

English L'Abri Advent Newsletter 2021

Dear Friends of English L'Abri

For the past few months I have been reading and re-reading the Songs of Ascent, the Psalms that the people of Israel sang as they processed up the mount in Jerusalem to worship God at the temple. Psalm 130 in particular has been my constant companion, especially in this season of Advent waiting.

Psalm 130 - A song of ascents.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
O Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins,
O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness;
therefore you are feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

O Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.



This psalm covers three of the most basic human experiences – suffering, waiting and hope. It starts with a cry to God from the depths of suffering; and which of us has not suffered in these past two years of COVID fear, isolation and uncertainty? But the encouraging thing is that the psalmist doesn't ignore his suffering or try to pretend that it doesn't exist, as if a good Christian shouldn't suffer. Rather he prays it, knowing that being in the depths does not mean he is cut off from God, but that God is present with him, hearing his cry for mercy. Indeed, with a New Testament perspective we know that God himself went *into* the depths, both in the wilderness and in Gethsemane. The depths are not a place without God, but a place where God is present and hears our cry for mercy.

The Psalm starts with the experience of suffering but it ends with hope. Not just a vague hope *that* things will be better next year but a hope *in* the God who hears him in the depths. The name of the Lord is mentioned eight times in these eight verses and each time the psalmist is reminded of why he can have a real hope *in* God. He can hope in the Lord because

He hears our voice in the depths; because although He is holy and we are sinful, He forgives and wipes clean the record of our sins; he can have hope because God's word is so true and sure that nothing can reverse it; and because the Lord is unfailing Love and the One who will bring about the redemption of all things. I love the way it describes this in some of the older Bibles as 'plenteous redemption'. This gives the sense of a redemption that is abundant, that spills over in joy. As T.S. Eliot put it, quoting Julian of Norwich, this redemption means that in the end, *'All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'*

Connecting these two experiences of suffering and hope, and also forming the central part of the psalm, is the present activity of waiting; waiting as a watchman waits for the dawn. A watchman is employed to wait; that's his/her job. The sure and certain thing is that dawn will come, just as the sure and certain thing is that God's plenteous redemption will come. The watchman does not make the dawn come. He knows and trusts that God does that. Rather he waits. But waiting does not mean doing nothing. In his book on the Psalms of Ascent, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson explains that waiting is not fatalistic but instead means 'going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions... It is the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulations, of scurrying and worrying... It is a willingness to let God do it his way and in his time.'

This is just what Francis Schaeffer meant by his term active-passivity. It is the passivity of knowing that God is at work and will bring about His plenteous redemption in His way and in His time. It is the passivity of trusting that the whole world does not depend on us; on our cleverness, our systems, techniques and programmes, nor even on our hard work. The Lord makes the dawn come, just as He will bring about His plenteous redemption. But waiting is also active. We faithfully carry out the tasks that the Lord has put before us in the present moment. This active-passivity is something we attempt to embody in the life of L'Abri; a moment-by-moment getting on with the everyday tasks of welcoming guests, offering them warm hospitality, helping them towards finding answers to their questions in God's word, and ultimately pointing them to the Lord of unfailing love - whilst at the same time leaving the meaning and conclusions up to the One who brings all things to their full redemption.

News of this autumn term 2021

It has been a very full fourteen-week term. In many ways it has felt like things have returned to normal despite the ongoing COVID pandemic, but the emergence of the Omicron variant looks like providing a bumpy road for some time to come. Thankfully we had no cases of COVID in the L'Abri community, despite having a number of students arrive from abroad.

In late August **Andy and Lindsey Patton** at last got an emergency appointment at the US Embassy in London to get a birth certificate and passport for their daughter Ivy, which they have waited for since her birth in May 2020! So a few days before term started they were able to fly to the US and begin their new life there after 6 years at Greatham. After visiting Lindsey's family in Illinois they are now in Nashville staying with friends of L'Abri while Andy looks for work and continues to work on his book on deconversion.



The graduates from CARE

On September 7th we began our term with a visit from thirteen graduates from **CARE** (Christian Action, Research and Education) as they prepared for a year in politics working alongside members of the UK Parliament. I took them through C.S. Lewis' Abolition of Man and Josue lectured on Worldview.

A week later, on a gloriously sunny early autumn afternoon we hosted a wonderful **Arts and Community Day** as part of the **50th anniversary celebrations of L'Abri at the Manor**. We invited local supporters as well as neighbours from Greatham village to celebrate with us. Around 20 local artists exhibited their work in various rooms on the ground floor of the Manor and there were art workshops for children in a marquee on the back lawn. Peter Merz took visitors on an historical and architectural tour of the

Manor, after which we served tea and cake on the Manor back lawn whilst a string quartet (featuring Bridget Hughes and Dorry Macaulay) played a variety of classical pieces. Then Peter Donaldson, a local Scot, led us in Scottish dancing before the evening finished with an open-air disco. Something for everyone! Many thanks to Dawn, Sarah, Bridget Hughes and Trisha Porter for all their help with organising the event.



The string quartet playing at the 50th anniversary Arts and Community Day



Peter Merz taking visitors on a tour of the Manor

The following Sunday L'Abri joined with St John's Anglican Church and Hope Church Greatham for a **village-wide thanksgiving service**. Starting with a children's time at Hope Church, proceeding to a service at St John's and then some plainsong at the old parish church ruins (adjacent to the L'Abri property), we finished on the Manor back lawn where I



gave a short address on *'the God who welcomes us to come and have breakfast'*, based on John 21:12, and some of the students sang an arrangement of *'I heard the voice of Jesus say.'* Around a hundred local people attended and once again we enjoyed offering them warm L'Abri hospitality with tea, coffee and cakes after the service. Some even stayed for an impromptu lunch

provided by Dawn! It has been very encouraging to make good connections with our village through both these events, and a number of local people have dropped by since.

Throughout the rest of September we had around 25 students staying with us at the Manor, including a family based in Switzerland. However, the majority of guests were British, international visitors being less common due to the COVID travel restrictions. Amongst these was a visit from the team at **the Oxford Pastorate** who provide evangelical Christian witness to the post-graduate community at the university. We continue our daily schedule of morning prayers in the chapel, work and study time, tea-breaks, lunch discussions and evening lectures twice a week. We are very thankful for our local friend Marsh Moyle who

continues to come in most days to help with teaching and tutoring and this term ran a weekly group helping the students learn how to study the Bible.



Students having dinner in the Main Flat

In mid-September **Joel and Catherine Barricklow** and family moved from the Back Flat into the Pump House, which with its 4 bedrooms provides a much more suitable space for their growing family of 5. Catherine's parents came down from Scotland to help look after the children while Joel and Catherine organised the students who helped with the move. Grace (2) was baptised at Hope Church and their son Lewis (4) joined his brother Ben (6) for his first term at a local primary school, as did Addy Merz (6); all three are settling in well.

In early October we had our **annual apple harvest day**, where the students and workers picked, peeled and sliced-up apples from the Manor orchards before freezing them to provide ample supply for apple-pies and apple sauce throughout the rest of the year. But



the unusually wet summer meant that most of the apple trees on the property had a very poor crop, with each tree having only a few small, and rapidly rotting apples. Yet one tree that normally doesn't produce many apples had somehow escaped the wet weather and produced a bumper crop this year. From that tree we picked hundreds of apples and were able to fill the Manor freezer full to bursting. Plenteous redemption indeed!

During the October half-term **Edith** made a trip from Holland together with her brother Henk and niece Mia to pack-up her flat in the Well House as she relocates to the Netherlands after more than 18 years at the Manor. Unfortunately Mia tested positive for COVID on her arrival test which meant Edith, Henk and Mia had to quarantine in the UK for 10 days rather than be able to return to Holland after 3 days as planned. In the Lord's economy, Arthur and Meika, new workers at the Dutch L'Abri, were visiting their friends the Reichows that same week, and Arthur was able to drive the rented removal van back to the Netherlands in place of Henk. Also, our visiting Swiss family went on a two-week vacation at just that time, meaning that Edith, Henk and Mia could spend their quarantine in the relative comfort of the Granary. It gave more time for local friends to say (a socially-distanced) goodbye to Edith, and our team were able to host a farewell tea in the garden at which we gave thanks for Edith's faithful and loving service of L'Abri and pray for her as she begins this next chapter in Holland.

In October **Benja Reichow** was baptised at IPC Liss and in November he celebrated his second birthday. Josue and Lili went to London on a couple of occasions to continue teaching the CARE graduates, and Josue also gave a series of well-received online lectures for the **Christians in Science** group in Brazil. The Reichows were also very thankful to receive two gifts which enabled them to replace the broken gas central heating boiler in the Stables, just before our first sub-zero winter temperatures arrived.

On November 13th we joined in celebrating a 'creation care' **COP26 event** on the field opposite the Manor, which L'Abri was able to purchase and save from building development several years ago, thanks to a substantial gift. Our gratitude goes to Jenny MacKenzie and the St John's Trust who manage the field, who organised craft workshops for children making bird boxes, ornaments from clay dug out of the field and decorated cards using leaves and twigs collected from the field hedge rows. Later Ken Cope and our helper Jonno led music around a campfire.



We were also very thankful that in late November the **Pacholke Family** from Australia were able to return to Greatham after a term at the Dutch L'Abri. The Pacholkes were with us as helpers for much of last year and now they are going to spend Christmas in the Back Flat and then help our worker team for the spring term before returning to Australia in May. Karl Pacholke had to apply for a UK volunteer visa to enter the UK, which was only just granted a week before they had to leave the Netherlands.

On Thursday 25th November we celebrated with the students a harvest **Thanksgiving Day** with a beautiful walk in the Hampshire countryside, followed by a Thanksgiving dinner and then an evening celebrating together God's wonderful provision for us over this past year.



A few days after Thanksgiving **Sarah Liechty**, our community administrator, was able to catch her flight to the US, despite a close-call with a COVID contact, where she will be taking a well-deserved eight-week break with family and friends. Sarah is such a wonderful support to our team, whether answering emails, greetings guests when they first arrive, cooking the Wednesday student supper or just being a friendly and helpful presence around the Manor.

From **December 2nd – 6th** we hosted the **L'Abri International Trustees Meeting**. Despite travel regulations changing in response to the Omicron variant, 6 of the 7 trustees were able to gather at the Manor for three days of meetings. It was very encouraging to be face-to-face after 2 years of only 'seeing' one another on Skype, and to hear that although the past year has had its stresses, we have all experienced the Lord's provision in significant ways at each branch.

On the last Sunday of term Dawn and Peter organised a beautiful **andle-lit Advent Service** in the sunken garden chapel, with new arrangements of carols provided by our helper and accomplished musician Jonno Saunders. Then on Thursday 9th December after the previous day all working together to give the Manor a thorough clean, we **waved goodbye** to our students. We had a wonderful core group of students throughout this term; serious in their engagement with ideas, full of questions and very appreciative of the hospitality and shelter they have experienced at the Manor.



We are especially thankful for our four excellent helpers this term: Jonno and Jessa Saunders who stay with us as helpers again next term, Linn Iverson (whose parents visited from her native Norway) and Ethan Schaffe who now returns to Oregon after two terms with us.

We now have a 4 week break to catch our breath and have family time before term starts again on January 12th. Merran and I are very thankful for our team of workers who have faithfully pulled together in the daily tasks of life at L'Abri during this past year of uncertainties, trusting that the Lord holds the meaning and the conclusions of the work we do.

May you grow in hope in the God who listens, hears, forgives and brings plenteous redemption as we wait his coming again during this Advent season.

With warm greetings from us all at the Manor

Jim Paul



Just in case some of our faces are new to you....

Front row left to right: Dawn Merz, Catherine Barricklow, Merran and Jim Paul, Sarah Liechty
Back row, left to right: Peter Merz, Joel Barricklow, Marsh Moyle, Lili and Josue Reichow

P.S. Thanks to Hannah Smith and Eve Kovalenko for the beautiful photographs in this newsletter.