

Christward

The magazine of



September 6th—October 25th
2020

~ What God looks like ~

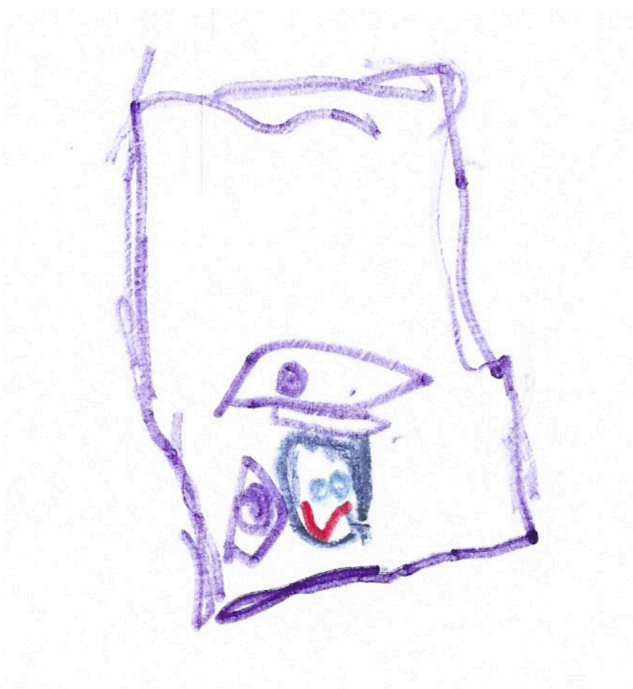
In his service a few weeks ago Andy asked Quinn and Rory to draw a picture of 'What God looks like'. I asked for contributions for the magazine on the same theme. A few people took up the challenge but no one was as daring as Quinn and Rory.

Quinn's picture:

Quinn initially said it was impossible to draw God as he could be anything but eventually decided on something. The yellow circle is the light surrounding God.



Rory's picture



Rory said God was a ball. His drawing is of a ball with a smiley face wearing a hat in a cupboard.

I think that the boys have the right idea. It is certainly the one I hold to. If you want to know what God looks like then look at human beings. There is a poem by William Blake called 'The Divine Image' which says,

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
*Of every race and hue;
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

*line altered

Also at the Last Supper Philip says to Jesus “Show us the Father” and Jesus replies “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” So look around at everybody if you want to know what God looks like. OK it’s a cop out to cover the fact I can't draw but it's the same for the others who answered my request.

Alan

Steve writes

Pictures of God – Two for the price of one....

The Tree: A good few years ago now Gwyneth led a meditation asking us to imagine our “God tree”. I swear I wasn’t being contrary or cynical, but the picture that came to mind was of a very large, very dead tree. Leaves and twigs long gone. Reduced to a few very solid main boughs. Rather like this one (from my collection of photographs of dead trees!):



I think the original might also have had the deep helical crack of a lightning strike. It has become a running joke in the family that my God-tree was dead. Nevertheless it’s an image that has stuck with me. Dead in itself but full of life – fungi, lichens, insects, birds nesting. Yes it may be channelling Nietzsche, but a dead tree is not valueless, but a source of beauty, inspiration and life.

I sent this picture to Andy as it was his service that prompted the memory – his response described the tree as “uncompromising, bleak, stark, complex, beautifully simple. Defiant.” That will do.

The Eye: Again, a good few years ago, I accidentally ended up participating in one of those psychological exercises I generally

would go to great lengths to avoid. I can't remember the supposed purpose of the drawing, or what it was supposed to be of. But I do remember the large eye that appeared in the sky – something like this:



The spy in the sky. Many find the words of the psalmist comforting: “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.” (Psalm 139) To me they sound creepy and

intrusive. The one who knows all your thoughts and deeds. Who knows your motives. Always watching and monitoring your behaviour. Even if you do the right thing, if your motives are not right, it's no good. The angry condemning God. Controlling. Always saying no. Always seeing our imperfections. That's the God I found in that picture. I don't believe this is the God Jesus wanted us to imagine. Once that eye has been seen, been named, it has to go. And, actually for me, by and large if not always, it has gone.

So two pictures. The Eye crystallises much of the negative baggage that for some of us has become associated with our sort of religion. That baggage can go. I'll stick to that tree. The very dead tree of life.

Geoff writes

What does God Look Like?

I have no idea what he looks like. Well, that could be the end of the article!

However, I have what might be a hint. By looking at what someone does, we see something of the person, and how they think. So what has God done? Possibly by his standards, not much. He made a universe, and a world and life just by speaking, although it does suggest that he needed to rest on the seventh day. Thinking can be hard work! But considering it says later “He that watches over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps”, I have no doubt the resting on the seventh day was mentioned in hindsight by the writer of Genesis in anticipation of the institution of the Sabbath. One wonders however, just how many universes could an infinite being make?

Returning to the train of thought, perhaps we can see what the inside of God’s mind looks like, by looking at what he has made. It would seem that nothing would be capable of coercing him, so presumably he made it because he wanted to. It was a desire that made him do it, not a reason. And this creation is what he wanted.

Then God made a single entity in which was male and female. And this bit is somewhat mysterious. So much so that the translators didn’t know what to do with it. The word “side”, doesn’t mean something in one side, it is more like an architectural term, as one side of a building, say the left or the right side. Symmetry is involved. And he referred to the being as “The adam”. Adam means earthling. It has a definite article. Adam was the creature’s description and later became his name. He made the adam in his image and likeness, so that must be another clue to what God looks like. But I don’t know whether that gets us very far. So it seems to relate to thought and being creative which we like to be. This must apply to both genders.

After the separation, Adam came round and when he saw Eve he said “Bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh”. So there is more

than a rib involved. The woman was, and still is, far far more than something a man might not miss, like a rib. A rib falls very short!

We are invited to look backwards in time to what God was before creation, and probably still is. He is one, and complete. So possibly the adam was one and complete when created. The part about not being good for the man to be alone, seems like a literary device to justify the separation, and of course to make reproduction possible. So the whole point may be about how man and woman can be one and reflect who God is. An ideological account to fit perceived reality.

The story may be a means of trying to raise people's vision of how good it is to be a human being, amongst other things. Any suggestions on a postcard!

Andy writes

Following our discussion after our service a couple of weeks ago, Margaret E. left a message of support and solidarity on the Chorlton Central Facebook page, on behalf of all of us. I took this screenshot of the outside of their building as described so vividly by Lorna,

And Jesus answered, 'I tell you, if you remain silent, the very stones will cry out'. Luke Chapter 19 verse 40.



which I think shows how powerful their approach is to Black Lives Matter, and to using their space and their position. I think it raises the question again for us of our response to BLM, and to related social justice issues such as environmental sustainability. I hope that in the coming months we can work out how to do more with our own space and physical presence in Fallowfield to show solidarity with these significant and urgent movements.

The photo might serve as a picture of how I see God, too. In the middle of life, reaching out, undaunted, without malice.

And that is the sum total of the response to my request. Quinn, Rory, Steve, Geoff and Andy with a comment from me. Except that Rachel Eeckelaers (nee Garner), who wrote that she was still thinking about it, sent me in lieu the great article printed below:

~ A summer of books ~

In the spirit of procrastination, on the last day of the summer holidays when I really ought to be thinking about preparing for the new school term, I would like to offer to you a book review of what I have been reading this summer. (This is in place of a drawing of what I believe God to look like- which I must admit still has me stumped and scratching my head).

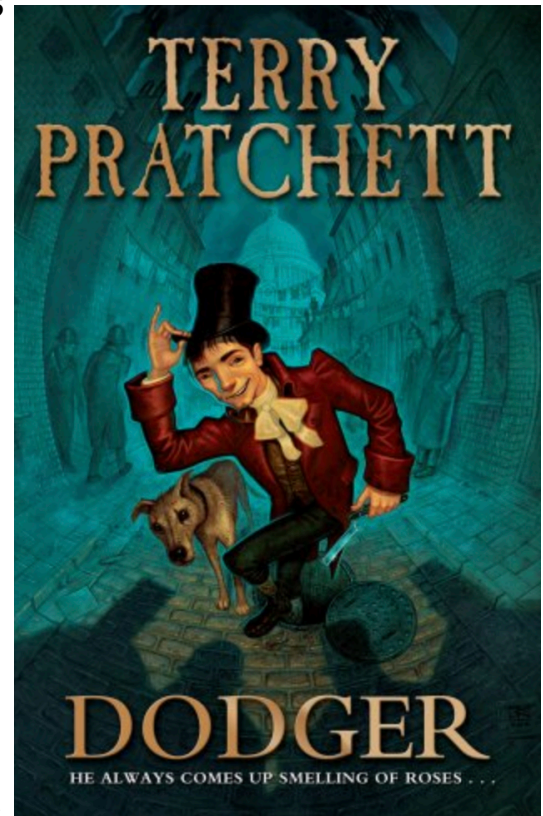
The summer began with reading Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I am no longer talking to White People About Race*. Within her introduction Eddo-Lodge explains the choice of her title, which some people have described to her as being 'controversial'- the front cover design which I have included below is certainly a striking image but one that acts as a powerful metaphor for the book's topic. It draws attention to the fact that we do not pause to think about 'whiteness' and what this means in our society because it is the majority



ethnicity and therefore blends into the background evading critique and analysis. In 2014 Eddo-Lodge posted a message on her blog that was titled “Why I am no longer talking to white people about race” which essentially explained that she had decided to withdraw from engaging in conversation with white people about race because she had experienced it as emotionally exhausting, alienating, frustrating and at times dangerous. Ironically after this tweet Eddo-Lodge acknowledges that she ended up having a lot more conversations

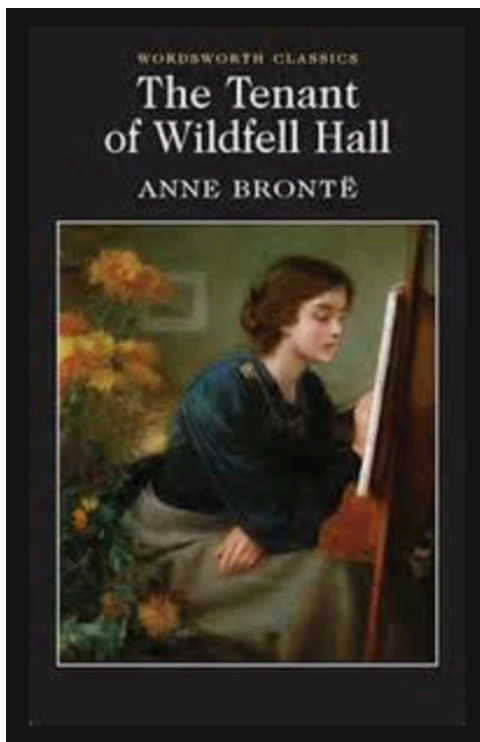
with white people about race and wrote this powerful and insightful book. Eddo-Lodge discusses Britain’s history with race noting that often the educational experiences of many in British schools look at the history of the civil rights movement focusing on people such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr or on Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad. Although these are important figures and events for all children to learn about it does not provide a context for understanding race within Britain today with all the implications that this still has within the structures of our society, which Eddo-Lodge goes on to unpick. She also examines the intersections of race and feminism and race and class. In another very interesting chapter she explores a wide range of popular culture from Star Wars to Harry Potter looking at it through the lens of race. The book is well worth reading and not just for her analysis of Hermione and a contrasting interpretation put forward by Rosianna Halse Rojas but because it is illuminating, challenging and changes how you view everyday occurrences. Eddo-Lodge finishes her book by summing up the task ahead of dismantling and challenging racism wherever we see it by quoting Terry Pratchett “There is no justice, just us”.

This leads us nicely into the second book of this review *Dodger* by Terry Pratchett. The origin story of the Artful Dodger from Dickens' famous *Oliver Twist*, which is your classic rags to riches tale. The book is set in Victorian London and throughout the course of the story the reader is introduced to many famous and infamous Victorians both real and fictional. Charles Dickens features as himself during his time when he was working as a journalist with a shrewd ability to read people and divine their true characters; so much so that Dodger quickly decides there is not much point in lying to him. We also meet Henry Mayhew, Robert Peel, Benjamin Disraeli, Queen Victoria, Joseph Bazalgette, Angela Burdett- Coutts and Sweeney Todd- who is painted with much sympathy and empathy by Pratchett. Although it did not produce in me the same irrepressible mirth that Pratchett's discworld novels or *Good Omens* (his collaborative work with Neil Gaiman) did, it still engendered many smirks and smiles. Much of the book is set beneath the streets of London in the sewers where Dodger works for his living as a tosher. The treasures that are washed away in the storms and fall into the sewers of London are discovered by Dodger. It is a testament to Pratchett's writing that he manages to romanticize these sewers and paint them as a place of peace and prosperity through Dodger's eyes. However Dodger finds himself living a life more and more above ground as he is drawn into a dark and dastardly plot involving a beautiful young woman. Perhaps the most enjoyable and moving aspect of the book is Dodger's relationship with his landlord/friend Solomon Cohen, an older Jewish man. Despite the similarities between Dodger and Cohen and Dickens' Artful Dodger and Fagin Pratchett's interpretation- not unsurprisingly- is much less problematic and shows a relationship built on genuine care and affection and not one suggestive of grooming and manipulation. Solomon's musings and reflections on his conversations with God



that he relays to Dodger are one of the frequent delights of Pratchett's dialogue.

Staying in the same time period but moving to a much wilder and more rural landscape we come to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë. Both controversial and incredibly popular when it was first published it still feels incredibly fresh and relevant reading it today. It is told as a series of letters and diary entries. The first part



of the book invites us to share the perspective of Gilbert Markham as he writes to his friend to relate the events that follow when a young widow, Helen Graham, with her young son comes to live in their small community. The second part of the novel is told from the point of Helen through her diary entries that reveal the reasons why she has moved to Wildfell Hall and the true circumstances surrounding her 'widowhood'. Some of the passages of dialogue that are reported by both characters function as a thinly veiled feminist manifesto which is most satisfying to read. Yet despite the

fact that it was written over 150 years ago there are still issues that are raised within its pages that are still the cause of debate within today's society. I was particularly struck by the discussion around the raising of children and the different ways in which boys should be treated from girls. Helen Graham is reprimanded by those in the village of spoiling and 'suffocating' her son through her 'mollycoddling' and devoting too much time and attention to him. There are still strong ideas within society, sometimes subconscious, of the different ways in which boys and girls should behave as children which are in turn brought about because of the way we respond to them. The other strong theme of the book which still resonates strongly in today's society is domestic violence. It seems that the methods people use to control people have not changed

much in over a century. Helen's husband subjects her to a familiar mixture of financial deprivation, emotional abuse and techniques that serve to isolate her from her family and friends which are not dissimilar from the experiences of people who have or continue to experience domestic abuse today. However, dear reader, I implore you to take heart and persevere as this is a novel that will not deprive you of a happy ending. Helen Graham is a strong, determined and resourceful woman who inspires a feeling of hope in the reader. Helen, like her name, is a shining light of feminism in a grim and murky world. Happy reading.

Any reading recommendations warmly welcomed.

Rachel Eeckelaers

**~ Music for wellbeing:
a fascinating music website
to explore and enjoy ~**

One of the benefits of the increased on-line presence- of everything- is that new resources come to light. If you haven't used this website before, I recommend it.

<https://www.recoverycollegeonline.co.uk/music-for-wellbeing/help-me-manage-my-mood-and-feelings-playlists/>

It has been designed by the Academic Health Science Network based in North East and North Cumbria with the support of the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust.

On the 'music for well-being' part of the site there is access to a number of music playlists. The playlists are organised by health care professionals and others, using 'X-System', which analyses music to predict its effects on health and well-being, and how it may help change your mood and feelings.

X-System 'uses a model of the musical brain and body to predict the level of relaxation or excitement of a piece of music, and how positive or negative a mood or emotion it may make you feel' (from the website).

The playlists are designed to support a level of mood and activity, or help you alter the level by graduated change in the music tracks during the playlist. If you prefer, though, you can simply dip in and take advantage of a truly wide-ranging musical selection.

The range of music is immense, including Western classical and popular music but also African music, singing from a Middle Eastern monastery, Japanese temple and Inuit fishermen.

A vast musical playground awaits you, well worth a visit!

Margaret Garner

~ A hybrid meeting ~

The process of leaving lockdown can be difficult. The Buddhist group in Sheffield have found a solution which might be of interest to us.

During lockdown their Sangha night had very successfully been held on Zoom and so was available to all members of their community including some who were currently living away from Sheffield. As lockdown restrictions were released it became apparent that many members wanted to meet together in person as they had done previously. However there were those who were in ill health, or over seventy (and following government guidelines to stay mainly at home) and those abroad. The solution was to combine a Zoom meeting for the latter group with an actual meeting in the Great Hall for the others. The Zoom screen was projected onto the wall and the proceedings were videoed.

This has become known as a hybrid meeting, and has enjoyed very positive feedback. They have written a detailed report of this which I can forward to anyone who is interested.

Obviously there are differences between a Buddhist Sangha night which is largely meditation and a Union Chapel service. There are

also differences in the membership in that a larger proportion of the Buddhists are younger and half of Union Chapel are over seventy. It should be noted that the government advice for over seventies is unchanged. However it might be possible to adapt the principle of the hybrid service to meet our requirements.

Margaret Edmonds

~ Going Forward ~

In relation to our building, I want to say thanks to David and others for all the work in getting it to a Covid-secure state. I was perhaps not alone in feeling surprised at our decision to delay any opening – I thought a gradual, flexible step-by-step reopening plan was sensible. I am sure the deacons will be considering the next steps in our decision making, and help to frame how we approach these decisions in a timely way. This seems particularly important, given the challenges of working through decisions where considerable emotions can become engaged, online and in a short space of time on a Sunday morning.

My view is that we have done really well overall as a congregation since March, and also now at this point of tension and disagreement, given the challenges of the crisis, the limitations of technology, and the range of views represented about who we are in relation to our buildings. In terms of Union Chapel going forwards, I think this period of being *away* from the buildings is likely to have a profound impact on us. I hope it does. Perhaps we are starting to explore the dimensions of this impact. My own experience of Union Chapel is as a local church that I can cycle to, with a rich diaspora, *and* as a significant place of learning and connection throughout the week (Open Tuesday has been my main commitment here, along with many others). But as a *church*, we've often focused quite strongly on our status as *exiles*. I'm sure we've discussed this before... But to provoke: to what extent are we in exile? And from what? From most of the Baptist church? From contemporary Christianity? From contemporary society in

Manchester? From our local context? Are we to remain in exile now, and in the foreseeable future? And whether we are in exile or not, how can we build more strongly the connections which sustain and enrich? At one level we are a collection of individuals, but at another, we are part of very many wholes.

Andy Howes

Upcoming Lectures

~ The 2020 Whitley Lecture ~

Finding A Friend:

The Baptist Encounter With Judaism - Robert Parkinson

Scholarly abstract

Ever since the horrific events of the Holocaust, the relationship of Christianity to Judaism has been under constant review. Many Christian denominations have made great strides toward a much closer rapprochement with Judaism. This lecture will ask where British Baptists stand in relation to this sea change in Christian-Jewish relations. It will identify potential problems in the theology, exegesis and preaching of Baptists. It will offer examples of friendly engagement between Baptists and Jews, examine possible impediments to the development of a closer relationship, and propose constructive suggestions for deepening the encounter of Baptists with Judaism into the future.

Popular abstract

Are Baptist churches sometimes guilty of unwitting anti-Judaism? What is the state of play for Baptist-Jewish relations? This lecture will examine these and similar questions. Drawing on the positive side of Baptist history and practice, it will offer guidelines for

encouraging a greater regard for Judaism and a closer friendship with Jews.

The lecture will take place on Monday 14 September 7pm. Watch below or access direct to take part in the chat and ask questions.

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/331392/2020_Whitley_Lecture.aspx

The above link will take you to watch the video of the lecture on 14th September. Robert Parkinson is minister of Didsbury Baptist Church.

~ The Sam Sharpe Lecture 2020 ~

Organised and presented by the Sam Sharpe Partners, this year's Sam Sharpe lecture will be delivered by Bishop Wilton Powell, OBE - Former National Presiding Bishop of the Church of God of Prophecy. With Lecture Facilitator: Dr Dulcie McKenzie

Why is the Sam Sharpe Project important?

The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Jamaica Baptist Union are committed to walking the ways of God's justice. One demonstration of this joint commitment is The Sam Sharpe Project. We want you and your church to be aware of the project and join us. Sam Sharpe was hanged in Montego Bay on May 23, 1832 after initiating and leading a revolt for justice. Just before his execution he said: 'I would rather die upon yonder gallows, than live in slavery.' The revolt and Sharpe's actions played a huge role in British parliamentary deliberations, and ultimately the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. It is this legacy the Sam Sharpe Project seeks to build upon by promoting his story and exploring his relevance in today's context. The Sam Sharpe annual lectures, an idea

conceived by Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed, a Partner of the Sam Sharpe Project, remains its key educational resource.

The lectures have become an important fixture in the calendar of community events marking Black History Month. The best of them have sought to create a community event where scholars, social activists and religious leaders share their vision for a just society.

The link below will take you to the lecture web site which gives full details as to how you can join the lecture.

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/320542/Sam_Sharpe_Lecture.aspx

I am grateful to Jonathan Roberts for discovering this little gem in our denominational history. Fortunately today the Church no longer uses guilt to extract money or

~ The Reverend Donatus Urdosh on Zacchaeus ~

While researching the history of our denomination, I uncovered, deep in the archives, a collection of sermons by the late Revd Mr Donatus Urdosh, minister of Runnothermill Road Baptist Church from 1875 to 1898. I below faithfully reproduce his sermon (preached roughly three times a year from 1881 until the Reverend Urdosh's death) on Mark 19, in the hope that it is of interest to readers.

'We are gathered here today, ladies and gentlemen, to hear the word of the Lord concerning Zacchaeus, as great a sinner as ourselves.

-(Reading goes here)-

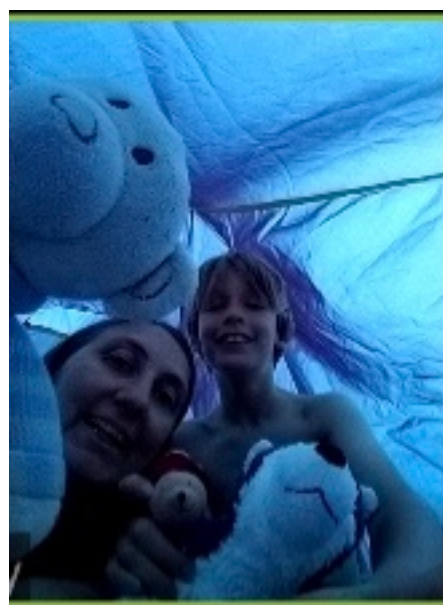
Brothers and Sisters in Christ, is this not a remarkable story? Jesus, dining with a tax collector, inviting himself into the home of a man as great a sinner as the Methodist brass band who practise next to the manse early on a Saturday morning, or the glazier who defrauded the Congregation of Christ of 12 shillings to repair the north-east window. We are all sinners, Brothers and Sisters, and none more so than those of us who fail to contribute towards the New Pew Fund. But despite our grievous Sin Christ comes, nonetheless, into our houses to eat, offering not only Forgiveness, but also Salvation. And Zacchaeus was not only a Sinner, but also climbing a tree! Heaven forgive those poor misguided souls who attempt to elevate themselves above their Brothers and Sisters in Christ – for example by wearing their new hats to Church on a Sunday morning. Truly, Brothers and Sisters, ours is a merciful Lord! For instead of striking proud Zacchaeus out of the tree, he called him down, and into his own company, extending Salvation to the Unworthy! How gracious is our Christ, for he not only wisely refrained from smiting proud Zacchaeus, but also extended his merciful presence by dining with such a Sinner. Zacchaeus, rightly grateful to have received such undeserved Mercy, was blessed with repentance, giving half his sinful wealth to the Poor. Would that God grant us the Grace to follow his example! May we therefore beseech the Lord to grant to us the generosity of spirit needed to give not only to the New Pew Fund, but also to the Reverend Stantic Memorial Pulpit Fund and even the Reverend Smith Memorial Flowerbed Fund! How eternally lucky is Zacchaeus, to have been visited not only by Salvation, but also by generosity! Brothers and Sisters, we would do well to emulate his example in our dealings! Now go forth and do Christ's Work, and please don't forget that the Soup Committee now meets on a Tuesday – Tuesday, not Wednesday – at 8 O'clock! Go now in peace, Brothers and Sisters, and may the Lord go with you.

Jonathan Roberts

**~ Two Lockdown Pictures which just missed
last month's magazine deadline ~**



Is this what they call a bubble?




No social distancing for soft toys then.

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to alan.redhouse@virgin.net or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.

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