

intouch

NEWSLETTER

Benefice of Clothall, Rushden, Sandon,
Wallington, and Weston



Welcome to this edition of In Touch.

Mike Leverton has been continuing to help us explore the Arts with his wonderful series of explanations of the works of some of the most famous artists. He has sent me two paintings by Rembrandt which have to be seen side by side for us to contrast them and then read the story that goes with them. I hope you enjoy looking at them and learning more about Rembrandt. We also have a roundup of the Season of Remembrance around the benefice which has been very different this year – thanks to those who sent me photos, very much appreciated. I hope you are all okay in our second lockdown – not quite so bad as the first but a reminder that we are not out of the woods just yet with this wretched virus. **With blessings to all - Fiona**

Named Storms

Deirdre, Angus, Katie, Jake
These are names which trouble make;
Gertrude, Doris, Caroline
Bring us weather less than fine!
Desmond, Erik, Imogen
Storms are named, but only when
Just like one named Abigail
They bring wind and rain and hail!

Barney, Clodagh, and Aileen
What, I wonder, does it mean
Barbara, Dylan, Eleanor
If the choice of name is poor?
Ali, Freya, Callum, Ciara
Does it make things any clearer
Jorge and Hannah, Brian too

If they name one after YOU?

The season of Remembrance

For the church, this season begins with All Saints (November 1st) when we gather to remember all those who trod the path of faith before us. This is closely followed by All Souls which, in the Anglican church, is a chance to gather and remember all those we have loved and lost but who will remain forever in our hearts and memories.

These two festivals are followed by Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance Day when we recall those who died for us in war, honouring their memories and pledging ourselves anew to continue to work for peace. This year we just managed to hold the All Saints and All Souls services in church but sadly Remembrance Sunday fell

victim to the new lockdown restrictions. We were, however, able to meet at a zoom service and over one hundred people tuned in to share some deeply moving footage of the memorials and our villages (thanks to Peter and Hannah Taylor), to hear the names of the fallen read out and to sing our hearts out (suitably muted) with old favourites such as The Lord is my shepherd, Guide me O thou great redeemer, I vow to thee my country and the National Anthem.

All completed in time for us to either be at a small allowed outdoor service or to join the TV with the poignant footage from the Cenotaph. Let us all hope and pray that next year we will all be able to gather freely once again

Poppy waterfall at
Weston



Memorial stone at
Sandon



Poppies at Weston



All Soul's at
Clothall



Candlelit All Souls at
Clothall





Rembrandt van Rijn: The Return of the Prodigal Son

(c.1669)

Seven years after she perched boldly on his knee to play her part in her husband's recreation of the Prodigal Son's partying days, Rembrandt's beloved Saskia was dead at the age of 29. Soon his style of painting, burning with human honesty, would fall out of fashion in an Amsterdam seeking to be flattered for its sophistication. Now other painters, some his former pupils, picked up all the portrait commissions. Unable to keep up the payments on his impressive town house Rembrandt fell into debt, was declared insolvent, his possessions auctioned off.

Rembrandt van Rijn: Rembrandt and Saskia in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

(c.1669)

This variously named painting is also known as 'The Prodigal Son in the Brothel', 'The Prodigal Son with a Whore', or simply 'Portrait of Rembrandt and Saskia'. How persuasive Rembrandt had to be to convince his wife to play the part of a prostitute we do not know, but she's gone along with her husband's exuberant scheme and dressed for the role as he has for his. Planted firmly on his knee she gazes knowingly over her shoulder at the viewer, mildly bored perhaps, but as tolerant and near-smiling as her pretended profession obliges her to be. The artist casts himself as the son who has extracted his share of the family property from his father and gone off to live the high life – 'he squandered his property in dissolute living', says Luke 15. Rembrandt certainly throws himself into the part.

At one level this is simply a portrait of husband and wife. By 1635 Rembrandt

Once Saskia was gone the good times ebbed steadily away. Where do you go when your life is so badly crushed as to be irreparable? If you cannot bear the decision that your life must be ended, then you return to the last place you knew where love was unconditional, freely given, never withheld or withdrawn. You go home. All the money was gone and illness overtook the land, says Jesus in Luke. That the only work the son can find is among pigs, unclean creatures to any Jew, is humiliation only exceeded by the hunger which makes him desire to eat their food, not that he is permitted to do even that. So he returns to his father with head shorn in penitence, the remains of once fine clothes hanging in filthy tatters, the heel of his right sandal broken revealing feet holed and torn, the left fallen from him as he presses himself empty and exhausted upon his father.

He demolishes all his former pride, as indeed did Rembrandt over the 27 years between Saskia's death and his own. All the egotistical bravado displayed in his earlier painting of the Prodigal Son is replaced with forlorn humility, his former fine reputation all but gone. But whereas the first painting had depicted the human mask, this one shows the human truth, himself as he is, ourselves as we are. Rembrandt must have felt that the story of the Prodigal Son was deeply interwoven with his own.

He had discovered that a looser, rougher painting style freed him to reveal the light that shines from within the human frame. Witness the inner radiance of the father,

was at the height of his fame with the most influential citizens of Amsterdam queueing up to be painted by him. He had married well and the combination of his own success and Saskia's wealth had enabled the couple to move into a grand house, with Rembrandt indulging in a not inexpensive passion for collecting art and all manner of costume and curios. We see them celebrating the good life they've achieved – there's sex and there's wine, and peacock pie (the food of vanity) to eat. Life couldn't be better. But was he overspending? Saskia's family certainly believed he was squandering her portion of her father's estate.

Rembrandt intended this painting to be both a celebratory self-portrait and an illustration of the Prodigal Son story. The merry young gallant with one hand around his new acquaintance and the other around a provocatively tall glass of wine was a well-known manner of depicting the tale. But Rembrandt knew how the story unfolded. The longer we look the more we seem to discern unease, disquiet behind the smile. Rembrandt conceals but reveals – it's clever but it's as true to real life as it is to the story. All that rollicking bonhomie seems almost frantic to disguise its hollow

A prayer for all those affected by coronavirus

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us
from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

If you would like to donate to any of our churches in the current crisis - details are below. We would be very grateful in your help to keep our churches going.

Thank you.

PCC OF RUSHDEN

LLOYDS BANK: 30-94-30 A/C 01845350

SANDON PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL
BARCLAYS BANK: 20-73-26 A/C 53610802

PCC ST MARYS CHURCH WALLINGTON
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his hands laid tenderly upon the shoulders of his beloved son in absolute forgiveness and acceptance. The eyes of both father and son are closed; touch expresses everything needful. Painted in the last year of his life and found in his house after his death, we understand Rembrandt's desire to return home to a loving father, and discover a great longing that we may be permitted to do the same.



core, the knowledge that all parties must one day be over. Are we witnessing Rembrandt's own fear that his good times cannot last, that the fate of the Prodigal Son will be his also?

Rembrandt was not finished with the story of the Prodigal Son, nor was the story finished with him. Eventually he would return to it, and the results that second time around, would be very different, as we'll see....