

Pentecost Newsletter

June 2020

Hello dear friends of Pilsdon

Over these last weeks we have prayed for you all daily and wonder how you are? It is likely that some of you or those you love have been ill and sadly may have died, do let us know so that we can hold you in our thoughts. Thank you to those who were able to respond to our Easter Newsletter and to give us your news. It helps us to know how and what to pray about.

We live in increasingly simple ways and feel settled about refusing to be drawn into unnecessary complexity, though this may be easier said than done. We miss so much the committed group of friends who for years have joined us for Sunday evening worship. The empty chairs and straw bales remind us of familiar loving people who enrich our lives more than they can know. Our other regular visitors and familiar Wayfarers are much missed too. We are frequently receiving enquiries from new people who have the space to browse the internet and are enquiring about our future plans and to ask questions about our way of life. As a community will need to dovetail moving out of lockdown exceptionally carefully as one of our number needs shielding and about half of our community sits within the categories of people who need to be careful by reason of age or infirmity.



Sue, our Warden

Gaynor turns 100



Gaynor Smith co-founder with Percy of the Pilsdon Community was 100 years old on 17th May. Author of 'Pilsdon Morning' Gaynor's capacity to communicate the essence of the community continues to hold the vision, and is a constant touchstone for us and required reading for potential members and volunteers. We sent flowers and good wishes from us all and Ruth her daughter was able to visit, with her husband Mike, whilst remaining outside the french windows of her room. We decided that Gaynor's inspiration needed a more permanent recognition so we have instigated an annual celebration on her birthday to be called 'Gaynor's Day'. We understand she is rather tickled at the idea.

One of the prevailing issues I find among some people who have found their way here is a genuine difficulty with 'God and Religion' even though they often admire what Jesus stood for as we stumble to live it out. It struck a cord with some a few Sundays ago when I read a quote from Meister Eckhart (1260-1328):

'I find nothing more destructive to the well-being of life than to support a god that makes you feel unworthy and in debt to it. I imagine erecting churches to such a strange god will assure endless wars that commerce loves. A god that could frighten is not a god - but an insidious idol and weapon in the hands of the insane.'

They were shocked to discover how long ago it had been uttered and how contemporary it was. It may well be found pinned to wall here as an ongoing reminder for those whose images of God have been damaged from their earliest days.

Over these weeks of Easter we have been moving through John's Gospel. Many of its verses point to 'something' that cannot be conveyed on the level of mind and it challenges our need for intellectual satisfaction. Recently all of us have had experiences that have both challenged us and given us a great opportunity to surrender our need for control and the need for distraction from what makes us feel uncomfortable. John's Gospel supports our desire to feel closer to God and encourages us to trust Christ when he said *'On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you'*, John 14:20.

Here we are more convinced than ever to follow the contemplative pathways the ancients have laid out for us. Our desire is not to return to 'normality' but to resist the compulsions of complexity and to really 'listen' deeply to what we are called to live, and to live actively. St Augustine said, *'You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.'* This quotation from Mark Nepo speaks eloquently into this space...

'Stopping the noise' ~ Often we are cast about by the noise of the world and the noise in our heads. Often we are mesmerized by the stunning cacophony that masks as excitement. And though there's much to be gained for being in the world, we can't make sense of it till we stop the noise, till we go below the noise, till we go below the habit of our own thoughts. But it's impossible to be still and quiet all the time. As a whale or dolphin must break surface, only to dive back down, only to break surface again, each of us must break surface into the noise of the world, only to rest our way back into the depths of stillness, where we can know ourselves and life more deeply, until we have to break surface again. No one is ever done with the crossover between noise and stillness. Not even those committed to a contemplative life. No. For the noise of the mind never dies. Not even those who are blind and mute. It can only be put in perspective, quieted until we can hear the more ancient voices that give us life. At every turn, we need to stop the noise, our own and everyone else's, not to retreat from the world but to live more fully in it.

Living more fully here we are a bit thin on the ground and miss our volunteers tremendously. It has given us a chance to really grapple with issues just like the 'workers in the vineyard'.

'Work is love in action' my Dad taught me this, he could turn the most boring job into play at the drop of a hat. Dressing up while washing up and the dance of the seven tea towels along with 'Round the Horn'. The time flew for my brother Francis and me and we felt a kind of sadness when the job was done. He also knew when he was being taken for granted and felt everyone deserved encouragement.

As wages for work is not part of our 'economy', everyone can take a whole new look at the opportunity 'work' gives us if rooted in love and what it gives us and others when its received rightly. Comparison used negatively, 'Why isn't he doing more?' occasionally has a point but not often. For someone to find a role model who knows 'how to put their back into it' and loves to do what they can do, is inspirational to others who've only ever been taught that 'work' as something too difficult or beyond their capacity. We have a saying here, 'Community for me or me for Community'. When we get it the right way around, 'me for Community' then we thrive and grow and the community flourishes. This Lock-down Community has just about nailed it. We are learning every day how much more we need each other. We cannot do LIFE on our own when living in Community especially, inter-dependence has always been the model and forgiveness is the practice when we don't quite manage it. Trusting everyone is doing their best is the stuff of unspoken love between us.



As each day passes, I am aware how our small and in many ways self-sustained community is inextricably linked and dependent on the wider world; the postman, the bin men, the endless delivery drivers, our hairdressers and dog groomers, the GPs and nurses, pharmacists and dispensers. Our beloved family, friends, therapists and spiritual directors may be seen via Zoom but they are not who we are seeing in the flesh.

Every day I think of all the lovely friends of the community that I'm desperate to see, have a joke with, share an empathetic smile with or play cards together. I think of all the wayfarers and long term visitors who will be able to be with us again at some point. Of all the new people that we might meet this year. I look forward to a full dining room after this quiet time. I'll be able to thank all of the people who sent us thoughtful parcels to let us know they'd not forgotten us and this special place. *Melissa*



Franti and his little lamb, her fleece is white as snow

News from the farm...

The farming season is in full flow! In April we welcomed 8 lambs into the world. All are thriving, including one orphan lamb which a number of us have been feeding by hand. She is now so used to being around human beings and happily follows me around everywhere. The hay barn has been cleared and a new pallet floor has been put down in readiness for the new hay which we will be helping to bale in a couple of weeks. Our beautiful and faithful dairy cows Snowdrop and Daffodil will give birth in July so preparations are being made, including a period of drying off. Thankfully Eddie has been freezing lots of their milk to see us through. As the weather gets hotter the sheep will be glad to have their fleeces sheared next week! *Frantisek*

News from the garden...

My new role in the community (and now as a full-time member) is planning and managing the garden, both veg and formal. Spring has sprung with unpredictable force and there is much to do but it is all creative work and there is nothing better than sowing seeds and planting out with hope for harvest. We are planting more than we have in previous years with a view to becoming more self-sufficient and looking to share our abundance with food banks and those who are in need. We will see if there are any takers for the inevitable marrow glut.



We miss friends of the community and the flow of people coming to stay here. This has been a strange time but with some benefits; time to focus on the gardens and stewarding the land, looking at alternative farming and gardening methods, experimenting, and in everything feeling a deep rooted way of being and our place in the seasons. One of the most precious outcomes has been time with the kids and Madeleine(6) has become an expert in planting out and seed sowing and Roxanna (2) loves nothing better than filling her wheelbarrow with weeds and taking it to the compost. Great with a watering can too. *Jim*



First Early Potatoes being planted back in April

News from the kitchen...

Food has always been at the heart of the Pilsdon welcome. Knowing that in these strange days we can no longer show hospitality by offering a cup of tea and a weekend of hot meals to whoever walks through the door, it can feel like we are unable to fulfill the shape of Pilsdon in the world. We so look forward to those days when we can share our bounty with friend and stranger alike. However, this time of isolation has increased our awareness and gratitude for how much we have, of the abundance we are blessed with, and the enriching connection that we can have with the food that we grow and the animals we raise here.

The kitchen is the place where this abundance is transformed: into delicious meals, into jams, bread and cakes aplenty. As the garden flourishes we notice new flavours and colours appear on our plates as creative chefs use tender herbs now ready for picking, fresh salad leaves, sweet broad beans fresh from the pod, crisp onions that have been over-wintered in the cold frames...and now the promise of new potatoes, courgettes and, oh so many, fresh tomatoes.



Rhubarb and Elderflower Jam

We have taken this opportunity to re-organize the larder and food store. The panic buying period of early lockdown was a good moment to reassess what we might need in reserve in these uncertain days—and not just plenty of loo roll (!) We have turned one of the annex rooms into an additional store with new racking, and have been rearranging our freezers so as to ensure enough room for all the extra vegetables and fruit we hope to store.



What have we been feeding our cabbages?

I often think that the kitchen is the place where some of the most enriching and challenging conversations happen, and through this time I have certainly experienced that. Our smaller number has meant cooking more regularly with each other, getting used to each others cooking styles, and levels of (...ahem) messiness. Whilst stirring the pot heated debates about the meaning of life occur, existential musings take place about the nature of suffering, reflections are made on the small kindnesses and moments of joy we have encountered that day, and deeply important exchanges are voiced about whether we should use cream or just milk in the mashed potato. *Mary*

Lockdown at Pilsdon ~ Eddie

Well two months in and the “new normal” is now my reality. I miss seeing friends, family, and the freedom of the “old normal” but as one of my sons said to me, “you must be in the best place in the world during a pandemic”.

The Sunday service has lost the regular visitors from outside of the community; they are greatly missed, but we will see them again.

The impact of the virus reached me in other ways through the loss of a good friend to it. Being unable to attend his funeral was hard, but it focuses the mind as to the reasons for this lockdown, and endorses my gratitude for the luxury of my life at Pilsdon.

Pilsdon is still the haven of peace it has always been. The cows are on the grass and lambs have been born, but without the bustle of wayfarers, visitors and guests there is more spare time to do all those jobs you never quite had time for before? So....let's tidy the workshop!

The tidying of the workshop soon became a major operation as my obsessive nature kicked in...soon it became re-vamp the workshop...which quickly turned into re-model the workshop as my head got up and running.

The upshot is that the workshop is now painted, all leaks fixed, and countless other tasks completed; all ready for the larger jobs that need to be done in the longer drier summer months.

Lockdown will end, and the normal will be what it will be, but this enforced time living with just the few of us in the community has shown me some of my many faults and the goodness in people. Hopefully we can all learn and be better from it.



Has the workshop ever looked so tidy?



We enjoyed the beautiful Bluebells in April and May



The beginnings of the new barn floor...

Pentecost is such an important day at Pilsdon; we know that our frail attempts to live in accordance with the life Jesus Christ invites us into is simply not possible without the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit. We do not underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to inspire, guide and lead us into truth. Annie Dillard has quite strong views about the subject:



Lad is now 9 months old and enjoying learning tricks on the front lawn

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no-one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should be all wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return. Annie Dillard,

Teaching a Stone to Talk

Thank you for all your donations especially we thank through this Newsletter the anonymous donor of £5,000. Your gifts too, a most beautiful rainbow, many multicoloured masks, doughnuts and plants, cakes and books and DVD's. WhatsApp's that make us laugh or go 'WOW'. Your emails and cards and letters have been appreciated and have stayed on the Aga room windowsill for many days. An abundance of virtual hugs fly through the air keeping our hearts warmed and open. Thank you so much for your prayers, we look forward to the time when we can all meet again. Please keep an eye on the website for news and updates and let us know how you are getting on too.

Many gentle blessings
and much love you all, Sue



We found this small nest in the garden; inside it was lined with the tiny soft dandelion clock seeds. So intricate and beautiful