

## VIEW FROM THE HEIGHTS December 2023

Greetings,

We returned late last night from a brilliant, though too brief, holiday in England. The first few days were spent in London with my son and his family; the final days in Kent, my home county. Every experience was a sermon-in-waiting; so be warned! 😊

In London, visits to the British Museum and Imperial War Museum challenged us to take a moral stand on empire, power, violence, and warfare. Fortunately, a magnificent production of the “Lion King” reminded us that love can conquer every evil. (It is the Bible message orchestrated, choreographed, and fantastically costumed!)

The spiritual dimension of our holiday was magnified by our accommodation. In London, we stayed round the corner from St. Paul’s Cathedral; in Kent, we lodged within the precincts of Canterbury Cathedral.

England’s first Cathedral was founded in 597; the present edifice originally completed in 1077. As well as being the Mother Church of the worldwide Anglican Communion, Canterbury Cathedral has been a famous pilgrimage site since Thomas Becket was martyred on the High Altar in 1170. He was murdered by Henry II’s knights for speaking out against the King’s excessive power. Like Jesus and countless Christians after him, Archbishop Becket recognized that God calls us to stand with the powerless against the powerful. It is rarely a winning stance!

St. Paul’s Cathedral has also stood up to power. St. Christopher Wren’s ecclesiastical masterpiece has been beloved by the people of London since 1710, when it replaced the previous, fire-destroyed, church. During the London bombardments of WWII, its magnificent dome became a symbol of resistance to the Nazis. Churchill was determined that St. Paul’s must be saved. It received two direct hits!

But, thanks to the bravery of a volunteer fire brigade, the Cathedral was spared total destruction. A crew of some 300 clergy, local residents, and others maintained a nightly vigil to spot and extinguish fires. They were supported by a volunteer first-aid team (mainly women). St. Paul’s Watch fended off fires caused by over 60 bombs, as well as responding to the two direct explosions.

Dean Walter Matthews noted that, *“Those nights evoked a spirit we shall never forget. We knew then the comradeship and friendship which come to men and women of goodwill when trivialities fall away and they face realities, realities of life and death, with a common purpose.”*<sup>i</sup>

God gave humanity the common purpose of protecting all that is good and resisting everything evil, hate-full, and harm-full. Standing up against tyrants and standing with the oppressed has been part of Christ’s – and Christianity’s - mission since Mary of Nazareth first declared it to be so. It is the heart of who we are and what we are about. It is the essence of Christmas.

*God silences the arrogant  
with the strength of Her outstretched arm,  
puts down principalities and powers*

*as She empowers the poor,  
feeds those who are hungry,  
while those who seem to have everything  
are left unsatisfied.  
We have felt Her compassionate presence.<sup>ii</sup>*

May the Holy Season of Advent fill you with all that is good,  
and empower you to continue Jesus' mission.

Blessings,  
Brenda

---

<sup>i</sup> St. Paul's Cathedral website

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 1: 51-54a, in, Miriam Therese Winter, "The Gospel According to Mary"