<u>Lent Eco Walk 2: 22.3.'25: World Water Day</u>

Route: through Fabs Wood, down flint footpath to top of Kemsing Hill

<u>Physical foci & themes: Chalk Grassland,</u> Spring flowers, wooden cross on hilltop & view over the Weald, incl St P and P's Seal Church

?The amazingly huge and moving Daffodil cross, if cattle haven't decimated it, this year?

1. **<u>Prayer:</u>** re **<u>water</u> (Today is World Water Day, 22 March 2025)**.
   The day was formally proposed in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro by the United Nations General Assembly, and it was adopted the year after as an annual observance day focusing on the importance of fresh water.
   Last year, the rain during the wettest February since circa 1840, caused a deep rivulet in the hilltop path & eroded topsoil, revealing +++ flints):

"Father of all creation, we give you our thanks for rain, snow, fog and dew,

For water beneath the ground, above ground and in the oceans,

For water in glaciers, polar caps, rocky streams, gushing rivers, ponds, lakes, water falls, aquifers, mud, puddles and rivulets, revealing the flints under our feet.

Please guide us and bless us with the wisdom to use and conserve water wisely; to do our part in reducing pollution of our waterways and have a hand, however small, in stewardship of your blessed gift; to grow some understanding of the global needs, so that all your creation and all your peoples might share this essential and endangered resource.

In Jesus' name. Amen".

Saint Francis of Assisi:

“Praised be you, my Lord,

through Sister Water,

who is so useful, humble,

precious, and pure”

Discussion about flint stones & marvel at their origin and forms/awe that the North Downs, as well as the South, had once been beneath sea level.

2. **Wood Anemones:**
   Emerging early (climate change?):

Wood Anemones are key indicators of Ancient Woodland. They only spread about 6” every 100 years.

From a poem by John Clare (1793-1864):

“ The Wood Anemone through dead Oak leaves

And in the thickest woods, now blooms anew,

And where the green briar and the bramble weaves

Thick clumps o’green, Anemones thicker grew,

And weeping flowers in thousands pearled in dew

People the woods and brakes, hid hollows there,

White, yellow and purple-hued, the wide wood through”.

3. **Primroses:**

From “Escape to Britain”: William Wordsworth:

“Primroses, the Spring may love them,
Summer knows but little of them”.

Brief reflection

4. **Wooden Cross :**

After stopping at the Millennium plaque mapping the coordinates & major landmarks in the approx. 270 degree vista below us from this North Downs hillside, we’ll survey Oak Hall’s wooden cross (the original objective destination of this accessible walk, was to walk within the amazing Daffodil cross planted on the top of the hill, above the wooden cross; to my dismay, on a recce yesterday, I found a herd of large cattle (considerably larger than the KWT grazer of choice, Dexters!) grazing the hillside, having eaten every single one of the hundreds of blooms, except for these three!)

<u>Scripture: Cross:</u>

“ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said”: Matt 28, vv5-6

“ Greater love has no one than this, than he lay down his life for his friends”: John 15 v 13.

<u>Prayer: Cross:</u>

“Lord Jesus, Thank You for sacrificing Your life of love on a wooden cross, for our sins.

Because of You and the cross, we can now stand before You, pure and holy and ready to reflect Your radiance by the gift of Your Holy Spirit.

Amen”

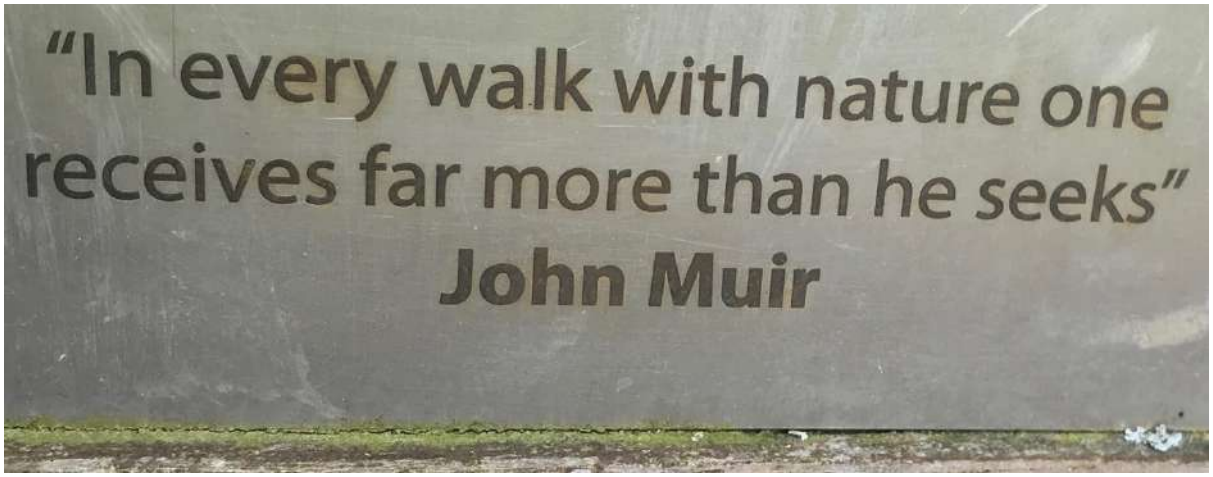
<u>Silent reflection on the cross.</u>

5. **<u>Stillness/Silence</u>** (very little sound, even from the Motorway cutting through the valley below):

<u>From "Amongst the Silence" by Ellis Nightingale</u>

"I heard the saplings whispering,
The chanting of the old Ash trees.
I heard the singing of the woods,
The chorus of the leaves.
I heard the stirring of the soil;
The earthworms dancing in the dirt.
I heard the spinning of the ants,
The ballroom underfoot.
I heard the greetings of the air;
The gathering of everything.
The way it was before it all,
Before the world got loud".

From a seat at the top of the chalk hill



6. **Daffodils:**

A symbol of hope, renewal , rebirth and of course, Springtime in the UK, with the drawing out of daylight hours after the long Winter, Daffodils, able to withstand a deep covering of snow as well as frost, hail, gales and torrential rain, also symbolise vital dispositions or attributes for life, learning, peace and happiness. And also of active Creation Care at this time of environmental crisis: perseverance, resilience, forgiveness and vitality.

From one of Britain's most well-loved poems, "Daffodils" by William Wordsworth, but actually attributed to his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth:

"I gazed and gazed, but little thought
What wealth to me this show had brought

For oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood
They flash upon the inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the Daffodils".

7. Environmental reflection on the rarity and value of Chalk Grassland & celebration of our North Downs

Chalk Grassland = habitat of international importance for both its rarity and its species richness.

40 + different plant species can be found in 1 square metre. The majority are so specialised that they only grow on chalk grassland, adapted to the thin, infertile, but base-rich soils.

Characteristic features of this invaluable habitat include ant-hills (vital to the lifecycle of several rare British butterflies) and on steep slopes, terracettes (sheep walks). These along with patches of scrub, add to habitat diversity greatly and provide bird-nesting habitat and song-posts, as well as basking banks for Slowworms and Common Lizards (seen often, here, along with Skylarks).

The UK holds around 50% of the world's surviving Chalk Grassland, with major concentrations on the North and South Downs of SE England.

Formerly widespread, an estimated 80% had disappeared by WW2.

Only 1% of Kent and Surrey Hills have remnant Chalk Grassland cover, now.

Chalk is absolutely key for Carbon sequestration, so incredibly vital for our environment to offset CO_2 emissions.

4 specialist species = key indicators of Chalk Grassland:

- Bee Orchid
- Small Blue butterfly
- Salad Burnett
- Horseshoe Vetch

Good land management for these species will create a high density of wild flora and their associated insect life.

Sound management will benefit a wide range of other specialist Chalk Grassland plants, incl. other vetches, orchids, wild Marjoram, Dropwort, Scabius and more. Vetches and other species-specific foodplants will result in a myriad of insects incl Blue butterflies.

Opportunities to create/improve/extend optimal habitat incl.:

- Grazing by hardy livestock breeds to control scrub and dominant invasive grasses (and Daffodil crosses!)
- Cleaning scrub and keeping its regrowth in check
- Managing invasive and non-indigenous species eg Ragwort, Creeping Thistle & Tor grass
- Protection from nutrient enrichment by fertilisation and agricultural drift

Managing areas for these species will help deliver the following benefits to our local communities:

- Clean water
- Clean air
- Protection from & mitigation of environmental hazards
- Mitigation of & adaptation to climate change
- Thriving wildlife incl. potential for rare species return/spread (eg Brown Hairstreak)
- Beauty, heritage, engagement and personal well-being of walkers, both local and visiting.

8. Celandines:

From " The Lesser Celandine": William Wordsworth

Which describes how the fresh flowers close in cold and rain, but "the very first moment that the sun may shine, Bright as the sun himself, 't'is out again!", noticed faded petals later in the Spring, which makes Wordsworth, older in age at this time himself, smile:

"The sunshine may not cheer it, nor the dew:
It cannot help itself in its decay;
Stiff in its members, withered, changed of hue,
And, in my heart, I smiled that it was grey.

To be a Prodigal Favourite, then worse truth
A Miserly Pensioner- behold our lot!
O, man, that from thy fair and shining youth
Age might but take the things Youth needed not!"

Reflection on ageing & its joys.

Refreshments at The Rising Sun, if wished, to close our Lent walk.

Babs Bartholomew
St P&P's Seal Eco Church team
22nd March 2025