echoed those of David the psalmist in Psalm 22? "I cry out by day but you do not answer." Forewarned was not forearmed today.

The sermon was not so much spoken or delivered, it was positively "performed" with a conviction and passion from Andrew which I found spellbinding. Moving images on screen brought our shattered worlds to life. It's ok to feel like this when the world is too hard a place to occupy, Andrew implored. Illness, work, relationships, money. These things weigh us down. They question our faith. Why has He forgotten me? Even Jesus felt lost and abandoned up there. Veiled in flesh the godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity. He knows how we feel. He knows the thoughts that surround us. Where was *His* God when the going got tough? Love lay bleeding.

Yet even on this darkest of days, we saw brushstrokes of what was to come. Lay down your soul at Jesus' feet. The darkest hour is just before dawn. The hints and whispers of the psalmists and others gave clues.

But for now. We wait. We wait in the darkness which covers the land of faith. We feel abandoned. We hear from Mark's gospel how Jesus gave a loud cry... and breathed his last.

The congregation retreated in silence.



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HOLY WEEK & EASTER

AT LLANDAFF CATHEDRAL

26th March

HOLY WEEK

MONDAY, March 26th.
10.30 a.m. REFLECTION at CYNCOED Methodist Church, Vestminster Crescent, led by the Revd. Philip Buckland.
3.30 p.m. Ladies Circle - Holy Week Service led by David Tychen - A warm welcome to all ladies.
7.00 p.m.-9.30 p.m. Kick Boxing/Tae Kwondo Lessons in Hall.
9.15 p.m. Cardiff Methodist Community Choir.

TUESDAY, March 27th.
10.30 a.m. Reflection at Cyncoed led by Rev. Philip Buckland
1.30 p.m. Girls' Brigade - 6.00-7.30 p.m. Explorers & Juniors (10-18) & Seniors & Brigaders (ages 11-18) 7.30-9.00 p.m. 10-9.30 p.m. City Sirens in Basement. (letting).

WEDNESDAY, March 28th.
10.30 a.m. Reflection at Cyncoed led by Rev. Philip Buckland
8.30 p.m. Yoga (Ray) in Basement. (letting).

THURSDAY, March 29th. (Maundy Thursday).
10.30 a.m. Reflection with Communion at Cyncoed, led by Philip Buckland.
The Cyncoed Ministry Area presents: CONCEPT - Easter Reflection with Communion, here at CATHAYS. Examining the people in the Easter story within ourselves, very real today. Please come along and support.

FRIDAY, March 30th. (Good Friday).
10.30 a.m. Reflection at Cyncoed led by Rev. Philip Buckland
The Cyncoed Ministry Area presents: CONCEPT - Easter Reflection with Communion, here at CATHAYS. Examining the people in the Easter story within ourselves, very real today. Please come along and support.

SATURDAY, March 31st.
10.30 a.m. Dance Class in Hall. (letting).

Holy Eucharist
Evening Prayer
Holy Eucharist

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& I

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CATHAYS -
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www.eventagious

Cardiff
East
Church in Llandaff

Good Friday Act of Witness

Prayer and Introduction

There is a green hill far away

1. There is a green hill far away.



Christchurch United Church

Christ Led : Christ Centred : Christ's Church

A warm welcome to all visitors who are worshipping with us today.
Please make yourself known to the minister or one of the stewards.



The Cyncoed Ministry Area
of the Church in Wales
Diocese of Monmouth
www.cyncoedministryarea.org.uk
A Church Registered in England and Wales No. 2887653

Easter Day Sunrise walk

6.00am (TBC) Roath Park lake

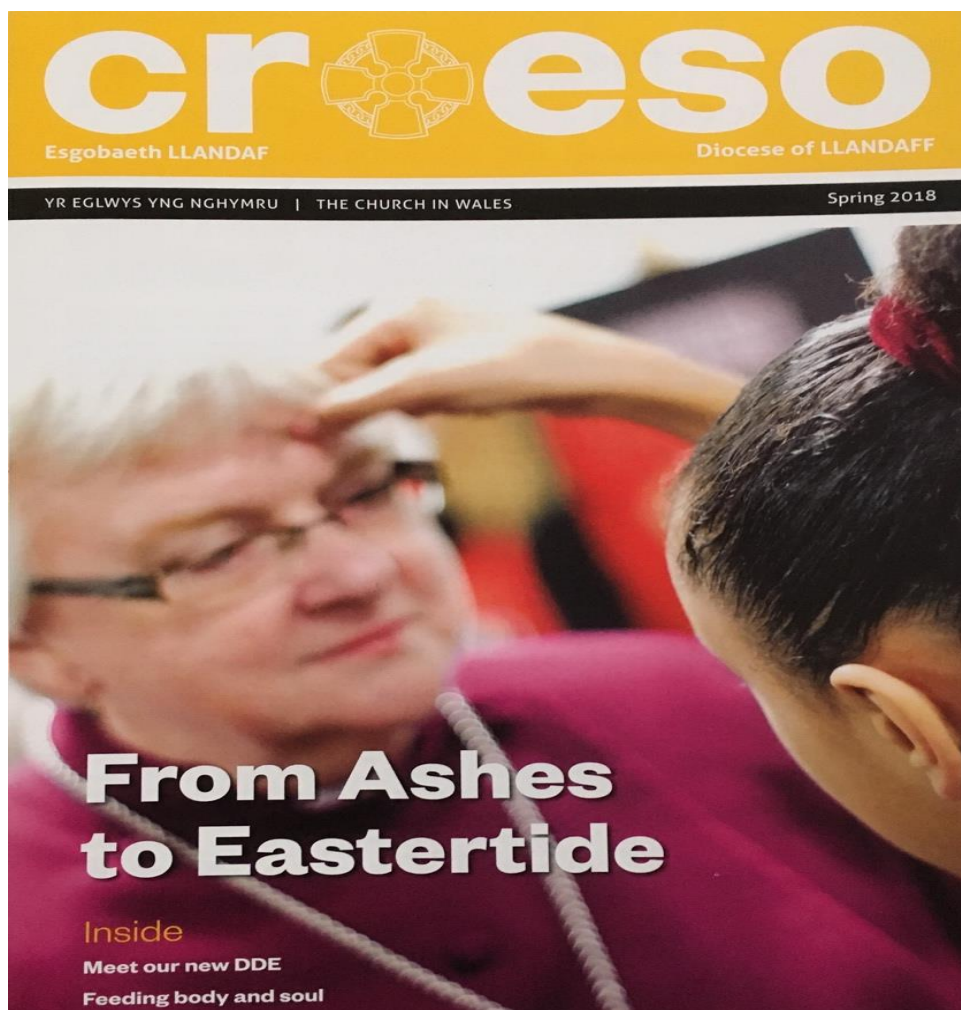
"Light will break out like the dawn"
Isaiah 58:8

When Saturday Comes

Easter Saturday is sometimes overlooked in this mighty trail of events. Churches are bare and little formal activity takes place. But life goes on. I found myself in the vicinity of Llandaff for Easter Eve. A city within a city, as all Cardiffians know. The magnificent cathedral provided an opportunity to end my journey on a high. I smiled as I read the diocesan magazine. It introduced us to the new bishop and described legislative changes to data protection issues. I read with interest about the work of chaplains at football clubs. Three at Swansea City apparently, though no mention of the Bluebirds. My good friend Mari, from Christian Aid Wales, had even contributed an informative article about the work of Christian Aid. It was almost as if they knew I was coming.

There has been a Christian presence on this site from the time of Saint Teilo in the sixth century, and this was shown by the early Christian pillar-cross in the south aisle and grave markers reset into the fabric. The present building dates from the Norman period and was extended in the early thirteenth century, with further additions and modifications in the later Middle Ages.

I received a warm greeting from a kindly gent who described himself as simply “a welcomer.” An impressive catalogue of leaflets and literature disclosed the cathedral’s mysteries to the curious amongst us. The kindly gent told other visitors that “unfortunately” the church was stripped bare today. I couldn’t let it pass. “It’s not unfortunate” I interjected. “It’s Easter.” I think he took the point.



And so.....

“On the first day of the week.....while it was still dark.”

On Easter Day, before 6am, a dozen or so of us drawn from five local churches – including several of those referenced above - met at Roath Park Lake, a picturesque beauty spot much loved by generations of the capital’s citizens. Friends and family. This random gathering felt almost hand-picked for my personal benefit. My past, present and future assembled around me in the pre-dawn blackness. A son, a vicar, a fellow Cardiff City season ticket-holder and a Dad whose daughter played the Holy Spirit a few nights ago. Familiar faces in the cold night air. Shadows across the dark waters as we began our tour of the lake’s mile long perimeter. What a marvellous night for a Moondance.

But, as sure as eggs is eggs on this Easter Day, the light soon shone through the darkness. Dawn broke, magnificently. The darkness could not overcome it.

Geese, ducks and swans ran busily amongst us, quacking and screeching. Their webbed footprints occupied the grassy banks of the lake. Their nasal tones pierced the Sunday Morning Silence. “Alleluia,” they cried, “He is risen!”

He is risen indeed.



Epilogue

And so this is Easter. And what have I done? Another Lent over.....

A journey of many highs (the breathtaking simplicity of the Teize service) and even one or two lows (I later learnt that the inspirational Georgia would not be with us beyond June). I didn't manage to finish "Conchie" by Easter but was able to lend it out to an ordained friend of mine before Low Sunday arrived, all pages fully thumbled.

I met friends of strong faith and no faith. Strangers and Siblings. Mourners and Merry-makers. Church and Chapel. All played their part.

But above all, I saw Faith, in all its manifestations. Laid out for me in an eclectic, ecumenical tapestry. Sometimes I was shown this strength within mighty ecclesiastical arenas. Sometimes..... less obvious venues.

I saw the power of the cross and the risen Lord, whether that cross was made by hand and carried through the streets of my community - almost in an act of defiance, or quietly displayed in the tea urn filled by a faithful soul after weekly communion.

I saw the Church trying to reach out - and some people wanting to be reached. New buildings opened, old buildings in need of restoration. The Holy Spirit aching for its people. Run Forest Run, it cries, urging greater effort. Small children eagerly colour in their Bible stories. Young men clear snow from the church roof. Older ladies bake lemon drizzle. It's their way of giving. And who am I to voice a view on all that?

It's been quite a journey. When I began, I just thought it might be fun. Interesting at best. But Lent has a strange way of giving. At times it bordered on the uncomfortable. At times, I felt His presence, nudging me along. A Pathfinder along my way.

My Easter Eggs are long since eaten and Lent's tough path has been walked. I feel a closer relationship with the Almighty and have even been shown a glimpse of the future.

*Clearly there is soil to plant in, but it needs work. Watering. If the church is to grow, it must change, yet somehow stay the same? At times, we are like the disciples, hidden behind a locked door following the Resurrection. Hiding from what? Jesus appeared to them then, but how do **we** reach outside that room?*

How do we show our Faith amongst the Foodbanks?

My journey has told me about God; about church and the symbolism of Easter. But most of all, has it told me about myself? What have I gained from all this? Trinity beckons now. Green. A season of growth. Is Easter a new start or just simply a chance to breathe a sigh of relief and return to the old ways, only to commence a new journey of penitence next February?

Here lieth the next challenge??

David Collins
April 2018

Diary

My Lent

Week by Week

Quinquagesima	Pontprennau Community Church, Cardiff
Ash Wednesday	My Dawn to Dusk Fast. (Cwmbran and Cardiff)
Lent: Week 1	St Ederyn's Church, Llanedeyrn Village, Cardiff
Lent: Week 2	All Saints Church in Wales, Cyncoed, Cardiff
Lent: Week 3	All Saints Church in Wales, Llanedeyrn, Cardiff
Lent: Week 4	Christians in Sport Partner Evening, Cardiff City Stadium St Mary of the Angels RC Church, Canton, Cardiff Capel Wenallt Chapel, Thornhill Crematorium, Cardiff Pontprennau Community Church, Cardiff (Mothering Sunday)
Lent: Week 5	Pontprennau Community Church, Cardiff Opening of "The Ark Centre." Ararat Baptist Church, Whitchurch, Cardiff.
Palm Sunday	Pontprennau Community Church, Cardiff
Maundy Thursday	Cathays Methodist Church, Cardiff
Good Friday	Christchurch United Free Church. Llanedeyrn, Cardiff Good Friday procession. Llanedeyrn, Cardiff Act of Witness, Churches Together Shop. Maelfa, Llanedeyrn, Cardiff
Easter Saturday	Llandaff Cathedral All Saints Church in Wales, Llanedeyrn (children's Easter egg hunt)
Easter Day	Sunrise Walk. Roath Park Lake, Cardiff Christchurch United Free Church. Llanedeyrn, Cardiff (Holy Communion)

Bibliography

The Books I read. The Songs I sang.

Not a definitive list, but I remember these highlights from my journey. Apologies to any I have omitted.

I also wish to record my thanks to those I encountered on my journey, both ordained and laity, many of whom I had not met before. "Often, Often, Often Goes the Christ in the Stranger's Guise."

My appreciation also to Gareth Bennett AM for his patient proofreading and grammatical observations. Any mistakes though, are mine, not his. Thanks also to Mike at Leaflet Ewe for the printing.

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I Write the Songs. Bruce Johnston 1975

and finally.....The Holy Bible. Various authors.



All proceeds to Christian Aid Week 2018

The Author

David Collins lives in Cardiff.

His obsessions include the fluctuating fortunes of Cardiff City Football Club and a single handed quest for ecumenicalism. Both need more work, he reckons.

He worships in various venues. Wherever they'll take him really. He prefers The Word told KJV style but wears a hoodie if it's raining.

He tolerates flower rotas and the weekly offertory but would rather shake his collecting tin outside the local betting office. Don't ask him to read in church.....he'll end up performing it.

David supports Christian Aid and is a trustee of a local ecumenical "Shop" project.

When he does something, he tends to write it down. Or link it to a song title. I write the songs, he said.

Read this deeply personal account of his adventures on his own Lenten Journey.

Ask yourself.....How was Lent for You?

