

Newsletter for APRIL 2014

Holy Week and Easter

We hope that the weekly instalments of '[Just Love](#)', based on the Sunday gospel readings of Lent, are helping you to make connections between this season and the wider issues of justice and care for the underprivileged, not only in our own increasingly divided society, but worldwide. As in previous years, we have had a bucket in church each week for **Water Aid** - a well-focused [pun intended!] charity working to give communities in Africa and Asia proper access to safe water supplies. This year, on Lent 3, we heard the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well - *you have no bucket, and the well is deep* - linked to their astonishing debate about 'living water'. Despite this winter's abundance of water in Britain, in global terms water rights are becoming a political hot potato: the rich stealing it from the poor. We are also supporting **ALMA** (Angola London Mozambique Association - a diocesan link) in their appeal for £60,000 for young people, 'Helping Children be Children': information in church and [here](#).



Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, unfortunately clashes (as in some previous years) with the Virgin London Marathon: or maybe that should be the other way round - these days promoters of major events seem less aware of Christian festivals than of those of other faiths. Because of road closures our service has to be at 9.00am - though the organisers will be as helpful as possible in allowing vehicular access to church. But to be more positive: we will have our palm procession at the end of the service, as a witness to the gathering crowds, and then we will gear up to offer them hospitality: drinks, cakes, sandwiches (but not loos - elf'n'safety!)



We are offering the eucharist at different times each day during the first part of the week: Monday evening, Tuesday lunchtime, Wednesday morning. On **Maundy Thursday** all are welcome at St Paul's at 10.30am for the diocesan service of renewal of ministerial vows and the blessing of the oils, led by Bishop Richard. At 7pm we will gather in the panelled room for the first part of our liturgy, reflecting the Passover (which this year for our Jewish neighbours begins two days previously), moving into church for communion, stripping the altar and the watch of prayer.

On **Good Friday**, we join Churches Together in Stepney and Wapping for a walk of witness, carrying a cross through the streets and pausing for prayer and reflection as we go (deliberately not inside churches, but outside): we start at Whitechapel Mission at 11am (the route will be available in church, for those who want to join it part-way through).



On **Easter Eve**, all are invited to come and help clean and prepare church for Easter (with coffee and cakes as an inducement!); and at 8pm we gather for our Easter liturgy. This is a dramatic (and child-friendly) service - starting with the new fire on the forecourt, taking the light of Christ into the dark church, telling the Christian story, renewing our baptismal vows, and sharing the first communion of Easter with joy. We encourage you to be there, as well as on **Easter morning!**

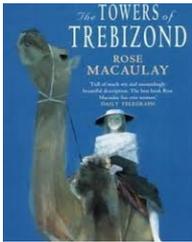
Annual Parochial Meetings

Our thanks to Archdeacon Rachel for a very positive parish visitation on 18 March, when she confirmed that all of our documentation is in place or in hand, and was affirming of our work and vision for the parish. Please make our annual meetings, after church on 27 April, a priority: we elect our churchwardens and Parochial Church Council members and receive the annual report and accounts. This may sound dull, but it can be quite lively - and is our chance to show support for church officers who have served us so well over the past year.

Tower Hamlets elections: Mayor and Councillors

Like other places of worship in our borough needing work doing to make them fit for purpose, we made a detailed bid to the Mayor's Fund for our major project to achieve disabled access. (This £3m fund, unparalleled in other local authorities, was set up to assist all faith buildings in Tower Hamlets - a laudable project, but there have been uncertainties about the criteria for making grants, and slipping timescales.) We expect that the results will be announced before the Council goes into 'purdah' - the period leading up to the mayoral and council elections on 22 May when political activity is restricted. We urge all readers resident in the borough to take a close interest in these elections - which will be hotly contested, with wide media coverage - and if you are a Tower Hamlets resident, to use your vote!

"Take my camel, dear", said my Aunt Dot as she climbed down from this animal on her return from High Mass



- the opening words of Rose Macaulay's 1956 novel *The Towers of Trebizond* featuring a bunch of mainly crazy characters travelling through Turkey. It's an odd book, but one that addresses various religious and cultural issues with humour. Aunt Dot (accompanied by bigoted Father Chantrey-Pigg) was campaigning to introduce hats to Muslim women, and everywhere were young people writing their 'Turkey books'. This country - variously known down the ages in whole or part as Asia Minor, Anatolia, Lycia, Cappadocia - has long intrigued tourists. A 'melting pot' straddling Europe (around Istanbul) and Asia, reflecting many cultures, it has a galaxy of fabulous historical sites from every epoch, including, of course, key Christian locations, attested by St Paul and the author of Revelation (the 'seven churches').

The Turkish government, seeing tourism as a key part of its future, is currently subsidising winter 'cultural' trips to keep hotels open all year round and reverse the drift towards Istanbul (where a fifth of the population already lives), and Jan and I were enticed onto one of these by its absurdly cheap price, seeing it as a good way of exploring some of the Christian sites, some of which are remote and hard to get to independently. (We saw it advertised in *Private Eye*, but our fellow-travellers were recruited from many other magazines, so we were a very mixed bunch, which added to the fascination of our first-ever coach holiday.) I promised a brief report it - it seems some time ago now.....

Billed as 'In the steps of St Paul and Alexander the Great', we did indeed see some of the Christian sites, the most astonishing being Ephesus, where so much of this affluent and cosmopolitan former port (the sea is now some miles away) has survived and has been restored. It gave new insights into the context of Paul's preaching. We also saw Demre, where the cult of St Nicholas (aka Santa Claus) began, and other sites.



However, 'cultural' also apparently means shopping opportunities, so there were various stops at what in this country are termed 'outlet centres', where a number of the group - but not us - were persuaded to buy (tax-free) jewellery, carpets, and leather goods (after a satwalk show). There was also a 'cultural evening' the star of which was an astonishing accomplished male belly dancer!

This mix of ancient and modern (coupled with our very grand hotels, all set on the outskirts of the 'real' communities), brought home to us the challenges of present-day Turkey, which is struggling with its identity - a secular republic since 1923, strident Muslim voices are in the ascendant, and a country which has always been in transition between various powers is once again locked in confusion. Our very engaging guide (with a string of degrees to avoid national service - but it caught up with him in the end) is a case in point: an Arab father, a Kurdish mother, a German wife (one of whose parents is Croatian), he is a nominal Muslim but does not want to be locked into sectarianism. This perhaps was the main message of our trip - and, in my view, made it more real than a trip to the Holy Land, where it's harder for tourists/pilgrims to get the real story. Michael