

## Autumn Newsletter

October 2020

### *Hello dear friends of Pilsdon*

How are you? We are glad to be in touch with you again and have held you in our prayers over these weeks. This edition of our newsletter, as we celebrate our 62nd anniversary, is a mixed bag, a liquorice all-sorts. We all hope you enjoy it.

I begin with our gratefulness to you for all your prayers, donations, messages of encouragement and enquiries. For our cake maker, our venison casserole bringer, our haymaker, our log finder, our book givers; for the phone calls, the WhatsApp's and emails from friends longstanding and new. The zooms with supportive Trustees and for the chair, Andy Davey who has been a great sounding board. And, of course, for our wonderful Office Wizard Jane who stops the bits of paper having parties when my back is turned. THANK YOU ALL!

And in so many ways we thank those who live this life with us, you are wonderful, courageous, gifted and forgiving people and we love you: your kindness and generosity keeps Pilsdon quietly humming the vision of hope which it has been threading through its years. Our anniversary this year was inevitably smaller in scale, but was more meaningful in some ways, as we are vulnerable and your absence gives us a pause to see God's handiwork in us and you and in this place over the 62 years. We heard recently from Ruth that Gaynor loved her 100th birthday and though very deaf now looks forward to distanced visits from the family. I've been reading Percy's letters which were a source of encouragement and kept me going especially in early lockdown; we hope to make some extracts available on our website soon.



Sue, our Warden



### **Nuts**

*For many years a hazel tree has stood by the potting shed at the entry to the vegetable garden. Each year it has produced a large bowl of nuts in time for Harvest Thanksgiving. Two winters ago Jim cut it back. In response the tree produced a bumper crop of over three kilos of unshelled nuts.*

*Jack and I have grown several oak trees before, one of which is now planted at the end of the North Paddock. We decided to grow some more hazel trees. After much discussion, six or more will be planted out this Autumn. Trevor*



Farewell! In true Pilsdon style we waved the Johnson-Hills off with our t-towels

Jim, Melissa, Madeleine and Roxy left us at the end of August and live close by in Charmouth. Jim has a great job working as groundsman/ gardener at one of our local schools. We are glad they are close by and are grateful for the two years they lived with us.

So, we are three Members, Mary, Frantisek and me with two residential volunteers, Craig who arrived in July—and who you will hear from later in the newsletter—and Bob who came back to be with us at the end of September. Also three short term residential volunteers have given us a real lift. Ianthe came for September and Marian and David are with us over the month of October; their coming has meant the three of us can each have two weeks break before the winter sets in. Regular holidays have been a thing of the past since lockdown began, and before we can bring new guests we need to restore our own resilience.

Back and forth to gratefulness, .. for the rhythm of our prayer life. Walking the short path to our beautiful Church, sitting on our straw bales, slipping between minimal words down into the place where we meet all that gives us life: keeps us safe, keeps us from the exhaustion of trying to do it all and ridiculously trying do it in our own strength and we hope keeps us present to most of the moments of our days.

Gratefulness is, as David Stendl-Rast reminds us, a spiritual practice and Albert Nolan agrees:

*‘The grateful heart is a manifestation of the true self. Nothing sidelines the ego more effectively than a grateful heart.’*

Still feel thirsty  
I want to drink the water from the well  
Still feel thirsty  
God  
I want to drink and ring the living bell  
Ring the bell  
Ring the Living Bell  
I wanna sing to help the light  
Descend on earth today  
Ring the Living Bell

*Lyrics by Melanie Safka  
Contributed by Peter*





Following weeks of Matthew's Gospel we cannot escape the invitation to a radical transformation of the human heart and consequentially a radical transformation of the social order. Hearing Jesus, he clearly turns down the role of 'predictable, innocuous, do-gooder' when he says, 'I bring a sword'. There are so many challenges whether its climate change, racial injustice, what's happening politically in our own country, across the Atlantic and the world; and not least the pandemic; it is all having an effect on the things we may well have taken for granted. Employment now for so many more is in question. Whole sections of our economy are under strain and millions of people are seriously affected psychologically and financially. Taxation on employed earnings will undoubtedly increase and the moment to Tax wealth rather than just income is surely upon us.

Wherein is our hope? For us here and for many of you it will be determinedly making a new path into a future that has serious possibilities to level the playing field. Michael Sandel, known to many as the public philosopher, has a new book. " 'The Tyranny of Merit' What's become of the Common Good?" The paragraph on the fly leaf reads:-

*'We live, more than we have for generations in an age of winners and losers, where the odds are stacked in favour of the already fortunate. Stalled social mobility and entrenched inequality give the lie to the promise that, 'you can make it if you try'. Worse we have, increasingly come to view the money people make as a sign of their worth. The consequence is a brew of anger and frustration that has fuelled populist protest and extreme polarisation- economic, cultural and political - and has lead to deep distrust of both government and our fellow citizens, leaving us morally unprepared to face the profound challenges of our age.'*



Eddie at work...laying a concrete drain to help with our lane flooding



Trevor and George with t-towels in hand...they have waved a few of us off the premises over the years

One of the faded quotes stuck for years on my desk 'shouts' at me:

*'Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.'*

The Talmud



Jerry

The responsibility we share, let's make clear what the word means, 'the ability to respond', implies a choice, a choice more of us need to make, every day. To personally challenge ourselves through a regular examination of consciousness, a daily raising of our awareness to save us from falling into forgetfulness and separation: for 'we are one body' who can, if the will is there, 'share one bread'. And how do we do that? ... practice, practice, practice.. prayer, silence and service. Sounds simple and isn't easy. Do you remember the hymn, not often sung these days, 'Fight the good fight'? I know in ways I couldn't possibly have imagined as a child what it is exhorting us to do. The fight within me to consume less, to share more, to encourage and uphold more, to keep my heart open more, to know there is no peace until I surrender and let go of my own need for control, love and esteem and security. I've prayed the following prayer for many years and sent it to a few ordinands in formation, clergy in new incumbencies and freshly consecrated bishops.

*This is my prayer to Thee, my Lord -  
Strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.  
Give me the strength to lightly bear my joys and sorrows.  
Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service  
Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knee to insolent might.  
Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles,  
And give me the strength to surrender my strength to Thy will with love.*

*Rabindranath Tagore*



Apple pressing this year—yielded about 580 bottles of delicious juice



### A new choir

A couple of months after I moved to Pilsdon, I casually suggested to a member that it would be nice if we had a choir. She jumped at the idea, enthusiastically encouraging me to start one up. That wasn't exactly what I had in mind. So, thrown in at the deep end, I began to ask people if they were interested, "I'm starting a choir, would you like to come?". The response was overwhelmingly positive, and I began to prepare some warm-up exercises and a version of "Wade in the Water" with three parts and no instrumentation. It was only when 3.30pm on Monday rolled around and almost the whole community stood eager-eyed awaiting my instruction that I realised that I had no idea what I was doing. I took a deep breath and began to teach.

That was the first week of many that I was required to sing solo in front of a group of people, so that they could learn their parts. I'm not a natural performer and I don't have a particularly strong singing voice, and that week my heart was beating out my chest, my voice shaky, as I avoided eye contact with anyone while I sang. But the three groups soon learned their parts, and we gradually built the song until the three parts intertwined. At times we sang out of tune and the melodies clashed, but by the end of the session it sounded harmonious and warm. The 45 minutes flew past, and we ended with a canon round of "Frère Jacques". People left the church, excitedly chatting to one another, or singing "Wade in the Water" together. As the voices became more and more distant, and I was left alone in the empty church, I began to collect my materials. I breathed a sigh of relief. "That wasn't so bad," I thought, "this might actually be possible."

The Monday after, nine of the group showed up again. We began to learn an African Lullaby, again with three parts, called "Souallé" (meaning "Goodnight"). In the following weeks, our number dwindled down to six including myself, and I began to wonder if less and less people would come until there was no one but me. Surprisingly though, those five other people religiously turned up week after week, ready to learn. I found and bought an acapella (meaning "without instrumental accompaniment") songbook, and was thrilled when it arrived. I eagerly started turning the pages, but as I did so, my heart sank. This was far beyond our current capabilities. Dismayed yet determined, I found another songbook, and when that arrived, I was relieved to realise that the songs were achievable for us. It had spirituals, pop songs, Christmas songs, songs from musicals... We've worked on a few pieces from that songbook, most recently "Make You Feel My Love" by Bob Dylan, and "I Dreamed A Dream" from the musical Les Misérables. Both pieces sound really good.

Each new piece is a stumbling block. We misread lyrics (most notably instead of singing "I could make you happy", someone once sang "I could make you hungry"), supposed harmonies sound far less than harmonious, we second guess our abilities to hit the high notes, and it feels like we'll never get there. Yet we always do. And that first time we get it right, the sense of pride is often so overwhelming that it manifests itself in smiles and cheers. Last week I decided that it was time to give a difficult piece from the acapella songbook a try, and that it may take us longer to learn, likely with more mistakes, but that our determination and enthusiasm will mean that it is possible. We started work on it this week.

Every single person that takes part in the choir has told me how much they appreciate it. The most encouraging feedback I received was when one of the group came up to me after everyone else had left and said, "I've been feeling really low, but after choir I feel uplifted." That meant the world to me. But that's what singing does: it lifts you up. You can't avoid feeling good during and after singing, it raises your spirits and evokes a sense of wellbeing. We now end every session with a canon round of a song called "Shalom", a Hebrew word meaning "peace", and the melody and lyrics invariably do bring peace. It's not uncommon to hear people singing or humming "Shalom" throughout the community.

Choir has taught me a few things. It's given me more confidence (something that I am often lacking in), not only to perform in front of others, but also to lead people. Choir has taught me that music unites us - that despite our differences, we all feel a sense of togetherness when we sing with one another. It's reinforced my belief that hard work and determination pay off. Most importantly though, choir has taught me that singing simply makes you feel better: it's taught me that singing heals. *Joni*

### Our new pigs...

We have recently had five new additions to the Pilsdon family, PIG-LETS! They have the energy of a mad Jack Russell and the appetite of a whale. I am one of three people who look after the little fellows.

Contrary to popular belief pigs are very clean, intelligent and very playful animals. It is great to have them here on the farm...though it is hard not to get too attached.

*Jack*



In the same way a child cries long before the end of a journey "Are we there yet?", I was emailing Sue with the question "Can I visit yet?" The lockdown and gradual unlocking continued on (and on) until finally circumstances and permission dove-tailed and a date was set.

My weekly Covid test (at work) was taken and I duly arrived at Pilsdon. My Covid result did not. I was here, but still 'not yet'.

Wisdom cautioned a time of semi-isolation (no entry into the main house, no close contact and outside activities only) and Pilsdon's hospitality and love rose to the occasion to give me the treat of 'meals on wheels' (trays actually) to my accommodation - for a whole week! Thank you all for that extra gift to rest and 'to be'.

Finally, with a negative result confirmed and no symptoms, I was welcomed into the house and full Pilsdon Community living and sharing - hurray! - it was worth waiting for and it has been a joy to see everyone again and be a 'proper' volunteer for another very special month. *Ianthe*



Our anniversary cake and Act of Dedication that we say each year at our service. We re-commit ourselves to this community, and to what it stands for in the world.

### PILSDON ACT OF DEDICATION

We commit to a rhythm of life

#### To finding a balance of being and doing

We commit to praying together

#### In the midst of daily living

We commit to living simply and sustainably

#### Taking small steps to bring about change

We commit to offering a welcome

#### To friend and stranger alike

We commit to living with vulnerability

#### Knowing this world and human lives are vulnerable

We commit to working for the good of one another

#### Rather than for financial gain

We commit to creating safe and nurturing space

#### Where each may emerge in truth

We commit to community

#### Accepting one another within the love of God

A few hours after having stumbled across John Donne's famous "no man is an island" line on the internet, I find the old folk song by the same name stuck in my head. "No man is an island, no man stands alone, each man's joy is joy to me, each man's grief is my own..." I don't usually listen to folk, and I only know the song because it's sung a lot at the intentional community I'm from, started up to guitar accompaniment around campfires and even called for in worship services. Having sung it since childhood and known the words by heart before I was even old enough to fully comprehend what they meant, I've never really thought about the lyrics, but now they strike me with their simple affirmation of the connectedness of humanity.

Human connectedness is something that's always been a fundamental part of my life. It's inescapable in any environment, but especially so in a radically communal one, and, writing this, I find myself in my seventh such environment - I've lived in three British, two American, and one German settlement of the Bruderhof, an international communal movement, and am now a resident volunteer at Pilsdon Community. You could say human connectedness runs in my veins.

Donne wrote his Meditation 17, the well-known "no man is an island" devotion, in the sick bed, looking death in the face, and his reflections on the interwoven fabric that is humanity focus almost morbidly on human loss. "If a clod be washed away by the sea," he bemoans, "Europe is the less...", and the "bell tolling softly for another" that serves as a unifying motif in his writing is a funeral bell. When, for the only time in the piece, he addresses the reader directly with "...it tolls for thee," the mood becomes almost depressing. Applying his underlying message to my experiences in community though, I think I know what Donne is getting at, and it's not only about death - and it's definitely not depressing.

Any change involves loss, and since life is shaped by change, you could say that life is a never-ending line of tiny deaths - the end of one era when the next one begins, the closing of one opportunity when another one opens, the death of one version of you as a new one is formed. Donne concludes, since the bell is lost on the person it's actually tolling for, that its value is for others, likening his suffering, now that his life is over, to a bar of gold for him - valuable but not converted into spendable money. Only those still living can convert this gold and invest the money, learning from and being strengthened by his pain. The thousands of little funeral bells tolling constantly throughout the network of humanity as each series of little deaths continues attest to the wealth around us that is ready for the taking - in fact, is our duty to take and use.

All of which is simply to say that the story, embedded in Meditation 17, of two religious orders solving a dispute with the agreement that the first to rise in the morning ring the church bell for morning prayers, and Donne's admonishment that, "...if we understand aright the dignity of this bell...we would be glad to make it ours, by rising early..." have me getting out of bed for the early milking shift with a bit of a different attitude - and that the bell that calls us to meals, events, and services here at Pilsdon seems to be signifying more than just another soup lunch or tea and toast for me lately. It's saying that it's a very good thing that no man is an island, and that I shouldn't regret a single minute of my life in community. *Craig*



Craig preparing something delicious for dinner





**The Day I Lost My Mind**

I took my mind out for a walk  
 And stopped where the philosophers all talk  
 I took it off the lead  
 And it went chasing after a dandelion seed  
 I saw it go around the bend  
 Don't think I'll ever mend  
 I've no idea where it is to be found, not any

Perhaps I'll find it on sale in a charity shop for a penny  
 So if you're in search of an honest man  
 Beware lest your mind go down the pan  
 And when you take your mind out for a walk  
 Keep your eyes on it like a hawk.

Peter

True surrender is the most ruthless act of a lifetime. It is the willingness to die to all hope of pleasure, comfort and reassurance, then see what is received. Again back to gratefulness, ... quoting from Diana Butler-Bass, from her book 'Grateful , The subversive practice of giving thanks.'

*'Thus, gratitude strengthens our character and moral resolve, giving each of us the possibility of living peaceably and justly. Being thankful is the very essence of what it means to be alive and to know that life abundantly.'*

We are thankful here, having just celebrated our 62nd anniversary; and we have you all in our hearts and minds, grateful for all those who have gone before us in this place. I will finish with a few lines from Percy's first anniversary newsletter from October 1959:

*"It is a year since we bought this manor house and wrote our first letter to you, a year crowded with activity. At this moment the feeling that dominates is one of deep gratitude that what is happening here is allowed to continue. ...*

*October 16th was the date of our first anniversary. The day began with a quiet celebration of the Holy Communion, and after breakfast we went on with a normal day's work until evensong, when the Church was packed and rang with hymns and anthems of thanks giving.*

*.... Pilsdon is difficult to write or talk about. It has to be lived in and shared in order to be understood....*

*.... One thing is certain. We are very ordinary people, and our faults and weaknesses do not suddenly disappear because we live here. If we have bad tempers we go on losing them. If we are by nature lazy, we do not suddenly become gluttons for work. It is however, the constant giving and receiving of forgiveness that, under God, makes life in community possible.*

*Thank you and God bless you"*

And to Percy's thanks and blessing I add my own. With our love to you all as we go forward into a future as yet unknown.

Sue Langdon

