Lent Eco Walk 1: Saturday 8th March 10am: meeting at the lych gate

- **Morning prayer** at North wall of churchyard, overlooking North Downs:
  "Thanks be to you, O God, that I have risen this day
  To the rising of life itself.
  May it be a day of blessing,
  O God of every gift,
  A day of new beginnings given,
  And as the mist scatters,
  May each ill haze clear.
  Amen".

Walk down the hill from the North wall gate, & through fields to the brook:

- Intro re chalk streams:

Chalkstreams are so very rare and we've one here, a tributary of the River Darent, which used to feed the two mills in Mill Lane, Greatness, and which can be walked alongside in Otford, Shoreham, Eynsford and Farningham *(we discussed the pack of walks between local train stations, available at Seal Library and Bat & Ball railway station café, some of which highlight the Darent, and the cultural, architectural and historic buildings and artist's residence, eg. Lullingstone Castle, Roman Villa, Samuel Palmer's house, Otford Palace etc.)* The pattern of ancient settlements and ritual sites around chalk rivers suggest that our ancestors understood that they were beneficiaries and custodians of an astonishing treasure. But somewhere along the line, since, we seem to have forgotten this.

Water courses that possess all the properties of source, clarity, temperature and mineral content to qualify, are not only the stuff of dreams (especially given their specific wildlife and biodiversity richness), but are also the result of a very particular set of circumstances, and are extraordinarily rare on a global scale.

Worldwide estimates for the total number of chalk streams range from about 200 and 250, depending on how they're counted. Of these, 90% of the entire planet's chalk streams are in England, with the majority in the South East, including here!

In 2019, 2/3s of chalk rivers and streams ran dry, which should never happen, as vast reserves of water in chalk aquifers are more than enough to keep rivers running throughout even the driest of Summers. The problem is abstraction, exacerbated by the fact that the highest number of these invaluable rivers in the world are located in the most highly populated region of the UK *(we discussed how advocates like Feargal Sharkey are calling out the water companies, Environmental Agency, Defra, to ensure visibility of the appalling abuse of our rivers and call these responsible bodies to public account).*

In most cultures and faiths, streams are symbols of spiritual growth, renewal and purification.

- For Christians, “streams in the desert” is a symbolic phrase describing the refreshment that comes from the Spirit of Christ within us. If we reflect upon the course of flowing water in nature, God may be the spring, the very source, Christ , the son, may be regarded as the fountain or reservoir of this divine water, and the Holy Spirit, the living stream, flowing through is, cleansing and enabling us to recognise and make use of our God-given gifts to reflect His all embracing love, to others. This resonates with our preparation for Easter and prayer that our First Fruits are employed by God’s grace during this time of Lent.
- **John 4:14:** “ But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life”.

Pause by brook on way down/way back up: *we listened in silence to the gurgling.*

- **Poem:** extract from “The River” by Kathleen Jessie Raine (1908-2003):

“One last look into that bright stream-

Trout there were, and clear on the bottom,

Monster form of the great Crayfish that crawls to the moon,

On its rocky bed, living water

In whorls and ripples, flowing unbended”.

(We talked about the crayfish and freshwater mussels found by one of us in the Darent in Otford about 20 years ago, and how we boated and swam there as children 5 decades ago- you couldn’t now, regretfully).

By the Oak tree:

- **Psalm 1.3**: “They (those who delight in the law of the Lord) are like trees along the riverbank, bearing fruit in its season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do”

Walk to the natural “lake” in the field near the Chalk Stream river:

- A call to worship together **(Isaiah 55 1-3 inspired)**

“Come to the water, all of you who thirst,

Come, drink deeply form the river of life.

Come to the water, all you who are weary,

Come rest in the quiet pools of God’s love.

Come to the water, all you who long for justice,

Come to be renewed in God’s ever-flowing stream.

For God is here among us,

Washing away the dust and grime of our lives,

And pouring out the Spirit on all who thirst.

Let us know this of God, here, together.”

We paused to pray individually holding a pebble each, which we then threw gently into the lake on this first Saturday of Lent.

Some of us crossed the railway, and hung over the river bridge, where Water Crowfoot and Water Star-wort gleamed luminous green on the river bed, and hoofprints of the cattle coming down the bank to drink of it, were very visible.

Looking down onto the Chalk Stream from the bridge:

- Litany/Prayer **(inspired by Mark 1, 4-11 and Luke 3: 21-22):**

“God of the waters- water of birth, moving us from womb’s safety into the world,

God of the waters-water of connection, engaging the playful spirit, the passionate Christ, the challenging God,

God of the waters- water of life, sustaining, quenching, cleansing.

God of the waters-water of trouble, journeying us from here to there,

From the known to the unknown.

God of the waters, birth us, connect us, live in us, trouble us. Amen.”

- **Poem:** Extract form: “Heaven” by Rupert Brooke: 1913:

“Fish…

Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,

Each secret fishy hope or fear.

Fish say they have their stream and pond.

But is there anything beyond?

… One may not doubt that,

Somehow, good shall come of water and mud.

And, sure, the reverent eye must see

A purpose in liquidity…”

Some of us walked on to the Italian Deli for refreshment and a chat, admiring the Spring flowers and leaf buds emerging on trees, after which we visited St Edith’s Well, and discussed this historic spring of water, marking the miracle of a local saint, born ignominiously. The return walk up the hill to St Peter’s and St Paul’s, gave us a stunning view of the church in the sunshine.

March 2025: Babs, Eco Church.