



**The Chapels Royal of St Peter ad Vincula and St John the Evangelist
HM Tower of London**

Dear friends,

This week, for Laura and me, happens to be bookended by funerals. On Monday there was the ceremony for John, an old friend of ours, and on Friday there will be the funeral for dear Barbara Hall. Roger wrote movingly about Barbara in the newsletter two weeks ago, which you may wish to read again [here](#). His words will have resonated with all who had the privilege and delight of knowing her. Her death has come as a shock to many.

The vicissitudes of human existence constitute a theme which has occupied writers for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Chapter 3 (verses 1-8) of the Book Ecclesiastes is a classic text:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

I may not be alone in sometimes feeling a little uneasy as I hear these words. Whilst making sharp contrasts between different aspects of our lives, they may appear to condone or even to encourage things that we should surely shun: killing, destruction, hating and making war. The writer's purpose here, however, is not to endorse particular behaviours – especially the negative ones – so much as to remind readers of the realities of human existence: that is, of the human condition. In doing so, the writer recognises what life is really like – and it is not all roses. The Book of Common Prayer, in its funeral service, contains a ringing phrase which is chillingly true: 'in the midst of life we are in death.' To that, I should wish to add that it is no less true that, in the midst of death, we are in life. A belief that death, whilst inevitable, is not final, is basic to our Christian faith. The following prayer, also taken from the Book of Common Prayer, effectively offers a concise summary of the spirit of Ecclesiastes whilst stressing the essence of our Christian faith - of hope and trust in God:

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers, and dispose the way of thy servants towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that, among all the changes and chances of this mortal life, they may ever be defended by thy most gracious and ready help; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Our world has become more unpredictable and sometimes seems to be spinning out of control. I commend this prayer to you in these times of sadness and tribulation.

With all good wishes,

Cortland.

Sunday Service 2nd March 2025
The Sunday called Quinquagesima or the next Sunday before Lent

0930 Holy Communion, The White Tower
Readings 1 Corinthians 13:1-end and Luke 18:31-end.

Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth;
Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity,
the very bond of peace and of all virtues,
without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee.
Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. **Amen.**

Prayer of the week: The Kontakion for the Departed.

Not many prayers have been adopted in the West from the Orthodox tradition. One exception is the prayer known as the Kontakion for the Departed. A kontakion is a form of hymn in the Byzantine liturgical tradition, originating in around the 6th century. The name derives from a Greek word meaning 'rod' or 'stick' and refers specifically to the rod around which a scroll is wound. The name may be a reference to the fact that kontakions tend to have many stanzas, thus requiring a great deal of 'scrolling'.

The text of the Kontakion of the Departed or of the Dead is dated to the 6th or 7th century. It was translated into English from Russian by William John Birkbeck, an English theologian and musicologist who studied Russian church music in Moscow in 1890. The traditional tune, known in English as the Kiev Melody, was edited by Birkbeck's close friend, Sir Walter Parratt, the organist of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. Queen Victoria may have heard this kontakion in Russian at a memorial service in London for the death of Tsar Alexander III in 1894, where she noted that "a fine Russian hymn, always sung at funerals throughout the Greek Church, was sung without accompaniment, & was very impressive." She certainly heard Birkbeck's translation sung at the funeral of Prince Henry of Battenberg in 1896. During the planning of Victoria's own state funeral, her daughters asked that it be included in the service as it was a favourite of hers, a suggestion blocked by Bishop Randall Davidson with the support of King Edward VII, on the grounds that the text was not in keeping with Anglican teaching on prayers for the dead. Nevertheless, it was sung at the funeral of Queen Alexandra at Westminster Abbey in 1925.

The Kontakion of the Departed with Parratt's arrangement was included in the first edition of *The English Hymnal* in 1906, and has since appeared in several other Anglican hymn books, including *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. It has been sung at the state and ceremonial funerals of Sir Winston Churchill, Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and Queen Elizabeth II.

The English text is as follows:

Give rest, O Christ,
to thy servant with thy saints,
where sorrow and pain are no more;
neither sighing, but life everlasting.

Thou only art immortal, the Creator and Maker of man;
and we are mortal, formed of the earth, and unto earth shall we return;
for so thou didst ordain when thou createdst me, saying:
'Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'
All we go down to the dust, and, weeping o'er the grave we make our song:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

You can hear the Kontakion for the Departed as sung at the funeral of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II [here](#).

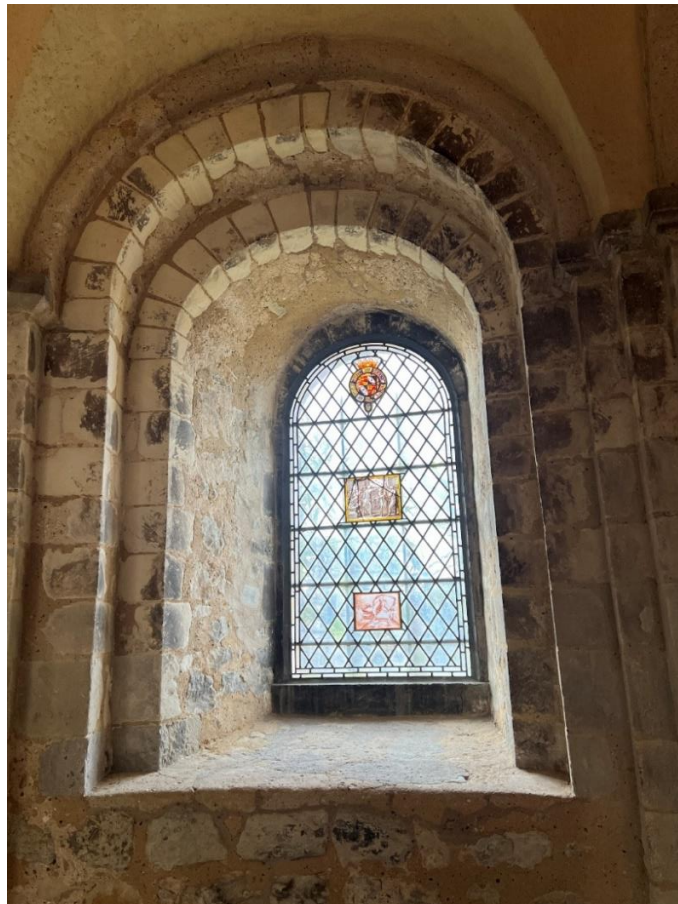
Music: God be in my head - Philip Radcliffe (1905-86)

Colm Carey, Master of Music, has provided the following commentary on this week's music item performed for you by our choir. Philip Radcliffe had a lifelong association with Cambridge, where he was a student, Fellow and then University Lecturer. As a composer he mainly wrote songs, incidental music and church music. Of the many settings of the text 'God be in my head', this is one of the most beautiful. Radcliffe's iteration maintains the simplicity and directness of this beautiful prayer while the 8-part texture creates a rich and sonorous sound.

God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing.

Jigsaw

This week's picture is of one of the windows in the Chapel of St John the Evangelist in the White Tower. You can find the jigsaw [here](#).



Prayers

Please continue to remember those on our sick list, some of whom are very ill, amongst whom we name: Stanley, John, Mark, Rob, Kofi, David, Val, and His Holiness Pope Francis.

RIP

Barbara Hall, Ron Owen (Priest), John Carroll, Michael Crosby and Arnold Scott.

Please continue to pray for Ukraine and the countries of the Middle East:

God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine and the Middle East today.

We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons.

We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow,
that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them.

We pray for those with power over war or peace,
for wisdom, discernment, and compassion to guide their decisions.

Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear,
that you would hold and protect them.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of peace. Amen.

With best wishes to all, Cortland.



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