

Rev Max Ramsay Keeping in touch 15th May 2020

First, a bit of history. Back in 1992, I decided to retire slightly early from full-time parish work in order to write a book on the Old Testament which, with the coming of the new worship-forms in the Church of England, had virtually disappeared from worship. But thanks to persistent arm-twisting by Ken Lewis, the then Churchwarden, and Christine Armstrong, I felt I had no choice but to return to duty as Vicar of St. Margaret's. The book never got written, but since then, I've had what can almost be described as a love-affair with our church and with its people.

Prior to St. Margaret's I had two parishes in South Cheshire, one of which was Crewe Green. A village church, but one whose parish extended into Crewe itself, to the point where I was Vicar of Crewe Station!

The church was built by Gilbert Scott in the late 1850s and an early Incumbent was a man called John Ellerton. As well as caring for the surrounding farming community, he made it his business to tackle the welfare and education of the engine-drivers, firemen and locomotive builders in the railway town that Crewe had now become. There are many contemporary tributes to his dedication to this task.

Above all, though, he believed in hymns. And he wrote them. Hymns in memorable but accessible language, expressing Christian truths in a way that could touch the heart. Still familiar are 'The day thou gavest, Lord, is ended' and 'Saviour, again to thy dear name we raise', but there is one of his less familiar hymns which, at this time of uncertainty and potential loss of loved ones, seems to me to speak simply but movingly of death and resurrection. I finish by quoting from it in the hope that it may be a source of strength where it is needed.

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God of the living, in whose eyes
Unveiled thy whole creation lies,
All souls are thine; we must not say
That those are dead who pass away,
From this our world of flesh set free;
We know them living unto thee.

Not spilt like water on the ground,
Not wrapped in dreamless sleep profound,
Not wandering in unknown despair
Beyond thy voice, thine arm, thy care;
Not left to lie like fallen tree;
Not dead, but living unto thee.

Released from earthly toil and strife,
With thee is hidden still their life;
Thine are their thoughts, their works, their
powers,
All thine, and yet most truly ours,
For well we know, where'er they be,
Our dead are living unto thee.

Thy word is true, thy will is just;
To thee we leave them, Lord, in trust;
And bless thee for the love which gave
Thy Son to fill a human grave,
That none might fear that world to see
Where all are living unto thee.

Max Ramsay.