

# intouch

NEWSLETTER

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



KINGS  
WOOD  
BENEFICE

## Welcome to this issue of In Touch.

I hope you have been enjoying the spring sunshine, it is still rather chilly but the clear skies certainly lift the spirits. I have new neighbours at the vicarage – a small flock of sheep who have been producing lambs over the last week. Every morning I wake up and go and see what has happened over night and every evening the lambs go manic around the field, chasing each other – it is wonderful therapy. I am reminded of the old poem about the season and the May couplet – May brings flock of pretty lambs, skipping by their fleecy dames! With blessings Fiona.

With blessings Fiona

23rd April:

## St George, our Patron Saint who isn't English

The English have a patron saint who isn't English, about whom next to nothing is known for sure, and who, just possibly, may not have existed at all. But that didn't stop St George being patriotically invoked in many battles, notably at Agincourt and in the Crusades, and of course it is his cross that adorns the flags of English football fans to this day.

It's most likely that St George was a soldier, a Christian who was martyred for his faith somewhere in Palestine, possibly at Lydda, in the early fourth century. At some point in the early centuries of the Church he became associated with wider military concerns, being regarded as the patron saint of the Byzantine armies. There is no doubt that St George was held as an example of the 'godly soldier', one who served Christ as bravely and truly as he served his king and country.

The story of George and the dragon is of much later date and no one seems to know where it comes from. By the Middle Ages, when George was being honoured in stained glass, the dragon had become an invaluable and invariable visual element, so that for most people the two are inseparable. Pub signs have a lot to answer for here: 'The George and Dragon'.

However, it's probably more profitable to concentrate on his role as a man who witnessed to his faith in the difficult setting of military service, and in the end was martyred for his faithfulness to Christ.

The idea of the 'Christian soldier' was, of course, much loved by the Victorian hymn-writers - 'Onward, Christian soldiers!' The soldier needs discipline. The heart of his commitment is to obedience. The battle cannot be avoided nor the enemy appeased. He marches and fights alongside others, and he is loyal to his comrades. In the end, if the battle is won, he receives the garlands of victory, the final reward of those who overcome evil.

St George's Day presents a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to distance the message of his life from the militarism and triumphalism that can easily attach itself to anything connected to soldiers and fighting. The opportunity is to celebrate the ideal of the 'Christian soldier' - one who submits to discipline, sets out to obey God truly, does not avoid the inevitable battle with all that is unjust, wrong and hateful in our world, and marches alongside others fighting the same noble cause.

Discipline, obedience, courage, fellowship and loyalty - they're not the most popular virtues today, but that doesn't mean that they don't deserve our admiration.



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.*

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## Peter Paul Rubens: The Descent from the Cross (1611-14)



With flanking panels depicting the pregnant Mary and Elizabeth, then in the temple Mary passing her son into the arms of Simeon, with further paintings on its reverse showing St Christopher carrying the Christ child across a river and a hermit holding aloft the Christ-light, the theme of the triptych of which this painting is the central panel is the bearing of Christ, and to his followers this means being called to bear him in faith throughout their lives.

Can an image of the cross be called 'beautiful'? I think so, and Rubens' mighty painting in which the visible weight of the dead body of Christ is balanced with the loving tenderness of those who release him from the all but obscured instrument of his death, epitomizes undefeated human compassion, living hope defying merciless judicial murder. This is not the cross of death; it is the tree of life.

But there is unequivocally a death. The bloodied pale body with sightless eyes and stilled lips not quite closed is unmistakably beyond life. Yet its weight is transformed into light illuminating those who take infinite, almost quixotic care not to cause Jesus further damage. This is the human response, this is love, this is us, it's what we do: this is faith.

They work together in strong, serpentine organic unity. Above, two labourers, the

first balanced on one foot with the other suspended in mid-air while using an arm of the cross as an uncertain fulcrum for his body. We almost smile at the second with the winding-sheet gripped tenaciously between his teeth as he yields the burden to those below. It's the youthful John in the blood red robe firmly planted on both ground and ladder of ascent who receives the heaviest share for upon his future discipleship much will depend. Above him a sturdy Nicodemus plays his part, accepting the discomfort of his right arm twisting back to maintain grip. On the other side a richly-clad yet determined Joseph of Arimathea takes the strain. Finally the three Marys; the mother of Jesus looking up to her son's face in hollowed-out grief, a sorrowing Mary Clopas, and Mary Magdalene lovingly solemn. Jesus' foot momentarily brushes the hair on her shoulder recalling how she once used it to dry his feet after anointing them.

Rubens painting is an altarpiece and it still performs that function. At the bottom and therefore nearest the altar table is a blood filled bowl accompanied by the discarded crown of thorns and the 'King of the Jews' inscription pinned down with a small rock. To approach and receive communion here is a fearful and glorious thing.

## Science and Society: How Can We Approach New Ethical Issues? The five 'Cs'

**For example, who should be treated first when resources are limited?**

**Virtue ethics** are about building character, growing in wisdom and the fruit of the Spirit. There are plenty of biblical principles to guide virtuous living, such as the idea that we are 'made in the image of God' which supports the value of every human life (e.g., Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 9:6, James 3:9-10), but the right decision can vary depending on circumstances

So how can we make ethical decisions about new technologies? **The five Cs** bring together a number of different types of ethical thinking into a helpful framework for decision-making.

**Clarify the facts and key questions.**

**Consider our choices: what could we achieve?**

**Constraints: External - what must we do?; Internal - how should we behave?**

**Compare the pros and cons of each approach.**

**Choose what is best, with all parties in mind.**

Finally, we have to recognise that the information available to us will change over time, our knowledge of God and His word will keep growing, and we cannot avoid making mistakes - so our ethical decisions will need to be revisited and revised from time to time.

This series is written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

**"Do you ever go into your own garden and feel that you are trespassing?"**

### MY GARDEN?

*I thought I owned a garden  
A lovely place to be  
A bird said, "Beg your pardon,  
"This land belongs to me!"*

*A squirrel dropped a nut on me  
Which wasn't what I'd planned  
"Get lost!", said he, "for can't you see  
"You trespass on my land?"*

*A pheasant flapped and squawked so loud  
I scarce could hear me think!  
"Get off my ground, for two's a crowd!"  
He kicked up such a stink!*

*The wild-life around me  
So loudly do protest!  
They growl and screech till I can see  
That I am just a guest!*

By Nigel Beeton

