

Witney Congregational Church

R CROSS A D S

Witney Congregational Church is a crossroads where we:

meet God in worship

meet one another in friendship

meet our community and world with the love of Jesus



WHAT'S ON GUIDE

Witney Congregational Church offer a whole range of activities through which we seek to Worship, Work and Witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in this community today

MINISTER

Rev Dr Jason Boyd

ASSOCIATE MINISTER

Rev Judi Holloway

WORSHIP

Daily Worship	9.30am	Mon-Fri	Short time of Prayer and Reading
Saturday Praise	11.00am	1 st Saturday of the month	
Sunday Services	10.30am		
	6.00pm	1 st Sunday of the month	

Communion is held twice during the month at the first Sunday evening and third Sunday morning services

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

Tuesday	12.15pm	Light Bite Piece of the Word (1 st Tuesday of each month)
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YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Sunday	10.30 am	Crèche, Noah's Ark & The K.I.C.K. on Sundays
Monday	10.00 am	Noah's Ark – Infant Group for babies and pre-school children

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Tuesday	7.30pm	Monthly Deacon's Meeting
Thursday	10.00 am	Weekly Coffee Morning
Saturday	10.00 am	Weekly Coffee Morning
Sunday	12.00 noon	Bi-Monthly Church Meeting

SUNDAY LINK

Weekly bulletin for all Christians providing stimulating thought along with news and notices concerning our Church

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

Opening Hours: Monday – Saturday



01993 709429

09.00 am – 5.00 pm

CHURCH WEBSITE

For further information, please visit our website:

www.witneycongregational.org.uk

MAGAZINE EDITOR

Terry Powlesland

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Further information can be obtained from the Church Office: 01993 709 992



The next 2-monthly edition, covering April & May 2019, is due on **Sunday 31st March**

Your Editor

As the magazine is now produced bi-monthly, this is the first edition of 2019; so, may I take this opportunity of wishing you all a belated Happy New Year. I hope that the festive period was not too stressful and that 2019 will be a good year for you.

Before we get to the contents, and looking back 10 years, when other than December & January being a double-edition, in the February 2009 edition I wrote *'let us be thankful for the safe arrival of Jason and his family, and to God for giving him the vision to take the big step of leaving Scotland and coming to Witney as our Minister, and a new chapter in our church history.'* – so hasn't time gone quickly as his children are now either at University or College!

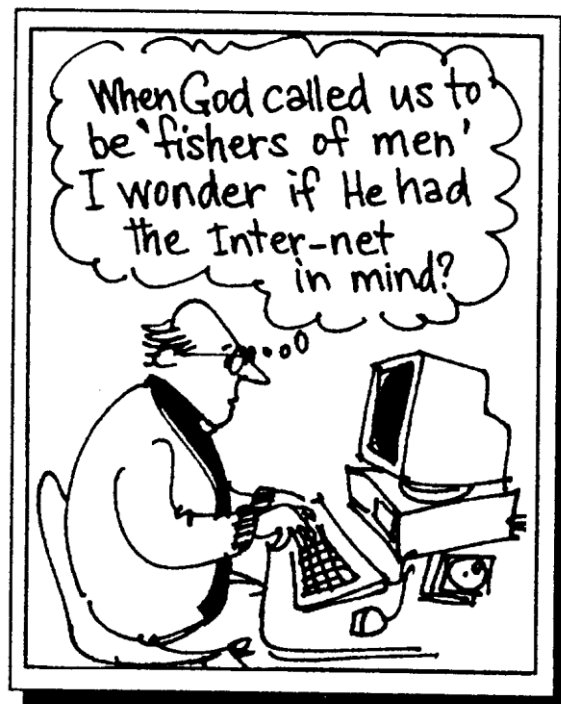
Turning now to what has been contributed to this edition: Pip Cartwright has given a short history to our Church; David Kinchin writes about the Congregationalist; Jason Boyd has given two Sermons to consider; there is an article of the Middle Eastern Christians and Nanna Blackman has given us different interpretation of the 23rd Psalm, to name but a few

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:
E-mail:

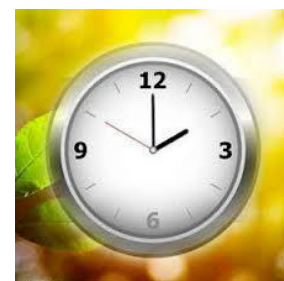
terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

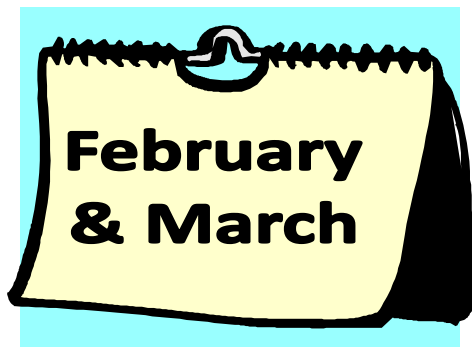


BST starts on 31st March



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Daily Prayer Time:

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Services

10.30 am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month and will normally be led by Rev Dr Jason Boyd unless advised below

February

2 nd		Saturday Praise	11.00am	
3 rd	am	Morning Worship		
	pm	Evening Worship		Communion
10 th	am	Morning Worship		
17 th	am	Morning Worship		Communion
24 th	am	Morning Worship		

March

3 rd	am	Cafe Church		
	pm	Evening Worship		Communion
10 th	am	Morning Worship		
17 th	am	Morning Worship		Communion
24 th	am	Karen Bruschi		
31 st	am	Morning Worship		
		Madley Park Residential Home	3.00pm	

April

6 th		Saturday Praise	11.00am	
7 th	am	Morning Worship		
	pm	Evening Worship		Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

February

3 rd	Church meeting	12.00pm	
5 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
	Arts Week meeting	7.30pm	
9 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
	WRAG Sewing afternoon	1.30pm – 4.30pm	
15 th – 16 th	Sale of items in Bridal Shop	10.00am – 4.00pm	Help needed
22 nd – 23 rd	Sale of items in Bridal Shop	10.00am – 4.00pm	Help needed
27 th	World Day of Prayer rehearsal	1.30pm – 3.00pm	

March

1 st	World Day of Prayer	10.30am	
	World Day of Prayer	7.00pm	
1 st – 2 nd	Sale of items in Bridal Shop	10.00am – 4.00pm	Help needed
2 nd	Creative Church	10.00am	
5 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm	
6 th	Ash Wednesday Service	9.30am	
9 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
16 th	Listening Course	10.00 – 3.00pm	
24 th	Church meeting	12.00pm	

April
2nd

Springfield School Easter service	10.00am - 12.00pm
Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
Deacon's meeting	7.30pm

Feb	02	Andrea
	04	Elaine B
	08	Pat B
	13	Judi
	16	Leah
	22	Dave W
	24	Marion



Mar	08	Joan
	11	Lesley
	19	Beryl
	22	Peter
	28	Wendell

FORMERLY

CAROLINE JANE BOUTIQUE

33A, HIGH ST. WITNEY

TOTAL SHOP CLEARANCE

Over 1,000 items must be sold:

Wedding gowns, Prom dresses,

Occasional dresses, Shoes, and more

Friday 15 - Saturday 16 February 10am – 4pm

Friday 22 - Saturday 23 February 10am – 4pm

Friday 1 - Saturday 2 March 10am – 4pm

**All items 90% off original marked
price – everything must go!**

Cash or cheque (with card) only

Bulk buyers contact 01993 709992

(between 9.30 and noon, Monday to Friday)

for earlier appointment

Pastor's Paper

What I've written here is not something to be read through in one sitting. It is something to be savoured and enjoyed. It is intended to encourage you in the life of prayer and in so doing to deepen your life in Christ.

I would invite you to read the following passage from Matthew 20:1-16. Begin with prayer and ask the Spirit to open your heart, mind and body to what God in Jesus wants to say to you. Read it through several times. You may wish to read aloud and then settle into silent reading and then silence.

Close your eyes. What do you see? What do you feel? Are there any smells? Where are you in the story? Spend time in silence and let the Spirit speak to you. Then, when you feel ready, imagine Jesus is in front of you. What do you want to say to Jesus? Then pause and let the silence hold you. When you are ready, wait to hear what Jesus is saying to you. You may want to jot down what you experienced in a notebook. This is a way of mapping how God is moving in your life. You might go back in a month, a year or 20 years and be reminded of God's grace given to you at a particular moment in time.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here

idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

This process of praying the scripture is known as 'divine reading' or *Lectio Divina*. This is a way of prayer that can become part of your habit of prayer. It engages the whole person and opens up the possibility for the words of the Bible to leap to life in our imaginations and actions.

In what follows, I offer a short excerpt from my journal after praying through this passage on the 15 August 2018. It began with the realisation that

God is generous. Why should I doubt it? God provides everything I need. God is scandalously generous with all people whether they come early or late to the vineyard.

Why should I be envious? Why jealous? God is good. God wants to give me the good. I'm challenged... I'm reminded of the generosity of God even though I do not

feel it. By faith I know it. In trust I accept it.

Then I turned to consider the nature of the job of those hired to work in the vineyard.

It strikes me that the 'work' in the vineyard is the work of prayer. I am being called to throw my meagre energy; my failing strength; my lacklustre desire into the work of prayer. I need to turn up in prayer. I need to keep trusting God. I DO NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH. God give me the power I need to keep seeking you. I am helpless without you.

I notice that I'm vigorous and free and hopeful when I run. The seeing, the breathing, the straining through the first 5 to 10 minutes takes me through to a pace of perseverance; of enjoyment. Then the finish brings immense satisfaction. I never start out full of energy. I have to make a choice. I have to warm up. I have to begin. When I run I pray 'Jesus, mercy!' I think too. Perhaps this too is what is meant by Mechthild of Magdeburg when she writes of 'The prayer' which has 'great power'. It is the effort of turning up; warming up; taking the first few steps; pushing through the strain of the first 10 minutes and persevering to the end.

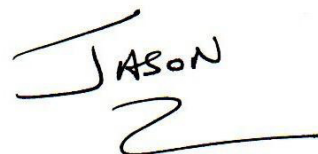
I urge you to enter into the life of prayer. Steep yourselves in scripture. Place yourselves in the still place in readiness to receive God's grace and a moving of the Spirit. It is a discipline that becomes a way of life in which we are conscious that our life comes from God and goes back to God. Prayer invites us to live thankfully, knowing that every moment is a God-moment to be lived for him. The work of the vineyard is the work of prayer and it is the hardest work and will bring the deepest joy as we discover our life is in God, 'For "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

As you develop your life of prayer, I would encourage you to fast and pray. Whatever form your fast takes, may it prompt you to receive God's generous grace and in turn to be generous with yourselves and with others.

In order to grow our generosity I would like to encourage everyone in the church to take up this challenge with me:

- When I see a problem, I will find a solution instead of trying to find someone to blame.
- When I see someone or something that doesn't meet my expectations, I will choose to focus on what is going well and how I can make things better.
- When I find myself saying something critical about another person, I will stop and choose to say something positive and encouraging instead.
- When I am faced with change and all I can see is why it won't work, I will choose to imagine the impossible and risk failure.

Shalom

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JASON" in all caps, with a stylized flourish underneath.



PRAYER LETTER

No 188

COME

What does the word 'come' conjure up in your mind?

When used it is always in the present tense. We use lots of short phrases starting with the word 'come' implying some sort of action.

Come and see.

Come and hear.

Come here.

Come and follow.

I invited a friend to 'come and see' the snowdrops in Sherbourne Woods as it is such a beautiful sight. Snowdrops are the first signs of new life towards the end of the winter. These delicate white bell like tiny flowers are a delight to the eye. The sight of them lifts your spirits looking forward to Spring and more new life.

Have you ever invited someone to come and **hear** a well known speaker, preacher, musician, band, orchestra ? Was it because you wanted to share the experience? Would it encourage the person you invited to find out more about this person or the subject or the arts?

'Come here' can be an invitation or a command depending on the intonation of the voice or the situation. More often than not it is an invitation to 'come here' to show or share something interesting or exciting or to explain how to make or do something.

In John 1:43 Jesus in finding Philip says 'follow me', which he did. Later Philip found his friend Nathaniel and told him they (meaning Andrew, Simon and himself) had found the one Moses wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth. Nathan's comment was scathing as he sarcastically questioned Philip saying, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth'? Philip then invited and probably persuaded Nathaniel to 'come and see this Jesus'.

There are several occasions when Jesus was teaching when he invited people to come to Him.

- John 6:35 ' I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry and he who believes in me will never thirst.
- Matthew 11:28 ' Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest.
- Then in John's Revelation 3:20 ' Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.'

Jesus is waiting. He is always there waiting for us to listen to Him and open the door, (metaphorically), and invite him into our ordinary everyday lives.

As Christians we might be referred to as Believers, Followers, Disciples of Jesus on the Pilgrimage of life.

The hymn, 'Come and follow me' printed opposite asks questions in the first three verses. The last verse should be our response. Yes Lord, we will come and follow you. Reflect on the words of this hymn written by John Bell and Graham Maule.

Every Blessing,
Beryl

Will you come and follow me if I
but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will
you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown,
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I
but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should
your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you
and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide if I
but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and
never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and
sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and
never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your
love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

Left blank for thought(s):

The following article has been
submitted by Nanna Blackman and
extracted from 2011 The Friendship
Book gives a new take on the well-loved
23rd Psalm verses:

The Lord is my Shepherd – That's
relationship!

I shall not want – That's supply!

He makes me lie down in green
pastures – That's rest!

He leads me beside still waters – That's
refreshment!

He restores my soul – That's healing!

He leads me in the paths of
righteousness – That's guidance!

For His name's sake – That's purpose!

Yea, though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death – That's testing!

I will fear no evil – That's protection!

For you are with me – That's
faithfulness!

Your rod and staff comfort me – That's
discipline!

You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies – That's hope!

You anoint my head with oil – That's
consecration!

My cup runs over – That's abundance!

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life – That's
blessing!

And I will live in the house of the Lord –
That's security!

Forever – That's eternity!

The following two Sermons have been prepared, given and submitted by Rev Dr Jason Boyd

Mystery Revealed

Text: Ephesians 3:1-12

Murder has been committed. The bodies are piling up. The clues are being followed. Indignant suspects are interviewed. As viewers we try to piece together the information revealed to us and we guess at who committed the crime. If it's Hercule Poirot then the suspects are gathered together in a room. He begins to tackle the mystery by drawing together all the evidence until the moment when he declares who is guilty of the crime. The mystery has been solved and we switch off the telly for the night.

There is a mystery in this letter attributed to Paul. It is a mystery that has puzzled generations of people but was only made plain to God's holy apostles and prophets. The mystery revealed to them was mind blowing. It disrupted all the assumptions about God and who could belong to God.

Before the mystery was revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit, it was accepted that God had made a promise to the people of Israel. The mark of the covenant was circumcision. Those who were not circumcised were the Gentiles. They were not part of God's people and were far away from him. The temple expressed the division between the circumcised and the uncircumcised by having a wall built. This kept the Gentiles outside of the part of the temple in which the Jews could enter.

This settled reality was shaken as the mystery was made known. Paul has already made it plain that peace has been brought about by Jesus. He has removed the barrier and the Gentiles who were far off have been brought near. They are part

of one new humanity. They have been brought together into one structure with Christ as the keystone built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This is a living, breathing temple without barriers.

Paul is furiously writing 'This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus'. He then breaks off in a diversion and picks up 'For this reason' in verse 14. In this brief phrase and the parenthesis that follows, we discover that he has been given the responsibility to get the message of God's grace out to the Gentiles. As a result of his radical message, he is a prisoner for Christ Jesus.

Paul indicates that he has written briefly about the mystery earlier in his letter. In 1:3-14, he makes plain that God's wise plan has been the 'gathering up of everything' in Christ, both in heaven and on earth. Through Jesus' blood we are forgiven and lavished with grace. The mystery is that God's grace knows no boundaries. God's gift is for all peoples – even the Gentiles!

This mystery of Christ was not made known to humans in previous times. It is only now that it has been made plain to 'his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit'. This gathering up of all things is in Christ. Christ who is our peace brings together the circumcision and the aliens. The Gentiles are now fellow heirs, members of the same body, sharing in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. They are full members of the new community.

Paul is a servant of the gospel by the gift of God's grace given by the working of his power. Though he was the least of all the saints Paul is given the great task of bringing the good news to the Gentiles.

What news? News of the boundless riches of Christ. Boundless. In a world of boundaries this speaks. God is not stingy

and mean. God in Christ breaks down walls whether they are designed to keep people out or to keep people in. God in Christ breaks down cultural barriers too. He is not into apartheid.

This is news of the mystery – of that secret hidden in God’s being and in the fabric of all that he created – being revealed. It can be seen. It is made visible. This mystery is the very wisdom of God. God’s wisdom is rich variety and not the hegemony of sameness. God’s wisdom announces to the rulers and authorities who try to crush the human spirit into a single mould that our unity is in variety; our humanity is made colourful by its radiance.

What is easy to miss is that the very-varied wisdom of God is made visible through the church. What a responsibility! God’s wisdom in its kaleidoscopic colours is revealed through the life and witness of the church.

George H. Reavis tells the story of an Animal School (Chicken Soup for the Soul, 1993, pp. 93-94): Once upon a time, the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of ‘a new world.’ So they organized a school. They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming, in fact better than his instructor, but he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practise running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He also developed a ‘charlie horse’ from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there.

It is sobering to realise that the Church has often been on the side of barriers and division. We have attempted to squeeze everyone into one mould and in doing so the Church has played its part in embracing anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic thoughts and actions. The Church has excluded women from positions of leadership. The Church has been aligned with slavery and racism in its many expressions. It has been homophobic too. The Church has been quick to define who ‘belongs’ and who is excluded.

It is a matter for thanksgiving when the Church in some of its expressions has moved to celebrate difference and encourage diversity. It is an occasion for thanksgiving when the Church has equipped people to nurture their gifts and play to their strengths. Think of the breaking down of barriers in the abolishment of slavery and apartheid. Think of when she has been at the forefront of environmental campaigns; has united through agencies such as Christian Aid to act for systemic changes to the causes of poverty; has found ways of welcoming the leadership of women and including those of different sexual

orientations. The Church has been at its best when it is united in its differences. Back to the mystery revealed. This mystery is not a whimsical, spur of the moment thing. This is in harmony with God's eternal purpose which was enacted in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is through Christ that we have access to God with boldness and confidence through faith in him. This contrasts with the temple in which only a certain race could gather in the temple, only the priests could enter the Holy Place and only the High Priest the Holy of Holies. The mystery hidden is now revealed. All are included in God's new humanity. God's grace is boundless, a wealth to be shared with all people. God revealed his wisdom through the church, a kaleidoscopic community of breath taking beauty. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared, "You are the rainbow people of God."

Giver of Gifts

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Mention spiritual gifts and everyone sits up straight, snaps to attention, and wonders what's coming. There are those immediately inspired by talk of the Holy Spirit and they have strong views about the spiritual gifts, replete with stories of their experiences. There are others who recoil in fear. It is a mysterious business and seems out of this world, for another time and place. Some will carry negative experiences of being told they weren't spiritual enough and didn't have enough faith. Enthusiastic or reticent about the spiritual gifts, most people are curious. In particular, we hope for a definitive guide with all our questions answered irrefutably.

A pivotal moment in the modern Pentecostal movement happened in Azusa Street in 1906. Speaking in tongues was linked to being filled with the Holy Spirit. It

was only much later after the Second World War that charismatic experience found its way into mainstream churches both Catholic and Protestant. In the 70's and 80's many mainstream churches in the UK were deeply affected as groups of charismatics, unable to convince their own churches of their practices and theological views, left them to form house and community churches.

There were some charismatics who were clear: if you were filled with the Holy Spirit then the evidence of it would result in speaking in tongues. Those who could not or would not accept this view could be left feeling as if they weren't spiritual enough. The impression was that if you weren't raising your hands and speaking in tongues then somehow your spiritual experience was insufficient. It was as if those who did not speak in tongues were second class Christians.

There were those who rejected the charismatic movement vociferously. Being filled with the Holy Spirit was the experience of all Christians at the moment of placing faith in Jesus Christ. The gifts talked about in the New Testament were for the early days of the church but not for now. The spiritual gifts, especially those deemed to be 'supernatural', were for a previous time.

Often I've been asked, 'So what do you think about the spiritual gifts?' This is usually followed by a query, 'What do you think about speaking in tongues?' I find myself reticent to enter into the discussion because I suspect the questioner has already formed their opinion and is hoping that my view will match theirs.

The Corinthian followers of Jesus had a fixation with the spiritual gifts, especially speaking in tongues. It would seem that they thought that because they spoke in tongues they were filled with the Spirit and possessed a special level of knowledge and

wisdom. There was a spiritual elitism in which those who did not speak in tongues clearly were not as spiritual.

To make matters worse, there was a class divide between those who were wealthy and those who were poor. This is evidenced by Paul's words about the greed of those who came to the table, having already eaten their fill and coming drunk whilst others go hungry. The wealthy were parading their wealth and humiliating those 'who have nothing' (1 Corinthians 11:22).

So when Paul turns to the topic of spiritual gifts – or spiritual things, he begins at the beginning. He carefully lays the groundwork for his later discussion regarding tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

The heart of the problem both for the Corinthians then and Christians today, is that our focus is on the spiritual gifts. We are fascinated by tongues. There is something titillating in talk about miracles and healing. It is riveting. It is fascinating. And we all hope that maybe we will be the lucky ones to be given one of these more spectacular gifts. It would be amazing, wouldn't it? To be caught up in the inexplicable world of tongues and healings and miracles.

Our focus is on the gifts and not the giver. The spiritual gifts are not something we earn or deserve. The spiritual gifts are not something to be longed for because it will be an exciting adventure for us and give us good stories to tell. No. The gifts are given by God and they are just that: gifts.

Paul takes them back to the very beginning. The bedrock of spiritual gifts and spiritual things is our common confession. The Corinthians were reminded of their days worshipping non-animate idols in the temples. People would get caught up in a frenzy of excitement. They worked themselves into a state in

which they spoke in tongues. The idols were mute, unable to speak. Implied in what Paul is saying is that speaking in tongues or ecstatic utterances in and of itself is not evidence of the Holy Spirit.

The evidence that one is Spirit filled is to make the common confession, 'Jesus is Lord.' The Spirit cannot be the source for, 'Let Jesus be cursed.' Incomprehensible tongues are not evidence of the Spirit but rather the clear declaration 'Jesus is Lord.' The common creed is not merely something that is said, it is something that is lived.

The common giver of the gifts is our one God though there is colourful variety. There is one Spirit that gives a variety of gifts. There is one Lord that gives a variety of services. There is one God who activates and works the gift out. Here we have a hint of the Trinity.

The Giver gives the gifts for a particular purpose: the gifts are for the common good. Paul scribbles down nine gifts leaving the most troublesome, contentious gifts until the last. These gifts are given, not to make us feel special; not to give us something to brag about; not to bolster our image as super-spiritual people. These gifts are given for the common good; for the mutual building up of the community; for the encouragement and growth of all who make the common confession 'Jesus is Lord'.

Paul's list is not comprehensive. These are examples of gifts given. Furthermore, he does not explain what he means by the various gifts though some are fairly clear. It is likely that the word of wisdom and knowledge are closely related. The word of wisdom is spoken and gives us insight in how to live well. The word of knowledge may have been understood to be an insight into something that could not be known in any other way other than with

the Spirit's help. It may also refer to a gift of inspired teaching.

It is likely that the gift of faith that Paul had in mind was of the kind that moves mountains. The gift of healing is given to bring wellness to the sick. The working of miracles is the gift that has to do with that which is out of ordinary experience (faith and healing would fall into this category too). The gift of prophecy is speaking God's word under the inspiration of the Spirit. Paul probably has in mind speaking in an extraordinary way, perhaps characterised by ecstasy and frenzy. The discernment of spirits is not clearly understood but suggest special insight given to judge if what is being said or done is consistent with the confession 'Jesus is Lord'. The gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues is Spirit inspired speech which is unintelligible to those who hear it and therefore requires Spirit inspired interpretation.

These gifts were understood and practiced in particular ways in Paul's time. And even though we cannot be sure of all that is meant by each spiritual gift, we can be sure that the Spirit still gives gifts in our time. There are many more gifts than Paul lists. The gifts are given to each one as the Spirit chooses. One giver. Many gifts. The common confession, 'Jesus is Lord' is the basis for receiving the gifts from the common giver and are used for the common good of the body.

Corinne was born with Down's syndrome and came to church with her mother. There was a kind of unspoken pity for Corinne by many in the congregation. Corinne's mother wanted to be confirmed with her daughter. The vicar was perplexed wondering how to catechize someone who was disabled.

The vicar met with Corinne and her mother and they talked about believing and belonging to the church in the simplest

terms. They talked about how everyone has their part to play in the church. The vicar talked about a few people from the bishop down to the Church Warden and thought about the jobs they did. The vicar identified, in a somewhat condescending way, that Corinne's job was welcoming people and being very friendly.

The following week they resumed their chat. The vicar had forgotten to make a list of the people and their jobs and was surprised to find that Corinne remembered them all. The vicar was jolted by this and suddenly saw with fresh insight that Corinne was truly the most welcoming person in the church. She was always open to others and exuded love.

When she was confirmed and began receiving communion, the vicar noticed that as she received the bread and wine '...there was an incredible attentiveness and calm in the way she received Communion' (Rhodes,ⁱ p. 14). '...The one person in the church who would be instantly judged as less than the others, and to be damaged in her personhood, was in reality one of the most profoundly alive and loving... Poor girl, people would say sympathetically. Poor people, thought the vicar, who often wished a few more of the congregation were able to engage with God in the way she did, and to love other people with that same Christlike directness' (p. 14).

The giver of gifts has given each of us gifts for the common good. Do we know our gifts and use them with humility for the sake of Jesus and others? Do we see the gifts in others and receive the encouragement offered?

ⁱ David Rhodes (2013) Faith in Dark Places (London: SPCK, revised edition).

The following article has been written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, and is entitled:

A Wandering Church

It occurred to me that a number of our friends worshipping with us, who have joined us recently, may like to know something about the history of our Church.

So for those who are aware of our background and history and have read my previous articles, please bear with me. Witney Congregational Church claims to be founded in 1662 when the residing Lecturer (Vicar) of St. Mary's Parish Church was ejected with some of his congregation.

The detailed background leading up to the Great Ejection need not be repeated here, but I feel it necessary to place Witney and its people in the general context of the nation's political and religious setting.

With the onset of the Civil War in 1642, everybody became involved whether they liked it or not. No matter where you lived, people had to choose. From 1649 after the execution of King Charles I to 1660, England became a Republic. Independents especially Congregationalists were given positions of power and influence in the Church, Courts and Universities. Learned non-conformists were often placed in vacant livings as 'lecturers' or in some cases 'Royalist' clergy were dispossessed of their positions. These actions were to fuel the fire of revenge in 1662.

Oliver Cromwell allowed tolerance and freedom of worship hoping that religions of different persuasion could work together in a National Church.

Witney was an important wool market town and became noted for cloth and blanket making. Even during the 16th Century some West Oxfordshire families were accused of disseminating the scripture in English and questioning Catholic doctrine. By the early 17th Century there seemed to be evidence of

a leaning toward Puritans and during the period of the Commonwealth Witney was considered to be a Puritan stronghold. The Lectureship in the Parish Church was held by John Rowe, M.A. in 1652.

With the restoration of the monarchy (King Charles II) in 1660 the 'cavalier' Parliament and the 'official' church brought about a change in the balance of power. No doubt grievances surfaced and revenge was a predictable reaction. There was a drive to enforce religious conformity. All clergy were required to make a public declaration of their consent to the contents of the prayer book which had been revised with an Anti Puritan bias. All Ministers failing to comply by St Bartholomew's Day, 24th August 1662, were to be ejected and deprived of their living.

William Gilbert M.A. Lecturer in St Mary's Parish Church apparently didn't comply and subsequently was deprived of his living. This could be said to be the birthday of Witney Congregational Church. According to Calamy in his **History of South Area Congregational Churches** "Witney Congregational Church is supposed to date back to 1662 or very nearly so". 1662 to 1688 was a time of persecution for all non-conformists. Conventicals (secret unlawful religious meetings) appeared everywhere. The non-conformist church was driven underground and it is not surprising that any written evidence was highly dangerous and probably nonexistent. Thus information and evidence of our early church is sparse and is mainly conjecture based on what went on elsewhere. After the Puritan Lecturer William Gilbert at St Mary's Church was ejected, we hear no more of him or his supporters. However it seems Witney was a fairly convenient area for ejected clergy to lay low or return to.

It would make sense to think that many Non-conformists crossed the River Windrush and found a spiritual home at Cogges. It is

known that the Lord of Cogges Manor, William Blake, was a Dissenter and that Congregationalists and Presbyterians worshipped at Cogges in the Church or later at the Manor. It is known that the benefice at Cogges was vacant and with William Blake's sympathy, up to 200 Dissenters worshipped there. Local Magistrates turned a blind eye until probably 1665.

The Conventicles in Cogges got so popular that the Royalist Anglican elements in Witney became angry enough to do something about it. Dr Francis Gregory, the Headmaster of the newly founded Grammar School (1660) was an ardent Royalist and later became a Chaplain to Charles II (1670). It is recorded that "He confronted the local Dissenters at Cogges" (compelled the Magistrates to enforce the law) "and evicted them".

In 1672 Charles II recognised that suppression had not been successful. The 1672 1st Declaration of Indulgence allowed Ministers to license their Church. It is recorded that Francis Hubert M.A., the 'rejected' Vicar of Winterborne Monkton was licensed to preach at his house in Witney on 10th August 1672. Originally he settled in Oxford but after the Five Mile Act, he had to move and eventually settled in Witney. By many he is considered to be the first pastor of Witney Independent (Congregational Church). He was educated at Westminster School and Balliol College, Oxford. For illegal preaching in 1676 he spent 6 months in the Bocardo Prison in Oxford.

It was during the sad time of persecution that a member of the local Gunn family was a Minister and Member of the Congregational Church. It appears he was obliged to visit Eynsham and in so doing he was punished for being a Dissenter. It so affected his mind that he drowned himself in a part of Emma's Dyke known thereafter as 'Gunn's Hole'. This was part of the Town

Ditch and was situated at the southern end of the High Street.

Where the Church worshipped in the latter part of the 17th Century no-one knows. In 1703 a Rev. Samuel Mather, married to a daughter of the wealthy Townsend family who owned Staple Hall Inn, gained a licence to worship in his house, which was part of Staple Hall. Staple Hall was renamed recently and is now the Mill House Care Home found on the corner of Bridge Street and Newland at the double roundabout where Wood Green, West End, Newland and Bridge Street meet. Rooms in Staple Hall were used for all types of meetings so it is likely that sometimes the congregation met there. With the financial wealth of the Townsends, the Rev. Mather built a Meeting House along Marlborough Lane (then just called Meeting House Lane). The Rev. Samuel Mather came from a famous New England family who were all eminent Preachers. It was noted by an early historian (Calamy) that "he had a small congregation estimated to be between 400 and 500". One wonders what a large Church was like. He described "that thirty are said to be gentlemen, ye rest, tradesmen, farmers and labourers". He was still the Minister in 1728 when he passed the reins to a gentleman named Blake. Samuel Mather died in 1733. This, our first permanent purpose built Church building, was used right up to 1828. It is still standing today and is used by the Boy Scouts Association.

We are indebted to the Rev. Thomas Taylor, who was our Minister in 1806, for the history of our Church up to his time. If written records existed they never survived and he, with Rev. Nicholas Hellings (1826), gathered information regarding the previous century from "aged" persons in their congregation whose parents were connected to the Church. Thus the information about the Ministers who followed Rev. Samuel Mather M.A. is rather

scant and it seems that numbers fluctuated and occasionally it was shut up for a season and re-opened sometimes as a United Presbyterian Baptist Church. Nevertheless, at that time, it was recognised as the principle non-conformist church and played an influential role in Witney.

The following article written by Canon David Winter, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers the weather, and is entitled:

Organised rain?

Recently the weather men and women have taken to talking about 'organised' rain to be expected following drizzle on western parts. It's nonsense, of course. Rain isn't 'organised', it isn't 'tame'. Like all our weather it happens because of vast natural laws of nature, and there's precious little we can do about it. Pleasant summer sun can set fire to forests. The rain that nourishes our crops can turn to storms and floods. It's the disorganisation, or unpredictability, of weather that catches our attention.

The Psalms in the Bible are full of descriptions about the weather - the lightning and thunder, the gentle spring rain, the baking heat of midday and 'the barren and dry land where there is no water'. The weather is part of the mystery and unpredictability of life; the constantly moving background of life on earth.

In truth, it is the price we pay for living in our beautiful world, with its lakes and marshlands, deserts and rivers. It is the world we have from our Creator - green and pleasant sometimes, and wild and scary at others. The world is not a 'tame' place.

The Bible seems to think we should take the good with the bad – even the weather of February. As Psalm 148 says: 'Praise the

Lord from the earth...fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word!'

Or, as our grandmothers used to say: 'Whether the weather be cold or whether the weather be hot, we'll weather the weather whatever the weather, whether we like it – or not!'

The following article, author unknown, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

QWERTY celebrates a big birthday

The inventor of the QWERTY keyboard – now almost universally adopted in English-speaking countries – was born 200 years ago, on 14th February 1819, in Pennsylvania. Christopher Latham Scholes was an Episcopalian who could trace his ancestry back to two of the original Mayflower pilgrims, John and Priscilla Alden.

Although he did not invent the typewriter from scratch, Scholes was instrumental in developing a successful working model. Vital to this was his changing the keyboard, which was originally in alphabetical order but had a tendency to jam. Scholes rearranged the levers so that frequently used keys would not interfere with each other.

Scholes started out as a printer and then, after moving to Wisconsin, became a newspaper publisher. He served two terms as a Senator for Wisconsin, one as a Democrat and one as a Republican.

His typewriter was not a commercial success until he joined forces with the Remington company, selling them half his rights for \$12,000. In 1878 he added a shift key so that the writer could switch easily between capitals and lower-case letters. He died in 1890, probably of tuberculosis.

The following articles have been written & submitted by David Kinchin, and is entitled:

The Fate of “The Congregationalist”

The Congregationalist magazine has been running since October 1997 when Val Price edited its first issue. Ian Gregory took over as editor in 2000 and served in the role for ten years. In April 2011 I became editor; at the same time the magazine changed from A4 to its current smaller A5 size. You are holding in your hand this **112th issue** but for how much longer will we have a magazine?

There is no doubt that sales of the magazine have declined. In 1997 there were 312 member churches in the Federation and almost 12,000 members within those churches. Today, there are 248 churches and around 6,250 members, so the number of people likely to buy a copy has almost halved.

The Federation website is starting to cover many matters which might usually be covered in the magazine. Numbers of those using the website have steadily increased. Younger people tend to prefer the website while older members may still prefer a printed format – I appreciate this is a generalisation but it does have some merit.

The other issue to consider is financial. Should it be expected that The Congregationalist makes a profit? *It never has done.* And by the same token, *the website has never made a profit either.*

Communicating with members is not about profit and loss. It is about conveying information through the best medium for that purpose. A communications group has been set up and is exploring what people want from the magazine and how much they are prepared to pay for the privilege of continuing to receive it. Current issues are:

- Should it have editorial independence as it currently does?
- Is the magazine a forum for you to discuss church life?
- Should it appear more frequently? Bi-monthly maybe? *We need to*

*communicate with our members and not everyone likes the Internet. **This is the alternative.***

- Do readers think there is a place for a voice outside Council? *For example where people can express a point of view or engage with a new project or simply share their good news.*
- Should the cost of production prevent it from continuing?

I will continue to edit the magazine but it relies heavily upon your support and your contributions (articles) to continue to make the magazine diverse and interesting. I most certainly don't wish to write all the magazine myself!

David Kinchin (editor)

It's back!

CF May Assembly!

It would be wonderful to see you this year:

Saturday 11th May 2019
West Park Conference Centre
319 Perth Road,
Dundee
DD2 1NN

There will more information available through the mailing sent to your church and on the website. The day starts with refreshments at 10am. The venue is fully accessible and there will be provision for children and youth, if required.

The venue has plenty of parking and is only a few minutes' drive from the railway station (taxi fare £6). Lunch can be pre-ordered and all dietary requirements can be met. There are a few local shops close by.

Janet Wootton will become President and we anticipate accrediting four students onto the roll of ministries.

At the heart of Congregationalism is fellowship, so come and be with others from Congregational churches across Great Britain. Come in love, come in joy, come in peace.

The Congregationalist

ISSUE No.1

October 1997



INTRODUCING THE NEW MAGAZINE

THE CONGREGATIONALIST – the Federation's new magazine, which will be going into full production in January. There will be six issues a year and it will incorporate several publications currently being produced within the Federation – including the Quarterly, the Bulletin and Congregational Briefing. It will feature news from CWM and aim to cover all aspects of activity within the Federation.

Both your editor, Val Price, and production editor, Ian Gregory, are professional journalists, and we will do our very best to make the new publication attractive, lively and relevant. To do that we need *your* input.

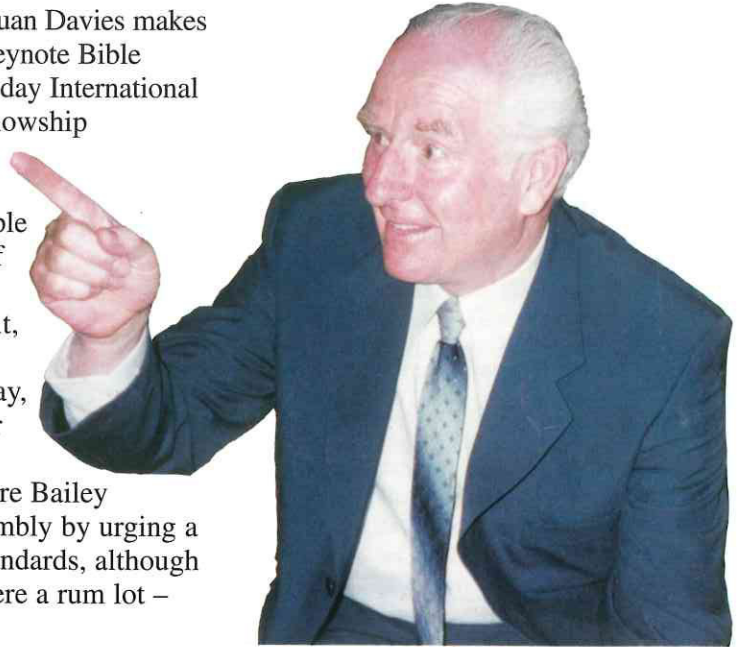
We need to be kept up-to-date with news and events in the areas and local churches. We will welcome pictures – really good pictures.

And we want your reaction to the items and issues we feature. If you like it – tell your friends about it. If you don't like it – tell us. But don't leave it there. Take the trouble to tell us what you would really like to read about. And be sure to let us know what you're up to in your little corner of the World Church.

Write to me at The Manse, Pound Green, Guilden Morden, Royston, Herts SG8 0JZ.

Val Price

WELSH minister Ieuan Davies makes a point during his keynote Bible studies at the five – day International Congregational Fellowship conference in July at York University. More than 300 people from many parts of the world attended the sixth such event, at which musical director was Sue Ray, of Newcastle under Lyme. American minister Steven Ware Bailey galvanised the assembly by urging a return to Puritan standards, although he admitted they were a rum lot – see pages 11-14.



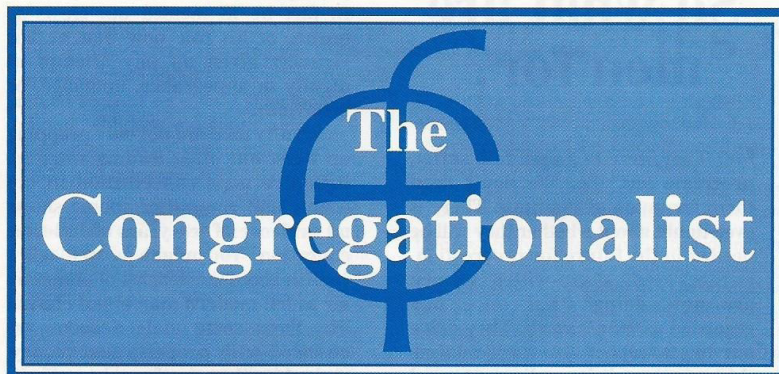
FOUR-POINT DRIVE IS APPROVED TO KICK-START RENEWAL

NEW plans to improve training, leadership, and work among children have been approved by the Council of the Congregational Federation. Funding from the Council for World Mission is being sought to enable a dream series of hopes to be realised, making existing churches more effective, and enabling some threatened with closure to stay open and grow. But Federation Secretary Graham Adams also warns that some churches have reached a 'critical point' at which they must change or close. SEE PAGES 2, 3.

INSIDE.... Graham and Andrea inducted – p.3
Do we need ministers? – p.6, 7
Big project at Southam – p.9

Awkward Squad for 25 years – p.10
Area News – p.16, 17
Minister opens a pub – p.24

AMAZING THINGS ARE HAPPENING



Issue No.46

July 2005

'Holy kiss'
(Romans 16.16)
for John
as he
heads
the Fed

Surprise colourful moment at the end of a happy and well managed Cheltenham May Assembly.... New President John Nockels was confronted by David Kinchin (Hope, Oldham) who chose this way to wish him well. David had just invited the assembly to the next venue at Oswaldtwistle, Lancs, on May 13 next year.



INSIDE:

Assembly: p3, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 Area News: p17-22
Is Jesus 'Lord'? p3 Does Communion matter? p24, 25

Retiring President Val Price reflects on the transforming power of earnest prayer



GOD'S GUIDANCE sometimes comes 'with a kick in the pants' Federation retiring President Val Price told the May Assembly. In her report, Val said her experience in Wales, Scotland and various areas led her to know that 'the Lord is at work in our churches'.

At the end of my year I can say without any reservation that the Lord is at work in our churches. Where fellowships have prayed earnestly together to seek His will for the way forward – and been prepared to listen and follow – the most amazing things are happening. Many of our churches are still small but even some small, elderly congregations are taking adventurous steps and reaching out to the community around them.

I have been invited to special ceremonies to mark the opening of new buildings, refurbishments, extensions. The common factor, it seems, is prayer, and a genuine seeking for guidance: and responding to that guidance even if it seems to come sometimes with a kick in the pants.

In the wider Church, I have had the privilege of sharing with people from so many other denominations – at the annual assemblies, for instance, of the Union of Welsh Independents and the United Reformed Church; at gatherings of Churches Together in England and Christian Aid hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

All this reinforced by belief that it is only by coming face to face with people who may think differently that we can realise how much we have in common – and how we can put aside our differences to work together for the common good.

But from the experiences I have had in the smallest churches to some of the greatest palaces in the land, what will stand out in my mind is the memory of the people I have met. God's instruments, all of them, in the building of his Kingdom.

I'm not going to apologise for sounding upbeat in this report. Of course I'm aware that some of our churches are struggling, that they may not be able to survive. Of course I'm aware that there's a mammoth task ahead to reach out to the children, young people – and older people! – around us: to bring them into relationship with the Lord. And quite frankly, if we're going to try to do all this on our own we'd just as well give up.

From what I've seen, though, it has confirmed my belief that we won't be doing it on our own if we really try to find out and follow where Jesus is leading.

Bible Study

In this edition, and with permission from Ken & Marjorie Lee's family, and in memoriam to Rev Ken Lee, a series of Bible Studies, written by Ken and first submitted back in 1999, will be re-produced and is entitled:

MEANDERING IN MARK

"Meander" means "To wander deviously or aimlessly". Perchance this is not too accurate a description of these studies; it is hoped that they are not too devious nor totally aimless. However, the term "meander" is used to indicate an approach which takes its time, stops as needful to let a thought, an idea, an insight develop - all with the purpose of seeing what the Lord has to say to his people. May He speak, and to Him be the glory.

8. Mark 3: 7 – 19a

Mark has set the scene of opposition to Jesus, to both his teaching and his actions; opposition by people of influence and of some power in the land. Now Mark goes on to tell of those who support Jesus and who continue to be with him despite the opposition of the "good religious people" and of those who might be regarded as "establishment politicians". Mark moves the story on, out into the open air again, to beside the sea. As Jesus moves out from Capernaum, or whatsoever other community of people he has been amongst in Galilee, a great number of people follow him. But it was not only from Galilee that they came. Mark speaks of news of what Jesus was doing spreading far and near so that people came from not only Judaea and Jerusalem, but even from Idumea, nigh on 100 kilometres south of Galilee, as well as arriving from around Tyre and Sidon to the north-west and beyond Jordan to the east and south-east. The picture which Mark paints is of an

eager crowd from far and near, seeking not so much to hear what Jesus has to say, as to obtain from him help in their needs. They came because they had heard what he was doing. Then, as now, it was deeds rather than words which attracted people; yet the deeds brought those people within range of hearing the words, the words concerning the Kingdom of God.

Mark, at this point in his account, gives no record of anything which Jesus teaches. The only instruction recorded is that to his disciples to have a boat ready so that Jesus can distance himself somewhat from the crowd, the crowd who, by their very eagerness to touch him, to receive his help, were in grave danger of destroying the very one from whom they sought aid. How very human this is, this self-centredness which demands help without any thought of the cost to the one who is trying to give that help. Despite the pressure, Mark records that Jesus cured many. Yet however many he cured, there always seemed yet more to press in upon him; in physical terms there was more than one man could do. It still remains so to this day, there is always more need than an individual, or even a whole group of individuals can meet, because human need requires much more than "cures", it requires a change of direction and purpose that can come through listening to and following the "Son of God".

Once again Mark introduces this term "Son of God" into his Gospel story, introduces it again on the lips of those described as being unclean spirits. However, unlike the unclean spirit which possessed the man in the synagogue, back in Mark 1:23-26, who was afraid of the holiness of Jesus, these unclean spirits adopt an attitude of supplication or worship, "they fell down before him". Had perhaps the news of the release from his unclean spirit of that man in the synagogue and of the wonderful

change that this had made to his life reached these poor possessed people? We do not know. All we know from Mark's account is that these are the people who had the eyes to see, the understanding to know who exactly Jesus was and still is. Scarcely a person took any notice of what they were saying. Jesus did. He heard it very clearly and told them not to tell other people who he was, "not to make him known". Once again Mark pictures Jesus, Jesus whom Mark proclaims as "Jesus Christ, the Son of God", as not wanting people to accept this fact because other people tell them, but rather to come to their own conclusion as to who he is from their personal encounter with him. True evangelism is about introducing people to Jesus, not about telling others what they ought to believe concerning him.

Mark now introduces, or in some cases re-introduces, a group of people whose names were quite possibly familiar to the first readers of his Gospel as having been close to Jesus in his earthly ministry. The setting is full of symbolism. Jesus went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted. "The mountain" is so often the place of God's disclosure; Moses was called up the mountain by God to receive the Commandments, Elijah had his renewed experience of God and his fresh calling to new service upon the mountain. Jesus goes up the mountain and calls those whom he wants, wants for special service. As he called them, so they came to him - twelve of them. Again a significant number - the number of the tribes of Israel, the People of God. And, says Mark, he named them "apostles", that is, people who are charged with a specific commission. The commission is described under three heads, each of which remains to this day the task of the People of God.

First, they are to be with him. How easy it

is to forget that this is the first requirement of any form of witness to and service of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the requirement to be with him! This is not just about proximity, about physical closeness, but rather is it about closeness in heart and mind, of becoming at one with Jesus so that as apostles they would think his thoughts, love as he loved and reach out to others as he reached out. Being with Jesus is about going the whole way, wherever it might lead. It seems highly unlikely that those whom Jesus called to him here on the mountain realised just what "being with him" was going to involve. The first excitement and joy at being selected, of being called, would have buoyed them up to enthusiastic response. It was only as the days went by that they began to realise the full meaning of what being with Jesus involved and also the costs of ceasing to be with him.

Meanwhile their active attention must have been given to the second and third parts of their calling - to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. These two things still remain the practical activity of all whom Jesus calls to be with him. While Jesus calls men and women to come to him, this call to come to him is always followed by the word "Go". That which one has received from Jesus, concerning him and his Gospel is to be shared, to be proclaimed. There is an authority given to the words of each apostle, for a proclamation is an announcement with "official authority". Those whom Jesus sends out in his name, are sent out in power. This is reflected in the words concerning authority to cast out demons. The Good News of the presence of the Kingdom of God has in itself the power to cast out every demon that haunts the lives of human beings - the demons of fear, of hatred, of lust, of greed, of self-loathing,

of vengeance - to name but some. All are under that authority which Jesus gives to those whom he has called to be with him. Yet it is only as we are indeed "with him" that that authority can have its effect to release men and women into fullness of life. It is the release of the love of God in and through Jesus which destroys the hold of demons upon people's lives. So we find Mark painting this picture of Jesus calling the Twelve to him as the symbolic picture of the New Israel which was to, and still does, go forth into all the world in his name, making the Good News a present reality for all peoples.

Mark now lists the names of the apostles. First is Simon who is here introduced as being given a new name by Jesus, the name of Peter. Mark gives no explanation of this new name, nor any reason for Peter's name to be first in the list. Perhaps Mark felt that no explanation was necessary since Peter was so well known as a foremost leader of the Church. Peter is followed in the list by James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James. It is interesting that James precedes John and that these brothers precede Peter's brother Andrew in the list. We can only speculate as to the reason for this; perchance it may be because by the time Mark wrote his account James had already been killed by Herod Agrippa some two decades earlier and was therefore held in high esteem as a martyr. We just do not know, any more than we know why Jesus called the brothers Boanerges, which may, or may not, have meant "sons of thunder". The reason and the meaning seem to be obscure and further speculation upon them does not appear to produce much spiritual blessing. Nor does it seem profitable at this stage in looking at Mark's account to spend time on Andrew and the next seven men named in the list of apostles, some of whom Mark does not mention again. The main purpose of the

list does not seem to be to give an accurate record of those closest to Jesus in his daily ministry, as it is to set the picture of the Church as the New Israel, the Resurrection of the Twelve Tribes of the people of God.

There remains the last name of the list, that of Judas Iscariot. Much attention has been given to the meaning of Iscariot. The least unlikely suggestion is that it means "from Kerioth". Kerioth was apparently a village in the area to the east of the Dead Sea and, if this was from where Judas came, he would have a somewhat different background and outlook on life to those disciples who came from Galilee. However the whole matter as to the origins of Judas Iscariot remains obscure. To his name are added the words "who betrayed him". Mark here steps out of his usual narrative pattern, which is to keep his readers wondering "what comes next?" by foreshadowing the act of betrayal and naming its perpetrator. Could it be that it was impossible for Mark to think of Judas without thinking of his act of betrayal? Or does Mark include these words as a reminder to his readers, and to us, that even being called to be with Jesus, to proclaim the Gospel, to receive authority to cast out demons, still leaves within the human heart the possibility of betrayal? Those called to be apostles are not called because they are perfect but that they might stay with Jesus and, by God's grace, become as him. Within the New Israel as within the Old, there remains still the possibility of turning from God, of betrayal of his outpoured love. Betrayal and opposition come from the least expected of places; it is to such unexpected opposition that Mark will next turn his attention as he continues to show people facing the question as to whom Jesus really is.



The following two articles have been extracted from Parish Pump and concerns Middle Eastern Christians

Christians in the Middle East face 'imminent extinction'

Christians have been in the Middle East for nearly 2000 years, but they now face the threat of 'imminent extinction', the Archbishop of Canterbury has warned.

In a recent letter to The Sunday Telegraph, Archbishop Justin Welby told of a visit he had made about 15 years ago to the home of an elderly Palestinian Christian man in Galilee. 'Foolishly, I asked, "How long has your family been Christian?" The man gave me a look and replied, "Since about the time of St Paul".'

Yet, now Christians in the region are facing 'the worst situation since the Mongol invasions of the 13th Century', Archbishop Justin said. It is vital that these Christians in the Middle East know 'they are not forgotten by the world, or treated as an irrelevant minority, a societal optional extra, or even a threat'. Archbishop Justin called on the Government to take in more refugees.

According to the Barnabas Fund, following a freedom of information request, the Home Office has not admitted a single Christian among the 1,112 Syrian refugees resettled in the UK in the first three months of last year.

The four Christians out of 1,358 Syrian refugees recommended by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), for resettlement in the UK were rejected. Only Muslim refugees were granted permission to resettle.

Prince Charles has praised the 'extraordinary grace and capacity for forgiveness' of the thousands of Middle Eastern Christians facing persecution.

Speaking late last year, the Prince said he had been "deeply humbled" by meeting

Christians from the Middle East 'who, with such inspiring faith and courage, are battling oppression and persecution.'

He wanted to assure these Christians of 'steadfast support and most heartfelt prayers' as they battle 'oppression and persecution.'



The following article written by Lester Amann, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers darkness and light, and is entitled:

Shine, Jesus, Shine

At the flick of a switch or a press of a button we can illuminate our homes with all kinds of gadgets. City life has street lights everywhere and if we need a light for dark places we can use a torch.

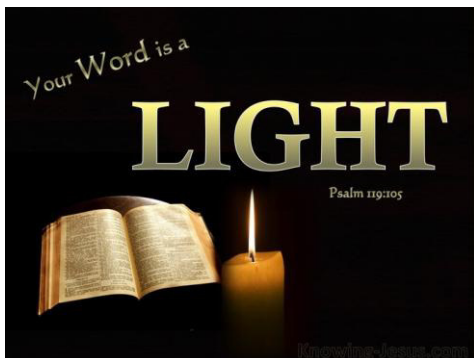
Life for people in Bible days must have been so different. The darkness was something to be feared. Anyone in the open at night was vulnerable to attack, not only by robbers and thieves but also by animals. The Bible often mentions darkness to be a symbol for evil, whether real or imaginary. The Old Testament records watchmen on the walls of a city or large town who were employed to protect the inhabitants. Watchmen were impatient for the sunrise

and a psalmist thinks of his soul waiting on God to deliver him, like the watchman waiting for the dawn. (Psalm 130:6)

The Bible often associates darkness for inappropriate behaviour, problems, difficulties, wrong-doing and malevolence. Darkness can also mean a wrong course of action, wilfulness and stupidity. When the Scriptures speak of *light* this shows up what is amiss with our lives. Light can reveal a problem and show the way to avoid or overcome it.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about people walking in darkness and seeing a great light. This in turn would change their lives for the better. He was describing the coming of Jesus who would be a light for us. He would come to reveal everything that is wrong with us, and to be the means to bring us a new life, a new purpose and a new future. He would break the power of sin and death and make it possible for everyone to be reconciled to God.

In a world that needs to see the healing and saving light of Jesus, we are called to be lights of hope, peace and love. What we do and what we say matters. Our actions and words should point people to our heavenly Father. Sometimes this is difficult and sometimes we fail. But we still should try to be like the psalmist who, while thinking about God, said *Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.* (Psalm 119:105)



The following article written by Tim Lenton pays tribute to Buddy Holly and friends and is entitled:

The day the music died

The day the music died – according to Don McLean in his epic song American Pie – was 60 years ago, on 3rd February 1959, when rock-and-roll star Buddy Holly died in a plane crash in Iowa. With him were two other singers, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper.

Charles Hardin (Buddy) Holly, who was 22 when he died, was born in Lubbock, Texas, at the heart of America's Bible Belt, and he and his family were closely associated with the Tabernacle Baptist Church there, though he himself was seen as something of a rebel.



His style was initially influenced by gospel and country music, and he formed groups with friends from his high school. After opening for Elvis Presley in 1955, he shifted to rock and roll. With his new band, The Crickets, he achieved international success with songs such as *That'll be the Day*.

Immensely talented, he wrote, recorded and produced his own material and is often thought of as the man who defined the traditional rock-and-roll line-up of two guitars, bass and drums.

He was a big influence on such major artistes as Bob Dylan, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton and was one of the first artistes inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.