

Time to connect



Lucy Mills

We live in a world of connection. It's easy to emphasise our disconnectedness, especially at times such as these. But with all the language we have heard about isolation and distance, we find hope in our recognition of one another's humanity.

When I overhear people talking, they talk about the same things. The same turns of phrase, the same anxieties, the

same observations being made about the world. Yes, there are differences of opinion. Yes, we have different lifestyles. But some experiences we all share. We share a world. We share fear. And we share the possibility of hope.

For some of us, physical isolation is no new thing. Having had a downturn in health the past couple of years, I found my social world shrinking... but also

Continued overleaf

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calendar & lectionary

- 1** Visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth
- 3** Martyrs of Uganda, 1885–7, 1977
- 4** Petroc, abbot, 6th cent.
- 5** Boniface (Wynfrith), bishop, martyr, 754
- 6** Ini Kopuria, founder of the Melanesian Brotherhood, 1945
- 7** **Trinity Sunday**
Isaiah 40.12–17, 27–end, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13.11–end, Matthew 28.16–20
- 8** Thomas Ken, bishop, nonjuror, hymn writer, 1711
- 9** Columba, abbot, missionary, 597, Ephrem, deacon, hymn writer, teacher of the faith, 373
- 11** Barnabas the Apostle
- 14** **1st Sunday after Trinity**
Genesis 18.1–15 [21.1–7], Psalm 116.1, 10–17, Romans 5.1–8, Matthew 9.35–10.8 [9–23]
- 15** Evelyn Underhill, spiritual writer, 1941
- 16** Richard, bishop, 1253, Joseph Butler, bishop, philosopher, 1752
- 17** Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, social reformers, 1913 and 1936
- 18** Bernard Mizeki, martyr, 1896
- 19** Sundar Singh, sadhu (holy man), evangelist, teacher of the faith, 1929
- 21** **2nd Sunday after Trinity**
Genesis 21.8–21, Psalm 86.1–10, 16–end, Romans 6.1b–11, Matthew 10.24–39
- 22** Alban, first martyr of Britain, c.250
- 23** Etheldreda, abbess, c.678
- 27** Cyril, bishop, teacher of the faith, 444
- 28** **3rd Sunday after Trinity**
Genesis 22.1–14, Psalm 13, Romans 6.12–end, Matthew 10.40–end
- 29** Peter and Paul the Apostles

Continued from page 1

enlarging. Because when we can't get out and meet face to face, we look to other ways of connecting. And there you find others also needing to reach out, others in need of comfort and company. You might discover someone who has been waiting for you to walk into their world. Someone who needs that light you carry inside you.

You may love the digital world and all it offers. You may find it daunting. You may emphasise its strengths; you may focus on its weaknesses. It's a human construct so, of course, it has both! As we have been looking to reach out to one another, we may have needed to push ourselves out of our comfort zones, to exercise wisdom in new arenas. And those arenas need us.

For if the wise, the thoughtful and the loving do not walk into a room, how can that room be transformed or be the best place it can be? As we look to ensure that people do not feel alone, we look to find the healthiest and safest ways of practising connection and community. This may mean getting things wrong. It may mean imperfect solutions (but aren't they all just a little bit imperfect and messy? After all, we are all human).

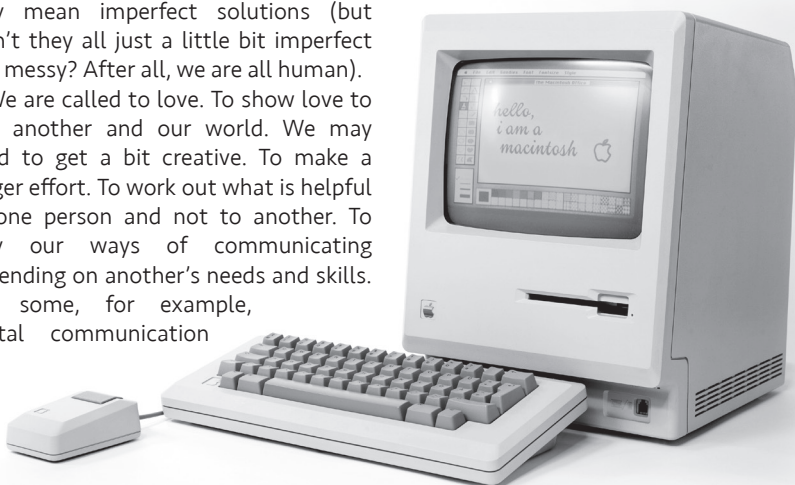
We are called to love. To show love to one another and our world. We may need to get a bit creative. To make a bigger effort. To work out what is helpful to one person and not to another. To vary our ways of communicating depending on another's needs and skills. For some, for example, digital communication

is the 'perfect imperfect solution'. For others it is impractical, unhelpful and frightening and they have needed you to pick up the phone or talk through a window. For many, it will be somewhere in between. Let's take advantage of our tools of communication but keep things as simple as possible, so that we don't exclude people.

Love is the key. How are we showing love to one another? This isn't about being the most impressive, the most streamlined, or even the most efficient. It is about being the most loving. How can we love our neighbours – all of them, all those connections we make in our varied lives – in the most genuine, respectful and helpful way possible?

*Lord, teach us to love
teach us to show compassion
stir our hearts and transform our minds
to see how we can shine your light
into the murkiest, most muddled places
in our world.*
Amen.

Lucy Mills is a writer and artist
www.lucy-mills.com



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Hospital Prayers

ISTOCK



For Medical Staff

O Lord Jesus Christ,
who alone hast power over life and death,
over health and sickness,
give power, wisdom, and gentleness
to all thy ministering servants, our
doctors and nurses,
that always bearing thy Presence with
them,
they may not only heal but bless,
and shine as lanterns of hope in the
darkest
hours of distress and fear;
who with the Father and the Holy Ghost
livest and reignest, ever one God, world
without end.

Amen

For Myself In Hospital

Grant, O God, that amidst all the
discouragements, difficulties and
dangers,
distress and darkness of this mortal life,
I may depend on thy mercy, and on this
build my hopes, as on a sure foundation.
Let thine infinite mercy in Christ Jesus
deliver me from despair, both now and
at the hour of death.

Amen

Bishop Thomas Wilson (1663–1755)

*From Pocket Prayers for Healing,
compiled by Trevor Lloyd, Church House
Publishing.*

Becoming Reverend



Matt Woodcock

Wednesday 13 October

Anna called me in a state of tearful panic tonight. She'd fallen downstairs. Thank the Lord she slid down on her back. The babies seem fine. Anna checked their heartbeats to be sure. It was a scare we don't need right now. The whole thing feels precarious again just when I was beginning to relax.

My 'college buddy' says he is struggling to cope with the fawning attention of the female undergrads. I can't imagine what it must be like training here as a 19-year-old. The poor guy must be bouncing off the walls. He doesn't seem too distressed by all the attention, mind you.

Thursday 14 October

I dragged myself up at 6.30 a.m. to run with Rhys Thomas. We beat our personal best by one minute. Durham's hills are brutal.

I've received another email from Major Alex in response to the package I sent him. He's doing well but missing his family. Eleven weeks is a long time when you're stuck in a desert wasteland surrounded by local people who want to kill you. He sent me some cool pictures of him posing in a Blackhawk helicopter.

Father Mark's seminars continue to fascinate me. Our class is a lovely cross

section of the different Anglican traditions we're learning about. Mark told us that, contrary to popular belief, there were actually fewer people going to church in the seventeenth century than there are now. Anglicanism was on the verge of extinction until the evangelistic preaching ministry of three men changed everything – John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. We need a new generation of Wesleys and Whitefields to get busy. Starting with me.

Friday 15 October

Our pioneer ministry seminar was a tasty one. I argued that as a Church we had become 'dangerously irrelevant' to huge swathes of society and urgently needed to re-engage. Aidan and I joked about the potential of 'Matt Woodcock Ministries'. We even came up with a theme tune for the inevitable advert on God TV.

There doesn't seem to be a chapter of the Bible that isn't disputed or questioned in some way in our Cranmer seminars. There's a lot of chin-stroking, brow-furrowing and 'mmm'-ing. It wearies me. We were presented with a hermeneutical analysis on Jesus' central claim of being 'the way, the truth and the life'. Our lecturer claimed it may not

be saying what we think it is. For instance, it doesn't rule out the potential that there are other gods. The annoying thing is that this was just left there ... hanging. They leave us standing on theological sand the whole time. We also got onto the thorny issue of universalism (the idea that everyone gets to be with God in heaven in the end, such is the extent of his love and mercy). Can we be 'certain' about anything written in the New Testament? It would be helpful to know. I know the point of theological training is for me to test and stretch the boundaries of what I know and believe. It would be nice if I didn't actually lose my faith in the process, though.

Sunday 17 October

Harry and I were interviewed at a Methodist church in our placement patch today. I could tell the minister instantly regretted giving me the microphone. I shared how lovely it was to be in a nice warm building with comfy chairs instead of cold, hard pews. 'My bottom thanks you!' I shouted. Cue a wave of embarrassed silence broken by nervous coughs. Cringe.

Monday 18 October

Terrible start to the day. I looked at my alarm clock and saw 6.30 a.m. I showered and liberally applied my Lynx Africa. Glancing at the clock again, I noticed it was actually 3.30 a.m. No! I put a towel over my pillowcase and tried

to get back to sleep. I later feigned illness to skip discipleship group. My impression of a chesty cough is getting rather good. I just couldn't face it. I needed to crack on with my essay.

I'm trying to hide from my neighbour Zach. He's a lovely guy but I need more alone time. He keeps sticking rude messages on my door with Post-it notes and coming round to share silly banter. It's like being in one of those frat houses. If I'm not careful Zach will start letting

cattle loose down the corridors. Paul says I suffer from IFS (Instant Friend Syndrome). I'm the worst kind of extrovert. I only want to be one when I'm in the mood. Then I'm the most extreme type of one. At all other times I need to be quiet and alone. People struggle with the extremity of that transition. I'm a

walking Nirvana song - quiet-loud, quiet-loud. It's exhausting.

I ran, observed and prayed the seven miles round our placement patch this afternoon. The big superstores are the new community gathering places. I'm arranging a meeting with the manager of the local Tesco. They could have some useful insights. I'm seeing the area at the moment but not feeling it. I can't hear its heartbeat yet.

This is an extract from Becoming Reverend by Matt Woodcock (Church House Publishing, £9.99).





Laurie Lee

Ronald Blythe

Pentecost – 70 days after the resurrection, when the house shakes, and tongues of fire become mitres. The old garden blazes with summer, which is not officially here. Pale-yellow irises, immense red poppies. The white cat hiding from the sun. Jean's horses swigging at the water-trough. Mr Cousins's bees and Tom's aeroplane buzzing around. Myself languid in the heat, and surrounded by Laurie Lee's books – I am supposed to be celebrating his centenary.

He is walking in Spain, just before the civil war. He carries a violin, and is 18, and penniless, joyful, and naïve. His life tumbles around me on the grass. Tumultuous birdsong. Cool aspen music. I planted these tremendous trees 40 years ago, and they have shot up so they

can see what is going on over the hill. All the windows are open wide. The wavy painted roof sheds mossy cushions. The TV aerial glitters. In a brief silence, when the birds take a break, I catch bell-ringers' practice at Little Horkesley.

The garden is a kind of unintentional botany of autographs, of stolen cuttings, inherited plantings, and remembered species. Sometimes, the giver's name comes to mind, but not the plant. It has two heydays: spring bulbs, and this midsummer splendour.

The old farmhouse is, at this moment, nothing more than a prop to hold up foliage. It smells inside and out of mint and freshly shorn grass. Butterflies have to be rescued from double glazing, and the occasional swallow from my bedroom.

I preach on the moment when not only tongues of fire blazed on heads, but



all languages were understood. St Luke's Acts of the Apostles has always enthralled me with its heat and voyagings, its insistence that the followers of Jesus should take to the road or the sea, and not remain a small Palestinian sect.

Of course, there were those who never left home but covered the ground mentally. It is what I am doing now, I tell Laurie Lee. I glimpsed him once when I was young. A friend said: 'You see that man at the bar – that's Laurie Lee.' He had walked all the way from Gloucestershire into fame. In *Cider With Rosie* – a great walk book – he describes it quite dangerously; for even now, all this time since, it is enough to make one pack a haversack and take to the road. Only it is best to be about 20 for it to make sense.

A friend starts up the mower. It vies with the bees. The horses toss their manes. David is having his funeral in the church, a Thomas Hardy figure from the last of the old farmworking race. He and his wife sat at the back of the church for

always. A long weariness claimed him, wore him out.

The psalms understood such physical exhaustion. 'Forsake me not, O God, in my old age.' Although, wonderfully, the older one gets, the closer God is, it often seems. But, with the passing of men such as David, the gradual disappearance of those whose bodies shaped the village fields, and whose faces met the village weather in all its moods, rural life in its classic shape is concluded.

He was cremated – a hurrying of his body into dust, and different tongues of fire to claim it. The church was full to overflowing for him. Voices of unseen riders converse as they pass the garden, and there is a slight stumbling of hoofs.

Kilvert climbs Cader Idris

To Aldeburgh, where Peter Grimes would confess his crimes in an opera house on

Continued overleaf

Continued from previous page

the shingle. And not only this, but the Suffolk coast had taken a leaf out of the Côte d'Azur, and was balmy. My friend Ian, never a man to miss an opportunity, jumped into the sea and swam several yards. I breathed in the unaccustomed warmth, and listened to the furious gulls.

It was Sunday evening, and my having taken matins at Little Horkesley that morning seemed aeons away. For this is what the sea does: takes over. Replaces what went before with its vast significance. I heard it hollering, as it were, below the balcony of my room all night.

The costly whiff of skate and haddock rose from the fishermen's huts, and the birds cried even louder. Christianity was born to this smell and noise. Galilee was 74 square miles of serenity and turbulence, where squalls blew up, or where surfaces were calm, concealing great depth. It bred a distinctive race, as seas do. As Aldeburgh does to this day. I mean, Southwold and Great Yarmouth are only a few miles north, but are they like Aldeburgh? Not remotely.

It is Songs of Praise at Mount Bures from its modest height. And all around the epitome of flower festivals. Pure Kilvert. Or so I always think. Francis Kilvert died in 1879, and his niece Miss Kilvert was my Suffolk neighbour. The contingencies of human existence can be unbelievable. This is the time of year when I might include some of Kilvert's diary in a sermon. Might he not console others as he consoles me? St Paul blessed the Romans via the God of patience and consolation.

On a June morning such as this, Kilvert let himself out of the Golden Lion Hotel at Dolgellau to visit real lions; for the

menagerie had come to town. It was 5.30 a.m., and the lions, ostriches, gnus, and antelopes, wide awake but caged up, were 'eliciting divers roars, groans, howls, hoots and grunts'. All that I heard when at this hour I braved the sopping wet grass were Jean's horses cropping and breathing, and the final notes of the dawn chorus.

Kilvert climbed Cader Idris; I became waist-high in my wildflower meadow and sticky with pollen. But the early-ness of being outside was just the same for both of us. Only he ran into Welsh rain, and I into the clarity of an East Anglian morning. Kilvert descended Cader Idris by the 'Fox's Path', as I had done, a hundred years later.

I came into a stingy breakfast, being too idle to cook. And now, wet-footed, I am writing this, consoled by the selfish thought that never in my life have I ever had to catch the commuter's train. Only to stumble from bed to meadow at an unearthly hour. For 5.30 a.m. can be paradisaal, whatever the weather.

Kilvert, a mighty walker, met early risers of all ages; whereas I meet fewer and fewer fellow tramps. Sunday afternoons might bring one or two of them out. Old paths are grown over, old views no longer seen – such as that from which, at a certain point, one can just make out Wormingford Church, or an oak which is contemporary with Shakespeare.

So back to Songs of Praise, and what to say between these hymns. And to hear them sung eloquently inside the thick old walls. George Herbert, of course. J. M. Neale, of course. Charles Wesley always consolingly brilliant.

*From Stour Seasons by Ronald Blythe
(Canterbury Press, £14.99).*

Recipes

ISTOCK



Broad Bean and Feta Salad

It is the time of year for barbecues! The challenge is how to find side dishes that are tasty, but not too boring. Here is a idea that plays with seasonal flavours.

Ingredients

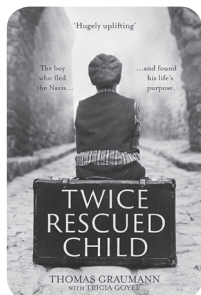
450g (1 lb) of shelled broad beans
stock, vegetable or chicken
the juice of 1 lemon
two sprigs of thyme
ten finely chopped mint leaves
black pepper
3 tablespoons of olive oil
200g (6½ oz) of feta cheese, crumbled

Method

1 Boil the broad beans in stock for a few minutes. Turn off the heat and leave the pan to cool.

2 At least an hour before serving, strain the beans into a bowl and stir in the lemon juice, the leaves from the sprigs of thyme, the chopped mint, a good grind of black pepper, the olive oil, and the crumbled feta.

books



TWICE RESCUED CHILD

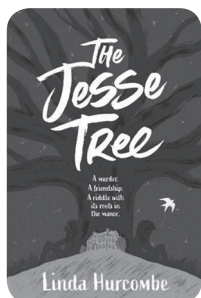
Thomas Graumann
SPCK £13.99
(£12.59)

Thomas Graumann was born into a secular Jewish family in pre-war Czechoslovakia. He was saved from the Holocaust by the Kindertransport scheme, which brought hundreds of Jewish children to Britain. He lost his family, but gained a faith — being “rescued” for a second time as he experienced Evangelical conversion. He

then trained as a missionary and headed out to the Philippines.

It is an undeniably striking story, and one illustrated with some lovely details. Not least of these is the fact that the first English that the eight-year-old Graumann ever learnt was “Player’s, please”, a phrase taught by a Church of Scotland minister who sent him off to buy cigarettes. Although it is never quite clear where his words stop and those of his co-author, Tricia Goyer, start, there is authenticity and real honesty here.

The Revd Dr William Whyte is Fellow and Tutor of St John’s College, Oxford, and Professor of Social and Architectural History in the University of Oxford.



THE JESSE TREE
Linda Hurcombe
Orphans Publishing
£7.99

“Be kind to your parents though they don’t deserve it — remember they’re grown ups, a difficult stage of life.” Linda Hurcombe tells this multi-layered story through the eyes of Robin Swallow, rising 14 years old, intelligent, witty, and wise for her age. Her father has disappeared, believed dead in action abroad; her decides to move Robin and her brother Zach, plus their dog, out of London to live in a “rural backwater where nothing ever happens” — except that such a lot does:

a recent murder of the lord of the manor house near by, perpetrator currently unidentified; and, at a busy gypsy encampment, Robin’s getting to know young Summer Locke, a Roma who was a friend of the murder victim.

Hurcombe’s novel is beautifully written, with vivid but economical descriptions, and excellent dialogue that works for both adult and teenage readers. I was impressed by a remark in the Author’s Note: “Fiction needs to be realistic, unlike reality, which is often so bizarre as to be inconceivable.” But this novel also deals with the bizarre and the unusual, and makes the little-known world of the Romany Gypsy, Summer’s own family environment, vividly real.

Peggy Woodford is a novelist.

YOURS TRULY:
Parables and stories
Murray Watts
SPCK £9.99

Words are potent, pregnant with the power to inspire, delight, and wound. In the hands of a skilled storyteller, they invite a reader to see the world afresh. Jesus, of course, presents the very model of this. In *Yours Truly*, Murray Watts places his own substantial storytelling gifts in service of telling the good news of Jesus afresh.

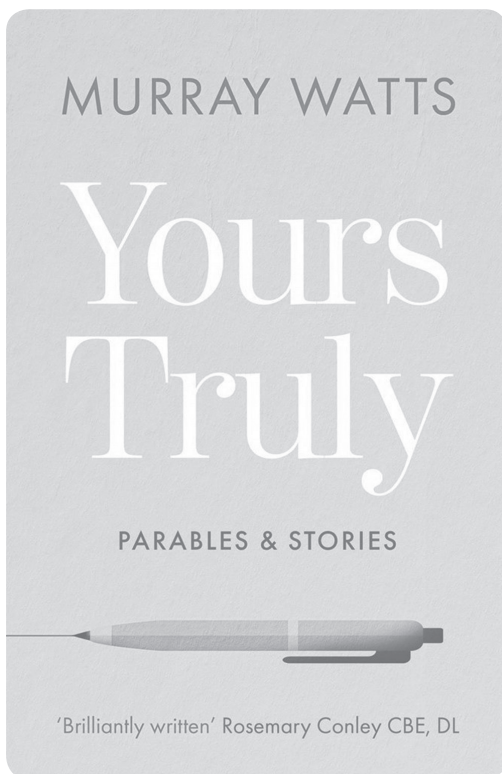
Watts's stories delight the imagination. He engages with a range of biblical characters in a fresh way, most notably the penitent criminal crucified with Jesus. His cast of colourful characters extend far beyond the Bible, however: here are jaded celebrities, successful businessmen, and even a "wayward" spider.

Yours Truly is deceptively simple. At a little more than 100 pages, it is possible to read the book in one sitting. Watts's stories, however, invite the sensitive reader to slow down and savour each parable's magic.

Watts's parables would work very well in sermon-slots, and stories such as "The Spider Who Believed in Himself" have that magic simplicity that most all-

age talks lack. In short, Watts understands that storytelling is about imagination and participation: he invites his audience in and lets them think for themselves. Surely Jesus would approve.

Canon Rachel Mann is Rector of St Nicholas's, Burnage, and a Visiting Fellow of Manchester Met University.



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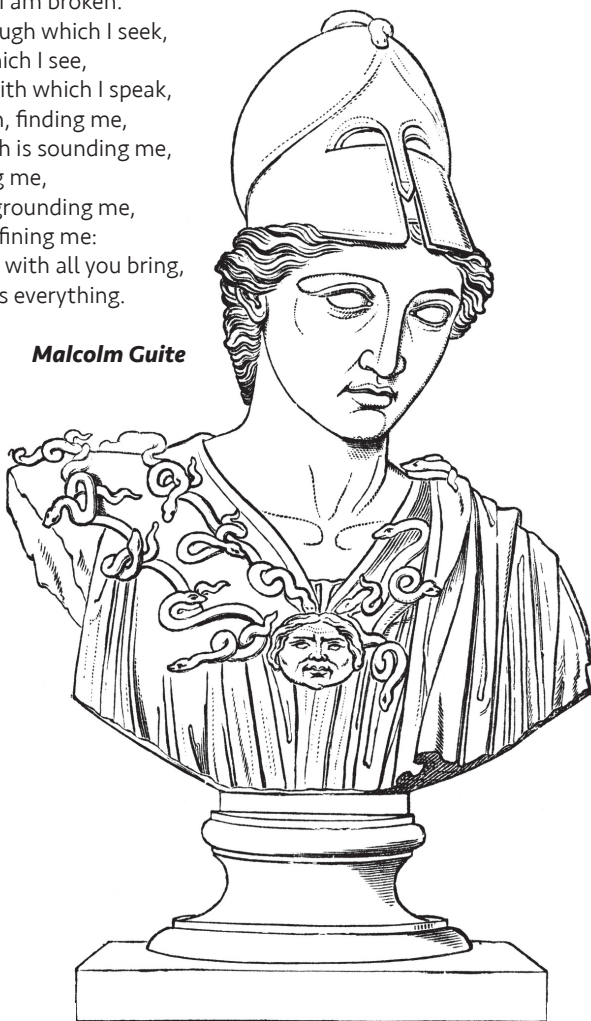


poetry place

O Sapientia

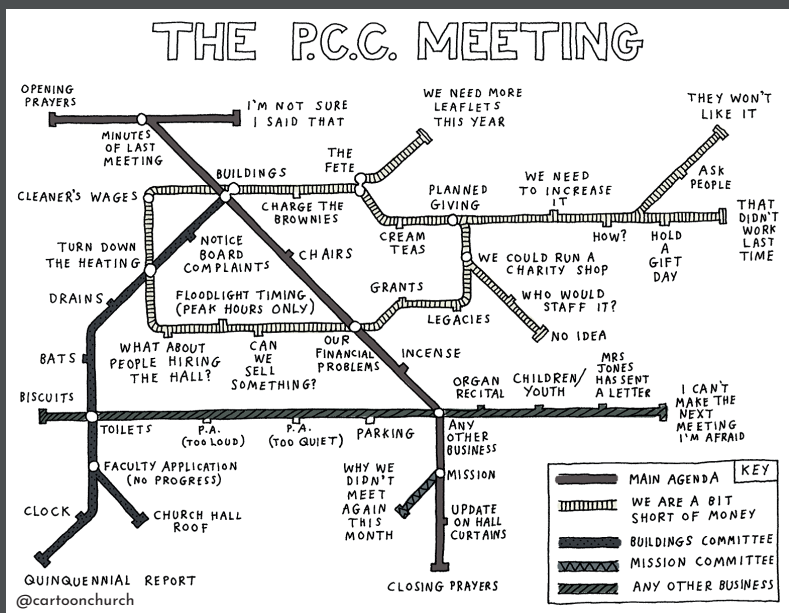
I cannot think unless I have been thought,
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken;
I cannot teach except as I am taught,
Or break the bread except as I am broken.
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,
O Light within the light by which I see,
O Word beneath the words with which I speak,
O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,
O Memory of time, reminding me,
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,
My Maker's bounding line, defining me:
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,
Come to me now, disguised as everything.

Malcolm Guite



PALLAS ATHENE.

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BAMETHYST DIAMOND EMERALD GARNET ONYX
QUARTZ RUBY SAPPHIRE TOPAZ

Can you find the words listed in the grid? They may be written in any direction. The sender of the first correct solution to be opened after the end of the month will receive a £10 book token.

Send your entries to: June Wordsearch, The Sign, 3rd Floor, Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0TG.

The closing date for submissions is 15th July.

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