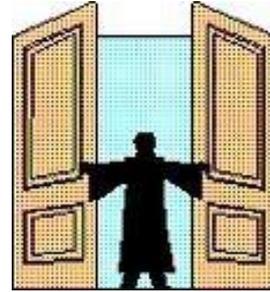


THE OPEN DOOR



NEWS AND VIEWS OF CROYDON UNITARIANS

JULY 2019

***Our minister Rev. Art Lester is pleased to
welcome you to worship every Sunday from
10:30am for the Service at 11:00am and
afterwards for fellowship and refreshments***



The Best Country in the World Is...

Have you ever wondered why migrants won't give up trying to live in Europe and the USA?

In the late eighties I went back to the States for a summer and worked with Mexican migrant labourers in rural North Carolina. I was employed as a volunteer by some radical Mary Knoll Catholics, good people with good intentions who didn't mind that I wasn't a believer.

North Carolina had changed a lot since I left it ten years earlier. During harvest season for crops like salad vegetables and tobacco, the population of small towns virtually doubled. The shelves of the Dunn, NC, Piggly Wiggly were full of tortillas and candles for the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The idea was to run a free translation service, and also (as a radical side line) to check that the crew bosses were treating the workers fairly in their camps. I was given a pickup truck and a bedroom in a mobile home. I bought a baseball cap as camouflage. The locals had a history of extreme racial prejudice and didn't much like foreigners.

One of the jobs I inherited was ferrying a few devout migrants to mass on Sunday. I could sit outside and wait as their sins were washed away and they consumed some communion wafers and wine. Afterwards, I usually took one of the Mexicans to a Sunday barbeque at the nuns' headquarters.

One Sunday I had a man named Ruben in tow. We sat at a big table with the jolly sisters and ate fried chicken. They had a guest, a rich young man from Panama, who knew the priest from when he had a church in Central America. He carried a picture of himself kissing the ring of Pope John Paul II, taken when his wealthy family were granted an audience during the visit in which His Holiness refused to bless the radical priests of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. He bragged for twenty minutes or so.

Then he said, "America is the best country in the world, isn't it?"

No one replied to this. Ruben bent his face to his chicken and ignored the question. But the guy kept at it. He nudged Ruben, and said, "Well, isn't it?"

"I don't think so," Ruben said.

The Panamanian snorted. "Then why does everyone in Latin America try to come and live here? Tell me that." He looked around at us, resting his case.

Ruben put a drumstick carefully on the side of his plate and wiped his mouth. He glanced apologetically at the nuns and said, "We've come to get our effing money back."

--Art Lester

Service - Leaders

Art Lester (Our Minister), or Rev Steve Dick.

July Musicians

7 th	<i>Freda Lodge</i>
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14 th	<i>Gill Stone</i>
21 st	<i>Freda Lodge</i>
28 th	<i>Bill Higgins</i>

News

- We need some Washing-up volunteers. If you would like to help, please contact LOL.
- From LOL: The Church hearing system is working well for those using the induction loops.

It's Good to Walk by John Craske

I saw this title in a recent SAGA magazine, and it pulled me up with a jolt. I had not been out of the house once that week due to the weather, in the one month in the year that you can normally expect warm sunshine, sadly lacking this year. For health reasons alone, it is not good and, regardless of wind and rain, cloud and cold, I must resolve to get out and about - if only to visit the local shop for bread and milk or coming to Church on a Sunday.

Maybe you need to do the same, for it is good to walk and most people do so regularly, if only a stroll after Sunday lunch.

I saw a review of a recently published book, hard bound and attractively produced and all about walking for just £11. Having bought the book, I found it interesting but it told me nothing much new, so I gave it to Jim, the editor in chief of our Church magazine. *{The book details are at the end of the article...Ed}* As most people like walking, and this book is full of ideas for going places, easily reproduced for short articles to fill the odd gap in our Open-Door magazine; suggesting that a collection of short walks will do us all good.

This book is full of ideas of all kinds of outings suitable for Sunday afternoons and more; visits to the park or out of town - castles, museums and art galleries; gardens open to the public; hilltops and streams of running water through wooded valleys, the perfect change from the streets of Croydon.

There is much more in the book, but not for a Sunday afternoon, e.g. nature trails, old hilltop routes known for centuries, white horses carved in the chalk hillside. There is also the naked giant overlooking the Dorset village of Cerne Abbas, centuries old and which must have shocked the ladies of Victorian times. The village is one of the prettiest, with fresh chalk streams and old thatched houses, with enough public houses to refresh its many visitors.

There are many famous walks for pilgrims like the one Chaucer wrote about, to Canterbury in Kent and mazes in which to lose yourself like the most famous of all, perhaps, at Hampton Court Palace, only a bus ride away. There you will have lots of fun if you take the grandchildren - answering their awkward questions at Cerne and losing them for the afternoon at Hampton Court.

Book Details

Mindful adventures for modern pilgrims. By Clare Gogerty

ISBN 978-0-349-41967-1, Punted by Clays Ltd. Elcograf S.p.A

If you would like to borrow the book, please ask John, who would be pleased to lend it to you.

Here are some examples of walks of interest taken from the book:

Page 80 - 89 Pilgrimages to wise and noble trees:

- Crowhurst Yew, Crowhurst, Surrey

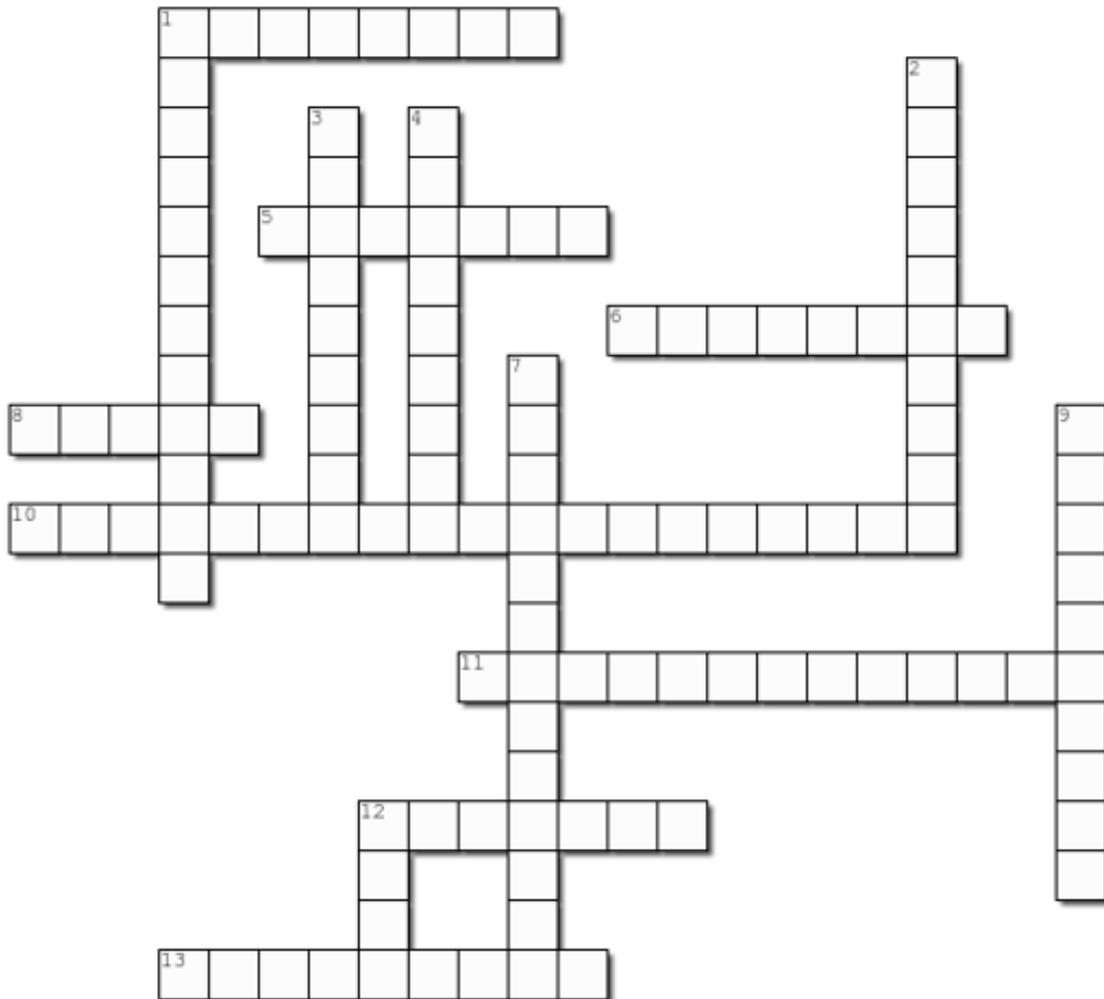
Page 102 - 108 Pilgrimages to artists gardens:

- The Bloomsbury Group, Charleston, Sussex
- Derek Jarman, Prospect Cottage, Dungeoness, Kent
- Vita Sackville-West, Sissinghurst Castle, Kent

Get Parking!

A crossword by Martin White to keep you busy in the hot summer.

Can you work out London's Parks and Green spaces from the clues below (the word "Park" has been omitted from some of the answers, the clues, the ones marked *, to save someone writing it dozens of times!) The solution is on page 8.



Across

1. Belonging to the man who always knocks twice* (8, Park)
5. Regarding polite men* (7, Park)
6. A well heeled hill* (8, Park)
8. In need of a prune* (5, Park)
10. Maurizio Sarri's English needs a bit of brushing up if he was going there to get some predictions in his own backyard.(7,6,6)
11. The man on the omnibus had more class (7, 6)
12. Go Dutch* (7, Park)
13. Get some scraps from the chip shop when your by the sea* (9, Park)

Down

1. Maybe it was her stuffy outlook that made this flower forget to drop her aitches when she was ill (8,4)
2. Put your duvet on to go here* (10, Park)
3. Ask Alexa about Horis and...?*(9, Park)
4. She was working on a recycling spell* (9, Park)
7. Diamond Castle, just don't ask a seagull to go there* (7, 6, Park)
9. It's not modern but it's close and has it all.* (6, 3, Park)
12. This one can be hard to find* (4, Park)

Spots of Time

I've done lots of workshops, that misappropriated term for getting people together to think, feel and talk to each other. Some of these involve things that are so personal that they can't be shared outside the group. Often, people speak of incidents in their lives that have had a strong effect on them. Some interesting and ordinary and some much more of the mystical variety. What it does is reinforce something that I've long believed: that there is a kind of wisdom at work all around us, or within us, that we are usually unaware of.

Theologians write books and gurus and modern-day prophets set out programmes of enlightenment for us, the confused, to follow. All that can seem to be over our heads, requiring a degree of intelligence or self-awareness that is far too complex to even begin on. But I think that the wisdom I'm speaking of isn't over our heads at all. If anything, I think it works *under* our heads. Unnoticed, rarely evident and easy to ignore.

William Wordsworth, in his poem, *The Prelude*, talks about something he called "little spots of time."

*There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence—depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse—our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;*

*A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.*

So, if that 19th century language is a bit dense for us, let's explore a little. What are these little spots of time the poet talks about? Something like this: brief moments when the muddle of our thoughts and preoccupations give way to a state of calm, maybe joyous awareness. They can occur when someone says or does something in our presence. They can happen while viewing a mountain sunrise or a walk by the sea. Sometimes they can occur in times of great stress, when they appear as a clear rescue from unbearable circumstances. And sometimes they just happen by themselves.

The theologian Karen Armstrong relates them to the Greek word *ekstasis*, which means to step outside yourself. Moving from the "small self" to another point of view, which also represents your nature, but which isn't tied to the limits we impose upon ourselves. Some people might call that the "ego". But "ego" simply means "I am", and to me at least, those moments of *ekstasis* seem also to be who I am, but in a much clearer and wiser way.

These spots of time have appeared in all the mystical literature down the ages. In Hebrew scripture we have this striking example, from 1 Kings 19:11-13, when Elijah is hiding in a cave from his enemies:

¹¹ And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:

¹² And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

So, it is the rule that real revelation about life doesn't happen, or at least doesn't always happen, in the big events. Not all of us are present at the occasion of great storms, earthquakes and infernos. But all of us have the ability sometimes to hear the truth, or maybe just the comforting intuition that there IS truth to be heard, in our ordinary pedestrian lives.

One of the lucky things about my job is that I'm more often put into situations where important things are discussed by other people. Just by being a minister, I seem to invite people's reflections on life, the universe and all that. Sometimes, in the case

of barbers or taxi drivers, it isn't all that welcome. But sometimes something extraordinary happens.

One day, when I was minister in our Kensington church, I was performing a house visit with an elderly member. It was a routine visit, but I was also there to collect material for a funeral service, if that became necessary. But we didn't talk about that at all. We sat around and ate Viennese pastries and drank coffee and laughed and told stories all afternoon. It began to get dark, and I rose to leave. I was standing by my chair when my friend said, "I suppose there is one question I should ask you: do you believe in life after death?"

You might be surprised to hear that we ministers seldom hear this most challenging of all life's questions. This is the BIG ONE that is probably too big to ask. We must assume that people think that no one knows, and so why ask? But this one took me by surprise, and before I had time to think, I heard myself saying this: "Yes, I do. And I think we're already living it."

I was dropped without warning into one of those "spots of time". It was as if a million little tumblers had fallen together in some lock of my mind and the door had swung open on smoothly oiled hinges. I think we were both startled for a second, and then I started to speak, as much to myself as to my friend. Here is what I said.

I believe that who we really are has always existed, before our birth, during our life span, and after we die. I think the reason we don't realise it while we live is because we are too busy being merely ourselves to feel being everybody and everything, which is what we truly are. I think that that is the reason for prayer and meditation and poetry: it puts us just that little bit in touch with our real selves. I think it is the only valid reason for what is called ethics and morality—doing harm to others is doing harm to one's true self. I think people like Jesus and Buddha remind us of our true selves, and this is why we deify them. And I think that what we call love is a visible sign of that invisible reality: loving is feeling the underlying oneness of things.

For me the word *ekstasis*, as used by Karen Armstrong, means being in touch with a self that is also you—in fact more you than you are, if you catch my meaning—a self that isn't normally accessible to us as we go about buying cabbage, ironing shirts and even going to church to listen to a sermon. The search—you might say the longing—to be engaged with this truer version of ourselves is what turns us towards religious activities, makes us write songs and go hiking, and fall in love. The absence

of this contact is what makes us unhappy, creates our attempts at diversion, and forms our addictions, obsessions and neuroses.

We lurk in a self-created story about ourselves and anchor it down with the trivia of daily life. We find friends who will co-conspire with us in making things “normal”, because that somehow seems safer. We will do almost anything to ward off emergency, even though all around us we can see signs of injustice and damage. By doing so, we do make a rather confining nest for ourselves, and make unlikely the occurrence of the “spots of time” or the still small voice—call it what you like, but I prefer to call it the temporary emergence of our true selves.

So, if that’s true, what can we do about it? If there IS a truer, wiser version of ourselves, how can we invoke it more often? How can we learn to live in it?

There are ways that have been passed down by sages from all the traditions. If the trick is to get out of your limited way of experiencing life, some of them are very useful indeed. A simple meditation like sitting and saying inwardly, “I am not this body. I am not this mind” works for some. But meditation like that can become a routine like any other, and you can find yourself merely doing a version of mundane things, like watching TV.

The genuine practice of concern for others is a way of getting out of yourself. It is known as *karma yoga*. But watch out—the ego can come along and invest itself in telling you how virtuous you are, and get you back into the same old loop.

The real expert on finding the still small voice isn’t the author of a spirituality paperback or a meditation teacher. The real expert is—that’s right—you yourself. It’s a bit like that old game of hot and cold. You know the one I mean? Someone picks an object and you have to guess which it is. When you get nearer, the other person says, “Warmer,” and when you’re moving away from it, they say, “Colder.” If you play “hot and cold” with yourself, you might find what you’re looking for. It does require the honing of the attention, but it’s probably sure-fire in the long run. So, if long hikes up mountain trails don’t work for you, don’t do it. If drinking organic carrot juice and making your body flexible doesn’t work, don’t do it. If going to church doesn’t help, don’t do that either.

I don’t know what works for you, and I’m not 100% sure what works for me. One thing I can say I do know, however. Remembering those little “spots of time” is a kind of path in itself. More—expecting them to occur at any minute. Going around as always, but with a certain little—as the Quakers put it—“stop in the mind”. I know some people who remember one of the names of God every time they look at their wristwatches. I believe that if we could keep the attention ready to experience the

truth, that it would happen. Like another thing the Quakers have bequeathed us, a line from George Fox, their founding father.

“Walk cheerfully over the earth,” he said, “greeting that of God in everyone.”

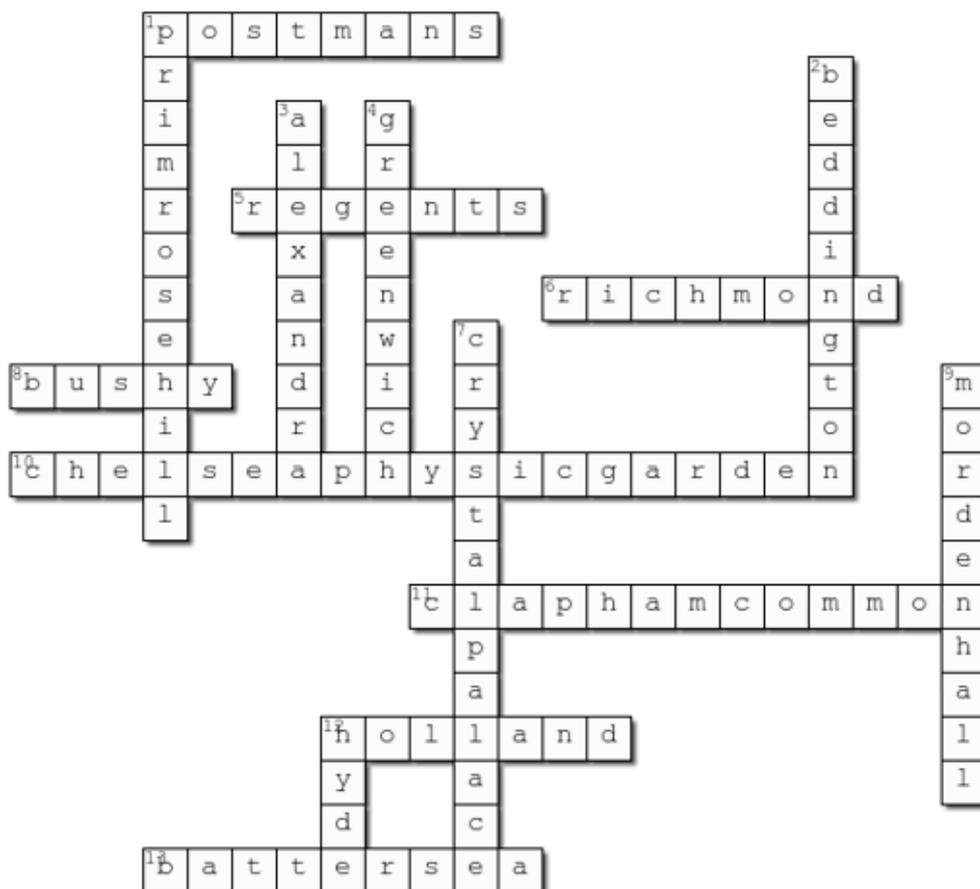
What makes me want to sing and laugh, however, isn't the thought that I could one day have the full awareness of my true self at every minute. No, I think that's probably unlikely. What thrills me is this: because I have had my little “spots of time”, because I know that it is possible to see beyond this ponderous form of reality that demands centre stage, I know that when I'm finally out of ideas and projects and ways of protecting myself from illness and old age, I will inhabit that which was so hard to see from here.

That's why I keep on saying the same thing, in different ways, from up here in the witness box: “Everything is all right. Nothing is broken. Everything is as it was supposed to be. Nothing is lost.”

You'll see.

-- *Art Lester*

The Solution to Martin White's Get Parking crossword



Getting to Know You

This is a regular feature (but with custom -tailored questions) for anyone willing to participate. Please let us know. Unfortunately, we have no participant this month.

Happy Birthday!

We wish

*Anne McClelland, Fiona Anderson, Mark Burrell,
Richard Lodge, Henry Walsh, David Williams and
Daryl Usiholo*

a very happy birthday.

The law now requires us to ask you if you would like us to continue sending you emails. If you do not wish us to continue sending you emails, could you please let us know? -- ed.

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The Open - Door Newsletter

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PLEASE NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER.