Are you good at making things with your hands? I’m afraid I am not very blessed in this way but I do admire people who are! I was back inside the Cathedral the other day looking at all the work being done – it is beginning to look wonderful!

Over the last few weeks I’ve been enjoying The Great British Sewing Bee on television. The programme searches for the best amateur sewer through a series of sewing challenges each week, gradually whittling the contestants down, until one is crowned the winner. I am always in awe of the garments that are made, sometimes from recycled fabrics or off-cuts, transformed into something beautiful and useful.

Inside the Cathedral at the moment, the limestone floor with its intricate pattern is being formed with skill and care. There are four different types of limestone being used, sourced from Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Dorset. I spent some time watching the floor-laying team at work. Each stone is carefully measured and cut to fit a specific place, then placed, levelled and fixed into place. It is skilled and precise work. Outside the work is progressing too – from what to me looks like a chaos of steel, mud and other materials, a fantastic new building is emerging. I was shown one of the terracotta fins which will decorate the outer skin and was amazed by its beauty and the way the sun brought out its depth and colour. I can’t wait to see what it will look like when finished.

The emotions of amazement and awe that we may experience when we come face to face with a beautiful creation, whether it be an item of clothing, a limestone pavement or smart architecture, are there in the line from Psalm 139 which inspired the title for this piece: ‘I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.’ The psalmist is able to look upon themselves as a beautiful creation of God. I wonder if you can do the same when you look in the mirror? The Bible affirms God indeed is a creating God, we are made in God’s image and being formed into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3.18). We should expect to see something of God’s creating skill in ourselves and each other.

What might this forming and creating look like? In The Great British Sewing Bee there are three challenges each week. First comes the Pattern Challenge, where contestants have to produce a garment as accurately as possible, following a set pattern and instructions. Next is the Transformation Challenge, where the sewers are given a variety of items or materials – perhaps duvet covers or even shower curtains – and asked to use their imagination to produce a wearable piece of clothing. The Made-to-Measure challenge is the final one, which entails making an outfit to fit a real human being who then models it on the catwalk.

Does God go about the business of creating us in similar ways I wonder? Are we made to a set pattern with accuracy and attention to detail, or is our forming more akin to God transforming us from unlikely fabric into something wonderful and unexpected? Or perhaps God may be fashioning for us clothes of life that are made to measure for each of us uniquely? Surely it must be a bit of all three! Moreover,
the joy of creating something wonderful is not only found in the finished product but in the creating process itself. In watching the sewers on TV and the floor-layers in the Cathedral, what drew me in was their methodical care, imagination, skill and persistence. I believe that God has not finished the work of creation but is constantly in the business of creating in this world and in us, sometimes concentrating on the details, sometimes picking up the scraps we think are beyond redemption, always focusing on a perfect fit for each of us.

What God creates of us will be beautiful and useful. What God will delight in is when we wear our created nature with pride and joy on the catwalk of this world. What might this look like for you, for me, for us? While we wait in anticipation for the final revealing of our renewed Cathedral, let us live our lives with praise, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made!

Canon Emma Davies
Canon Precentor
News from Leicester Cathedral

Philippa Langley visits the Cathedral

It was great to welcome Philippa Langley to the Cathedral earlier this week and to show her the work currently being undertaken, pictured here with the Cathedral’s Canon Precentor, The Revd Canon Emma Davies.

She was here to film footage for a documentary that will be released later this year, to coincide with her new book on Richard III and the Princes in the Tower.

South Asian Heritage Month

From 18 July to 17 August it is South Asian Heritage Month. As I am sure we are all aware, people of South Asian Heritage make up a significant part of the population of Leicester, and as a result the city has over the years been blessed in many ways through the culture and heritage of South Asia.

During this month there are various great events marking South Asian Heritage Month across Leicester and you might well want to join in with some of them. At Leicester Cathedral we have asked Bishop Saju how his South Asian Heritage has shaped him and his answers are really inspiring, have a look on YouTube here.

Revd Manuela
Services this week

While the Cathedral is closed for building works, our services take place in St Martins House (Sunday mornings) and in St Nicholas’ Church, Leicester (Monday to Friday). The Cathedral will also be Together with other churches on some Sunday afternoons.

All are welcome to our services. Services of Morning Prayer are also live-streamed.

**MONDAY 31 JULY**
8.30am  Morning Eucharist  (St Nicholas)
5.30pm  Evening Prayer  (St Nicholas)

**TUESDAY 1 AUGUST**
8.30am  Morning Prayer  (St Nicholas)
1.00pm  Lunchtime Eucharist  (St Nicholas)
5.30pm  Evening Prayer  (St Nicholas)

**WEDNESDAY 2 AUGUST**
8.30am  Morning Prayer  (St Nicholas)
5.30pm  Evening Prayer  (St Nicholas)

**THURSDAY 3 AUGUST**
8.30am  Morning Prayer  (St Nicholas)
1.00pm  Lunchtime Eucharist  (St Nicholas)
5.30pm  Evening Prayer  (St Nicholas)

**FRIDAY 4 AUGUST**
8.30am  Morning Prayer  (St Nicholas)
5.30pm  Evening Prayer  (St Nicholas)

**SUNDAY 6 AUGUST**
10.30am  Sunday Eucharist  (St Martins House)
6.30pm  St Nicholas Eucharist  (St Nicholas)

**MONDAY 7 AUGUST**
8.30am  Morning Eucharist  (St Nicholas)
5.30pm  Evening Prayer  (St Nicholas)
Questions Together – July

Why do you believe in Jesus?

At the end of each of our monthly ‘Questions Together’ discipleship sessions, we ask the group for suggestions of what we might explore together in future sessions.

Our key question for our July session came from Junior Church: why do you believe in Jesus? This is obviously quite a significant question! So, to help us begin to reflect on our own answers, we first explored other questions we might have about Jesus.

We opened our discussion together by considering ‘who was Jesus Christ, and what was he like?’, using examples of how Jesus has been portrayed in art from around the world (taken from The Christ We Share resource pack) to get us thinking. I’ve offered a couple of examples for you here, too: the Maria Christina Gomez Cross from El Salvador, Angry Christ by Lino Pontebon, a Filipino artist, and a painting of The Last Supper from Cameroon.

This discussion led us to consider many different aspects of what we have heard, read and experienced of Christ, from his kindness and generosity to his skill as a teacher, but also his dedication to challenging injustice and standing up for what is right.

Through this conversation, we explored what else we know of Jesus, and what we would like to know — what would we ask Jesus if he walked into the room right now, for example? In fact, how would we know it was Jesus if he walked in
right now?! We also began to explore much bigger questions that would take much more than one session to answer, such as what it means for Jesus to be both human and divine, too. We also shared examples of our favourite stories of Jesus in the Bible. These questions paved the way for us to eventually explore why it is we believe in Jesus, and it was very powerful to hear people share personal stories of how they have encountered Jesus, and the impact he has had, and continues to have, on our lives in many ways.

At the end of the session, there was an opportunity to then reflect on our own discipleship. **One of our three key questions as a Diocese** is ‘How are you serving your community and enabling others to love and serve those around them?’

Drawing on our discussion of Jesus and how he loved and served others, we were each encouraged to continue to reflect on what it means to serve our communities, and to enable others to love and serve, based on our discussions of Jesus. I wonder how you might answer this question, and how Jesus’ example might inspire you as you live out your everyday faith.

Our next ‘Questions Together’ group session will be taking place after the service on Sunday 20 August, upstairs in the Grand Hall at St Martins House following coffee (approximately from 12.15pm onwards).

Jude Taylor
Discipleship Officer
‘Of shapes transformed to bodies strange I purpose to entreat’ – the opening line of Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Or at least, how it is in the first English translation by Arthur Golding in 1567. A more modern interpretation can be found in Ted Hughes’ Tales from Ovid: ‘Now I am ready to tell how bodies are changed into different bodies’. The same meaning expressed through different words, a little example of how art can change once it has been disseminated through other voices.

This is the opening point made in this year’s Glyndebourne Festival programme, which I attended for my annual visit last week. Ovid’s poem is the primary inspiration for Handel’s Semele, the production I went to see, but I couldn’t stop thinking about the unlikely connections Semele had with the other opera I was there to see out of curiosity, Poulenc’s Dialogues des Carmélites, which explores its heroine’s personal transformation from timid woman to heroic martyr in the most emotionally crushing way possible.

The prevailing popularity of Ovid’s tales of transformation as inspiration for the artists that followed him suggests a fundamental truth, that the very idea of metamorphosis is a key to survival not just in the stories of art, but for us the audience through escapism.

The plot of Semele was based on Ovid, but came from the libretto of William Congreve, a Restoration playwright. Handel’s work was an oratorio staged in the Lent performance season in 1744 – theatre was forbidden and his audiences were expecting a Christian work. Handel’s choice of pagan subject matter – his attempt to straddle religious oratorio and the now-failing genre of mythological Italian opera – met with disapproval for its bawdy sex, limp penis jokes, and adulterous title character.

Glyndebourne’s production interprets the work in a changed way, as director Adele Thomas says:

“For me, the central idea is that of overreaching. Semele’s crime in mythology is that she steps out of her mortal sphere and ascends to heaven; that cannot be tolerated and must be punished with death... I started to look not at Semele’s supposed guilt [of sleeping with Jupiter] but at why on earth we place these limits and caveats on people. Reverse the perspective and it’s actually not a piece about one woman’s overreach but about a community, a heavenly jury who have a questionable attachment to this idea; it’s about jealousy”.

One of the moral dilemmas confronting the audience past and present is with whom we should place our sympathies – Juno, the wife of the adulterous Jupiter, or with Semele, who caught his eye, enjoyed his love and then found herself in a trap she could not escape? The story ends with Juno tricking Semele into demanding Jupiter prove his love by revealing his true celestial form, something no mortal could ever survive. Is it possible to even pity him, compelled to destroy Semele? 
after promising to grant her any wish? Regardless, Semele is quite literally consumed by her love for him, and by her desire to transform the realities of her mortal life.

Poulenc’s Carmélites, premiered in 1957, also follows the desire of its heroine to change her situation. Set in 1794, at the climax of the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution, Blanche de la Force is a nobleman’s daughter terrified by the horrors committed on the streets of Paris. She seeks the refuge of a Carmelite nunnery, and becomes the convent’s newest novice.

Unusually, Blanche is an operatic female protagonist not in love, or ill, or there at the whims of a male character – instead the opera follows her finding of a new family and faith, showing us her fears and desires, dreams and nightmares, as she engages spiritually with her fellow nuns. Concurrently, just before the threat of the Terror (literally) breaks into the convent, the end of Act 1 shows without mercy the agonised death of the Prioress, who after a lifetime of service believes God has abandoned her. Trying to make sense of her despair, Blanche’s friend Sister Constance wonders if the Prioress was experiencing someone else’s death, transferring with them, as it were, a more peaceful death – a thought-provoking take on St Paul’s command to ‘carry one another’s burdens’.

At the climax, after their arrest by the state, the nuns are murdered one by one as they sing Salve Regina, their song reducing in number before only Constance is left before Blanche joins her on the scaffold (having previously run away from the Carmelites’ collective vow of martyrdom). That off-stage endless *sh-thunk* of the guillotine is the most horrendously evocative sound I have ever heard in a theatre, and in Glyndebourne’s production the affect was so forceful I shall be thinking of it for years.

Poulenc’s nuns embody their vocation of self-sacrifice, choosing to suffer death rather than deny Christ. Their public sacrifice helped erode support for the Terror, ending 10 days later with the execution of Robespierre himself.

Blanche’s journey from a noblewoman afraid of death, nervous and insecure, to a woman of faith unafraid to walk to the guillotine, is a remarkable mirror to the transformation Semele undergoes. In her own desire for freedom and for Jupiter, Semele suffers the consequence of her passion – she desires to be closer godhood and is immolated in a way we can metaphorically understand. The martyrdom of Blanche and the Carmelites though, is delivered in a manner hugely evocative of Christianity’s history of sacrifice.

Semele’s name survived antiquity because she was hailed as the mother of one of the most important gods of all. In Ovid’s version of events, the baby she was carrying as she died was rescued by Jupiter, eventually morphing into Dionysus (or Bacchus) – the god of wine, revelry and theatre. It is worth marking, I think, the huge work undertaken by the musical performers and behind-the-scenes staff of all cultural performances, who bring us these works through their own transformation and exploration of very human endeavours.
Hello there one and all! May the Lord be with us all, and may his spirit and his love guide our minds and hearts, words and actions!

Yes, we are now back from Île-Tudy, after a protracted absence, back in our second home in Leicester, closer to space than to the nearest sea.¹ Although it is good to be back – our cats were delighted to see us – one purred all the way home from the cattery. I am missing the beautiful dancing, sparkling, ever-changing sea, whether it be walking at the ocean’s edge, paddling, swimming (at least one bathe per day!) or most of all sailing! Although this is nominally the dreaded Bay of Biscay (Golfe de Gascogne), the Anse de Benodet is protected from the Atlantic swell and consequently brilliant place to sail small dinghies such as mine; the water is usually wonderfully flat, allowing me to zoom about at high speed (as seen in the photograph above – the blue sail at the bow is called a gennaker, an asymmetric sail, which lifts the bow out of the water, allowing the dinghy to “plane” at unprecedented speeds, even up to 15mph – but it feels so much faster as you are so close to the water – I am usually covered in spray and the boat hums and sings along with me!!). I simply adore it. I am alone, often kilometres away from the shore, with only a tall water tower in Combrit to guide me home (that said, I am often accompanied by two or four sandwich terns that constantly chirrup away one to another – perhaps they think I know where the fish are!).

For me, this seems close to heaven – I sometimes wish these adventures, when the big blue sail is pulling well, and the water is flying everywhere, could go on forever.

¹ Distance to space from Leicester = 100km; distance from Leicester to nearest sea = unknown – no-one has ever made that journey! (Skegness does not count!)
² Could be wrong since his books have mysteriously disappeared from our shelves – but most likely to be Sacred Diary, I suspect. I might have to buy it AGAIN [sighs]
³ And I think this is why there is so little to go on in the Bible – Heaven is beyond us and for now at least, it remains a mystery.
⁴ Matthew 4.17 – but Matthew mentions the kingdom of heaven 31 times in total!
⁵ Acts 10.38
⁶ Link: The Guardian
You may recall that for Adrian Plass, his heaven would be like opening the batting for England against Australia at Lord’s!² And whilst we don’t really have a very clear notion from scripture of what Heaven (with a capital H) will be like, personally, I very much like this idea that we shall be completely complete, completely ourselves, without all the “excess baggage” we accumulate and carry with us during our life. I think this is something we cannot begin to comprehend.³ On the other hand, perhaps you can think of nothing worse than either of these images! How would Heaven look for you? What image would you use?

On the other hand, I strongly believe that heaven is also for right here and now on planet Earth – yes, even in Leicester!

When Jesus Christ began his ministry on Earth, He said “Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”⁴

What might this mean? “Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with Him”;⁵ and we are called to do likewise, as mini-Christ’s if you will, bringing in the kingdom of Heaven wherever, whenever the opportunities arise. There are some terrible things happening in our world just now – the roar of the French military jets overhead this year whilst I was sailing was a constant reminder. Jesus shows us, in words and actions, God’s heart of compassion.

How can we do this? I don’t think this is as difficult as it might seem!

Lectio 365 ends every morning devotions with this prayer:

“Father, please help me to live this day to the full, being true to You in every way. Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet. Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.”

Being kind, being generous and being grateful certainly usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. The “First Dog on the Moon” cartoon this week reported some lovely “good news/kingdom stories.”⁶ One example: “I had both hips replaced and now I can run and jump and spin like a wild thing again!” – not me in case you were wondering!

We are in the world but not of the world. We carry within us a very different Spirit. We are looking for the coming of His Kingdom of justice and mercy and peace. It is all about love, actually!

Come, Lord Jesus.

Finally, today was the last Sunday that the Khene family will be with us in the Cathedral. Caroline has a fabulous new position in the Institute of Development studies in the University of Sussex, and so the family are moving to Hove next week. We will miss them all – they are very special people. But I particularly want to thank Samson for all his hard work on the Coffee Team! Thank you for all that you have brought to us and may Father bless you all richly in your new location.

Martin
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SAFEGUARDING

THE ACTING DEAN and Chapter of the Cathedral are wholly committed to the safety, well-being and protection of everyone having contact with our community.

We all share responsibility for Safeguarding.

If you have concerns about the welfare or behaviour of an adult, young person or child, please speak to one of the Residentiary Canons or to Linda Green or Kath Rowberry, our Safeguarding Co-ordinators.

The Residentiary Canons can be approached in person or contacted on 07399 523 330.

The Safeguarding Co-ordinators do not publish their contact details. Please speak to a verger if you wish to contact them. You do not need to explain the reason for your request.

All concerns will be responded to proportionately and with discretion.