

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

7th June 2020

Doreen Platts



The Starry Night

I love this painting by Vincent Van Gogh. It is exuberant, powerful, full of energy and totally overwhelming. It seems the beauty of the night sky has entranced the artist.

During Lockdown it has become usual to have a late night conversation with my eldest son from his home in Gerrards Cross. One evening he said 'I'm outdoors, have you seen the moon tonight? It's very low in the horizon and the sky is beautiful'. I went outdoors to continue the conversation and we marvelled together at the beauty of the night sky. Those 10-15 minutes outdoors will be one of my abiding memories of Lockdown. The date was 7th May and it was the final Supermoon of this year.

Supermoons occur as a regular part of the Moon's orbit of the Earth. They occur when there is a full Moon and the Moon is also closest to Earth. During a supermoon the Moon appears up to 14% bigger and 30 % brighter than the furthest Moon from the earth can be.

Verses from Psalm 8 speak of the wonder the psalmist felt:-

‘When I look up at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
At the moon and the stars you have set in place,
What is a frail mortal, that you should be mindful of him,
A human being that you should take notice of him?

Or a verse from a favourite hymn of my long-ago schooldays by Joseph Addison

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame.
Their great original proclaim.

The painting hangs in the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Van Gogh painted this picture in June 1889. It was his view of the night sky from the east window of the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum where he had admitted himself six months previously after a severe mental breakdown. In a letter to his brother Theo he said “this morning I saw the country from my window for a long time before sunrise with nothing, but the morning star which looked very big”. This morning star, or Venus, may be the large white star just left of centre in the painting.

The son of a Dutch protestant pastor Van Gogh had been brought up in a religious household. He had considered going into the church before, at the age of 27, becoming an Artist. He suffered from depression and mental illness most of his adult life. No doubt like many of you, I watched the programme on 28th May when the Duke of Cambridge, who has been campaigning for support and understanding for those suffering mental health problems, spoke to footballers and others about men’s approach to depression. The importance to sufferers of the support and understanding received was stressed and how essential it is to be able to talk about the issues involved.

Our ‘Partnership in Mission’ communion offering in June is for the Samaritans, who do such wonderful work listening and talking to people when they find themselves in desperate situations.

The peaceful village in the painting, nestling in the valley, with the church spire pointing heavenwards is an imagined scene. Church spires and steeples were used to remind the local community to remain focussed on God

As we celebrate Trinity Sunday tomorrow may the God we worship,

God the Father, creator and sustainer

God the Son, our saviour, friend and guide,

God the Spirit, healer, comforter, active in our world,

be with us all.