

Being a whole body



Living Lord, we give thanks for the rich diversity of the Christian faith. We pray that we might grow in unity and understanding with all your faithful people. Amen.

Books of the Old Testament

Part 22 – Song of Songs

by Richard Greatrex

The last of the Wisdom texts, the Song of Songs, is a conundrum: like the book of Esther it doesn't mention God by name and, although often titled the Song of Solomon, its language dates from the third to fourth century BC, while Solomon reigned in the tenth. It is the Bible's only love poem, a dialogue between two lovers. She is high-born; he is a handsome young shepherd. Her words dominate – this is one of the few occasions in the Bible where we hear a woman's perspective

directly. But both lovers are uninhibited, sensual in their expressions of love, admiration for each other's physical beauty, frustration over separation and the bliss of union.

For Jewish interpreters it is an allegory of God's love for Israel, while for Christians it represents either Christ's love for the Church, or God's relationship with the individual soul. Whether read as an allegory of the soul's yearning for God, or simply a celebration of human love, the Song of Songs offers insights into the vulnerability and vitality of physical, emotional and spiritual relationships. 🍷

“Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.”

John Stott (1921-2011), cleric and theologian

Richard Greatrex *reflects on* Romans 14:1-12

Members of communities, especially religious ones, have a natural tendency to disagree. In today's epistle Paul is addressing just such a situation which has arisen among the Roman Christians. He categorises them as two distinct groups – the “weak”, who tend towards a narrow view of everyday religious practice, and the “strong”, who hold a broader position. The weak take a black-and-white stance, the strong prefer shades of grey. However, Paul judges neither over the other, insisting that a good motive – honouring God – can lead to a variety of responses and that, within certain boundaries, each is equally valid.

The crux of the passage comes in verses 7-9, when Paul reminds his readers that there is no such creature as an individual Christian; we are all part of the whole body. Our entire life, and death, is dedicated to the Lord, and if we are “the Lord's” then we are part of a body that includes both the living and the dead, a cloud of witnesses encompassing the past, present and future.

As members of the Lord's community each one of us is ultimately accountable to God. Judging one another is both unnecessary and detrimental to the life of the whole body. Instead we are encouraged to place our faithful diversity under God's scrutiny and, if we read on to verse 19, to “pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life”. 🍷

Foraging Funghi

by Caroline Hodgson

It goes without saying that any funghi-hunter needs to really know what they are doing. Happily for would-be foragers, organisations like the National Trust and the Woodland Trust organise guide-led walks around this time of year, where you can learn what to look for, what to avoid and how to forage sustainably and responsibly. I now know enough to recognise a few funghi, and I love it. It turns an autumn walk into a treasure hunt, reminding me of

the verse from Matthew 3:44: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field...”

After an early-morning dog walk I love coming home to a foraged fry-up breakfast, or cooking up a wild garlic pasta for supper, with vivid purple amethyst deceivers and succulent bay boletes.

If you say grace before meals, it makes it all the more meaningful to thank God for something you have found and picked yourself.

Always forage safely and sustainably. For more information go to www.nationaltrust.org.uk and www.woodlandtrust.org.uk 🍷