

Pastoral letter 11th March

Dear friends,

In a British garden during spring, the song thrush may strike up well before dawn. Soon he will be followed by the robin, blackbird, wren, garden warbler, chiffchaff, hedge sparrow and chaffinch. There is no fixed order in which each species takes its cue from the eastern sky, but there is a genuine tendency for some to start earlier than others. Indeed wren, robin, song thrush and blackbird often burst into song well before daybreak, this natural phenomenon has given rise to such phrases as “up with the lark” and “rise before cockcrow”. It is also true that songs carry much better around dawn and dusk because there is less wind at those times of day. Not only is there tranquillity, there is also much less background noise (natural and man-made). For these two reasons a typical bird song, it has been calculated, will carry 20 times as well as at noon.

The above reflection about ‘The dawn chorus’ by Jeffery Boswall (1931-2012), who was a natural history broadcaster, film-maker and producer, gives to us maybe some of the more practical aspects of what is one of the most wonderful encounters we can have with nature during spring time, just by listening.

There is one part of his reflection that really resonated with me, however, during this time of Lent, and that was in respect of how we might hear and experience God in our lives and the world around us. He says that one reason why the dawn chorus takes place when it does, so early in the morning, is because at that time there is also much less background noise. The birds themselves seem to be aware of this and so their song can be carried and heard over a much wider distance.

Many years ago now, I was given a gift of a beautiful little book called ‘The Birds Our Teachers’, by the Revd Dr John Stott, who was for many years chaplain to the Queen. As a lifelong bird-watcher Stott showed how being aware of the natural world around us and especially birds, can teach us a lot about how we might open our lives to the presence of God.

So, during this time in our Lenten journeys and in the coming Spring-time, let us try to make space for some peace, free from the back ground noises of our lives (natural and man-made), and in so doing, let us individually and together as a church family, make space to hear and experience God at work in our lives, in our villages and in the world around us.

Love & prayers

Revd Neil

