

# HEATH STREET

BAPTIST CHURCH



# A SERMON FOR FATHER'S DAY

## AT HEATH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH,

### HAMPSTEAD, 16TH JUNE 2024

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It's Father's Day, and to celebrate it, I am going to explore with you four words from the Lord's Prayer. These are *Father, Heaven, Hallowed, and Kingdom*.

Father's Day as celebrated on June 16th, rather than with St. Joseph in March, began in America 116 years ago. Over time, it has been much mocked as just another commercial gambit, but as is the way with such things, it is now accepted by almost everyone. Richard Nixon made it official in 1972.

The founder, Sonora Smart Dodd, was an Episcopalian Methodist. In her pioneering feminism and her independent spirit, I am quite sure that she found common cause with the Baptists. I am a Catholic convert from Anglicanism, but for more than two decades, I too have been drawn to the Baptist church, inspired by your conviction that just everyone has direct and implicit access to God. Like Sonora, I am content to be an ecumenical

work-in-progress.

As an Anglican, I once asked to be ordained. The answer came back: "No, Charles, or at least not in the way you hoped". Instead, I found fulfillment in pastoral psychology, a discipline of listening and relating to others in pursuit of understanding and healing. It is this approach, with something added by my instruction by the Dominicans, that I bring today. Thank you for making me welcome.

#### **FATHER**

It's worth considering how the idea of God we have can owe a lot to our experience of our own dad ... as a role model, and as a relationship while we are growing up. How generally satisfactory was yours? Mine was fair-to-middling. Yes, he was decent and kind and reliable, but through no fault of his own, he was not quite what I wanted. I was ambivalent about him, and this was true too of my feelings about God.

His story is soon told. In 1943, as a volunteer in Burma, he was seriously ill with malaria for about nine months. With a jeep and four men, he then took part in the Japanese retreat, going ahead of the troops to clear landing strips. He was often at risk. He described enemy leaping in the dark over the trench in which he was trying to sleep. In a photograph I have, he looks exhausted, like the waking dead, absent and drained. Returning home, he obviously needed and deserved plenty of rest and time to recover. He wanted to be an actor, going one better than his flamboyant am-dram mother. But then his father had a near fatal heart attack, and he found himself inheriting responsibility for a large and thriving factory, manufacturing hand tools. With reluctance at first, he did his duty by his family calling and became a businessman. (It is also true that later he chaired the committee that created the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield.)

I have to admit that, growing up, I was very unhappy about his choice to follow his dad, and given my conviction, I could only suppose

that God shared my view. I did not like it that he worked in a pinstriped suit, with telephones and typists, and not in a boilersuit with dirt and flames and steel. It's easy to see that this was absurd, but it was my phantasy. It was mostly unconscious, as these things are, occurring in powerful dreams and in the choices that I made about the games I played. Looking back, I think that I too wanted him to be an actor.

As time went on, Dad did his best to understand me. I was given a boilersuit and invited to hang out in the maintenance department during the holidays from my boarding school. I was a teenager though, and I continued to pick fights. He supported Sheffield United, so I had to be Wednesday. He was pals with the local Tory MP and embarrassed and exasperated when I said I would vote for Harold Wilson. I tried to study economics for him at university, but that was a hopeless failure.

Eventually it was a good woman who came to our rescue. I married her aged 22. Dad bought us a smallholding and came to watch me get my hands dirty

with chickens, a pig and a milk goat. Babies soon followed. His wedding present to us was a saw, a screwdriver, a hammer, a vice, and a spade.

(I wonder if you have felt my love for him in this account?) I think that God's blessing can also be attested by the fact of my account existing at all...

In my twenties, the only God I could worship was found in the likes of William Blake, Bob Dylan and the Maharishi. He would never have fitted in at an Anglican Parish Council! He was a poet and a lover, not an administrator. But it is also true that it was my father and my grandfather in their tool factory who provided the means for my lovely romantic God to exist.

Let me say, at this point, that I am aware there may be among you those who never knew their father, or who had a very hard time with the one they did have. In such lives, the search is for a father figure outside the family. It's a very important search. If it is yours, I wish you God's blessing in it.

### **HEAVEN**

My Dad kept good boundaries between the Works, as we called

it, and his home life. He would leave well before eight and arrive home when we were at supper. Inevitably on occasion he was tired and preoccupied, and we knew not to approach him until he had washed and changed and poured himself a gin and tonic. This daily negotiation between the dad who disappeared to go somewhere more important and then reappeared, having donned slippers and a cardy and smiled on us, left me with a firm assumption that heaven is very much elsewhere. And God is far too busy there, and impatient as well, to want to listen to me.

Well of course this doesn't do heaven justice in the least. Let's be grown-up and try instead to think of those moments ...when they occur ... probably not that often ... when we exclaim Isn't this heaven! [At this point I gestured to the three musicians who had, as an introit to the service, played Telemann for us on recorder, viola da gamba and baroque clarinet. They were then sat about four feet from me, and my thoughts had been ... birdsong ... and meditative dance.]

[We can also note here that

Ewan had earlier recited George Herbert's poem Prayer, with the words 'heaven in ordinary'. Neither of us knew what each had been preparing. Mine follows.]

What is going on here? Clearly, it's a special moment, filled with deep pleasure and delight. Surprise is present. One is filled too with a desire to share it. What else can we say? There is satisfaction... completion, perhaps. "If only it would last forever!" Can you see how potentially present a benevolent God is at such a moment? How easily too can He be imagined to be interested in what's going on? How attentive to our excitement?

My Dad—Tony was his name—died aged 84, full of well-earned contentment, and cradled by sailing, sun, sea and sand, at Hayling Island. His trajectory is proving a comfort to this 75-year-old. It has continued beyond the grave. Of this, I am sure.

### **HALLOWED**

Let's pause here to note how talk of heaven can create among us an atmosphere of, well ...holiness. (I was close to tears just then.) I am interested in the task of

protecting such an atmosphere, and its capacity for blessing and growth, from attack ... by hubris, or self-righteousness or embarrassment, or worse, rivalry, egoism and sarcasm. Hallowing – taking God seriously ... as unbelievably precious ... openly worshipping Him out of a bursting heart – this requires a state of innocence that is hard to find, and once found, hard to maintain. It is why the Church exists. Via shared experience as people of faith, we can provide not only companionship but objectivity. This is what I found at Blackfriars. Church helps with the continuity that gets us past the awkward coming down moments. It's two thousand years of coffee and tea after the service, of residual calmness and confident chatter. A person who has explored this is Elizabeth Oldfield, a former director of Theos and author of Fully Alive: Tending to the Soul in Turbulent Times. I found her reviewed in the excellent Catholic weekly, The Tablet. How far we are, she says, from Irenaeus' vision of the glory of God as a human fully alive! Our society is marinated in irony and skepticism, and Christianity



is perceived as a sort of boring background noise, like Radio 4 turned down low. Her visionary word is Connectedness, and sin she sees as everything that is working against it. Oldfield is a charismatic Anglican, and while she is plenty willing to voice her anger, she is shy of committing herself in print to what we are calling the innocence of hallowing. Who can blame her? It's all too easy to try too hard to be convincing and descend into guff. In the final chapter, however, she finds herself kneeling in prayer. I quote: "The other I believe I am kneeling before is not a distant deity demanding obsequiousness ... this Other is meeting me, and the image that rises unprompted is of us kneeling forehead to forehead ... which implies that He is kneeling too."

### **KINGDOM**

We end with possibly the trickiest word of the four: With its echoes of religious tyranny, and with despotic wars even now raging, the idea of God as rival to an ersatz king is ... well ... more problematic than His being a businessman! My wife and I say a Daily Office, and recently we followed the

battles of Joshua against the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. It left me feeling grumpy, but a book has since revealed my ignorance and changed my mind. It's Reading Genesis by the American novelist Marilynne Robinson. You may know Housekeeping and Gilead. Robinson glories in the familiar stories of Creation, the Fall and the early history of the Jewish people, seeing them – in the King James translation – as great works of literature. They evolved and survived in oral folk memory for millennia before being committed to writing just 500 years before Christ.

The power in the region at that time was Babylon, and their creation myth, the Enuma Elish, has survived. It stands in stark contrast to Genesis, and it has occurred to me that if the Hittites, Perizzites and so on shared its outlook, then one can quite see why Joshua found it necessary to protect his religious heritage. The gods of the Enuma Elish suffer hunger, terror and loss of sleep. There are generations of them, born of one another. In this, they are like my dad! The great mother

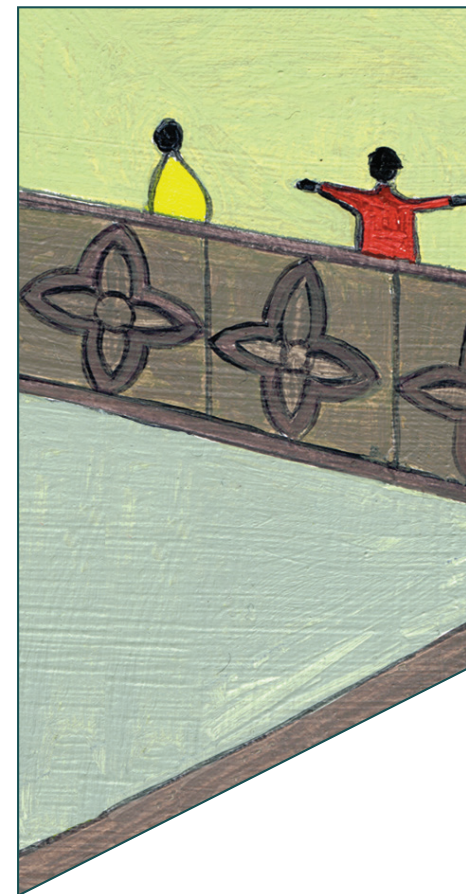
Tiamat is a serpent monster who, provoked by the noise they make, determines to kill them all. Terrifying though she is, the young god Marduk is able to defeat her. He splits her corpse like a fish, uses half to make the sky, the other half the earth, and her two weeping eyes become the Tigris and Euphrates. Robinson comments: "This could hardly be more remote from the infinite serenity of ... 'let there be ... and there was!'" She goes on to draw a crucial distinction, and indeed the meaning of the Cross is present here. All the evil in the world is accounted for by the gods in the Enuma Elish. Created Dis-order produces and justifies a cycle of violent, paranoid (everyone is frightened), schizoid (everyone is blaming, hating, idolizing, envying) chaos ... and we are resigned and helpless in its grip. We can find it now in Ukraine and Gaza. On the other hand, the way in which Genesis depicts God—and the witness of the nails driven through His Son's wrists and ankles—is as a deity who holds Himself un-accountable to human beings, who does what pleases Him. And what pleases Him is Goodness

and Love.

But they are His, not ours, to take for granted.

And that is the nature of His Kingdom.

–Charles Hampton



## CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HAMPSTEAD

### AFTERNOON WALK

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Churches Together in Hampstead is a loose association set up to promote fellowship between various congregations in the area through the exchange of news and organisation of joint events. Like many joint ventures, its activities were brought to a halt by the pandemic. When meetings recommenced, the group determined to redouble its efforts to strengthen links between participants and to start organising some joint events again. The annual quiz was resurrected first; then there was a ceillidh, with proceeds from these events being donated to a mutually agreed charity. Enjoyable and beneficial though these social events were, something seemed to be missing. Previously there had been a joint service once a year at one of the churches, but that had become increasingly difficult to fit around regular services. After discussion,

it was decided that we would all benefit from getting to know one another better by visiting our respective places of worship to learn more about their history and traditions. So, on the afternoon of Sunday 5 May, we gathered for the first Churches Together Walk which was to take in four different religious establishments, walking together between them and starting and concluding with an act of worship. The tour was open to all and participants could dip in and out as suited them. A surprisingly large number of us gathered at 1.30 p.m. at the first stop: Hampstead Quaker Meeting house. Here, after a brief introduction to the history of the Quaker movement and the distribution of some informative literature, we adjourned for a short 'Meeting', conducted sitting in a circle. (Extra chairs needed to be brought in, so good was the

attendance!). At the beginning, it was explained that the Meeting would be conducted largely in silence in order to better hear God's message: that message might be for an individual or something to be shared. Anyone who felt moved to speak could stand and deliver their message in an orderly and respectful manner. After a short reading, the Silence commenced. There were a few speakers, including one who pointed out that Quakers sit in a circle to signify that there should be no barriers or 'borders' between people. The end of the meeting was signalled by a handshake between two leading Quakers. The next stop was Heath Street, where we started by sitting in on a delightful rehearsal of Baroque music. We then retired to the Vestry, where we were introduced to some of the children's activities and shown a recent piece of work by Sunday Club: a splendid model of The New Jerusalem first depicted by the Prophet Ezekiel and taken up in the Book of Revelation. By this point, we were ready for tea, so a good number of us processed (informally!) down the hill to Rosslyn Hill Unitarian

Chapel where we were joined by others and given some background on the history of the congregation and building and treated to tea and an array of delicious cakes, accompanied by some talented junior musicians. After that, we proceeded to St Peter's Belsize Park for a service of Taizé Sung Evening Prayer. The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic community in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France. It comprises about 100 brothers, from Catholic and Protestant traditions, who originate from about 30 countries around the world. The style of worship developed there is quiet and meditative and based on simple but beautiful repetitive chants or 'songs' in various languages, including Latin, French and English. Candle light and imagery are used to great effect to calm and focus the mind. The service was led by Catriona Laing, Vicar of Emmanuel Church West Hampstead with assistance from Ewan, who played guitar and directed the musicians, including three of his children, Anselm on bass, Frida on harmonium and Joachim on recorder, as well as

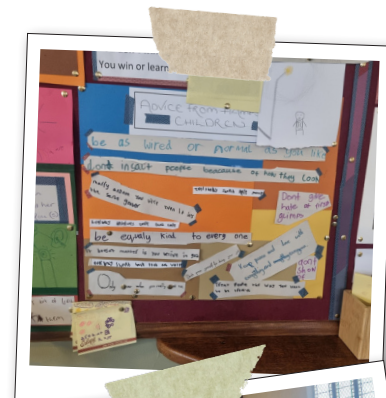


the harpist Glain, who sometimes performs at Heath Street. Emmanuel Church provided a wonderful lead singer. Some more people joined the congregation at this service, including a contingent from St Peter's, which holds more regular Taizé services on Sunday evenings. The younger and more supple accepted an invitation to sit on the floor at the front. Those of us with creakier limbs stuck to the pews! As well as music, the service included a short reading and guided prayer.

A really lovely way to end the day. This afternoon event was a great success and has been described by one participant as a 'celebration of togetherness.'

It is hoped to have a follow up 'walk' in the Autumn, encompassing Emmanuel Church West Hampstead, St Andrews Frognal, United Reformed Church, St Mary's Catholic Church, Holly Place, and finishing with Evensong at Hampstead Parish Church. Following on from the joint Taizé, on 16 June, Emmanuel Church hosted a Taizé style youth service, with musical assistance from Ewan and co. A further joint service will be held at Heath St on 21st July at

6.30 p.m.  
Plans are afoot for further inter church initiatives. Watch this space  
...  
-Theresa Thom



## PRAYERS FOR HAMPSTEAD WRITTEN FOR THE CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HAMPSTEAD WALK BY THE CHILDREN OF ST. MARY'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

We thank you Lord for Hampstead Heath, which has lots of animals and plants. Please help us to look after the Heath for future generations.

We pray for all those who are unwell in the Royal Free Hospital and for those who are looking after them.

We pray for the homeless in Hampstead, that they get the help and support they need to find hope and rebuild their lives.

We pray for all the people of Hampstead of all faiths and none, that they come to believe and trust in you.

Amen

## A MUSICAL PREMIERE

People who like to take part in Heath Street services which feature the organ are always pleased when it is Bill Carslake in the organ loft, putting our instrument through its paces and often treating us to complex and wonderful improvised pieces at the end of services. It is a great pity that now Bill spends much more time in Ireland than London, this is becoming quite infrequent.

But most of us don't know that playing the organ is only a part of Bill's musical life. For example, he has been the Music Director of Imperial College Sinfonietta until very recently and is Artistic Director of St Albans Symphony Orchestra, and more. Last month, to celebrate Sinfonietta's 25th anniversary but also mark the end of Bill's 12 years with them, the orchestra, plus extra forces provided by former students, played the first performance of his composition Carrownagappul. It was part of a longer concert, and while Bill conducted Sibelius and Moberg works, the founding conductor Daniel Capps came back to conduct Bill's piece and lead tributes to Bill's long period with the orchestra.

The new piece is utterly fascinating. It's for solo marimba,

solo timpani, symphony orchestra and off-stage band (oh yes, and a jawbone). Bill says: "Carrownagappul ('place of the horse') is a big raised bog in County Galway, Ireland ('raised' meaning slightly dome-shaped). It's a protected site and has some of the most pristine raised bog habitat in Europe. It's in a healthy state thanks to restoration work (over 3000 dams!) and community involvement. A video [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPXxIxnplq8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPXxIxnplq8) really takes you there. The project is part of a national raised bog restoration project ([www.raisedbogs.ie](http://www.raisedbogs.ie)). I had a great time camping on the bog for a week last summer with permission from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the local Interpretative Centre. I was also very lucky to meet and learn from the photographer Tina Claffey, who is kindly sharing some of her stunning macro-lens photographs to feature in the posters and programme."

The word 'bog' can sound dark and dead, but a restored bog like this one teems with life and colour and sound – birds, animals, butterflies and other insects, a huge variety of plants – all adapted to a unique habitat. Moreover, a well-functioning bog like this one

contributes to environmental health and sustainability by capturing a high level of carbon. This complex beauty and strength was conveyed in Bill's music and the evident pleasure the performers took in it. There was one dark moment while Bill was explaining a few points before we heard the music: the musician who was to play the donkey's jawbone managed to

shatter it in her demonstration. The audience was shocked but a little hysterical too. I learned later it was an authentic Peruvian jawbone lent by John-Henry Baker – too sad for words – but since then Bill has found an authentic Peruvian replacement and John-Henry and his family will be happy to accept it.

–Gaynor Humphreys







[info@emmanuelnw6.com](mailto:info@emmanuelnw6.com)

07751 534 297

Evening service for youth,  
Yr 5 & up  
**Prayer, music & silence by  
candlelight, Taizé style.**

Sun 16th June @ 6:30pm at  
Emmanuel NW6 IJU

Sun 21 July @ 6:30pm at  
Heath St Baptist NW3 IDN



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## CONGRATULATIONS



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STEPHEN AND MIKI



## READINGS AND PRAYERS

July 21-27

2 Samuel 7.1-14a

21st Gaynor Humphreys  
22nd Zahra Safaryazdi  
23rd Robin Thorne  
24th John-Henry Baker  
25th Elisa Ghasempour  
26th Esme Baker  
27th Frida King

July 28-August 3rd

2 Samuel 11.1-15

28th Phoebe Jiang  
29th Joachim King  
30th Coco Ellenbogen  
31st Annie Fang  
1st August Leila Ranjbar  
2nd Sarah Harper  
3rd Babak Agin

August 4-10

2 Samuel 11.26-12.13a

4th Jen Finamore  
5th Dusol Lee  
6th Wilf Merttens  
7th Ottilie Johnson  
8th Elya Ghasempour  
9th Edward Humphreys  
10th Lydia Baker

August 11-17

2 Samuel 18.5-33

11th Fiona Ranford  
12th Theresa Thom  
13th Susan Le Quesne  
14th Evelyn Baker  
15th Laura Somers  
16th HK  
17th Ali Ghasempour

August 18-24

I Kings 2.10-12; 3.3-14

18th Grace Jiang  
19th Ewan King  
20th Maral Agin  
21st Thaddeus King  
22nd Juno Lee  
23rd Emad Eisapour  
24th Hyun Ju Lee

August 25-31

I Kings 8.1-11

25th Anselm King  
26th Mysie Johnson  
27th Genna Naccache  
28th Cole Ellenbogen  
29th Julie Benoit  
30th Birgit Leuppert  
31st Nathalia Bell



## WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

Check website for summer timings

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Sundays	11 am	<b>Divine Worship</b> Including our Children's Sunday Club – stories, crafts, drama and play for all ages.  Live stream also available on request by e-mailing <a href="mailto:johnhenry@heathstreet.org">johnhenry@heathstreet.org</a> at least 24 hours in advance.
	6 pm	<b>Sunday Sundown concert series</b>
	7 pm	<b>Contact Club</b>
Mondays	5 pm	<b>Storymakers Club</b> An after-school club aimed at children between the ages of 7 and 13.
Tuesdays	9:30 am	<b>Oldtime Nursery</b> Introducing old melodies and traditional stories to a new generation of children.
Wednesdays	7:00 pm	<b>Hampstead Folk Singers</b> Traditional songs sung by 21st century people. No audition. No choral experience required
Thursdays	10:30 am	<b>Oldtime Nursery</b>
	7:30 pm	<b>Heath Street Choir rehearsals</b>



Please see the church website for updates  
**[www.heathstreet.org](http://www.heathstreet.org)**

For requests regarding church membership,  
Baptism or opportunities for Christian ministry in the church,  
please contact the minister.

**Copy for the next Newsletter**  
should reach Eleanor Patterson ([eleanorlaise@gmail.com](mailto:eleanorlaise@gmail.com))  
not later than Wednesday 28th August.

**Church Officers**

Gaynor Humphreys (Treasurer)  
Wilf Merttens (Church Secretary)  
Annie Fang (Deacon)  
Sarah Harper (Deacon)

**Minister Ewan King**

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