

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH



Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple,
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)

April & May 2021



Have you ever been on a rollercoaster? Lots of people really enjoy that feeling of excitement, anticipation as the car hurtles round the track and you are lurched from side to side and even taken upside down at times!

It certainly seems like the past year has been a time of ups and downs, hasn't it? We appear to have lurched from one period of uncertainty to another.

But doesn't time fly by as it is now just over a year since COVID and the associated restrictions, which are slowly being removed and Spring is here at last! The daffodils are everywhere, and soon their golden trumpets will herald the return of life and light and warmth. They are good companions for us during Lent, reminding us of the inexpressible joy that lies ahead of us, both on Easter Sunday morning, and also one day beyond the grave.



Our church is closed, but those who have broadband internet connection and a device connected to it, our Sunday morning services are being done via Zoom; and it is hoped that you will take this opportunity to be part of this when you receive the associated link by e-mail or input the codes as published on the Sunday Link



Once again, I hope this edition of the magazine will remind you that you are not forgotten; so, may God bless you and keep

you in the months ahead. He alone is our refuge and strength when times get tough.

So, on that note, I now turn to some of this month's contents: Lesley Barter, once again, gives us the Deacon's Letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study and Pip Cartwright's history of WCC; some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to which we subscribe, 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

The next 3-monthly Summer edition, covering June, July & August is due on **Sunday 6th June**

Your Editor

SPRING

Spring has arrived with armfuls of blossom,
Petals of every colour and hue,
Rain and sun caressing the earth
Inspiring spring bulbs to come into view
Now is the time of new beginnings
Giving us pleasure all season through.

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Reflections during COVID-19 pandemic

The weekly services will be via Zoom & will start at 10.30 am but you will be able to join at 10.15

April

4 th	Rev Judi Holloway	Easter Sunday with Communion
11 th	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
18 th	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
25 th	Rev Elaine Kinchin	

May

2 nd	Rev Judi Holloway	
9 th	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
16 th	Rev Judi Holloway	Communion
23 rd	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Pentecost
30 th	David Kinchin	

June

6 th	Rev Elaine Kinchin	
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Apr	12	Andrew MacLarty
	23	Jo Rudd
	26	Joyce Kearsey
	28	Jo Matthews



May	04	Graham Beechey
	16	Jean Stanley
	21	Terry Powlesland
	24	Pip Cartwright
	30	Pat Smith

Witney Congregational Church meets on-line!

Zoom meeting every Sunday morning where you can join from 10.15 with the service starting at 10.30

- This is FREE to users, as the church has purchased a subscription.
- To join in, you need a computer, laptop, tablet, iPhone or android (smart) phone.
- Search for Zoom - and follow the instructions. Once you have set yourself up, you will be able to JOIN A MEETING - as it is called - using the codes sent to you by email & will always be the same
- On Wednesday mornings there are reflections from 10.30-11.00 but the meeting is open both before and after this time, and have different codes
- Please join us, and if you need help, contact David on david.kinchin@gmail.com - but not ten minutes before the service starts!
- You do not have to speak or have yourself visible - you can just listen and only join in if you feel comfortable and confident

Deacon's Letter

Dear Friends

It's official - Spring has truly arrived, and that in itself is cause for celebration. Every year God sends us renewal, with the trees bursting into leaf, the birds building nests for their prospective families and the bright splashes of colour provided by primroses and daffodils. He is ever faithful to His promise of regeneration.

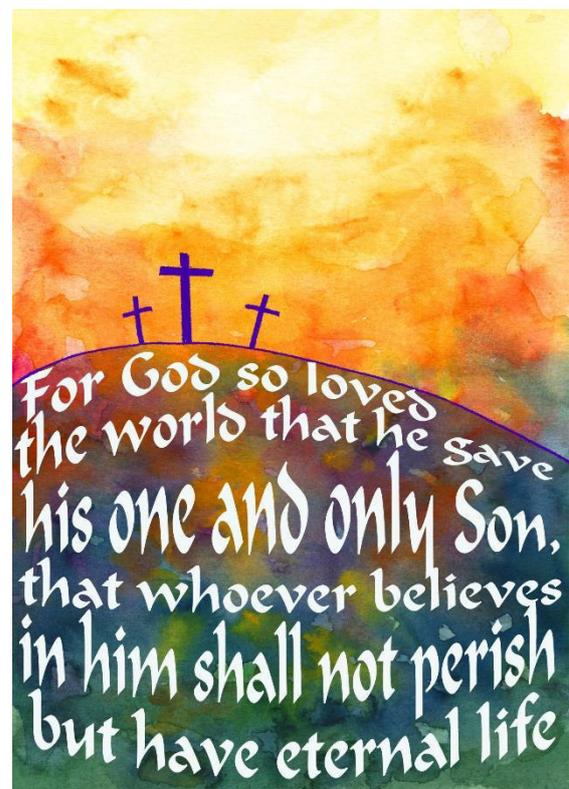
Despite the worrying things that are happening in many parts of the world and the apparently relentless march of global warming we can hold firm in the knowledge that God has a grand plan. He holds us fast in his loving care. We need to start looking forward instead of regretting the past. We have mourned and regretted what we lost in the past year but it has given us the opportunity to start again and to change what needs improvement.

When we can get back to regular face to face worship together we shall need to take a realistic look at our way forward as a church. It may be that we choose to create a mix of online and personal worship. Maybe we could continue to offer online bible study to reach a wider audience or to make it more accessible for some who have work commitments. Having seen so many examples of community service this last year perhaps we should think of creative ways that we can all participate in this most Christian of activities and thereby spread our message wider. For those of us who aren't confident evangelists it is something that would give us the opportunity to let action speak for our faith. We might consider this more deeply as we prepare for the renewal that Easter brings.

We have much to be thankful for. So far our church family has escaped the worst consequences of Covid and we are still a caring community. Let us dwell on the

positives as we prepare to move forward. Never has it been more important to choose the right Minister for our future vision – but we can only do it if we HAVE a vision and it is a realistic one. Let us pray for the inspiration and the leadership that we need 'for such a time as this'.

But most of all we should be thankful that by the sacrifice of God's son we are forgiven for all our mistakes and shortcomings. Christ is Risen indeed! Let us rejoice and be glad in Him. Alleluia!



True story

My curate friend had to preach his first-ever Easter sermon, and was very nervous about it. However, he prepared hard, and when Easter day came, he strode into the pulpit and thundered through his sermon, only to crash at the closing line. He pounded the pulpit and shouted: "Yes...it is all true! Jesus rose...and then He died again! Hallelujah!"



PRAYER LETTER No 197

Darkness and Light

What is Darkness? The sun determines the natural circle of day and night. Sunlight can be blocked by clouds or shadows of trees, people or objects. In previous times people worked in daylight hours as it was dangerous or not profitable to do outside work after dark.

There are phrases we use to emphasise the importance of light when in difficult situations. The phrase 'There is light at the end of the tunnel' meaning this light (situation) gradually gets brighter from a glimmer to fullness of light.

During this past year people of all races and creeds from around the world have experienced and are still experiencing dark times due to the pandemic Covid 19. People are grieving loss of loved ones of whom many have not been able to say goodbye due to restrictions before their loved ones passed away in hospitals, Care and Nursing Homes or living in another country.

Others are in dark places due to unexpected loss of employment, not being able to meet living costs, loss of homes, problems within relationships and mental health and other illnesses.

Many people who experience these dark times turn to the 23rd Psalm verse 4; 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death' I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff, they comfort me.'

Another phrase 'You're in the dark, switch on the light' means one can see immediately. For some people this is what it is like during their dark times if they have faith or not. For other people the awareness or 'seeing the light' is a revelation to their faith.

'Seeing the Light' means I see what you mean, understanding the situation. Unless you understand what, the Light means you can't really see it.

Hundreds of people saw and heard Jesus during his Ministry, some understood Him and followed Him recognising the Prophecies in the Old Testament referring to the Light of God and the coming of the Messiah. Others still followed Jesus hoping that He would release them from the Darkness of the oppressive Roman Occupation and the oppressive Jewish religious culture and then there were the ones who totally rejected Jesus and were therefore 'in the dark'.

After the celebration of Palm Sunday, we have come through Holy Week, participating in Maundy Thursday Supper with the instructions Jesus gave his Disciples; we have remembered the darkness and horror of Good Friday and the sacrifice Jesus made for us and all mankind into the Light of Easter Day. The resurrection of Jesus, Light of the World, was not just for the Jews but for the Gentiles too.

There are still many people who cannot 'see' or accept or are not willing to see Jesus as the Son of God being the Light of the World.

God gave His Light to His Son Jesus who reflected His Light to His Disciples and as followers of Christ who see and understand the Light pray that God through the Holy Spirit will help us reflect the Light of Jesus in our everyday lives whatever difficulties we may be going through.

The words of Jesus in John 12:46 'I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness'.

Praise and thank God for His Light.

Every Blessing,

Beryl

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Beryl (703717)

The following article was written and submitted by David Kinchin, and is entitled:

Fresh Expressions of Church

Do you recall this term, “Fresh Expressions” of Church? It is under this umbrella what we started running a Café Church once a quarter. Jason introduced to the Word Café in much the same way. You may also have heard of “Messy Church” too.

Now we have something different. ZOOM Church. Go back twelve months and we were entering our first Lockdown. Church closed. People were naturally scared by the Pandemic. Yet, in the same way, the weather turned warm and we all spent much more time in our gardens or taking exercise; sales of bicycles soared.

Who would have thought then that we would even entertain holding church services on the Internet? I didn't. Yet here we are a year further on with regular church services, reflections, book circles and Deacon's meetings all on Zoom, and all in the comfort of our own homes.



Initially I was worried people would not adapt to this new expression of church. Now, we regularly have twenty people attending (at home) on a Sunday morning, and even hit the dizzy heights of 30 people attending on 7th March. One day, maybe we will hit 40 attendees – that is a goal to aim for. An additional bonus and beauty is that we can have ‘visitors’ joining us from other parts of the country,

without them having to leave their own homes.

We have explored ways of singing, using YouTube as a background, we can share images, Bible verses and prayers. We have even experimented with “break-out groups” (another new term) so that we can sit after the service and chatter in smaller groups. This is really imitating the relaxed atmosphere in the Coffee Lounge after a service. All that is missing is Jacqui's wonderful cakes, and I am working on that!

We have also experimented with Church Meeting on ZOOM, and it was a big success.

One day we will return to services in the church building – in the near future I pray – and when we do, the plan is to continue to Zoom these services to those who feel they still have to ‘shield’ and not go out and about. When we do meet, we will still have to be incredibly careful. Having had the vaccination doesn't mean you are at no risk at all. It reduces the risk but relies on our God-given common sense to still be safe.

- A man was found guilty in traffic court and when asked for his occupation he said he was a schoolteacher. The judge rose from the bench. ‘Sir, I have waited years for a schoolteacher to appear before this court.’ He then smiled with delight. ‘Now sit down at that table and write “I will not run a red light” one hundred times.’
- The nice thing about becoming forgetful is that you can hide your own Easter eggs.
- I ate a kid's meal at McDonald's today. His mum got really angry.

The following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers Easter

Hope

“So many people right across the country are anxious about employment, anxious about food, isolated from loved ones and feel that the future looks dark.” These are words from the Archbishop of Canterbury’s sermon on Easter Day 2020. Who would have thought that we are experiencing the same uncertainties this Easter!

Yet the Easter story remains one of hope overcoming darkness and despair. The women arrived at the tomb on Easter morning with mixed emotions, as they came to anoint Jesus’ body. *‘But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.’* (Mark 16:4). They were confused, as they tried to make sense of Jesus’ death. Their hopes were dashed with an uncertain future. In the current pandemic, we too are left asking: *Where is God in all this?*

The young man at the tomb reminds them that God is still in control: *“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* (Mark 16:6).

The women had forgotten Jesus’ promise to the disciples that He would die and rise from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection is also the sure foundation of hope for us in the present crisis. He turns our confusion and fear into joy and wonder! We can trust Jesus’ plan for the future of our world and lives, despite the fact that things can’t return to the way they were: *“There needs to be a resurrection of our common life, a new normal, something that links to the old, but is different and more beautiful. We must dream it, build it, make it, grasp it, because it is the gift of God and the call of God.”* (Justin Welby).

The most joyful day of the year

Easter is the most joyful day of the year for Christians. Christ has died for our sins. We are forgiven. Christ has risen! We are redeemed! We can look forward to an eternity in His joy! Hallelujah!

The Good News of Jesus Christ is a message so simple that you can explain it to someone in a few minutes. It is so profound that for the rest of their lives they will still be ‘growing’ in their Christian walk with God.

Why does the date move around so much? Because the date of Passover moves around, and according to the biblical account, Easter is tied to the Passover. Passover celebrates the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, and it lasts for seven days, from the middle of the Hebrew month of Nisan, which equates to late March or early April.

Sir Isaac Newton was one of the first to use the Hebrew lunar calendar to come up with firm dates for the first Good Friday: Friday 7th April 30 AD or Friday 3rd April, 33 AD with Easter Day falling two days later. Modern scholars continue to think these two Fridays to be the most likely.

Most people will tell you that Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox, which is broadly true. But the precise calculations are complicated and involve something called an ‘ecclesiastical full moon’, which is not the same as the moon in the sky. The earliest possible date for Easter in the West is 22nd March, which last fell in 1818. The latest is 25th April, which last happened in 1943.

Why the name, ‘Easter’? In almost every European language, the festival’s name comes from ‘Pesach’, the Hebrew word for Passover. The Germanic word ‘Easter’, however, seems to come from *Eostre*, a Saxon fertility goddess mentioned by the Venerable Bede. He thought that the Saxons worshipped her in ‘Eostur month,’ but may have confused her with the classical dawn goddesses like *Eos* and *Aurora*, whose names mean ‘shining in the east’. So, Easter might have meant simply ‘beginning month’ – a good time for starting up again after a long winter.

Finally, why Easter eggs? On one hand, they are an ancient symbol of birth in most European cultures. On the other hand, hens start laying regularly again each Spring. Since eggs were forbidden during Lent, it’s easy to see how decorating and eating them became a practical way to celebrate Easter.

The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

The Growth of WCC: 1958 - 1960

With the departure of the Rev. Renwick Jackson in January 1958, he was replaced by the third American Mansfield College postgraduate student, the Rev. Richard Roupp. The Church agreed to have a telephone installed in the Manse (at the Minister's expense!) Plans were made to alter and modernise the Manse and the Right of Way (at the side of the Church) for 13 High Street was approved at a rent of £10 per annum.

In 1958 the Deacons consisted of Mr A Sellman (Church Secretary), Mr Cadel (Treasurer), Mr Philip Turner, Miss Ostler, Miss M Lea, Mr Sid Collis, Mr Peter Sellman, Mr R Wright and later, after the resignation of Mr Wally Honey, Mr Bob Richardson (a farmer from Ducklington who was made a member with his wife Evelyn earlier in the year), Mr R Hick (Choirmaster). Later Mr Ted Braine took the place of Miss Ostler. The Finance Committee, which included Peter Sellman, conducted an 'Every Person Census' campaign which encouraged a pledge system of giving and it was at this time that our envelopes system of giving started. In December there was also to be a Gift Day. Reports of the Women's Pleasant Hour and the Ladies/Women's Guilds were encouraging and the Youth Club had to impose a numbers ceiling of 50. The Sunday School outing in June reverted back to a visit to Wickstead Park, Kettering. Looking back at this time, and having visited Wickstead Park myself with my Northampton Church's Sunday School, it might be considered the equivalent to our present day 'Alton Towers' – though in a more genteel 1930's style! Among the baptisms were: Peter Pearson and the daughter of the then Minister, Wendy Susan Roupp. The work on the Coach House continued and in November 1958 it was dedicated.

In February 1959 the Minister announced that he would resign in June to return to U.S.A. The Minister's stipend was increased to £430 per annum but he had to pay for the light and heating bills. In March the Sacred Musical Cantata by J. H. Maunder "Olivet's Calvary" was performed. The Pledge System was a success and so May 24th was designated 'Pledge Sunday'. In the July the Deacons announced that the boiler needed a new oil fired replacement and the Church heating system renewed. At the same time a new roof was required for the Marlborough Lane Hall. It transpires that the Church didn't have the finances to cover it, so the members at the Church Meeting agreed to lend money to the Church to pay for it and the Church Members would decorate the Manse themselves. A new Manse Cooker was installed and paid for. Due to the Church expenditure and financial commitments the Moderator suggested that it might be advisable to consider a student pastorate in the shape of a Mansfield College student, Mr David Dews. At the AGM Mr David Dews was invited to take the post. During the summer of 1959 the new heating system was installed including the Coach House and the Kitchen and the men decorated the Manse.

A work party set about the Manse garden and the Tennis Court was levelled and seeded. By November 1959 the Youth Group had risen in number to 50. The Manse was finally redecorated and it was assessed that 500 hours of work had been necessary and 50 rolls of wallpaper and 5 gallons of paint used. The Church heating had been completed at a cost of £734.

So, after all this preparation in December 1959 Mr David Dews was installed. It appears that the Dews' lived in College so a Rev. B and Mrs Rudd rented the Manse and their daughter was born there in March 1960. The ladies renamed the Women's Happy Hour to the Women's Bright Hour! Necessary repairs were made to the Church roof. With all this financial burden the Church continued to urge for the sale of the Marlborough Lane Hall and

at the same time they were informed that the Witney Urban and District Council were putting a road through from the High Street (Welch Way?) and so develop the land behind. Consequently, they proposed to develop a wide swath of ground behind the Manse, no doubt buying the Church portion of this land as compulsory purchase if the Church didn't agree. This, no doubt, set some minds thinking about the long-term position and development of the Church and its future outreach to Witney. In May, Mr Frank Collis celebrated 60 years as a Church Member and in June the Sunday School outing visited Ruislip Lido.

Mr David Dews must have impressed the congregation because in March 1960 he was invited to accept the full-time pastorate after completing his studies at Mansfield College. This he did and Rev. and Mrs Rudd vacated the Manse. After he graduated the Rev. David Dews was ordained and inducted into the pastorate of Witney Congregational Church, which he served for four years.

The following article, written by the Ven John Barton, and extracted from Parish Pump, considers the Government's policy on Covid-19, and is entitled:

Covid-19: should we have sacrificed the economy, or us?

Suppose the Government had chosen an entirely different policy for dealing with coronavirus. Instead of building temporary hospitals and instructing us to wash our hands, observe social distancing, and then locking us down, they had let the pandemic run its course? Hundreds of thousands of people would have died: mainly those who were old, as well as some younger people with pre-existent health deficiencies.

As these potential casualties were already costing the National Health Service much

more per head than anyone else, their (slightly) premature deaths would have saved the Exchequer billions and freed up resources to improve the health and standard of living for the rest of the more vigorous population. Only the fittest would have survived. Isn't that the law of nature?

Instead, the policy was deliberately to sacrifice the economy. At all costs, human beings were to be saved, whatever their longer-term prospects. Consequently, many businesses have gone under, unemployment has shot up and may get worse when the dust clears. Family relationships have been curbed, children may have lost a year's schooling, and leisure, hospitality and travel have been hampered.

Why? Why choose this policy and not that?

The answer is a religious one. Perhaps without realising why, policy-makers chose to act as though each human being has a value which can't be measured by their state of health or wealth or status. That's not what 'nature' intends. It's what the Christian faith demands. Everyone, everyone without exception, is unique and marked with God's image. Everyone has the potential for adoption as a child of God. Christ died for each one. You can't put a price on that.

Some countries have this faith ingrained in their national character. Some do not. In some, life is cheap, disposable and valued only by its usefulness for production or warfare. The fittest survive. Even then some are sacrificed as warriors, like suicide bombers paying the price of an ideology.

Christianity doesn't happen by accident. It is the outcome of missionary activity and the conversion of one-time unbelievers. They then saw other people in a new light: equally worth saving, whatever the cost.

Dreadful as it is, Covid-19 will eventually be controlled. In its wake will be a history of survival, not of the fittest, but of the God-given value of every human being.



The Agony in the Garden

The Agony in the Garden is a small painting by William Blake, completed as part of his 1799–1800 series of Bible illustrations commissioned by his patron and friend Thomas Butts. The work illustrates a passage from the Gospel of Luke which describes Christ's turmoil in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest and Crucifixion following Judas's betrayal.

In Blake's painting a brilliantly coloured and majestic angel breaks through the surrounding darkness and descends from a cloud to aid and physically support Jesus in his hour of agony. The work is dominated by vertical lines, formed both from the trees and from the two arms of the angel. Two inner lines converge on Christ's palms, evoking the nails driven through him during his crucifixion.

The Agony in the Garden was bequeathed by Blake collector Graham Robertson to the National Trust in 1948. It was acquired by the Tate Gallery the following year.

The words, "Is it nothing to you, that I bow my head, and nothing to you that my blood is shed" from Stainer's Crucifixion were the music that accompanied my thoughts as these words were written.

The Garden of Gethsemane

Spoken aloud ..

.... Nothing? Nothing?

Was it nothing?

Shedding blood

...third dayrising up

Was it nothing?

God made man

Earth's new plan ...

Promised ...

Given ...

fulfilled

Was it nothing?

Curtain rent ... top to toe

Time now spent

Nothing?....

Access given

Spirit sent

Churches build

Nations changed

Future gained

World taught

of all He sought

Relationship broken

Now repaired

Spoken..

Taught..

Filled..

Wrought..

Made whole again

My God....

What joy....

All by Your pain.....

Nothing?

No! No! not nothing..

A life regained

A worldwide change

Rules for living

Loving

Neighbours... friends ...

Even enemies bend

To hear good news ...

Gospel message

Of God's own Son

Made now as one

Returned to save

Each one of us

That day ...

In the garden ...

Now will we turn ...

To?... or from?...

Is that message
 Just too strong
 In all He did
 It was for me..
 For you....
 To show His love...

 Too big?...
 Mighty? ...
 Almighty! ...
 Do we reject?..
 Can we take on
 Such love, such love ...
 Yet He made possible...
 What we find difficult...
 Such Love
 Such love ...

 Yes!! Such love
 We can know..
 It's real
 It does show
 Shines through our lives
 We see and know
 We witness to that love
 As we grow...
 Slowly...
 We grow...
 To know...
 His love....
 His Joy...
 And peace....
 Turn back again ...
 And hear His word...
 Know His peace....
 Turn back again ...
 Read His book...
 Know His Love....

 Be Still....
 Be still before your Lord
 And hear His love..
 in your heart ...
 There just for you
 Wrought...
 In pain ...
 In suffering ...

Spoken aloud ..
 Nothing? Nothing?
 Was it nothing? ...

Note: In this form of poem the dots denote pauses. The more dots the longer the pause

Extracted, with permission, from CF Secluded Place

©Adrian Burr June 2008

The following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump:

Pentecost

Revd Canon Paul Hardingham

The celebration of Pentecost this month could be described as a birthday party for the Church, as we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit to the first disciples (Acts 2:1-13). What are we celebrating?

God's Promise:

The disciples obeyed Jesus' instructions as they gathered in the Upper Room: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised' (1:4). They met expectantly in prayer for God's promised gift. Just as we look forward to birthday presents, how eager are we to receive more of the Spirit in our lives?

God's Power:

'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit' (4). The disciples needed the power of the Spirit to be different: not fearfully gathered behind locked doors, but energised to make Christ known. The Spirit can transform our lives into the likeness of Jesus and give gifts to equip our witness. Although the disciples' experience of this power was overwhelming, it was essentially an encounter with God's love. For us, this can

be equally emotional or quiet, but all are included, and nobody is excluded from this experience.

God's Purpose:

The disciples 'began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.' (4). The Spirit empowered their witness, so that everyone heard them speaking in their own 'native language' (lit: dialect, v8). We all have a story to tell of God's activity in our lives and it's the Spirit who translates our words and actions into a language that those around can understand! At Pentecost, 3,000 people were added to the church in one day! What do we expect of the Spirit in our day?

'Let the Church return to Pentecost, and Pentecost will return to her. The Spirit of God cannot take possession of believers beyond their capacity of receiving Him' (Andrew Murray).

Hiding, waiting, hoping – FREE!

Revd Dr Jo White

After many long months during the Covid pandemic we are at last beginning to be able to come together again. Some countries and some areas of some countries will be more open than others and we can only hope, pray and wait for all of us to be able to be 'free' again.

May, in the Church's calendar, is supremely the month of freedom.

During the first few weeks we continue to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and reflect on the Bible stories of those who met Him after His crucifixion and resurrection.

Then we celebrate His Ascension – Jesus' return to His Father.

And finally, we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and all those locked in that Upper Room – with the subsequent birth of His Church.

Freedom indeed!

This last year has for most of us felt like a waiting time to see and hold friends and family again. We have some understanding of fear and the hope within us.

What a celebration there must have been when Jesus returned to His Father – and what a celebration also when the Holy Spirit so powerfully descended.

It is the story of those 'simple' men who were scared and hiding one day and the next day bold and outspoken that speaks to me of something outstanding happening.

As I received my anti-Covid vaccination I felt that same freedom from fear. Not that I would be 100% safe and never ill again, but rather that whatever happened now would be manageable.

Have a think this month about fears that you may have held inside you in this past year and how you have been able to manage them. Have you known the Spirit of Our Lord by your side as you have walked these roads? I hope so, and I hope also that together we can help others to know His reassurance from fear. Freedom indeed.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of all people and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

100 years of the British Legion

One hundred years ago, on 15th May 1921, the British Legion was founded in the aftermath of the First World War, to provide support to veterans of the British Armed Forces, their families and dependants.

It was created at a time when two million people were unemployed. More than six million had served in the war: of those who came back, 1.75 million had suffered some kind of disability, and half of those were disabled permanently.

Four organisations came together at the instigation of Lancastrian Lance Bombardier Tom Lister, who was angered at the Government's unwillingness to help, and Field Marshal Earl Haig, who had been Commander in Chief of the British Forces. The Legion campaigned for fair treatment of those who given everything for their country, and it continues this work today.

In 1922, the Legion's poppy factory opened in the Old Kent Road, London, with 40 disabled men manufacturing 1000 poppies a week. The first Poppy Day was held that same year. The Festival of Remembrance began in 1927, and the Legion became 'Royal' in 1971 – 50 years ago – on its golden anniversary.

At first membership of the Legion was confined to ex-Service personnel, but it was expanded to include serving members of the Forces in 1981.



ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

23rd May: Pentecost: not a Ghost but a Gift

Canon David Winter

We used to call it Whitsun – 'White Sunday' because long ago children marched to church in white on that day. No processions nowadays, and we've even changed its name. It's now 'Pentecost', which is more accurate but needs explaining.

Pentecost marks a vital event in Christian history. It is celebrated 50 days after Easter. The year Jesus was crucified (which took place at the Passover), the remnant of His followers, just 120 of them, were together in an upper room in Jerusalem. They were afraid to show their faces in case the authorities arrested them. But on the day of Passover they had an amazing collective experience.

They described it in terms of wind and fire, a great surge of spiritual energy and confidence. Afraid no longer, they burst out on to the streets where crowds were gathering for the festival, led by Peter they began to tell them about Jesus and His resurrection. As they did so, although many of the people in the crowd were foreigners who spoke other languages, everyone heard them in their own tongue. Peter told them that what they were seeing was the fulfilment of an old prophecy when God would pour out His Spirit on the human race, men and women, young and old.

As a result of His words and the extraordinary spectacle, 3,000 people believed and were baptised in the name of Jesus. They were the nucleus of what in 100 years would be a Church that would turn history upside down. For Christians Pentecost is in effect the birthday of the Church.

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.

17. Mark 6: 30-44

Mark moves his narrative onwards as he pictures the apostles, who have just returned from their first experience of healing and teaching in the name of Jesus, gathering around their master. We can imagine the six pairs of disciples eagerly sharing experiences, bubbling over with the excitement as they tell Jesus, and one another, what they had done and taught. Significantly, what they had done precedes what they had taught; apostleship is foremost about going and doing in the name of Christ, it is about showing the love of God in Jesus rather than merely talking about it. The news of the return of the apostles must have got around the neighbourhood, for Mark records that there was a great deal of coming and going of people, so that neither Jesus nor his apostles had even the time to stop and eat. No doubt the apostles were on a "high", the sort of high which can so easily lead on to "burn-out". Jesus shows his concern for them, for their needs for rest and reflection. "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while" he

says. They followed Jesus to a boat, maybe that belonging to Peter and Andrew, and set out to go to such a deserted place to enjoy a time of recreation.

As so often happens in life, events did not work out as planned, as hoped for; when they arrived at the "deserted place" they found a great crowd waiting. Mark's record gives us little indication of how this could have happened. He simply says: "Many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them". The gathering of a crowd before Jesus and his disciples landed certainly rules out their crossing of the lake by boat, since walking round the shore would take at least two to three times as long as a boat crossing. Maybe the deserted place for which they set sail was a well-known "retreat spot" not too far along the shore from where Jesus set out and, because they were taking a break, those in the boat took their time on the journey, heading well out into the lake before returning to their intended destination. This would possibly have allowed a crowd to gather before their arrival. It is, however, more likely that Mark was just not concerned about such matters as to how the crowd gathered in a deserted place. For the next major story which he was to tell, he needed Jesus with his disciples in a desert place and so he wrote what seemed a convenient linking passage. Thus, Mark has set the scene for recounting the first of two major nature miracles included in his story of Jesus.

We are presented with the scene, a great crowd on the sea shore in a desert place. The word used here to describe the place is the same as is used elsewhere for "the wilderness". The environment of this place is not conducive to human comfort or ease - it has little to commend it except its loneliness. In such a place a crowd has gathered and Jesus arrives among them, sees them and has compassion upon them

because, to him, they are like sheep without a shepherd. Here they are, this flock in the wilderness without anyone to lead them to water and to pasture or to protect them from the perils of wild beasts. At the first sign of danger they would be scattered and many would perish. It is a picture of a needy people. Such is the love of Jesus that he can do no other than minister to their needs: he began to teach them many things. Mark records nothing of what Jesus taught at this time for, as so often in his narrative, Mark is more concerned with what Jesus does so that people may come to know for themselves who Jesus is.

"It grew late". How rapidly time passes when listening to Jesus! However, there comes a point when, however fascinating the discourse, the needs of the body assert themselves. Maybe the disciples were beginning to feel hungry, or perhaps tiredness had at last caught up with them as the euphoria of their healing and teaching mission had ebbed away. Whatever the reason, the disciples came to Jesus saying something like: "Look, this is a desert place, it is getting late, these people must be hungry so send them away to go and find food for themselves." Effectively they were saying; "Scatter the flock to fend for themselves." Jesus remained the Shepherd as he said to his disciples, "You give them something to eat." This was another new challenge to the disciples. They had but recently returned, full of the excitement, from going out to heal and to teach - something that they had never done before. But this was something different, it required the actual production of something material - food. No one could do that without a great deal of work, or the payment received for that work - money. Through their minds flashed the question which so often flashes through our minds when faced with a challenge from Jesus to take action, the question: "How are we going to pay for it?" They estimated that to buy bread for the multitude would cost two

hundred denarii. That was a lot of money, the denarius was the usual day's wage for a labourer. Perhaps the nearest modern equivalent is eight times the National Minimum Hourly Wage. The disciples knew they had not got that sort of money available so they could not do what Jesus told them, feed the people.

Jesus also knows that they have not got that sort of money available. However, as they speak of bread, he tells them to go and check how much bread they have got. This causes them to review their resources. They find that they not only have five loaves, but they also have two fish. Their resources are more than they thought; not only bread but also fish. Oh yes, it is all a pitifully small amount, but it actually exists, exists to be put to use for that which Jesus requires, the feeding of the multitude. They bring what they have to him, they give it to him, it is out of their hands and into his for him to use. In their eyes the resources are not enough but Jesus seems well content - for all they have has been brought to him. Jesus now takes control and orders them to get the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. This is a command. Rarely is it recorded that Jesus gave a command in terms of how people are to act, a command which he expected to be obeyed. Here Mark records Jesus as giving a command, a command which seems to have been effective in creating some semblance of order among the crowd, for they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. It seems doubtful as to whether Mark intends to convey precise numbers in these groupings; more likely he is painting a picture of the crowd broken up into family style gatherings as they settle down for whatever is to happen next, now that Jesus appears to have come to the end of his teaching. One can almost hear the conversations going on within the groups as a sense of expectancy develops. With the crowd so seated, Jesus stand forth clearly for all to see.

Then Jesus behaves in the customary manner of a devout host who has invited guests to share with him in a meal. He takes of some of the food provided, lifts it up in the presence of God, says a blessing and breaks of the food and gives it to those around him to be distributed among all the guests. Those in the crowd would have been quite familiar with the action as that of a host before a meal. What was different was the amount of food which was apparently available. Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, gave thanks and divided them among them all. "And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.

Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men." So, Mark finishes his story of this event. There is no reaction recorded by those who were fed. Surely, we would expect some tremendous form of reaction if the event happened just as Mark tells the story!

Mark records no reaction! This lack of recorded reaction raises the question as to whether the event did happen in quite the manner told. If it did so happen, the mystery remains as to why there is no reaction by either the disciples or the crowd.

But if it did not happen quite as Mark records it, we are faced with the question as to what Mark intended his readers to learn from his narrative. Those who knew the history of Israel would possibly recall the story of Elisha feeding one hundred people with twenty barley loaves and some grain in a sack, while proclaiming that the Lord said there would be some left over (II Kings 4:42-44). Mark's account speaks of a feeding with far less resources and with a symbolic twelve baskets full being left over and being gathered in - perchance as the twelve tribes, the fullness of Israel were meant to be gathered in by the Messiah. They would see also that the story carries with it echoes of the people of Israel being fed in the wilderness by the manna when there was no other food available - only God

could so provide. Certainly, they would have noticed the familiarity of the action of Jesus in breaking of bread and distributing it among those with him; an action pointing not only to the Christian celebration of the Eucharist but also to the expectation among the Jews of the Messiah presiding over the elect at the Messianic Banquet. Whether the figure of five thousand men fed had any particular significance for Mark's original readers is not known; nor is it known whether there were women and children present as well. The lack of such details does not reduce the impact of the story, the wonder of the provision for the needs of many from the dedication of all that was available from the few.

Thus, we have the story as Mark tells it. What actually events in the life of Jesus are the source of the story remain obscure. Doubtless Mark based his account on an actual event or events about which he had heard or been told. He then tells his story in such a way as to point towards his own certainty about who this Jesus is while inviting his readers to draw their own conclusion.



Divine Intervention?

A little boy was playing outside with his mother's broom in the garden. That night his mother realised her broom was still missing and asked her son to go out and bring it in.

When the little boy confessed he was afraid of the dark, his mother tried to comfort him: 'The Lord is out there too, don't be afraid.' Hesitantly, the little boy opened the back door and peered out. He called softly: 'Lord, since you're out there already, please will you pass me the broom?'

The following article has been submitted by Pat Brent, and is entitled:

A year in Malawi

This has been a very strange year with Covid-19 affecting so much that we do both in Malawi and the UK. However, God has been faithful to us throughout the year and as we look back, we can see His hand has been upon the work, enabling us to help and reach out to those in need in Malawi.

January – the new year began with the good news that the chalk’n’dusters project had raised enough funds to provide 7 schools with chalk for a year, for each class and will also provide 212 blackboard dusters to go to the schools that most needed them.

February - saw our appeal for Disability Transport, enabling children who needed operations to get to hospital for them, receive just over £4,000.

March - brought news that the supply of 14 Quick Cricket sets for each of the Children’s Clubs, had just arrived in Malawi, to the joy of the teachers!

April – saw us responding to the Covid-19 crisis in Malawi by producing nearly 100 washstands including supplies of liquid soap. These were installed in the Salima market area and in local schools. We were overwhelmed with the funds raised by our supporters for this which amounted to just under £6,500!

May - gave us the news that the main building of Hope Clinic had been completed and the staff house was being constructed.

June – we were given the news that the classroom at Trinity School Moyo, which was begun by the Mission Direct team in 2019, had been completed.

July – came with the news that the Doctor’s house at Hope Clinic was completed and the small washstands had been delivered to local churches.

August – We were delighted to hear that Michael Jackson Legacy wanted to partner with us to build a special needs resource centre. This will be built near Hope Clinic and MJL have already raised over 50% of the funding.

September – we were able to hold our Bewl Water walk event, which was an amazing event with over 60 walkers. We were walking to raise funds for Glad Tidings Orphan Care and we raised a little over a staggering £ 11,000!

We also had the great news that Hope Clinic opened its doors to patients. This will now provide free outpatients healthcare for 13,000 people in the Ngolowindo area.

October – brought news that the Covid-19 situation was getting better in Malawi with no new deaths reported.

November – We began to consider how we could help the people in the Salima area during the Hungry Season which starts in January. We launched the Maize Fund appeal and to date have over £2,300 to enable our team to purchase bags of maize and distribute it.

December – brought news that the staff house for the nurse at Hope Clinic was nearing completion. This will mean that both the doctor and the nurse will be living on site.

We praise God that in a year where there has been so much despair and anxiety with Covid-19, that He has continued to move the work in Malawi forward.

NOTE: Malawi have just put out an urgent appeal for funds to supply oxygen cylinders. they are finding it difficult to supply the hospital, the clinic and women in childbirth. People can donate through this website.

www.justgiving.com/campaign/fightingfundformalawi

The Fruit of the Spirit
is
Love JOY Peace
Patience
Kindness Goodness
Faithfulness
Gentleness
and Self-control

Galatians 5: verse 22