

Les Misérables: a grace-fest By Sarah Kewly Hyde on the EAUK website. Sarah works with women in the Criminal Justice System.

I only came to watch a "classic" stage story retold on screen, but within 10 minutes I was quietly weeping at this story of super-human mercy, manifested through fallible human beings. I'd stumbled upon a grace-fest.

"Look down look down, upon your fellow man. Look down and show some mercy if you can.

Prisoner 24601, Jean Valjean, has been granted parole after 19 years: five years for stealing bread for his sister's starving child and 14 years for escape attempts. Valjean gets his papers, which mark him as a convict, meaning he is unable to find work, money or shelter. My heart hurt with its contemporary resonance. Although the probation service does an amazing job and many charities help those leaving prison find work, the prejudice experienced by Valjean is all too familiar. I work with women in the criminal justice system and have heard story after story of hard attitudes, closed doors where employment or housing is concerned, that could've made a difference. Much rejected, Valjean finally experiences acceptance when he encounters a Christian – a bishop – who feeds him and offers him shelter. Not only this, but when Valjean attempts to steal the bishop's silverware, the bishop covers for him, telling the police it had been a gift to Valjean. This act of grace changes Valjean's life. I can't help wondering what would happen if Christians today weren't known for judgment but for generosity and free-flowing grace? I daydream of a world where mercy triumphs over judgment, no grudges are held, where mistakes are learnt from and moved on from. Where love covers a multitude of sins. Fantine's fall from grace is next. It transpires she has a child whom she sent away to live with an inn-keeper, to whom she sends money. Fantine then loses her factory job, sells her hair and her teeth, becomes a prostitute who contracts TB. Again, I think of the women I've worked with in prison who've had their children removed by the state, who work the streets, whose drug addiction has taken its toll on their teeth and who contract all kinds of diseases. And I'm praying, that those children have adoptive families like Valjean and aren't left languishing in our over-stretched care system.

The film ends with the death of Valjean, who's met by Fantine's ghost, singing some pseudo-biblical lyrics such as, "come with me, where chains will never bind you" and "to love another person is to see the face of God". By this stage in proceedings, I was done in. I wasn't thinking about the terrible representation of women in it (quite literally virgins, mothers or prostitutes) or the problematic elevating of the love story over the political barricade. I was musing on mercy, great huge waves, giant lung bucketfuls. Mercy. How it could revive the Church in the UK, marking it out as exceptional, where all are loved and given multiple chances. Where a perfect God uses His imperfect children to carry it to others. And from my fondness for Brecht in my undergrad days, I remember that to cry at a performance is not the same as having changed something. I must not mistake my tears for engagement and action with the issues raised, with mercy.

"Quite a lot to think about on a Sunday over lunch"



**St. John's Church**  
FAITH • COMMUNITY • ACTION

**Sunday 3rd February 2013**



**A very warm welcome to St John's!**

**The Mystery Plays performed by A Company of Friends at Worcester Cathedral**

**10th, 11th & 12th April, 7.30pm**

### **The real Easter Egg**

Time to order your Real Easter Eggs - first and only Fairtrade chocolate egg to explain the meaning of Easter. £3.99 each which includes a donation to charity. Traidcraft Exchange received a cheque for £21,475 last year as part of the giving. There is a poster and a sign up form in the church foyer. Dot will be taking orders until Feb 3rd so we can have free postage on delivery

### **Pastors piece**

I've just got back from visiting my father and mother in a very windy North Norfolk, surrounded by thousands of pink-footed geese, widgeon, brent geese, etc. down from the Arctic. Uplifting and beautiful. It's good to be back, though, and I'm put in mind of the event that the Church of England remembered yesterday: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, sometimes known as Candlemas. This includes that amazing statement in Luke 2 from the old man Simeon, known as the Nunc Dimittis; it was given to him by the Spirit to recognize who Jesus was and is: 'A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.' This, of course, is our light too, and we can pray together today: 'Lord, give us pure and clean hearts, and make your home with us that we may also be presented to you as pure and holy, and full of the light of Christ.

**Amen'**

Every blessing,

Gary

Pastor Gary Noyes. The Vicarage 29 Sheldon Road, Greenlands, Redditch, Worcestershire. B98 7QS.

Telephone 01527 501092. Day off Friday.

## The Collect of the Day

Almighty God,  
you have created the heavens and the earth  
and made us in your own image:  
teach us to discern your hand in all your works  
and your likeness in all your children;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all  
things,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

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## Diary Time

Tues 12 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Columbia evening with Ann Donovan
Wed 13 <sup>th</sup> Feb 7.30pm	Parish Ash Wednesday Service- Christ Church.
Thur 14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 7.45pm	Church as the family of God at Peter and Eileen Bishops
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup> Feb	DCC away morning at Inkberrow.
Mon 18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 8pm	Prayer ministry team meet in church.
Tue 19 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Gary to Deprived Communities meeting at Old Palace
Wed 20 <sup>th</sup> Feb 7.30pm	Parish lent course starts in the Huband Room
Mon 25 <sup>th</sup> Feb 7.45pm	Children's meeting at the Skelton's
Tue 5 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Standing committee at the Vicarage.
Tues 19 <sup>th</sup> Mar 7.45pm	DCC at St John's.
Sat 23 <sup>rd</sup> Mar	Messy Church at Woodrow Community Hall.
Sun 24 <sup>th</sup> Mar 4pm	Dedication of Ella Rose Turner; St Johns.
Sat 18 <sup>th</sup> May	Messy Church at Woodrow Community Hall.
Sun 19 <sup>th</sup> May 6.30pm	JOINT PENTECOST SERVICE AT ST PETER'S.
Thu 27 <sup>th</sup> Jun 7.30p	Parish Prayer meeting S Peter's
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Messy Church at Woodrow Community Hall.
W/E 4 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Church weekend away - Cloverley Hall.
Wed 23 <sup>rd</sup> Oct 7.30pm	Parish Prayer meeting at Christ Church
Sun 24 <sup>th</sup> Nov 10.30am	Christ the King at St John's;10.30am

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## Today - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday before Lent

10.30am All age worship with Vicky and Ron Skelton.

6.30pm Evening service of Holy Communion and Healing with Pastor Gary Noyes, Revd Garth Nathaniel will be speaking on Psalm 147 and Matthew 6: 30-end

## This week

Monday	1.30pm	Bowls in the Church Hall.
	7.30pm	Bishops Certificate.
Tuesday	10.00am	Parents & Toddlers in the church hall. Standing committee at the Vicarage
Wednesday	7.30pm	Jump Youth Group in the hall. Parish Clergy Retreat to Barnes Close Cloverley Planning at Vicarage.
Thursday	10.00am	Parents & Toddlers in the Church Hall.
	7.45pm	The church as the family of God - Peter and Eileen Bishop's house.
	7.30pm	PCC at St John's
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> Feb	10am	Clergy/Churchwardens meet at St Peter's

## Next Sunday

10.30am Pastor Gary Noyes will be leading, Rosemary Humphrey will be speaking on Exodus 34: 29-end and 2 Cor. 3:12-4:2

6.30pm Vicky Quarton will be leading and Pastor Gary Noyes will be speaking on Exodus 3: 1-6 and John 12: 27-36

## Church as the family of God

A new 6 week course has started on Thursday evening at Peter and Eileen Bishop's in Studley if you would like to come along opr find out more call Peter for more information 01527 857209.

## PRAYER Please pray for:-

- ❖ Gary and April, Garth and Jenny, Richard and Sally, Richard and Wendy.
- ❖ Those who are mourning
- ❖ Those known to us who are suffering ill health.
- ❖ Those without enough to eat.
- ❖ Those trying to find work.
- ❖ Planning for this year's Ventures.
- ❖ Allison and Rosie as they undertake ministry training.