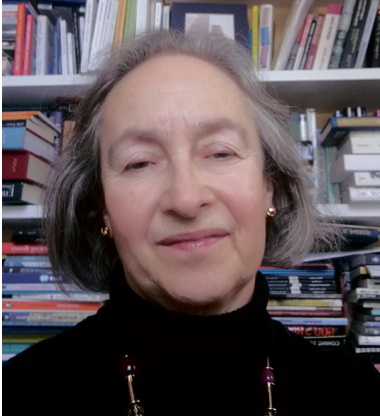


Lift up your hearts



Jane Williams writes:

EASTER celebrations may feel a bit muted this year. But there is no rush: Jesus is alive, and will be for ever. The couple on the road to Emmaus are still mourning while others rejoice, and the good news will come, in its own time.

Our ordinands at St Mellitus College are doing wonderfully creative things with their church communities over Easter, as are so many churches in the country. Technology has its blessings. We have moved our teaching, tutorials, seminars, and so on online, so I am having to grapple with mysterious things like the Big Blue Button (don't ask).

It works quite well for a lot of interactions, but I miss the kind of nuances of body language that tell you when teaching is getting through and when it isn't. Easter vigils and meditations seem to work better.

IT IS a pleasure to retreat from the computer to the still, slightly weary, atmosphere of Gwen John's **painting**, *The Convalescent*. The atmosphere here is calm, but sickness endured hovers in the background. This is perhaps the introvert's Easter celebration? It is a salutary reminder that many who can't be Christians openly have regularly hugged the news of the resurrection to themselves in quiet.

As for **music**, Handel's *Water Music* has long been a favourite. I'd like to sit with the *Convalescent* and listen to the different moods of the music: stately, sombre, serene, sparkling. Cambridge, where I live, is quieter than I've ever seen it; a daily walk along the



river is now a peaceful pastime rather than the effortful avoidance of camera-snapping tourists. I never thought I'd miss them.

There won't be baptisms at Easter this year, but there is still the promise of renewal as the water runs on.

CONTINUING the water theme, as we all anxiously check ourselves and our friends and family for symptoms, the **book** I'm enjoying again is Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*. It may be hard, at the moment, to sympathise with the young hypochondriacs in the book's opening, but that doesn't stop it from being funny.

"We were all feeling seedy, and we were getting quite nervous about it. Harris said he felt such extraordinary fits of giddiness come over him at times, that he hardly knew what he was doing; and then George said that he had fits of giddiness too, and hardly knew what he was doing.

"With me, it was my liver that was out of order. I knew it was my liver that was out of order, because I had just been reading a patent liver-pill circular, in which were detailed the various symptoms by which a man could tell when his liver

was out of order. I had them all."

Since we can't be out and about much at the moment, this seems the perfect time to take what the author describes as "a travelogue of the heart". J. K. A. Smith's *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A real world spirituality for restless hearts* (Brazos, 2019) is a particular gift for us at a time of enforced introspection. Although we learn a lot about Augustine of Hippo, we learn even more about ourselves: what makes our hearts so restless, and where we might find rest.

MY go-to comfort **film** is still *The Railway Children*, though the reunion scene at the end now has a particular poignancy, as we look forward to the day when we can be together again with wider family and friends. This Easter, I'm particularly noticing the re-encounter theme in the resurrection narratives, especially in the meeting between Jesus and Peter.

I'VE always been glad of the sad and angry Psalms, as an indication that we don't have to be on our best behaviour with God. Psalm 77 is one of the Psalms of Lament. It isn't exactly Easter reading, but it asks what a lot of people are asking now, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" (verse 9).

The Psalmist responds to the question by telling again the stories of what God has done in the past, and so of who God is still in the present. Verse 19 says: "Your way was through the sea. . . your footsteps were unseen." Not seen — but not absent. The miracle of Jesus's resurrection is still invisible to many, but that does not make it inactive.

THIS **prayer** of Dag Hammarskjöld is one that I am trying to be brave enough to pray wholeheartedly. It is very much an Easter prayer, a yes to the one who has conquered death and hell:

"For all that has been, thanks; to all that will be, yes."

Jane Williams is Assistant Dean and Tutor in Theology at St Mellitus College.

Next week: Rachel Mann

Cured of all our defects

IT IS hard to believe that we have got this far into a crisis without drawing on that most healthful of clergymen, the Revd Sidney Smith. This Regency cleric, a near contemporary of Jane Austen (they were once in Bath together — not as scandalous as it sounds, for it is not recorded that they met), is famous not only for his wit but for his humanity, most notably in his famous cure for low spirits, sent to Georgiana, Viscountess Morpeth, which included: “Don’t expect too much from human life — a sorry business at best”; “Make no secret of low spirits to your friends, but talk of them freely”; “Be firm and constant in the exercise of rational

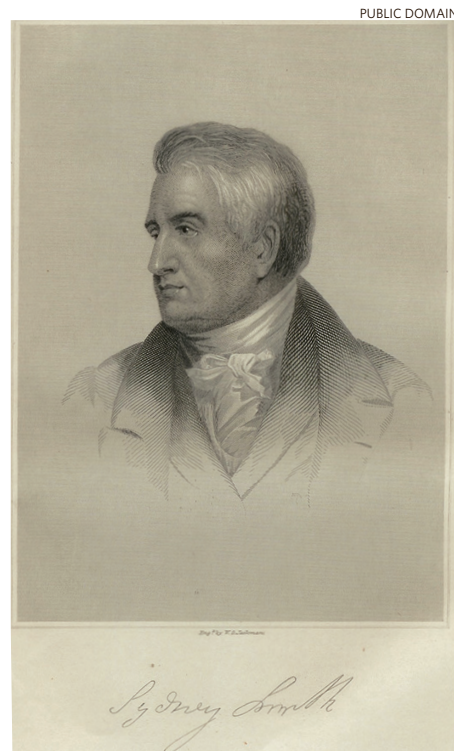
religion”; and “Short views of human life — not further than dinner or tea.” He also advised against too much sleep.

When he had entered what is now termed vulnerable adulthood, he wrote to a correspondent, Lady Holland:

“IT IS a bore, I admit, to be past seventy, for you are left for execution, and are daily expecting the death-warrant; but, as you say, it is not anything very capital we quit.

“We are, at the close of life, only hurried away from stomach-aches, pains in the joints, from sleepless nights and unamusing days, from weakness, ugliness, and nervous tremors.

“But we shall all meet again in another planet, cured of all our defects. Rogers will be less irritable; Macaulay more silent; Hallam will assent; Jeffrey will speak slower; Bobus [his beloved brother] will be just as he is; I shall be more respectful to the upper clergy. . .”



A doctor returns the applause

LAST week, Alice Gerth, a doctor in the east of England, responded to the accolades given to medical staff

I FIND it strange that we are held up as heroes. Don’t get me wrong: I understand the intention, and it is overwhelmingly generous. But hear me when I say we aren’t the heroes. You are.

For all of us working in hospitals, doctors in particular, we have a stable salary and a job that will exist at the end of all of this. In fact, I’m earning more, as I’m working longer and more antisocial hours. Business and local communities are providing food for us for free.

The sentiment is so kind, but I feel guilty. There are many in much harder economic situations than I am. There are the children who normally get their main hot meal at school, and their parents trying to feed them on their two-of-any-item rations and a reduced salary. Those who need foodbanks, which are struggling to meet their needs. Those who have lost jobs or had their hours cut. . .

Christianity doesn’t really subscribe to the idea of heroes in the same way as the Greek and Roman mythology that it was

born amongst. There are no Herculean trials of strength.

Instead Jesus washes feet, mixes with undesirables, and demonstrates God’s heroism in dying for others. This is biblical heroism, sacrificing yourself to help others

. . .

Doing what is hard to protect others from Covid-19 is modelling Christ’s heroism more clearly than any health-care professional who goes to work.

The heroes are the parents with children at home 24/7; and that’s before I consider single parents, or those in houses/flats that are too small for their families.

The heroes are those staying at home who don’t know whether their job will still exist at the end of this, and for how long their employer will keep paying them.

The heroes are the business owners desperately trying to keep staff on the books whilst maintaining the chance of their business surviving.

The heroes are those who live alone, who have lost their Thursday lunch club, who don’t have Zoom or Facebook to keep in touch, who are scared because they are frail and old.

The heroes are the families who worry about us and tell us to stay safe as we go out to work.

The heroes are the patients and families separated by stringent visiting rules that mean they cannot be together when ill or dying.

The heroes are those who unceremoniously get on with the unglamorous, day to day staying at home with no applause or accolade.



Spanish health-care workers returning the applause last week