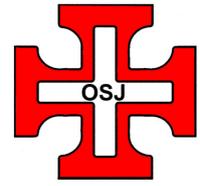


The Order of St James Newsletter

January 2020



Participants, not passengers:

As a Christian, you should be being used. The church is meant for participants not passengers - that is what busses are for.

Everyone has some kind of ministry to offer, without which the church and the community it serves will be made less and less complete. Also, there are no such things as 'great ministries' or 'lesser ministries', they are all equally necessary and carry the same weight.

For the most part Christian ministry will be 'in passing', almost unconsciously dealing with those things that are needful on a day to day basis, and that is something that everyone can be involved with without any formal training or qualification.

These things will often appear quite ordinary and routine but are actually quite necessary, and it is real ministry without which the church would come to a grinding standstill.

There is often no 'official' organisation, it mostly seems to organise itself and just happens. It often brings some kind of strange order where there has previously been chaos, and any attempts to bring it under formal control or to 'improve' it usually causes upsets and makes things a lot less effective.

This, if you have to give it a name, is the church's 'ministry support team' in action, the essential group that 'gets on and does' because it has both faith and love, and an instinctive sense of communal purpose and direction.

OSJ (UK) has adopted this as its membership model simply because it works.

Anyone who joins OSJ (UK) automatically is a member of the Order's Ministry Support Team (MST) and this is open to all Christians, even if they are also members of other Christian communities.

OSJ (UK) MST members are the people that enable 24/7 ministry and without whom the work of the Christian community would quickly stop. MST members are the life blood of the Order, (especially when it comes to prayer), and are the hands, feet, heart and voice of God on the front lines of daily life.

It would be quite wrong to underestimate or underappreciate this work they do. Without it there would be no Order.

There are occasions however where some official or formal authentication is required regarding some forms of ministry.

In the early church this was often demonstrated or confirmed by the laying on of hands and commissioning.

It didn't mean that these people were super-Christians, in fact they were often quite ordinary and flawed, they were just set aside for particular (and often difficult) roles.

That model continues in many churches today. OSJ (UK) uses this model too.

OSJ (UK)'s Ministry Team is made up of those whose work is perhaps a little more sensitive and comes under safeguarding rules. These people are no different to anyone else in the OSJ (UK) community and are not to be thought of as being special or privileged or flawless or more gifted.

The most obvious differences will be that members of the Ministry Team require police/CRB checks and come under much closer supervision and direction by the Order's bishops and the Order's Executive Council. (Added to that and not generally seen, the application process is highly detailed and complex, requires full disclosure, several interviews, supporting documentation and references, and a probationary period.) OSJ (UK) has a legal obligation to ensure effective safeguarding.

In practice, all our priests/ministers/pastors have to be members of the Ministry Team to comply with safeguarding requirements but being a part of the Ministry Team isn't just restricted to clergy.

Non-ordained members with particular giftings such as community chaplains, liturgists, eucharistic ministers, etc., are also able to be part of the Ministry Team. It also includes those undergoing training, those either on the Deacon's course or heading for the priesthood.

There is a common misconception that being called to ordination is the ultimate recognition of one's faith. Well for the record, it isn't. It's a complete myth.

Let me assure you that without exception everyone is called to their own special form of ministry by God, and that 'ordination' is just one of many forms of calling - all equally valuable, necessary and just as important. There are elements to be found in all forms of ministry that reflect the communal priesthood of all church members. Not only that, but there is no necessity to be 'ordained' in regard to most Christian ministry, or to be 'authorised' in some way. Ministry is and should always be a simple and natural response of faith and love. It is definitely not about recognition, personal power, prestige, control, authority or titles.

There is nothing 'magical' about being ordained - it confirms what already exists rather than it 'giving power to'. In truth, there isn't great deal more you can do once ordained that you couldn't already do before, although there seems to be a lot more paperwork involved. Those who are ordained will tell you it is rarely what they thought it would be. The clerical collar is nothing more than an invitation to a conversation about life and faith and holds no power in itself, and nor should it. It is no guarantee of 'ministry' either.

If you didn't have ministry before being ordained, wearing a clerical collar generally won't make things any different.

Ministry is all around us and we all have something to give and receive. Ministry is for all, by all, and in God alone.

Regardless of rank, title, qualification or position, all members of OSJ (UK) carry equal status (so don't expect any special treatment if you happen to be ordained). All OSJ (UK) members have their own God given mix of gifts, talents and skills, all are called to serve God and the Christian community in some way, and are all equally needed.

Membership is all about serving Christ and community, not servicing your own needs or ego.

-oOo-

Practical Orthodoxy:

OSJ (UK) takes a very pragmatic view of the bible but its content remains the unchangeable and eternal word of God and it is given for our edification, instruction and guidance.

Not everything in the bible is 'written in stone' and we are actually given quite an amount of free choice as to how we live out our faith. In these circumstances it is up to the individual to decide what is good and acceptable in their relationship with God and those whose lives they are a part of.

These are matters of free will.

However, there are some things in the bible we don't get a choice with. These things are non-negotiable and the bible makes those things quite clear. They can't simply be dismissed because we don't agree with them. The bible is either God's word or it isn't. If it isn't then what is the point of being a Christian.

The non-negotiable parts of the bible will not always be popular (they rarely are!) and will inevitably cause conflict and be quite divisive, even within the greater Christian community. The fact is how we handle these things come with consequences and responsibilities, and our choices not only affect us but they affect the lives of others, possibly for generations to come. If we get things wrong, we may not be able to undo them, so what we do and how we respond really does matter.

As far as OSJ (UK) understands, there are a number of biblical principles believed to be non-negotiable and therefore they are not a matter of personal choice but a matter of spiritual discipline and submission to the authority of God. These things may be a very troublesome and difficult test of our faith and trust in God, but appropriate and considered responses are required.

Some of the current and most pressing issues OSJ (UK) is facing are listed below but the list is by no means complete, or exclusive to OSJ (UK). Many churches and Christian communities are struggling with these things too as they try to understand God's word and His purposes in a world that seems to be changing so very quickly.

We accept the bible as God's word and, as a matter of spiritual discipline and submission to the authority of God, we observe and uphold the following:-

1. Marriage is intended for the life of both partners, is between a man and a woman (as defined physically at birth) and is intended for the procreation of children and mutual comfort.
2. Marriage is a calling and sacrament, not a matter of temporary convenience, and children are a gift of God entrusted into the protective care and stewardship of both parents and the Christian community.
3. Marriage, or anything described as 'marriage', between those of the same sex (as defined by birth, self-determination or by other choice or process) is contrary to scripture.
4. Sexually or physically intimate relationships between same sex couples (as defined above) is contrary to scripture.
5. Sexually or physically intimate relationships outside of marriage, regardless of gender, are contrary to Holy Scripture.
6. The deliberate termination of life (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, etc.) is contrary to scripture.
7. The ordination of women as priests (or consecration as bishops) is also contrary to scriptural principle. This does not deny though, that all people have some kind of God given ministry that is to be supported and encouraged once recognised,

8. as is the good and proper stewardship of all spiritual, material and practical gifts and resources for the benefit of the communities we serve. This also includes global stewardship of the Earth, the Church, the community, marriage and the family.

There are no easy responses as each has different and lasting consequences.

For those who understandably may find these too difficult to accept, there are plenty of churches and Christian communities who express their faith much more liberally and are much more accepting of less 'orthodox' lifestyle trends.

As regards being a Christian, membership of OSJ (UK) is not obligatory or compulsory - it is just one of many expressions of the Christian faith you can choose from.

We know we are very conservative in some respects, and our way of doing things doesn't suit everyone. It is up to you to choose what in God is best for you.

We respect the concept of 'free will' as a God given gift to all of humanity, and we respect the choices that other people have made (even if we might disagree with them).

That does not however preclude a continuing dialogue or ministry as we work towards a true understanding of what is right and good in God's eyes. It would take an unbelievable kind of arrogance to say we (or you or anyone else) had all the answers.

So, we respect your choices and viewpoints - and hope in return that you respect ours.

Ultimately we are all on the same journey of discovery and faith and whilst our destinations may be the same by intention, the reality is our paths may be quite different and have very different outcomes. It is up to all of us to choose well and take full responsibility for and justify our choices and decisions on the Day of Judgement.

-oOo-

Luke 4 v 21 – 30:

Unice Brierley, OSJ

According to this reading Jesus has gone back to his house in Nazareth

I don't know about you but I have always had the impression that Nazareth was a village, but according to research it was called a polis which means a town or city, and could well have had 20,000 inhabitants.

Three great roads skirted it.

There was the road from the south carrying pilgrims to Jerusalem. There was the great Way of the sea which led from Egypt to Damascus with laden caravans moving along and there was the great road to the east bearing caravans from Arabia and Roman legions marching out to the eastern frontiers of the Empire.

Jesus had gone to the synagogue as was customary, although his local synagogue left much to be desired. Jesus attended services wherever he was every week, His example make our excuses for not attending Church sound weak.

We should make regular worship a part of our lives if we are serious at following Jesus' word and works.

Jesus had been given a scroll to read, the passage he reads is Isaiah 61 verses 1 – 20 which is relevant to the delivery of Israel from exile in Babylon.

This reading starts actually half way through a sentence when Jesus announces “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” Jesus was proclaiming himself as the one who would bring the good news to pass but in a way that people would not yet be able to grasp.

Even Jesus himself was not accepted as a prophet in his home town. Many people have a similar attitude today – an expert is anyone who carries a briefcase and comes from more than 50 miles away. We mustn't be surprised when our Christian life and faith are not easily understood or accepted by those who know us well. I wonder if this is why many local preachers I have met over the years are very nervous preaching in their own Church.

Jesus' remarks filled the people of Nazareth with rage because he was saying that God sometimes choose to reach out to Gentiles instead of Jews, and implied that they were unbelieving It. Both Matthew and Mark record this incident, but neither of them actually state which passage of scripture Jesus read not the implication that he referred to the Gentiles. Luke being a compatriot of Paul wrote his gospel with Gentiles in mind.

The Jews were so sure that they were God's people that they tended to look down on all others. Some believed that God had created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell.

And here was this young Jesus, whom they had all known from childhood preaching as if the Gentiles were specially favoured by God.

It was beginning to dawn upon them that there were things in this new message the like of which they had never dreamed

We have only to read the passage of Isaiah that Jesus read to see the difference between Jesus and John the Baptist. John was the preacher of doom and those who heard his message must have shuddered with terror. It was a Gospel – good news – which Jesus brought, Jesus, too, knew the wrath of God but it was always the wrath of love.

You have to say it.

What has to be said that only you can say it?

Uncomfortable though it may be we sometimes find ourselves in situations where we are convinced that a crucial point is missing from the discussion, or that a particular option is being wilfully ignored, or that someone is being badly treated by the group and no one seems prepared to speak up. So it's up to us – to me! To you!

This can be even more challenging when we are one of the youngest in the group, grateful for what the others have helped us to learn, but now feeling compelled to offer our own opinion, humbly and honestly but with heartfelt conviction.

That is one reading of the situation in which Jesus found himself in the synagogue at Nazareth. He was faced by those who knew him well, were perhaps sceptical of this newly acquired reputation and who wanted to see what he was capable of, Yet Jesus knew his message was radical and was convinced it was of God.

So he had to challenge the small-mindedness, prejudice and hostility he found amongst them.

What needs to be challenged in our situations today?

It can be really hard to make a stand for our beliefs and values amongst those with whom we have grown up, or within our own home, yet it is in these situations that faith can be compromised, spiritual growth blocked and respect for other undermined.

Bigotry and racism must be challenged. It is in the groups and organisations which are full of self-righteousness that openness to learning has to be introduced, in church as well as political, community or economic institutions, a commitment to truth and compassion for others has to be nurtured and resistance to the comfortable and the self-serving has to be shouldered.

You are not the priority.

Many of us do not relish being in the limelight yet it is good to be affirmed and to know that we are appreciated. Perhaps at our best we are prepared to let go some of our rights for the sake of benefitting others in greater need, but having our rights taken from us, our name and reputation besmirched, being treated as second (or lower) class can be difficult. So it must have been galling for those who had known Jesus as a lad to hear such harsh words from him.

It has been said that the powerful do not give up their positions willingly.

For men used to having their words hold weight in the home or at work, the adjustment to equality with women has been difficult, even when the justice of the situation is accepted. It is still a big issue in many concerns even today.

For older people the revolution in behaviour by the young has been like watching the whole world transform before their eyes.

Perhaps we can recall an experience of hesitating to take an opportunity to which someone else has responded more quickly and we have lost the chance. When we have chosen the safe option and others have gone for the risks and won, it would be churlish to be envious, though that may be actually how we feel.

It was reported a few years ago that an Australian batsman “walked” breaking a well-established pattern of behaviour within the cricket team of waiting till the umpire signalled that the batsman was out. This was reported as unusual, and still is, because the 'gentlemanly' character of the game was assumed to be dead.

Voluntarily giving up anything appears to be weak these days. Yet, is this not at the heart of what Jesus did and taught – self-giving to those in need even at the cost of hardship, pain or ultimate death?

There have been instances of this in Iraq and Afghanistan where soldiers have risked their own lives to try and save a comrade who has been injured.

Many hard decisions have to be made because of scarce resources in the face of need, in medical care, agonising decisions have to be made about priorities for operations, medication even attention, these seem to be becoming more prevalent with cutbacks in National Health Service and the cry for better cancer drugs especially.

How do we act when we learn that we are not the priority?

Are we gracious?

Do we even aspire to give up our rightful place in the queue so that the needs of others can be met?

We know and believe that all people are precious in God's eyes. We hold to the conviction that we are loved and cherished. We do not need the assurance of social status, or the protection of rights and privileges for ourselves.

We can be content knowing that we are faithful to God in the way of Jesus Christ. It is for the needs and rights of others that we must fight and resist injustice.

How do we fit into this category at the present time?

We may have very difficult decisions to make.

Are we up to it?

-oOo-

Did you know.....?

+David OSJ (Wales)

The Ark of the Covenant, built under God's direction (Exodus 25), was the holiest physical object within the Tabernacle's (later the Temple's) most sacred location known as the Holy of Holies.

This unique object, which symbolized God's presence and glory, contained within it a pot of manna, Aaron's budded rod, and stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28, Hebrews 9:4).

It existed as an Israelite possession from the time of Moses until Jerusalem was attacked by Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar.

It was prophesied, 100+ years before the temple's destruction, that all its treasures would be taken to Babylon (2Kings 20:17). This was accomplished during Nebuchadnezzar's three attacks on Jerusalem (2Chronicles 36:7, 10, 18).

It is during Babylon's third attack, in 586 B.C., that the city and its "house of prayer" (Matthew 21:13) is burned to the ground.

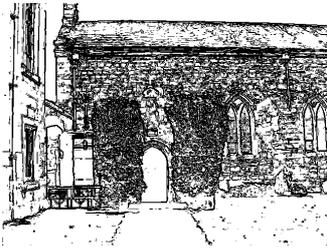
The Ark of the Covenant, once taken to Babylon, existed for an unknown period of time before likely being lost or possibly cut into pieces (see 2Kings 24:13) and its precious materials reused for other purposes.

It should be noted that the Ark is not mentioned as one of the treasures given back to captive Jews when they were allowed to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:7 as well as chapters 5 - 6).

The Ark of God was still missing, roughly 500 years later, when Herod the Great began to tear down and rebuild the temple.

In its place, within the Holy of Holies, was a large stone on which the high priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement.

(‘The Temple its Ministry and Service’ by Alfred Edersheim, Chapter 2).



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020	19th January, 2020
2nd February, 2020	16th February, 2020
1st March, 2020	15th March, 2020
5th April, 2020	19th April, 2020
3rd May, 2020	17th May, 2020
7th June, 2020	21st June, 2020
5th July, 2020	19th July, 2020
2nd August, 2020	16th August, 2020
6th September, 2020	20th September, 2020
4th October, 2020	18th October, 2020
1st November, 2020	15th November, 2020
6th December, 2020	20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

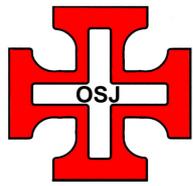
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

February 2020



Ministry: just get on with it.

There is a continuing nagging doubt in my mind that the traditional view of Jesus and the spiritual legacy he has left us has been usurped and disempowered by 'the church' so none of us 'bums on seats' get above our station and upset the peaceful tranquillity of 'good order' and unquestioning 'obedience'.

It may seem an outrageous statement but here is the logic.

Jesus was born human and so emptied himself of the power, nature and authority of God. There was nothing in him that we did not have when we were born.

There was just a big gap waiting for God to fill it.

But how can you pack an eternal and infinite God into one human being?

It would be like trying to fit 2 litres of wine into an empty and clean 70 cl bottle.

The bottle would simply be broken and destroyed, and the wine spoiled and wasted.

Somehow, Jesus, as he was growing up, allowed himself to be filled by God in as much as any human can. How, I have no idea, but he did not lose his own being and persona as he was being filled. God does not work that way.

Just like the bottle of wine, the bottle remains the bottle and the wine the wine, but what is one without the other?

One colours the other when light shines through them both, and sometimes it seems as if they are 'one'.

When you have seen the bottle, you have seen the wine, even if you haven't tasted it.

The bottle protects the wine until it is fully matured and ready to be poured.

Until it is completely emptied the bottle has not yet served its full purpose.

So was Jesus wholly man, but filled with the nature and power of God in as much as was humanly and perfectly possible?

It would not be difficult if this was the case to claim that this close and unhindered relationship allowed Jesus to legitimately claim Son-ship with God.

Jesus knew God intimately, as did God know him.

It was hard at times to know where one stopped and the other began even though they were distinct and different, and the more Jesus emptied himself, the more God filled him, the more he was able to do.

Jesus made it quite plain that we could enjoy this very same relationship with God. He was both the precursor and the proof. Does it seem far-fetched?

It shouldn't. It's all in the bible and it's all a matter of faith.

Jesus once asked the question, 'Who is my brother and sister?'

He went on to explain, '..... whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.' (Matthew 12 v 50)

So, if they/we are his brothers and sisters, and he is the Son of God, then aren't they/we also the children of God too? We have the same Father and we are inheritors of the same kingdom because of Jesus.

It becomes more intriguing when you read, ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.' (John 14 v11-13)

Also, add Mark 11 v 23, 'Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.'

It's a simple argument, but it has implications.

If these things that Jesus said are not true, then Jesus was lying, and if he was lying then our faith is of nothing.

If however these things Jesus said are true then it suggests that the faithful can (in theory) do everything that Jesus did, miracles and signs included.

So just where are these signs and miracles in these present times?

Has 'the church' deliberately hidden them away from view?

(This happens, even locally. There was a miraculous solar event at Hazlewood Castle during a retreat was back on 11th September 1982 and the then Roman Catholic bishop apparently made everyone who witnessed this event promise never to speak of it but news got out. This event is recorded in Desmond Seaward's book, 'The dancing sun – journeys to miracle shrines', page 111.)

Or is it that 'the church' in its fear of losing control of or to the masses is universally guilty of misleading and/or disempowering God's people?

Or is that this 'power' is so great it frightens the very people it was given to?

Or is it that they 'can't be bothered' or are overwhelmed by the demands and responsibilities it lays upon them?

(If you have ever been asked to lay hands on someone requesting healing in public you might know exactly what I mean.)

Or is it simply 'safeguarding' and 'political correctness', etc., gone mad?

(We live in an age when even praying in public can get you arrested – [click this link.](#))

There is no one, single answer because all of these things (and more) apply.

But that doesn't answer the question and the question remains - just where are the prophets and miracle workers and the healers of this age? They should be evident, but they aren't.

I imagine that the main reason is because these people are a threat to 'the church' as it exists at the moment, that they have been silenced with red tape, safeguarding, training courses, the need for qualifications, membership of 'Churches Together' and a whole raft of other 'initiatives' designed to protect 'the church' and 'the faith' they are supposedly entrusted with. Only professionals who are appropriately qualified and whose faces fit may apply.

I do not think we have moved from the position Jesus found himself in when he was asked 'by what authority do you do/say these things?'

My feeling is that ministry and witness have been officially stifled under the pretext of 'good order'. Paid professionals have taken over and tied everything up in religious red tape so only they are 'eligible'.

It is no wonder there is a feeling of disengagement amongst congregations and many churches are emptying, not because their congregations have lost their faith in God, but because they have lost faith in 'the church' that was supposed to guide them along the paths of righteousness. It has left people feeling they no longer have a place or value other than to feed the dwindling collection.

(I recently attended a service at York Minster and was horrified that as a congregation we weren't even trusted to say the Lord's Prayer. It had to be sung to a particularly impossible setting by the choir. We were relegated to being passengers, not participants. There were five clergy leading the service but strangely not enough to serve some of the outlying parishes who were doing without.)

I seriously wonder whether Jesus would recognise the faith he entrusted to us as portrayed by 'the church'. Many of the things he spoke against have re-emerged. There are new teachers of the law, Scribes and Pharisees, rules and regulations, and they continue to keep people distanced from God. Jesus would certainly recognise those things but I doubt that they would be welcomed.

Do we need to hold our hands up and take responsibility?

I'm afraid we do and we have no choice but to admit fault.

When it comes down to it, 'the church' has become what we have let it become. We have allowed it to stray in our continued and unquestioning silence, and we are now paying the price.

But we need to see and keep this in context: 'the church' is not a replacement for either 'God' or 'faith'. 'The church' was intended to support, encourage and help us explore and grow in our faith, but not to take primacy of authority away from God. In spite of this, 'faith' still exists in spite of 'the church's' best efforts to extinguish it or keep it under control. It is what happens when organizations become an end in themselves.

It is true that the relationship between 'religion' (in this case 'the church') and 'faith' is a difficult and complex one. It is easily unbalanced. 'Faith' and 'religion' are an uneasy alliance at the best of times, even when they are both in good health.

'Religion' is about order and structure and conformity. It is more about the group.

'Faith' is about spiritual consciousness and reacting to 'the moment'. It is more about the individual.

Whilst 'faith' may take note of 'religion', 'faith' has a mind of its own and will make its own choices.

The thing that holds the two together is either God or fear.

Regarding God, if He isn't present then everything falls apart.

Regarding fear, 'the church' has long had power over its members in that it can deny the sacraments and forgiveness. It has certainly been an effective stick with which to beat the masses into submission, and now 'the church' is paying the price for that deceit now it has been rumbled. That seems to be the problem at the moment and 'the church' is struggling to decide how it should recover.

The current trend of 'the church' abandoning long held theological and scripturally founded views on sexuality, gender, abortion, euthanasia and marriage (to name but a few), to climb the popularity stakes will just add to the existing confusion. Just ask yourself, what is left if there is no integrity?

What happened to the centuries old traditions and belief of 'the church', those things people held so dear they willingly died for?

Just what does the church hold as true if it can abandon even these things?

And if they abandon these things, what of God, the one we call 'Our Father'?

Will He be abandoned with the same speed, be replaced, or be re-launched in some non-offensive, scripturally abandoned, politically correct 'anything goes' campaign to appeal to the hedonistic and morally bankrupt needs of the masses?

And if God, the Father goes, then what of His Son?

And then what of our Son-ship?

What of 'our faith'?

Or does what 'the church' thinks really matter?

In practical terms, what 'the church' thinks doesn't really hold that much sway in either the Christian community or the society it pretends to serve.

As an example, put three Roman Catholics in a room and you will have at least six different versions of Roman Catholicism. It is the same for all those of other denominations. When it comes to it, they trust what they personally 'know' to be the truth rather than what they are 'told' is the truth. They are not stupid.

The fact is that 'the church' has no power to save. It cannot even save itself in a society that is changing and rejecting all it stands for, let alone save any lost souls for God. 'The church' can only lead to or point people towards God. If it thinks it alone can 'save' them then it has usurped the power and authority of God.

What really matters is the relationship between the individual and with God, not the relationship between the individual and 'the church'. Only then there is the possibility of 'being saved'. Only God can 'save' and it is an on-going process that lasts a life time.

It's is not what 'the church' tells you that you can (or cannot do), but what you yourself know is right to do (or not do) and what you do about it that counts. It is a matter of conscience* and discernment, between you and God. It is matter of discipline. It is a matter of trust and just getting on with it rather than thinking about it, seeking permission or being qualified. If you ask, expect 'no' to be the answer, just because people love to exert their authority for no other reason than they can. If God says get on with it, what more do you need?

'The church' is not the sole supplier of discernment of ministry - discernment can come from other quarters, but 'the church' can be of real use in testing those things. Ultimately 'the church' has no authority to deny ministry once it has been discerned and tested, even the ministries of those beyond its own fold. If it tries, it will stand before God's judgement throne.

It comes down to something as basic as which matters most, what God thinks or what 'the church' thinks?

It would be a wonderful thing if both were in agreement but it should never be assumed to be a forgone conclusion. If there is any doubt I would always trust God first.

Ministry is driven by a living faith, and ministry comes as a consequence of it faith being active. It conforms to Holy Scripture and is generated and dictated by a love and trust of God without it being an end in itself.

Denomination has nothing to do with anything. Faith, on the other hand, has everything to do with it.

Remember this text (John 14 v11-13) from the beginning of this article - Jesus stated four specific truths:

1. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;
2. or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.
3. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.
4. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.'

No doubt 'the church' will continue to make every attempt to claim this as their scriptural mandate to conduct and control ministry but I believe they would be mistaken. This is a call to all believers. It is intended to be read, understood and applied by them as individual in the community as a sign of God's love for us.

My belief is that when we as believers truly accept the truth of these four statements and put our trust in God (and God alone), then there will be the real signs of faith and the age of miracles that Jesus began will be resumed.

It comes down to whether we believe God's Word in Jesus and whether we have enough faith to start.

You do not need my permission, or anyone else's for that matter. Just do it.

** Conscience and the Roman Catholic Catechism: thought provoking material that all Christians may care to read and consider. The OSJ (UK) principle is to 'accept what is good and reject what is not.'*

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON - MORAL CONSCIENCE

1776 "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths."

I. THE JUDGMENT OF CONSCIENCE

1777 Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, enjoins him at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil. It bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn, and it welcomes the commandments. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.

1778 Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right. It is by the judgment of his conscience that man perceives and recognizes the prescriptions of the divine law:

Conscience is a law of the mind; yet [Christians] would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise. . . . [Conscience] is a messenger of him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ.

1779 It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of interiority is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination or introspection:

Return to your conscience, question it. . . . Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness.

1780 The dignity of the human person implies and requires uprightness of moral conscience. Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (synderesis); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgment about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed. The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the prudent judgment of conscience. We call that man prudent who chooses in conformity with this judgment.

1781 Conscience enables one to assume responsibility for the acts performed. If man commits evil, the just judgment of conscience can remain within him as the witness to the universal truth of the good, at the same time as the evil of his particular choice.

The verdict of the judgment of conscience remains a pledge of hope and mercy. In attesting to the fault committed, it calls to mind the forgiveness that must be asked, the good that must still be practiced, and the virtue that must be constantly cultivated with the grace of God:

We shall . . . reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

1782 Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters."

II. THE FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

1783 Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.

1784 The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

1785 In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.

III. TO CHOOSE IN ACCORD WITH CONSCIENCE

1786 Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.

1787 Man is sometimes confronted by situations that make moral judgments less assured and decision difficult. But he must always seriously seek what is right and good and discern the will of God expressed in divine law.

1788 To this purpose, man strives to interpret the data of experience and the signs of the times assisted by the virtue of prudence, by the advice of competent people, and by the help of the Holy Spirit and his gifts.

1789 Some rules apply in every case:

- One may never do evil so that good may result from it;
- the Golden Rule: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."
- charity always proceeds by way of respect for one's neighbour and his conscience: "Thus sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience . . . you sin against Christ." Therefore "it is right not to . . . do anything that makes your brother stumble."

-oOo-

Abortion: the real figures.

Report extract from the Christian Institute.

More than 42 million abortions took place around the world last year – the single largest cause of death in 2019.

Numbers compiled by independent statisticians reveal that over the past 12 months, 58.6 million people died from all other causes, leaving abortions responsible for around 42 per cent of all deaths.

The Worldometer organisation revealed that in comparison, deaths due to all illness, including cancer, accounted for around 21.2 million deaths – half that of abortion.

It is estimated that over a million abortions have taken place already in 2020 worldwide.

In England and Wales, abortion figures were at their highest in the last ten years in 2018, when more than 205,000 abortions took place. This is equivalent to almost one in four pregnancies ending in abortion.

Catherine Robinson, a spokeswoman for Right to Life UK said: “It is heart-breaking that a mother’s womb, which should be one of the safest places for any person, is one of the most dangerous places to be.

“In 2020, and beyond, we will be calling on the Government to urgently bring forward increased support for women with unplanned pregnancies to reduce the tragic number of abortions that happen each year.”

Comment: +lan

These figures are truly appalling.

The population of London is just under 9 million.

Imagine the world reaction if the population of London was wiped out in the blink of an eye in some nuclear accident. Now multiply that by 4.5 and you are getting near what 42,000,000 lives look like.

Put another way, it is nearly the same number as the total estimated number of deaths, civilian and military, over the six year period of the WW2, but compacted into just one year. And the same will happen next year, and the following year and so on until something is done to stop it.

(Within the next ten years half a billion lives may have been terminated by abortion.)

Despite being morally unacceptable, hardly a word is said. This is death on a truly industrial scale and by allowing it to continue we all carry the burden of corporate guilt. We could have done something to protect these lives and instead we did nothing, we looked the other way and pretended it never happened.

Psalm 139 suggests that from the moment of conception, a child is known of God and is in fact a gift of God.

That alone contradicts any reasoning that may be offered in support of abortion.

We seem to be very big on 'our human rights' but what about the rights of the unborn child?

The argument put forward by feminist thinkers that they have rights over their own bodies could also be applied to the small lives they carry.

Don't they have a right to life no matter how difficult it might be?

THE ORIGINS OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS: a Roman Catholic viewpoint.

(Extracts of lectures and notes by Fr. Giles Dimock OP, and not indicated as being copyright from source.)

A sacrament is an outward efficacious sign instituted by Christ to give grace. Jesus Christ himself is the sacrament, as he gave his life to save mankind. His humanity is the outward sign or the instrument of his Divinity. It is through his humanity that the life of the Trinity comes to us as grace through the sacraments. It is Jesus Christ alone who mediates the sacraments to allow grace to flow to mankind.

Christ sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to inspire his Apostles and his Church to shepherd his flock after his Ascension into heaven. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 17:18, 20:21). Jesus is the Head of his Body the Church (Colossians 1:18). The Church itself is a sacrament instituted by Christ to give grace. Jesus gave us his Body the Church to continue the works he performed during his earthly life. Grace given to us through the sacraments will help us lead a good life in this world and help save us for the Kingdom of Heaven.

The sacraments were instituted by Christ and were part of the Tradition of the early Christian Church. The Church celebrates in her liturgy the Paschal mystery of Christ, his Passion, Sacrifice on the Cross, Resurrection, and Glorious Ascension. The Greek word **μυστήριον** or **'mystery'** in the Greek New Testament is translated into **'sacramentum'** in the Latin Vulgate Bible, from which we derive our English word **'sacrament'** (examples: Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:27). The saving effects of Christ's Redemption on the Cross are communicated through the sacraments, especially in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist. The sacraments to this day are called **'mysteries'** in the Eastern Churches.

All Catholic and Orthodox Churches recognize the seven sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The three sacraments of Christian Initiation are Baptism, Chrismation or Confirmation, and the Eucharist. The two sacraments of Healing are Penance and the Anointing of the Sick, and the two sacraments of Vocation are Holy Orders and Marriage. Three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, and Holy Orders, are given once, as they render a permanent seal or character upon one's soul (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Ephesians 4:30, Revelations 7:3).

The Gospel of Mark 5:25-34 describes a woman afflicted with hemorrhage who touched the cloak of Jesus and was immediately healed. There is a fourth century fresco painting in the catacomb of Sts. Marcellinus and Peter depicting this event, which serves as an apt symbol of Sacrament - the power that flows out from the body of Jesus, in order to effect both remission of sin and new life in Christ. The fresco image frames Part II of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the Liturgy and the Sacraments, The Celebration of the Christian Mystery. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa Theologica, has written the standard exposition on the Seven Sacraments.

Each sacrament consists of a visible external rite, which is composed of matter and form, the matter being the action, such as the pouring of water in baptism, and the form being the words spoken by the minister. Each sacramental rite confers a special ecclesial effect and sacramental grace appropriate for each sacrament. The sacraments occur at pivotal events and give meaning to a person's life.

The sacraments act *ex opere operato*, by the very fact of the action being performed, independent of the minister. The effect on the person receiving the sacrament is called *ex opere operantis*, and depends on the interior disposition of the receiver.

Grace is a favour, the free and undeserved gift from God through Christ Jesus, to help us respond to his call to become children of God, to become partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is a participation in the life of God and is necessary for salvation.

BAPTISM

Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, as we are born of the water and the Spirit and receive the grace of Christ. Baptism is necessary for salvation (John 3:5), and conveys a permanent sign that the new Christian is a child of God and a temple of the Holy Spirit (First Corinthians 6:19). Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Mark 1:9-11). The martyr St. Ignatius of Antioch, in his Letter to the Ephesians written about 100 AD, stated that Jesus "Christ was baptized, that by himself submitting he might purify the water."

Baptism is prefigured in the Old Testament through the saving of Noah and his family during the Flood (Genesis 7:12-23, First Peter 3:20-21), and Moses crossing of the Red Sea during the Exodus, leaving captivity for the Promised Land (Exodus 14:1-22).

The Greek word baptizein means to "immerse, plunge, or dip." The infant or candidate is anointed with the oil of catechumens, followed by the parents, godparents, or candidate making the profession of faith. The essential rite of Baptism consists of the minister immersing the baby or person in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." The infant or candidate is then anointed with sacred chrism.

What has taken place in Baptism is indicated by the rites that follow it, the clothing in the white garment and giving of the lighted candle: the baptized person has "clothed yourself with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

CONFIRMATION

Confirmation or Chrismation is the Sacrament of the Holy Spirit. Jesus instructed his Apostles that "you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit" and called upon the Apostles to be "my witnesses" to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). At the Pentecost, the Apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), and began to spread the Word of God. The Acts of the Apostles is often called the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote on Baptism, Eucharist, and Chrismation in the mid-fourth century AD.

The rite of Confirmation is anointing the forehead with chrism, together with the laying on of the minister's hands and the words, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." The recipient receives the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2-3). On occasion one may receive one or more of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit (First Corinthians 12:7-11).

The ecclesial effect and sacramental grace of the sacrament give the recipient the strength and character to witness for Jesus Christ. Chrismation in the East continues the tradition of the early Christian Church by administering the sacrament with Baptism.

Confirmation in the West suggests that this sacrament both confirms baptism and strengthens baptismal grace. It is administered by the Bishop.

THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is also named Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. Eucharistia means thanksgiving, and the Eucharist is the "source and summit of the Christian life." St. Justin Martyr described the Eucharistic Liturgy in 155 AD in his First Apology. The Paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated in the liturgy of the Mass (or Divine Liturgy in the East), which consists of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the principal sacramental celebration of the Church, established by Jesus at the Last Supper, in which the mystery of our salvation through participation in the sacrificial death, Resurrection, and Glorious Ascension of Christ is renewed and accomplished. The word "Mass" comes from the Latin missa, as it refers to the mission or sending forth of the faithful following the celebration, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives.

The essential signs of Holy Communion are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked during the Sacrifice of the Mass, and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper: "This is my body...This is the cup of my blood..." (Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20, First Corinthians 11:23-26).

Jesus died once on the cross in sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:25-28). But Jesus is present for all time, as he is the eternal Son of God. What he did once in history also then exists for all eternity. What happened in time goes beyond time. In the heart of Jesus he is always giving himself to the Father for us, as he did on the Cross. When we celebrate the Mass, the sacrifice of the cross, that happened once in history but is present for all eternity, that same reality is made present in mystery.

The bread and wine through Transubstantiation become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, and we receive the Real Presence of Jesus when we receive Holy Communion. Our soul is nourished, helping us to become like Christ. The Eucharist is the heart and source of community within the Church. Receiving Holy Communion with others during the Mass brings unity of the Church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 10:16-17).

CONFESSION

Jesus Christ gave his Apostles the power to forgive sins. The Sacrament is also known as the Sacrament of Conversion, Forgiveness, Penance, or Reconciliation.

During the persecution of the Roman Emperor Decius (249-251), many Christians left the Church rather than suffer martyrdom. The martyr St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, allowed apostates the Sacrament of Confession, as recorded in his Letter De Lapsis (The Lapsed) in 251.

The sacrament involves three steps: the penitent's contrition or sorrow for his sins, the actual confession to a priest and absolution, and then penance or restitution for your sins. The experience leads one to an interior conversion of the heart. Jesus describes the process of conversion and penance in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24).

The penitent confesses his sins to the priest in the confessional, and the priest then gives absolution to the repentant soul, making the Sign of the Cross, and saying the words "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It is Christ Jesus through the priest who forgives your sins. As the penitent must make restitution or satisfaction for his sins, the priest gives a penance to the forgiven one, usually prayer, fasting, or almsgiving (I Peter 4:8).

Confession gives one a wonderful sense of freedom and peace from the burden of sin. Sorrow, affliction, and a desire for conversion follow the remorse of sin in those with a contrite heart. Some believe we can confess our sins privately to God. But man is a social being.

The humbling experience of unburdening your soul to someone, of exposing your weak nature, and then being accepted for who you are and what you have done by having your sins forgiven brings one an incredible sense of relief! The experience brings a sense of gratitude to our generous Lord for his love, compassion and mercy.

As one is to be in the state of grace before receiving Holy Communion, the child makes his first Confession before his first Communion, generally at the age of reason.

THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

The Anointing of the Sick is the Sacrament given to seriously ill Christians, and the special graces received unite the sick person to the passion of Christ.

The Sacrament consists of the anointing of the forehead and hands of the person with blessed oil, with the minister saying, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who frees you from sin, save you and raise you up."

Origen of Egypt in his Homilies on Leviticus described Anointing for healing the sick and forgiveness of sins in the third century. St. Thomas Aquinas stated that Extreme Unction, as the Anointing of the Sick was once called, is "a spiritual remedy, since it avails for the remission of sins, and therefore is a sacrament" (James 5:15).

The ecclesial effect of this sacrament is incorporation into the healing Body of Christ, with a spiritual healing of the soul, and at times healing of the body. The sacramental grace helps us to accept sickness by uniting ourselves to the passion and death of Christ (Colossians 1:24) and the grace even to accept death if that is God's will.

Jesus healed the blind and the sick, as well as commissioned his Apostles to do so.

HOLY ORDERS

The Sacrament of Holy Orders began with the Last Supper, when Christ Jesus commissioned his Apostles to continue the Eucharistic celebration. He also commissioned his Apostles following the Resurrection to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). Thomas Aquinas makes the point that only Christ is the true priest, the others serving as his ministers (Hebrews 8:4). St. Ignatius, Bishop of Syria around 100 AD, in his Letter to the Magnesians (6), established the hierarchy of bishop, priest, and deacon for the early Churches, the pattern which still exists today. Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, and priests and deacons are his assistants in rendering service. Men are ordained to the priesthood in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as the sacrament confers upon the priest the character to act in the person of Christ - in persona Christi.

Holy Orders is the sacrament of Apostolic ministry. As in the Pastoral Epistles, the rite consists of the Bishop's laying on of hands on the head of the priest-candidate with the consecrating prayer asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the gifts of the ministry. There are three dimensions to ministry, that of Bishop, Priesthood, and the Diaconate. See Matthew 16:18-19, John 21:15-17, Romans 10:14-15, 2 Timothy 1:6, and Titus 1:5.

MARRIAGE

The union of a man and a woman is natural. The natural language of the human body is such that the man gives to the woman and the woman receives the man. The love and friendship between a man and a woman grow into a desire for marriage. The sacrament of marriage gives the couple the grace to grow into a union of heart and soul, to continue life, and to provide stability for themselves and their children. Children are the fruit and bond of a marriage.

The bond of marriage between a man and a woman lasts all the days of their lives, and the form of the rite consists of the mutual exchange of vows by a couple, both of whom have been baptized. The minister serves as a witness to the couple in the West, but serves as the actual minister of the rite in the East. The matter follows later through consummation of the marriage act.

Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God, and concludes with a vision of the "wedding-feast of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7, 9). The bond of marriage is compared to God's undying love for Israel in the Old Testament, and Christ's love for his Church in the New Testament of the Bible.

Jesus stresses the significance of the marriage bond in his Ministry (Matthew 19:6, 8). The importance of marriage is substantiated by the presence of Christ at the wedding feast of Cana, where he began his public ministry at the request of his mother Mary by performing his first miracle (John 2). It is the Apostle Paul who calls matrimony a great sacrament or mystery, and who identifies the marriage of man and woman with the unity of Christ and his Church. The theologian Tertullian, the first Latin Father of the Church at the beginning of the third century AD, (also) wrote on the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Question: are (all) the sacraments still relevant in a changing society and changing church? +lan



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020	19th January, 2020
2nd February, 2020	16th February, 2020
1st March, 2020	15th March, 2020
5th April, 2020	19th April, 2020
3rd May, 2020	17th May, 2020
7th June, 2020	21st June, 2020
5th July, 2020	19th July, 2020
2nd August, 2020	16th August, 2020
6th September, 2020	20th September, 2020
4th October, 2020	18th October, 2020
1st November, 2020	15th November, 2020
6th December, 2020	20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

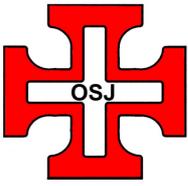
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

March 2020



'God in love unites us'? Perhaps not.

The Current Position.

(1) The scriptural view of marriage:

1. Marriage is a calling and sacrament, not a matter of temporary convenience, but instead is intended for the life of both partners,
2. Marriage, once entered into and established, cannot be undone,
3. Marriage is between a man and a woman (as physically defined at birth)
4. Marriage is to the benefit of society as a whole in that it provides a good foundation for social stability built on relational boundaries, mutual trust and integrity.
5. Marriage is intended for the procreation of children (even if that involves occasional medical intervention)
6. Marriage is for mutual comfort. It is a self-contained unit where everything that is needed for its purpose can be found, (same sex couples must look beyond their union if they wish to have children and that simply works against the whole principle of fidelity in marriage)

7. Children are a gift of God entrusted into the protective care and stewardship of both parents and the Christian community.
8. The deliberate termination of life (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, etc.) is contrary to scripture.
9. Marriage, or anything described as 'marriage', between those of the same sex (as defined by birth, self-determination or by other choice or process) is contrary to scripture.
10. Sexually or physically intimate relationships between same sex couples (as defined above) is contrary to scripture.
11. Sexually or physically intimate relationships outside of marriage, regardless of gender, are contrary to Holy Scripture.
12. Surrogacy is not within the scriptural boundaries of biblically based marriage although adoption is.

(2) The scriptural view of same sex relationships:

There is no issue with platonic same sex relationships.

The issue is when they become sexually intimate, just like other relationships regardless of gender, outside of marriage.

Context of the report.

At the moment in the Methodist church, discussion documents are being circulated in preparation for abandoning the traditionally accepted view of marriage for something 'more inclusive' of same sex relationships.

The church's biblical understanding (as being between a man and a woman (as defined physically at birth) intended for life and for the procreation of children) is now being challenged.

The main thrust of this discussion is found in a somewhat technical and overly complex document called 'God in love unites us', the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group for discussion and prayerful consideration.

What is eminently clear is this group is seeking a particular outcome and it puts forward an apparently well-argued case which talks about the higher Christian gifts of love, unity, fidelity and compassion which transcend gender boundaries.

Reasoning.

The argument being put forward to us in short goes something like this.

The bible is a social construct and was shaped by various historical and sociological events with a bit of theology thrown in.

It therefore needs to be reinterpreted because those historical and social constructs no longer apply because things have changed.

We are told that we, in our present time, have a deeper and far clearer understanding of our own sexuality and gender, and the concept of 'man' and 'woman' no longer apply as rigid definitions. Previously it was a conversation that couldn't happen until this time of true enlightenment and liberal thinking.

Even on the issue of gender there are issues. According to the bible, gender remains binary. HMGov and the LGBT community are challenging that and soon we will legally be able to self-define our own gender without the need for medical intervention.

Therefore, because there is no longer a clear sense of 'man' and 'woman' any more, we need to look at the concepts of marriage and other long term adult relationships again, and look at ways of making them far more 'inclusive'.

It requires us to be much more accepting of new forms of relationship because Christianity and God are all about 'love' – the rule is, if 'love' is involved then it must be ok because 'God is Love', and we have to set aside our own prejudices for the greater good. Therefore, by implication, those who do not accept this way of thinking are not really 'Christian' because they do not demonstrate 'love', 'tolerance' and 'inclusivity'.

The report uses many bible texts in support of its argument and position, but this

is anomalous as it ignores some fairly essential texts on same sex relationships which involve physical intimacy, and also texts about marriage and the nature of 'male' and 'female'.

Whilst appearing to be logical and persuasive argument in support of the report's proposals, the argument is deeply flawed.

It is predominantly a socially driven response rather than a theocentric one.

The hidden agenda.

Let me restate those principles in the way they should really be understood:

1. That in order to be 'inclusive', the church must be willing to accept and embrace whatever morality society demands. Anything now goes so long as it involves 'love' (because 'God is love' and that makes everything ok).
2. That the inclusive church can no longer continue to promote biblically based standards of morality because these are discriminatory. Inclusivity means accepting those things that previously were unacceptable 'in a spirit of Christian love'.
3. That the Bible is no longer to be considered God's immutable and eternal Word but is something you can pick and choose from to justify your own personal lifestyle choices/opinions/views/theology/etc.

4. That the bible can be made to fit whatever you want, and if it doesn't fit it can be ignored on the basis that 'God/Jesus didn't specifically speak on this matter so it must be up to us to decide....'

5. That as inheritors of the Kingdom and, because we have grown in faith, understanding and stature, we can now abandon parts of our long established Christian heritage and traditional teaching. God has entrusted such decisions to us because we now know what He really meant to say. We now speak for God.

Is the bible really God's Word?

What it all comes down to is not whether the Methodist church should adopt in principle the idea of same sex 'marriages' but whether it acknowledges the authority and authenticity of the bible as God's Word.

Either it is or it isn't, and on that hangs the whole argument.

If it is God's Word then really this discussion shouldn't even be happening.

If it isn't God's Word then there is no need for discussion because we can do whatever we like.

Implications.

The sting in the tail is that those who disagree with the report's recommendations will inevitably be labelled homophobic and there will be an implicit threat to those who voice their different opinions that they will fall foul of hate, equality and anti-discrimination legislation (as well as not being 'very Christian').

There are no legal justifications for believing that this is the actual case* but there is strong social pressure to believe that this is the reality, (i.e. you must agree or you will fall foul of the law). It is little more than a form of coercion and blackmail.

The report's recommendations, if successful, will simply split the church. Any hopes of 'unity' (i.e. even just agreeing to disagree) between the opposing factions will evaporate very quickly as people will become even more emotionally involved in the discussion and more alienated.

People will inevitably leave the church whatever the outcome, whether the report's recommendations are accepted or rejected.

The Report acknowledges that if its recommendations are accepted it will cause division. It asks for a spirit of Christian love (i.e. just accept the recommendations and all will be well) to heal the inevitable wounds but the underlying theme is that whatever the outcome on this occasion, implicit within the report is the principle that if it doesn't get through this time, there is no question that more attempts will be made until success is achieved.

But that simply won't be the end of the matter. There will be more reports and more recommendations to come that will slowly but inexorably take us further and further away from a biblically based faith.

If one accepts the validity of same sex relationships then what about the validity of other forms of long term relationships?

Interestingly, polygamy has just been decriminalised in Utah so this may well become the next attack on the church's view on marriage. Why stop at just two partners in a marriage when you can have three or more? The more the merrier. It's all about 'love' so it must be ok.

It isn't just happening in the US either. Worryingly, there have been moves in the UK from the judiciary to have the age of consent reduced to as little as 5.

So where does it end, and at what point does the faith we hold becomes so eroded it becomes scripturally unrecognisable?

The Church as a model of the love of God.

The church is supposed not only to be God's voice to the world but a model of God's standards for the world. It is there to show the way. It is supposed to be exemplar in all it does and be a light to those in darkness.

Whilst the church is supposed to be

(1) a model of love and compassion, it has to be tempered with

(2) obedience to God's law, responsibility, faithfulness, self-discipline, trust, humility and a continual turning away from sin.

You cannot separate one from the other. Love comes with responsibilities.

Unfortunately people seem far happier to accept the warm and cuddly freedoms of (1) rather than the hard and challenging responsibilities of (2).

The truth is that 'love' is not about giving people what they 'want' but what they 'need'. 'Love' is as much about the 'No' as the 'Yes' and requires a trust in God's wisdom when it goes against the things society is asking or even our own beliefs.

Sometimes, a 'No' seems hard and uncaring but there is always a good reason and purpose to that 'No' even if we can't see it immediately.

It seems that the report has been overly indifferent to (2) in its pursuit of (1). It certainly has not demonstrated a true and full understanding of what 'love' is and isn't in God's eyes.

Real love isn't always inclusive.

It is exclusive in nature too. That is the basis of marriage. It is the basis of our faith too.

So if the report's recommendations are accepted then what does it really say to the world about the faith the church proposes and preaches?

It will certainly be seen that the church has little or no integrity or loyalty or understanding of God's authority when it comes to the execution of a scripturally based belief and faith.

If the church blows with the wind rather than standing firm then what certainty does it offer? Apparently, very little when it denies its scriptural basis.

And if that is true, why would anyone in their right mind want to belong to such a fickle and unstable organisation?

Outcomes.

This will not be one of the desired outcomes the report authors will be looking for but it is inevitable.

Neither will be the division it causes in the church itself. The reports talks about maintaining unity within the church but its recommendations will generate a lot of dissent and hurt and there is no real pastoral plan in place to deal with this, just the vague hope it will all somehow blow over and everything will be alright.

Well, it won't.

The proposed recommendations will never be enough as far as the LGBT

community and other groups are concerned, and the reality is that they will just keep on asking for more and more. They are not interested in a faith that does not completely support or justify their ideals and goals.

It's not even as if there will be a big take up for the new inclusive same sex services. Mostly, they just want to change the status quo and be justified by it. Any underlying optimism that opening the church doors to the LGBT community will fill the church is both naïve and unrealistic.

It simply won't.

The church has long been seen as 'the establishment enemy' by the LGBT community and that will remain the case for the foreseeable future, 'inclusive' services or not.

Any increases in membership as a result of accepting the report's conclusions and proposals will be heavily outweighed by the subsequent losses of existing and long standing members.

The Reality.

Whilst some people may accept the principles of the report, the actual practice may be a real shock when it comes to implementation.

Witnessing the first same sex kiss at the altar will be a profound and disturbing shock for many people.

For some of the more traditional souls amongst the assembled company, it will be as if they were witnessing the desecration of the altar, a point from which there is no return. That should be a massive pastoral concern in the report but it isn't.

Many heterosexual couples may feel that the acceptance of same sex couples into any form of recognised 'marriage' is a betrayal of the marriage vows they made, that they have been lessened in some way or diminished. That is simply not acceptable.

With the best will in the world, there are consequences that cannot be predicted and there is no going back from this position once put into motion.

The report has made some attempt to reconcile this but it has failed, not that it could ever hope to succeed given all the unpredictability of possible outcomes.

The long term affect hasn't really been considered either. This is a legacy for our children and all subsequent generations and it may not be appreciated. What happens when the social moral pendulum swings back to a more orthodox morality? It will as that is evidenced by centuries of recorded social history, but yet again we have failed to let it teach and inform us.

That is a great burden to leave our children, one they may not thank us for.

Same sex couples.

What of the same sex couples who seek to get 'married' in church and intend to celebrate their long term relationship in sexual terms?

Don't they have any rights or say in all of this?

I don't want to seem unsympathetic but the bible is quite clear on this matter. It's a 'No.'**

If you can't accept the bible as God's Word then why on earth would you want to get married in a church that has built its faith upon its precepts?

If you do accept it as God's Word then why are you going against it?

Or are same sex couples looking for some kind of religious justification?

We are all given free will as a gift of God and it can be abused or used. That is our decision and choice. We all have to accept the consequences of our choices and actions.

However, we cannot as Christians pick and choose from the Bible and just have what works for us. We can argue about it all day long but it doesn't change anything. It's the whole package. So when the Bible states that same sex relationships that involve sexual intimacy are off limits, discussion is not needed.

The bible also says that sexual intimacy outside of marriage is off limits too, and that applies whatever sexual preferencing consenting couples have, heterosexual or not. Just how clear does it need to be?

Choices.

When it comes right down to it, we either trust God or we don't.

When God says 'No' it is for a reason and going against that is putting ourselves above God.

If we go against God, it doesn't stop God loving us in just the same way but it will have consequences. It may separate us from His presence if we do not come to our senses, not just in this world but maybe in the world to come.

That is not God's fault. It will be our choice and the blame lies fairly and squarely with us. We have free will and we decided against the better advice. It is our choice.

Similarly, there is an argument that states we cannot choose who we fall 'in love', and this is sometimes used in defence of same sex relationships and unfaithfulness in marriage.

It is a complete myth. It is not a reason but simply an excuse.

Like a lot of things in life, we have choices. That includes who we fall 'in love' with. We need to grow up and accept responsibility for our choices and start acting like adults. Our lives should not be ruled by our emotions.

We need to face up to that fact. Being 'in love' is mostly about a transitory but overwhelming hormonal need for sexual gratification.

It also has little to do with real love and is essentially an act of great selfishness.

Love, trust and obedience.

What the world understands as 'love' is but a shadow of the love God intended for us. It isn't based just on romance or sexual desire but on something much more substantial, something that is tough and durable, disciplined, faithful, trusting, resilient, and based on compassion, forgiveness and completeness.

The main thing is that Christian marriage as scripturally interpreted is self-contained and there is no possible reason to go looking beyond its boundaries because it is whole and completely fulfilling in itself.

Similarly, if we say we love God, then we have no need to look beyond His Word. If we do, like a married partner straying beyond their marriage, we have been unfaithful to God.

On the subject of same sex relationships involving physical or sexual intimacy, it's a definite 'no'.

So is any relationship involving physical or sexual intimacy outside of marriage – that too is a definite 'no'.

Regarding that latter point, maybe if the church hadn't been so silent in its teaching that would have gone a large way to avoiding some of the 42,000,000 abortions (yes, forty two million confirmed abortions) worldwide last year.

There are consequences to 'going with the flow' when something really needs to be said. We are guilty as charged on this particular issue and it should weigh heavily on the church's conscience.

That alone might prompt us to consider the real possibility that God really does know best and that there is real purpose to His Word, rather than Him just trying to stop us having 'a bit of fun' on the side.

We can trust God and what He says. Not only that but we should learn to trust God and do what He asks, especially if we claim to love Him.

Consequences.

There are always consequences to our actions whether good or bad, but especially

when we turn our back on God and go it alone, and these consequences are often far greater than expected and end up affecting lots of other people.

In terms of the report recommendations, especially regarding same sex marriage, I sincerely hope they are rejected by the Methodist church members.

If accepted, then there will be no turning back. Not everything that is done can be undone.

Whilst the report has some worthy points to make, (as any good politician knows, it has to have some elements of truth to be convincing), I believe it is ill conceived in principle, misleading, politically rather than theologically motivated, largely one sided and will have both lasting and damaging consequences if adopted.

My concern is not just for the Methodist church, but the whole church. What the Methodist church decides matters. What happens in one church affects all the others for good or for ill. Thus, a move towards ignoring or even denying the authority and integrity of the bible as God's Word is a serious wound.

The report and its recommendations may have good intentions but the road to hell as I remember is paved with the very same.

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Appendix, notes and supporting material:

* On the right to hold religious views that are different to other people:

The Human Rights Act: your rights under article 9

The right to hold beliefs

Article 9 protects your right under law to hold both religious and non-religious beliefs. This is an absolute right which means it can't be interfered with by the state, groups or individuals. Article 9 includes the right to freely choose or change your religion or beliefs.

The right to manifest your beliefs

Article 9 also protects your right to manifest (live out) your beliefs - for example, your right to wear religious clothing, the right to speak about your beliefs or take part in religious worship.

The right to manifest your beliefs is 'qualified' - in certain situations it can be legally over ridden, for example, to protect the rights of others or in matters of keeping public order, but these situations are exceptionally rare.

The Equality Act: religion or belief discrimination

The Equality Act 2010 says you must not be discriminated against because:

- you are (or are not) of a particular religion
- you hold particular (or do not hold particular) religious views/beliefs
- you hold (or do not hold) a particular philosophical belief
- someone thinks you are of a particular religion or hold a particular belief (this is known as discrimination by perception)
- you are connected to someone who has a religion or belief (this is known as discrimination by association)

In the Equality Act religion or belief can mean any religion as long as it has a clear structure and belief system.

The Equality Act also covers non-belief or a lack of religion or belief.

- the Equality Act also protects those with no religion if they are discriminated against because of their beliefs.

Hate Crime:

A hate crime is when someone commits a crime against you because of your disability, gender identity, race, sexual orientation, religion, or any other perceived difference.

It doesn't always include physical violence. Someone using offensive language towards you or harassing you because of who you are, or who they think you are, is also a crime. The same goes for someone posting abusive or offensive messages about you online.

A hate crime is defined as 'Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.'

A hate incident is any incident which the victim, or anyone else, thinks is based on someone's prejudice towards them because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or because they are transgender (or even 'straight').

Hate crime can fall into one of three main types: physical assault, verbal abuse and incitement to hatred.

Physical assault

Physical assault of any kind is an offence. This law covers physical assault motivated by prejudice.

Verbal abuse

Victims of verbal abuse are often unclear whether an offence has been committed or believe there is little they can do. However, there are laws in place to protect you from verbal abuse.

Incitement to hatred

The offence of incitement to hatred occurs when someone acts in a way that is threatening and intended to stir up hatred. That could be in words, pictures, videos, music, and includes information posted on websites.

Hate content may include:

- messages calling for violence against a specific person or group
- web pages that show pictures, videos or descriptions of violence against anyone due to their perceived differences
- chat forums where people ask other people to commit hate crimes against a specific person or group

Summary:

You have the legally protected right to hold whatever beliefs or opinions you wish and the right to express them. This is protected under Article 9 of the Human Rights Act.

You may not be discriminated against because you hold those beliefs or opinions under the Equality Act.

However, these laws do not give you or anyone else the right to behave or speak abusively, unreasonably, inappropriately or irresponsibly or to deliberately cause harm or offense.

**** What the bible states:**

Leviticus 18:22:

"Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."

Jude 7

"Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?"

Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. "

Romans 1:26-27:

"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion."

Supporting Extract: Rob Wood, May 2017

The Bible defines marriage in Genesis 2:24 as a union between one man and one woman. Jesus Christ upholds this definition of marriage in Matthew 19:5, as does the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31. Any and all sexual activity which takes place outside of this context is treated as sinful, what Jesus calls 'sexual immorality' in Mark 7:21.

Further to this, same-sex practice is specifically highlighted as sinful a number of times in Scripture. In God's Law, for example, condemnations of same-sex practice are given in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.

Further references are made in the New Testament. For example, in Romans 1:24-32, amid echoes to the Genesis creation account, both male and female same-sex practice are treated as sinful. Further references to the sinfulness of same-sex practice can be seen in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10.

The Scriptures are, therefore, consistent in their prohibition of same-sex sexual activity, across different periods of salvation history and within different cultural settings.

Although the Scriptures are clear on sexual ethics, they also tell us that the prospect of forgiveness and eternal life is held out for anyone who turns from sin and puts their faith in Christ (Mark 1:15), no matter how they may have fallen short of his good design for sex and marriage.

For more a detailed exposition, click <https://www.livingout.org/the-bible-and-ssa>

Jonah 3 v14 – 4 v 11

Unice Brearley, OSJ

It is not often we look at the Old Testament lessons, but it would seem that the one about Jonah it has a great deal to tell us about our attitudes to the work God wishes us to do.

While on holiday in Cyprus a few years ago, we were with a Christian Tour group. Our leader in the second week took the story of Jonah, and broke it down into 5 evening sermons starting with Jonah trying to run away from God. I think we have to just recap on Jonah's adventures to understand this 1 chapter of the book of Jonah.

We had Jonah's adventures illustrated on a roll of wallpaper, the whole story laid out, and I can still see the picture of Jonah, after God had told him to go to Nineveh, illustrated by a little man with a small suitcase, haring down the road to catch the ship in the distance, trying to convince himself he could get away from the job God had asked him to do.

How often do we turn in the opposite direction when God asks us to do something we don't want to do or think we are not capable of doing, forgetting God never asks us to do anything that he is not prepared to help us through?

God does have a way of doing His work at times in spite of our disobedience, even Jonah on the ship, in the midst of the storm had the sailors praying to His God, whether they meant it or not remains to be seen.

Jonah has gone through all his traumas at sea repenting of his disobedience and eventually going to Nineveh to preach that they would all be destroyed if they didn't mend their ways and turn to God. What do we find?

He was so effective that even the King dressed in sack cloth and repented as did all his people but was Jonah pleased.

Jonah should have been pleased, but no here we find him sat out in the desert sulking and he was very angry with God. God had decided that because the Ninevites had repented he wasn't going to destroy them. Chapter 3 verse 10 says he had compassion on them. He was slow to anger and had great concern for these people.

Can you imagine how Jonah felt?

He had been preaching God's destruction of the people of Nineveh and here was God forgiving them. Jonah wanted them to be punished. He felt God had made a fool of him.

He prayed to God, it was a very sad prayer in which he blames God and tries to justify himself, but even that sort of prayer was better than running away again. Jonah had to get his prayers right and rejoice at what had happened and not complain.

How often do we have a tantrum or go off and sulk if things don't go our way, or we know we are in the wrong but we don't want to admit it - can we take our anger to God?

Can we be angry with God?

Jonah was really angry with God and from Jonah's limited perspective, he had been discredited and made to look a fool, his image is tarnished.

It is God's forgiveness that Jonah finds so offensive. He wants the people of Nineveh to be punished, and he wants old fashioned justice 'an eye for an eye' How dare God forgive!

Think how Jonah's behaviour often mirrors that of our own society.

We don't like people to be forgiven.

Our media or our politicians often demand a justice system that is 'tough on crime' but see this only in the length of prison sentence.

Often we are still unforgiving once someone has served their sentence, so much so that rehabilitation into society is made still harder on leaving prison. Society doesn't like people to be forgiven and move on.

Jonah certainly had a wrong attitude.

He needed to get his priorities right. He was concerned about His status - he said God had made a fool of him by replacing judgement with mercy for the people of Nineveh.

His pride was hurt. As a Jew, and a prophet he found it very difficult to accept that God would receive and forgive Gentiles. They were the lowest of the low compared to the Jews.

Do we foster these kinds of prejudices about certain groups of people?

Jonah's sin, his lack of concern for people's salvation, was inexcusable to God.

At this point Jonah was sat outside the city, away from where the blessings were, waiting to see what God would do next, but not anxious to be part of it.

What lessons can we learn from Jonah?

It is quite possible for us to be in the midst of God's work being fulfilled and yet miss out on it, through pride, status or sin.

Do we think that if the work around us does not fit in to OUR idea of what God should be doing, we don't want to be counted in?

If it's not exactly according to our interpretation of scripture, do we run away as Jonah did?

It is interesting to note what Paul has to say about this in Philippians, chapter one, verse 18: “It does not matter! I am happy about it so long as Christ is preached in every way possible whether from wrong or right motives. And I will continue to be happy.’

This certainly wasn't Jonah's attitude.

God provided Jonah a plant to provide him some protection and shade in the hot desert sun, but it was to help Jonah understand he was in error. This plant was attacked by a worm and it died. The shade was gone. Jonah was very angry and couldn't understand why God had allowed the plant to die. Why couldn't God show a little compassion, even if it was just a plant?

God had to explain to Jonah that people were much more important than plants.

Similarly, we have to learn what is more important in our lives and ministries. If our 'plant' becomes more important than the people to whom we are trying to bring the Good News, then God provides a worm and our 'plant' will be destroyed.

What is our 'plant' today? It may be quite legitimate and important to us but what if it becomes more important than the work God is asking us to do, or the thing we hide behind?

Maybe we need to question our own attitudes to doing God's work?

So Jonah felt uncomfortable without his plant, almost suicidal, and not only that, God had made a fool of him, and he never wanted to do the job in the first place.

Is this the way we feel about the work God is asking us to do?

Jonah repented whilst he was in the fish's belly, but just how long did that last?

Are we as Christians also capable of being just as fickle at times?

God has asked Jonah to convert 120,000 people, but Jonah wanted them punished instead. Maybe it was just easier for Jonah and involved less work.

Without question, Jonah's behaviour is outrageous but God doesn't argue back. Instead he ignores the tantrum.

God uses a very visual aid, quietly and firmly, to put things back into perspective and Jonah gently back into place. Jonah missed the opportunity to proclaim the good news of God's forgiveness to Nineveh and lost face in the process. It took the post tantrum visual aid and conversation to restore the relationship. Jonah had to learn he was only a small part of a much bigger picture.

God is concerned for the whole of creation not just about Jonah's image, or ours.

What visual aids does God use in our society to turn us gently around and bring us back into relationship with each other and with God?

Often it is the restoring of relationships that helps us to forgive.

So how does the story of Jonah end?

It doesn't!

True story it may be, but it is also a parable without a neat ending.

Perhaps God wants us to write our own ending on the basis we are just like Jonah.

We are mirrored so much in his life that this might well be our own story.

Just how will we react to it comes to speaking out God's warnings to those who haven't yet heard His voice or experienced his love?

When we look around the world to-day, do we see ourselves like Jonah, wanting the world punished even more than it is being these days?

Or are we prepared to respond to God's call and work with Him and do His bidding?

Are we prepared to do whatever we can to follow the Lord's way, or shall we run away and just carry on grumbling, just like Jonah did?

It's up to us. Will we finish the story?

Luke 10:27 Love

Rev David Startup, OSJ

As Christians we talk an awful lot about Love - and quite rightly so as God is Love.

Agape - is a selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love and is the highest of the four types of love in the Bible. A Love practised by God and we need look no further for a good example of Agape when we look at the Crucifixion of Jesus, God's only Son, who gave himself up to redeem us all from our sins.

Back to Agape then: A kind of Love that Jesus had for His father and for his followers - and that includes us...

Jesus says (John 14:21) *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.*

If we look into Luke 10:27 and the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus tells us how we must love Him:

"Love the Lord your God with all your Heart and with all your Soul and with all your Strength and with all your Mind; and love your neighbour as yourself".

"You have answered correctly" Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live".

So Jesus not only tells us who to Love - but with what do we do it?

With all our Heart, Soul, Strength and Mind. Wow!

We need to love God in these four ways in order to Love God completely.

So as individuals how do we Love God with all our Heart?

Well, from a spiritual feelings point of view the heart contains powerful emotions, affections and desires.

How often have we been told by a wide range of people, "Don't let your Heart Rule your Head?"

Our individual affections are deep currents that give direction to our life. We have affections that long to cling to someone or something. So where ever these affections are found so will our hearts be.

The Lord has put into us a need, a desire, to belong or to feel safe knowing that there is someone keeping a eye on us. He has planted a seed of fascination in each and every one of us. How many people have told us that they are looking for something?

The heart longs to love and be loved.

To give and receive affection.

Our affections are attracted to where we find this treasure. Jesus says and is recorded in Matthew 6:21: "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*"

As we grow closer to a person through meeting, talking, listening and being with them, our affection for them increases and our hearts grow fonder. We have found treasure. It's the same with Jesus. He becomes our treasure the more we speak with Him/read His Word. For where your treasure is, there your Heart will be also.

How do you love God with all your Soul then?

We need the answer -is one of the four things we need to do in order to Love God completely. We love the lord with all our Soul by living a life faithful to all that the Lord requires of us. So while loving the Lord with all our Heart has to do with affection, loving with the Soul has to do with devotion. The soul, so I understand, is the part of us that describes who we are.

The biblical definition of soul is life, personality our inner self or identity. It's where we make choices , decisions that decide our attitude and behaviour - our lifestyle. the soul is our core being...So to love the Lord with all your soul means to love Him in the way we live, in the choices we make and the behaviour and lifestyle we live out. Therefore: We should make Godly Choices. We do what we value. If we treasure our relationship with the Lord we must act out how the Lord would want us to be.

We must be obedient to Him - to His Word - and to the Holy Spirit. We shall then be showing to others our love for the Lord. We must ask and speak in Meekness, as Jesus does. Meekness - God given power and privilege "under control".

So we've looked at Heart and Soul and moving on then:

How do you love God with all your Mind?

Paul tells us in Romans 12.2: " Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good pleasing and perfect will".

There are indeed four ways that we can Love the Lord with our mind:

Reason: Isaiah says : 1 - 18 "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.

To reason is to think, understand and logically come to a conclusion. This is along with lots of other attributes, a gift from God. We must remember though it's not a case of "Mind Over Matter" the mind learns from the heart. How many times do we feel something from the heart but cannot understand straightaway?

The Mind learns from the Heart. Faith however goes way beyond reason. It looks to the improbable and the impossible and trusts in our All-knowing God. Reason is powerful.

We can look at the ways God has an impact on our lives and Thank Him for it.

Knowledge Hebrews 10:16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time says the Lord. I will put my Laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." To love God with all our mind means taking the time to fill our mind with God's word and to rightly agree with who He is. When we grow in knowledge we gain the truth. When we agree with God it wakes up the love in us. Knowing truth and loving God are deeply connected. Jesus is the Truth. As we gain more knowledge about Jesus, the more and more we are able to love Him.

Memory The Bible is full with information to remember. Good memories lead to thankfulness and praise of His kindness, mercy, grace, patience and peace and builds a foundation of faith ,hope and love. We are loving God through and with our memories.

Imagination Isaiah 55:8 "My thoughts are completely different from yours" says the Lord "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine"

In our imagination then Heavens thoughts can come to us and be captured. This enables us to explore possibilities we have with God in all areas of our lives.

We all have the Mind of Christ. Let's love Him with it.

How do you Love God with all your Strength?

Last but not Least

Well, in practical terms it means with all and everything you've got by way of time, stamina, energy, passion and more. To go all out. To give it your best shot.

Love Him with all our might 110%

Loving Him with all our strength is to love Him with all our resources available to us.

Love Him with our Hands

We are His Hands. Feeding the poor playing an instrument. Writing an article.

Love Him with our eyes and what they see. Fixing our eyes on Jesus. We become what we see. The eyes are the gateway to the Heart.

Love Him with ears to hear. Listen and be changed. Walk away from gossip heard. Listen to others - share their pain. Have the strength to handle negativity.

Love Him with our feet. Go to Church. Go to a friend in need. Go the extra mile. Let's be led by the Holy Spirit into amazing places and divine opportunities.

Love Him with our mouth to speak.

Declaring Praise and Worship to the Lord. Sharing our Faith with others. Let us edify and encourage others.

Four ways we need to Love the Lord - (to Love Him Completely).

(1) Love the Lord your God with all your Heart

(2) and with all your Soul

(3) and with all your Strength

(4) and with all your Mind

Amen.



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020	19th January, 2020
2nd February, 2020	16th February, 2020
1st March, 2020	15th March, 2020
5th April, 2020	19th April, 2020
3rd May, 2020	17th May, 2020
7th June, 2020	21st June, 2020
5th July, 2020	19th July, 2020
2nd August, 2020	16th August, 2020
6th September, 2020	20th September, 2020
4th October, 2020	18th October, 2020
1st November, 2020	15th November, 2020
6th December, 2020	20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

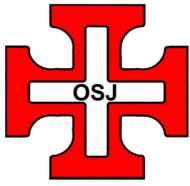
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

March 2020



Nicodemus.

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ (UK)

We aim to see Jesus as our light and our life.

As we celebrate our thoughts today, let us channel them through the Gospel(s) as to what and how the Lord Jesus himself would have thought, and the actions he may well have taken.

Normally Jesus would work in the daytime with many crowds of ordinary people around him, he would not just be associating with the rich and titled dignitaries.

The Gospel of today strangely enough is of a rich aristocrat who came to Jesus by night for a one to one meeting. To do so was most intriguing, until we begin to understand the culture of that period.

Nicodemus was leader of the Jews - that means, he would have been a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin of which there were only 70 members. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews and it had religious jurisdiction over all the Jews in the world.

One of the things the Sanhedrin did was to examine anyone charged with being a false prophet. It is amazing such a man risked coming to see Jesus. He also came at night, perhaps out of caution.

Maybe, just maybe, he did not wish to be seen with Jesus. Possibly because rabbis taught that time to study was at night when one was not disturbed. Perhaps he wanted to see Jesus on his own.

Night might also be a symbol of his own darkness, of all the unanswered questions about his life and his relationship with God. He was a believer, a law abiding person.

Perhaps he felt there was more. Religion and law abiding are not enough. Nicodemus knew there was something else needed.

Many church-goers find themselves in this position: it is the position of needing to move from a belief to faith, from religion to the living God. Nicodemus is courteous and says how he is impressed by the miracles of Jesus.

Jesus gently sweeps this aside and comes to the need of Nicodemus. Jesus talks of the need to be born from above. NB ***He does NOT state 'to be born again'.***

Nicodemus asks if this is possible for an old man. A quite honest and legitimate question in the circumstances, and one I feel that obviously played on his mind.

Perhaps we should also ask if it is possible for a CHURCH that has grown old to be

reborn? Jesus says there is need to be born of the SPIRIT. We are not just earthly beings but children of God and we need to know our Father and that we belong to him.

Jesus understands well that Nicodemus knows these things with his head but he has to accept them in his heart and life. Only in this way will the darkness be dispersed with the light and love of God. (Read John 3:19-21) St John wants us to know we can experience this in Jesus from the outset. John says of Jesus, 'in him was life, and the life was the light of all people'. (John 1:4).

It is to Nicodemus that Jesus said probably the most famous and well known words in the Bible: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3:16).

We do not hear of Nicodemus again until after the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, asks to be allowed to take away the body. Nicodemus is also there, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about 100 pounds for the burial of Jesus - two members of the Sanhedrin showing their unconditional love and respect for Jesus.

The gift is a costly one and one that shows Nicodemus in the daylight. I began by mentioning rich and well off people, then immediately stated the ordinary people too.

I must not lose track mentioning that fact. Indeed there are many clever and capable people (they are often also well off) who feel they are missing out on something of the fullness of life.

The following words are from Federico Fellini, the Italian film producer: 'Like so many people I have no religion and I just go sitting in a small boat drifting with the tide. I just go on working, cutting, shooting, editing and looking at life and trying to make others see. Today we stand naked and defenceless, more alone than at any time in history. We are waiting for something - perhaps another miracle, perhaps the Martians, who knows?'

Fellini, like Nicodemus, is in the dark, seeking someone or something that will deliver him from the darkness, from nothingness and death.

A deliverer, a Saviour, is truly needed.

If ever the words "Come Jesus Come" were needed to be said! They need repeating more than ever, in the present climate which we are all now confronted with here on earth.

Amen.

Acts 11 v 1 – 18:

Unice Brierley, OSJ (UK)

We find in this reading of Acts that Luke has spent a lot of time and space on this incident. In ancient times a writer had to limit his space. Acts was written on rolls of material called papyrus a paper made from a kind of bulrush. Rolls of this type of material were thirty five feet long and very unwieldy but Luke used such a roll to write his Gospel and to write the Acts of the Apostles. Both were the same length.

This particular incident was written down with tremendous care as when we study it we find that it was of the greatest importance in the coming of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The early Church was a Jewish Church and the coming of Gentiles to the faith posed a tremendous challenge to the Jews, Luke must have selected with great care what he was going to set down, he finds the story of Peter and Cornelius of such importance that he twice relates it in full

Luke was right. I never realised, having read this passage many times, but only recently having really studied it just how near Christianity was to becoming only another kind of Judaism. At that time all the Christians were Jews and the whole tradition and outlook of Judaism would have moved to keep this new wonder to themselves. They couldn't imagine that God meant this new religion for the Gentiles. And even when the first Gentiles

became Christians, the Jews were expecting them to be circumcised and obey the Torah.

Peter was in trouble over this and when he returned to Jerusalem after his experience with Cornelius he had a lot of explaining to do. Even when everything seemed to be falling into place. On visiting Paul in Antioch he refused to eat rabbit when his fellow Jews were present.

Peter was certainly in trouble in Jerusalem for having eaten with the Gentiles even though God had told him to , they were outraged. Peters defence was not an argument it was a statement of facts. Whatever the critics, and there were many, might think it was the Holy Spirit who had come to these Gentiles.

In verse 12 there is a significant sidelight. Peter says that he took six brethren with him. Together with himself that made seven persons present. In the Egyptian law, which these Jews knew well, seven witnesses were necessary to prove a case. In Roman law, which they would also know well, seven seals were necessary to authenticate a really important document. So Peter was in effect saying "I am not arguing with you. I am telling you the facts and of those facts there are seven witnesses. The case is proved.

The proof of Christianity is that it works, that it does change men and it does make bad men good, that it does bring to men the Spirit of God.

It is when a man's deeds give the lie to his words that the gravest discredit is brought on Christianity, it is when a man's words are guaranteed by his deeds that the world is presented with an argument for Christianity which cannot be denied..

Peter 's vision certainly challenged the perception that the gospel was restricted to the Jewish community. . The Gentiles were certainly open to the word of God, and as we know from other parts of Acts that Paul was called specifically to bring the Gentiles to the faith.

We hear the Gentiles were open to the word of God. And open to everyone who was prepared to come to God. How welcoming are our Churches to those outside? Church can sometimes appear to be quite exclusive to outsiders. Do some of our own rituals or traditions restrict others from being part of the Church. It is up to us to explore the ways in which our Churches can help visitors and enquirers to feel welcome, and the ways we reach out into the wider community.

To the Church in Jerusalem it certainly seemed incredulous that Gentiles could be people of faith. Perhaps there are people who might be seen as modern day Gentiles. We can all too easily made judgements about people and put labels on them. Asylum seekers, travellers, people of different racial origin, even people of different faith traditions, to give us just a few examples. Are not these people members of God's family too? Peter is urged not to make a distinction between them and us, instructions that

could really challenge the Church to think about how it views others in the community in both words and action.

The Gospel takes us back to the Lord's supper and to Jesus' command "Love one another" it shows us in a concrete way that he began to live this command after the Holy Spirit had shown him the way in this particular reading.

In his vision Peter defends the fact that nothing profane or unclean has ever entered his mouth. We could be called to question what comes out of our mouths too. Jesus said that no food that goes into your mouth is unclean, it is the words and deeds that come out that are unclean.. How do we express our faith outside the safe environment of the church building. Are We always worthy witnesses of our faith? I am sure we all fall down on this point at some time or other.

Peters initial concern with that which is unclean is perhaps something that still concerns us. . What do we think of as being unclean today. What things can really be seen as unclean? How can we influence others in both positive and negative ways, through our attitudes and gestures towards such things.

I read a book some time ago called The Island this is about an Island called Spinalonga off the coast of Crete. A place where people who had contacted leprosy were sent to live, they had a fairly good life there many barely

showed the signs of the disease and lived a full life, but others were badly affected and were nursed in their illness, It was only in 1957 that it was realised that this disease was easily curable that the island community was closed down. Although even after that people who had had family affected by leprosy and cured kept the knowledge to themselves because of the previous stigma. Leprosy is still rife in parts of India, it can easily be cured but people are afraid to have treatment or cannot afford treatment so are still being isolated because of lack of understanding and medication.

How do we react today. In this passage Peter is directed by the Holy Spirit, ARE WE , the Scriptures encourage us to help people in need, of course, but they go way beyond that. In the Hebrew bible – what we call the old Testament – God's main concern in almost every book is justice rather than charity God's people are challenged not just to do good to the poor but to organise themselves so that there will be no poor who need doing good to. A very difficult situation when we look around the world to-day.

Our being open to the Spirit can be a frightening experience for some, almost as if it expresses being out of control.

Peters' guidance from the Holy Spirit touches his life and changes it radically. He is invited by Jesus to build God's kingdom, and he is strengthened in his mission by the Spirit. We don't all receive visions as dramatic as Peter, but we can all experience the presence and guidance of the Spirit in more subtle ways.

In this busy world we don't always get time for a space for silence and stillness. We can sometimes miss these moments of God's blessing where the Spirit is at work. It very often comes from a timely message from a relative or a friend or through our experience of the beauty of creation as we look around us, particularly at the moment with all the Spring flowers and blossom in their full glory, We cannot but see the hand of God in all of this. We may also get guidance from the Holy Spirit in our dreams ? Let us not be afraid to acknowledge the Spirit at work.

Peters' openness to the Spirit showed he still had much to learn . Our lives of faith are constantly changing and evolving if we are similarly open.

Sometimes we give the impression to other people that we are totally sorted in our faith journey, but that's often when the Holy Spirit can surprise us and challenge us to think again, and even at times to change course.

There are many symbols and images of the Spirit used in Scriptures and in various traditions of Christianity, many use fire, wind, a dove, a wild goose.

What symbols would we use to represent our own experience of Spirit in action.

The Didache: the Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations.

Background: Jonathan Draper writes (*Gospel Perspectives*, v. 5, p. 269):

Since it was discovered in a monastery in Constantinople and published by P. Bryennios in 1883, the Didache or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* has continued to be one of the most disputed of early Christian texts.

It has been depicted by scholars as anything between the original of the Apostolic Decree (c. 50 AD) and a late archaising fiction of the early third century. It bears no date itself, nor does it make reference to any datable external event, yet the picture of the Church which it presents could only be described as primitive, reaching back to the very earliest stages of the Church's order and practice in a way which largely agrees with the picture presented by the NT, while at the same time posing questions for many traditional interpretations of this first period of the Church's life.

Fragments of the Didache were found at Oxyrhynchus (P. Oxy 1782) from the fourth century and in coptic translation (P. Lond. Or. 9271) from 3/4th century. Traces of the use of this text, and the high regard it enjoyed, are widespread in the literature of the second and third centuries especially in Syria and Egypt.

It was used by the compiler of the Didascalia (C 2/3rd) and the Liber Graduum (C 3/4th), as well as being absorbed in toto by the Apostolic Constitutions (C c. 3/4th, abbreviated as Ca) and partially by various Egyptian and Ethiopian Church Orders, after which it ceased to circulate independently.

Athanasius describes it as 'appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of goodness' [Festal Letter 39:7]. Hence a date for the Didache in its present form later than the second century must be considered unlikely, and a date before the end of the first century probable.

Chapter 1. The Two Ways and the First Commandment.

There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbour as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you.

And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do the same? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy. Abstain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you shall be perfect. If someone impresses you for one mile, go with him two. If someone takes your cloak, give him also your coat. If someone takes from you what is yours, ask it not back, for indeed you are not able. Give to everyone who asks you, and ask it not back; for the Father wills that to all should be given of our own blessings (free gifts). Happy is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless. Woe to him who receives; for if one receives who has need, he is guiltless; but he who receives not having need shall pay the penalty, why he received and for what. And coming into confinement, he shall be examined concerning the things which he has done, and he shall not escape from there until he pays back the last penny. And also concerning this, it has been said, Let your alms sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give.

Chapter 2. The Second Commandment: Grave Sin Forbidden.

And the second commandment of the Teaching; You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born. You shall not covet the things of your neighbour, you shall not swear, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not speak evil, you shall bear no grudge. You shall not be double-minded nor double-tongued, for to be double-tongued is a

snare of death. Your speech shall not be false, nor empty, but fulfilled by deed. You shall not be covetous, nor rapacious, nor a hypocrite, nor evil disposed, nor haughty. You shall not take evil counsel against your neighbor. You shall not hate any man; but some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life.

Chapter 3. Other Sins Forbidden.

My child, flee from every evil thing, and from every likeness of it. Be not prone to anger, for anger leads to murder. Be neither jealous, nor quarrelsome, nor of hot temper, for out of all these murders are engendered. My child, be not a lustful one. for lust leads to fornication. Be neither a filthy talker, nor of lofty eye, for out of all these adulteries are engendered. My child, be not an observer of omens, since it leads to idolatry. Be neither an enchanter, nor an astrologer, nor a purifier, nor be willing to look at these things, for out of all these idolatry is engendered. My child, be not a liar, since a lie leads to theft. Be neither money-loving, nor vainglorious, for out of all these thefts are engendered. My child, be not a murmurer, since it leads the way to blasphemy. Be neither self-willed nor evil-minded, for out of all these blasphemies are engendered.

Rather, be meek, since the meek shall inherit the earth. Be long-suffering and pitiful and guileless and gentle and good and always trembling at the words which you have heard. You shall not exalt yourself, nor give over-confidence to your soul. Your soul shall not be joined with lofty ones, but with just and lowly ones shall it have its intercourse. Accept whatever happens to you as good, knowing that apart from God nothing comes to pass.

Chapter 4. Various Precepts.

My child, remember night and day him who speaks the word of God to you, and honour him as you do the Lord. For wherever the lordly rule is uttered, there is the Lord. And seek out day by day the faces of the saints, in order that you may rest upon their words. Do not long for division, but rather bring those who contend to peace. Judge righteously, and do not respect persons in reproofing for transgressions. You shall not be undecided whether or not it shall be. Be not a stretcher forth of the hands to receive and a drawer of them back to give. If you have anything, through your hands you shall give ransom for your sins. Do not hesitate to give, nor complain when you give; for you shall know who is the good repayer of the hire. Do not turn away from him who is in want; rather, share all things with your brother, and do not say that they are your own. For if you are partakers in that which is immortal, how much more in things which are mortal? Do not remove your hand from your son or daughter; rather, teach them the fear of God from their youth. Do not enjoin anything in your bitterness upon your bondman or maidservant, who hope in the same God, lest ever they shall fear not God who is over both; for he comes not to call according to the outward appearance, but to them whom the Spirit has prepared. And you bondmen shall be subject to your masters as to a type of God, in modesty and fear. You shall hate all hypocrisy and everything which is not pleasing to the Lord. Do not in any way forsake the commandments of the Lord; but keep what you have received, neither adding thereto nor taking away therefrom. In the church you shall acknowledge your transgressions, and you shall not come near for your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life.

Chapter 5. The Way of Death.

And the way of death is this: First of all it is evil and accursed: murders, adultery, lust, fornication, thefts, idolatries, magic arts, witchcrafts, rape, false witness, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, deceit, haughtiness, depravity, self-will, greediness, filthy talking, jealousy, over-confidence, loftiness, boastfulness; persecutors of the good, hating truth, loving a lie, not knowing a reward for righteousness, not cleaving to good nor to righteous judgment, watching not for that which is good, but for that which is evil; from whom meekness and endurance are far, loving vanities, pursuing revenge, not pitying a poor man, not labouring for the afflicted, not knowing Him Who made them, murderers of children, destroyers of the handiwork of God, turning away from him who is in want, afflicting him who is distressed, advocates of the rich, lawless judges of the poor, utter sinners. Be delivered, children, from all these.

Chapter 6. Against False Teachers, and Food Offered to Idols.

See that no one causes you to err from this way of the Teaching, since apart from God it teaches you. For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect; but if you are not able to do this, do what you are able. And concerning food, bear what you are able; but against that which is sacrificed to idols be exceedingly careful; for it is the service of dead gods.

Chapter 7. Concerning Baptism.

And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water.

But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whoever else can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before.

Chapter 8. Fasting and Prayer (the Lord's Prayer).

But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week. Rather, fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday). Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, like this:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily (needful) bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (or, evil); for Thine is the power and the glory for ever.

Pray this three times each day.

Chapter 9. The Eucharist.

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup:

We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever..

And concerning the broken bread:

We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever..

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

Chapter 10. Prayer after Communion.

But after you are filled, give thanks this way:

We thank Thee, holy Father, for Thy holy name which You didst cause to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which You modest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Thou, Master almighty, didst create all things for Thy name's sake; You gavest food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to Thee; but to us You didst freely give spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Thy Servant. Before all things we thank Thee that You are mighty; to Thee be the glory for ever. Remember, Lord, Thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom which Thou have prepared for it; for Thine is the power and the glory for ever.

Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God (Son) of David!
If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha.
Amen.

But permit the prophets to make Thanksgiving as much as they desire.

Chapter 11. Concerning Teachers, Apostles, and Prophets.

Whosoever, therefore, comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. But if the teacher himself turns and teaches another doctrine to the destruction of this, hear him not. But if he teaches so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. But concerning the apostles and prophets, act according to the decree of the Gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain more than one day; or two days, if there's a need. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet. And every prophet who speaks in the Spirit you shall neither try nor judge; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven. But not every one who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; but only if he holds the ways of the Lord. Therefore from their ways shall the false prophet and the prophet be known. And every prophet who orders a meal in the Spirit does not eat it, unless he is indeed a false prophet. And every prophet who teaches the truth, but does not do what he teaches, is a false prophet. And every prophet, proved true, working unto the mystery of the Church in the world, yet not teaching others to do what he himself does, shall not be judged among you, for with God he has his judgment; for so did also the ancient prophets.

But whoever says in the Spirit, Give me money, or something else, you shall not listen to him. But if he tells you to give for others' sake who are in need, let no one judge him.

Chapter 12. Reception of Christians.

But receive everyone who comes in the name of the Lord, and prove and know him afterward; for you shall have understanding right and left. If he who comes is a wayfarer, assist him as far as you are able; but he shall not remain with you more than two or three days, if need be. But if he wants to stay with you, and is an artisan, let him work and eat. But if he has no trade, according to your understanding, see to it that, as a Christian, he shall not live with you idle. But if he wills not to do, he is a Christ-monger. Watch that you keep away from such.

Chapter 13. Support of Prophets.

But every true prophet who wants to live among you is worthy of his support. So also a true teacher is himself worthy, as the workman, of his support. Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you shall take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. But if you have no prophet, give it to the poor. If you make a batch of dough, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. So also when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the first-fruit and give it to the prophets; and of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment.

Chapter 14. Christian Assembly on the Lord's Day.

But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations."

Chapter 15. Bishops and Deacons; Christian Reproof.

Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers. Therefore do not despise them, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers. And reprove one another, not in anger, but in peace, as you have it in the Gospel. But to anyone that acts amiss against another, let no one speak, nor let him hear anything from you until he repents. But your prayers and alms and all your deeds so do, as you have it in the Gospel of our Lord.

Chapter 16. Watchfulness; the Coming of the Lord.

Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord will come. But come together often, seeking the things which are befitting to your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if you are not made perfect in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied,

and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increases, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, and then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; but those who endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. And then shall appear the signs of the truth: first, the sign of an outspreading in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet. And third, the resurrection of the dead -- yet not of all, but as it is said: "The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him." Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.

Fear and the Shield of David.

+David OSJ (Wales)

Fear is in the air – and it is a particular kind of fear.

Amidst the daily readjustments, the working from home, the scurry for loo paper and pasta, (Why Pasta in view of the deaths in Italy having passed that in China?) the calls to relatives, and the deep concern for our livelihoods, the underlying fear that chills the nation is a fear for our very lives.

Our delusions of invulnerability have been shattered.

For the first time since the threat of nuclear annihilation hung over the UK in the 60s, millions are worried about dying, or worried about someone else dying.

Suddenly, the question that door-knocking Christian evangelists and Jehovah's Witnesses used to ask, 'if you were to die tonight, where would you go?' has a fresh pertinence.

In reality, we ourselves may be in need of reassurance. Death has been firmly off the evangelistic and teaching agenda for some while. Yes, we have all heard sermons on death at funerals, but I suspect that on such occasions many of us are too busy grieving to fully take in the glorious truths of the future we have in Christ.

Physical death has a sting – it is an enemy.

Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus, but Jesus also raises him to life – a foretaste of the day when he will raise all who are his to eternal life in a transformed body. Of course, there are many ways we can serve our neighbours and co-workers – offering practical help, sharing supplies, calling – but one of the most powerful is to be a non-anxious, non-fearful presence, and to seek ways to share how our peace flows from our assurance of eternal life in Christ.

Out of love, Christ gave his life that we might live. And it is that perfect love that drives out fear (1 John 4:18), and empowers us to take risks for others. In dangerous times, army chaplains tell me, people are much more open to offers of prayer, much more open to phrases like, 'bless you', or 'praying for you'.

Workplace groups testify to the same reality: co-workers in trouble are quicker to ask for prayer – *if they know it's on offer*. This day, I am praying, as David did, that the Lord would be your shield (Psalm 18:2), your very present help in this time of trouble, and a fountain of hope and shalom to others.

Take care, keep safe, keep well, with all blessings at this time to you and all your family members and loved one's.

God Guard Thee And All Who Serve. +David

Mothering Sunday

+David, OSJ (Wales)

Readings : 1 Samuel 16:1-13 ; Ephesians 5: 8-14 and John 9:1-41

The prayer for today:

Merciful Lord, absolve your people from their offences, that through your bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins which by our frailty we have committed; grant this Heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen

Sermon: Today is Mothering Sunday, or Lent 4, and most of you would be thinking about where to take your mums for dinner.

Sadly, that won't be the case this year as we begin to understand what is coming our way.

The pictures from Italy are bad - let's hope and pray that it won't be as bad here.

What has upset me the most is the way people have been behaving - why oh why do people need to buy every toilet roll?

It's been like that for two weeks now! To witness on the news yesterday (Friday) that nurse in York brought to tears because she was unable to purchase food in a supermarket, because people were over purchasing was heart-breaking. Sadly, it's our very nature as humans; to put ourselves first.

The collect (special prayer) for this Sunday asks that: "we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins which, by our frailty, we have committed" At a time like this we all need to come together for the common good and try as best as we all can to help each other.

That is why I have taken the view that we need to run a local Food bank during this time, so that we have some food to help those most at risk over the next few weeks. We already know there is a need for such services in emergencies and we can of course help out others as best we can who have little chance to obtain food themselves through disability or of senior age.

The current situation has escalated the need and I ask those of you who can to pick up a few extra things for our elderly, disabled or sick neighbours / friends incapacitated or unable to leave their own homes to purchase such necessities.

We hear of people in need around our homes we can help with a little, even if it's just a small tin of soup. As Tesco say, "every little helps".

We can manage this service as best we can, we are now in hard times like nothing we have seen since the 1940s.

Evolution is a powerful tool of nature and we are living at a time when its full power is being sent at us.

We, as Christians, must first say that this virus is not God having a go at the evil in our world but rather the work of the world in which God has placed us all. During the season of Lent we are called to think about our lives and the way we live. Now is the time for us to live out our calling to be God's light in the world and do whatever we can.

For most of you as of now that is going to be praying from your homes; please first and foremost keep yourselves safe and do what is being asked of us all.

Do phone each other to keep your spirits up and do let me know if you have any concerns for anyone a message with a contact phone number would be good - to my email address:- david@trauma999.co.uk or otherwise phone me on 07811-325174.

In the first part of St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians he tells us:- "I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him. So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you."

It's my prayer that we all have our hearts enlightened and that our spirit is peaceful as our government and our communities locally do their best to help us get over this.

Most importantly we keep in touch with each other and to know we CARE for each other through thick and thin!

With my love and prayers, to you, your family, and all who you care for.

+David, OSJ (Wales)

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

5th April, 2020

3rd May, 2020

7th June, 2020

5th July, 2020

2nd August, 2020

6th September, 2020

4th October, 2020

1st November, 2020

6th December, 2020

19th January, 2020

16th February, 2020

15th March, 2020

19th April, 2020

17th May, 2020

21st June, 2020

19th July, 2020

16th August, 2020

20th September, 2020

18th October, 2020

15th November, 2020

20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

May 2020



WHAT GIVES THE CHURCH ITS PAROUSIA?

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ (UK)

Text based on John 15, 9-17 & 1 Thess. 4, 1-12

John gives me some lovely themes, bless him. **WHAT MAKES A CHURCH?** Fortunately our two lessons of John's gospel chapter 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 match up beautifully to help our deeper understanding of our common life here in Holy Trinity, Stapleton.

Paul was on his second campaign when he came to today's Thessaloniki, taking the gospel through Asia Minor to Europe. A large and flourishing seaport situated on the Via Egnatia which carried traffic from Asia, across Greece to the Adriatic, it was capital of Macedonia and a free city of the Empire enjoying considerable importance and prosperity. A Jewish colony with fringe of Gentile adherents made up the centre of the Christian community.

I commend to your further reading and consideration these often overlooked two letters to the Thessalonians, the first almost certainly written by Paul and the second possibly also by him.

These, apart from personal letters to Timothy Titus & Philemon, are the last writings we have of Paul to the emergent church and the last significant documents before the Revelation of St John was tacked onto the Canon of Scripture; therefore the imminence, if not the immediacy, of the return of Jesus Christ is emphasised frequently. Their idea of time-scale was very naive compared to our historic concepts.

We call this the **Parousia** - a Greek word meaning 'arrival' or 'being present'. The Christian church throughout the developing world and especially in the main communities of Macedonia: Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica, from which the main missionary outreach went, had been led for years to understand that Christ would come again soon and take them out of their suffering and minority status to their reward in Heaven. But significant leading Christians and ordinary folk who bore loyal testimony and witness to the faith were dying off at the end of fulfilling lives. How so? Had the whole idea of the end of the world been misunderstood? Were those who had died forfeiting their share in the wonderful happenings promised for The End? Were they now at a disadvantage? Or had they already got their reward?

Paul refers five times to the Parousia of Christ: 1 Corinthians 15; and then 4 times in Thessalonians: chapters 1, 2, 3; here in chapter 4 and again in chapter 5. Note that in verse 14 Paul refers to Jesus having died. Everywhere else he refers to Jesus as 'Christ'. And Christians dying are referred to by him as 'falling asleep'. Here he uses the word 'die'.

Was it part of God's plan that Christians should witness as much in their death as in their life, that others might come to know the Saviour for themselves?

We'll have to discuss the possible significance of that another time. Also the evidences for Parousia and the ideas of imminency and immediacy. Think about it meantime.

But many documented letters of the period refer to the different human attitude held by Christians towards death. The pagan view was one of despair, of men who have no hope. Even of sacrifice to the Gods. But Aristides wrote of Christians:
<If any righteous man among them passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to

God; and they escort the body as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.>

Don't doubt it! For our hope is in resurrection as God demonstrated in Christ's death. No doubts, no fears, no horror, no void. Professor Leon Morris, theologian, has written a fine commentary on Thessalonians as well as a treatise entitled: The Wages of Sin, both of which I commend to you.

All this must have been difficult for Paul and for Peter too. The gospel accounts seemed to suggest that some standing there in Christ's presence might not see death until the second coming. Why was it taking so long? How to answer the mockers and doubters?

But Jesus had made one thing clear, in the second part of our John's gospel chapter 15 reading, verses 18 to the end, that the world would indeed punish believers, with humiliation, rejection and martyrdom. For this reason he gave them the Holy Spirit to tide them over this difficult period of the Church's growth: then He would come again to them. So the bidding of Our Lord was clear: love one another as I have loved you. Go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. And the Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name. Be my disciples.

Paul loved the Thessalonians. Look at the loving language he uses of them. They were doing well. They were warmly and loyally and faithfully obeying Christ's commands. Look again: he says 'You are all sons of the light and of the day'. 'You are living to please God'. 'Do so more and more'. 'You love each other and love all the brethren throughout Macedonia. Do so more and more'. 'Encourage one another; build each other up.'

'Lead a quiet life - necessitated by this self-isolation at present, mind your own business, work with your hands, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders'. Do you remember this is so like the words of Jesus himself, years before, recorded in Matthew 5,16, when he had said: 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.'

At this time of Advent, time for preparation and spiritual discipline, let us remind ourselves of this Coming of Christ to a wicked world - still wicked after 2 millenia [Old Testament and New, that is]. What do we believe?

We believe each of us is loved by God and precious in His sight. We believe that in each life God is working out a loving purpose, part of a plan far too vast for our full understanding - even if we're getting there gradually by our study and practice of faith, helped by this community and our Alpha study courses and Christian reading. We believe that God's plan will know victory, not defeat by any means; not by ignorance, prejudice, folly or sin. We believe we have a part to play in that plan and need constantly to seek God's guidance of what He wants us to do.

The great Dr Farrar, Dean of Canterbury, wrote in his wise book, *Love Almighty & Ills Unlimited*:

“We must believe that God has acted in all for the best...how could we possibly think otherwise? We believe we are in the hands of a loving, wise, finally undefeatable Power whom we can call Father, and like every other human being, we are dear to Him and cannot fall out of His hands.”

Our ministry is therefore one of being truly faithful teachers, pastors [or pastoral carers], whose task is ever to feed the flock, seek those who've gone astray or aside from the faith, and keep disciplined in body, mind and spirit and faithful until he comes again.

That's a tall order and in human terms impossible. But with Divine help, we can!

Paul warns the Thessalonians of some compromising practices, sexual, cultic and excessive, which the Christian community should avoid actively and with vigilance. For when our Lord does come again we must be found alert, doing his business.

It's too easy to slip into self-indulgence, loose morals, sad, unhappy and sinful ways. Resist. The permissive society, which was talked about a lot in the 60s, although less obvious today is now perhaps more dangerous: a society and way of life where people can do as they like without being bound by standards of conduct set either by religion or by public opinion; and as long as they don't get caught or hurt and damage others, then this seems to be all right.

Look at our often feeble and puerile, fragile national role models, our 'unfortunate' royals, our gun and knife culture [what an extraordinary use of the word 'culture'!], our films and tv models. If the BBC's putting the appallingly tasteless 'The Simpsons' on at a time when nationally we are saying we want children to behave properly is helpful, then show me something more unhelpful to teachers and parents. And we'll probably hear: 'it's only a cartoon', the same as Crash is 'only a film'! There is negative input all around us. It seems extraordinary to me that an apparently panic-stricken government coming up to election is almost pretending it has invented the word 'control'. Have they forgotten who is really in control of our World? Praise God He Is!! Then we are told that permissiveness is 'a way of reaching full human experience and understanding.' Did you ever read Eve's explanation of eating the apple of the tree of life? Any doubts about how far we've come?

We have allowed a society where the law appears to be manipulated and made to look right! Some self-confessed villains get off on a technicality. We even doubt sometimes that those in authority are really telling us the truth, or the whole story. We have become suspicious and often cynical. Our Lord said, and demonstrated: the laid down law and rules of behaviour are good; but you have to go beyond the letter of the law, far beyond. Love God and love your neighbour is part. 'But I say to you: Love one another as I have loved you.' Nothing barred, no holds, no restrictions, no running down, no derision, no belittling, no undermining - these are negatives. Love and keep on loving. As Paul said: you are doing it right, but do it more and more. Be extra vigilant.

Be assured, as Paul reminded the early church, when restraint is thrown aside, other restraints of a more vicious and dangerous nature quickly flood in, dragging us down into new depths of bestiality, pornography, cruelty and oppression, papered over with lies - the stock in trade of the Devil himself, the 'Man of Lies'. So Paul's fruits of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control are again recommended and urged, more and more. If we ever think these are easy then just remember the Cross. It was to the Cross that the love Jesus professed and taught, led Him. But also remember, in His resurrection, we have life.

The Greeks of Thessaloniki would have known the word: koinonia - they coined it. It is variously translated as: fellowship, sharing, communion, participation and community.

The author John Macquarrie writes:

“The basic idea is that of sharing. The Christian life is a shared life, shared with God through Christ, with the other members of the body of Christ, the community of the Spirit.”

So, until He comes again, let us share and witness, and may He fill us with His power, His strength, His fellowship and His love.

...for His Name's sake. AMEN.

-oOo-

Matthew 3 v 13 – 17

Unice Brearley, OSJ (UK)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordon to be baptised by John. But John tried to deteer him saying “ I need to be baptised by you , and do you come to me.

Jesus replied “Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulful all righteousness, then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptised he went up out of the water. At that moment the heaven was opened, anad he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said “This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased”.

We hear very little of Jesus during the period of his boyhood except the time he was left behind in the temple talking with the priests, but he must have been growing from boyhood to manhood in a good home, brought up as a good Jew with all its laws and traditions, Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus took up his profession.

He was fulfilling the duties of an eldest son, it is likely that Joseph had died before the family grew up, as it states that he was much older than Mary, and Jesus was supporting the family and learning about the lives and challenges of ordinary people, and understanding their needs through his work and daily contact with them.

Jesus faithfully performed all these smaller tasks in order that he might take on the mighty task of being Saviour of the World. We should never forget that how we live our everyday lives is part of our worship.

John, Jesus' cousin, had been baptising people and getting them to repent of their sins. Israel had strayed away from God once again and needed to be brought back.

John had been explaining to his followers that someone was to follow him whom he John was even unfit to untie his sandals, and as John baptised with water he would baptise with the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus suddenly appeared at the water's edge and asked to be baptised,

was it a shock or was he half expecting something to happen?

Whichever it was he certainly felt unqualified to baptise Jesus. He wanted Jesus to baptise him, but Jesus remarked “Let it be so just for now, for so it befits us to fulfil all righteousness” meaning to accomplish God's mission.

Why did Jesus ask to be baptised? It couldn't have been for repentance of sin because we believe Jesus was without sin. Jesus saw his baptism as advancing God's work.

The early Church was confused by Jesus' baptism. Here are one or two ideas explaining a possible solution to the outcome.

Was he baptised because

1. he was confessing sin on behalf of the nation as Nehemiah, Ezra, Moses and Daniel had done.?
2. he was showing support for what John was doing?,
3. he was inaugurating his public ministry?
4. or because he left Jordan and went into the wilderness to pray and seek God's help and guidance?

The latter may possibly be the main reason, but it doesn't devalue the other possibilities.

Jesus was identifying with the penitent people of God, not with the critical Pharisees who were only watching.

Jesus the perfect man didn't need baptism for sin but he accepted baptism in obedient service to the Father, and God showed his approval by coming down as a dove and stating, "This is my Son, the beloved with whom I am well pleased.

Put yourself in John's shoes.

Your work is going well, people are taking notice, everything is growing but you know that the purpose of your work is to prepare the people for Jesus.

Then Jesus arrives, and his coming tests your integrity.

Will you be able to turn your followers over to him.?

John passed the test by publicly baptising Jesus. Soon he must say, "He will become greater. I will become less."

From the Dead Sea Scrolls we know that John the Baptist was an Essene and they "ritually bathed" every day, probably in a stone trough, it was a kind of permanent baptism!

Remnants of these have been found in excavations of places where they lived.

The doctrine of the Trinity means that God is three persons and yet one in essence, in this passage all three persons of the Trinity are present and acting. God the Father speaks. God the Son is baptised. God the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus. God is one, yet three persons at the same time. This is one of God's incomprehensible mysteries.

How DID Jesus view of himself after baptism compare with before?

Was he happy or bewildered?

Did he wish he had never gone to the Jordan?

Can you imagine Jesus saying, 'Oh no, it can't be me', or 'Perhaps I am the one. How am I going to cope?' or even, 'How am I going to handle this information, this inner conviction?'

Many people have had a strong sense of God's call. They tell of how they tried to resist.

I know I did when he called me train as a local preacher, but it was impossible to shake the conviction off. In the end I had to say that with His help I would do my best. Perhaps our experience or reaction can give us a clue as to how Jesus must have felt at that time.

How do we actually deal with times of waiting and preparation?

Are we tempted to act before being sure that we are the one for the job?

Clearly these two men were concerned about God's business.

John was energetic, outspoken, attracting attention with his forthright preaching not afraid of challenging his superiors.

At least to begin with Jesus was contemplative, preferring not to draw attention to himself.

Both came to believe they were earmarked for a unique role in the Kingdom of heaven.

Both lived in an environment where Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah.

Some expected a political leader who would drive out foreign troops and administrators.

Others were more concerned about a revival of their faith. They looked for and expected somebody to come to announce this new era, someone with authority, NOT A CARPENTER! The question "Are you the one," must have been asked many times, even John asked this when he was in prison.

Word had spread about this preacher, this Jesus.

He was unlike the orthodox religious teachers. He urged people to prepare for something momentous to turn around and repent and be baptised. Jesus heard about his cousin's preaching and of the crowds who wanted to identify themselves with what God was doing.

Did something stir within him awakening his desire to join this new movement?

Clearly he was drawn to his cousin's ministry and decided to go to the Jordan to see what was happening.

And be baptised.

Often someone other than ourselves can identify our gifts, see our potential and nudge us in the direction where our aptitudes and convictions can be used for God's purposes.

In the same way we may recognise other people's gifts and graces, maybe that we are one to act or speak and so help another to use his or her gifts. So when John rebuffed his cousin and suggested that their roles be reversed Jesus found himself in a situation when something momentous could happen.

He encouraged John to baptise him, he recognised that he and John were involved in a joint enterprise. He may have been as surprised as everyone else.

What was different for John after Jesus came out of the water?

John realised that his work had come to an end and that Jesus had to take up the challenge.

Who would have noticed the changes, if any were visible?

How does baptism make a difference to our commitment to following God's way for us?

How do we deal with the challenge of baptism?

John in his gospel says we must be baptised, to die to sin and re-emerge from the water to a new life.

Jesus emerged from his baptism to a completely new life, eventually dying for our sins.

We as Methodists don't usually be physically baptised by full immersion, although I have known people who have chosen this way, even in our Church.

Most of us were baptised or as we would say Christened as a baby, and many of us studied the catechism and came into full membership of the "Holy Catholic Church" in our teens, but how many of us have really taken God into our hearts fully and try to do his will?

How long is it since you read the Baptism of adults service and confirmation Service in our Service books and rededicated ourselves to God?

I will admit that until I started studying for a local preacher it had been a while since I had fully read these through other than at a Baptism service. The Catechism we did study in our House Group and I have had to study it again.

Many of us renew our Covenant with God on a yearly basis and are challenged to ask God what he wants us to do, and where he wants us to go.

So I give you the challenge to go a step further, and renew your Covenant with God regularly by prayer and Worship. Asking God to show you the way, He needs us all to serve him in many capacities, not always in our own area or Church.

When we look at the work such organisations as Tear Fund do all over the world, particularly ask for our support of regular prayer which they say helps tremendously.

This we can all do even if we are not capable of doing anything else. But we must ask God to show us the way he wishes us to go.

Are we prepared to take up his challenge in 2020 and beyond and help make a difference to the Church, the Community and OUR world?

I leave you with the words concluding our affirmation at the Covenant Service:

Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine, and I am yours.

May it be so for ever.

Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen

-oOo-

A Palm Sunday Sermon:

+David, OSJ (Wales)

Palm Sunday is a reminder to us all that it is the beginning of Holy Week.

On Palm Sunday our Lord rode into Jerusalem amidst crowds waving palm branches. He went to the Temple, and drove out those money changers and merchants.

On the Monday He returned to teach in the Temple.

On Tuesday He is questioned by His enemies as they try to catch Him out.

Wednesday was probably spent in seclusion at Bethany.

Thursday is called Maundy Thursday. (In the UK this day is a public ceremony the Thursday before Easter where the Monarch distributes specially minted coins). In the evening our Lord kept the Passover in the Upper Room.

He himself washed His disciples' feet.

He gave them a new commandment; ***“A new commandment give I unto you; that ye live one another.”***

Then he gave us the Holy Eucharist, Mass, the Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper.

He took bread and wine, and blessed them, and gave to the disciples saying; ***“Do this in remembrance of me.”***

After supper they go out into the night to the garden of Gethsemane. The Saviour spends the night in an agony of prayer. ***“Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.”***

His disciples slept.

Early in the morning, Good Friday morning, Judas brings a company of armed men, and betrays His Master with a kiss.

Our Lord is seized and bound, and taken away to be tried. He is deserted by His friends. He undergoes five trials. He is scourged, and spat upon, buffeted, mocked and shamefully condemned to death. He is taken to Calvary hill, and there nailed to a cross beside two thieves. In agony He is left to die.

All kinds of people pass by. Some mock and say smart things. Some are moved to pity, and try to help. Some are very glad to see dying the enemy of their evil ways. Some are broken hearted, and stand by offering their understanding and love and loyalty.

This Good Friday enjoy it in your own way spend some time picturing the cross and the scene on Calvary Hill.

It is all so up to date. The same thing is going on all around us today.

There is the standard of Jesus Christ.

There are all of us passing by. Some react this way, some that. What a difference it makes how we react. Lovely people, lovely ideals, lovely things are being crucified. Where do we stand?

There at the Cross is the Mother of Jesus.....there is also the thief.

All men meet there at the place marked with the Cross. There comes from the Cross the challenge; "Who is on the Lord's side?"

The Cross stands for goodness. It is Good Friday.

How desperately we want goodness in our lives.

We hear so much about better conditions and better things. But we all know that what we really want is goodness. That is not just something to say. It is true and we all know it.

A man was described to me the other day as "One of God's good men." By such men the world lives. We need so urgently to get back to the goodness of the Cross.

There has got to be, if we are to have sanity in our living and thinking, a deepening of our ways of living. Each man of us must take a tighter grip, and reset his standard of goodness by the standard, the measure of the Cross.

As you look at the Cross can you say your life is a good life?

Pray for goodness, desire goodness...for yourself and for others.

The Cross stands too for service with sacrifice.

“The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give His life a ransom for many”. There lies the route to happiness. There lies the way to the righting of our so unbalanced world.

In costly service lies the secret to well-being. I find I too often think of my rights; too seldom of service.

Don't be too clever about it all.

Be real and practical in your thinking about the Cross.

Start by trying to live a better, a good life yourself.

Start by serving those nearest to you.

“Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus, Mary His mother.....”.

Amen.

-oOo-

Enjoy the following:-

+David, OSJ (Wales)

A woman collecting donation envelopes for Christian Aid called at one house to be told, “I’m sorry, I can’t give you anything, our dog ate the envelope you left.’

‘That doesn’t matter,’ replied the collector, ‘I’ve got a spare envelope here.’

‘That’s no good,’ said the householder quickly, ‘he’d only eat that one too.’

Another one was a young man collecting on behalf of the Salvation Army offered his tin to an elderly man sitting over a pint of beer in a pub and said, 'I'm collecting for the Lord.'

To which the old man answered. "Well, you'd better give that to me then. I'll be seeing him before you, lad!"

As no football is occurring presently, and not to leave the fans out, if Anglicanism can be said to reflect any single feature of the English as seen by other nations, it must be that the quality of national tolerance, indifference or impartiality, call it what you will. An Englishman watching the annual Rangers - Celtic match in Scotland threw himself into the game and cheered loudly whenever a goal was scored, no matter which team had kicked the ball into the net. At half time a Scotsman who'd been keeping an eye on him since the kick off, leaned over and asked, 'Good God, man. Haven't you any religion at all?'

A question which can only be capped by the man at Speaker's Corner who assured his audience in terms worthy of many of the laity, 'Thank God I'm an atheist.'

Anglican Laity have set ideas on what they want from their Church as well, and campaigns to 'ginger them up' don't always attain the desired result, as this parishioner remarked to his parish priest after a recent stewardship campaign: 'I've been through a good many of these missions, Vicar,' he said, 'and they're all alike. While it's on, everything is "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost." But once it's over, it's back to "As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen."

There was a flattering degree of attention paid to a more recent bishop when he preached in a newly constructed church for the first time. This had been fitted out with the latest ecclesiastical mod cons and included a sophisticated and somewhat bewildering public address system, up in the pulpit the bishop tapped the microphone apprehensively and hearing no noise, bent down and whispered, 'There is something wrong with this microphone.'

He was wrong, however, and his words echoed round the church, to which the congregation, keyed up, on their best behaviour, and eager to impress him with their grasp and knowledge of the service, replied instinctively, 'And also with you.'

Less fortunate was the preacher in a strange church who asked obligingly at the start of his sermon, 'Can you hear me at the back?'

'Yes, I can hear you fine,' answered a voice, 'but I don't mind changing with somebody who can't.'

When the crisis is over.....

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

The main problem I see with re-opening or even re-launching a church after this period of enforced isolation is not slipping back into old, familiar and comfortable ways. This is a great opportunity to get our houses in order and not to be missed.

Therein lays the problem. New wine doesn't sit well in an old wine skin.

We have learned a lot over the last few weeks and months. Building based church organizations have been proven to have their weaknesses as we have seen in this crisis - close the building and it seems as if the whole pack of cards collapses.

Everything the building stands for, all its traditions, practices, liturgies, sacraments, etc., become meaningless if it can't be maintained or remain open.

It has been a tough reality to face. We have become so reliant on the building we have forgotten what 'church' really is. We have become so accustomed to this that we now think about the physical building rather than the living contents when anyone uses the word 'church'.

It is the building that now represents and acts as the focus for Christian group dynamics and practice rather than the community who use it.

Its existing structure and management encourages group conformity rather than individuality and creativity. It is the embodiment of rigid tradition, a way of doing things where anything different is wrong.

You know your place in the hierarchy. You know you don't have to make any real decisions or choices because it is all laid out for you. Resistance is futile. You have been assimilated.

It becomes the place to worship rather than a place of worship. I hope that subtlety is not lost on you.

Reliance is more focused on the building rather than God because it provides everything we have become accustomed to.

What is worse is by its very creation, it denies its members from continuing in a sacrament life if the building is closed.

'Only the priest can do that.'

'It can only be done in church.'

Who says so?

Show me the evidence – where does it say that in the bible.

Is it of man, or is it of God?

If it is of man then I suggest that 'church' in the way we have come to perceive and understand it is actually dangerously irrelevant.

I think this is something that Jesus kept coming back to time and time again in his ministry. Organised religion (whether church or synagogue) has a place but when it becomes an end in itself, it has failed in both intent and purpose.

The current crisis has given us an opportunity to look at the purpose of 'church' and similarly the role of clergy again.

It has seemed that with the closing of the churches (buildings) during this time of social isolation that the church (people) has vanished overnight.

I can assure you the buildings may have closed but faith does not depend on the buildings or the organisations that run them.

Our Christian faith survives in spite of buildings being closed and no services.

It survives without clergy, and liturgy and all the theatrical trappings.

So what is 'the church'? Whatever it is, it definitely isn't the building.

It begins with the individual and their personal relationship with God. That is the primary building block, the single most important component of 'the church'.

Then there are the extended relationships with other like-minded people who have their own and often quite different relationships with God.

The church is the coming together and the sharing of that experience, that knowledge and the celebration that we are loved, not only that we are loved by God but also by our neighbours (no matter how crazy or disagreeable they may be) in Christ. 'How we do it' is much less important than the 'why we do it'.

Remember the two great commandments: 'Love God, then love your neighbours as yourself.....' The church is simply the embodiment of these two goals.

These two commandments come with implicit responsibilities.

Jesus was keen to bring us into a personal experience with God and to say we had choices to make.

They were our choices because we have been given the gift of free will and it was a gift to be used responsibly for the benefit of other. It was not something that was intended to be primarily used for our own selfish benefit or glory.

It was not something to be usurped by 'religion' either, even if it was well intended.

Jesus said, 'I came to set you free,' and it wasn't with the intention of swapping one kind of bondage for another.

Over time, 'the church' (the structural organisation that goes with the building) in its wisdom has placed its members in bondage by telling them what to believe, how to worship, when to turn up and how much it will cost. For those dangerous people who are capable of thinking for themselves, the church keeps them in check with the threat of the removal of sacramental access and even threatening that they won't go to heaven because of their disobedience and waywardness.

That is not the purpose of 'the church', and just to be clear, 'the church' is not God.

The purpose of 'the church' is to be a community of people of faith who seek to love God better and take that love to other people.

It is a community based on loose ties and connections rather than geographical and denominational boundaries.

It is a community made up of individuals whose small, inclusive and personal actions bind them together and reach out into the greater community.

'See how they (these Christians) love one another.'

So what do people need to fulfil this role?

Encouragement, teaching, the opportunity to pray together, occasional guidance, to come together occasionally.

'The church' would say in response, 'but we have already been providing that'.

My response would be to ask, 'then where are the people?'

As I have already said, when it comes to setting up or relaunching a church, new wine and old wine skins don't go together.

The old ways have been revealed as flawed. It is time for a rethink.

Firstly, responsibility needs to be placed back into the hands of the people.

Secondly, ministry is the responsibility of the whole Christian community. It does not lie in hands of a few paid professionals.

Thirdly, everyone has some kind of ministry and it needs to be encouraged and exercised for the greater good of the community and for the glory of God.

Fourthly, there is no 'one size fits all' approach. What is right is what is appropriate to need, and that may change over time and as circumstances evolve.

Fifthly, there is nothing wrong with ritual, tradition or canon, but it is secondary to need. It is not God or even comes close.

Sixthly, it is nice to have a building for church use but it is essentially a luxury.

Seventhly, there needs to be some organization and someone in charge so chaos, anarchy and division do not destroy the whole. Having said that, the organization needs to be flexible, appropriate and allow for change and growth. There needs to be a God centred reliance on inclusive prayer and vision.

I propose that any new church should move away completely from the traditional idea of 'church', and rather than be building centred, be based instead on providing community chaplains* who encourage small cells of Christians to be self-supporting and work out their own biblically based way of doing things.

Flexibility is the key rather than rigid forms. People need to take ownership of what works for them rather than being shaped to fit a pre-existing former. They also need to take responsibility for the good stewardship of whatever ministries they have been entrusted with.

If they don't use them then the whole community is lessened by this omission.

The role of these chaplains is firstly that of encourager and secondly to make sure that these cells don't stray away from what is biblically acceptable or become exclusive or are hijacked by those with other agendas.

These community chaplains should be bible based and be clear about their mandate.

It's all about building up relationships first rather than 'getting people into church'.

These chaplains are not clergy in the traditional sense.

They are there to support, develop and guide small home based Christian communities which are part of the greater community, not to be professional leaders but encouragers of faith and developers of spiritual gifts amongst the people they serve.

They are not there to serve denominational needs (or those of the individual chaplains themselves) but to nurture and protect the individual groups.

This is moving back to the idea of the shepherd of the flock. Looking at a scriptural model, maybe cells of around twelve people, but whatever best works.

There won't be a single model that can be applied overall. Not everyone's needs are the same. Not everyone's gifts are the same. Not everyone is able to offer the same level of commitment.

Some groups will last. Some will be short lived. Some will only last as long as a particular need exists. This is natural evolution. However, it will be up to the chaplains in charge of those groups to make sure they are organised and run properly, that they meet the needs of those attending and are spiritually wholesome and grounded.

If the cells are successful and grow then it is a good source of new chaplains, especially since they will have been tested 'in the field'.

There is no doubt that each cell will grow in a different way and that chaplains will need to be flexible.

Chaplains would however be responsible for the social and spiritual welfare of members in their own cells.

Likewise, cell groups would take a shared responsibility for the spiritual welfare of its own chaplain, a duty shared equally with the other (college of) chaplains and designated members of a 'leadership team'.

Selection of chaplains and general organisation: general considerations

Chaplains:

CRB/full declaration and references with interviews.

Must have existing ministry and be recognised as having spiritual gifting, authority and wisdom.

Chaplains to meet regularly (monthly) to share ideas and experiences. They come under the governance of the leadership team which may be comprised of members of cell groups and ordained clergy.

Ordination:

up for discussion.

There needs to be a training minimum but also up for discussion.

Safeguarding policy:

essential.

Overall organisation:

figurehead/governing body or leadership team/chaplains/cells. Simplicity is the key.

Cell members need to have ownership.

There need to be an agreed number of biblically founded non-negotiables so that the overall group has a clear self-identity.

The overall group is both a part of, and distinct from, the general community. The question of what makes the group distinctive is one that does need careful consideration.

Developing or agreeing a working 'creed' is a good idea and will help clarify thinking.

Cells groups can be made up according to need, e.g., men's group, woman's group, youth group, family group, prayer group, study group, chaplain training group, et al.

Movement between groups or multiple memberships according to need perhaps needs to be considered in the long term for the welfare and well-being of each group.

Care in stopping or limiting 'cell tourists' may be required but all cells should be welcoming and non-judgemental. The ideal minimum and maximum size of cells needs discussing according to both location and purpose so they can remain easy to manage and be effective.

All members of all cells need to meet up en masse regularly (hired venue/open air/etc.), perhaps monthly or quarterly, for worship and/or for socials. This would allow a regular exchange of idea and re-affirm the sense of being part of a greater community of believers.

There certainly needs to be an accessible figurehead to the whole group and their role will largely be determined by the group need and spiritual gifting.

There is no reason why this person (or others) may not be prayerfully elected/appointed, or set apart/consecrated, as was the historical case in the early church - see Didache, chapter 15:-

Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers.

The role of existing clergy does need addressing. Their role will need to be re-evaluated and it needs to be made clear that there will be no return to 'the old ways'.

This does not mean that clergy are redundant.

Far from it – everyone has been given the God given stewardship of their own distinct ministry and they must not be denied it.

It just means they will probably be doing things differently and traditionally accepted distinctions and lines of authority may become increasingly blurred.

This is only one model of many and there are other alternatives. It would not be unreasonable to try several models before adapting one to meet the needs of a particular Christian Community.

All of this assumes we aren't back in total lock down.

Just ideas to play with.

God bless.

Ian

* I couldn't think of another word to use but put whatever you wish in exchange. 'Deacon' might be a good alternative but care should be made not to create a new layer of 'church' hierarchy.

THE CHURCH MISSION

+David, OSJ (Wales)

The last few years have seen drastic reductions in both Church attendances and Churches not being opened for worshippers. When we say the Church, it is NOT the building!

Church means the people.

It is not natural for people to be separated or detached from society, it goes against everything we are taught. The Churches should be supporting, comforting all people during times such as these we are facing presently.

The very least Clergy should be doing is maintaining a contact even using phone, mobile or Internet messaging, certainly not maintaining deathly silence.

My wish is this article is found most useful, and just may answer some of your questions. This may sound outspoken, but I say it none the less with conviction. Clergy have to be honest and not afraid to speak up as and when needed for the safety and comfort of our flocks. This is my reason for writing this article.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

The Mission of the Church is EVANGELISM.

The last words of Jesus to the church (above) were commands to witness.

The Mission is Four-Fold:

1. GO
2. Make DISCIPLES
3. BAPTISE
4. Teach OBEDIENCE

Note: The commission of Jesus was to the whole church in every age. The imperative phrase in the commission is "make disciples of all nations." However, the baptising and teaching ministries have the force of a mandate because they follow logically the imperative "make disciples." Matthew concludes his Gospel with the blessed promise of our Lord's presence as we endeavour to carry the gospel to all people.

The EXTENT of the Church's Mission. Notice the use of "all" in Matthew 28:18:20

All AUTHORITY; All NATIONS; All THINGS ("everything"); ALWAYS

Acts 1:8 explains the Geographical and Ethnical extent of evangelism

Geographically Ethnically

Jerusalem Jews

Judea Jews - Acts chps. 1-7

Samaria Half Jew - Acts 8 - Half Gentile

Ends of the Earth Full Gentile - Acts 10ff

What should be the extent of our Geographical and Ethnical evangelism?

Evangelism begins where we are PRESENTLY and extends to all of humanity.

Church Growth through Evangelism is the NORM. Consider the church in Acts:

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty). Acts 1:15

Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. Acts 2:41

...praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47

But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. Acts 4:4

Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. Acts 5:14

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Acts 6:1

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. Acts 9:31

The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. Acts 11:21

He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Acts 11:24

At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed.

Acts 14:1

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. Acts 16:5

Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women. Acts 17:4

Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised. Acts 18:8

Effective Ways to Carry Out the Church's Mission:

PERSONAL Evangelism

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?" Acts 8:35-36

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). John 1:41

SMALL Groups

Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Romans 16:5

You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers

1 Corinthians 16:15

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

1 Corinthians 16:19

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptised. Acts 16:32-33

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised. Acts 18:7-8

You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Acts 20:20-21

THE CHURCH MEETING CORPORATELY

Note that only those who are believers can truly worship God.

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. John 4:24

WORSHIP can be a powerful witness to non-Christians.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. Psalms 40:3

I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. Psalms 57:9

When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." Psalms 126:1-2

So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" 1 Corinthians 14:23-25

Always Remember

You will never meet ANYONE who does not NEED what you HAVE in Jesus Christ.

You will never meet ANYONE who is not the OBJECT of God's LOVE and CONCERN.

May you and all your loved ones remain blessed and in the care of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God Guard Us And All Who Serve. +David.

Office of National Statistics : marriage and divorce.

A selected merged summary of their latest reports for a balanced overview.

1. Number of marriages

There were 242,842 marriages registered in England and Wales in 2017, a decrease of 2.8% compared with 2016 and 1.1% lower than 2015. The change between 2016 and 2017 was driven by a 9.5% decline in the number of religious marriages coupled with a 0.6% decline in the number of civil marriages.

Marriages of opposite-sex couples accounted for the majority (97%) of marriages in 2017, with 235,910 opposite-sex marriages registered, a decrease of 2.8% compared with 2016. Since 1972, the number of opposite-sex marriages has decreased by 45%

In 2017, there were 6,932 marriages formed between same-sex couples, a similar number to the previous year (7,019 marriages). Of these, 44% were between male couples and 56% were between female couples. These percentages have remained unchanged since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in March 2014.

In comparison, our latest statistics on same-sex civil partnerships show that in 2018, nearly two-thirds (65%) of civil partnerships were between male couples.

2. Marriage rates

Marriage rates are the number of marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and women aged 16 years and over. They provide a better indication of trends than simply looking at the number of marriages because they also take account of changes in the size of the unmarried adult population, which can affect the number of marriages.

Marriage rates for opposite-sex couples have fallen to the lowest on record (since 1862) for both men and women. In 2017, there were 21.2 marriages per 1,000 unmarried men and 19.5 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women aged 16 years and over, representing decreases of 3.2% for men and 3.0% for women compared with 2016. This continues the overall long-term decline in marriage rates since the peak seen in 1972, although there have been small fluctuations over this period.

Since 1972, the number of marriages of opposite-sex couples has decreased by 45% but marriage rates have fallen by three-quarters for men (75%) and by 69% for women.

This long-term decline in the number of marriages and marriage rates is a likely consequence of increasing numbers of men and women delaying marriage, or couples choosing to cohabit rather than marry, either as a precursor to marriage or as an alternative.

3. Age at marriage

Among opposite-sex couples, more women than men married at younger ages (under 30 years) and more men than women married at older ages (30 years and over) (Figure 3). This pattern reflects that, on average, men tend to form relationships with women younger than themselves. Among same-sex couples in 2017, more women than men married at ages under 50 years whereas more men married at ages 50 years and over.

Similarly, marriage rates for opposite-sex couples have generally been increasing among older people in recent years and falling at younger ages. Over the last decade, men and women aged under 20 years have recorded the largest percentage decreases in marriage rates (57% for men and 62% for women). In contrast, marriage rates for those aged 65 years and over have increased the most; for men it increased by 31% while for women it has more than doubled (89%). For marriages of opposite-sex couples, the average (mean) age for men marrying in 2017 was 38.0 years, while for women it was 35.7 years. In comparison, the average age at marriage for same-

sex couples in 2017 was slightly higher, at 40.1 years for men and 36.6 years for women.

Since 1970, there has been a gradual increase in the average age at which opposite-sex couples marry, increasing by 11 years for both men and women over this period. These changes are in line with wider demographic changes seen in society recently.

4. First marriages and remarriages

Among opposite-sex couples, more than three-quarters of men (76%) and women (77%) married for the first time in 2017. In comparison, a higher proportion of same-sex couples married a partner to form their first legally recognised relationship (89% of men and 81% of women).

There has been a gradual decline in the number of first marriages since 1972, which mirrors the long-term trend recorded for all marriages (Figure 5). In contrast, the number of remarriages (where both partners were previously married) increased in the early 1970s. This may be related to the increased number of divorces in the 1970s following the introduction of the Divorce Reform Act 1969, which made it easier for couples to divorce upon separation.

Two-thirds (67%) of all marriages between opposite-sex couples in 2017 were first marriages for both partners. Remarriages for both parties accounted for 15% of marriages while the remaining marriages were to couples where only one partner had been previously married.

Among marriages of same-sex couples, 80% of marriages between males and 69% of marriages between females in 2017 were the first legally recognised partnership for both partners.

5. Type of ceremony

The popularity of religious ceremonies has steadily declined over time compared with civil ceremonies. In 1900, religious ceremonies accounted for 85% of all marriages; by the late 1970s this had fallen to less than half (49%) and then to 23% in 2017. Civil marriages have outnumbered religious marriages every year since 1992.

Religious ceremonies accounted for less than one in four (23%) of marriages between opposite-sex couples (the lowest on record) and 0.6% of marriages between same-sex couples in 2017. Only 43 same-sex couples married through religious ceremonies in 2017; not all religious organisations conduct marriages of same-sex couples.

6. Cohabitation

Nearly 9 out of 10 opposite-sex couples (88%) cohabited before getting married in 2017. This proportion has steadily increased over the last 20 years from 69% in 1997 to 81% in 2007 and is in line with the increasing level of cohabitation seen more generally.

Couples who marry through a religious ceremony are less likely to cohabit before marriage than those who have a civil ceremony. In 1997, less than half (48%) of all couples who had a religious ceremony cohabited before marriage compared with 83% of those who had a civil ceremony. In 2017, this gap had reduced and 81% of couples who had a religious ceremony cohabited compared with 90% of couples who chose a civil ceremony.

The percentage of same-sex couples who cohabited before marriage in 2017 was similar to that of opposite-sex couples who had civil marriages. In 2017, 94% of male and 92% of female same-sex couples cohabited before marriage.

8. Marriage conversions

Following the introduction of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, same-sex couples in a civil partnership have been able to convert their existing civil partnership into a marriage from 10 December 2014, if they so desired.

In 2017, there were 1,072 same-sex couples who converted their existing civil partnership into a marriage, 36% fewer than in 2016. Male couples are more likely than female couples to convert their civil partnership into a marriage (57% of all conversions in 2017 were between male couples).

9. Divorce: main points

- There were 90,871 divorces of opposite-sex couples in 2018, a decrease of 10.6% compared with 2017 and the lowest number since 1971.
- Recent Ministry of Justice statistics highlight an administrative reason behind the scale of this decrease: divorce centres processed a backlog of work in 2018 resulting in 8% more divorce petitions; we expect this to translate into a higher number of completed divorces in 2019.
- The divorce rate among opposite-sex couples fell to 7.5 divorces per 1,000 married men and women from 8.4 in 2017, the lowest rate since 1971; this will also have been affected by the backlog of work in divorce centres in 2018.
- The average duration of marriage among opposite-sex couples who divorced in 2018 was 12.5 years.
- There were 428 divorces of same-sex couples in 2018, increasing from 338 in 2017; of these, three-quarters were among female couples.
- Unreasonable behaviour was the most common reason for opposite-sex couples divorcing in 2018, with 51.9% of wives and 36.8% of husbands petitioning on this ground; it was also the most common reason for same-sex couples divorcing.

10. The number of divorces of opposite-sex couples decreased to the lowest level since 1971

The number of divorces of opposite-sex couples in England and Wales in 2018 decreased by 10.6% to 90,871, compared with 101,669 in 2017. This decrease partly

reflects the overall trend seen in recent years, but it can also be attributed to a particularly low number of divorce petitions processed in 2017, which then reached decree absolute in 2018.

The Ministry of Justice's Family Court Statistics Quarterly 2018 report indicates that as a result of divorce centres processing a backlog of work last year, divorce petitions increased by 8% in 2018. This is more in line with the number of petitions seen prior to the low number in 2017. The 2018 backlog of work also resulted in a five-week increase to the average time taken from date of petition to decree absolute in 2018 (to 54.3 weeks). As a result, the number of completed divorces is likely to increase in 2019 compared with 2018.

11. What percentage of marriages end in divorce?

The percentage of marriages ending in divorce generally increased for those marrying between the 1960s and the mid 1990s (Figure 3). For example, 22% of marriages that took place in 1965 had ended by their 20th wedding anniversary. By 1995, this had increased to 38% of marriages ending in divorce after the same length of time.

For those marrying since the mid 1990s, there is evidence of a decrease in the proportion of marriages ending in divorce (Figure 3). For example, 11% and 25% of marriages that took place in 1995 had ended by their 5th and 10th anniversaries respectively. Our latest data indicate that only 6% of marriages that took place in 2013 had ended by their 5th anniversary and 19% of marriages that took place in 2008 had ended by their 10th anniversary.

The average (median) duration of marriage of opposite-sex couples who divorced in 2018 was 12.5 years, increasing from 12.2 years in 2017. There has been a gradual increase in the median duration of marriages that end in divorce since 1995, when it was 9.6 years

The average (mean) age for divorce among opposite-sex couples in 2018 was 46.9 years for men and 44.5 years for women. This continues a year-on-year increase in average age for divorce since 1985, increasing by over nine years for both men and women. This reflects increases to both the average age at which couples marry and the average time they remain married before divorcing.

12. The number of divorces of same-sex couples has increased each year since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples

In 2018, there were 428 divorces among same-sex couples in England and Wales, increasing by more than one-quarter (26.6%) from 338 in the previous year. Of these, three-quarters (75%) were among female couples, a similar proportion to that seen in 2017.

This is the fourth year that divorces among same-sex couples have been recorded since the introduction of marriages of same-sex couples in March 2014. Divorces among same-sex couples were first recorded in 2015 and annual increases have been seen each year since then, reflecting growth in the size of the same-sex married population in England and Wales.

The median duration of marriage for same-sex couples who divorced in 2018 was 3.9 years for men and 3.5 years for women. Although marriages of same-sex couples have only been possible in England and Wales since 29 March 2014, it was legal for same-sex couples to marry in certain other countries prior to this date, for example, in the Netherlands. Divorces relating to marriages that took place abroad are included in our figures, provided the marriage was legally recognised in the UK, the divorce took place in England and Wales, and one of the parties had a permanent home in England and/or Wales.

Same-sex couples have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage since 10 December 2014. If a civil partnership was converted into a marriage but has subsequently ended in a divorce, the duration of marriage is based on the original date of the civil partnership formation. Consequently, the duration of marriage to divorce for same-sex couples can exceed the 29 March 2014 commencement date for marriages of same-sex couples.

The average (mean) age for divorce for same-sex couples who divorced in 2018 was higher for male couples (40.7 years) than female couples (38.3 years). This may reflect that male couples tend to be older when they marry compared with female couples. Our latest marriage statistics for 2016 show that the average ages for marriage for male and female same-sex couples were 40.8 and 37.4 years respectively.

13. Unreasonable behaviour was the most commonly used ground for divorce by both opposite-sex and same-sex couples

Unreasonable behaviour was the most common ground for divorces granted in England and Wales in 2018. Of all decree absolutes granted to one partner (rather than jointly or both), this ground accounted for nearly half (46.3%) of all divorces granted; 46.1% opposite-sex couples and 76.2% of same-sex couples divorced for this reason. Unreasonable behaviour for same-sex couples who divorce can include having a sexual relationship with someone else of the same sex.

Two years separation with consent was the second most common ground for divorces granted in 2018 and accounted for more than one-quarter of divorces (26.8%), while five years' separation without consent accounted for 16.1% of divorces. Most of the remaining divorces were granted on grounds of adultery (10.1%) and 0.8% were for desertion and a combination of two or more grounds. [Adultery](#) can only legally be committed between two persons of the opposite sex.

Unreasonable behaviour has consistently been the most common reason for wives petitioning for divorce since the late 1970s. For husbands, however, unreasonable behaviour has only been the most common ground for petitioning a divorce since 2006. In the 1980s and 1990s, adultery was generally the most common ground for husbands, while between 1999 and 2005, it was two years' separation with consent grounds. There are likely to be a range of behavioural, cultural and financial reasons for these trends.

Something to consider:

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

Looking at the above figures, what can they tell us?

In summary, in 2017 there were 235,910 marriages, of which 25% were religious ceremonies (something the church needs to look at quite seriously!)

Heterosexual (one man and one woman) marriages made up 97% of **all** marriages

Same sex marriages represented only 3% of all marriages, 44 % being between male couples and 56% being between female.

The median length of heterosexual marriage is 12.2 years.

In heterosexual marriage divorces, 'unreasonable behaviour' accounted for approximately half, 40% being made up of 2 years separation with consent/ 5 years without consent and the remaining 10% infidelity/adultery

The median length of a same sex marriage is 3.9 years.

Where same sex marriages ended in divorce, unreasonable behaviour was cited in 76% of cases.

In same sex divorces, 75% were instigated by women, 25% by men.

Whatever the current political climate and after all the media hype, it is clear that the overall view of society is that heterosexual marriage is clearly the majority view and the norm, and by default same sex marriage is abnormal.

The figures show that the take up on same sex marriage has been very poor and actually same sex marriages are two thirds less successful in outcome. They are in fact the least successful form of legal marriage.

The figures show that same sex female marriages are even successful less with three times as many female couples being dissatisfied with their married relationship compared to their male couple counterparts.

The figures speak for themselves.

The politicians and the social liberals have clearly got it wrong and have not listened to or taken into account the majority view.

Heterosexual marriage is the accepted and preferred social norm according to these figures.

This parallels the religious norm.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

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2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

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Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

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7th June, 2020

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We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

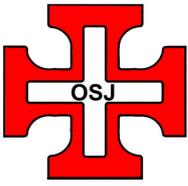
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

June 2020



Paradox of Life

Unice Brearley, OSJ (UK)

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller people, but shorter tempers, wider motorways but narrower viewpoints, we spend more, but we have less, we buy more but we enjoy it less.

We have more knowledge, but less judgement, more experts, but more problems, more medicine but less good health.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.

We talk too much, love too seldom and hate too often.

We've learned how to make a living but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbour.

We've conquered outer space but not inner space.

We've cleaned up the air but polluted our souls, we've shattered the atoms but not our prejudices.

We have higher incomes, but lower morals, we've become long on quantity but short on quality.

These are the times of big ideas and little character, steep profits and shallow relationships, more leisure but less fun, more kinds of food but less nutrition.

These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce, of fancier houses, but broken homes, it is a time when there is much to show in the window, but little in the stockroom, a time when technology can bring this to you, and a time when you can choose to either make a difference.....or just hit delete!

Or in other words just walk away.

Weddings and Covid-19: advice for those couples planning weddings.

Whilst social distancing is in place, it will have a major impact on the way your day goes, what you can do and the way that you do it.

Typically guests will congregate at a bar or outside the church, and this is something that will not happen in the same way now under social distancing rules.

If you are using a venue like a hotel as a meeting place, they will likely have restricted service. Social distancing will have been planned into their risk assessments.

You may have to limit the number of guests using that facility so social distancing can be adequately and safely maintained.

These risk assessments will be very detailed. Even social distancing measures will have to be observed in toilet facilities.

There should be hand gel points and guests should be encouraged to use these frequently.

Staff will certainly interact with you and your guests in a very different way and may wear masks and PPE.

Inside the church.

Let's take a typical church service for example. Remember that most churches were not designed to accommodate social distancing so there will be problems.

Face masks should be worn by guests inside buildings, just the same as on buses and in other enclosed spaces.

You should plan for how guests will safely enter and exit buildings so there are no congestion points that conflict with 2 metres social distancing.

Guests should be seated at least 2 metres from other guests unless they are part of the same household.

This may limit the number of people able to attend quite restrictively.

Also guests should be seated 2 metres from the centre line of the aisle. This is particularly important when the bride and her escort, and other members of the bridal party enter and exit the building. They need to maintain social distancing too.

Musicians and choirs need to maintain social distancing so space near the altar becomes a premium.

Ideally the building needs to be sanitized before and after services to reduce contaminant contact with the virus.

All hard surfaces likely to be touched should be cleaned, and soft surfaces where possible.

You should also consider the possibilities of cross contamination with things like hymn books and orders of service, and even flowers and confetti.

The exchange of rings as part of the wedding service also needs consideration as these will be handled by more than just the bride and groom. These are not immune from contamination by third parties.

Similarly unity candles and the signing of documents may also require review.

Good ventilation is important to keep air flow moving to reduce the risk of inhalation of the virus.

The bride and groom and celebrant should also wear face masks, particularly where social distancing is not possible.

Obviously this will have a major impact on things like video and photography.

Social distancing still applies whether inside or outside buildings and group shots and family and friends photographs will have to be reimaged and require some really creative thinking, particularly if you have particular photographs in mind like a confetti shot.

Bridal preparation.

The tradition of the photographer photographing the bridal preparations also needs to be reconsidered as it simply may no longer be possible.

You should also consider what arrangements you have for makeup and hairdressers as these services cannot be socially distanced and are 'high risk'.

You should also consider whether your bride's maids and any other close family and friends should have access to you as you get ready for your wedding and how that is to take place.

The groom, best man/men and groomsmen.

Social distancing (unless they are members of the household in which you live) must still be observed under all circumstances, and that includes any group photographs and gatherings at the bar.

The traditional sharing of hip flasks is now a definite 'no' under any circumstances.

You should also consider how the best man/men handle wedding rings as cross contamination can take place.

The wedding breakfast.

Social distancing still applies and the two metre rule for social distancing still applies. This will have a major impact on the receiving line and seating arrangements which will even apply to 'the top table'.

Members of the same family living in the same household will be able to sit together but not if they live in different households. They must maintain two metres social distancing at all times.

How you decide to seat other guests still has to comply with social distancing rules.

If you are planning on dancing later in the evening consider how social distancing

can be maintained whether coming on to the dance floor, using the dance floor, or even exiting the dance floor. Again, be advised by the venue.

Wedding favours and table centres carry the same risks of contamination as those presented by orders of services, hymn books and the like.

It all becomes a bit of a logistical nightmare. You should take advice from the venue if they have completed an adequate risk analysis.

Your responsibilities.

Protect yourselves.

Protect your guests.

Protect those working to make your day a success.

Comply with all HMGov recommendations and minimise the all the risks.

Do not 'bend the rules'. They are in place to protect you, your guests and staff.

Your responsibilities as a guest.

Do not attend if you think you have Covid-19 or have been in contact with someone infected with Covid-19 within the last two or three weeks or feel unwell.

Do not accept an invitation to a wedding if you are in the 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' group.

Observe all recommended hygiene protocols and social distancing measures at all times.

No physical contact with people outside of your immediate household.

Wear a face mask in places where social distancing may be a problem.

Do not put yourself or others at risk.

Your responsibilities as a third party supplier.

Have risk assessments in place and observe them to the full.

Observe all hygiene protocols (including wearing PPE) and any recommendations made by HMGov and/or the professional bodies you belong to.

Don't put yourself or staff or guests or other third party suppliers at risk. No short cuts, no compromises.

Make it absolutely clear what is acceptable and practical and don't make assumptions that the bride and groom fully understand what is required of them

and their guests regarding social distancing.

The risks of Covid-19 contraction are not to be underestimated. An Australian report on pre-lock down weddings found a 60+% infection rate regarding Covid-19 at several venues.

Best advice:

1. wait until social distancing measures are fully relaxed and Covid-19 is brought under control if your dream is to have a traditional wedding in church.
2. if you want to get married, then get married at a registry office as soon as they have re-opened. Getting married is about a relationship, not a big day. You can always have a celebration with family and friends at a later date.
3. if you must get married then please realise you can't have everything you probably dreamed of whilst social distancing is still enforced. Do not ask venues and suppliers to 'bend the rules' for you because you will be putting other people a risk.

Comment: ‘Do as I say, not as I do.....’

The recent debacle caused by Dominic Cummings over lock down and social distancing has revealed a rather unpleasant side to power politics.

On the one hand you have an advisor flouting the rules for lock down and social distancing that he helped to create.

On the other hand you have a parent trying to do the best for his family, even if it meant breaking those rules.

Two different sides of the same coin perhaps. A case of ‘what you see depends on where you stand’. [\(Example news article.\)](#)

Whatever your opinion the actuality is that a lot of damage has been done by this, and the damage continues to be added to as each day goes past.

The situation as it stood on 26th May, 2020, appears to be:

1. confidence and trust in HMGov has been undermined at a time we need to be confident,
2. there increasingly appears to be one rule for politicians and one for everybody else,
3. it has caused a situation where some people no longer now see the need to follow the rules and guidance if being ignored senior government officials,

4. and this puts people at greater risk of infection.

5. Covid-19 has not gone away and there is a real risk of a massive second spike in both infections and deaths if the advice given is ignored. According to the World Health Organization we are still in the first wave of the pandemic and there will likely be more to come, especially if precautions are dropped at this stage.

The current outcry for the resignation of Mr Cummings seems to be both reasonable and just. However this is the world of power politics, and not everything is as it seems. There are other reasons why Mr Cummings going on any account would be welcomed.

There are many MPs who would be delighted to see a power vacuum by Mr Cummings being forced out. It would certainly be a chance for them to put themselves forward or benefit from putting others forwards who are 'more sympathetic'.

The media and press also have their own political axes to grind and their reporting is both selective and biased. It is rarely neutral and often sells opinion as fact.

Nothing is as it seems.

The only thing that is clear is the general population felt that Mr Cummings broke 'the rules', and not just once, and this is by his own admission.

So what to do?

Should he stay or go?

It's a matter of principle and integrity, especially for someone who holds a position of considerable influence within HMGov, someone who was appointed rather than elected, and someone whose accountability is not subject to the electorate or to carefully prescribed official governance.

It seems he is unlikely to go of his own accord and it has been suggested from some unconfirmed sources that that if he goes, he will take a number of others with him. [\(See biographical link.\)](#)

This particular series of events regarding lock down have evoked a bitter response from those who have followed the lock down advice to the letter and have subsequently suffered great emotional hardship and personal difficulty.

What did Mr Cummings expect?

That bitterness is hardly unsurprising and is a reasonable response in the face of the few and carefully selected facts that have emerged or been released.

The church was rightly not silent either.

A number of public comments were made by the different churches about this and quite a few rightly came from bishops within the Church of England.

It appears that these were replied to by e-mail from an undisclosed source on the lines of 'stay out of politics if you want to live'. [\(See link.\)](#)

Police are now investigating these possibly unconnected threats.

One might be justified in thinking that the voice of the church was not welcome.

So much for democracy and free speech but it is good to know that the establish church can still rattle a few cages as the moral voice of the nation.....

However, this incident is not over and will continue to have repercussions for many months yet regardless of whether Mr Cummings stays or does what I consider to be the honourable thing. Not being party to all the pertinent facts and political deceptions, I'm pleased to say it is not my decision to make.

It is alright to have opinions on different matters but the bible warns against judging people, particularly in power.

We know that God appoints who He appoints and it is not for us to criticise His choice. He has His reasons.

Four valuable biblical principles still exist, and Mr Cummings would be foolish to ignore these: (paraphrased)

1. 'The greater the authority, the greater the responsibility, the faster the condemnation and the faster and harder one falls from grace',
2. 'the truth will out and nothing will be hidden',
3. 'God both gives and takes away,'

4. and 'there is no forgiveness without repentance. Repentance requires admission of fault, true regret and a willingness to make good'.

There is much in this unfortunate series of events we can all learn from, and we shouldn't point the finger without taking a deep look into our own hearts and actions.

We all have things we have done in our lives that we would perhaps do differently if given a second chance.

That is in no way said to mitigate Mr Cummings actions but we all need to take responsibility for our own choices and decisions, not anyone else's.

We would all like to believe that 'we would do the right thing' but who knows what our choices and decisions would be given the same set of circumstances being applied to us.

The whole series of events has certainly given Christians a lot to consider and pray over.

It has also given HMGov a substantial amount to consider, and if they wish to repair the damage Mr Cummings (whether deliberate or accidental) has inflicted on this nation, it must act accordingly. Mr Cummings also needs to make his own response after due consideration. He is not alone, for we will all be called to account for the things we have done.

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

What We Believe – will our personal beliefs protect us from real consequences?

+David, OSJ (Wales)

If we do not believe in the laws of gravity, will our beliefs stop us from the consequences of falling? As a rule, decisions we make are based on what we believe to be true – thus there will always be consequences as a result of our beliefs.

We should really consider what we believe. If our beliefs are based on a scientific theory like evolution (lack of supportable evidence means it is a theory, not a fact), we believe we are cosmic accidents without any high purpose – born simply to breed, suffer and die.

Sadly this is the grim message being taught as fact to our children in schools. They quickly learn the irony that the ultimate point of evolution is, all existence is ultimately pointless. As a society we are now reaping the consequences in: high suicide rates, depression, lack of direction, lack of hope, break-down of family, rampant crime and a mass dependency on drugs. If, as a society, we believe and teach that our existence is ultimately pointless, do we think there will be no repercussions?

The Bible states: The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1); even though God’s handiwork is plainly seen in creation (Psalm 19:1). If we reject the biblical claim of God and Jesus Christ, what are the consequences if we are wrong?

John 3:36 says: “He who believes in the Son (Jesus Christ) has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

There are eternal consequences to our personal beliefs. You may think: ‘But I believe in nothing. I haven’t rejected the idea of God; I’m sitting on the fence’. Those that think like this must remember that they haven’t accepted God either. Believing in nothing doesn’t mean nothing will happen – there are serious repercussions.

Choosing to sit on the fence - is a decision and we should consider the cost. God has made provision for you through acceptance of His Son. Your eternal future is based on your belief in Jesus Christ. John 14:6 states: Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

We must consider our beliefs carefully (both individually and collectively). A belief in Christ (Christianity) offers everlasting salvation, a code of integrity, a sense of purpose, a hope for the future and a meaning to all existence. (John 3:16)

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

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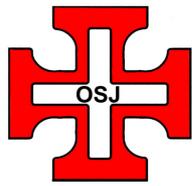
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The Order of St James Newsletter

July 2020



Lessons from Exodus and Covid-19

On the whole, people were pretty caring when it came to social distancing and being supportive of those less capable than themselves.

We were impressed by acts of selfless generosity and outpourings of thanks and appreciation, and then it all seemed to go to pot shortly after the Dominic Cummings fiasco.

From that moment things changed.

I don't often write to my MP and anything other than marriage, sexuality and divorce legislation which seem to go against everything I have been taught and believe as a Christian. This time was different. Not only that but I actually got an immediate, hand crafted response from the man himself instead of a pre-prepared general statement full of gratuitous political platitudes and double speak which were intended to deflect and demoralise further communication.

Let's face it, this action by Dominic Cummings was a slap in the face for everyone who had done as HMGov had asked.

The sea change came when people started asking the question, 'Why should we follow HMGov guidance when members of HMGov obviously don't?'

Why indeed?

Cummings somehow stayed in post despite the furore and thousands of objections, and a social rebellion was started.

It has so far culminated in serious breakdown of social distancing measures which cannot be controlled. Un-necessary Covid-19 deaths will be the outcome.

Then it was hi-jacked by other groups. Demonstrators then took it upon themselves the break social distancing rules even further and the police found themselves powerless to keep things under control.

I felt HMGov lost its nerve at this point and capitulated on reducing social distancing rather than take on the public dissatisfaction and disaffection. It may have saved some face but it has put more lives at risk.

Last weekend (20th June-ish) there was the suggestion that the accepted 2 metre social distancing measure might be relaxed in order to get the economy going again.

The pre-announcement guess was it may go to one metre, and this was later confirmed as being conditionally correct.

What was actually stated by HMGov was '1 metre plus' and face masks and surgical gloves if social distancing could not be observed.

Unfortunately, 'one metre' was the only thing people heard, and let's face it, one metre, however you look at it, is 'personal space' and would not be enforceable.

By Monday morning when I went to our local Aldi store to do our weekly shop, customers had decided for themselves that social distancing, disposable gloves and face masks were a thing of the past. It was as if Covid-19 had never happened.

They had decided this new rule signified the end of lockdown and social distancing.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Covid-19 is still the same as it was before lockdown and that has not changed. It is still a killer without a vaccine.

It made me wonder about people's attitudes in general. It seems their hearts are generally in the right place but only if other people play fair and abide by the rules. And therein lies the problem in a nutshell. It's 100% or nothing.

I found myself thinking how God felt giving the 10 commandments to the Children of Israel to keep them safe from the power of sin and eternal death. Despite opinions to the contrary, God did not want anyone to get hurt or suffer the consequences of sin so he gave a number of easy to follow rules to protect people.

At first people followed the rules to the letter because they could see the benefit even if they caused problems at times. But as they saw other people break the rules without any immediate consequences, they began to have second thoughts. Even some of their priests and leaders turned to other Gods.

Excerpts from the Book of Exodus.

The Ten Commandments

Chapter 20 *And God spoke all these words:*

² *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

³ *"You shall have no other gods before^[a] me.*

⁴ *"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

⁷ *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

⁸ *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labour and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your*

towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ "You shall not murder.

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ "You shall not steal.

¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

(The next chapters expand on the law)

The Golden Calf

Chapter 32 *When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."*

² *Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me."* ³ *So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.* ⁴ *He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods,^[b] Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."*

⁵ *When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD."* ⁶ *So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.*

⁷ *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt." ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'*

⁹ *"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."*

¹¹ But Moses sought the favour of the LORD his God. "LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'?"

Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" ¹⁴ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

¹⁵ Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. ¹⁶ The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

¹⁷ When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp."

¹⁸ Moses replied:

*"It is not the sound of victory,
it is not the sound of defeat;
it is the sound of singing that I hear."*

¹⁹ When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

²¹ He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"

²² "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' ²⁴ So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

²⁵ Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. ²⁶ So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.

²⁷ Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbour.'" ²⁸ The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. ²⁹ Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

³⁰ *The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”*

³¹ *So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”*

³³ *The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”*

³⁵ *And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.*

As a Christian, I can see some similarities in our present situation to this recounting if I link ‘sin’ (deliberately turning away from God) and ‘covid-19’.

I also found myself asking what the relationship between Dominic Cummings and Aaron was....

Aaron, as Moses’ right hand man should certainly have known better after seeing everything that Egypt went through before setting free the Children of Israel?

Did Aaron buckle to public pressure and the threat of open rebellion and rejection?

Had he secretly had enough and wanted to break free of the rules?

The excuse given is very 'Cummings' as there is no apology and no admission of guilt.

“Ch 32v²⁴ So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewellery, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Maybe in your dreams.

This is a good example of damage control by manipulating and massaging a partial truth, something politicians are extremely good at.

Rules are not there to be broken.

The rules are there to protect and guide us, not to be abused or worked around on technicalities so we can do whatever we want. God knows we have seen enough of that lately in our political and spiritual leadership.

But we have been just as guilty in this in our own lives too. We find it all too easy to make both 'the rules' and holy scripture fit our own desires rather than God's. And we believe the lies we tell ourselves to justify our actions.

It seems to me that society's Golden Calves have been gender diversity, physically expressed same sex relationships, easy divorce, a disposable attitude towards family and marriage, a silencing of the moral voice and a silent tolerance towards abuse of power and privilege.

'The church' seems to have been a little too quiet on these matters lately. It begs the question, 'Does 'the church' have a voice these days?'

If not, it is our own fault and the result of a lack of watchful integrity on our part. We are as much to blame for not speaking up as those who commit the sins that will result in eternal damnation.

I'm not suggesting we physically take up arms but Exodus 32 verse 25-26 is where we should be spiritually. Being counted as God's own and not only rejecting but actively standing firmly against the false idolatry of our Golden Calves and their supporters is something we are being called to accept and not shy away from.

Our faith is not about 'going with the flow'. We are supposed to be the exemplar standard to those without faith, guidance and direction. We need to make a continuing, definitive moral and spiritual stand because people need clear leadership and example in this era of false Gods.

I'm not sure we have seen that.

Just as one person with Covid-19 goes on to infect others, a single person who turns away from God's guidance infects others. And each infected person passes on the virus to others.

A person with Covid-19 may not display any symptoms but that does not mean that Covid-19 is any the less dangerous or infectious.

The same is true of sin (going against God). It is contagious. If he can get away with doing that then why can't I? You could call it the 'Cummings effect'. It's a spiritual pandemic in the making, the consequences of which will be felt eternally.

'The church' has certainly been found wanting in both pandemics and it is now time to put things back in order.

The biggest flaw in 'the church' has been its reliance on building based communities. Shutting the doors effectively shut down 'the church'.

As we come out of the first wave of Covid-19, I know many 'churches' are considering their future because their weaknesses have been clearly exposed.

Back in the early days of Christianity, the faith was held in and promoted through family groups. 'The Church' was quite simply 'the home' with all of its complex relationships.

The strength and faith of the individual families was the strength and faith of the emergent church community. It was certainly strong enough to survive centuries of repression, and not only survive but grow.

The next step, centralising these home Churches in one large communal building (effectively removing them from 'the home' and having paid professionals to run the show) was the worst thing that ever happened to 'the church' in my opinion.

Personal power, ambition and politics got in the way.

This is when we began to hear less of God and more of 'the church'. It was a time when the bible began to be mis-used to justify any corrupt and Godless falsehood.

This is when I believe many of the problems we now have to deal with began to rear their ugly and unnecessary heads. Over time they have become deeper rooted and more divisive and directly challenge God's authority.

Like way back in the time of Exodus, it comes down to choosing God's way and sticking to the guidance given because we trust God, or being 'party animals': i.e.

(Ch 32 v⁶ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry).

And when they got caught out, they were so full of excuses.....

Ch 32 v 22 "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'

A warning perhaps about the dangers of 'absent leadership', but it can't be used as an excuse or justification for turning against God. We know the difference between right and wrong – God wrote it in our hearts, so there are no excuses.

In order to do those things we know are wrong (sin), we have to (sub) consciously turn against God. It is not God's fault or anyone else's, it is our deliberate choice.

The Christian faith has always been about binary sexuality, ordered relationships, family discipline and structure, responsibilities in marriage, effective bringing up of children, and these have been quite strictly defined throughout Holy Scripture.

These are the real heartlands of the Christian faith, and the Covid-19 pandemic had proved that this is where the strength of the Christian faith lies rather than in 'the church' organisation.

For those who want the faith we profess and our moral voice silenced, all they have to do is to attack and undermine those key areas.

Strange how all those key areas are currently subject to increasing legislation by HMGov (see previous newsletters focussing on same sex relationships and non-binary relationships being taught in schools, the 'no fault' quickie divorce bill, gender diversity legislation, hate laws, etc.)

Once this is completed, then the very last thing to do is to close the church's doors.

And just how easily that was that done in the early stages of the current pandemic.....

The moral and spiritual vacuum it will create can simply be replaced with a Golden Calf of society's choosing.....

Sorry, but I don't think so.

This is God's world not ours and our deliberate waywardness will not go unnoticed or unpunished if we do not heed His words. Not only that but we care enough not to give in to the selfish and self-centred ways of the world. We still have a freely given obedience to do God's will based on His genuine love and care rather than out of a sense of fear and retribution which only serves evil.

Just as with Covid-19 legislation we can either follow the guidelines or not or even in part, but there will be consequences whatever we do.

It isn't just about us as individuals but what we pass on to others, and they in turn pass on to those who share their lives. Pandemics are a nasty business and the greatest and most destructive of all of these may simply be 'sin'.

The only way to beat Covid-19 is to find a safe and effective vaccine.

There is no vaccine against 'sin', only time spent with God.

+Ian

Meditation on the Wise Men:

Unice Brierley, OSJ (UK)

There will be no camels, we are going on horseback at least for some of the way.

And we won't arrive there a few hours after everyone else. It will be weeks perhaps months.

We are not in a hurry. That is not the way we work, we are not Europeans.

We will discuss the phenomenon – the star – and if it does not go away, and if we still feel curious we will travel.

We will look in the wrong place. Yes I admit that, because wise men, potentates, intellectuals – call us what you will – are not infallible

We expect a new power to emerge from the side of the old one.

We expect the destination we seek to resemble what our common sense deduces

We will be upset, angry even, to find that Herod is ignorant and that his living space is not the birthplace.

We will find it hard and intellectually demeaning to bow the knee to the son of refugees.

And all this, all this upset will be compounded when it comes to journeying back and we discover we have got home by another way.

That is the trouble with God, He does not let you leave as you came,

He sends you back stripped of your presumptions, making for home by another way.

PASTORAL DEPRESSION

+David, OSJ (Wales)

I have found it difficult over the years as to why a Priest suffers from depression.

Surely is it not the Priest who should be there to comfort and support all those feeling weary and struggling through life?

I know too well the responsibilities and tasks which befall on the shoulders of Clergy. Having treated so many over the years, including chaplains and padres who have burned themselves out having given their all to aid and comfort others.

The work or rather the duties of a priest is a task of great magnitude. Here are frail creatures of dust, mere mortals, given life by the Holy Spirit, and called to be overseers of the church which Christ purchased with his own blood.

Such a high yet humbling call, for it is a call that is often difficult and costly, referred to at Ordination by the Bishop as ***“The heavy burden of Priesthood”***.

We often allow the trials which accompany pastoral service to overshadow its joys.

These trials are varied and numerous; some common to all priests, others peculiar to certain men and women for one reason or another. One thing is for sure - unless trials are dealt with correctly, they will result in pastoral depression.

From the crucible of experience, I wish to briefly state some causes, signs, and cures for pastoral depression.

There are three main areas in which trials arise that can lead to depression.

First, there is the area of the priest's own private life. His time is not his own. There are the demands of study, prayer, visitation, counselling, meetings, and telephone calls.

Any priest who takes his task seriously can soon find himself physically exhausted.

With the great need of finding spiritual food for the flock he may neglect to take spiritual meat and drink for himself, thus soon finding himself on the verge of spiritual starvation.

There are the besetting sins of his own life which must constantly be dealt with. As John Flavel once said, ***“Brethren, it is easier to declaim against a thousand sins of others, than to mortify one sin in ourselves.”***

If other pastoral acquaintances appear to be “succeeding” in the ministry, and he is not, the priest may feel that God has deserted him or that he has been placed upon a back burner.

Secondly, there is the area of the pastor's immediate family.

Financial needs are often pressing him as he struggles just to pay the bills. He may find himself seeking additional employment which of necessity must take away a great amount of time from the work he truly loves.

He must also spiritually feed his family. The salvation of his children is his great concern, for he cannot bear to think that for years he might preach to others but see his own children perish unconverted.

And, perhaps he has a burning desire for the glory of God and the advancement of the kingdom, but his own wife has become unconcerned and callused.

Thirdly, there is the flock, his charge. A sickness here, a death there, financial woes here, divorce there, apathy here, stunted growth there.

Perhaps the priest is faced with the loss of church, home, and resources at the sinful hands of professing Christians whom he has offended by his preaching.

The pastoral ministry can often seem like the job of a fire fighter, running here and there trying to put out little brush fires.

With all of this the best of men are only men at best and as such can fall into mild and even severe depression.

One needs to learn to recognise the signs of depression in order to deal with them properly.

Here are just a few:

1. Loss of physical energy and stamina.
2. Loss of spiritual appetite for prayer and worship.

3. Bitterness in mind and heart towards the people of God.
4. Envy and jealousy of the ungodly and their temporal prosperity (Psalm 73).
5. Feelings of being only a hireling instead of a true shepherd.
6. Doubts concerning God's wisdom and love.
7. Verbal expression of such doubts.
8. Rapid and frequent mood changes.
9. Feelings of failure or uselessness.

These danger signals can and must be dealt with.

Here are some suggestions for getting out of the lion's den:

1. Learn when you are prone to depression. Is it after a conference as you leave the confines of the brethren and return to your lonely part of the vineyard? Does it occur when you take certain medications?
2. Acknowledge your utter weakness before God. You are not sufficient for these things, but Christ is. In your weakness his power can be made known.
3. Learn to cry and express your emotions at the throne of grace. You may need a release from the pressures of your deepest feelings.

4. Maintain a disciplined reading of the Word, praying the Scriptures as you read them.

5. Feed yourself spiritually. Listen to tapes of solid expository preaching, saturating yourself with the milk and meat of the Scriptures.

6. Meditate upon the mercies of God's providence towards you in the past. It may help to keep a spiritual diary where you can record God's blessings for future reference.

7. Correspond with other priests by letter or telephone. You are not alone, dear brother and sister. Let others know that you are hurting so that they might exercise their spiritual gifts of exhortation and mercy-showing. It is here that I send out a call to the brethren to keep in touch and communicate with one another, and to be doers of the Word by expressing brotherly concern.

8. If the depression worsens or continues, see a medical doctor. Undetected illnesses such as diabetes can result in sluggishness and fatigue. A certain food may be disagreeing with your system. A chemical imbalance (though I personally disagree with this term, many Psychiatrists use this term, my question to Psychiatrists would be, "what imbalance, what chemical are you talking about that may need to be corrected." Then sit back and await the reply! My observation has found a total silence, because they cannot give such a definitive response!

I would recommend the reading of Dr. John White's book, "The Masks of Melancholy: A Christian Physician Looks at Depression and Suicide," published by InterVarsity Press.

Here then are some causes, signs, and cures for pastoral depression. None who engage in the holy work of the eldership are exempt from the onslaughts of depression.

My dear Brothers and Sisters if you are depressed, be it mild or severe, I say this to you out of the depths of my heart, the precious Lord Jesus cares for you and awaits your petitions at the throne of grace, where "we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). We must allow the Holy Spirit to do his supernatural work in the inner man. And, as he brings us back into a right frame of heart and mind, let us remember the words of the Apostle Paul who wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Amen.

May I conclude by wishing you all, and all your loved ones and those in your pastoral care, much Love in Christ Jesus. I send you all blessings: "Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. (Heb.13:20-21)

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS REVEALED IN HIS NAMES.

+David, OSJ (Wales)

At least twenty-two different names are used in the Old and New Testaments in speaking of the Holy Spirit. There is the deepest significance in these names. By the careful study of them, we find a wonderful revelation of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit.

The simplest name by which the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Bible is simply "The Spirit." This name is also used as the basis of other names. The Greek and Hebrew words translated Spirit literally mean, "Breath" or "Wind." Both thoughts are in the name as applied to the Holy Spirit.

1) The Spirit as "Breath."

And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." John 20:22

The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me my life with God, His inmost life going forth in a personal form to bring us to life.

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive the inmost life of God Himself to dwell in a personal way in us.

When we really grasp this thought, it should overwhelm us. Just stop and think what it means to have the inmost life of that infinite and eternal Being whom we call God, dwelling in a personal way in you. How solemn and how wonderful and yet unspeakably glorious life becomes when we realise this.

2) The Spirit as “the Wind.”

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:6-8.

In the Greek, it is the same word that is translated in one part of this passage “Spirit” and the other part of the passage “wind.” And it would seem as if the word ought to be translated the same way in both parts of the passage. It would then read, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Wind gives birth to wind.

The full significance of this name as applied to the Holy Spirit (or Holy Wind) it may be beyond us to fathom, but we can see at least this much of its meaning:

(1) The Spirit like the wind is sovereign.

“The wind blows wherever it pleases” (John 3:8). You cannot dictate to the wind. It does as it wills. The same is true of the Holy Spirit—He is sovereign—we cannot dictate to Him. When the wind is blowing from the north you may long to have it blow from the south, but cry as loudly as you like to the wind, “Blow from the south” and it will keep blowing from the north.

But while you cannot dictate to the wind, while it blows as it will, you may learn the laws that govern the wind's motions and by bringing yourself into harmony with those laws, you can get the wind to do your work for you. You can erect your windmill, whichever way the wind blows the sails will turn and the wind will grind your grain, or pump your water.

While we cannot dictate to the Holy Spirit, we can learn the laws of His operations bringing ourselves into harmony with those laws, above all by submitting our wills absolutely to His sovereign will, the sovereign Spirit of God will work through us and accomplish His own glorious work by our participation.

(2) The Spirit like the wind is invisible but none the less perceptible real and mighty.

You hear the sound of the wind (John 3:8) but the wind itself you never see. You hear the voice of the Spirit but He" is always invisible. (The word translated "sound" in John 3:8 is the word which elsewhere is translated "voice.")

We hear the voice of the wind but we see its mighty effects. We feel the breath of the wind upon our cheeks, we see dust and leaves blowing before the wind, we see vessels at sea driven swiftly towards their ports; but the wind itself remains invisible.

The Spirit; we feel His breath upon our souls, we see the mighty things He does, but Himself we do not see.

He is invisible, but He is real and perceptible. None of us have seen the Holy Spirit at any time, but of His presence we have been distinctly conscious again and again and again.

His mighty power we have witnessed and His reality we cannot doubt. There are those who tell us that they do not believe in anything which they cannot see.

Not one of them has ever seen the wind but they all believe in the wind. They have felt the wind and seen its effects, similarly we, beyond any question, have felt the mighty presence of the Spirit and witnessed His mighty workings.

(3) The Spirit like the wind is mysterious.

“You cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.” Nothing in nature is more mysterious than the wind. More mysterious is the Holy Spirit in His operations. We hear of how suddenly and unexpectedly in widely separated communities He begins to do His mighty work. Doubtless there are hidden reasons why He does so in this way, but often these reasons are completely undiscoverable by us.

We do not know where He comes from or where He is going. We cannot tell where the next place might be that He will display His mighty and gracious power.

(4) The Spirit, like the wind, is indispensable.

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." John 3:5

If the wind should absolutely cease to blow for a single hour, most of the life on this earth would cease to be. There are many who maintain that to live near the seaside with the tides and winds surrounding them, they live much healthier lives!

The explanation is simply this, it is the wind blowing from the lakes that has brought life and health to the cities. When the Spirit ceases to blow in any heart, any church or any community, death ensues, but when the Spirit blows steadily upon the individual the church or the community, there is abounding spiritual life and health.

(5) The Spirit, like the wind, is life giving.

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." John 6:63

He has made us competent as priests / ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2
Corinthians 3:6

Perhaps the most suggestive passage on this point is Ezekiel 37:8-10: I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live. "So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet - a vast army. Ezekiel 37:8-10

Israel, in the prophet's vision, was only bones, very many and very dry (vv. 2, 11), until the prophet proclaimed unto them the word of God; then there was a noise and a shaking and the bones came together, bone to his bone, and the sinews and the flesh came upon the bones, but still there was no life, but when the wind blew, the breath of God's Spirit, then "they came to life and stood up on their feet - a vast army." All life in the individual believer, in the teacher, the preacher, and the church is the Holy Spirit's work.

You will sometimes make the acquaintance of a man, and as you hear him talk and observe his conduct, you are repelled and disgusted. Everything about him declares that he is a dead man, a moral corpse and not only dead but rapidly putrefying. You get away from him as quickly as you can. Months afterwards you meet him again.

You hesitate to speak to him; you want to get out of his very presence, but you do speak to him, he has not uttered many sentences before you notice a marvellous change. His conversation is sweet and wholesome and uplifting; everything about his manner is attractive and delightful. You soon discover that the man's whole conduct and life has been transformed.

He is no longer a putrefying corpse but a living child of God. What has happened?

The Wind of God has blown upon him; he has received the Holy Spirit, the Holy Wind. One day you visit a church to worship. Everything about the outward appearance of the church is all that could be desired.

There is an attractive auditorium, expensive instruments, gifted vocalists, an interesting preacher. The service is well arranged but you have not been there long before you are forced to see no life there, that it is all form, there is nothing really being accomplished for God or for man. You go away with a heavy heart. Months later you visit the church again; the outward appearance of the church is the same as before but the service has not gone on long before you notice a great difference.

There is a new power in the singing, a new spirit in the prayer, a new grip in the preaching, everything about the church is teeming with the life of God. What has happened? The Wind of God has blown upon that church; the Holy Spirit, the Holy Wind, has come.

You go some day to hear a preacher who you have heard great things about. As he preaches you soon learn that no one exaggerated when they praised his abilities from the merely intellectual and rhetorical standpoint. His diction is faultless, his style beautiful, logic unimpeachable, his orthodoxy beyond criticism.

It is an intellectual treat to listen to him, and yet after all as he preaches you cannot avoid a feeling of sadness, for there is no real grip, no real power, indeed no reality of any kind, in the man's preaching.

You go away, yet again, with a heavy heart at the thought of this waste of magnificent ability. Months pass-by, again you find yourself listening to this celebrated preacher, but what a change! The same faultless diction; Beautiful style, same unimpeachable logic, same skilful delivery, and sound orthodoxy, but now there is something more. There is reality, life, grip, power in the preaching.

Men and women sit breathless as he speaks, sinners bowed with tears of contrition, pricked to their hearts with conviction of sin; men, women, boys and girls renounce their selfishness, sin and worldliness to accept Jesus Christ and surrender their lives to Him. What has happened? The Wind of God has blown upon that man. He has been filled with the Holy Wind.

(6) Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is irresistible. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." – Acts 1:8

When this promise of our Lord was fulfilled in Stephen, we read: But they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Acts 6:10

A man filled with the Holy Spirit is transformed into a cyclone. What can stand before the wind? When a cyclone occurred years ago, the wind picked up loaded goods wagons carrying them away off the track. It wrenched an iron bridge from its foundations, twisted it together and hurled it away.

When another cyclone later visited, it cut off telegraph poles a foot in diameter as if they had been pipe stems. It cut off enormous trees close to the root, it cut off the corner of brick buildings where it passed as though they had been cut by a knife; nothing could stand before it; and so, nothing can stand before a Spirit-filled preacher of the Word. None can resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he speaks.

The Wind of God took possession of Charles G. Finney, an obscure country lawyer, mowing down strong men by his resistless, Spirit given logic. One night, scores of lawyers, led by the justice of the Court of Appeals, filed out of the pews bowed in the aisles offering their lives to God.

The Wind of God took possession of D. L. Moody, an uneducated young business man, and in the power of this resistless Wind, men and women and young people were mowed down before his words and brought in humble confession and renunciation of sin to the feet of Jesus Christ, filled with the life of God they have been the pillars in the churches of Great Britain and throughout the world ever since.

The great need today in individuals, in churches and in preachers is that the Wind of God blow upon us. Amen.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available with instructions to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

5th April, 2020

3rd May, 2020

7th June, 2020

5th July, 2020

2nd August, 2020

6th September, 2020

4th October, 2020

1st November, 2020

6th December, 2020

19th January, 2020

16th February, 2020

15th March, 2020

19th April, 2020

17th May, 2020

21st June, 2020

19th July, 2020

16th August, 2020

20th September, 2020

18th October, 2020

15th November, 2020

20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

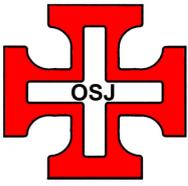
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

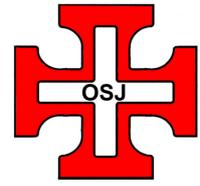
Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

August 2020



Can any comfort come out of death?

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ (UK)

It has been a horribly painful time during the uncertainty and, in some instances, wild panic, of COVID virus infection and spread. As much as Government briefings have tried to pacify us with statistics and small crumbs of good news as infections fall: rising again alarmingly in some towns and cities, but overall, falling. We are assured.

One of the hardest experiences has been the inability of family and friends to be able to pay proper tribute to, and say goodbye to, loved ones, due to restriction of crowds meeting. Zoom and other sites have come to a sort of rescue, enabling faces and voices to be shared with family groups in an 'electronic bubble'. But these are no substitutes to sharing grief, memories, joy and departure in a physical connection.

Our Lord said: Let not your heart be troubled. John 14 King James Version (KJV)

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.

I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless.

If ever the promises of Christ to His followers, us, his believers, were relevant, then surely post pandemic times will call on the very depth and nature of our relationship with Him.

Make time to read them again in your prayer life and the quiet times this 'lockdown' still enables us to have, without dashing around so much, not tied by the prattle of friends or the raucous sounds of television, the over-use of purple prose from our newspapers. Take time, with the Lord, and be comforted.

Death is going to happen - with taxes, described as the only two certainties in life. We do not like it. We put it off as long as we can. Medication and good doctoring is enabling us to live longer and longer, if our genes are good enough to allow it. But death will come. It is how we view it that matters most.

Making a 'good death' was the description of someone who knew their time had come, prepared themselves, quietly, maybe received the last rites, and died 'neatly' and without unnecessary suffering. And still in many cultures, celebration of the life 'gone on' is made into a party, a 'wake' a gratitude for life lived and memories retained.

Kahlil Gibran gave us many valuable philosophic insights - some of his words are often used at weddings and funerals these days to add to the known and proven wisdom of the Scriptures.

Imagine the old prophet, visiting the people at Orphalese, where he had dwelt for twelve years awaiting the return of his ship to take him back to the isle of his birth...'and in the twelfth year on the seventh day of Ielool, the month of reaping, he climbed the hill without the city walls and looked seaward; and he beheld his ship coming with the mist. Then the gates of his heart were flung open, and his joy flew far over the sea. And he closed his eyes and prayed in the silences of his soul.' Can you imagine him answering their last questions with such as 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity', or 'There's enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed', or 'God is a millionaire'? His parting words are thought provoking, especially as so many of our congregation are coming to terms with death of loved ones. Their question was: 'We would ask now of Death.'

And he said: You would know the secret of death? But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life? And what is it to cease breathing but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand, and seek God unencumbered? Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing, and when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb, and when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.'

-oOo-

A study based on Acts 1, 6-14, 1 Peter 4, 12-14; 5, 6-11, John 17, 1-11

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ

The enquiring disciples, and the thirst-for-truth leaders of Judaism - its rites and rituals – searched, in our Acts lesson, to know the true relevance of Christ in their midst. Will you at this time restore the Kingdom – [earthly kingdom, that is, not heavenly one – different source in the original text].

Christ's reply is unequivocal: it is not for you to know or question the times and dates of the Divine plan, the Father's authority or forthcoming holocausts. You are now given the Holy Spirit's power to send you out as witnesses both in Jerusalem, while it still stands, and throughout the rest of the world, even to the ends of the earth. So cast your searching eyes back from the empty heavens to the bustling earth: see the task ahead of you now your Master has returned to his Father, by which route, be assured, he will return again. But don't spend too much time speculating when this will be: just be sure you are ready and active when He does return for you.

In our 1st Peter Epistle, there is more learning and instruction. Do not consider suffering, as a Christian, to be in any way strange or exceptional. It was promised us from the start. We may just have been fortunate that others died before us to enable us to worship in peace and security: though it is not so for all our Christian brothers and sisters.

On VE Day last week, we recalled with gratitude those human brothers and sisters who gave so much, everything, so that our world might be free of tyranny and oppression. It partially worked and we continue the task to try to mould the minds and wills of sinful mankind to the light and truth and idealism of the Gospel message.

But, in sharing with Christ, rejoice that such persecution proves your faith; in insult is blessing. It is part of your pilgrimage and a purifying of your faith. Humble yourselves so that God can lift you up. Cast your anxiety on Him – he cares. Be self-controlled and alert against all the devil's tricks. The Lord will restore you - and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. These are wonderful words of encouragement.

Alan reminded us when he first arrived that there are hundreds of English speaking people in our church environ. Drawing them here, bringing them with us, ministering to their needs is on our doorstep; it may not always be as hard as you expect it to be to invite or encourage restoration of lost, forgotten, forsaken or lazy faith. I was quickly amazed when I was appointed as a School Chaplain how many staff, pupils and parents were 'touched' by the wider Chapel ministry that developed – and the stories abounded as trust grew.

There is then, hidden there, the rather uncomfortable bit which we may often choose to forget. Some of your brethren throughout the world, Peter reminds us, ARE suffering. How often and too easily we can forget daily prayer for those who are daily on trial for their faith.

In the political run up to last week's election, we thought much of the lies and the tragedy of the Iraqi war. How often do we pray for Christians and Muslims in their painful fight for freedom - with the constant struggle our Jewish friends have to contend with - and the daily risk they take to worship their God. In Russia, China, Korea and persecuted Africa too.

And then, in our Gospel, for me one of the most beautiful and re-readable passages of our New Testament and the longest continuous passage which may well be as close to the actual words of our Saviour as we are likely to get in translation.

He prays for His disciples, earnestly, warmly, emotionally – as we believe He still prays for us and intercedes for us before the Throne of Grace. Read it again during this week and be encouraged, strengthened, warmed.

Eternal life to all those God has given Him, to follow Him.

He brought glory to God on earth by completing the work God gave Him to do. [May the same be true of us]

My disciples, he says, are still in the world, having to cope with all the world throws at them.

Protect them, Father, so that they may be one, as we, Father and Son, are one.

Olive Wyon writes in her delightfully practical book 'The Way of the Pilgrim', which I re-read:

'How can we follow this 'Way' and 'lead this Life'? 'Journey' will mean very different things to each one of us, according to our vocation; but one point comes out very plainly through our Gospel story that the 'way of Jesus' was a living and a moving way. There was no stagnation; no withdrawal from the demands of life, although there were many periods of solitude and unrecorded experience. Wherever He was, He was always 'on the way'.'

It's true, isn't it? We are called, whatever our life may be, to be always 'on the way' – the way that leads to God, the way of uttermost love and service. When we offer ourselves to God, we promise to follow wherever He may lead, without knowing what this will involve.

Sometimes we shall feel afraid, like His disciples on the road up to Jerusalem. Sometimes we shall feel that we have lost sight of the track, or even the 'plot'. Like travellers in the Sahara when a sandstorm has blotted out all recognisable features of the route.

But we learn to keep on, regardless of feeling afraid or uncertain, rejected or perplexed. God provides occasional landmarks to help guide us back into the way. All these temptations to fear and anxiety can be met by casting ourselves more resolutely than ever into the arms of God, who has pledged Himself to bring us through.

Our life should be in so many ways like a pilgrimage, though, mercifully, different from theirs.

The hymn 'O happy band of pilgrims' reminds us that, though lesser a sacrifice than the saints and martyrs before us, 'such a light affliction shall win so great a prize'.

Continuing the theme of pilgrimage, upon the aftermath of my late respected Father's death - assured of his place in Heaven, he firmly believed, after a devoted life of faith, I had the immense task of sorting through his effects in Budleigh Salterton, Devon - not least his vast, added to mine, book collection, comprising several hundred volumes.

I found a small [3rd edition] volume of Sir Walter Raleigh, local explorer and bad boy made good. [1552-1618].

In it, *The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage*, I read this small verse:

Give me my scallop-shell of quiet
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope's true gauge,
And thus I take my pilgrimage.

Working as organist in the Pyrenees area of France, in Pau, I explored an area where hundreds of scallop shells were to be seen in halcyon summer months en route to St Jacques, not all religious pilgrims by any means, but people who felt a need to rediscover themselves, work things out in silence and in discussion with strangers, making time to consider a path of faith, or of life, to return home refreshed and renewed, re-inspired and re-motivated. What St Paul calls: "our own gifts and our own calling in Christ".

In the Christian vision, each of us is on a pilgrimage to discover that the wonder of our own creation is that we are created by God for an eternal destiny, for an infinite expansion of spirit. What we have to learn when we meditate is some glimmer of an insight into our own value and importance. If God has sent his son, Jesus, to reveal both his greatness and our potential, this is the basis of seeing our infinite value – to Him and for Him. Seeing this is the perception of faith. We learn in our meditation that the source of faith is the Spirit of Jesus dwelling within our heart – and the ability and willingness to extend that spirit to others wherever their need arises. The chance occasionally to be still, wait for God to speak to us, as meditation affords, and to be able to perceive how to turn the Call into a mission.

Jesus's promise to return is both reassuring and confusing. For more than 2000 years Christians have fully expected this event, sometimes with disastrous consequences as cults have attempted to bring about 'the day of the Lord' through violence.

But, as the Epistle of John reminds us, there are various ways of interpreting Jesus' return: translations of the biblical term 'parousia' – the Greek word for 'presence' – include 'coming', 'advent', 'return', 'appearing', 'arrival' and 'reappearing'. Yes, we believe He will come again, return, arrive, reappear and so forth. But we also believe He is already present in our midst, giving us daily and hourly power. We can be at home with Him in the present tense, but a dwelling place awaits us, as David Jones reminded us two weeks ago, in our future and the future of the Kingdom of God.

This is, after faithful pilgrimage - and always necessary after every journey - our 'Coming Home'.

Elizabeth-Anne Stewart in her helpful book: 'Pilgrims at Heart' puts it like this:

"Given the complexity of our task, our best course of action is simply to 'live' the gospel rather than speculate about the time of Our Lord's return. Apocalyptic visionaries can read the signs; for our part, the surest way 'home' is to concentrate on the sacredness of the present moment.'

"So with this new Spirit power, with the prayer and protection of the Master, the intervention and comfort of the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ; for us all, with the great cloud of witnesses past and present, saints and martyrs, loved ones who have gone before, the worldwide Church in all its facets, we walk on with strength in our pilgrimage, renewing ourselves in the elements of this Eucharist, infused and enthused by the body and blood of Christ, who Redeemed us".

In Mediaeval times it was quite customary for wealthier folk to pay someone else to go on their pilgrimage for them. Nice and easy.

Well, we have also been paid to go on this journey of faith, but paid for by the blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so it is time to take that walk seriously and renew our vigour and vision, for Him and in Him and through Him.

We are the only ones who can do this job for ourselves, not expect others to do it for us. It is our common task. The finding is ours, alone, too, at the end of the journey.

Ever faithful and erudite Bible commentator William Barclay reminds us that it is only in the rough and tumble of world affairs that the Christian can be truly tested, not withdrawn into a monastery or separated zone.

Yet there is need for quiet and meditation, which by now you all know I value in my own life – and am lucky to have time for such ‘dwelling’ with the Lord and His word.

Study and prayer life strengthens and equips in heart and mind and character, for better coping with life in its fullness. And some of us know the constant struggle that derives.

Jesus prayed for the unity of ALL his disciples. Pope Benedict, in his inaugural sermon, reminded us that: *(continued on next page)*

“God does not abandon His flock, but leads it throughout time, under the guidance of those whom He has made pastors” - and that it is - “through the power of God, who, through His Church, wishes to form a great family of all peoples, through the unifying force of Truth and Love”.

He told us how he valued John Paul II’s attempt to confirm the Christian people in faith, gathering them around him and making the entire human family feel more united.

“The Eucharist” says Pope Benedict, “makes the Risen Christ constantly present: Christ Who continues to give Himself to us, calling us to participate in the banquet of His Body and His Blood. From this full communion with Him comes every other element of the life of the Church, in the first place the communion among the faithful, the commitment to proclaim and give witness to the Gospel, the ardour of charity towards all, especially towards the poor and the smallest.”

What a world-wide task has been given to us all; this special corner of France to which some of us have been called, must be our starting point. Not to preach but to demonstrate by our lives and by our unity, Christ to the world. And by our spiritual renewal and re-commitment to draw closer to the Lord and Master who set out such a clear road-map for our Christian journey.

May we do this, in sincerity and truth, and with zeal and energy, for His Name’s sake. AMEN.

-oOo-

SAINTS PAUL AND BARNABAS AND THE ISLAND OF CYPRUS

Close to the ruins of Salamis, not far from Famagusta in Northern Cyprus, is a carefully restored site of the tomb of St Barnabas and the Monastery [Aylos Varnavas] bearing his name and votive.

The 18C monastery [Arab raids destroyed the 5C original] functioned until 1976 having been lived in by a remaining brotherhood of three, the youngest aged 79, a painter prolific in ikons which now are displayed in profusion in the former cells and communal rooms of the protective courtyard cloister together with artefacts from the Enkomi excavation site. Jasmine, hibiscus, cacti and olive dress the site and geckos play unaware of tourists. The pulpitums and lecterns remain but pews were removed to make a gallery for ikons of Constantinople visit by the Archbishop of Cyprus to Emperor Zeno [under whom in AD477 Cyprus church is permitted and established], a visited facilitated originally, it is believed, by Barnabas himself.

The self-governing Church of Cyprus now stands fifth in Greek Orthodoxy, after the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, and before those of Russia, Greece, Serbia and Romania.

He is believed to have brought Christianity to Cyprus, St Paul himself visiting to encourage and promote the faith.

He was martyred by Jewish migrants, history records, who had fled here to escape Roman persecution, under the instigation and tyrannical rule of Trajan around AD100, along with 240,000 Cypriots and his body dumped in marshland and brought back to this spot.

[NB The Romans expelled all Jewish residents as a result of this massacre, Hadrian encouraged Roman art and sculpture and in AD 313 Emperor Constantine, through his mother Empress Helena's influence and persuasion - and the fabled symbol of a triumphant cross to win his battles - embraces Christianity].

Three levels below ground one finds a catacomb like rock tomb burial shelf where his remains lay forgotten for centuries until its location was revealed in a dream to Anthemios in AD477, discovered and honoured. A copy of St Matthew's gospel, seemingly in Barnabas' own hand was found, it is said, clutched to his bosom.

Barnabas was probably unmarried and from a prosperous family [1 Cor 9, 5] and that Mark was his cousin [Col 4,10] so both were companions to Paul in his fabled Missionary journeys. In Philemon 1,24 and 2 Timothy 4,11 Mark was close to Paul and to Timothy and was summoned to be with Paul during his last days. He is also seen with Peter during his later years [1 Pet 5.13].

References show that Barnabas was an effective leader, a trailblazer and a nurturer, first leading the young church at Antioch and then the first missionary journey from Antioch with the comparatively inexperienced Paul at his side. Together they were acknowledged as 'apostles' [Acts 14,4] who had 'risked their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ [Acts 15,26]

Probably deceased by the time Acts was written, Luke warmly remembers Barnabas as 'a good man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit'[Acts 11,4].

But he encouraged individuals. He took Saul, who had been completely disconnected with the other apostles, the disciples who had known and worked with 'the Master', in fact openly hostile in his attempt to arrest them for perverting the traditional Jewish faith of his inheritance, and persuaded them to recognise 'the changed man'. Finding him in Tarsus [see below] he personally recruited 'Paul' for the work in Antioch, where he could develop teaching and leadership skills not known to this firebrand Jewish 'protector of the faith' whose Damascus bright light experience had so transformed his Divine mission. 'I am Jesus, whom you persecute'. And the implied: Follow me!

On the journey to Antioch he had the wisdom to know when Paul's gifts and abilities exceeded his own, allowing Paul to shine to the glory of God instead of keeping him 'in his place' to maintain his, Barnabas' own prominence, the experienced churchman. Humility and modesty, then! The similarities to how he worked with the very young John Mark, his cousin are easy to perceive.

Barnabas first appears in Acts 4,36 as a Levite named Joseph from Cyprus, apparently wealthy, selling a field to give money to the apostles for their onward distribution to the burgeoning church. Clearly he got to know the apostles well at that time, hence the introduction of the ex-persecutor Saul of Tarsus as a 'brother in the Lord' [Acts 9 27].

Being sent [Acts 11, 22] to Antioch by them to lead and encourage the young church, he recruited Paul. They then both visit the Church in Jerusalem with a generous [or it would not have been so mentioned] gift for those converts suffering from the famine in Judea [Acts 11, 30], returning with the young John Mark to Antioch in Acts 12,25.

During this time the Holy Spirit 'selected' the three of them' [Acts 13,2] to Cyprus [probably AD45] and the city of Salamis and to Paphos where the Roman consul is converted to Christianity, sailing onwards to Pamphylia, an area south of Asia Minor, between Lycia and Cilicia, extending from the Mediterranean to Mount Taurus, modern-day Antalya province, Turkey. John Mark returns thence to Jerusalem, controversially [Acts 15.38], P&B to Pisidian Antioch*.

Note the reference here is to Paul and Barnabas, not Barnabas and Paul, so some conjecture this suggests Paul had risen to higher importance or prominence - or maybe a controversy John Mark could not handle! Paul's eloquence is referred to in praiseworthy terms in Acts 14.

*Antiochia Colonia Caesarea – a city in the Turkish Lakes Region, at crossroads of Mediterranean, Aegean and Central Anatolian regions, formerly the border of Pisidia and Phrygia, so also known as Antiochia in Phrygia,,a site approx.1km NE of Yalvaç, modern town of Isparta Province.

At this time they discussed re-visiting churches previously visited, another 'missionary journey', [Acts 15,36]. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them but Paul objected, as he had deserted them in Pamphylia.

They sharply disagreed and parted company over the matter - a holy spat! [Acts 15,39]. So they divided their 'territory' Barnabas and John Mark leaving for Cyprus [their ancestral homeland] and Paul, now with Silas, to Syria and Cilicia [Paul's ancestral homeland].

Scholars have advanced all sorts of speculations about what was 'really' behind the conflict over John Mark, but none rises to a significant degree of consideration. Luke clearly describes it as 'desertion' or 'abandoning' [[Acts 15,38 Gk *aphiemi*, leave - Matt 1:19 among the Dead Sea Scrolls is translated as divorce: the only other time it appears is 1 Cor 7:11 where Paul uses it to describe the legal separation of a man and wife]]. A suggestion of a moral or character failing on the part of the young John Mark at that time in his life. Speculation abounds as in other parts of the life of St Paul [see A.N. Wilson]

Some attempted to paint a picture of Barnabas being weak or over-sentimental regarding his young cousin in his advocacy of the man's suitability for 'the cause', yet there is no indication of this and it ignores known strong traits Barnabas had up until now shown. He obviously saw clear potential in the young man. He would not allow Paul's earlier ministry failures [Acts 9,30] to be his legacy, nor John Mark's failure in Pamphylia to be his.

Barnabas, maybe due to his age and maturity, and wider experience, perceived that failure has always been one of God's 'tools' for training people - but only if that failure is transformed by perseverance into triumph, for the sake of the Gospel and in the Name of Christ.

Any 'sinfulness' on the part of Paul in the story [unlike the incident in Gal 2,11]. The Conference of Jerusalem, which split Peter and Paul with their conflicting views of whether converts should subscribe to all the rules of Judaism, including circumcision and dietary rules. Paul declared it was unnecessary. Whatever the reason, Paul obviously did not think John Mark suitable for this 'promotional journey'. The alternative arrangement, proposed and agreed, served to enrich John Mark's continuing growth in the faith and added Silas into a position to be trained for ministry.

Tarshish* and Tarsus

Paul was invariably referred to as Saul of Tarsus until Acts 13 when he and Barnabas had an encounter with a false prophet on Cyprus [Acts 13, 6] where Luke refers to his 'also called Paul' thence always by the Greco Roman 'Paul'. The popular perception that it was changed after the Damascus Road experience is incorrect. Acts continues to call him Saul until the Cyprus trip, a decade or more after the Damascus Road.

*Tarshish is associated with the land of the Kittim, which Josephus tells us was a designation for not only Cyprus but also the nearby coasts of Asia Minor and Syria, Northeastern Mediterranean Sea and Anatolia: Tarsus in Cilicia, but after 1646 often identified with Tartessus in Spain), Kittim (modern Cyprus)- Elishah too, and Dodanim (alt. 1 Chron. 1:7 'Rodanim,' the island of Rhodes, west of modern Turkey between Cyprus and the mainland of Greece).

The city of Tarsus was a Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese, attested between 7C and 13C. Nearly 20 Metropolitans of Tarsus are mentioned by Michael the Syrian [1166-99] or in other Syrian Orthodox narrative sources.

The Archdiocese is last mentioned toward the end of the 13C, lapsing during the 14C of record appended to Vol III of Michael's Chronicle, where he lists most of the Bishops consecrated, Patriarchs of Antioch 9C -12C and 28 Syrian Orthodox patriarchs sitting during this period. In many cases Michael could list names of bishops during their reigns, their monasteries of origin and the places where they were consecrated.

SERMON FOR THE CHURCH TODAY.

Maybe for the church today, people with Barnabas' nature and encouragement, positive thinking, recognition of failure or inadequacy but determinedly propelling the deeper qualities perceived in the nature of a minister, missionary or convert member of a church, are essential and to be treasured.

Romans 12, 8 and its 'gift of encouragement, demonstrates that where positive and training and teaching are in evidence, God's work of the gospel will go forward, whoever we are and however limited we may feel we are to progress the work set before us. To Barnabas, the Kingdom of God and the Reign of Christ were not machines needing cogs, but bodies of individuals building a faith. 'What is more important', I asked a church in Bristol I was running a study group for, 'the mission or the members?'

To Barnabas, the mission WAS the members. A kingdom with no place for a Saul, or even a Paul, or yet a John Mark, in time becomes a Kingdom with no place for anyone! Failures, sins, temptations and yieldings in a life of faith are part and parcel of a life of faith.

As Paul went to Tarsus in disappointment and John Mark returned to Jerusalem in dishonour, Christians today have experienced the same things. Many have stepped out boldly in faith intending to accomplish some great thing for God - only to meet with disillusion, or dashed hopes, vision of glory dimmed to rose coloured spectacles, or to find themselves enmeshed in an unworkable or unhealthy - or just plain irritating - church situation. They dared to act in faith and later wondered if they had been fools to think so, and to have done so.

Maybe what today's church needs, alongside the friendly coffee mornings, social agencies, loans to the poor and food banks, festivals and fetes, fizzy and clappy music, joy unbridled in charismatic covens, is people who personally practice a Barnabas style of devotion and sincere love that looks for those who are down - or even out - and commitment to the rebuilding of their faith and their usefulness.

Changing plans to use most appropriate people, even if untried and untested, may sometimes be God's plan, not ours. Slowing down the ministry to ensure firm basis and foundation of faith, can sometimes mean more rapid eventual progress for a church - even some revival when stale and apparently on life-support-machine minimal survival.

Such church leadership can realise that a failed John Mark probably became a gospel writer and that a damaged Saul of Tarsus becomes a preacher to kings, emperors and Caesars. As John Engler, theologian, reminds us, a Barnabas Ministry probably needs to start with a Barnabas Heart.

Sadly, the modern church has not always know quite what to do with such enthusiasts. As the psalmist described [Ps 69,12] they have been mocked with the taunt 'sinner' and 'has-been' status, no longer relevant by their peers.

A drunkard lurched towards the great Baptist preacher and progenitor of Baptist theological argument and debate, evangelist extraordinaire, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, yelling: Spurgeon, Mr Spurgeon, the great humbug. Spurgeon replied, 'for the Lord, my friend I am happy to have been a great anything!'

Today's minimalist congregations produce mockery as do many churches' resort to populist 'takes' on 'generalised Christianity'. Our country is Christian and that is enough.

Oh, no it isn't and oh no it's not!

Where is now thy God?, sneered the psalmist. Put Thou thy trust in God replies the devotee. Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4.) declares the persistent pilgrim. [Bunyan]

As the sinking Peter cried out on the lake, Save me! [Mt 14,30] they called out to others but sometimes received an anchor thrown to them, instead of a lifeline or a helping hand. Not waving but drowning!

Where would Peter and the other apostles have been, in the hour of their devastation at the brutal murder of their Master on a rough cross, had Jesus not come to them, in the quiet of the road to Emmaus and in the cloistered room, to restore them with Resurrection.

Where might Paul, Silas and John Mark have been without the faithful Cyprian, Barnabas?

O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

George Matheson

Fr.Ed Elsey, OSJ

CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ

Much is known, popularly, about public worship, churches, congregations and the usual panoply of 'hymn-prayer sandwich' employing various liturgies and none, music of differing styles - and none. The joy of the final prayer and the sound of tea urns clicking into action: biscuits, sponge and fellowship.

It works for many people, though many fewer than in previous years. It is what many have only known, without stepping to explore anything else. A pity not to try alternatives.

Time alone will show whether, after pandemic lockdown, size and make-up of congregations will ever revive what pundits term a dying church. Charismatic congregations and the enthusiasm of Ethnic minority congregations, their hands in the air and their dancing in the atrium, flourish in many corners of the earth - to some it is praise to the Christ who saved them: to the more stoic traditional groups of worshippers, anathema.

Christian monasticism describes the almost opposite to all that. It is worship of a quieter, more devotional practice of individuals who live ascetic, often atypically cloistered lives, dedicated to Christian worship. Notwithstanding the vast ornate monasteries of the continent, not subject to Britain's dissolution by royal paranoia and devastation, beautiful architecturally and religious flamboyancy of statues, saints, martyrs and sinners; stucco and trompe l'oeil.

Their monks worked each for each within a community, praying in their cells and formally in the daily offices dating back before the 9C. Matins (nighttime), Lauds (early morning), Prime (first hour of daylight), Terce (third hour), Sext (noon), Nones (ninth hour), Vespers (sunset evening) and Compline (end of the day)

Christian Monasticism began to develop early in the Church's history, modelled upon scriptural - Old and New testaments - examples and ideals, regulated by religious rules - viz the Rules of Saint Augustine, Anthony the Great, St Pachomius, St Basil, St Benedict [all worth a punt on google and wikipedia] and subsequently by Canon Law of respective Christian denominations, all of which contain forms of monastic living. Those living the monastic life are known by the generic terms monks (men) and nuns (women). Also nowadays by the term ascetic and contemplative. The Greek monachos [monk], is from monos meaning 'alone'. I am finding a number of fellow retired Christians, distressed by the noise and rattle of much modern worship are taking instead to having a small room in their home, termed an Oratory - a separated space for prayer and contemplation, study and writing. My own oratory is dedicated to St Philip, Apostle. Derived from Christ's reply to Philip's question: 'Have I been with you this long time and you have not known me, Philip?', and Philip's reply to the Ethiopian eunuch's question: 'What doth hinder me to be baptised?' - and noticing water nearby was baptised at once by the apostle. No rules or restrictions standing in the way. My contention, dealing with so many needy folk who have requested counselling, support, advice on reading and prayer aid, that nobody is denied access to the Lord and Master we worship, proclaim and serve, whatever their pain, their past, their predilections and their pursuance of faith.

The test I placed upon my own faith when I relinquished my several life-time roles in the Church, musically and theologically, pastorally and promotionally, led me to this quieter discipline, from early morning to late night, supported by colleagues in the faith, and found it worked better for me and for my witness with a worldwide set of friends and adherents.

Study of the Desert Fathers, St John Henry Newman, Cardinal Rosmini, and others, fulfilled a need for peace and quiet, which many a church failed to provide for me. Each has to be open for himself or herself before Christ in such a lifelong search. And the search, I can assure you, goes on and on. For those who like to do the same Sunday after Sunday that, too, is fine if 'it does it for you'. Daily ritual is harder but deeper, for me. My prayers are the same for all Christ's church and its very assorted people. His Name be Praised.

-oOo-

FORMING CHRIST WITHIN US:

+David, OSJ (Wales)

It is a wonderful and deeply significant prayer that Paul offers for the believers in Ephesus and for all believers who read the Epistle: I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this

love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:16-19

We have here an advance in the thoughts I shared with you all. It is the carrying out of the former work to its completion. Here the power of the Spirit manifests itself, not merely in giving us victory over sin but in four things.

In Christ dwelling in our hearts.

The word translated “dwell” in this passage is a very strong word. It means literally, “to dwell down,” “to settle,” “to dwell deep.” It is the work of the Holy Spirit to form the living Christ within us, dwelling deep down in the deepest depths of our being. We have already seen that this was a part of the significance of the name sometimes used of the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Christ.” In Christ on the cross of Calvary, made an atoning sacrifice for sin, bearing the curse of the broken law in our place, we have Christ for us. But by the power of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon us by the risen Christ we have Christ in us. Herein lies the secret of a Christ like life.

We hear a great deal in these days about doing as Jesus would do. Certainly, as Christians, we ought to live like Christ. But ask yourself honestly “Do I live like Christ?”

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 But any attempt on our part to imitate Christ in our own strength will only result in utter disappointment and despair.

There is nothing more futile that we can possibly attempt than to imitate Christ in the power of our own will. If we believe that, we can succeed it will be simply because we have a very incomplete knowledge of Christ.

The more we study Him, and the more perfectly we understand His conduct, the more clearly we will see how far short we have come from imitating Him. But God does not demand of us the impossible, He does not demand of us that we imitate Christ in our own strength. He offers to us something infinitely better, He offers to form Christ in us by the power of His Holy Spirit.

And when Christ is formed in us by the Holy Spirit's power, all we have to do is to let this indwelling Christ live out His own life in us, and then we shall be like Christ without struggle and effort of our own. In and of ourselves we are full of weakness and failure, but the Holy Spirit is able to form within us the Holy One of God, the indwelling Christ, and He will live out His life through us in all the humblest relations of life as well as in those relations of life that are considered greater.

He will live out His life through the mother in the home, through the factory labourer, through the business man in his office everywhere.

In our being rooted and established in love (v. 17)

Paul multiplies figures here.

The first figure is taken from the tree shooting its roots down deep into the earth and taking fast hold upon it.

The second figure is taken from a great building with its foundations laid deep in the earth on the rock.

Paul therefore tells us that by the strengthening of the Spirit in the inward man we send the roots of our life down deep into the soil of love and also that the foundations of the superstructure of our character are built upon the rock of love. Love is the sum of holiness, the fulfilling of the law (Romans 8:10); love is what we all most need in our relations to God, to Jesus Christ and to one another; and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to root and establish (or “ground”) our lives in love.

There is the most intimate relation between Christ being formed within us, or made to dwell in us, and our being rooted and grounded in love, for Jesus Christ Himself is the absolutely perfect embodiment of divine love. In our being given power to grasp with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth of Christ’s love, as well as to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

It is not enough that we love, we must know the love of Christ, but that love surpasses knowledge. It is so broad, so long, so high, so deep, that no one can comprehend it. But we can “apprehend” it, we can lay hold upon it; we can make it our own; we can hold it before us as the object of our meditation, our wonder, and our joy. But it is only in the power of the Holy Spirit that we can do this.

The mind cannot grasp it at all, in its own native strength. A man untaught and un-strengthened by the Spirit of God may talk about the love of Christ, he may write poetry about it, he may give speeches about it, but it is only words, words, words. There is no real apprehension. But the Spirit of God makes us strong to really apprehend it in all its breadth, in all its length, in all its depth, and in all its height.

In our being “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

One older translation reads “Filled with all the fullness of God.”

Later translations more accurately translated this “filled unto” or “filled to” the fullness of God.

To be filled with all the fullness of God would not be so wonderful, for it is an easy matter to fill a 2 litre bottle with all the fullness of the ocean, a single dip will do it. But it would be an impossibility indeed to fill a 2 litre bottle unto all the fullness of the ocean, until all the fullness that there is in the ocean is in that 2 litre bottle.

But it is seemingly a more impossible task that the Holy Spirit undertakes to do for us, to fill us “to the measure of all the fullness” of the infinite God, to fill us until all the intellectual and moral fullness that there is in God, is in us. But this is the believer's destiny, we are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), i. e., we are heirs of God to the extent that Jesus Christ is an heir of God; that is, we are heirs to all God is and all God has.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to apply to us that which is already ours in Christ. It is His work to make ours experimentally all God has and all God is, until the work is consummated in our being “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

This is not the work of a moment, nor a day, nor a week, nor a month, nor a year, but the Holy Spirit day by day puts His hand, as it were, into the fullness of God and conveys to us what He has taken from there and puts it into us, and then again He puts His hand into the fullness that there is in God and conveys to us what is taken from there, and puts it into us, and this wonderful process goes on day after day and week after week and month after month, and year after year, and never ends until we are “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Amen.

+David

-oOo-

WIND THAT UNSEEN INVISIBLE FORCE

+David, OSJ (Wales)

Wind is defined as air set in motion by natural causes. Since wind is an invisible current, how can we be sure it exists? We deduce wind's existence and presence by how it influences surrounding objects. We see trees swaying, flags fluttering, clouds moving and so on. We can also personally feel its force on our skin and hear it when it blows through certain instruments.

To us, God is an unpredictable, invisible force like the wind. We cannot see Him, but just because He is not seen doesn't mean He is not there.

Most of the time, God is like the still air that unnoticeably surrounds and sustains us. At other times, He is a gentle breeze that relieves us on a hot day. Yet, on occasion, He can be a hurricane ripping the roofs off those who shelter in their ignorance and refuse to acknowledge His existence.

God is everywhere (omnipresent) and, like the invisible wind, we can deduce His presence by the way He affects things around us. We can witness God's wonderful design in Creation.

We can see the changes in those people's lives who have trusted in Him. We can hear God's whisper-quiet voice as it blows through our conscience.

Furthermore, just as wind makes a distinct sound when blown through an instrument, God works through the lives of many Christians so His message is clearly heard around the world.

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. John 3:8

Matthew 14 v 13 – 21

Unice Brearley, OSJ (UK)

In this reading we find Jesus had just heard of the death of his cousin John the Baptist, and must have felt for him, also his disciples had just returned from their travels, and they were all gathered I've no doubt he would want to get away from the crowds for a while, so he went with his disciples to Bethsaida but the crowds were having none of this and., they followed him, but despite his grief for John he welcomed them.

This is the only miracle of Jesus which you can find in all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The twelve have just come back from their tour, and this was a time when Jesus really needed to be alone with them to hear all their news about their travels

Most people would have resented the invasion of their hard-won privacy. How would we feel if we had sought out some lonely place to be with our best friends and suddenly a clamour of people turned up with their insistent demands. Sometimes we are too busy to be disturbed, but to Jesus human need took first place.

Would we have followed the crowd, when we see a queue, do we join it? We certainly would have done during the war, expecting something good to turn up, but in this case who did the crowd think they were following? As I have said before the reason Jesus went to this deserted place was to take in the news of John's death and to hear the news from his disciples.

But the crowd were unlikely to be offering comfort for his loss, all they thought about was seeking healing for themselves, which he gave.

There are many ways of looking at this event, here are two of them.

The evening came, home was far away, and the people were tired and hungry. Jesus astonishingly ordered his disciples to give them a meal. There are two ways in which we can quite honestly look at this miracle. First we can see in it simply a miracle in which Jesus created food for this vast multitude. Second some people think that this is what happened. The people were hungry and they were utterly selfish. They all had something with them, but they would not even produce it for themselves in case they had to share it with others. The Twelve laid before the multitude their little store and thereupon others were moved to produce theirs, and in the end there was more than enough for everyone. So it may be regarded as a miracle which turned selfish suspicious fold into generous people, a miracle of Christ's changing determined self-interest into a willingness to share.

Before Jesus distributed the food he blessed it, he said grace. There was a Jewish saying that "he who enjoys anything without thanksgiving is as though he robbed God" The blessing said in every home in Palestine before every meal ran "Blessed art thou Yahweh our God, King of the world who caused bread to come from the earth" Jesus would not eat without giving thanks to the giver of all good gifts. This is a story which tells us many things.

At the end they took up twelve basketful of fragments. Are any of you like me, I had always wondered where these baskets came from, but apparently no orthodox Jew travelled without his basket. The Romans made a joke of the Jew and his basket.

There were two reasons for the basket which was a wickerwork affair shaped like a narrow-necked pitcher, broadening out as it went down.

First, the orthodox Jew carried his own food supplies in his basket, so that he would be certain of eating food that was ceremonially clean and pure.

Second many a Jew was an accomplished beggar, and into his basket went the proceeds of his begging.

The reason that there were twelve baskets is simply that there were twelve disciples. It was into their own baskets that they frugally gathered up the fragments so that nothing would be lost.

The second version of the story, gives us a wonderful insight into the attitude of Jesus and the attitude of the disciples.

It shows us two reactions to human need. When the disciples saw how late it was, and how tired and hungry the crowd were, they said, "Send them sway so that they can find themselves something to eat." In effect they said "Get rid of them and let someone else look after them.

Would this have been our reaction in the circumstances?

Is it our reaction when this type of situation is put before us?

But Jesus said “You give them something to eat.” In effect Jesus said “These people are tired and hungry ‘we’ must do something about it. And there are always the people who when they see someone in trouble say ‘Let others worry’. And there are those who say ‘I must worry about my brother's or my sister's need.’

So which category do we come under?

It also shows two reactions to need. When the disciples were asked to give the people something to eat they insisted that 200 denari, (or 200 pence) was not enough to buy bread for them. This was more than six months wages at that time. Jesus said “What have you got” They had five loaves, small barley loaves. They had two fishes which would be the size of sardines.

This did not seem much But Jesus took it and worked wonders with it. In the hands of Jesus little is always much. We may think we have little of talent or substance to give to Jesus. That is no reason for hopeless pessimism such as the disciples had. The one fatal thing to say is “For all I could do, it is not worth my while trying to do anything. A very big mistake for if we put ourselves into the hand of Jesus Christ, there is no telling what he can do with us and through us.

We all have talents of some sort, some we are aware of but others if we put our trust in Jesus and give him our lives and work for him marvellous things will happen and our world will be transformed.

It would be most interesting to work out how much time Jesus spent not talking, but easing human pain and satisfying hunger.

He still needs the service of human hands. The mother who have spent a lifetime cooking meals for a hungry family; the nurse, the doctor, the friend, relation or parent who has sacrificed life and time to ease another's pain; just think of the social reformers, who have turned themselves out to seek better conditions for men and women – they have all preached far more effective sermons than the eloquent orator.

Jesus' help was generous. There was enough and more than enough. In love there is no nice calculation of the less and more. God is like that. When we sow a packet of seeds we usually have to thin the plants out and throw away far more than we can keep. God has created a world where there is more than enough for all if we will share it.

As always there is permanent truth in an action in time. In Jesus all our needs are supplied. There is a hunger of the soul there is in each of us, sometimes at least, a longing to find something in which we may invest our lives. Our hearts are restless until they rest in him. “My God will fully satisfy every need of yours” Said Paul (Philippians 4 v 19) even in the desert places of this life.

When we look around society today, there is a hunger of the soul, but people don't seem to be looking in the right place for it. What are we doing to help our neighbours to find Jesus and help bring them to hear His word and see his works.

The situation on this little hillside in Bethsaida went from an awkward problem for the disciples, surrounded as they were by a huge number of hungry people, to a party with plenty to spare.

When we give away generously we do not end up with nothing, we have more, because we cannot out-give God.

Whether the food did multiply in the basket or people gave what they had, either way it was a miracle and it resulted from Jesus' influence. It may be that the mechanics of how food was shared is less significant than the meaning of the event, Jesus is the bread of life who provides enough and more than enough.

The people had followed Jesus and he gave them food, which was in many ways an ordinary Jewish meal, with a blessing, followed by sharing eating in family groups. But without Jesus they would have been hungry. To-day we are less likely to be ill-prepared - and in such a situation there would be a fast-food van not far away. So we are less dependent on Jesus to supply practical needs. Apparently we are too self-sufficient to need God.

We ought to ask ourselves about the dangers associated with this.

The people seeing the food provided would have recognised a parallel with Moses and the Israelites in the desert when God provided manna.

For Christians to-day the link is to Holy Communion, in both cases there is a relationship between obedient followers and God's loving care

Connecting the miracle of Jesus in Matthew to the reading in Isaiah God calls his people.

The invitation is open but it comes with a challenge, which comes to all of us today, God gives generously and he gives good gifts, but his grace needs a response.

God gives in abundance, as is shown in the feeding of the 5000, but there is also responsibility and accountability.

God loves his people and lifts them up, they reflect God's glory.

They have what they need but to what end?

What does accepting God mean to us here and now?

Reflections on three 'C's:

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

(Christian) Compassion



Condone

Condemn

The problem for most people who would say they are Christian is that whilst they would like to show faith driven compassion, there is a fine line between condoning and condemning sin. It isn't always as straight forward as it seems.

There is an equilibrium that must be carefully regulated and maintained.

Unfortunately, where it comes to condemning specific kinds of sin, 'the church' has chosen to remain silent rather than risk any kind of public backlash.

That uncomfortable and irresponsible silence is often taken as an endorsement for particular sin to continue unquestioned and unchallenged. It neither helps the sinner nor 'the church'. This is not a good or honest place to be.

Have we become so 'compassionate' in our so called 'love' for others that what society thinks, not God, now dictates our actions and faith? The signs are there.

I increasingly find that the 'love' some of the main stream churches talk about is something quite different to the 'love' that is exemplified in the bible. According to recent trends in thinking, the bible must apparently now be reinterpreted to be sexually inclusive and diverse in all of its non-binary expressions.

Traditional teachings about marriage, family, sexuality, relationships and social responsibility, etc., have all been thrown out with the baby in the bath water, and the authority of the bible questioned. When I hear things like 'when God/the bible says....., He/it really means.....', 'we now have a better understanding...', 'society has moved on since then....,' I instinctively know God's authority is being undermined yet again and the defining lines of sin are being further blurred.

Whilst it may be theologically 'on trend' and 'contemporary', it isn't biblically based and it won't bring people back to church. It will do just the opposite.

This current theology seemingly being forced upon us is that if an action is based on 'love' then it must be alright because 'God is Love'. It's just a pity that this 'love' 'the church' is talking about isn't the same robust love that God talks about.

As an example, just because you 'love' someone, it doesn't give you the right to have sexual intercourse with them, even if you both have that desire to express your relationship in that way.

Some things are just off limit like sexual intercourse between children and adults, or indulging in casual sex outside of marriage. Both are a betrayal of trust and responsibility, never mind just being downright wrong.

But some things are less clear. Take same sex relationships for example.

So long as sex is not involved, the bible holds no objection and even commends brotherly and sisterly love. The moment 'sex' becomes involved then that is a step too far. Society may disagree but I am taking a biblical point of view here.

This kind of same sex relationship receives condemnation in Holy Writ.

Trying to get around this in the recent legislative initiatives by HMGov, like allowing people to legally self-determine their own gender, makes no difference in God's eyes. We can believe whatever we like about ourselves but it is irrelevant if the facts don't support it. I can believe I am a bicycle, but if I haven't got two wheels, handle bars and pedals then the factual evidence stacks against me. So, physically intimate same sex relationships remain biblically disallowed.

Within the context of marriage, heterosexual couple indulging in sexual intercourse do so with the intent and desire of having children according to the bible.

Physically intimate same sex relationships simply fall outside of that biblically sanctioned remit as there is no natural physical ability to enable that process.

It cannot be achieved without a third party of the opposite sex being involved, and if this occurs then it falls under the same rules that sex outside of marriage fall under. Involving someone else is an act of infidelity.

One can immediately see some of the problems when this is pursued further. Even heterosexual relationships in today's more liberal social context are not without their own problems.

Sexual intercourse, even within marriage, is mostly seen as little more than a self-indulgent recreational activity by society, and any unwanted mistakes or imperfections can be terminated according to the law of the land.

Just because it is 'legal' does not mean that it is acceptable in God's eyes.

Worldwide, the numbers of pregnancies being terminated runs into millions each year. Just last year the number of pregnancies terminated was greater than the number of all those killed in the six years of world war two, military and civilian.

This is unacceptable but there is a strange silence about this fact. It is nevertheless a direct consequence of the change in social attitude towards relationships and sex.

That sexual intercourse as 'an expression of love' has a certain incongruity if it results in a termination of a life. Where is the expression of love towards the unborn child?

It appears there is none. This 'expression of love' is without any sense of responsibility and consequence. Termination is not an act of love, rather more an act of 'convenience', i.e. 'what works for me most easily and causes least effort'.

That puts the whole nature of that 'love' into question, and it is found infinitely lacking.

In my mind, casual or recreational sex is nothing more than an act of purely irresponsible selfishness when it comes down to it. If it ends up in the murder or termination of an unborn child it suddenly becomes a whole different matter.

Outside of marriage and taken on its own, 'getting your leg' over isn't an act of 'love' and neither should it be taken as an 'act of future intent' where it comes to faithfulness and life time's relationship. It is nothing more than it is, a moment of selfish indulgence. The sexual partner is simply a participant in the act, and there are no guarantees any words spoken in the heat of the moment were either truthful or will be honoured.

In these and similar circumstances, 'I love you' roughly translated often means nothing more than 'I want to have sex and you will do until I find someone better.'

In the current social climate, 'love' and 'lust' are often deliberately confused. The media is as much to blame as 'consenting' couples for this deliberate confusion.

They get away with this deception because there are no longer any social guidelines or rules. Basically, anything goes so long as it's all about 'love', nothing being said about 'responsibility' or dealing with consequences.

The fact is freedom without responsibility is anarchy.

I feel that people genuinely want to be loved and express their love towards others but it is a question of 'how' in the midst of all this shallowness.

The sexual act is no guarantee that 'love' is mutually shared between the consenting couple. It is only when lust has burned itself out that the truth of its reality emerges, and by then it may be too late.

With such a lack of understanding and preparation, it is hardly any wonder that so many marriages end in divorce.

'The church' must clearly take some of the blame for allowing this situation to exist when it should have set the gold standard for society. It has been silent when it should have spoken up, even if it would have been extremely unpopular.

'The church's (and our own) silence has allowed what the bible has not, and it has not condemned what the bible has warned against either. 'The church' is clearly now part of the problem and it needs to acknowledge its role in allowing this situation to exist, let alone become acceptable.

The excuse for this continued silence has often been 'we are a loving and compassionate church' and 'we do not judge people.'

Unfortunately the bible has made clear that those who repeatedly sin without repentance are already judged. Even Jesus hinted that forgiveness has a finite limit even if it is long suffering.

(Matthew 18 v21-22: ²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²²Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.")

As for 'silence', that is neither 'compassionate' nor 'loving'. It is an abrogation of those very things. Remaining silent in the face of oncoming danger is downright irresponsible.

'Compassion', and particularly 'forgiveness', are things that are aimed at those who recognise their sin and are truly and sincerely repentant. This demands an understanding and acceptance of wrong doing and a determination to do what is right whilst making restitution to those who have suffered as a consequence where possible.

It is not the easy option that most people think it is where just saying 'sorry' makes everything alright again and there are no further consequences.

It doesn't work like that.

Forgiveness comes with responsibilities on both the sinner's part and 'the church'. We cannot simply opt out – 'love' for the sinner comes with responsibilities too.

So where does this leave us, and what of 'free will'?

An important truth we need to recognise regarding our personal lives is that God can only do what we let Him do. (See Matt 13, v57-58)

For those who deny God or who declare they have no faith or choose to ignore God, essentially, they can do whatever they wish because they have denied God and have willingly placed themselves outside of His love and His statutes.

God will give them every chance to turn away from their way of life, but if continued it will ultimately end very badly. Once outside of God's love, what is left?

In this state they are 'lost' by your their own choosing, so may do whatever they wish and pay the eternal price later.

They cannot say that they were not warned about the consequences of doing this.

God will not interfere with their exercise of His gift to them, their free will. They have chosen their path and must now take responsibility for their actions and choices. Unless they have a real change of heart and come to know God then that is simply the end of the matter. They are on their own for the rest of eternity.

For those of us who would say we are Christian, our lives will not be easy because we will find ourselves tested by the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Our faith will be tested by those who test God's patience and those who choose other paths in life's journeys.

To be clear, we should draw closer to God in response. Our integrity and resolve are witness to the strength of our faith and the God we trust and love.

This is a challenge and threat to the Godless, so don't be surprised if you find yourselves facing adverse and unexpected hostility.

The best defence is to live in complete honesty with your conscience. If your actions do not measure up to God's Word, maybe you should look very seriously at what you are doing and why. You know what you should be doing (just as do the godless) as the knowledge of both right and wrong already been permanently and indelibly written in our hearts. Don't lie to yourself or God, or try to justify what is not justifiable.

Just do what you truly, truthfully and wholeheartedly believe is right and good. That is all any of us can do.

Remember that we may be able to pull the wool over our own eyes, but God knows our hearts and sees what we are really about.

If our perceptions don't match with either the words in the bible or Jesus's own words then maybe we need to think again.

My final observation is why do all this?

It matters on two counts.

1: we are doing this because we love God and He sets the rules. They are there for a purpose and God sees the consequences of our actions before they have even happened. We trust God.

2: the world we build or allow is our children's inheritance.

On the latter point, even perhaps as a non-believer, what kind of a world do you want to give your children, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren?*

Even if you have no regard for your own future, do you really have the right to squander their inheritance and destroy your children's future, or don't they and their lives matter?

Selfishness is a great destroyer of relationships.

The truth is the more selfish people become, the greater their loneliness. The greater their loneliness, the more acutely selfish they become, and no one wants to live with or be with a person like that.

Relationships are not about what you personally can get out of them.

They are also about what you put into it them too. They are mutually beneficial.

Whether transitory or long haul, relationships are best when treated with respect and with honour, and when it comes to marriage, the Judeo-Christian model is one that has proved very durable and has stood the test of time.

Even many of those who don't go to church feel that their marriage should be blessed or conducted in church. Even they cannot explain why it is that special.

Physical intimacy is reserved for marriage 'for mutual benefit and comfort and for the procreation of children if it is within God's will'.

Marriage is intended to be between a man and a woman as physically determined at birth and is a binding, life time commitment.

For those of the same sex intending to formalise their intention to have a long term same sex relationships which is expressed physically, 'marriage' is not an open to them and falls outside of scriptural acceptability.

The desire to emulate Christian marriage may be very strong but same sex couples cannot legitimately claim they have a 'marriage' even if there are similarities or share the some of the same ideals. This is because Christian 'marriage' is so closely and specifically defined.

Christian marriage is intended to be for life and is an on-going commitment and work. It is not intended to be treated as a temporary convenience, even if the law says something different on this matter.

According to the statistics, there is a lot of work to be done by 'the church. Their failure to instruct and prepare couples properly is abject. It is better than their support of couples facing difficulties, but that is hardly commendable.

Having said all that, my belief is that marriage remains a high calling and is not for everyone. It is frequently very difficult and involves a lot of hard work and difficult choices. Selfishness has no place in a successful marriage.

I also believe that divorce is not part of God's plan. I can say that having been divorced and witnessed first-hand the serious damage it caused. It is not a desirable state of affairs at any level and should be avoided at all costs if possible. There are never any winners, just losers, especially if children are involved.

All I can say in my defence is we were both completely unprepared for what was about to befall us. I am reliant on the fact that God's nature is to forgive and I am truly repentant of the huge hurt I caused.

We cannot avoid taking responsibility for our own actions. Whilst we can justify our actions and lie to ourselves that others are to blame, we cannot deceive God.

Ultimately we will have to account for the damage we have done to others.

The rules were already there in place to protect us all, but we ignored them.

We knew the difference between right and wrong, but we chose a few moments of selfish pleasure instead.

We abused the trust of others for our own ends.

Shame on us.

Yet we are still loved by God, even if we deny Him. He still has hopes for us but He will not over-ride the gift of free will he gave us. One does not give a gift and then take it back.

The love He wants us to give Him needs to be unconditionally and freely given, just as it was itself given by Him. Nothing less will do. He has given us everything with such fullness, generosity and grace, and there is nothing left for Him to give.

Now it is our turn to respond, but how we do that is up to us. God will not force us into making a decision but a decision will be required, even if it takes all of eternity.

We cannot afford to be woolly in our thinking. We will be called to account.

Whether we believe or not is of no matter. We will be called to account and we had better be ready.

All our actions and decisions will be put under close scrutiny, especially those that affected others for good or for evil. When we stand in God's light we will see for ourselves what we may have denied before or have been too afraid to admit to. Maybe some of us will be pleasantly surprised. Others, maybe not.

I wonder if God will need to say anything at all. Maybe condemnation or justification will come from our own hearts as we see ourselves clearly for what we truly are. Maybe, like the sheep and the goats at the final judgement**, we will know whether we should turn right or left even before a word is spoken. It is all guesswork. We simply will not know until the time comes.

So it comes back to us at the end. Maybe we should consider our future actions in the light of our final judgement.

We knew the rules but we didn't always follow them.

We played the game but on our own terms.

We changed the rules when they didn't work our way.

We made the decisions that benefitted us but maybe not the team.

When things went wrong, it was always someone else's fault.

The truth is unavoidable and there are no excuses, no reasons, no justifications when the final whistle blows.

Will we be 'in' or are we beyond that and are already 'out'?

God knows.

We know.

Do we need to change the result before the scores are in?

Only we can answer that and then do something about it if we so desire and if we still have time.

Free will. God's gift to us.

What will you do with yours?

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

** Deuteronomy Ch5, v9: 'I'm a most jealous God. I hold parents responsible for any sins they pass on to their children to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation. But I'm lovingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments.' (MSG translation)*

*** Matthew Ch 25, v35-46: ³¹'When the Son of Man comes in his glory,.... he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left' (NIV translation)*

A HOUSE BLESSING.

I have met so many Christian friends, contacts and colleagues over years of lay and later ordained ministry who seem never to have heard of a House Blessing.

They know the old song; 'Bless this house' which I am afraid I have always regarded as sentimental rubbish - a bit like the rhyme: one is nearer God's heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth'.

But recently I have been afforded the joy, here and in France and North America, to administer what is a very beautiful short ceremony which, whether the owners have a faith at all, an active faith, a suspicion of faith or doubt about the validity of this non-liturgical 'form of words', they seem to really appreciate the few minutes it takes - as they enjoy the glass of wine or 'champers' which I usually suggest might follow the procedure.

I offer this form of words for your consideration and use. Fr Ed Elsey

(I customarily offer owners a printed version of the wording so they can think about what is being said and keep it as a souvenir. I have often been invited by neighbours at a later date 'to go and do them as well'!!)

Liturgy: A Form of House Blessing.

V. Our help is in the Name of the Lord

R. Who hath made Heaven and Earth

V. The Lord be with you

R. And with thy spirit.

We ask God's blessing + upon this water: an everyday substance, sanctified here for special purpose.

Let us pray.

We humbly beseech Thee, O God, Father Almighty,
on behalf of this house, of those that dwell herein,
of all things belonging to them and treasured by them;
for the value of friends and family honoured in this place;
for the memory of loved ones gone before us into Glory,
for the joy we shared with them and the things we learned and exchanged;
that it may please Thee to bless and replenish it with all good things...

Grant unto us all, O Lord, abundance of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth for their sustenance, and so direct the desires of their hearts that they may obtain Thy mercy.

At our coming in, **ble+ss and sancti+fy this place**, even as Thou didst bless the house of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. and as your Apostles were commanded to bless each home they entered with the words, "**Peace be to this house**":

Priest then goes room to room, if required, and sprinkles each room with Holy water.

Vouchsafe to send Thy holy Angels to guard, cherish, protect, visit and defend all who abide here,
Let your peace and your love abide here and with all those who enter and leave. Keep them in your love and be with them in their going out and their coming in, from this time forth for evermore. **Amen.**

Hear us, Holy Lord and Father, Almighty and Eternal God. In Your Goodness watch over all who live in this place and derive relaxation and peace here. Put new heart and health into them; protect them and defend them from all harm. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Then to the owners, if they are willing to be granted The Peace of God.:

The Lord bless you and keep you:

The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you

The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you,

And give you peace. +

Amen

Compline:

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ

The Lord Almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. **Amen**
Our help is in the Name of the Lord **who hast made heaven and earth.**

**Most merciful God, we confess to Thee
before the whole company of heaven and before each other,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed
and in what we have failed to do.
Forgive us our sins, heal us by Thy Spirit
and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen**

O God make speed to save us
O Lord make haste to help us.
**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
world without end, Amen. Alleluia.**

**Before the ending of the day
Redeemer of the world, we pray
That Thou, with steadfast love wouldst keep
Thy watch around us while we sleep.**

**From evil dreams defend our sight, From fears and terrors of the night;
Tread underfoot our deadly foe, That we no sinful thought may know.**

Into Thy hands O Lord, I commend my spirit

Into Thy hands O Lord, I commend my spirit.

For Thou hast redeemed me, Lord God of Truth.

I commend my Spirit.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit

Into Thy hands O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Keep me as the apple of Thine eye

Hide me under the shadow of Thy wings.

Save us O Lord whilst waking and guard us while sleeping

That awake we may watch with Christ

And asleep may rest in peace

[Intercessions/Votives]

Visit this place, O Lord we pray

and drive far from it the snares of the enemy;

may your Holy Angels dwell with us and guard us in peace,

and may your Blessing be always upon us;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

In peace we will lie down and sleep;

For it is Thou alone, Lord, that makest us dwell in safety.

[Lights/candles are extinguished and all remain kneeling in private prayer until departing]

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available with instructions to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

5th April, 2020

3rd May, 2020

7th June, 2020

5th July, 2020

2nd August, 2020

6th September, 2020

4th October, 2020

1st November, 2020

6th December, 2020

19th January, 2020

16th February, 2020

15th March, 2020

19th April, 2020

17th May, 2020

21st June, 2020

19th July, 2020

16th August, 2020

20th September, 2020

18th October, 2020

15th November, 2020

20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

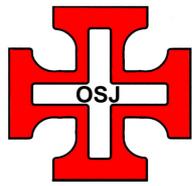
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

September 2020



When is a question not a question?

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

I tend not to listen to interviews or discussions on many news or current affairs programmes these days, largely because everyone seems to think their opinion is the only one that should be heard. There is no interest in hearing other points of view or having a real discussion.

Minds, it seems are locked. You are either a friend because you share my beliefs completely and unquestioningly or you are an enemy and will be silenced.

It seems that truth and understanding are passing strangers with unfamiliar faces, difficult to recognise and hard to get to know in the seething crowd of self that we are faced with each and every day.

Ask yourself, when did you last hear a good, well prepared, informed and balanced interview, one where people asked genuinely motivated questions and received informed and intelligent answers without having some hidden agenda, one where the interviewer and interviewee both presented themselves well?

(Perhaps I should listen to Radio Four more.)

Mostly it seems the only purposes of media interviews these days are to discredit, humiliate, sensationalise, assign culpability or to character assassinate, all in the guise of so called enlightened entertainment.

Yes, there is much talk, but rarely is much of lasting value said. There is very little in the way of real listening and an awful lot of interruption mid-sentence.

Conversation and discussion seems mostly about 'me', 'my beliefs', 'my feelings', 'my needs', 'my rights' (rather than yours), 'my opinions' and how circumstances or proposals personally affect me even if they are for the general good or benefit of the whole of society. (An example of this in the current situation might be 'you must wear a face mask to protect me but forcing me to wear a face mask is an infringement of my human rights'.)

The cynical and worldly definition of a 'good discussion' might be as follows:

1. I talk and you listen,
2. I ask the questions and then I tell you what the right answers are.
3. You must not interrupt me although I can interrupt you.
4. My opinions are undeniable and unchallengeable facts, your facts (however well researched) are merely incidental opinions in comparison.

5. I may or may not let you finish answering a question before I move onto the next question.

6. If I can't destroy your argument I will destroy your character instead.

Does it sound familiar, even if it is somewhat of a caricature?

It seems that 'the question' is often where the power lies, rather than 'the answer'. But not always. Sometimes they backfire spectacularly.

A well timed and worded question can open a complete can of worms, destroy a career, reveal lies and truths, inform, elucidate.

'Questions' are a powerful tool, not only in educating but also as a means of attacking ignorance, prejudice, inhumanity, unreasonableness and intolerance if used properly.

A question is a mixture of several things: the question itself, the motivation behind it, the tone of voice and body language. They are all key components.

Keeping those things in mind, questions can be or demonstrate many things.

Genuine interest.	'So what happened next?', Can you tell me more about....?
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Lead.	'Would you say that....?'
Advise/support.	'Why don't you look at/ask/consider/etc.?'
Challenge.	'And how will you prove that?'
Mock.	'You really thought that was the best course of action?'
Encourage.	'So what do you think the next step should be?'
Threaten.	'You don't need to answer that but if you don't....?', 'Will you give me an answer or not?', 'Are you trying to hide/cover up/protect something/someone here?'
Badger.	'Will you just answer the question?', 'Will you just get to the point?'
Disinterest/dismiss.	'And?', 'So?'

	'The point is?'
Cast doubt.	'Really?', 'Are you joking?', 'You don't really expect me to believe that do you?', 'How can that be possible?'
Affirm.	'How could you not agree?', 'Is it not proven beyond doubt?'
Manipulate.	'Jim says you are not very trustworthy. What is your response?'
Then there is the 'Secret Question'.	The one you really want to ask but just can't.

These are but a few of the different types of questions.

A lot depends on the tone the question is asked, and the body language.

The 'how', 'why', 'where' and 'when' questions are asked are just as important as the 'who' asked them.

If questions were characters in a story, they would probably play the parts of the pilgrim, the student, the healer, the teacher, the warrior, the judge, the fool and the assassin.

The kind of questions tell you a lot about the person who is asking, even about their motives for asking a question on occasion.

Knowing all of this makes some of the writings in the Gospels particularly interesting.

They are full of people asking questions with different purposes in mind, and we can learn some useful tips by studying these small insights into human nature. A random search can prove very informative and show that human nature has largely remained unchanged, even with great advances in communications technology.

The art of asking 'the question' has changed little.

Take some of the public and personal conversations for example:

Luke, chapter 10, verses 25-37: the Parable of the Good Samaritan

<p>²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”</p>	<p><i>It is almost certain that the expert in the law already knew the answer to this question, so asking it can be seen as:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. a means of affirming his own public authority and reputation</i> <i>2. as well as a means of testing Jesus.</i>
<p>²⁶ “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”</p>	<p><i>Jesus could have answered this question quite easily but he flips the question back on the expert in the law.</i></p> <p><i>It is now him who is being tested</i></p>
<p>²⁷ He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”</p>	<p><i>You can’t go wrong with quoting holy scripture word for word and it answers the question beautifully.</i></p>
<p>²⁸ “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”</p>	<p><i>This response is quite interesting. Did Jesus see something in the soul of the expert in the law?</i></p> <p><i>Was it personally directed at him because he wasn’t meeting those standards, or was it directed to everyone listening?</i></p>
<p>²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”</p>	<p><i>It must have hurt the expert in the law somehow because suddenly he needed to defend his position.</i></p>

	<p><i>Maybe Jesus in his response would give him an opportunity to find some fault or flaw and a means of reclaiming his authority.</i></p>
<p>³⁰In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.</p> <p>³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.</p> <p>³³ But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.</p>	<p><i>There were good reasons under the law why both the priest and the Levite should not stop.</i></p> <p><i>For the priest being contaminated with blood from the traveller's wounds would render the priest ritually unclean and he would not be able to fulfil his duties at the temple.</i></p> <p><i>Similarly, the Levite. Not only that, but both remain in danger of attack themselves the longer they stayed there.</i></p> <p><i>Samaritans were despised by the Jews and the feeling was largely mutual, and you probably might have heard some booing at the very mention of the word 'Samaritan', such was the animosity towards them'.</i></p> <p><i>The additional point that Jesus makes in the story is that care is costly in both time and expense, and there is nothing wrong in seeking the help of those who are better qualified to help with the caring.</i></p>

<p>'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'</p>	<p><i>Note the requirement for trust.</i></p> <p><i>Note the requirement for follow up.</i></p>
<p>³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"</p>	<p><i>There is only one answer that the expert in the law could give. He was now trapped and I can imagine the expectant anticipation in the crowds about him - could he wriggle out of this one?</i></p>
<p>³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."</p>	<p><i>I think this was a pretty good answer all told, and much better than simply saying the obvious. It shows wisdom.</i></p> <p><i>It was nothing to do with Jews and Samaritans and their hatred of one another but of people simply showing kindness to one another in times of need, even if they were complete strangers</i></p> <p><i>.</i></p>
<p>Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."</p>	<p><i>I like to think of this as 'You now understand the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. The letter will not save you but the spirit will.'</i></p>

Later in Luke, chapter 11, we see that the attacks have become frequent.

⁵² “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.” ⁵³ When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, ⁵⁴ waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Now it is evident that things haven’t changed much. One might consider how the media destroys people’s reputations or works in the same way as it did in Jesus’ time.

Jesus response was to attack their hypocrisy and lack of compassionate humanity: the use of the question is a means of attack. The following is from Luke, Chapter 14, verses 1 – 7, and has similarities to the story of the Good Samaritan.

<p>One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ² There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.</p>	<p><i>Note it is the Sabbath Day. There was great debate amongst the experts in the law as to whether healing the sick and doing good works on the Sabbath Day was lawful.</i></p>
<p>³ Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”</p> <p>⁴ But they remained silent.</p> <p>So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.</p>	<p><i>Jesus puts the experts in the law to the test and asks them directly.</i></p> <p><i>It is a theological trap, like them asking Jesus whether it was lawful for Jews to pay tax to Caesar.</i></p> <p><i>As to whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, they had no answer.</i></p>

	<p><i>So Jesus healed the man, almost as an act of defiance.</i></p> <p><i>Since the man was healed, one might argue reasonably that it was sanctioned by God and the question was therefore answered.</i></p>
<p>⁵ Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child^a or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" ⁶ And they had nothing to say.</p>	<p><i>He could see that they were still not convinced so Jesus tested them by asking a practical question.</i></p> <p><i>Again they did not answer.</i></p>

Finally we see direct confrontation in Luke, chapter 20.

<p>20 One day as Jesus was teaching the people and preaching the Good News in the Temple, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders came up to him.</p>	<p><i>This incident would have taken place quite publicly in the temple.</i></p> <p><i>There is a sense in which to preach and teach there gives anything said a sense of gravitas and extra importance as it is symbolically the physical heart of the religion</i></p>
<p>² They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"</p>	<p><i>This so smacks of the supposed authority of groups like 'Churches Together' and those denominationally based organizations who believe that they and they alone have to right to determine what is 'of God' and what isn't.</i></p>

<p>³ "Let me ask you a question first," he replied.</p> <p>⁴ "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"</p>	<p><i>This question is essential to all forms of ministry.</i></p> <p><i>It is about who has the final say, God or the organization that represents Him and cuts to the heart of the problems created by groups like 'Churches Together'.</i></p>
<p>⁵ They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe John.</p> <p>⁶ But if we say it was merely human, the people will stone us because they are convinced John was a prophet."</p> <p>⁷ So they finally replied that they didn't know.</p>	<p><i>They sense a trap and agree it is better not to answer Jesus' question.</i></p>
<p>⁸ And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things."</p>	<p><i>The fact that Jesus leaves this question unanswered adds to the mystery. It is left for us to decide just who he was and where he came from.</i></p>

From this point on, Jesus is not just an irritating nuisance but a real threat to the authority of the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law. Jesus is now a marked man.

At a more personal and localised level, we see questions used in a different way:

Luke chapter 10, verses 30 -41: at the home of Martha and Mary

<p>³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.</p> <p>³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.</p>	<p><i>As a good hostess, Martha would obviously be concerned about the needs of her guest and would busy herself accordingly.</i></p> <p><i>Mary, on the other hand, sits at Jesus's feet listening to his teaching, leaving Martha all the hard work to do.</i></p>
<p>She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"</p>	<p><i>This actually says more about Martha and her relationship with Mary. An interesting use of a leading question so Mary could get the practical help she felt she deserved.</i></p> <p><i>It also might suggest that Jesus would not to be manipulated or take sides.</i></p>
<p>⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."</p>	<p><i>This shows that Martha has completely misunderstood Jesus, unlike Mary.</i></p> <p><i>Sadly, we don't get to hear whether Mary comes to understand and benefit from Jesus' stay.</i></p>

Another similar example of the question used in an attempt to manipulate events can be found in Luke 12, verses 13 – 21, the Parable of the Rich Fool

<p>¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."</p>	<p><i>The use of the public forum to get a satisfactory outcome to one's personal problems is something we often still see these days.</i></p>
<p>¹⁴ Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you (both)?" (and onwards to verse 21)</p>	<p><i>A question that needs no answer. It's almost as if Jesus is saying 'this is business you need to sort out yourself, it is nothing to do with me.'</i> <i>The response is seemingly quite dismissive but Jesus goes on to explain why so in the verses that follow.</i></p>

This is taken up further in John, chapter 21, in this small recounting:

<p>²⁰ Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"</p>	<p><i>This question by Peter was probably a means of distraction as Jesus had tested him three times with the statement 'Feed My sheep'.</i> <i>It's a tactic that many people use in order to deflect criticism and comment away from themselves and on to others</i></p>
<p>²² Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."</p>	<p><i>Peter is firmly put in his place by the response. We should take a bit more note of this and mind our own business when it comes to others and their walk with God.</i></p>

<p>²³ Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die.</p>	<p><i>Misconceptions and misunderstandings lead to rumours which are not always easy to dispel</i></p>
<p>But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"</p>	<p><i>Our primary responsibility is to make sure we are walking with God before we make comment or pass judgement about anyone else.</i></p>

There is even the 'secret' un-asked question, the one everybody really wants to ask but dare not.

An example of this can be found in John, chapter 21.

<p>(12b) None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?"</p> <p>They knew it was the Lord.</p>	<p><i>The way this is phrased it could be interpreted in a number of different ways: it certainly conveys a sense of awe and even disbelief.</i></p>
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In Mark , chapter 8, it is the answer, not the question, that is to remain secret:

<p>²⁷ Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.</p> <p>On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"</p>	<p><i>Note the use of both economy of setting the scene and the use of the leading question.</i></p>
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<p>²⁸ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."</p>	<p><i>Note the vague answers. No one wants to commit themselves as to what they really believe so they express their responses in terms of the anonymous third party.</i></p>
<p>²⁹ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"</p> <p>Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."</p>	<p><i>Impetuous to the last. Peter is the one that always seems to open his mouth first, often without thinking about the consequences.</i></p>
<p>³⁰ Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.</p>	<p><i>Jesus warns the group. It is revealed to them but not to the world. Jesus' time has not yet come.</i></p>

Even simple questions can tell some truths. They can indicate knowledge, understanding and wisdom, or the complete opposite, perhaps indicating that the person asking the question may have not quite understood something.

Take Luke, chapter 12, verses 41 – 48, and again it is Peter.

<p>⁴¹ Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?"</p>	<p><i>This should be an 'either/or' answer, but it obvious that Peter has missed the point. Jesus circumvents answering the question by giving further teaching.</i></p>
<p>⁴² The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?"</p>	<p><i>It begins with a question followed by an answer.</i></p>

<p>⁴³ It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴ Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.</p>	
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And also another example from Luke, chapter 13, verse 23 onwards

<p>²³ Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"</p>	<p><i>Another example of a simple 'yes' or no question,</i></p>
<p>He (Jesus) said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.</p>	<p><i>but another opportunity for some clarification and additional teaching.</i></p> <p><i>This is almost saying 'don't be concerned about the salvation of others; be more concerned about your own'</i></p>

And then there are questions that make clear there is a lack of real understanding:

<p>⁵⁶ How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?</p>	<p><i>Jesus is not looking for answers particularly, but it is challenging our motives and thinking.</i></p>
<p>⁵⁷ "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?"</p>	<p><i>It's not as if we are ignorant.</i></p> <p><i>Sadly it is often the case that we know what is right but just prefer other people to tell us we can do as we wish.</i></p>

I suppose that takes us to the trial of Jesus before Pilate.

There is nothing unusual in the kinds of questions Pilate asks but the answers seem deliberately evasive given the seriousness of the circumstances.

It begs the question, 'Why is this so?'

You may wish to have a go at filling in the right hand blanks with your own thoughts about the questions asked, the answers, and how both might be interpreted.

Mark, chapter 15: Jesus' trial before Pilate

<p>15 Very early in the morning the leading priests, the elders, and the teachers of religious law—the entire high council^a—met to discuss their next step.</p> <p>They bound Jesus, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.</p>	<p><i>Again, a very economic but efficient setting of the scene by Mark</i></p>
<p>² Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"</p>	
<p>Jesus replied, "You have said it."</p>	
<p>³ Then the leading priests kept accusing him of many crimes, ⁴ and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer them?"</p>	

<p>What about all these charges they are bringing against you?"</p> <p>⁵ But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise.</p>	
<p>⁶ Now it was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner—anyone the people requested.</p> <p>⁷ One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising.</p> <p>⁸ The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner as usual.</p>	
<p>⁹ "Would you like me to release to you this 'King of the Jews'?" Pilate asked. ¹⁰ (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.)</p>	
<p>¹¹ But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus.</p> <p>¹² Pilate asked them, "Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?"</p> <p>¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify him!"</p>	
<p>¹⁴ "Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?"</p>	

But the mob roared even louder, "Crucify him!"

¹⁵ So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them.

He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

(You may have noticed that Pilate tries three times to acquit Jesus. You might wish to consider this against other 'three's' that appear in the Gospels and ask whether there is any significance to these occurrences.)

So where does all this take us and why is the use of the question so important in the presentation of the Gospels?

One answer may simply be it is a modified form of a Greek method of teaching being used around the Mediterranean around the time of Jesus and which still continues to this day. It is described as 'the Socratic method (also known as method of Elenchus, Elenctic method, or Socratic debate), and is a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions.'

That would be too easy. Human nature is to be very inquisitive and to question.

People were asking questions well before the Greeks. The very first question in the bible can be found in Genesis, chapter 3 and was a direct challenge to the authority of God. (see <https://doctrine.org/the-first-question>)

Questions are a doorway to many things and they can be used for good or for ill.

They are also a mark of character and intent and testify to the kind of people we really are.

A question sometimes reveals more than the answer.

The one thing I have found throughout my ministry as a priest and then bishop is there is no such thing as a simple or straight forward question. It seems the trick is to read between the lines and try to discover what question is really being asked.

Put another way, the question really being asked isn't always the one coming out of the mouth.

Jesus somehow has the knack of understanding that, and that makes a second look at some of his conversations with people a little more comprehensible. That is why the answer given isn't always what you might expect.

We have a lot to learn from the Gospels, but the major thing that is missing is we don't hear the tone of voice used or get to see the changing body language as the verbal dialogue plays out. The written word can only tell us so much.

Maybe this is why television is so engaging. It allows us to see these things but it also plays us too.

A clever director can feed in those things they want us to see and remove those things that he does not want us to see.

It is just as fabricated, constructed, misleading, and just as capable of sucking us in to believing that the created fiction is factual reality.

It is hardly surprising television and film has become the preferred tool of the political, the propagandist, the radical, the politically correct, the racist, the anarchist and the terrorist. It can create any kind of truth it wishes.

Mass market television entertainment means that everyone can have their moment of fame and get their voice heard. This kind of television thrives on the ill-considered and ill-informed to create the populist flash mob outrage we feed off. Like yesterdays' disaster, it is soon forgotten in the light of a new day. It is designed to create a culture of self-righteous blame rather than getting people to direct their energies to generating actual solutions.

As an example of this kind of attitude, I remember talking to a guest after a wedding at St Leonard's and he was complaining about the number of homeless on the streets. 'The council should be doing something but they aren't,' he said.

I asked what he was doing about the problem of homelessness.

'Nothing,' he said, 'it's not my problem.'

I missed an opportunity by not asking if he would like to help make a difference.

We both lost out by me not asking. As Christians, we have a responsibility to ask the right and appropriate questions, and they need to be surgically precise if they are to have any lasting effect.

We also have a responsibility to give right and appropriate answers. Without being unkind, it's time we openly spoke the truth and challenge what is not.

-oOo-

JOB'S DEPRESSION and our faith.

A study in perseverance by Fr Ed Elsey

First read Job 3, 1-11 and then 2 Corinthians 6, 1-13

"I wish I had never been born." The deepest depression seized Job after the destruction of nearly all he held of value and all he had built his life on acquiring. He had been blessed by God immensely, or so it seemed. Seven sons and three daughters, 7000 sheep, 3000 camels 500 yoke of oxen, 500 she-asses and a host of servants, making him [quote] 'the greatest man in the Middle East'. A position many then and since have desired for themselves. Most have disappeared from view and from history.

Then in a curious battle of power between God and Satan, the Devil wins the right to test Job to the edge of suicide.

News comes in of a Sabean raid on his oxen and asses, his servants being put to the sword. Hot on the heels of the first messenger, another reports fire of God falling from heaven, lightning, burning up his sheep and the shepherds. A third recounts three companies of Chaldeans [today's Iraq] pinching his camels with the same fate afforded to the herdsmen. Then the ultimate tragedy: his sons and daughter were having a party in the house of the eldest, when a tornado ripped the house apart, the roof falling upon all inhabitants and killing the lot. Job, servant of God, had lost everything in what seems to have been a few hours of one day.

Yet still he worshipped God and sacrificed to Him.

Satan persisted. Ah, but you've only touched his possessions. All that a man has he will give for his life: touch him and see what happens. So sores covered Job's body and tormented him without relief. Now he curses the day he was born. His friends come to counsel him: some with advice to stand firm and others telling him to curse God and die and get it all over with. Those who think they have reached that end-point of the depth of despair, or unrelenting pain, or the prospect that healing or renewal can never come: those who feel God has gone away from them, lost contact with them, or cut them off completely, will have a vestige of idea what Job was going through.

Our pandemic has set us all thinking of our mortality and why we don't appear to see the Hand of God coming to our rescue. We don't talk about it but inner doubts stay.

The story is apt for today's Christian. We know all too well from recent events how the acquisition of wealth by any means, greed, ruthlessness and the tyranny that accompanies it, extension of evil intents and practices through sons and daughters of tyrants, were commonplace in Old Testament times as today, especially where Job dwelt on the borders of Iran/Iraq, Ninevah's outlying prosperous hinterland. Many reading this story then and now might have concluded that 'he had it coming to him'; that 'rights of the people were being restored' and 'wealth re-distributed' - and all the trashy comments that often attend the downfall of a successful wannabee. Christians seem not to have shared the Jewish tradition that success was God-given: many even find the thought of great wealth an antithesis to sacrifice and service.

We have not, sadly, time to go through the end of the story, but if you have time to read through, see the Hand of God staying with the desperate magnate as he restores to an even greater sense of his own inadequacy in the light of the glory and magnificence of God, upon which, under his new and straitened circumstances he has to rely on entirely. The Grace, the Mercy, rather than the generosity, of Our Great God.

An older hymn puts it like this: 'There's a wideness in God's mercy...'

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=vJwfT3SY_PU

But the juxtaposition of this story with our New Testament lesson gives us a reason for stopping to review our own personalities and fates, worship and faith. We are entreated by the indefatigable Paul not to accept the grace of God in vain.

A quote from Isaiah 49, verse 8 is strategically inserted,

"At the acceptable time I have listened to you
And helped you on the day of salvation."

God doesn't necessarily answer us when we want Him to. More often than not when He judges best. It is a word of encouragement to the depressed Diaspora as they at last have permission to leave Babylon, Chaldea, and return to rebuild devastated Zion. Another good read for your quieter moments.

And what are we told is the acceptable time?

Now, says the Apostle Paul, now is the acceptable day of the Lord, the day of salvation. The human situation - amazing though it might seem centuries after an apparently perfect creation - is full of trials to be endured: afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger.

All our present pain and suffering is hard, yes of course. My father's arthritis is very real and very important to him. We all have our own set of irritating handicaps and pains.

But compared with what saints and martyrs have had to put up with over the ages, put to the sword, tortured for the faith, anxieties, testings, imprisonment, loss of loved ones, desperate to the point of death, Paul and Peter whose own example and death we celebrate, are both right to warn us against complaining about 'such light affliction' which we endure, when so much, without the Grace of God, could be so much worse.

Today we celebrate the life and example of St Alban, first English martyr in 209AD, and later in the week Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, martyred in 200. Even John the Baptist himself, a nasty enough end. And do we still dare to complain?

A favourite hymn asks us: 'And we, shall we be faithless...?'

We are reminded frequently in our Gospels and NT lessons of the JOY which, promised to us, should radiate from us, making us light-headed for Christ's sake in our world, full of confidence and of peace.

We remain firm, our lesson reminds us by employing, daily: "Purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God, with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good. Having nothing, in fact, yet possessing everything." "Yet possessing every Blessing, if our God our Father be."

And instead of acknowledging our own self-worth in it all, we are to acknowledge completely all we have and are, to a Gracious, Faithful God, Ever loving and ever-

caring for his wayward children, ever drawing us back to himself and His immense love, as shown to us in the sacrifice of his own Son on the Cross for our redemption. And can we take our faith so lightly?

So what is our response?

To try to re-stimulate my own faith a while back I penned the following poor poem, in response to a similar scansion from Patience Strong, which others say they have found helpful. Maybe appropriate for our thinking:

If sleepy the Christian and lazy the man,
He'll not even start to achieve what he can;
With twenty-four hours given him by his Lord,
There has to be plenty to spare for His Word,
In reading and action, meditation and prayer -
The wide-awake Christian had better take care
Not to waste an iota of what he's been given
But to 'beaver away' with his work before Heav'n:
Every hour be made useful, every job ably done,
With effort and honour to achieve His 'Well Done!'
Not a 'quite well' nor 'O.K.' nor 'Uh-huh' nor 'Mm'!
But a 'Well done!' a smile from His Lord and a 'Come
Enter the joy of your Lord, my Son!'

That's why at my fullness of life I get dizzy

With so much of justified work to keep busy,
To increase my vision of talent fulfilled,
A 'poo-poo' to fainting hearts, those too weak-willed
Who talk about stress as excuse for their sloth -
[Oh yes, there is stress and I know it can kill,]
But He gives the strength for the day, by His Will
- Better that way than to incur His wrath:
A 'Where were you, son, when I needed you so;
Naked, in prison, thirst, hunger and pain?
Did you use all your twenty four hours to go
To visit, to clothe, feed - again and again?
Inasmuch as you did it to any of these,
You did it to me!'

So when I'm on my knees
At the end of another exhausting work day
I could happily stay on those knees, and pray
That, another day spared me, I'll wake up and say:
Here am I Lord, so send me wherever you will
That I with some service your work may fulfil,
For if sleepy a Christian and lazy I am,
I'll not even start to achieve what I can.

Let Paul have the final word - as usual!

"We are treated as dying, and behold we live; as punished, yet always
rejoicing;

as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

Or perhaps we should let Job have the last word:

"I know thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted; who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee and I repent. Blessed be the Name of the Lord".

May it be so for us all, in the Name of that same Merciful Saviour, and for His Name's sake. AMEN.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

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September 8th, celebration of birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary

(diary extract from Fr Ed Elsey OSJ)

Lockdown and lack of permission to gather in large numbers or process, may restrict or cancel the traditional procession in Walsingham Norfolk on September 8th - we wait, as I write this article, to find out. But devotees will still celebrate Our Lady. May we wish you the Blessing and Divine intervention of Mary, Queen of Heaven, Stella Maris.

March 25th was the Feast of the Annunciation, nine months before our better known celebration of Nativity on December 25th.

Amazing that we spend so much concentration upon the somewhat spurious and historically inaccurate conventional celebration of 'Christmas' but forget that babies take a while to grow in the womb and eventually be born. Even in Divine intervention of Virgin birth!!

Mary was a 1C BCE Galilean Jewish woman of Nazareth, and the mother of Jesus, according to the New Testament and the Quran. The gospels of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament and the Quran describe Mary as a virgin; according to Christian theology she conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit while still a virgin. The miraculous conception took place when she was already betrothed to Joseph. She travels with Joseph to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born.

The Gospel of Luke begins its account of Mary's life with the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, announcing her Divine selection to be the mother of Jesus. According to canonical gospel accounts, Mary was present at the Crucifixion and is depicted as a member of the early Christian community in Jerusalem. According to Catholic and Orthodox teachings, at the end of her earthly life, her body was raised directly into Heaven; this is known in the Christian West as the Assumption.

Mary has been venerated since early Christianity, and is considered by millions to be the most meritorious saint of the religion. She is claimed to have miraculously appeared to believers many times over the centuries. The Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches believe that Mary, as mother of Jesus, is the Mother of God [Greek: Θεοτόκος, translit. Theotokos, lit.

'God-bearer']. There is significant diversity in the Marian beliefs and devotional practices of major Christian traditions. The Catholic Church holds distinctive Marian dogmas, namely her status as the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her perpetual virginity, and her Assumption into heaven. Many Protestants minimize Mary's role within Christianity, basing their argument on the relative brevity of biblical references. Mary also has a revered position in Islam, where one of the longer chapters of the Quran is devoted to her.

"Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art Thou among women and Blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and in the hour of our death”.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

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JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

an occasional paper by Fr Ed Elsey OSJ 2020

According to the Gospels, this Joseph donated his own tomb, pre hewn and prepared for his own burial, eventually, for the body of Christ after The Crucifixion. An influential Jewish sect leader and maybe a fellow member of the Sanhedrin with Nicodemus, who 'came to Jesus by night', the two are recorded as going together to the tomb to embalm the crucified body of the man who had been executed under Roman law for declaring himself to be a prophet, even the Son of God, anathema to the Jewish tradition and religious laws.

The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate gave in to pressure, seemingly to 'keep the peace'. Boy, how that misfired!

For 800 years, **Glastonbury** - a now ruined monastical site in Somerset, UK - has been associated with the romance of King Arthur, the Holy Grail and with Joseph of Arimathea. Later stories also connect Glastonbury directly to the life of Christ. That his uncle may have brought him to our country. The thorn staff he reputedly struck into the ground, took root, grew and bloomed.

The legend goes thus:

The Glastonbury thorn is a form of common hawthorn, *Crataegus*

monogyna 'Biflora' [often wrongly called *Crataegus oxyacantha/praecox*]

Unlike ordinary hawthorn trees, it flowers twice a year (hence 'biflora'), first in winter, second in Spring, considered mythically as 'miraculous'.

The trees in the Glastonbury area have been propagated by grafting since ancient times. The tree is also widely called the holy thorn, though this term strictly speaking refers to the original, legendary, tree, appearing in written texts from medieval times. The original was propagated many times, one tree growing at Glastonbury Abbey and another in the churchyard of the Church of St John. The "original" Glastonbury thorn was cut down and burned as a relic of superstition during the English Civil War, and one planted on Wearyall Hill in 1951 to replace it had its branches cut off in 2010 in an act of vandalism.

At the time of the adoption of the revised Gregorian calendar in Britain [1752], the periodical, Gentleman's Magazine reported that curious visitors went to see if the Glastonbury thorn kept to the Julian calendar or the new one:

Glastonbury - A vast concourse of people attended the noted thorn on Christmas-day, new style; but, to their great disappointment, there was no appearance of its blowing, which made them watch it narrowly the 5th of January, the Christmas-day, old style, when it blowed as usual.

[Gentleman's Magazine January 1753]

A flowering sprig sent to the British Monarch every Christmas, was initiated by James Montague, Bishop of Bath & Wells in James I's reign, who sent a branch to Queen Anne, King James I's consort. A spray of thorn was then sent to the Sovereign each Christmas by the Vicar and Mayor of Glastonbury. [The thorn also featured on British Postage stamps on the 12p and 13p Christmas stamps in 1986].

New archaeological research on Glastonbury Abbey pushes back the date for the earliest settlement of the site by 200 years – and reopens debate on Glastonbury's origin myths. Many Christians firmly believe it is the site of the earliest Church in Britain, allegedly founded in the 1C or 2C by Joseph. A legend grew that Joseph had travelled to Britain with the [Holy] Grail, a mystical lost relic, the vessel used to collect Christ's blood. In the 19C, a West Country folk tale claimed that Christ visited Britain with his great uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, in pursuit of the tin trade, rich in Somerset veins in the Mendip Hills. Hubert Parry immortalized the idea in the now popular congregational hymn, based on William Blake's 1804 poem:

"And did those feet in ancient time walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God, on England's pleasant pastures seen!"

Historical accounts describe an "ancient" church on the site in 10C, still standing in the 12C, described by historian William of Malmesbury as 'the oldest of all those that I know of in England': a revered and ancient edifice destroyed by a devastating fire in 1184, along with much of the old Abbey. It was the first structure to be rebuilt – a new chapel erected on the site of The Lady Chapel that was consecrated in 1186, commemorating the old church and still standing today. Any evidence for an early church would have been destroyed by the later construction of a crypt.

Archaeological evidence and research

Research and excavation by Reading University, confirm that the site was occupied before the foundation of the Anglo-Saxon monastery around AD 700. Traces of a timber hall within the bounds of the early monastic cemetery and a roughly trodden floor contained fragments of late Roman amphorae imported from the eastern Mediterranean, dating back to about 450–550AD. A radio-carbon date pinpoints the demolition of the timber building to 8C or 9C, which suggests the building was in use for a long period – extending from a pre-Saxon phase of the site around 500AD and into the period of the Saxon monastery - possibly up to 300 years.

This new evidence does not prove the presence of an early church – nor support a connection with Joseph of Arimathea, but it does confirm that the Anglo-Saxon

monastery was preceded by a high status settlement dating back to 5C or 6C – one with elite trading connections to the Eastern Mediterranean.

It may also suggest that the Saxon monastery carefully “curated” the timber building – in other words, preserved it for future generations, perhaps because it held special religious or ancestral significance for the monks.

Spiritual meanings and relevance

Glastonbury still appeals to a wide range of spiritual seekers, of all faiths and costumes and vestments which might appear strange to traditional Christians abound in and around the town. Many are drawn by the abbey’s associations with Celtic Christianity and the ancient wells which spring, millions of gallons a day, from the seemingly endless supply of water under the Mendip Hills. Joseph is an significant connection to Celtic origins - that he may have founded a church of British Christianity predating the Roman mission to England - circa 597 AD/CE.

Geoffrey Ashe - Arthurian expert and ‘doyen’ of Glastonbury’s alternative community - comments on the significance of these archaeological findings. To me, the most gratifying thing is the proof - at last --that the original community was British and existed before the Saxons’ arrival, as I have long thought and maintained. The foundation has now been moved back 200 years to the period where it belongs. Brilliant!

The Reading archaeological research provides extensive new insight into Glastonbury Abbey in Anglo-Saxon and medieval times - with digital reconstructions of the Anglo-Saxon churches and interior of the medieval Lady Chapel. So now, Glastonbury's legendary traditions can be assessed alongside its archaeological evidence. And one does not doubt there is much exploration, and unearthing still to discover as and when money is available and curiosity stimulated.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ 2020

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Tuning and the laws of Natural Life

an occasional paper by Fr Ed Elsey

A theory exists, with some substance and credibility, well-propounded and documented recently by Lyndon LaRouche, that conventional tuning pitch has been artificially defined and no longer relates to the pure sound level which nature dictates or to which it responds. I am attempting in this paper to summarise principal points of this thinking, as produced in a book by the Schiller Institute 1992 "Tuning and Registration - the Human Singing Voice."

- bel canto vocalization
- voice-registration
- well-tempered scale with middle C set at 256 cycles

are all characteristics of natural music, all discovered millennia ago, are biologically determined and this inherent truths of existence predate the first physicist or musicologist.

Bel canto is the human's most natural, relatively least effort, most efficient method of speaking and singing, by virtue of the biologically determined characteristics of the healthy expression of the human genotype. The human voice has four potential registers, each with a distinct quality [colour] of voice relative to each and all of the remaining three. The places on the scale, for each species of singing voice, at which the transition from one register to an adjacent one must occur is biologically determined - the place of 'register shift' and may not be shifted frequently without possibly irreversible damage to the singer's voice.

Voice range for each species have upper and lower limits with exception of some trained singers who can command extended range. The musical scale must be based upon the natural bel canto character-istic of healthy singing, on J.S.Bach's 'well tempered polyphony' and upon a value of $C=256$ cycles.

Lyre, woodwinds and horns extend into ancient history but the main 'chest' of instrument development and range fall between the adulthood of Leonardo da Vinci and end at 1814-15 with the Congress of Vienna. These instruments were designed on $C=256$.

Kepler, founder of first comprehensive mathematical physics, declared, in his work 'World Harmony', his famous universal three laws of motion.

- The planets move around the Sun in ellipses, at one focus of which the Sun is situated.
- As each planet moves around the Sun, the vector extending from the planet to the Sun sweeps out equal areas in equal times
- The ratio of the square of the planet's year to the cube of the planet's mean distance from the Sun is the same for all planets.

See [Harmonica Mundi [The Harmony of the Spheres:1619; Mysterium Cosmographicum; The Secret of the Universe: 1596; Commentaries on Mars: 1609]; On the Six-Cornered Snowflake: 1619]; Epitome of Astronomy: 1620

Kepler's number of possible orbits and their velocities is precisely determined with evidence of the uniqueness of the orbital positions and of the relative harmonic values of their velocities. The organisation of the musical scale follows conceptually the arrangement shown by Kepler [with Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa 1401-64, Leonardo 1452-1519, Leibnitz et al], not mathematically as adopted by Descartes, Newton, Kelvin et al.

The chief obvious reason, claims LaRouche, for the general decay of musical education's quality is the attempt of established musicologists to superimpose Hegelian metaphysical schema, in which the Romantic School is portrayed as the logical successor of the Classical, and the twelve-note modernist school as the logical successor of the Romantic.

The Golden Section is the characteristic feature of generation [determination] the five Platonic regular solids [polyhedra] which are the limit of such constructability within visible physical space-time. Golden Section harmonic orderings are not only

characteristic of all living processes but express a characteristic of negentropic processes. Gauss's work on asteroid orbits proved Kepler correct and Newton at fault.

The Classical tradition upheld by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann and Brahms continued through the 1890s. The House of Hanover and other factions known as the Venetian Party sought to obliterate Bach's music in European concert halls, a ban broken only by Mendelssohn with the St Matthew Passion in 1829 in Berlin.

An attack on, and shift from, the well-tempered C=256 to the Russian bandmasters' 'elevated pitch' of A=440 was by decree, as a purely political decision during the 1815 Congress of Vienna. A second attack came upon construction of the musical instrument. A third attack on principles of bel canto singing.

In the well tempered system we begin with harmonic intervals of minor third, major third, fourth, fifth and the Golden Mean [F-sharp] and with derived distinctions between major- and minor-key harmonic progressions constructed in this way. We are able to construct twenty-four major and minor keys, and their appearance as scale-inversions in this way. First construction of the harmonic system begins from middle C=256, refined by going to C above middle C C' =512 etc. This is the only musical arrangement which is coherent with the principle of life.

Normal range extension exceptional phenomenal [bel canto]

Soprano A - F F# - F1 F# 1 - B2 C2 - G2

Alto [mezzo sop] F - Eb E - Eb1 E1 - A2 Bb - B

Contralto D - C# D - C# D - G

Tenor A - B C - F F# - B C - F1

Baritone F# - A Bb - Eb E - A

Bass D - G Ab - C# D - G

Mozart required tuning of A between 427 and 430. A value of 430.5 is the calculable upper limit for A. A=427 defines the lower limit of a comfortable soprano register passage on the F#. Verdi demanded A=432 [ie C=256.9 as the upper extreme limit for singing with proper registration. [why do you suppose Mozart's music correctly pitched moves people spiritually or to tears of joy and deep emotion/pathos?]. There are also other theories in existence which suggest that our emotions can be triggered differently by different composers and in varying keys.

Kepler reasoned that if circular action reflects uniquely the creative process of the universe, then the form of everything which exists - of atoms and molecules, of the Solar System, and the musical system - must be constructible using nothing but circular action. Circular action is the maximally efficient form of action in visible space and therefore coheres uniquely with the bel canto musical tone and the beam generated by a laser. It is called 'synthetic geometry'.

The circle folded upon itself gives a straight line, the diameter.

Fold again to obtain a point, the centre of the circle, as the intersection of two diameters which creates the basic elements of plane geometry. By rotating a circle we obtain the sphere. And so on. Regular polygons - the equilateral triangle, square, pentagon, forming faces of the five regular solids.

From this, Kepler derived the fundamental musical intervals of the 5th, 4th, major 3rd without any reference to overtones. The octave or division by 2, we obtained by folding the circle against itself. From division by 2,3,4,5 Kepler gives us values for the basic musical intervals: octave 1:2, 5th 2:3, 4th 3:4, Maj 3rd 4:5 - all coherent with regular solids and also with the Golden Section. The same proportion is observed in the system of moons and planets, Kepler maintained.

C=256 has a uniquely defined astronomical value. The period of one cycle of C=256 [$1/256$ of a second] is constructed thus: Divide one rotation of the earth by 24 [$2 \times 3 \times 4$] to get one hour; divide this by 60 [$3 \times 4 \times 5$] to get a minute; again by 60 to obtain a second. Divide that second by 256 [$2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$]. The rotation of the earth is a [note] G - 24 octaves lower than C=256. By contrast A=440 is a purely arbitrary value, having no physical-geometrical justification.

Have a soprano sing a scale upward, starting at Middle C [256]. As the frequency increases, so does the intensity of the sound produced = 'energy flux density'. But it is not merely linear extension. It involves a register shift at F# in order to maintain the 'isoperimetric' [least action] form of bel canto tone. Secondly at octave C=512 one cycle of action has been completed, like a 360 degree rotation ergo a 'rotational component'.

Helmholtzian straight line action does not exist. It is more of a spiral action upward on a cone. C=256, C=512, C=1024. Or 12x30 degree displacement > 12 equally proportioned angles; interval of a Fifth corresponding to rotation through 7/12 of the circle or 210 degrees. Etc.

Our Solar system also makes a 'register shift'. Inner Planets [Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars] share small size, solid silico-metallic surface, few moons and no rings. Outer Planets [Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune] share large size, gaseous composition, many moons, and rings. The shift falls in the same geometric-mean position as the shift of the soprano voice in the proper C=256 tuning. [A convincing diagram is supplied] If the tuning is arbitrarily raised from C=256 [corr. To A between 427 and 432 Hz] to e.g. A=449 then the soprano register shifts [at approx. 350Hz and 700Hz] lie in the higher tuning, between E and F rather than between F and F#, dividing the octave in the wrong place, and destroying the geometry of the musical system. If we similarly changed the 'tuning' of the solar system, it would explode and disintegrate. Why not similar damage to the human voice by doing so?

Following Verdi's 1884 efforts to institutionalise A=432 in Italy a British conference held in Vienna in 1885 ruled that no such pitch could be standardised. The French, the New York Met. Opera and many theatres in Europe and the US continued to maintain their A at 432-435 until World War II. A conference organised by Goebbels in 1939 standardised A = 440 as the official Nazi German pitch. An 'enforced' congress in London [May-June 1939] to ratify this had no French composer invited, so they refused to accept it. [No change there, then!]

Then war prevented agreement. A second London conference, Oct 1953, passed it as a resolution but again no continental musicians present so widely ignored. Prof Dussaut of the Paris Conservatoire wrote, "British instrument makers cater to the US Jazz trade who have demanded the higher pitch and it is shocking to me that our orchestra members and singers should thus be dependent upon jazz players." In a referendum held by him. 23,000 French musicians voted overwhelmingly for A=432.

In 1971 the European Community passed a recommendation calling for the still non-existent international pitch standard. Lower tuning existed in Moscow where Time magazine reported, "orchestras revel in a plushy, warm tone achieved by a larynx-relaxing A=435 cycles" and that "at a performance in London British church organs were still tuned a half-tone lower, about A=425 than the visiting Vienna Philharmonic at A=450.

Further confirmation of C=256 is found in Psychology: frequency of 16 cycles per second '4 octaves above the second pendulum' and 4 octaves below C=256 is the threshold of 'flicker frequency' when the mind begins to integrate series of repeated stimuli in a continuous gestalt. [related to brain waves alpha: 8Hz and higher; theta: 4-8 Hz]

Living cells in Optical biophysics reveals that living tissue emits and absorbs electromagnetic radiation at a series of specific frequencies or wavelengths - it turns out these are 42 octaves higher than the musical scale but similar order.

In DNA the most important single frequency band corresponds to wavelengths of between 263 and 269 nanometers [1 billionth of a meter] the centre frequency of which [corres to 265 nm] is 1.1283×10^{15} cycles per second which is exactly 42 octaves above the frequency 256.54 c.p.s. SO the key biological molecule is tuned very precisely to C=256.

In Nuclear physics Leibniz and DeBroglie et al demonstrated that particles of matter such as electrons, protons, neutrons and atomic nuclei are all associated with very high frequency oscillations. DeBroglie's frequency for the proton is 2.26876×10^{23} Hz which corresponds to G in the 69th octave above Middle C=256Hz, the fine tuning being less than the 28th part of a semitone. The frequency of the neutron is very slightly higher by the 40th part of a semitone.

The electron corresponds nearly exactly to the A in the 58th octave above Middle C, differing by less than 10th of a semitone from 'equal-tempered value. [A chart is displayed of the Musical Scale and the Biological Spectra]

To escape C=256 we would, alleges LaRouche, have to banish ourselves from the universe!

Ed Elsey 2005 and edited 2020

-oOo-

Dear Lord, we thank you for your creation, this wonderful world in which we live. You gave us responsibility for all that you have made. You trusted us with the care of every living creature. Try as we may, much of mankind has betrayed that trust and many have neglected responsibility. Your good earth has been allowed to become polluted by greed, damaged by selfishness and eaten to the bone by materialism. Father, as your sons and daughters feel we can do little about it. Please give us a renewed urgency and passion to fulfil our responsibilities to you in any way we possibly can. Inspire us with fresh ways of keeping your world safe and clean.

Dear Lord, we pray for governments all around your world; their decisions will affect the whole of your creation. We pray you give them wisdom to so that correct decisions are made, especially as they look to the future of our children, grandchildren and all future generations. We thank you for Leaders of nations who are genuinely seeking to act responsibly and to be faithful stewards of your world. We thank you for the good example of our Queen Elizabeth.

Lord in your Mercy.....Hear our prayer...

Lord what do we bring to you today? We have to say that we are facing trials of many kinds when we look around - and when we look inside ourselves.

We ask for your Power, your Wisdom and your Strength to help us cope. The testing of our faith produces perseverance. We look to you to solidly seal it in our hearts.

We bring to you our times of unbelief – that you may reinforce our faith.

Our reliance on self – that we may learn to trust you even more Lord.

Our selfishness – that we may become selfless.

We bring Our weakness – that we can be made stronger in and with everything.

Our Fear of the unknown – that we may be made fearless.

Our worries – that we may have peace of mind – knowing that all will be well.

Lord, we need to be overflowing with the Holy Spirit – especially at this time in our lives:

When there is a cross to bear, we *will* carry it well; when we despair, we *will* endure it; when our peace is broken, we *will* suffer it; when we mourn we *will* do it bravely; when we are overwhelmed we *will* stay strong and focused - trusting in your promises. Lord, we rely totally on your Power, your Strength and your Wisdom.

Lord in your mercy, Hear our Prayer.

We pray for those all over the world that are in peril – that are injured, homeless, in despair. Especially we pray for those who have died, been bereaved and injured by the explosion in Beirut. Please Lord, repair broken limbs, hearts and minds – bring peace and comfort to those in need.

Lord in Your Mercy Hear our Prayer

We pray for those who are ill at this time. We ask for their recovery Lord and pray that you will keep them restful and secure.

We pray for those who have recently died remembering. They are safe in your arms Lord. We ask that you comfort those bereaved.

And one more thing Lord, please help us to read our Bible more often.

Lord, we commit ourselves again today to build on the foundations of Faith Hope and Love and to serve you all our days; to love our neighbour and to declare our Love of Jesus in ways and words that all may hear - and know you as Lord. Amen.

The Ripple Effect: *What sort of ripples are we sending into the world?*

If a rock is thrown into a still pond we see the 'ripple effect', where circles of small waves ripple out from the centre of impact.

The ripples will continue to spread until they are stopped by an obstacle or encounter ripples moving in the opposite direction. The world is no still pond; everyone is making ripples – mostly negative.

When a person is angry, they often spread their anger to the people around them – then in turn, those people spread it to others and the ripples go out. When we are victims of rudeness, intolerance or injustice, we usually react by being likewise in return.

We each add to the 'ripple effect' which collectively builds up causing destructive waves of anger and depression. God has called us Christians to be a barrier to those negative ripples currently swamping the world.

If we are focused on Christ, we won't react when faced with the world's hostility; instead, we will start ripples of grace to offset the destructive one.

As Proverbs 15:18 states: *A hot tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.* People are usually caught off guard when their rudeness is returned with kindness.

Unlike a hostile retaliation, a graceful attitude makes people stop and evaluate their behaviour. Instead of reacting tit-for-tat, an honest smile; a bit of tolerance, a small act of compassion; or a kind word can change the direction of someone's day.

This is one of the ways we live God's Word and fulfil our role as ambassadors and imitators of Christ. We should always question the sort of ripples we are sending into the world.

The ripples Jesus Christ sent out in His life were so gracious they will continue to ripple throughout eternity. ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...*** Galatians 5:22-23 NIV.

+David, OSJ (Wales)

Rev Edmund Geard: 1866-1929, Chaplain of St Giles Hospital London.

As you probably are aware, I have an interest in the work of military chaplains and if I come across on personal items I will research them.

I recently came across an inscribed altar cross and after doing some initial research was pleased to find the following information.

It also led onto another family member, a Royal Navy chaplain who survived both WW1 and WW2 and served on many famous ships.

The story cuts across several generations and begins with Edmund Geard's father. There are three Edmund Geards, father (senior), son and grandson (junior). The story mostly concerns the middle one.

Rev Edmund Geard, 1866-1929: Chaplain, St Giles Hospital, London.

Emma Grace Budle (born 1814, Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire) married Edmund Geard (Senior), landed proprietor, (born 1808, Biggleswade) on 21st October, 1837.

Emma was a widow*. The marriage was witnessed by Edmund's father, Samuel Geard, and Emma's father, Thomas Randall.

* *First married to Richard Buddle in Manchester on 17th March, 1835*

Emma and Edmund then spent some time in Wollongong, New South Wales before returning to England some time circa 1863-4. (Documentary evidence exists online for 1848-1857).

A long series of Australian newspaper mentions of Edmund (Senior), the last reference suggesting that Edmund Geard (Senior) had been accused of misappropriating funds and this accusation may have been the reason for his return to England.

Emma died 1866, apparently after a long illness.

Edmund Geard (Senior) then married Nanny Downing (1834-1919) later that year (1866). It appears that Edmund was born that same year too.

It is not known if Edmund had any siblings although there has been a suggestion of a brother William of whom little is known. It has been suggested he was 'the black sheep of the family', possibly transported to Australia after criminal conviction, and was never discussed.

Edmund Geard (Senior) died on 23 November 1870 at St Paul in Cornwall. He left a will, and an estate valued as "effects under £3,000", probate to which was granted on 19 November 1870.

The 1871 census reported that Nanny (age 37) and their son Edmund (age 4) were living at Chypons Villa, Jack Lane, St Paul, Penzance, Cornwall, and had the assistance of a servant, Mary Cattran (age 18)

Edmund Geard was born 1866, baptised 1st April 1867 in Penzance and died 1929.

1881 census - Edmund is recorded as being a pupil at East End College, Finchley and was staying with the Veazy family.

In 1889 Nanny Geard remarried either John William Hornby or Henry Harris Hill in Truro, Cornwall. The records are unclear.

By the time of the 1891 census Edmund (age 24) is living in Chantry Road, Lambeth and is a student in theology. He is living with Harry G Veazy (Clerk in holy orders, age 26,) and Harry's sister Mary Pettiffer Veazy (age 25).

At some point late in 1894, Edmund married Mary Pettiffer Veazy.

They had two children, Edmund (Junior) born in 1896 and Sybil Madeline born in 1898, and although they moved home from Grove Park to Camberwell Grove, they remained in the Camberwell area until 1929.

Edmund's Theological career is as follows: (C of E)

Deaconed 1892

Priested 1893

Curate of St Andrew and St Philip, North Kensington (1892-3)

Milton-Next-Sittingbourne (1893-4)

Curate in Charge, High Halstow (1896-7)

Curate of Hythe (1897-1900)

Chaplain to Camberwell Infirmary and Constance Road Workhouse (1900-1929)

(Source – Crockford's Clerical Directory)

Edmund (Junior) was born 26th March 1896 and Baptised 21st April, 1896.

In the 1939 census Edmund (Junior) was living with his mother at the Taylor household at 206 Camberwell Grove, Peckham, London, His mother was recorded as 'unpaid domestic duties' whilst Edmund (Junior) was recorded as being a 'solicitor' and as being married, but no wife was present.

Research has shown that an Edmund Geard married a Gladys Tidy (age 19) in Nottingham in 1945. Gladys was born in 1926 and died in 1971. The 1939 Census shows her living in the Tidy family home and records her as being Gladys Geard (Tidy) and still at school.

A Gladys Geard is also shown as getting married to a Frederick A Gray in Kensington in 1948.

It is difficult to know what to make of all this information or whether it is even connected but there appears to be little further information on the matter. One should not jump to conclusions.

Edmund (Junior) died 26th February 1964. Probate was dated 3rd April 1964 and the 'linked person' was recorded as Peter Douglas Canadine, an inlaw on his sister's side of the family.

Sybil Madeline (Pettiffer) Geard (Rev Edmund Geard's sister) was born in 17th August 1897 and baptised 9th September, 1898, at St Leonard's, Hythe. She married Ronald Douglas Canadine, Clerk in Holy Orders, in Camberwell in 1918, and in the 1939 census was recorded as having a son, Peter David Canadine, who was born on 8th January, 1928 and whose later death was recorded in 2006 in Kensington/Chelsea. It seems he did not marry and this particular line in the family ceases (according to a recent version of the Canadine family tree).

Ronald Douglas Canadine's clerical career is worthy of mention:

Trained Hatfield College, Durham, BA 1914, MA 1918

Deaconed 1914 (C of E)

Priested 1915 (Southwark)

Curate of St Saviour's, Champion Hill 1914-1916

Temporary Commission CF 1916-1919

BFBS for the North Midlands 1919-1921

Hon CF 1921

Chaplain (RN)

HMS Victory 1921—1922

HMS Courageous 1922

HMS Benbow 1922-1925

HMS Vivid 1925-1927

HMSA Revenge 1927

HMS Nelson 1927-1930

HMS Constance 1930

HMS Frobisher 1930-1931

HMS Royal Oak 1931

HMS Revenge 1931-1934

RN Barracks/HMS Victory 1934-1935

HMS St Vincent 1935-1937

HMS Collingwood 1942-1946

Rector of Alvescot and Vicar of Shilton 1937-1945

Rural Dean from 1945

Rector of Whitchurch, Oxford, 1945-1951 (1951 officially retired)

Permitted to officiate 1951- Chichester Diocese, resident in Bognor Regis,
Sussex

It was not easy being married to an RN Chaplain. Sybil gave the following interview which is recorded in notated form:

Formation of the Girl Guides in 1910, and involvement with the Guides from then on; as a Guide and later as a Guider.

Enrolled on first Saturday of January 1910. Continued as before, but called the First London. Assigned an adult leader, Cookie Moore, in July, 1910, and moved from the bedroom in the vicarage to a room in a school. Group grew from 12 to 20 girls.

1914: World War I broke out, Cookie Moore signed up, and Sybil Canadine became group leader until 1917, even when she was at college in Dartford at the Physical Training College.

Describes the Sunday Parades, marching up and down the church hall, and taking the special seat in church. Importance of the Guides to her. Head of P.E. at Derby College; starting cadets and Captain of the Tenth Derby; pioneering proper activity for girls.

Impact of war.

25th July, 1918: married Rev. Ronald Douglas Canadine (married by Winnington Ingram, Bishop of London), a parson in the navy. Had met when he was curate at her church, and came back to the Vicarage after the Harvest Festival Service one day, when she was 17.

Douglas Canadine was abroad with army at Ypres during the War, and then transferred to the navy. Married life: early years of marriage led separate lives, he was abroad, she was teaching P.E. in Nottingham, and running Girl Guide groups, as Division Commissioner.

No settled home life, but stability came from her activities and involvement in the community. Difficulties of being a Forces wife, "husbands were like vagrants."

Also on staff of University of Nottingham, teaching P.E., and introducing the ideas of Cecil Sharpe (folk dancing).

Her commitment to physical education. Living in Albert Road, Nottingham. Move to Portsmouth, c. 1921; continued to run Girl Guide groups and found new ones.

Asked to go to USA as America's Camp chief, setting up a Guide Camp, with 100,000 dollars donated by a Senator, to cover all the States.

Husband had just got a posting to with Allenby to Jerusalem, and so she accepted the American offer. Sailed on the Berengaria to USA at the age of 24.

Describes the first class trip to America, and the six months setting up the Girl Guide Camp: the responsibilities, living conditions, daily schedule, range of activities.

A final few notes about Rev Edmund Geard to conclude.

A reference found in Kelly's Postal Directory 1915 quotes the following:

Geard Edmund, A.K.C.L. chaplain of Camberwell Parish Infirmary, Gossett Street, Bethnal green, E Brunswick Square SE & Comptance Road Workhouse, East Dulwich SE. Residence, 206 The Grove, Denmark hill SE

Edmund died 28th April, 1929, cause unknown, just before the hospital was taken under the wing of the LCC. The altar cross was inscribed and gifted by staff at the hospital as a lasting memorial and I'm pleased to say is ready to go back into service.

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

Covid-19 and your place of worship:

Minimum legal requirements.

Taken directly from HMGov sources.

Communal worship or prayer can be attended by more than 30 people but only if the venues used can safely accommodate larger numbers in a way which complies with [COVID-19 secure guidance](#). It is important that risks are managed sensibly. In line with wider [Places of worship guidance](#) you should:

Do - Follow the mitigations that places of worship have put in place, for example using booking systems, changes to entrances and exits or staggered arrivals.

Do - Continue to broadcast services online for those who need to stay at home or are able to mark the event at home to avoid large gatherings.

Don't break social distancing (2 metres between households, or 1 metre with mitigations, if 2 metres is not possible), and especially avoid touching people outside of your household.

Don't interact socially outside of your household, or the group (of 2 households) that you went to the place of worship with.

Do - If you can, you should also [wear a face covering](#) – you must wear these if you travel on public transport or visit a shop.

Do - Make sure you provide contact details to the place of worship to support the NHS Test and Trace service designed to track and help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Don't use shared areas for ablutions – wash at home, unless in an emergency.

Do - Remove communal resources such as prayer mats. Single use alternatives should be removed after use and disposed of by the worshipper.

Do - Make sure only you touch your belongings, for example shoes if removed.

Do - Take home personal items brought in to aid worship, such as a prayer mat.

Do - Speak into a microphone to lead devotions or sermons to avoid shouting. Avoid sharing microphones between different speakers.

Do - Use a plexi-glass screen in front of a single individual raising their voice, singing or chanting at the front.

Don't - No one else should sing, shout, or raise their voice, beyond that one individual behind plexi-glass.

Do - Continue to broadcast services online for those who need to stay at home.

Gathering outside

We know that prayers in the park and other outdoor spaces are an important feature of some festivals.

It is against the law in England to participate in a gathering of 30 or more people in a public outdoor space unless the gathering has been organised by a business, charity, a benevolent or philanthropic organisation or a public or political body.

The organiser must also have carried out a full risk assessment (there is advice on doing this in government's [Places of worship guidance](#)) and taken all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of coronavirus, including taking into account any relevant government guidance on gatherings.

Government guidance on [Closing certain businesses and venues](#) sets out how gatherings can be made COVID-19 Secure.

Local authorities will make decisions on applications for prayers in public places, including those on private land which is not attached to your place of worship. Councils will be putting the public health and safety needs of communities first when making these decisions.

Don't - This year to make sure that people are not putting themselves at risk of contracting COVID-19, where possible you should avoid attending large gatherings.

Don't join in with any large prayers in outdoor spaces which do not have safety measures in place.

Don't risk your health by attending an event that hasn't been approved by your council or the land owner.

Do - If you choose to attend any gathering, you should ensure that it is COVID-19 secure and that you follow the safety advice set out by event organisers.

Do - The best way to make an event COVID-19 secure is for the community to actively work with the owner, the council, the local police and local partners. Those partners will have to carefully check that people can attend with minimal risk of transmitting COVID-19.

Do - If the numbers attending any gathering can be kept below 30 then transmission risks will be greatly reduced.

Do - All events should follow social distancing guidance, and organisers should carry out risk assessments and apply the principles above.

Do - In public spaces (beyond the place of worship's own grounds), you should work alongside the owner of that space and with other relevant authorities such as the local authority and police to put safety measures in place. You may want to do that even if on the grounds of a place of worship to manage other risks.

Do - Most importantly - if you are any doubt that risks can be managed effectively, then find a safer way to host your event.

Do - It's also important that you do not stay long after praying and you should not hug or touch anyone outside your household.

Do - You should ensure that any celebrations held after prayers only involve up to 6 people from different households if held outdoors or up to 2 households in any location. You should also keep 2 metres apart from others at any celebration, even if you are in someone's house.

We know this might be disappointing but it's important to remember that the virus is still with us and we need to do all we can to protect ourselves and our family and friends.

These restrictions and guidance are in place to keep all of our families, friends and communities safe during this time and we recognise that festivals will be marked differently throughout this pandemic.

OSJ (UK)

Covid-19 puts everyone at risk.

Additional requirements may be requested by the celebrant which go above and beyond the legally required list. You will be advised prior to the agreed service taking place.

Your celebrant will refuse to conduct services which do not meet minimum HMGov requirements.

Services may be halted or terminated where social distancing measures, etc., are infringed or are not complied with.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available with instructions to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

5th April, 2020

3rd May, 2020

7th June, 2020

5th July, 2020

2nd August, 2020

6th September, 2020

4th October, 2020

1st November, 2020

6th December, 2020

19th January, 2020

16th February, 2020

15th March, 2020

19th April, 2020

17th May, 2020

21st June, 2020

19th July, 2020

16th August, 2020

20th September, 2020

18th October, 2020

15th November, 2020

20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

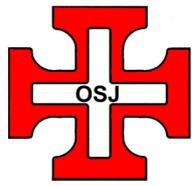
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

October 2020



I wrote This article for organist colleagues some years back for the Organ Journal of London.

My musical work which merged into pastoral work and eventual ordination is part of my long make-up and experience in Christ's wide-ranging ministry, happily led.
Fr Ed Elsey, OSJ (Wales)

LOUD ORGANS THEIR GLORY PROCLAIM

If clergy complain that the music played by the organist is too loud [surely never in your Diocese or your church] - oh yes, I have had complaints from time to time, when the sheer joy of being at the vast console of a great organ 'gets me released on a wing and a prayer' - you might care to remind them of this factual historical information from 'The King of Instruments' by Peter Williams, sometime Professor of Music, Duke University, North Carolina.

Several accounts from Constantinople in 9thC and 10thC say that, at a palace reception or when 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' is sung out of doors, the signal for continuing the proceedings is given by the organ-sound ceasing altogether.

Silence as organs and bells fall silent is often mentioned as a cue for something to happen, as in Bury St Edmunds [East Anglia UK - now a magnificent Cathedral to add to your 'must visit' list] in 1182 when the Prior began prayers in the reception service for the new Abbot, according to a rare but surely typical report. What needs to be envisioned here is not today's quiet organ prelude before a service begins - soft pitched music dying away as the priest enters - but a noisy, continuous, sustained sound rather like a siren's, as loud and high-pitched as bells, the kind of sound originally associated with outdoor events. Sudden silence would then be very striking.

Organis et aliis musicis - praise sounded aloud by organs and instrumentis concrepari other musical instruments et a populo laudes conclamari and was shouted out by the people.

Organs were certainly becoming well-known in the 12C; they were there for the sake of public ceremony or public splendour - the public whose participation was being periodically championed by reform-minded Bishops.

In Ramsey Abbey [in England's Fenland] the magister organorum [master of the organs] cum agmine ascendit populorum [ascended with the crowd of people] in altis sedibus [to the upper floor] quo tonitrualis sonitu excitavit [where the thundering sound he stirred up] mentes fidelium laudare nomen Domini [the souls of the faithful to praise the name of the Lord [Life of St Oswald c.1005AD].

The choir applied themselves to psalmody, singing sweet praises lustily in

alternation. When the right hand part of the choir sang out the melody with glorious voices; then the left jubilantly exerted themselves in 'organic' praises [Rerum britannicarum medii aevi scriptores].

Fr Ed Elsey [revised Oct 2020]

WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ (Wales)

The vision of Wycliffe Bible Translators is that all peoples would discover The Bible for themselves in a language they fully understand.

Their story is of a remarkable journey since William Cameron Townsend ventured out in 1917 to share the Scriptures with Cachiuel Indians in Guatemala.

Since those early pioneering days the pace of Bible translation has accelerated and is part of International Wycliffe Global Alliance of approximately 100 organisations from 60 nations working alongside partner organisations and individuals from local communities.

Their recent latest statistics show production of:

Complete Bible 636

New Testament 1442

Just portions 1145

Sections & main stories 1,145

Languages with some scripture 3,223 - languages spoken by 434 million people.

They pledge:

"We believe that God speaks directly to every man, woman and child through the Bible. It's the best way for us to come to know and understand who God is. But unless people have the Bible in their heart language, they cannot read the message of life, hope and salvation. Millions of people still don't have a single verse of Scripture".

How many languages still need translation?

In addition to over 2,422 active projects worldwide, work may still need to be done in a further, 1,700 - 1,800 languages.

How many people still have no Scripture?

An estimated 160 million without access to any Scripture in their 'heart language' and need Bible translation to begin. At least 1.5 billion people are without the full Bible in their first language.

The NRSI - Non-Roman Script Initiative - is a department of primary partner SIL International), works to provide computing resources for minority language groups, and has been going for 20 years. Scheherazade font, developed by NRSI uses Arabic script, beautifully presented.

Many clerics have read it in secret and become believers – some forfeiting their lives by doing so.

I recommend readers to follow up these few leaders to discover how God is blessing the work of spreading the Gospel.

NB I learned with some sadness, this month, that The Gideons [UK], for whom I worked for a number of years in Bristol area, have left the International main body, due to differences of opinion on the inclusion of women in membership [the International organisation are still opposed to this], and of the use of more modern translations of Scripture.

"Because of the move to admit women into full membership, and relax the rigid requirement for members to be only business or professional 'men', Gideons UK have left Gideons international. They therefore, are currently known as 'Good News for Everyone', no longer being able to use the name Gideons".

I met with Gideon colleagues when in Montana USA last July [2019] when driving a Model T Ford in a Rally in Billings, where I found to my delight, they were assembling in the same downtown hotel where we were accommodated. It was a joy to share fellowship with them again, despite differing views and 'updatings'.

Fr Ed Elsey October 2020

JOHN CALVIN 1509-1564

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ (Wales)

Calvin studied Liberal Arts in Paris before theology. His father fell out with the bishop [don't we all!] and wanted his son to pursue civil law. He graduated as Doctor of Law in 1531, returning to Paris to become a man of letters.

In 1532 he self-published a commentary upon 'Treatise on Clemency' but was otherwise largely unnoticed. He left Roman Catholicism, becoming informal leader of the Parisian Protestants.

“ I endeavoured faithfully to apply myself in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence gave a different direction. Since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from ‘the abyss of mire’, God, by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one of my early period of life.”

Commentary on the Psalms

En route to Basel, in 1536, he passed through Geneva where Reformer Farel persuaded him to stay and help the cause of the church, which he did for nearly two years...but due to government resistance, they both left Geneva, Calvin to Strasbourg as Pastor 1538-41. When his supporters won election to the Geneva City Council in 1541 he returned until his death in 1564. A monument, impressive, stands to him in that city but I have not yet found evidence of any such in Paris. Readers may be able to enlighten me. [Fr Ed]

“The certainty which rests on God’s word exceeds all knowledge.

We can do nothing unless by a super-natural grace of God.

It is God who gives the will: it is God who gives the power.” [Calvin]

“I think what Calvin may offer us is that God’s in charge of his world.”

George Carey, 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury 1991-2002, Baron Carey of Clifton

-oOo-

Working Side - By - Side.

+David, OSJ (Wales)

If God is all powerful and can do everything Himself, why does He want us to work and serve?

When people voluntarily work side by side it brings them closer.

When you work

with someone, you really get to know them.

Parents know how hard it is to encourage their children to assist around the house.

On those rare occasions when they help with a happy heart, it is pure delight to the parents and is frequently a bonding experience.

Alternately, when their children are uncooperative and sulky – it brings no pleasure to either party. It is usually easier for the parents to do the work themselves.

Sadly, the children have deprived themselves of the opportunity to improve themselves and bond with their parents.

God doesn't need our help in the 'Kitchen of Life'. We may think He does, but God is all-powerful and we only get in His way.

When we help God we are like little children; no matter how good we think we are and how important our service is, we generally make a horrible mess of things.

God usually needs to tidy up after our tidy up. With this in mind we should seriously consider the following questions:

God is omnipotent – He can do all things; so, if we are not helping out with a happy heart – why are we helping at all?

God owns the riches of the universe – He doesn't need our money to accomplish His purpose; so, if we aren't giving freely – why are we giving at all?

Working with the wrong attitude or from guilt, brings no pleasure to God. He has given us an amazing opportunity to be part of His work, and in so doing we begin to know Him better.

God understands that two people voluntarily working side-by-side is an excellent relationship builder. His greatest desire for us with Christian service is to improve ourselves spiritually by getting closer to Him.

Our Christian service may benefit others, but the one it was primarily designed to benefit was ourselves.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Service for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

When the Lord comes, He will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Hymn, to be said or sung

Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing.
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it Thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,
til earthly passions turn to dust
and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let Thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity,
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing

And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace,
'til we become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit Makes his dwelling.

Bianco da Siena (d 1434)

Jonah chapter 3 v. 10 – 4 end.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed His mind about the calamity that He had said He would bring upon them; and He did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry.

He prayed to the Lord and said; “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country?

That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and ready to relent from punishing. And now O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live”.

And the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord God appointed a bush and made it come up over Jonah to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

But when dawn came up for the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush so that it withered.

When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live”.

But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?.

And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die”.

Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Ninevah, that great city in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals”.

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St Matthew chapter 20 verses 1 – 16.

Glory to you O Lord

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, each of them received the usual daily wage.

Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of these 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 the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go, I choose to give to this last the same as I gave to you. Am I not allowed to 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 is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you O Christ.

Address

In the Name of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen

We catch up with the prophet Jonah towards the end of his reluctant adventure with God. Having made a determined effort to avoid visiting Nineveh, that city whose wickedness had become known to God and where God intended Jonah to visit and to save them, Jonah tried to avoid the task set before him. Indeed to avoid God's call, Jonah set off in the opposite direction! This rebellion did not go well as we all know the story of his ending up in the unlikely place of a whale's belly (Jonah 1.17).

Finally arriving in Nineveh in spite of himself, Jonah reluctantly preaches a short sermon. It is remarkably effective, (input 5 Hebrew words warning of disaster to come; the outcome 120,000 penitential people led by the king himself in sackcloth and ashes).

But to Jonah in the face of the utter wickedness of the city, this mass repentance did not bring joy. He complains to God, "I knew that you would let them off".

One of the hardest things to swallow about the nature of grace is that it means God can and will show mercy to our enemies including those who we choose to look down on and to judge harshly.

It goes against our fantasy that God likes the people we like, and dislikes those we dislike.

The reality is that God's love is for all. Jonah is angry as he sees life through his own clouded vision.

God encourages his prophet to have a divine perspective and explains to him, "Should I not be concerned about 120,000 people?"

Forgiveness and mercy are at the heart of God. And perhaps we can move on to the Gospel and begin to see Jesus' story through the lens of God's vision. With earthbound eyes we might think that the 'idlers' were lucky to be paid the same wage as the regular workers. But idle can mean simply unemployed.

Were they lazy or just people out of work, those who were disabled in some way or those with a bad reputation which disadvantaged them, or just those who had been left out of the job market?

One thing we know for certain. They wanted to work and when the landowner offered them something even for a short time, they jumped at it. They go no matter for only an hour, willing to work at any price.

The divine perspective sees our need and discerns our hearts.

Whatever our past record, like the people of Nineveh, that reputation can be healed and God can set us to work in His kingdom.

As our country is hit by a variety of economic and social problems this winter, we can choose to see people through God's eyes and to know for certain that His kingdom's door has no handle on the outside to lock people out who wish to enter.

We unlock it from within ourselves to enter in love and freedom, walking alongside others who are also striving to be worthy "to stand in His presence and to serve Him".

Amen

Prayers

Lord, teach us to live as those who are worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Keep us firm in the faith you have set before us.

Give us a clear vision of the forgiveness won for us by Jesus and the forgiveness and mercy to be shown to those around us.

Lord in your mercy, help us to be gracious to each other.

Loving Lord, we pray for Christians who face cynicism at home or at work.

For all who are afraid to confess their faith in you.

We pray for those who spread the gospel among those who are reluctant to receive it.

Lord in your mercy, help us to be gracious to each other.

Heavenly Father, we pray for your blessing on all employers to give them a spirit of fairness and justice.

We remember all those who queue for work, all who reluctantly depend on cash benefits.

We pray for all those who have had jobs and now find the humiliation of being unemployed.

We pray for the multitude on low incomes.

We pray that those who are flourishing will be generous to those in need.

We pray for all relief organisations that they will prosper enough to provide real assistance.

Lord in your mercy, help us to be gracious to each other.

Father we thank you for our own work and for those able to support their homes and families.

We thank you for those who supply the things we need.

Give us grace to keep before us those without food and those in debt for whatever reason.

We pray for those without the security of home and a firm livelihood.

Lord in your mercy, help us to be gracious to each other.

Heavenly Father, we remember before you those who have to struggle with disability and chronic illness, for all who are forced to rely on sickness benefits.

We pray for those at home looking after someone who is ill.

We remember before you those who are suffering from the virus and need support to get better. Lord in your mercy, help us to be merciful to those around us.

Lord of All, we thank you for those who have been faithful labourers in your kingdom.

We remember before you those we have loved and lost in the last months and for all those who have died in this pandemic.

May we with them rejoice in your loving generosity both now and in the life to come.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

The Blessing

May the peace of God be with all clergy and the people at this time, the power of God protect you, the Holy Spirit of God strengthen you for every task, and the Blessing of God, Father Son + and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always.

Amen

End Times?

The whole topic of whether we are in 'the end times' is one that is frequently based on opinion rather than fact.

The trouble is that we can't look at the subject with objectivity because 'the church' has created various historical theologies that are very difficult to shake off. They colour our thinking around the subject, and instead of remaining 'probabilities and possibilities in interpretation', they have for many become indisputable facts which lock us in to looking at one or two pieces of the jigsaw instead of the whole picture.

This is something that the church is very good at and has been doing for centuries.

Whether we are in 'the end times' or not is something we should not be concerned about. We have a job to do as Christians, and the circumstances we find ourselves in are of little consequence even if they seem exceptional.

Covid-19 has raised the question in people's minds of whether we are in 'the end times' or not, of that there is no doubt. It's not the first time we have been in this situation. A quick look through history at all the different pandemics will put Covid-19 into context. In reality, there has been worse.

I quote from '20 of the worst epidemics and pandemics in history' by Owen Jarus who is one of the Live Science contributors, 'All About History', March 20, 2020

'Plagues and epidemics have ravaged humanity throughout its existence, often changing the course of history.

Throughout the course of history, disease outbreaks have ravaged humanity, sometimes changing the course of history and, at times, signaling the end of entire civilizations. Here are 20 of the worst epidemics and pandemics, dating from prehistoric to modern times.

1. Prehistoric epidemic: Circa 3000 B.C.

The 5,000-year-old house found in China was about 14 by 15 feet in size.

The discovery of a 5,000-year-old house in China filled with skeletons is evidence of a deadly epidemic. (Image credit: Photo courtesy Chinese Archaeology)

About 5,000 years ago, an epidemic wiped out a prehistoric village in China. The bodies of the dead were stuffed inside a house that was later burned down. No age group was spared, as the skeletons of juveniles, young adults and middle-age people were found inside the house. The archaeological site is now called "Hamin Mangha" and is one of the best-preserved prehistoric sites in north eastern China. Archaeological and anthropological study indicates that the epidemic happened quickly enough that there was no time for proper burials, and the site was not inhabited again.

Before the discovery of Hamin Mangha, another prehistoric mass burial that dates to roughly the same time period was found at a site called Miaoziyou, in northeastern China. Together, these discoveries suggest that an epidemic ravaged the entire region.

2. Plague of Athens: 430 B.C.

The city experienced a five year pandemic around 430 B.C. Around 430 B.C., not long after a war between Athens and Sparta began, an epidemic ravaged the people of Athens and lasted for five years. Some estimates put the death toll as high as 100,000 people. The Greek historian Thucydides (460-400 B.C.) wrote that "people in good health were all of a sudden attacked by violent heats in the head, and redness and inflammation in the eyes, the inward parts, such as the throat or tongue, becoming bloody and emitting an unnatural and fetid breath" (translation by Richard Crawley from the book "The History of the Peloponnesian War," London Dent, 1914).

What exactly this epidemic was has long been a source of debate among scientists; a number of diseases have been put forward as possibilities, including typhoid fever and Ebola. Many scholars believe that overcrowding caused by the war exacerbated the epidemic. Sparta's army was stronger, forcing the Athenians to take refuge behind a series of fortifications called the "long walls" that protected their city. Despite the epidemic, the war continued on, not ending until 404 B.C., when Athens was forced to capitulate to Sparta.

3. Antonine Plague: A.D. 165-180

When soldiers returned to the Roman Empire from campaigning, they brought back more than the spoils of victory. The Antonine Plague, which may have been smallpox, laid waste to the army and may have killed over 5 million people in the Roman empire, wrote April Pudsey, a senior lecturer in Roman History at Manchester Metropolitan University, in a paper published in the book "Disability in

Antiquity," Routledge, 2017).

Many historians believe that the epidemic was first brought into the Roman Empire by soldiers returning home after a war against Parthia. The epidemic contributed to the end of the Pax Romana (the Roman Peace), a period from 27 B.C. to A.D. 180, when Rome was at the height of its power. After A.D. 180, instability grew throughout the Roman Empire, as it experienced more civil wars and invasions by "barbarian" groups. Christianity became increasingly popular in the time after the plague occurred.

4. Plague of Cyprian: A.D. 250-271

Named after St. Cyprian, a bishop of Carthage (a city in Tunisia) who described the epidemic as signaling the end of the world, the Plague of Cyprian is estimated to have killed 5,000 people a day in Rome alone. In 2014, archaeologists in Luxor found what appears to be a mass burial site of plague victims. Their bodies were covered with a thick layer of lime (historically used as a disinfectant).

Archaeologists found three kilns used to manufacture lime and the remains of plague victims burned in a giant bonfire.

Experts aren't sure what disease caused the epidemic. "The bowels, relaxed into a constant flux, discharge the bodily strength [and] a fire originated in the marrow ferments into wounds of the fauces (an area of the mouth)," Cyprian wrote in Latin in a work called "De mortalitate" (translation by Philip Schaff from the book "Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1885).

5. Plague of Justinian: A.D. 541-542

The Byzantine Empire was ravaged by the bubonic plague, which marked the start of its decline. The plague reoccurred periodically afterward. Some estimates suggest that up to 10% of the world's population died.

The plague is named after the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (reigned A.D. 527-565). Under his reign, the Byzantine Empire reached its greatest extent, controlling territory that stretched from the Middle East to Western Europe. Justinian constructed a great cathedral known as Hagia Sophia ("Holy Wisdom") in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), the empire's capital. Justinian also got sick with the plague and survived; however, his empire gradually lost territory in the time after the plague struck.

6. The Black Death: 1346-1353

*The Black Death traveled from Asia to Europe, leaving devastation in its wake. Some estimates suggest that it wiped out over half of Europe's population. It was caused by a strain of the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* that is likely extinct today and was spread by fleas on infected rodents. The bodies of victims were buried in mass graves.*

The plague changed the course of Europe's history. With so many dead, labor became harder to find, bringing about better pay for workers and the end of Europe's system of serfdom. Studies suggest that surviving workers had better access to meat and higher-quality bread. The lack of cheap labor may also have contributed to technological innovation.

7. Cocoliztli epidemic: 1545-1548

The infection that caused the cocoliztli epidemic was a form of viral hemorrhagic fever that killed 15 million inhabitants of Mexico and Central America. Among a population already weakened by extreme drought, the disease proved to be utterly catastrophic. "Cocoliztli" is the Aztec word for "pest."

A recent study that examined DNA from the skeletons of victims found that they were infected with a subspecies of Salmonella known as S. paratyphi C, which causes enteric fever, a category of fever that includes typhoid. Enteric fever can cause high fever, dehydration and gastrointestinal problems and is still a major health threat today.

8. American Plagues: 16th century

The American Plagues are a cluster of Eurasian diseases brought to the Americas by European explorers. These illnesses, including smallpox, contributed to the collapse of the Inca and Aztec civilizations. Some estimates suggest that 90% of the indigenous population in the Western Hemisphere was killed off.

The diseases helped a Spanish force led by Hernán Cortés conquer the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán in 1519 and another Spanish force led by Francisco Pizarro conquer the Incas in 1532. The Spanish took over the territories of both empires. In both cases, the Aztec and Incan armies had been ravaged by disease and were unable to withstand the Spanish forces. When citizens of Britain, France, Portugal and the Netherlands began exploring, conquering and settling the Western Hemisphere, they were also helped by the fact that disease had vastly reduced the size of any

indigenous groups that opposed them.

9. Great Plague of London: 1665-1666

The Black Death's last major outbreak in Great Britain caused a mass exodus from London, led by King Charles II. The plague started in April 1665 and spread rapidly through the hot summer months. Fleas from plague-infected rodents were one of the main causes of transmission. By the time the plague ended, about 100,000 people, including 15% of the population of London, had died. But this was not the end of that city's suffering. On Sept. 2, 1666, the Great Fire of London started, lasting for four days and burning down a large portion of the city.

10. Great Plague of Marseille: 1720-1723

Historical records say that the Great Plague of Marseille started when a ship called Grand-Saint-Antoine docked in Marseille, France, carrying a cargo of goods from the eastern Mediterranean. Although the ship was quarantined, plague still got into the city, likely through fleas on plague-infected rodents.

Plague spread quickly, and over the next three years, as many as 100,000 people may have died in Marseille and surrounding areas. It's estimated that up to 30% of the population of Marseille may have perished.

11. Russian plague: 1770-1772

In plague-ravaged Moscow, the terror of quarantined citizens erupted into violence. Riots spread through the city and culminated in the murder of Archbishop Ambrosius, who was encouraging crowds not to gather for worship.

The empress of Russia, Catherine II (also called Catherine the Great), was so desperate to contain the plague and restore public order that she issued a hasty decree ordering that all factories be moved from Moscow. By the time the plague ended, as many as 100,000 people may have died. Even after the plague ended, Catherine struggled to restore order. In 1773, Yemelyan Pugachev, a man who claimed to be Peter III (Catherine's executed husband), led an insurrection that resulted in the deaths of thousands more.

12. Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic: 1793

When yellow fever seized Philadelphia, the United States' capital at the time, officials wrongly believed that slaves were immune. As a result, abolitionists called for people of African origin to be recruited to nurse the sick.

The disease is carried and transmitted by mosquitoes, which experienced a population boom during the particularly hot and humid summer weather in Philadelphia that year.

It wasn't until winter arrived — and the mosquitoes died out — that the epidemic finally stopped. By then, more than 5,000 people had died.

13. Flu pandemic: 1889-1890

In the modern industrial age, new transport links made it easier for influenza viruses to wreak havoc. In just a few months, the disease spanned the globe, killing 1 million people. It took just five weeks for the epidemic to reach peak mortality.

The earliest cases were reported in Russia. The virus spread rapidly throughout St. Petersburg before it quickly made its way throughout Europe and the rest of the world, despite the fact that air travel didn't exist yet.

14. American polio epidemic: 1916

A polio epidemic that started in New York City caused 27,000 cases and 6,000 deaths in the United States. The disease mainly affects children and sometimes leaves survivors with permanent disabilities.

Polio epidemics occurred sporadically in the United States until the Salk vaccine was developed in 1954. As the vaccine became widely available, cases in the United States declined. The last polio case in the United States was reported in 1979. Worldwide vaccination efforts have greatly reduced the disease, although it is not yet completely eradicated.

15. Spanish Flu: 1918-1920

An estimated 500 million people from the South Seas to the North Pole fell victim to Spanish Flu. One-fifth of those died, with some indigenous communities pushed to the brink of extinction. The flu's spread and lethality was enhanced by the cramped conditions of soldiers and poor wartime nutrition that many people were experiencing during World War I.

Despite the name Spanish Flu, the disease likely did not start in Spain. Spain was a neutral nation during the war and did not enforce strict censorship of its press, which could therefore freely publish early accounts of the illness.

As a result, people falsely believed the illness was specific to Spain, and the name Spanish Flu stuck.

16. Asian Flu: 1957-1958

The Asian Flu pandemic was another global showing for influenza. With its roots in China, the disease claimed more than 1 million lives. The virus that caused the pandemic was a blend of avian flu viruses.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that the disease spread rapidly and was reported in Singapore in February 1957, Hong Kong in April 1957, and the coastal cities of the United States in the summer of 1957. The total death toll was more than 1.1 million worldwide, with 116,000 deaths occurring in the United States.

17. AIDS pandemic and epidemic: 1981-present day

AIDS has claimed an estimated 35 million lives since it was first identified. HIV, which is the virus that causes AIDS, likely developed from a chimpanzee virus that transferred to humans in West Africa in the 1920s.

The virus made its way around the world, and AIDS was a pandemic by the late 20th century. Now, about 64% of the estimated 40 million living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) live in sub-Saharan Africa.

For decades, the disease had no known cure, but medication developed in the

1990s now allows people with the disease to experience a normal life span with regular treatment. Even more encouraging, two people have been cured of HIV as of early 2020.

18. H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic: 2009-2010

The 2009 swine flu pandemic was caused by a new strain of H1N1 that originated in Mexico in the spring of 2009 before spreading to the rest of the world. In one year, the virus infected as many as 1.4 billion people across the globe and killed between 151,700 and 575,400 people, according to the CDC.

The 2009 flu pandemic primarily affected children and young adults, and 80% of the deaths were in people younger than 65, the CDC reported. That was unusual, considering that most strains of flu viruses, including those that cause seasonal flu, cause the highest percentage of deaths in people ages 65 and older. But in the case of the swine flu, older people seemed to have already built up enough immunity to the group of viruses that H1N1 belongs to, so weren't affected as much. A vaccine for the H1N1 virus that caused the swine flu is now included in the annual flu vaccine.

19. West African Ebola epidemic: 2014-2016

Ebola ravaged West Africa between 2014 and 2016, with 28,600 reported cases and 11,325 deaths. The first case to be reported was in Guinea in December 2013, then the disease quickly spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone. The bulk of the cases and deaths occurred in those three countries.

A smaller number of cases occurred in Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, the United States and Europe, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported.

There is no cure for Ebola, although efforts at finding a vaccine are ongoing. The first known cases of Ebola occurred in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976, and the virus may have originated in bats.

20. Zika Virus epidemic: 2015-present day

The impact of the recent Zika epidemic in South America and Central America won't be known for several years. In the meantime, scientists face a race against time to bring the virus under control. The Zika virus is usually spread through mosquitoes of the Aedes genus, although it can also be sexually transmitted in humans.

While Zika is usually not harmful to adults or children, it can attack infants who are still in the womb and cause birth defects. The type of mosquitoes that carry Zika flourish best in warm, humid climates, making South America, Central America and parts of the southern United States prime areas for the virus to flourish.'

These recounts do not include the individual details that really make these events so devastatingly horrible or make much of the personal cost to families and communities. There are some accounts that can be drawn from to give us some idea.

The Black Death, 1348

Coming out of the East, the Black Death reached the shores of Italy in the spring of 1348 unleashing a rampage of death across Europe unprecedented in recorded history. By the time the epidemic played itself out three years later, anywhere between 25% and 50% of Europe's population had fallen victim to the pestilence.

The plague presented itself in three interrelated forms.

The bubonic variant (the most common) derives its name from the swellings or buboes that appeared on a victim's neck, armpits or groin. These tumours could range in size from that of an egg to that of an apple. Although some survived the painful ordeal, the manifestation of these lesions usually signalled the victim had a life expectancy of up to a week. Infected fleas that attached themselves to rats and then to humans spread this bubonic type of the plague.

A second variation - pneumatic plague - attacked the respiratory system and was spread by merely breathing the exhaled air of a victim. It was much more virulent than its bubonic cousin - life expectancy was measured in one or two days.

Finally, the septicemic version of the disease attacked the blood system.

Having no defence and no understanding of the cause of the pestilence, the men, women and children caught in its onslaught were bewildered, panicked, and finally devastated.

The Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio lived through the plague as it ravaged the city of Florence in 1348. The experience inspired him to write The Decameron, a story of seven men and three women who escape the disease by fleeing to a villa outside the city. In his introduction to the fictional portion of his book, Boccaccio gives a graphic description of the effects of the epidemic on his city.

The Signs of Impending Death

"The symptoms were not the same as in the East, where a gush of blood from the nose was the plain sign of inevitable death; but it began both in men and women with certain swellings in the groin or under the armpit. They grew to the size of a small apple or an egg, more or less, and were vulgarly called tumours. In a short space of time these tumours spread from the two parts named all over the body. Soon after this the symptoms changed and black or purple spots appeared on the arms or thighs or any other part of the body, sometimes a few large ones, sometimes many little ones. These spots were a certain sign of death, just as the original tumour had been and still remained.

No doctor's advice, no medicine could overcome or alleviate this disease, An enormous number of ignorant men and women set up as doctors in addition to those who were trained. Either the disease was such that no treatment was possible or the doctors were so ignorant that they did not know what caused it, and consequently could not administer the proper remedy. In any case very few recovered; most people died within about three days of the appearance of the tumours described above, most of them without any fever or other symptoms.

The violence of this disease was such that the sick communicated it to the healthy who came near them, just as a fire catches anything dry or oily near it. And it even went further. To speak to or go near the sick brought infection and a common death to the living; and moreover, to touch the clothes or anything else the sick had touched or worn gave the disease to the person touching. "

Varying Reactions to Disaster

".Such fear and fanciful notions took possession of the living that almost all of them adopted the same cruel policy, which was entirely to avoid the sick and everything belonging to them. By so doing, each one thought he would secure his own safety.

Some thought that moderate living and the avoidance of all superfluity would preserve them from the epidemic. They formed small communities, living entirely separate from everybody else. They shut themselves up in houses where there were no sick, eating the finest food and drinking the best wine very temperately, avoiding all excess, allowing no news or discussion of death and sickness, and passing the time in music and suchlike pleasures. Others thought just the opposite. They thought the sure cure for the plague was to drink and be merry, to go about singing and amusing themselves, satisfying every appetite they could, laughing and jesting at what happened. They put their words into practice, spent day and night going from tavern to tavern, drinking immoderately, or went into other people's houses, doing only those things which pleased them.

This they could easily do because everyone felt doomed and had abandoned his property, so that most houses became common property and any stranger who went in made use of them as if he had owned them. And with all this bestial behaviour, they avoided the sick as much as possible.

In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and the executors of the laws were all dead or sick or shut up with their families, so that no duties were carried out. Every man was therefore able to do as he pleased.

Many others adopted a course of life midway between the two just described. They did not restrict their victuals so much as the former, nor allow themselves to be drunken and dissolute like the latter, but satisfied their appetites moderately. They did not shut themselves up, but went about, carrying flowers or scented herbs or perfumes in their hands, in the belief that it was an excellent thing to comfort the brain with such odours; for the whole air was infected with the smell of dead bodies, of sick persons and medicines.

Others again held a still more cruel opinion, which they thought would keep them safe. They said that the only medicine against the plague-stricken was to go right away from them. Men and women, convinced of this and caring about nothing but themselves, abandoned their own city, their own houses, their dwellings, their relatives, their property, and went abroad or at least to the country round Florence, as if God's wrath in punishing men's wickedness with this plague would not follow them but strike only those who remained within the walls of the city, or

as if they thought nobody in the city would remain alive and that its last hour had come."

The Breakdown of Social Order

"Brother abandoned brother"

"One citizen avoided another, hardly any neighbour troubled about others, relatives never or hardly ever visited each other. Moreover, such terror was struck into the hearts of men and women by this calamity, that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle his nephew, and the sister her brother, and very often the wife her husband. What is even worse and nearly incredible is that fathers and mothers refused to see and tend their children, as if they had not been theirs.

Thus, a multitude of sick men and women were left without any care, except from the charity of friends (but these were few), or the greed, of servants, though not many of these could be had even for high wages.

Moreover, most of them were coarse-minded men and women, who did little more than bring the sick what they asked for or watch over them when they were dying. And very often these servants lost their lives and their earnings.

Since the sick were thus abandoned by neighbours, relatives and friends, while servants were scarce, a habit sprang up which had never been heard of before.

Beautiful and noble women, when they fell sick, did not scruple to take a young or old man-servant, whoever he might be, and with no sort of shame, expose every part of their bodies to these men as if they had been women, for they were compelled by the necessity of their sickness to do so. This, perhaps, was a cause of looser morals in those women who survived."

Mass Burials

"The plight of the lower and most of the middle classes was even more pitiful to behold. Most of them remained in their houses, either through poverty or in hopes of safety, and fell sick by thousands. Since they received no care and attention, almost all of them died. Many ended their lives in the streets both at night and during the day; and many others who died in their houses were only known to be dead because the neighbours smelled their decaying bodies. Dead bodies filled every corner. Most of them were treated in the same manner by the survivors, who were more concerned to get rid of their rotting bodies than moved by charity towards the dead. With the aid of porters, if they could get them, they carried the bodies out of the houses and laid them at the door; where every morning quantities of the dead might be seen. They then were laid on biers or, as these were often lacking, on tables.

Such was the multitude of corpses brought to the churches every day and almost every hour that there was not enough consecrated ground to give them burial, especially since they wanted to bury each person in the family grave, according to the old custom.

Although the cemeteries were full they were forced to dig huge trenches, where they buried the bodies by hundreds. Here they stowed them away like bales in the hold of a ship and covered them with a little earth, until the whole trench was full."

References:

- Boccaccio, Giovanni, *The Decameron* vol. I (translated by Richard Aldington illustrated by Jean de Bosschere) (1930);
Gottfried, Robert, *The Black Death* (1983).
"The Black Death, 1348," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2001).

Looking closer to home, Samuel Pepys, the great diary writer, wrote of the plague 1663-65 and there were many events he wrote of that would be recognisable in today's pandemic.

So pandemics are not new. Neither is our response to them it seems.

Even the bible is a reminder of this fact.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it should help provide some indication:

God sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians before the Israelites left Egypt. These plagues include the plague of blood, the plague of frogs, the plague of lice (gnats), the plague of flies, the plague of livestock, the plague of boils, the plague of hail, the plague of locusts, the plague of darkness, and the death of the firstborn (Exodus 7:14–12:36).

God promised judgment if the people of Israel turned against the Lord. Part of God's judgment included plagues (Leviticus 26:25).

God sent a three-day plague to wipe out 70,000 men after King David sinned by numbering the people of Israel (2 Samuel 24:10–17).

Amos prophesied that God would send several judgments against the nation of Israel, including plagues similar to what Egypt endured (Amos 4:10).

God sent several judgments against the nation of Judah, including a plague, when he sent King Nebuchadnezzar to sack Jerusalem (Jeremiah 21:7, 24:10, 29:17).

The plagues described in the Book of Revelation including those sent by the two witnesses (Revelation 11:6) and the seven final plagues sent by God (Revelation 15:1).

In themselves, pandemics are not an indication of 'end times' but a reminder we are not God. We may have a wonderful grasp of technology and science, but we are just as vulnerable to the quirks of nature as any other creature. Covid-19 has proved that once again, and for those willing to look at the evidence, to see that what we call 'civilization' is little more than an a human affectation.

Many of the human disasters we have faced are little more than 'own goals'. That is not to say God will not use them to bring about His purpose. Wars, global warming, pollution, waste, environmental and social abuse, over industrialisation, global poverty, (to name but a few), are down to some seriously selfish human activity.

It seems we don't need God to bring about our own destruction as we are sufficiently capable of that without His assistance.

So what about 'end times'?

Look at Matthew, chapter 24, for example, but it's not the only reference.

(I offer a word of caution. It would be easy to think that this text was one complete and flowing discourse, but it is not. It is more likely a collection of teachings that Matthew (and subsequent editors) collated. It may seem that some texts are 'out of place' or have an air of incongruity about them. It may also seem that there are parts of the texts that are edited clarifications or additions deposited in Jesus name. Don't let that put you off. The essence of truth is still there.)

The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times (NIV)

<p>24:1 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."</p>	<p>The first sign Jesus talks about is the destruction/dismantling of the Temple. Here, the destruction is complete, and taking the bible literally, whilst some remnants of the temple complex remain standing, the end times are yet to come.</p>
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	<p>That is not to say that it couldn't happen as part of some cataclysmic disaster. As with other things in the bible, is Jesus referring to the physical or spiritual Temple?</p> <p>One might consider that it is spiritually already destroyed in the resurrection of Jesus, and if that is correct then it has implications in how we are to look at 'end times'.</p>
<p>4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many.</p>	<p>I would certainly include 'the church' in this inclusion, not just individuals.</p> <p>I will reiterate that our primary responsibility is to God and God alone.</p> <p>Our secondary responsibility is to the welfare (physical and spiritual) of 'our neighbour', anyone in need. Our response should be guided in the light of our primary responsibility and not just be a case of unilateral humanitarian good will.</p>

<p>3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"</p>	<p>Behind 'closed doors'.</p> <p>Three questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. when? 2. what evidence? 3. what then?
<p>6 You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed.</p>	<p>KEY PRINCIPLE:</p> <p>Hold your nerve whatever happens, do not lose faith.</p>
<p>Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.</p> <p>7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.</p> <p>There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.</p>	<p>These things are not the signs of the end times but precursors.</p> <p>There are two ways to read this. One is to look at earthly events and natural disasters, but the other is to look at these events spiritually.</p> <p>Consider the general collapse of 'the church', the lack of real teaching, etc.</p>
<p>8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.</p>	<p>Worse is to come but not without purpose or grace.</p>

<p>9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.</p>	<p>Step 1: Global persecution and silencing of Christians</p>
<p>10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,</p>	<p>Step 2: A global rejection of the Christian faith and its principles</p>
<p>11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.</p> <p>12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,</p>	<p>Step 3: ‘Christianity’ will be infiltrated and re-labelled and re-packaged. It will cease to promote God’s Word and instead promote ‘self-interest’, living for the moment, hedonism and immoral diversity. Much of this will emanate from within ‘the church’ itself, and will be received gladly by most church goers.</p> <p>The faithful will leave.</p>
<p>13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.</p>	<p>KEY PRINCIPLE: Hold your nerve whatever happens, do not lose faith.</p>

<p>14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.</p>	<p>Note the emphasis on the words ‘this gospel of the kingdom’.</p> <p>Remember the words of Jesus, ‘The kingdom of God is amongst you.’ It is very much ‘here and now’.</p> <p>This is not the gospel ‘the church’ is teaching.</p>
<p>15 “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—</p>	<p>See Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11. This reference feels out of place and much more like a later insertion.</p> <p>However, it is worth considering whether the ‘abomination’ is something physical’ or ‘spiritual’, or both.</p> <p>Could it simply be ‘despair’ or is it something that is essentially demonic in nature?</p>
<p>16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.</p>	<p>Escape or separate yourselves?</p>

<p>17 Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house.</p> <p>18 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.</p>	<p>Do not hang on to those things that will hold you back or be an encumbrance to your faith.</p>
<p>19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!</p> <p>20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.</p>	
<p>21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again.</p>	<p>This will be a ‘one of’.</p> <p>Implicit within this statement is that there will be a remnant of survivors and there will be life after this event.</p>
<p>22 “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.</p>	<p>Even in terrible times, God’s grace prevails.</p> <p>There is a mixture of tenses in this verse, a mixture of past and future, which is worth considering.</p>

	Does this allude to the nature of God transcending time?
<p>23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it.</p> <p>24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.</p> <p>25 See, I have told you ahead of time.</p>	<p>Jesus again speaks of religious deceivers, those who are seemingly able to do Godly and great acts.</p> <p>He warns that even the faithful are not immune to these deceits, and for them to be aware of the dangers they face.</p> <p>This applies as much to faith groups as individuals.</p>
<p>26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it.</p>	<p>An alluding to there only being one John the Baptist, and then possibly a post-resurrection reference.</p>
<p>27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.</p>	<p>The coming of the Son of Man will be unmistakable.</p>
<p>28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.</p>	<p>This fragment seems out of place and out of context.</p>

	<p>It seems to hint at a feeding frenzy at the death of 'the church'.</p>
<p>29 "Immediately after the distress of those days</p> <p>“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’</p>	<p>Note the timing of these events.</p> <p>Do these comments refer to physical events, or spiritual ones?</p> <p>(‘Stars’ referring to Christian leaders, and ‘heavenly bodies’ to Christian institutions and churches?)</p>
<p>30 “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.</p> <p>And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.</p> <p>31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.</p>	<p>‘Mourn’ is an interesting choice of word when it would make better sense for people to rejoice at the coming of the Son of Man.</p> <p>People recognising that sin has a price and it is now time to pay.</p> <p>This may suggest a coming together of the elect, both the living and the dead throughout all time.</p>

	It may not be a single moment in time but perhaps a series of events.
32 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.	A reference to being watchful, but also being able to wisely understand the signs of the times.
33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.	At best, we will know when the time is imminent without knowing exactly when.
34 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.	‘This generation’ – is this a reference for the reader’s time or was it intended to be contemporary?
35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.	What I say will or has already happened and is fixed, even beyond time and space.
36 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.	Stop asking.
37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.	Business as usual until the shop closes.

<p>38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.</p>	<p>The time for repentance has passed and the frequent warnings were ignored. It will be no different in the end times.</p>
<p>That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.</p>	<p>No one can say who will be saved and who will not. Only God truly knows and is able to see into the hearts of men. Note the references to working in the field and making bread – both these have special scriptural significance.</p>
<p>42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.</p>	<p>Don’t ask, just watch!</p>
<p>43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, (cont.)</p>	

<p>he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.</p>	
<p>44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.</p>	<p>No complacency.</p>
<p>45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?</p> <p>46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.</p> <p>47 Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.</p>	<p>Reward and punishment.</p> <p>Faithfulness, integrity and consistency in respect of one’s allotted gifts, talents and skills.</p> <p>Servant: does this refer specifically to ‘the church’, the elect, those who claim to be Christian, or all people in general?</p>
<p>48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.</p>	<p>Any abuse of responsibility will be discovered and dealt with. This should be a clear warning to ‘the church’ and those who say they speak in God’s Name.</p>

<p>50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.</p> <p>51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.</p>	
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Does this help explain 'end times'?

Or is it a case of looking for answers just raises more questions.

Perhaps it clarifies some things but it begs more questions, not so much about the content of Jesus' words, but actually how we come to understand and apply them.

The orthodox or accepted teachings of 'the church' haven't helped as the teachings have been selectively developed to suit the various theologies of the different denominations and their canons and traditions. It has in fact usurped the real authority of God and diluted scriptural authenticity.

So is the current Covid-19 pandemic proof of these being the 'end times'?

The best answer I can give is 'not on its own'. It will likely be one indicator of many. There will be others but we need to prayerfully pull the evidence together.

What is clear is that the end times are still to come and we need to be both watchful and prepared. We will not know the exactly when they will happen or how quickly all the events will come together.

Currently we are in a time of grace, but it won't last forever. We don't know how long it will last and we still have work to do - as verses 40-41 suggest, we will be required to work to the last moment. Worryingly, I do not see that sense of urgency, rather complacency and lack of purpose in general 'church' life.

There is a real possibility that we have much of our thinking about 'end times' very wrong, and that helps no one. If we really want to make the best use of the limited remaining time, we as Christians, need to be able to put forward a cogent and valid theology regarding the Gospel and the consequences of ignoring it. It can't be theory, we have to believe it and live it like our lives/our futures depended on it. The truth is it does even if those around us 'just don't get it'.

What it needs is a new look at the whole box of scriptural pieces, not just some (you can't just cherry pick), and not with fixed (theological/denominational) viewpoints, but with open and searching minds.

If we try and make pieces fit where they don't belong we will never see an end result, and may actually cause irreparable damage to some pieces.

We can't throw away the pieces we don't like either otherwise. It's all needed.

Something about cornerstones being rejected comes to mind.....

A [very] personal reflection....

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ (Wales)

Reflecting, as there has been much time to do during lockdown, upon one's own mortality, and one's amazing if curious path of faith, I resonated with the Irish priest on this morning's Radio 4 service, with my 'release' from regular [and for me tedious] regular Sunday worship, much repeated and much-mythologised ritual with less and less liturgy of any quality or excellence, by being drawn into the AIC, then when that exploded due to man-made bigotry, prejudice, in-fighting and fraudulence, being deep into study of the Desert Fathers, the founders of the faith, the martyrs and the philosophers, wondering whether it was almost time for a University or College course to update my thinking, the monastic personal oratory disciplines of solo and private liturgical discipline made itself known to me and - of such value and delight and reassurance - I began to make it my own. Thomas Merton also featured for me, as for this morning's speaker, with Cardinal John Henry - now saint - and his wrestling with the traditional church, with some of those who had had their toes in the Tiber for many years and 'swam across', something which I was unable for five deep reasons, to do.

Now, during lockdown, to have been able to converse with lap-top devices and written papers and sharing of theology with valued colleagues, and counselling [for nearly two decades structured with and for LGBT and others] since retirement from teaching - and directing musical liturgy where it was needed and sought - with sermon links and suggestions, I realise, in retrospect, as one often does come to recognise, the clear Hand of God, in my life and thinking and devotion, increasing and widening, deepening what was already there in embryo, and instead of my doing the directing myself, as for sixty years of church music-making, letting HIS hand do the guiding, presenting the opportunity to serve as most appropriate and needful. I praise Him for all that is past and all that is to come, in His Will and, prayerfully, being spared for yet more unexpected challenge and service.

I remember one counsellor and advisor I had back in the 60s, told me 'when He calls you, He will break you, and then build you...in His design, not yours. I didn't believe it then. I surely do now.

Fr. Ed

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available with instructions to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

5th April, 2020

3rd May, 2020

7th June, 2020

5th July, 2020

2nd August, 2020

6th September, 2020

4th October, 2020

1st November, 2020

6th December, 2020

19th January, 2020

16th February, 2020

15th March, 2020

19th April, 2020

17th May, 2020

21st June, 2020

19th July, 2020

16th August, 2020

20th September, 2020

18th October, 2020

15th November, 2020

20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

November 2020



To my beloved Godchild,

I hope you are well in the current pandemic climate and resulting chaos, and you are remaining diligent in your duties: enjoying what you can of the limited freedoms we still have and also stirring what remains of abandoned and lost souls.

Diligence is necessary and let not your doubts deter you from your responsibilities in Christ, for who would otherwise preach the saving Gospel of Christ.

Sadly, many priests have abandoned their true calling in favour of the things that please man rather than God, and have strayed from the truth. The sad thing is that they have also deceived their congregations and cause them to stray too, and for what gain? There will be a lasting price to pay and their guilt will be great.

I caution you to stay away from their presence and have no contact with them lest they entice you into their darkness with fine words that are born of silky tongues that tickle your ears with easy whispers. (I love this old fashioned imagery!)

They are become the tools of darkness that would take you from the light and convince you their evil is good and Godly.

Believe and trust them not lest you lose your way, and your soul for temporary and transitory pleasures. They count as nothing in the great eternal scheme of things.

You already know what is right and good, so do not let others deceive you into thinking otherwise. Not everyone is a friend to be trusted or confided in, but do not be swayed by this – be confident in your faith, express it in your behaviour and treat each person without favour or prejudice.

That does not mean you have to be a slave to the perceptions of others as to what a Godly person shall be. God gave us life and it is to be lived and enjoyed to the full even though the toil is sometimes hard.

He put beauty all around us to appreciate and bring us gladness of heart but even the Godless would take that away from us. They will tell you quickly enough not to gaze upon the beauty of young women for they say 'it is sin'. Since when did appreciating beauty in creation become sin?

It would be a sin not to. However, you should not be entrapped by it. Beauty can capture your heart and mind and lead you astray if you so desire, so take care. Look, appreciate, but do not take liberties.

I have found wisdom comes with age, as do aches and pains. These days I find myself being less troubled with the affairs of the world and find myself looking heavenward with anticipation and envy.

However, there is still God's work to complete and He will call me when He is ready.

It seems an unnecessary burden to bear that I cannot do well or do with ease what I could in my youth. Still God knows what He is about. Perhaps it is His way of teaching me humility or how to let go of the gifts and skills He has entrusted me with for someone with greater energy and vision. God's gifts are not ours but His, and what He has entrusted unto us can also be taken away. It is the economy of His way.

Hopefully, when it comes to hearing the call of God, I will have some semblance of hearing remaining when that time comes. It has not escaped my notice that the older we tend to get, the less we tend to hear. Whether that is by deliberate choice or by circumstance is not always easily discerned but it is something we should be aware of as our youth becomes more distant.

I have also noticed that with my time on this earth being shorter by default, I am much less tolerant of fools and the garrulous – I have less time to waste and a better appreciation of what remains.

(I have found myself wishing people would learn the art of silence rather than testing their unending views, advice and opinions upon my patience. It would be more tolerable if they had something useful to say or would do something positive to change the world rather than keep on complaining.)

It makes me wonder whether God feels the same about our never-ending petitions and prayer concerns. It's not as if God doesn't know what He is doing or what our needs are already without repeated reminders. He certainly does not need our advice when we are making such a mess of our own lives!

Changing the direction of our conversation, your recent communication with the gentleman who purports to be the representative head of one particularly self-important 'church', the result was hardly surprising.

One of the dark arts of 'the evil one' has is to convince those with authority they have none and that they have no power to change what should be changed. They become spiritually emasculated, giving up what they have through restless despair and ineffectuality.

Instead of fighting the darkness, they slowly let it engulf them, and they step into the shadows.

One of the signs is that they distance themselves from the people those who seek their help. They build more and more obstacles and layers in their unnecessary hierarchies to keep the people at arm's length.

If you are fortunate enough to get an answer to any missive, it will be neutral and full of grey words. There is a fear of commitment, decision and action. That is another sign that the darkness is engulfing those with authority. You might state rightly that their procrastination is a work of the darkness.

On the other subject you raised, the Old Testament prophets spoke of not making graven images. If the church had stayed faithful to this teaching then the desecration of public statues by the socially and politically disaffected would not have become the problem it has become, however fleeting and newsworthy it is.

Their cause may have some justification but it is more a chaotic disaffection, and I think any excuse would suffice in the current social climate. The situation exists and regardless of how it has arisen, it has to be faced and dealt with.

Misty answers and vague promises for action are hardly the way forward.

Neither can society allow civil disobedience without the risk of anarchy. It is not enough to use a populist movement as justification for law breaking, even if they have a legitimate point to make.

We already live in times where there is a blatant disregard for God's teachings, ordinances and institutes. Not only is the church under attack but so are the very basics of social construct and stability. It's all about 'self' when it comes down to it. Yet 'the church' remains mostly silent on all of these things and does nothing.

What people don't realise is that 'self' has no power to save even itself from sin. Rather it is driven by it. As for the life beyond death, it has traded it for a few moments of selfish pleasure. And these are the same people God wants us to save.....

Yes, I have to get past my judgemental self and rather than saying 'it serves you right', I have to see them through God's eyes and accept that God sees something of worth in them, people He let His Son die for that they may know real life, not the shadowy deception the world offers alternatively.

It is at this moment I realise I am a little bit too cynical and that the love God put in my heart has been deceived a little by the darkness. We all need to be careful and constantly vigilant.

The law was given to guide us away from sin, not to condemn us (or justify our condemnation of others), but it failed because of our weakness. In an act of deliberate defiance we took it from God but it brought nothing but death.

We proved we simply couldn't be trusted to use the law for the greater good, to bring us into God's presence. Instead we used it to drive people away by telling them they were sinners undeserving of God's love and that they were irredeemable unless they conformed to our way of thinking. This was backed up by two thousand years of canon, tradition, rules and regulations.

It was a deception well-conceived by 'the church'. Even they started to believe it.

'The church' simply took God's place with threats, coercion and part truths. Unlike God, it had nothing to offer for loyalty and love, and instead carried the guilt for keeping the very people it was supposed to be leading to God away from Him.

God in the meantime handed the power back to those who could be trusted. Not the organization but the people. They didn't need intermediaries. They could communicate with God themselves on a one to one basis. Jesus made that possible and continues to make it possible, even in these present times.

In some ways I am pleased that the current pandemic has revealed the truth of our situation. The 'organized and institutional church' has failed disastrously and the truth is revealed despite the rhetoric. It can't even save itself, let alone its followers.

Some will be saved in spite of 'the church' but it will come down to the individual relationships that are constantly being renewed and grown in love and faith.

Up until now I have tried to avoid using the word 'love' quite deliberately. What Holy Writ says of 'love' is not the same as the world understands it to be.

Christian love is uncompromising and tough. It is an act of faith and demands God being placed first in all things and 'our neighbour' taking precedence over our own needs providing God's law is not compromised.

This is a very different view to that of the world that sees love as something sexually driven and selfish to its core. This kind of 'love' (easily confused with 'lust') is all about self-gratification, nothing else. It leads to spiritual death, not spiritual life. It is about the moment, not the eternal. It is about 'me and my needs' rather than 'you and your needs'.

It is a temporary fix that inevitably becomes more self-centred and more extreme as time goes on. It cannot be satisfied or sated until it becomes terminal.

There is no release other than in God, and then it is not decided by act of will alone but is accompanied by true contrition and repentance. God know when it is real and when it is nothing more than a last desperate attempt at self-preservation.

My beloved child, I feel I have already rambled on too long but forgive my foolishness and bear with me. There is much I need to share with you that you may be wise and may profit from. I am an old man, nearing eternal life (if it is within God's will). Remember though, time is not as we see it but as God sees it.

I wish you great happiness in your life but it has to be worked for and is much dependent on others, not just yourself. Life is not about 'things' but instead is about giving and receiving real and giving love. It has nothing to do with personal gain – love cannot thrive where there is selfishness. Indeed it will slowly die.

Love your wife as much as God loves His chosen ones. Be generous but do not let her will rule yours, or yours her. It will only end in deep resentment.

As Christ is the head of the church, you are the head of the household and must rule as He does, with love, compassion and forgiveness. Want only the best for her. Be gentle but be resolute, especially in matters of faith. If you compromise your faith, then what about you can be relied on?

Remember that your position comes with authority and responsibility. Do not overstep what is granted you and break that trust.

There is a common saying, 'happy wife, happy life'. Be careful how you understand that. That does not mean that your wife should rule over you and her word become law, but that you accept and understand what it means to be 'husband', and she 'wife', and the joint and separate responsibilities and roles that you each have been given by God. It is not about domination.

It is not a 'partnership' as the world understands it to be either, for partnerships are disposable and temporary, matters of convenience and personal profit.

Marriage instead is the permanent joining of two different and unique components that become greater than the sum of their two individual parts.

There will always be tensions unless the two wills become one, and stay one. It is the perfect test of true fellowship and love, and also of patience. Self has no place in marriage. If it does it will tear down whatever has been built, stone by stone, until nothing remains but desolation and rubble.

Unlike a partnership, this kind of marriage cannot be dissolved, even if society deems otherwise.

This kind of marriage leaves an indelible mark and ties that cannot be broken, even if you choose to be separated. Divorce is physically and spiritually impossible.

This kind of marriage impacts and drives all other relationships and colours them rather than the contrary, where other relationships are allowed to drive what happens in the marriage.

Sadly, what society considers as 'marriage' these days is little more than permission to be legally promiscuous, one person at a time. There is no intention of permanence, just an attitude of 'if it doesn't work out I can get divorced and start over again'. Believe me when I say that is not 'marriage' as God has decreed it to be.

It is in our nature to get things wrong and God understands this. It is why the law exists, not to prosecute but to guide.

Jesus came to 'fulfil the law' according to the Gospels and early theologians, but I would argue a slightly different case. He came to clarify the law and put it back in the people's hands. It is not something to be obeyed because there is no alternative, but rather to be lived, and therein lies the difference.

'Love God' and 'love your neighbour as you would be loved yourself' is the law in its most basic form. Everything else comes from those two intertwined precepts. They are not separate as some suggest.

How can you truly love God if you don't know how to love those around you?

How can you love others if you do not see something worthy of love in yourself?

How can you love yourself if you do not understand or deny that God sees in you something worthy of His love, no matter how small?

The essence of this love is based on forgiveness. We forgive because we love. We are able to continue loving because we forgive. Not to forgive is to build walls and judge others as unworthy of love.

But there is a toughness in this love – sometimes it needs to hold back a little until people have learned that love and forgiveness have to be earned.

These are not rights but gifts, and speaking of gifts, we know it is not a good thing to give them if they are not appreciated or deserved or are going to be rejected, misused or abused.

Remember that forgiveness does not and cannot change what has happened. What has been done cannot be undone and it impacts everything that remains and is to come. Forgiveness changes relationships, not what is historical.

So that brings us back to the present times.....

Given everything that is going on around us, are we living in the End Times?

I do not know, but we should live as if we are. As Christians, it would not be good for us to be found wanting at the sudden return of our Lord. If by example we cannot be trusted, then what hope is there for the rest of mankind?

All that is required in these present times is for us to be attentive to our duties and calling, and be diligent in its execution. We have all we need and are prepared, even if we think not. God has already given us that which we require.

He will come when He is ready, and many will be caught unawares and be full of excuses. They will already have been judged by their own actions. The truth cannot be avoided – it is what it is, and it is impossible to lie to or deceive God.

He already knows the truth.

All we need to do is stand in His light and we will see plainly what we have become. It is then a matter of whether the love that binds God and us together is enough.

Put another way, do we have enough faith to look beyond our sin and failure and turn to God, or do we turn away, condemned by our own guilt?

The consequences of the latter are unthinkable.

We therefore need to make sure in our weakness that we are right with God at all times. Tomorrow won't do. He may come before we are prepared.

I find myself asking more and more, 'what is the role of the church' if my relationship with God is between me and Him, then the church is an unnecessary add-on.

I suppose it comes down to those two commands of Jesus, 'Love God' and 'Love your neighbour as you yourself would be loved'.

The first is personal, the second is communal.

Perhaps 'the church' is better defined as the love of God in the community, and therefore is the communal moral and spiritual consciousness that shapes the little bit of civilization we occupy.

I like that idea very much but that places 'the church' in a servant capacity in the community, serving God, serving its members and serving the community it is placed in.

It is a very different kind of church to the one we actually have.

It is a pity 'the church' has lost that understanding and purpose and become distant from God and the people it is supposed to serve. It is not easy to find the point at which it strayed from being servant and took upon itself the role of master.

Well, the principle is 'what God gives, God can take away', and this can occur in many different ways.

Perhaps the decline of the traditional 'church' is something of its own making and well deserved.

All I mostly see is self-interest and self-serving when it comes to protecting the status quo. The concept of 'one church with Christ as its head' (1 Corinthians 12) was dismissed at least 1500 years ago as denominationalism took hold.

The rules, canons and traditions they each independently evolved proved to be an overbearing master when it came to the ordinary church member as the individual practices of the faith came under greater and greater church control. The hierarchies gradually replace the authority and wisdom of God with their own.

Any sense of Christian unity between the different 'churches' was replaced with mistrust and scepticism – 'we are the only true church, only we speak for God, only we can offer salvation...'

Division ruled then and it still does today. It is not always obvious at first glance. It can be dangerously subtle.

My beloved child, I caution you against groups like 'Churches Together' who proclaim ecumenism. The truth is they do not. They are selective in who they allow to join them and deny many. Such groups as 'Churches Together' may have started with good intent but like many 'churches', they become an end in themselves and serve little Godly purpose. They are an anathema based on power and control rather than faith and love. And they will die as quickly as they came.

Not everything therefore that appears to be of God actually is. The biblical truth, 'you shall know them by their fruits' is still as pertinent as it ever was. The truth always comes out. It cannot be hidden for ever.

Let me take you back to those two commandments, 'Love God', and 'love your neighbour as you would be loved'. Where does it speak of or give justification to the power and authority of 'the church'?

The priority is firstly your relationship with God and secondly your relationship with your neighbour.

I am not saying that 'the church' doesn't have a place in this, but it does have limited context, something it often overstates and hopes we would believe.

Truthfully, it only has the authority and power we are prepared to allow it. That actually is very critical. It has no power or authority of its own, something 'the church' does not want us to know or understand.

It wants us to believe that its power and authority comes directly from God. It clearly doesn't and its fruit bears this out.

We shouldn't take 'the church' too seriously because 'the church' is nothing more than a 'man-made' construct where people of like minds (and prejudices and opinions) meet to get their 'religious fix', the one that says they are right and everyone else is misinformed and destined for hell.

The point that is being missed is that it is what happens outside of these artificial constructs that matters. That is where the real church is.

Put another way, your faith is the 24/7 part of your life, your religion is the two hours or so a week you go to 'church'.

You can maintain a deception or live a lie for two hours a week but it can't be maintained 24/7 and the truth will quickly be revealed by your actions. You can't hide what you are. 'The truth is out there' (Mulder).

Going to 'church' can be useful. It's a good place to share problems in a secure environment amongst friends, find some quiet space for prayer, be uplifted by hymns and get some good biblical teaching (if you are fortunate), but it all needs to be constantly tested, particularly regarding teaching.

Different denominations have different theologies and selective teaching can just reinforce these. Be cautious and questioning about intent and motive, but be very grateful and appreciative for any good teaching you receive, wherever it comes from, in or out of season.

Liturgy is good example of 'control'.

There is comfort in repeated patterns of worship and familiar words but there is a danger of believing that only one form is right and all others are wrong. It can end up being very divisive if pursued to its logical conclusion.

Used properly it can be very inclusive, but used wrongly can be very destructive and damaging. It can also be form of continual 'brainwashing' at its worst.

And it is only 'by tradition' we have liturgy.

Just as I questioned the place of 'church' when I quoted two commandments, 'Love God', and 'love your neighbour as you would be loved', the same applies to liturgy. Neither 'church' nor 'liturgy' is mentioned at all. Nor vestments, nor hymns, nor ritual, nor tradition, nor canon.

These two commandments are about relationships (God, neighbour, me), not form and practice of religion, so why should these lesser things occupy our minds and time when there are much more important things to consider and discern.

Therefore my dear Godchild, see things for what they are in God's eyes and take no note of the world and its deceptions, however impressive and important they may seem.

The things of the world cannot save you, only God can do that, so see things in their proper perspective.

Give respect where it is due and treat all men as you would wish to be treated yourself, even if you think they don't deserve it. They have their position according to God's will just as you have yours and to judge them is to usurp and judge God.

However great or humble people may appear, they are still subject to God and will be judged by Him, just as you will when the time is come, so keep your slate clean.

Keep the things of this life in perspective and take time to laugh at all its absurdities whenever you come across them. There are many things the world considers important but they rarely are and they rarely last more than a few days in the public eye before there is something new and more urgent. Mostly they are the result of our own lack of care and forethought, but it never ceases to amaze me how frequently and quickly the godless blame God for their discomforts.

Natural disasters and catastrophes, war, pestilence and plague are inevitable facts of life that we have little control over. Nevertheless, remember that you are not just God's eyes and ears, but also His mouth, hands and feet. You are His agent on earth, the bearer of His love and a gateway to His presence. You have His authority too.

Just do what you can, when you can, if and when you feel so led.

Do not be surprised if your works are rejected as not all welcome God's presence or light.

Prayer is often a more effective and constructive means to an end, but there is no harm in trying for the most part. A gift or some assistance may be offered, but it doesn't mean it has to be accepted or is even welcomed.

Free will is God's gift to all people no matter how much they may misunderstand or abuse that gift, and they are just as able to respond favourably as unfavourably.

You will find frequent disappointment in life, but don't let those things spoil the good things of life for they will pass quickly.

Give thanks frequently where you can and be generous in doing so, even shouting it out loudly if it is your wish.

Don't be so grown up that you cannot enjoy simple child-like pleasures of life.

Appreciate beauty, kindness, being loved and giving love to others.

Appreciate patience, faithfulness, wisdom and kindness.

Above all, appreciate God's grace and forgiveness.

Take heart too, for God is the ultimate power and authority in all things so you need not fear any circumstance that presents itself to you. Be very blessed and be a blessing to others in all you do.

Your loving Godfather.

+Jan

Mental health and a decline in the church.

You might not make an immediate link to mental health and the decline of the church but I'd like to put forward the suggestion that they are intrinsically linked.

All this was sparked off by a TV program following ambulance crews around London during a straight 24 hours of shifts. One of the crew members stated that they had seen a 45% rise in mental health related call outs in the last five years. That set me thinking.

With a decline in church going, there has been a softening of the hard lines that define society. Maybe that is part of the problem, no one knows how to behave or what to expect any more. There don't appear to be any rules anymore and that will inevitably create even more stress laden uncertainty and instability.

It may be an obvious comment to make but if you take away the foundations of social construct then everything built upon it will just collapse into chaos.

A quick flick through the web revealed the following snippets:

PremierChristian.News

A new study has revealed that young adults who regularly attend church have better mental health than those who don't.

A survey conducted by the Barna Group of 15,000 18-35 year olds found that those who weekly attended a place of worship were 10% less likely to struggle with anxiety than those who did not.

The Connected Generation study, examined the relationship between faith and mental health in millennials and generation Z across 25 different countries.

This was also picked up by ICN who stated –

A new worldwide study of 18-35 year olds has found that young people who attend church regularly are significantly more likely to be healthy mentally than those who don't.

Key findings include:

‘Respondents who attend a place of worship weekly were less likely to say they experience anxiety (22%), than those who do not attend church regularly (33%).

51% of practising Christians stated they felt "optimistic about the future" secure in who they are, able to accomplish their goals, and have someone that believes in them - compared with 34 % of those with no faith.

16% of practising Christians said they felt "lonely and isolated from others", far lower than those with no faith (31%)

28% of young people often feel sad or depressed compared with 18% among practicing Christians.

This latest report, conducted by Barna Group, The Connected Generation, surveyed more than 15,000 young adults across 26 countries, and has been released in partnership with children's charity World Vision. This survey is one of the one of the largest global studies of its kind ever to be conducted.

President of Barna Group, David Kinnaman said: "Through the largest single study in Barna's history, we've gained unique insights into the most pressing issues and concerns facing Millennials and Gen Z-cohorts who are much talked about and often misunderstood. In addition to providing many hopeful signs about the opportunities ahead of these generations, the study shows powerful connections between practicing faith and overall well-being."

Kinnaman said: "For years now, our team has gone to great lengths to listen to the stories and experiences of teenagers and young adults across the religious spectrum—from devoted and passionate adherents of Christianity and other faiths, to those for whom religion is an artefact of a bygone era. From this report we do see evidence that some key mentorships and friendships are common among young people with a faith, and patterns in the data at least suggest religion may play some role in keeping loneliness at bay."

The research suggests that faith also plays a role in how actively young people engage in voluntary work. Those who were engaged with church were more likely

to regularly contribute through volunteering to their community or world (39 per cent compared to 23 per cent) and more likely to give financially to charitable causes (23 per cent to 17 per cent).

World Vision UK CEO Tim Pilkington said: "We wanted to get a global understanding of 18-35-year-olds and what they perceive to be the challenges they face. Many elements of the findings have been illuminating, but I hope church leaders will be encouraged by the confirmation that the local church can be a place of leadership development, empowerment and a source of genuine hope."

The full report is available in both digital and print editions. For more information see: <https://theconnectedgeneration.com>'

The BMJ have also published on the long term benefits of attending church regularly:

PP66 Lifetime influences of religious attendance and beliefs on mental health and wellbeing in older age. A Kaushal, D Cadar, M Stafford, M Richards (Abstract)

'There is some evidence that religious attendance and beliefs are associated with positive outcomes for mental health and wellbeing, however there are very few studies using longitudinal data. This is important for older people as depression affects 1 in 5 people over the age of 65. The aim of this study was to investigate the lifetime influences of religion and spirituality on mental health and wellbeing in older age.

Regular church attendance (once a month or more) at age 36 and 60–64 was associated with a higher wellbeing score at age 60–64 compared to those who attended less than once a month or never.

Participants who reported ‘very strong’ religious beliefs at age 26 had a higher GHQ score at 60–64 compared to those who reported ‘little belief’.

Participants who said they had religious beliefs at age 36 had higher GHQ and wellbeing scores at 60–64, compared to those who say they had no religious beliefs at that age

Participants who reported that religion had an effect on their life at age 36 had a higher wellbeing score at 60–64 than those who reported no effect of religion on their lives.’

For more details see <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2015-206256.163>

From Science Direct:

‘Is going to church good or bad for you? Denomination, attendance and mental health of children in West Scotland’.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953603002831>

This research hints at reduced aggression with regular attendance and also the positive or negative effects of which particular church children attended.

Then there is research from the University of Nebraska:

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/188137369.pdf>

From 'Interactive Effects of Church Attendance and Religious Attendance and Religious Tradition on Depressive Symptoms and Positive Affect', authored by Philip Schwadel and Christina D. Falci

This research suggests it matters which church you went to in terms of the effect it had on your mental health.

Page 29 of the report states:

'Among Nebraskans as a whole, church attendance appears to have little relationship with mental health— both depressive symptoms and positive affect. This, however, is not the case when we take differences across religious traditions into account.

Low levels of church attendance are associated with more depressive symptoms for mainline Protestants, but not for evangelical Protestants or Catholics.

Comparing across religious traditions, we find that among regular attendees, evangelical Protestants are especially likely to report depressive symptoms, and among irregular attendees, evangelical Protestants report relatively low levels of depressive symptoms.

An important implication of this research is that religious affiliation matters.

Simply measuring church attendance without taking the context of this attendance into account misses a large part of the picture.'

Nice to see that they didn't miss that very important point.

Of course it matters which church you go to, as do the reasons why and what it gives you back in terms of your loyalty, time and commitment. It matters just how much those things empower whatever faith you have and how that in turn faith impacts on the community you are a part of.

It also matters how greater society views that church's presence too. It is easier to be part of a thriving church because of the confidence it instils rather than one that is failing and has falling numbers.

Spiritual and pastoral credibility impacts both 'the church' and the society it is placed in. This point was not lost on one of the reports cited.

It was interesting to read in the report 'Is going to church good or bad for you? Denomination, attendance and mental health of children in West Scotland' that there was a big difference between the results from the Roman Catholic Church (which is relatively stable in numbers) and the Church of Scotland (which is in decline). The loss of confidence in the Church of Scotland was felt not just by its own members but within the greater society, and these factors impacted on children's behaviour in school and manifested itself in higher levels of aggression. The mental health of individuals can mirror not just the mental health of society

but of the support institutions that are part of it. That includes churches.

Some institutions involved in mental health are beginning to realise that there is an important connection with spirituality when it comes to treating mental health problems, and it has to be accommodated rather than be ignored.

Refer to 'The impact of spirituality on mental health', by the MHA

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/impact-spirituality.pdf>

Report recommendations:

Those working in mental health services should:

1. ask service users about their spiritual and religious needs upon entry to the service and throughout their care and treatment
2. help service users to identify those aspects of life that provide them with meaning, hope, value and purpose
3. ensure that all service users including those who do not regard themselves as spiritual or religious are offered the opportunity to speak with a chaplain or other spiritual leader if desired
4. provide good access to relevant and appropriate religious and spiritual

resources

5. offer or make available safe spaces where users can pray, meditate, worship or practice their faith

6. provide opportunities for service users to discuss their spirituality or religion with others

7. build strong and effective links with religious and spiritual groups in the local community

8. avoid pathologising, dismissing or ignoring the religious or spiritual experiences of service users.

This is serious stuff after years of not being recognised as relevant.

Churches too are beginning to recognise that mental health and spiritual health are connected. Churches need to be fully aware of this and make sure that they are living out the Gospel, especially in the pastoral care and support they offer.

I am not suggesting that they should take on the role of professional mental health care in the community, but there is much they can offer as a natural part of their vocation and calling ('see how they love one another') at a local level.

Thriving churches seem to do this much more naturally than those that are in

decline, and they tend to have a focus on Christian living rather than liturgy, canon, ritual and tradition. However there are always exceptions to the rule.

More resources for churches and Christian communities are becoming increasingly available. This is a welcome sign things are happening.

Take Sanctuary Mental Health Ministry as an example:

<https://www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org>

It offers a free 8 week course for small groups and also has resources for helping deal with the stresses and strains to life caused by Covid-19.

Things are looking a lot more positive than they were a few years ago, but there is still a lot to do.

The most important thing I guess churches can do is re-engage with Christ if they have become bogged down with trying to survive in this changing social, moral, economic and political climate.

If they have lost that engagement with Christ then they may as well close because they have evolved into little more than ineffective based church social clubs. That engagement is the key to successful and effective ministry, lack of it is an admission of failure. It's not enough to 'talk the talk' without 'walking the walk'. Making spiritual claims is all well and good but where is the conviction and the

evidence – it begs the question are we ‘living the life’ or ‘living the lie’? It’s amazing the difference one letter can make!

Once we have engaged with Christ, we then need to engage with our fellow man.

Remember the two great commands, ‘love God’ and ‘love your neighbour as you would wish to be loved’.

Step 1 and then step 2.

Everything else drops into place.

The bible provided the social stability and it reflected itself in the definitions of society, standards and morals. They were clear and solid foundations that provided a symbiotic and balanced stability for both community and individual.

That has to be reclaimed.

The fact it has to be reclaimed is a failure of ‘the church’, and as members of the worldwide church that makes it our failure too. We can’t escape the blame because we allowed it to be possible. What happens next depends on whether we want to do something about this or whether we want to hold our hands up in despair, blame someone else for this appalling state of affairs, and do nothing else. Personally, I am not into defeatism. It always ends badly.

We are not without power, but that depends on whether we are prepared to claim

it and use it. There is always a cost and it depends whether we are willing to pay for it.

If we don't, then there will also be a cost, a different kind of cost that will affect our families and their families for many generations to come, not just in this life but the next, something we often choose to forget about.

The growing expressions of 'my needs', 'my rights above anyone else's' and 'myself' have been demonstrated to be inherently and terminally 'self-destructive' time and time again. It doesn't just affect individual but society as a whole. It has not led to the freedoms it promised but deepening uncertainty, doubt and chaos. It has delivered neither satisfaction nor fulfilment, rather just the opposite.

Put simply, it is nothing more than a deliberate contradiction of the two great commands, 'love God' and 'love your neighbour as you would wish to be loved', the results of which are now being reflected in our individual and societal mental healths. We live in and are part of an increasingly sick and dysfunctional society.

As loving and faith-filled Christians, it is time to put things right.

Time to be the responsible and loving healers and carers we were called to be in spite of everything that contradicts it.

Time to speak the truth. Time to open eyes, ears and hearts. Time to act.

'The beneficial assets of religious coping on mental health are consistent across

age, race, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic status, and they appear to be higher "for those under stressful circumstances."

Hence, religious coping serves as a valuable resource for individuals who are affected by mental illness, especially disadvantaged groups who experience substantial stress in daily life, greater rates of mental disorders, and who lack the social support and financial means to treat their illness.'

Maria Archer, 2017

<https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-positive-effects-of-religion-on-mental-illness>

How religion could influence mental health (Edited extract)

Although hundreds of studies report relationships between religious involvement and mental health, they rarely investigated the potential mediators of this relationship. Several mechanisms have been proposed to explain the influence of religion on human health.

1. Healthy behaviours and lifestyle

Several illnesses are related to behaviour and lifestyle.

The way we eat, drink, drive our automobile, have sex, smoke, use drugs, follow medical prescriptions, exam ourselves for prevention have important influences in

our health.

Most religions prescribe or prohibit behaviours that may impact health. The biblical teachings, 3000 years ago, about diet, ways to handle food, cleaning and purity, circumcision, sexual behaviour were important for preventing disease.

Today other illnesses are more relevant. Prescriptions about keeping a day of rest, the body as a sacred temple, monogamous sex, moderation on eating and drinking, peaceful relationships are doctrines that might be also helpful for contemporary health problems (related to stress, competition, individualism, narcissism, anger, shame etc.).

A good clinical example trying to apply those teachings was the research of Thoresen et al. who successfully tried to modify Type A behaviour in coronary patients through a program that included spiritual practices.

Certain religious practices are responsible for health hazards and risks. Visits to a holy shrine on specific times can enhance the risk of accidents. Prohibition of vaccines, medication or blood transfusion, endogamous marriages, violence against unbelievers, handling of poisonous snakes, the way dead bodies are handled are other examples of behaviours that can bring health problems.

1. Social support

Belonging to a group brings psychosocial support that can promote health.

Religion might provide social cohesion, the sense of belonging to a caring group, continuity in relationships with friends and family and other support groups.

Social support can influence health by facilitating adherence to health promotion programs, offering fellowship in times of stress, suffering and sorrow, diminishing the impact of anxiety and other emotions and anomie.

Social support, although important, is not the only mechanism by which religion influences health. Religion still has beneficial effects even when social support is a controlled variable.

2. Belief systems, cognitive framework

Beliefs and cognitive processes influence how people deal with stress, suffering and life problems.

Religious beliefs can provide support through the following ways: enhancing acceptance, endurance and resilience. They generate peace, self-confidence, purpose, forgiveness to the individual's own failures, self-giving and positive self-image. On the other hand, they can bring guilt, doubts, anxiety and depression through an enhanced self-criticism.

Locus of control is an expression that arises from the social learning theory and tries to understand why people deal in different ways even when facing the same problem. Why some actively act and others stay in despondency. An internal locus

of control is usually associated with well-being, and an external one with depression and anxiety. A religious belief can favour an internal locus of control with impact on mental health.

Many patients use religion to cope with medical and non-medical problems. The study of religious coping, which can be positive or negative, has emerged as a promising research field. Positive religious coping has been associated with good health outcomes, and negative religious coping with the opposite. Religious patients tend to use more positive than negative religious coping.

Positive religious coping involves behaviours such as: trying to find a lesson from God in the stressing event, doing what one can do and leave the rest in God's hands, seeking support from clergy/church members, thinking about how one's life is part of a larger spiritual force, looking to religion for assistance to find a new direction for living when the old one may no longer be viable, and attempting to provide spiritual support and comfort to others.

Negative religious coping includes passive waiting for God to control the situation, redefining the stressor as a punishment from God or as an act of the devil and, questioning (whether) 'God is love'.

3. Religious practices

Public and private religious practices can help to maintain mental health and prevent mental diseases. They help to cope with anxiety, fears, frustration, anger, anomie, inferiority feelings, despondency and isolation.

The most commonly studied religious practice is meditation. It has been reported that it can produce changes in personality, reduce tension and anxiety, diminish self-blame, stabilize emotional ups and downs, and improve self-knowledge. Improvement in panic attacks, generalized anxiety disorder, depression, insomnia, drug use, stress, chronic pain and other health problems have been reported. Follow-up studies have documented the effectiveness of these techniques. Other religious practices (such as personal prayer, confession, forgiveness, exorcism, liturgy, blessings and altered states of consciousness); may also be effective, but more studies are necessary.

4. Spiritual direction

Described as a special relationship between two human beings to help the development of the spiritual self. Its aims are to develop a relationship with God, to find meaning in life, and to promote personal growth. Several religious and psychological techniques may be used, and great similarities with psychotherapy can be found, as the same themes are discussed.

5. Idiom to express stress

In times of stress and social disorganization certain religious rituals by means of techniques that elicit altered states of consciousness, can produce catharsis, dissociative states and a special milieu to express problems and suffering.

6. Multifactorial explanation

Religion is a multidimensional phenomenon and no single fact can explain its actions and consequences. The combination of beliefs, behaviours and environment promoted by the religious involvement probably act altogether to determine the religious effects on health. However, empirical studies have had limited success in accounting the psychosocial mechanisms described above for the health-promoting effects of the religious involvement. The explanation of the mechanisms by which religion affects health has been an intellectually and methodologically challenging enterprise. (*i.e. we still don't understand how or why but it seems to work. Editor.*)

Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry: religiousness and mental health – a review.

By Alexander Moreira-Almeida; Francisco Lotufo Neto; Harold G Koenig

https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1516-44462006000300018&lng=en&tlng=en

+lan

Render to Caesar - a provocative study on money and wealth:

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ (Wales)

Christmas this year promises - or threatens - to be a bit different for most of us. The interminable preparations, which seem to commence earlier and earlier will again - maybe even more so this year for a generation of lockdown children, produce temptation to spend more liberally and generously on gifts. The number of youngsters who, in order to assist on line learning, have been provided by social services and generous firms with laptops and this form of learning seems now well-established in our 'new normal' society.

For me, the reference in Ecclesiastes 8,16 has never been more applicable this year, of all years.

"When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labour on earth then I saw all that God has done.

No-one can comprehend what goes on under the sun.

Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning.

Even a wise man claims he knows,

yet even he cannot really comprehend it."

I deeply regretted the disappearance of the Guilder, the Franc, the Mark and the Peseta, to be replaced by the rather anonymous Euro, even though little vignettes of historic monuments for each of the EU countries appeared on the currency.

It seems so long ago now as to be hidden in the memory, though our forthcoming departure at the end of this year brings it all to the fore yet again.

[Hopefully for the last time of debate, dare one say?]

The use of the Euro for me as a frequent traveller, at least prior to Covid-19, is certainly easier for me as I do not have to change money each time I go and come back. And good for my favourite Swiss Franc, which remains constant in both identity and value. And we still retain our English pound.

The taxes remain high everywhere and recent credit crunch. quantitative easing and Chancellor's 'largesse' [with our money] are struggling to cope with a world problem - all still continue to shock and amaze: the word trillion means little to me, I have to admit, but I know it must be very big indeed.

We may not have seen businessmen jumping off balconies as in the great Wall Street crash, but there are many who have lost considerable sums in the recent events, some probably losing what to them seems everything.

Businesses closed, in many cases not to re-open - others changing styles of trading in order to stay afloat. And so many fearful of what might lie ahead.

Now we, as Christians, know what is foretold, warned of, assured and underpinned – or should do. God and money, treasure on earth or in heaven is a well-worn quotation.

Self denial taught in years of youth Baptist chapel, instilled in our family a modest life - style and some scorn of wealth and money in any extravagance.

The critical Jewish leaders present Jesus with a coin and think they have him cornered at last. Let him talk his way out of this trick question!

If he could be tricked into denying the Roman taxation system, in public, then whispered word would quickly reach the authorities and it would become a Roman problem, not a problem for the Sanhedrin: which of course is the action they eventually had to take before Pontius Pilate to get him taken to the Cross.

They show him a denarius. On the obverse is the hated figurehead of Caesar, on a coin banned strictly from use in the Temple precincts, for which one had to exchange with a similarly pernicious rate of interest as I seem to feel Travelex and other agents always charge me at airports and the Post Office and banks likewise for vacation currency.

It was the required currency for all religious payments, for rites of circumcision, Bar-Mitzvah, wedding blessings, anniversaries, commemoration of their dead, buying of birds and animals for sacrifice to ensure healing and forgiveness and for all alms offered in the vast coffers of the Temple, which were the tithe of faithful Jewish adherents.

Robbing the poor, yet again, as Our Lord often pointed out.

Should we pay taxes to Caesar or give our resources, our tenth of income, our tithe, to the work of God in our Temple, or us in our churches of today?

The people eagerly listening would have understood the simplistic question easily enough, which was why the sly questioning was aimed, not at Christ, but at themselves. Upon His answer would depend the opportunity for an enormous breach in trust of a popular preacher and healer who had captured the people's imagination. If you seek a modern comparison for the way a nation responded to a leader they felt would change life for them and deliver them from a government they felt minimalised them, look at the immense popularity of Barack Obama quite recently – amazed everyone with the enthusiasm which backed his successful campaign – from grass roots to glory – the Audacity of Hope, the title of his book which I can recommend, including his strong Christian background and belief. Yet now allegations of his expecting vast state funds to support his post-presidential lifestyle, protection and former leader of his nation, and expensive foreign trips. Are any of these world leaders free of corruption, openly or in deception, we wonder?

So Jesus considers the coin presented to Him, the head of the reigning Emperor on one side and pagan images of heathen gods or emblems on the other. Jewish authorities had long declared these illegal and an intrusion on their sacred traditions. But Roman taxes had to be paid, upon pain of death.

A whole class of officials had grown up, whose job was simply to change the money and change it back - let us not go into mention of our quangos and bureaucracy in Britain – let's stay fairly uncontroversial for a moment.

Remember it was their tables Jesus turned over in the dramatic 'anger' story when he 'cleansed' the Temple. Matthew, the supposed inspiration if not the actual author of the Gospel which tells our story today, was one such who had made himself 'unclean' in the eyes of his community by handling the condemned Imperial coinage.

Remember also that these men, partly as a kind of compensation for the ostracism and unpopularity they enjoyed amongst their own people, allowed them to vary the rates of interest charged, within certain 'reasonable' [allowable] limits, but they tried to make as much as they could for their own pockets in the process and some, like Zaccheus, become very wealthy, and very hated. It was almost a protection racket. It was certainly extortion.

So Jesus throws their question back at them. Whose image and superscription appears on the coin you have shown me? Got him! Caesar's, they replied.

Then [can we believe he smiled inside or out] render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's, he rejoinders.

His answer has been the ensample of all discussions about Church and State relationships ever since.

The coin was the Emperor's and must be returned to him.

We are God's and must be returned to Him.

We are 'due' to our creator and nothing else in our lives can take precedence over that.

Let us remember that, or forget it at our cost.

Not to be concerned only with spiritual things: that wasn't the intent of his answer. How could we pray for our Queen, or for our non-Christian friends as well as the Christians, for the unemployed, the destitute, the neglected, the harmed and the abused. or for greater understanding between the nations, the G20 proposals, Brexit arguments, ourselves, in the ordinary unspiritual concerns of our everyday life and budgeting.

Politics such as these affect every one of us deeply, even though we might attempt to brush them aside. But the Church has in the past become far too involved with politics and sycophancy to government and monarchy. That is too far the other way, I would contend.

What I am rude enough to call, for my native and formerly practiced Church of England, 'the Conservative party at prayer'!! - or as a friend updated it for me the other day: "the Tory party at coffee and biscuits"

But the personal and spiritual between you and your Lord, who desires not sacrifice or burnt offerings, just the loyalty and faithfulness of the soul, is of

prior importance, whatever else is happening to us. As markets, banks and finance houses tumble around us we have to recall daily that our value is not reckoned in monetary terms but in something much higher and more consistent.

A person's value does not depend on his wealth. I saw a lovely example of this in my computer magazine, when the immense contribution 'given' to humanity by Tim Berners-Lee, creator of the World Wide Web was discussed in an interview with the man. He did not profit from the invention but, as with fairly few and select historic characters before him, gave the invention for the benefit of mankind and furtherance of knowledge and education – a remarkable story, in fact.

Tim Berners-Lee warns about 'doing things just because it is possible':

"People sometimes ask me whether I am upset that I have not made a lot of money from the Web. In fact, I made quite conscious decisions about which way to take my life. These I would not change. What does distress me, though, is how important a question it seems to be. What is maddening is the terrible notion that a person's value depends on how important and financially successful he or she is, and that that is measured in terms of money. That suggests disrespect for the researchers who are developing ideas for the next leaps in science and technology. Core in my upbringing was a value system that put monetary gain well in its place. To use net worth as a criterion by which to judge people is to set our children's sights on cash rather than on things that will actually make them happy..."

He later states,

“Our existence in one group affects that in another ...providing organisation and consistency to the world.” Tim Berners-Lee

Some of us are ‘sere’ enough to remember our old coin, the Sovereign. Jesus taught us the sovereignty of God in all things. God has created everything, including Caesars and their coins, Europe and its Euros, banks and their vaults. No ruler, nor realm, nor power nor principality has dominion over Him or His subjects, us.

Two lessons emerge, then, from our Scriptures.

The Church and its faithful adherents must always strive to present the Christian conscience and the Christian influence we can effect, through our MPs, our newspapers, our conversation and our witness for the improvement and uplifting of our nation.

Second we can never separate the sacred and secular. Humanity is composed of body, mind and soul. These are indivisible and inter-dependent.

If your soul suffers from some deep spiritual malady or malaise, your body will reflect it – and so will your conversation.

Moaning, complaining, sounding negative, sounding over-worldly will all degrade the example set us by Our Master, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Remember that Christ took ordinary human things, grain from the fields, water and wine, bread and fish and transformed them, as he will also transform us, if we let Him, into objects of His power and value in His world, which He left us to continue when He returned to His Father in Heaven. We give Him our gifts and He makes them worthy of His service, however small and insignificant they may seem to us to be.

Paul, with Timothy, in Philippians 3 reminded us...

'Whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him'.

May that be so for each of us, this day and for the rest of our lives, that we may come in time to His eternal Kingdom, and dwell with Him and understand fully all His promises to us. AMEN.

A favorite hymn of mine encourages me:

Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy,
the praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.

O magnify the Lord with me,
with me exalt his name!
when in distress, to him I called
he to my rescue came.

The hosts of God encamp around
the dwellings of the just;
his saving help he gives to all
who in his mercy trust.

O taste his goodness, prove his love!
experience will decide
how blessed they are, and only they,
who in his truth confide.

Fear him, you saints, and you will then
have nothing else to fear;
his service shall be your delight,
your needs shall be his care.

To Father, Son and Spirit, praise!
to God whom we adore
be worship, glory, power and love,
both now and evermore!

Let us pray:

Lord you told us that a person's life does not consist of the things he possesses.

Help us not to judge others by what they have, nor feel we are diminished by being different. Help us not to always want for more and more for ourselves, but be ever conscious of the needs of others less fortunate than ourselves and to spend our lives seeking the true riches that will endure to life everlasting. AMEN.

O Lord our God, give us by your Holy Spirit a willing heart and a ready hand to use all your gifts to your praise and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

A prayer of Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Lord, when I hear how others praise and pray to you, giving themselves to you without reserve, I am ashamed of my own misgivings and half-heartedness.

Fill me with such love for you that I may long to give myself to you too. Let the lesser loves of everyday life and possession take their proper place in my affections, leaving you to be the first in my life.

Here I am, Lord – body, heart and soul.

Grant that with your love I may be big enough to reach the world and small enough to be at one with you, Lord, AMEN

and of St Ignatius Loyola...

Take, Lord, all my liberty. Receive my memory, my understanding and my whole will.

Whatever I have and possess, you have given me; to you I restore it wholly and to your will I surrender it for my direction.

Give me the love of you only, with your grace and I am rich enough; nor ask I anything beside. AMEN.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and remain with us all, now and for ever AMEN

-oOo-

CODEX ZACYNTHIUS

I read with fascination, in the Daily Telegraph, of this document and its suggestion that early Christians were not shy about stating their tenets and fundamental principles in the face of dissent and even heresy. "Surprising open-mindedness of early Christians" was a finding of academics using multi spectral imaging in 2014 to discover an earlier document wiped from the parchment so new text could be used.

Reaching for another sheet of paper or today's simple selection of another blank 'page' on a computer screen - was not available to these early scholars who had to painstakingly write and re-write what needed to be recorded.

Professor David Parker (Principal Investigator) and Dr Hugh Houghton (Co-Investigator) led the research team on this, the oldest recorded manuscript of the Greek New Testament by Christian theologians, known as a 'catena', as well as the biblical text: copied circa 700CE and substantially the Gospel of Luke with extracts in outer margins added.

Check out the manuscript by searching www.youtube.com and references via google.

A palimpsest, the 13C manuscript was dismembered and as much ink as possible 'scraped off' and new text reconstructed to make a lectionary of Gospels, written at right angles to the earlier text...invisible until multi-spectral imagery was possible a few years ago, engendering the 2-year 2018 project at the Cambridge University Library who bought the ms in 2014.

How exciting! 'Through a glass darkly', one might say. I urge readers to explore.

Fr Ed October 2020

Advent.

High churchgoers, from Anglicans to Presbyterians, cringe when the local mall blasts Bing Crosby the day after Halloween. “Advent is a season, too, distinct from Christmas,” we crow. “Must our culture hurry everything?”

The season of Advent marks a time of holy longing and anticipation. It opens space for sitting with the stories of Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John the Baptist, of Mary, Joseph, the angel Gabriel, and the long journey to Bethlehem. Its liturgical colour, purple, is the same as Lent and links the two seasons together as similar spaces in which God’s people mourn the brokenness of the world and also participate in the sacred hope that Christ has come and will come again. To celebrate Advent is to make space for vitally important Christian practices: stillness, silence, and longing.

Yet here’s the rub—cultural Christmas starts early. As in, early early. Our local Costco had artificial Christmas trees on sale by mid-October this year. Schools and churches and community centres begin offering Christmas programs, concerts, and events before Thanksgiving turkeys have cooled. If the church holds off on the celebration of Christmas until December 24, we risk ending up so world-weary from cultural Christmas that we never properly celebrate the holier elements of the season.

The more persuasive argument, however, is that the theological practices of Advent and Christmas are not mutually exclusive. Keeping them rigorously separated might be less an exercise in Christian waiting than it is in unnecessary legalism. Why not overlap the two—celebration and

anticipation—and commemorate the birth of Christ while awaiting his return?

A blended season may be truer to the spiritual practices we're trying to sow the rest of the year for the simple reason that Jesus has been born but we are, in fact, waiting for him to come again. When we hold off until Christmas to celebrate the nativity of Christ, the advent of his second coming gets pushed to the margins, often a second thought at best and entirely forgotten at worst. Advent's purpose is to remind us of these two separate but equally impactful events, and thus celebrating one (the birth of Christ) earlier leaves space to more faithfully and fully remember the other.

The arguments for strict Advent-keeping are often drawn from Christian history and tradition, and yet a close study of the holiday's history shows us a less linear map for how Advent and Christmas should be celebrated. Christian traditions surrounding Christmastide have evolved over time, with the earliest records of festivities showing up around the fourth century. (Prior to that, Christians celebrated Easter and Pentecost, but a feast connected to the birth of Christ is absent from the writings of our earliest church fathers and mothers.)

In the Middle Ages, European children were given gifts on December 6 in honour of Saint Nicholas, a tradition that some still practice today. It was only as the Reformation started in the 1500s that the date of Christmas gift-giving began shifting to December 24, distinguishing Protestant celebrations of the holiday from Catholic ones.

Even today, if we take our cues from the global church, the liturgical Christmas season is far from straightforward.

The Catholic church traditionally practices the longest celebration, continuing Christmastide through February 2 with the feast of Candlemas, which commemorates the presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

Most Eastern churches celebrate the birth of Jesus on January 7. Liturgical Protestant communities commonly celebrate Advent the four weeks leading up to Christmas Eve and then the Christmas season following, ending with Epiphany on January 6.

Nondenominational and lower-church congregations vary widely in how they celebrate, from hanging greens before Thanksgiving to holding off on Christmas celebrations until the big day itself.

When we look to key figures from Christian history, we find that some of our greatest theologians and writers have argued—directly or indirectly—for an early Christmas. In the fourth century, for example, Saint Augustine preached a Christmas sermon on Jesus being “Born of the Father without the limits of time.” Meister Eckhart later paraphrased this idea by saying, “the birth of Christ is always happening.”

In 1629, John Milton penned a poem titled “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity,” reminding his audience that the birth of Christ had cosmic implications and needn’t be limited to one particular season of the year:

*For if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,
And speckl'd Vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous Sin will melt from earthly mould;
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering Day.*

In the same century, poet John Donne proclaimed in “The Showing Forth of Christ” that Jesus’ “birth and death were but one continual act, and his Christmas Day and his Good Friday are but the evening and morning of the same day. ... Every manifestation of Christ to the world, to the Church, to a particular soul, is an Epiphany, a Christmas day.”

Clearly, the diversity of practice that we find in Christian history and contemporary Christendom should give us room to approach the holiday season with an open spirit. There is no “right” date to begin celebrating these holy seasons, as many a Twitter curmudgeon would have us believe.

What are the benefits of blending Advent and Christmas?

First, it allows the church to unfetter some of our most theologically rich songs before Christmas Eve. From “O Holy Night” to “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,” Christmas songs turn our hearts to the plight of the oppressed and remind us of the hope for peace found only in Jesus.

An early Christmas also invites us to embrace gift-giving as an analogy of the ultimate gift God gave to us in his son, Jesus. As it is written in 1 John,

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9).

The Incarnation tips us off to the unbridled generosity of a God who comes to live among his people. It also reminds us anew that our posture before him is first that of a receiver.

Finally, the holy waiting of Advent combined with the unfettered celebration of Christmas helps us behold the sacred complexity of this season. We’re invited to light candles in the darkness, to proclaim hope through the silence, and to embrace peace amidst the violence of a world in desperate need of a Saviour.

As Philip Yancey puts it in *The Jesus I Never Knew*,

“Often a work of God comes with two edges, great joy and great pain.”

In both Advent and Christmas, Christians are invited to embrace the "already, not yet" of the human experience—the reality that Christ has come, is come, and will come again.

You may not want to blast Burl Ives from the stereo in June like I do. But go ahead and decorate that tree today if you want. It might give pleasure to your family, your neighbours, and your friends.

More than that, it'll remind you that we celebrate Christ's coming—and anticipate his second coming—all year long.

*Courtney Ellis is a pastor, speaker, and author of the forthcoming *Uncluttered: Free Your Space, Free Your Schedule, Free Your Soul* (Feb. 2019, Rose Publishing). Submitted as copy-right free material.*

Parish Prayers:

Rev David Startup OSJ (UK)

Dear Lord we come before you today to thank you for all your provision in our lives, that we enjoy every day.

We thank you for our families and our friends, who are continuously in our minds but who we see much less than normal in these distressing times of Covid 19.

Lord God we ask that you show our Leaders, pathways of wisdom and compassion, in handling today' challenges.

We pray especially for Elizabeth our Queen who in spite of her strong faith and the commitment to walk in Christian light, must wonder what on earth is going on – as do we.

We thank you for the Scientists and nursing staff who are working round the clock to keep us safe and protected. Please grant them your strength and your wisdom along with our earthly Leaders.

Show us all the safe way back to living a normal life and we ask especially that a vaccine is found to give us some sort of protection.

Please instill into those that need it, a sense of responsibility to others (and themselves) in following guidelines that will reduce the impact of coronavirus. Lord you must be tired of hearing our pleas but help us to learn and do the right thing.

Lord, we miss our daily acquaintances and especially our Christian friends terribly from day to day contact one way or another - and it's so easy to drift away from the normal way of things and the blessings of a Jesus' led life.

We pray for a renewed sense of our belonging to you Lord and being the body of Christ and for a deeper sense of belonging together, to each other. We ask for a new joyfulness and a fresh delight in and for each other's fellowship. May our renewed life together bring glory to God.

We pray for a new desire to help, care for and support each other and *all those* in need, to be kind to others and refrain from giving way to those every day events that upset or make us angry or indeed doubtful...

Give us more understanding Lord of what is going on around us. Let us find encouragement and support for others rather than joining in with dissent, divisions and discontent.

Help us to accept the thoughts and disappointments of others and offer our kindness and understanding, particularly with those who disagree.

Help us Lord to realize that during this time of turbulence, illness and blame, we are all learning how to cope, live with and overcome this terrible time in our lives.

No one is always right no one is always wrong – however - we are all learning. We pray for ourselves and our heart- felt longing and desire to be open to the work of the spirit and to allow Him to influence us, in all we say or do in Jesus' name.

We ask for freedom, joy and passion in our witness to others rather than keeping quiet and just enjoying it for ourselves.

Help us to listen to others, demonstrate our patience, and help wherever we can.

We know Lord that in times like these we are more inward looking that outward and upward.

We know Lord that Love never ever fails. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.

Lord we need your strength and your wisdom even more at this time in order to Love and be kind to ourselves and to others in a Jesus' like way.

Help us to remember all those who are suffering in any way, not just because of Covid 19, but any trial, tribulation and challenge in life they are enduring, whether it be financially, mentally, physically or emotionally. Please grant them Peace of Mind.

We pray for those known to us that are sick at this time.....

We ask that you heal them in your own way and in your own time and support those who look after them.

We remember those who have recently died.....and ask that you comfort those who have been bereaved.

Lord, we need to remind ourselves that if you are for us – then who can be against us?

Lord, help not to be anxious in anything. In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we have let our requests be made known to You. We rest in confidence then that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts & minds in Christ Jesus.

Let us all rest assured, God is with us and amongst us. Amen.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available with instructions to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ Services, 2020.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

5th January, 2020

2nd February, 2020

1st March, 2020

5th April, 2020

3rd May, 2020

7th June, 2020

5th July, 2020

2nd August, 2020

6th September, 2020

4th October, 2020

1st November, 2020

6th December, 2020

19th January, 2020

16th February, 2020

15th March, 2020

19th April, 2020

17th May, 2020

21st June, 2020

19th July, 2020

16th August, 2020

20th September, 2020

18th October, 2020

15th November, 2020

20th December, 2020

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

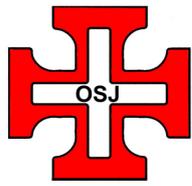
There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 8th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.



The Order of St James Newsletter

December 2020



Faith On Fire.

In the year 1510 Martin Luther visited Rome – He hiked there, about 700 miles, through a severe winter. Most Christians of his day believed they would go to heaven only if they did more good than evil, and most figured they'd fall short, so when they died God would need to purge them of their excess sin. They called this process *purgatory* and thought of it as thousands of years of misery. To reduce time in purgatory, many tried to pile up good works in this lifetime by venerating relics and doing penance. While in Rome, Martin visited the reconstructed steps of Pontius Pilate's palace – supposedly the very steps Jesus climbed on the day he was condemned. He climbed the steps on his knees, saying the Lord's Prayer on each step. The pilgrim's reward for this climb: 9 years less time in purgatory for each step. Later, Luther wrote that, reaching the top, he stood up and thought, "Who knows if it's true?"

Even today it is fair to say many Christians question 'Purgatory'. This word is used even today within the Church of Rome. Luther found himself facing a dilemma that many religious people have faced, and the issue is this: Can we reach God through doing the right things and saying the right things, and acting a certain way, or is there something more?

I'm here to tell you today that there is definitely something more.

Religion, in and of itself, does much more harm than good. Christianity, on the other hand, is a life-giving source from God Himself. I wish to discuss the difference between religion and Christianity by looking at some of the encounters Jesus had with religious people in Mark 2 and 3. Many of you will remember the time that Jesus was teaching and some friends of a paralytic man lowered him through the roof for Jesus to heal him:

*And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**” Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” **Mark 2:5-7.***

Notice the focus here – Jesus is concerned about this man's heart, while the teachers of the law are concerned about a violation of some unwritten code.

Consider Jesus' reply: ***“Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”*** Mark 2:8-11.

Jesus dealt with the man's spiritual need and then His physical need, while the entire time, the religious teachers were concerned with some technicality.

RELIGION is STERILE while CHRISTIANITY is SPIRITUAL

The religion of the teachers of the law did not focus on spiritual concerns at all. They were more worried that Jesus was doing something they didn't think He had a right to do. And so what does Jesus do? He proves that He has the right to forgive sins, by showing He had the supernatural ability to heal – something only God could do. I've seen something similar to this happen hundreds of times in churches – people focus on whether a preacher is using their favourite Bible translation and ignore the fact that people are getting saved through his ministry. Someone focuses on musical styles, rather than focusing on the fact that God is being glorified through worship regardless of style. Someone notices that a new convert has a facial piercing and neglect the fact that she is a growing, maturing child of God. The focus has to be on the spiritual – on the supernatural – on the dynamic way that Jesus ministers through us. That is Christianity, not religion. Let's consider another story in our text where we learn that:

RELIGION is filled with PRIDE while CHRISTIANITY loves PEOPLE

Jesus had called Levi the tax collector to be His disciple – we need to understand that tax collectors were somewhere down the social ladder under prostitutes and thieves, everybody hated them because they were like the HMR&C only worse. They were allowed to collect the Roman tax, and then could add to it whatever they wanted to take home in their own pockets. So you can see why people hated them.

But Jesus didn't hate them – He called this one to be His disciple. So Levi the tax collector invited Jesus over to a dinner party, and at this party were Levi's tax collector friends, and what the text describes as "notorious sinners." But notice the response of the religious elite to Jesus' presence:

When the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?" Mark 2:16.

They didn't care that Levi had gotten saved – they didn't care that Jesus was ministering to the down and out – they didn't care that God was working on the hearts of these people who had been far from Him for all of their lives. All they cared about was that these people didn't look like them, talk like them, think like them, or share their life experiences. These religious people were so full of pride and conceit that you could smell it coming a mile away. And how did Jesus respond?: *When Jesus heard this, he told them,*

"Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." Mark 2:17.

Have you ever noticed that Jesus really knew how to turn the screws on people? He never did it to those who were hurting, or those who needed salvation, or those who sought His advice for their lives.

He reserved His biting sarcasm for those who thought they had it all together but they really didn't – in other words, He never held back on religious people. In so many words He was saying,

“You're worried about these people's past, but I'm concerned about their future. You care about their social status, but I'm concerned about their status with God. You want to push them away, but I want to draw them closer to Myself. You want to ignore their needs, but I want to meet their needs. You're worried about the way they look on the outside, but I'm concerned that they receive an internal cleansing from God.”

And we have seen this sometimes in our churches of today. A man called Given O. Blakely, now well into his 60s, was kicked out of Bible College because he went to the local Snooker / Pool Club and shared the gospel there. He was told to cease and desist and he refused based on the grounds that these were the very people who needed Christ the most in their lives. True Christianity doesn't care about skin colour, or people's past, or their level of status in society. We simply see all people as in need of the love of our Saviour.

RELIGION *focuses on* **FORM** *while* **CHRISTIANITY** *focuses on* **FUNCTION**

When Richard quit farming and moved, he discovered he was the only Lutheran in his new town of all Catholics. That was okay, but the neighbours had a problem with his barbecuing beef every Friday. They weren't allowed to eat red meat on Fridays back in those days, but the tempting aroma was getting the best of them.

Beside themselves, they got together and confronted Richard. "Richard," they said, "since you're the only Lutheran in this whole town and there's not a Lutheran church for many miles, we think you should join our church and become a Catholic." Richard thought about it for a minute and decided they were right. Richard talked to the priest, and they arranged it.

The big day came, and the priest had Richard kneel – He put his hand on Richard's head and said, "Richard, you were born Lutheran, you were raised Lutheran, and now," he said as he sprinkled some water over Richard's head, "you are a Catholic!" Both Richard and the neighbours were happy, but the following Friday evening, the aroma of grilled beef still wafted from Richard's yard.

The neighbours went to talk to him about this, and as they approached the fence they heard Richard saying something strangely familiar to the steak: "You were born a beef, you were raised beef, and now" he said as he sprinkled salt over the meat, "you are a fish!" (Excuse the humour in this illustration!).

As silly as that story is, there is some truth to it when it comes to religion. Often we find that we are more concerned with form than function.

I can remember being at a Christian gathering once and at the end of a priest's prayer someone near me asked, "Did he say 'in Jesus' name' at the end?" As if not saying Jesus' name would somehow invalidate the prayer.

I remember another time when a person was baptised at a church we attended many years ago and one arm did not go down under the water. In Sunday School the next week someone asked if the baptism was valid since the one arm remained dry. I wanted to say, “well his arm will probably go to hell, but the rest of him will make it.”

I immediately suspected from that statement what Church this person belonged to! It gets ridiculous, doesn't it?

One day some people came to Jesus and asked Him why He and His disciples didn't fast like the Pharisees and John the Baptist. *And Jesus said to them,*

“Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. – Mark 2:19.

What was He saying?

He was saying that the issue isn't fasting just to fast – there is a time and a place for that – but right now the bridegroom is in their midst, and it's time to party!

The religious people who asked Jesus the question weren't really even concerned about what fasting was for, only that the religious ritual was performed. Jesus makes it clear that Christianity is more concerned with function than form, that there is a time and place for everything, and that religious ritual without purpose does no one any good at all.

RELIGION *is based on* **RULES** *while* **CHRISTIANITY** *is based on* **RELATIONSHIP**

A young woman was preparing a pot roast while her friend looked on. She cut off both ends of the roast, prepared it and put it in the pan. "Why do you cut off the ends?" her friend asked. "I don't know," she replied. "My mother always did it that way and I learned how to cook it from her." Her friend's question made her curious about her pot roast preparation. During her next visit home, she asked her mother, "How do you cook a pot roast?" Her mother proceeded to explain and added, "You cut off both ends, prepare it and put it in the pot and then in the oven."

"Why do you cut off the ends?" the daughter asked. Baffled, the mother offered, "That's how my mother did it and I learned it from her!"

Her daughter's inquiry made the mother think more about the roast preparation. When she next visited her mother in the nursing home, she asked, "Mum, how do you cook a pot roast?" The mother slowly answered, "Well, you prepare it with spices, cut off both ends and put it in the pot." The mother asked, "But why do you cut off the ends?"

The grandmother's eyes sparkled as she remembered. "Well, the roasts were always bigger than the pot that we had back then so I had to cut off the ends to fit it into the pot."

Sometimes we have rules that we follow, even when we don't know why.

This is something that happens often in the church. Sometimes it is innocent enough, but other times it can negatively affect our work in the kingdom. The religious leaders of Jesus were famous for making up rules about rules – what I mean by that is that they would take a legitimate instruction from God, and then add additional requirements to it.

One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” Mark 2:23-24.

Of course, this was a ridiculous assertion – they weren’t breaking any law at all. Jesus told them that King David had, in effect, done the same thing, and then made this statement:

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27-28

In other words, the Sabbath laws were given to benefit humankind and our relationship with God, not as a truncheon to beat us over the head with. Yet those who focus on religion look at their Christian life as one of “don’t do this, and don’t do that” thinking that with one slip God will be angry with them. It is an unfortunate way to live your life, and one that will do more to pull you away from God than it will to lead you closer to Him.

To conclude:-

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities:

Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form:

Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death.

The debate went on for some time until C.S. Lewis wandered into the room.

"What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity.

The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of Karma, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional.

Religion will lead you to a dead end, with no hope, and no relationship with God. But in Christianity, you have the opportunity to experience the love of God, and to spread that love to the world around you.

+David, OSJ (Wales)

-oOo-

Isaiah 35 1-10 James 5 7-10 Matthew 11 2-11 'Mary had a little lamb'

'The waiting is all', said Shakespeare. And what a long wait, we think. How long, O Lord, how long? When shall we see intervention of an Almighty God in the convoluted and disrupted affairs of a world once described as perfect, on seventh day of Creation, and which since still bubbles and erupts with violence, disgrace, murder, mistrust, exploitation and corruption. Those of us who feel our years are 'lengthening' must wonder if even the next generation, or grandchildren, will see change and movement forward. Or persecution for their faith.

Yet at a time when doom seemed inevitable, [the next chapter of Isaiah launches straight into Sennacherib's persecution], prophets shook the people firmly and picked them up with such words as we read in Isaiah 35. He reminds us that the sparsest of deserts, wild, unproductive, will bloom as the crocus and the rose; from a winter of death to eternal summer of blossom and splendour. Weak knees will feel strengthened, fearful hearts will no longer feel afraid; Our God will come and with vengeance, to save us, as a promised people. The eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Lamé invalids will leap like young deer and the tongue of the dumb will shout with joy.

How did the nursery rhyme go? Mary had a little lamb' Ah, my sister would say, here he goes again! Attacking Christmas! My family accuse me of 'Advanced Scroogedom' when it comes to Christmas. True, there is much I dislike about the way we 'do Christmas'. I have to confess concern about what I perceive is an increasing danger, of over-simplification of the Christmas story into a lovely, comfortable myth, out of which many people never seem to grow. Jesus remains for many only the baby in the manger, the 'little lamb that Mary had' of nursery rhyme level of intellect, meek and mild, instead of a developing recognition of the The Lamb of God that took away the sins of the world, and from whom, every Eucharist, we request Peace.

So what actually happened at Christmas? Well, 'Mary had a little lamb' Nothing disrespectful, but a hook to pin this sermon on. Isn't it what we commemorate? Well, yes, up to a point. Or if you like, in shades of CS Lewis's 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe', which do you want most? 'The lamb, the robin or the reindeer?' Which is most important to us of the three? The traditional images of frippery and most modern cards - even the horrid Christmas stamps - rivalling the much deeper symbolism of God's gift to mankind.

Maybe too big a gap between the Nativity story and any correct dating - largely inaccurate and mythical - and the stories of miracles and His Crucifixion - itself a stopping point for many people - [what a Jerusalem souvenir trader asked: do you want a cross with the 'little man on it? -and not much more] - is too hard a bridge for many to cross.

His cruel Death, which many forget he walked into willingly for the sheer purpose of Redemption of Mankind and His Glorious Resurrection, which many Christians, if they are really honest, find hard to believe - [some Bishops too, historically!]

There is a danger in today's world of spending more time investigating Da Vinci codes and searches for a Holy Grail, pointing accusing fingers at church traditional belief and acceptance - and in doing so, lose the opportunity to meet face to face with the Master Himself, who gave this Eucharist to his disciples – and still gives it to us, saying 'Do this in Remembrance of Me'.

Fascinating though they are – and don't we enjoy reading our modern novels? – one might suggest that Man-made mysteries bear no comparison to the great Mystery of the Incarnation, in the birth we are about to celebrate and in the on-going lifelong wonder we should study and experience, the joy of Resurrection and hope of Heaven thereby.

If we are not careful, we are left with simply a lovely, warm, cosy commercial festival, gross over-spending and over-indulgence, party-time [well not this year with Covid-19 hovering above Santa's sky-borne sled] the Midnight Mass – [if you are lucky enough to have one] – quickly forgotten as the New Year wears on in frantic world pace, procrastination of well-intentioned New Year resolutions and a mere glance at Calvary as most of us 'pass by'.

Those of us who believe the 'whole' Christ story and not just a part of it, can at least, with our families, neighbours and friends, try to lead others, with more

careful study of Scripture, deeper prayer life, practised behaviour, onto a more mature path of faith, which we, I suppose, all maintain we attempt to follow, yet probably fail miserably to do. Are we afraid to declare the truth in case it is not so exciting?

After all the prophecy of old, all the promises and assurances, one of the most powerful and authoritative figures in the outer universe was sent by God to a teenage bride bearing a curious child in her womb. Nobody claimed fatherhood, except God. Joseph, patient, caring, bewildered Joseph, stood by and nurtured the embarrassed girl, defending her against the prejudice of the age. Stoning was on the agenda.

For this is Advent, the true festival of the Church, when we commemorate and rejoice in the Descent of God to our Earth, the Earth He created - and in becoming Man, gave us the chance to attain Royal Priesthood, and Heaven and God Himself - witnessed by the light of a comet, the simplicity and startlement of the shepherds, the curiosity and courtesy of the Kings, the mild motherhood of Mary, the acclamation of the Angels, and the sanction and sanctity of Old Simeon. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast declared to all people. A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!

This child, a little lamb, was born. Not to stay in the manger of our minds, but to grow into the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, of the increase of whose government and of peace there shall be no end.

A lamb who would become, not a tainted wether of the flock, but the promised Lamb of God, promised before time, brought to birth and the pain of vulnerability, at a time when the world of the faithful was in turmoil and paranoia, tyranny and persecution, trial and patience – much as it is today!

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

A lamb who, in timeless Jewish tradition, would be sacrificed for the people, ritually by the priesthood, as appeasement to their God, and given apportionment

of blame for the sins of the world, which only He, the Son of God, was able to bear in that moment of separation from His heavenly Father. Why hast thou forsaken me?

‘O Saviour of the World, who by Thy cross and precious blood hast redeemed us, save us and help us, we humbly beseech Thee O Lord’.

Matthew 11 takes us delightfully into our adult thinking, about what we really believe about Christ the Lord. They knew they should expect a Messiah. They had some ideas of what he might be like. But all that had been written in Prophecy, way back before the Romans came and messed it all up for the traditionalists.

What kind of a Messiah would the Lord send to his people now?

A healer, a preacher – surely not!

A warrior to rouse the people’s Army and defeat the intruders. Now you’re talking!

Imagine their confusion. A group of selected emissaries go from John the Baptist, not realising that his life was about to end so cruelly. To Christ. ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other? Annoyingly, as always, Our Lord answers with a politician’s answer. Never ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. ‘Go and tell John what you have seen.’ And that set them thinking, on their way back to John. What was the evidence of the Christ?

[An old Wayside Pulpit poster asked: If you were on trial for your faith, would there be enough evidence to convict you?]

They had seen the blind recover their sight, as Isaiah had prophesied, the lame walking, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing again, and something Isaiah might never have dared proffer as a forecast: the dead raised to life.

Christ's reply is given to us today. See what is happening, see the way lives are being changed, see the power of God at work amongst those you know and trust, and then ask yourselves the question. Even in Iraq [which the media never report] and troubled Africa, Korea, China and Russia, where Christians are being 'born again' remarkably. There's a lot of literature available to give us updated news, for which we should rejoice!

But the real miracles, for me, follow in the next bit. And in the myriad accounts of changed lives through generations since in a plethora of Christian literature available to us. It was not just for the few we hear were healed, not for those who actually saw it in those days – but for the whole world. Gentiles too. Us too – and so on, until His coming again, for which we [should] pray.

'The poor are hearing the good news', the gospel says, those not privileged to participate in scholarship, synagogue teaching, some too dirty and sinful to be allowed into polite society. They hear words of 'comfort and joy', words they could understand, a feeling that there was a God who cared – for them.

And so in that declaration - Christ's honouring of John and his baptism into faith, his wilderness witness - Christ is no longer the Baby, but 'The Man'. As the evangelist black preacher put it: YOU'RE THE MAN, MAN!

Where else, and to whom else, in our troubled world, could we turn but to this Lamb of God.

So as Advent strengthens our resolve, excites us by the Promised Coming, prepares our hearts properly to receive the Redeemer of the World, let us be ready to welcome the baby and enjoy our Christmas festivities, but also to make room in our homes and our hearts, seek to know more of the Man, offer our hearts to the Saviour in humility and great devotion - and make sure our souls are right before God, in all that we do in our professional and our private lives, which our traditional Prayer Book reminds us, 'is our 'Reasonable Service'.

May it be so, for His Name's sake. Amen

©Fr Ed Elsey

INTERCESSIONS: HOLY INNOCENTS [Childermass] [last Sunday in December].

Blessed are you, Sovereign God, Creator of all;

To you be glory and praise for ever!

Exalted is your name in all creation,

Yet you have stooped to become one of us and one with us:

As we rejoice in the gift of your presence among us,
let the light of your love always shine in our hearts
and your praises ever be upon our lips

II Corinthians 8,9 reminds us:

You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
That though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor
So that by his poverty, ye might become rich.

We praise you, Heavenly Father for all your goodness and loving-kindness
To us in so many aspects of our life and preservation.

When we are tempted to complain, remind us of the needs of others
That we may always place others' needs before our own wilful desires.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

This week as well as celebration around the manger of the Christ-Child
we have also celebrated the witness of Stephen, first martyr for the faith,
who in the moment of his death prayed
"Lord, do not hold this sin against them"

...of St John Evangelist

the disciple whom Jesus Loved who witnessed to the Word made flesh,
dwelling amongst us, full of grace and truth
and today we mark the slaughter of the Holy Innocents.

Our Lord taught us that unless we change and become like children
We cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven

Heavenly Father give us grace never to act cruelly,
not to stand indifferently by, but to speak out boldly in support
of disadvantaged and abused children throughout the world
and in all our words and work to defend the weak,
from the tyranny of the strong and self-powerful,
and to foster the cause of justice and peace throughout our world.
Through the example of all your saints in light
By the example of Him who suffered for us
To guide our footsteps into the way of peace.

Judge eternal, throned in splendour,
Lord of lords and King of kings,
with thy living fire of judgment
purge this land of bitter things;
solace all its wide dominion
with the healing of thy wings.

Still the weary folk are pining for the hour that brings release,
and the city's crowded clangour
cries aloud for sin to cease;
and the homesteads and the woodlands
plead in silence for their peace.

Crown, O God, thine own endeavour;
cleave our darkness with thy sword;
feed all those who do not know thee
with the richness of thy word;
cleanse the body of this nation
through the glory of the Lord. *Scott Holland*

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for the peace of our world,
For all leaders, diplomats, presidents and potentates
That they may seek the common good
And build bridges of understanding between nations
To see for themselves and others the true path to God.

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us.**

We remember before God all those known to us
Who suffer physically, those who watch others in patience and love,

For all carers and those in professions which share love in practical ways,
including this week all those who rush readily to the aid of earthquake
and other victims worldwide.

We especially remember those who have lost loved ones to death recently
and all who have suffered in any way the pandemic inflicted on our world:
And whose lives at the start of a New Year will face adjustment
With new direction, new opportunity and new Grace.

May we in our prayers never cease to remember others before the Throne of
Grace,
Committing all to your Divine Love and mercy

Lord hear us. **Lord graciously hear us**

And for ourselves, our Church team, our absent friends. [a Jewish prayer]...

Divine Master, Father of mercy, continue we pray your loving-kindness to us.
Make us worthy to walk in the way of the righteous before you,
loyal to your Law and clinging always to good and honourable deeds.
Keep far from us all manner of shame, grief and trial;
and grant that peace light and joy ever abide in our homes,
for with you is the fountain of true life
and in your light we find light for our souls.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
AMEN.

Eastern Orthodox prayer

Christ is born, give glory.

Christ comes from heaven, meet Him.

Christ is on earth, be exalted.

O all the earth, sing unto the Lord and sing praises

in gladness, O all people, for He has been glorified.

Wisdom and Word and Power, Christ our God is the Son
and the Brightness of the Father;

unknown to the powers both above and upon the earth,

He was made man and so has won us back again:

for He has been glorified.

Eastern Orthodox Church

CHRISTMAS ANTHOLOGY

Ring out wild bells to the wild sky

The flying cloud, the frosty light:

The Year is dying in the night;

Ring out wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,

Ring, happy bells, across the snow:

The Year is going, let him go;

Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more;
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out a slowly-dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,
And ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease;
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Tennyson

And after him came next the chill December;
Yet he through merry feasting which he made,
And great bonfires, did not the cold remember;
His Saviour's birth his mind so much did glad.
Upon a shaggy-bearded goat he rode,
The same wherewith Dan Jove on tender yeares,
They say, was nourisht by th'Idean mayd;
And in his hand a broad deepe bowle he beares,
Of which he freely drinks an health to all his peeres.

Spenser

*Of the ascent of the sun through 22 December into the sign of
Capricornus, the goat, from winter solstice on 21st December rising in
January to new Aquarius.*

On Christmas Eve the bells were rung;
On Christmas Eve the mass was sung;

That only night, in all the year,
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear.

The damsel donned her kirtle sheen;
The hall was dress'd with holly green;
Forth to the wood did merry-men go,
To gather in the mistletoe.

Then opened wide the baron's hall;
Power laid his rod of rule aside,
And ceremony doffed his pride.

The heir, with roses in his shoes,
That night might village partner choose.
The lord, underogating, share
The vulgar game of 'post and pair'.

All hailed, with uncontrolled delight,
And general voice, the happy night,
That to the cottage, as the crown,
Brought tidings of salvation down.

Sir Walter Scott: Marmion

CATTLEWAKE CAROL

Dr Roger Harman, World famous Dermatologist, visited his cattle on his one small field by the River Chew each winter night and just stood with them, watching and listening. One misty, humid night he imagined, like Thomas Hardy, what they would 'know' on Christmas Night, and wrote this carol, which I had the privilege to set to music. As organist and choirmaster I invited five church members to come up with words and I would attempt to set them to music. They did, and so did I. Ed Elsey 1979

Under the heavens my cattle stand still,
The hay in their breath and the mist on the hill;
Happy my cattle that stood by the stall
And saw the fresh face of the Baby, Our Lord
- but I was asleep in the warmth of my bed!

Under the night sky my cattle stand close,
The dew on their coats and the damp on the grass;
Happy the animals chosen on earth
To witness the marvel of Jesus' birth!
- but my eyes were closed in the warmth of my bed!

Out in the darkness my cattle stand fast,
Their ears soft and listening, out in the frost;
Chosen to hear what the people ignored,
The first sound and cry of the Baby, Our Lord.
- but my ears were under my pillow in bed!

With angels and stars in the meadow we stand,
Their noses are warm and all wet in my hand;
Now with the beasts close to God in the night
I stand in the fields with my feet next to theirs...

- Who could stay sleeping? The Christ Child is born!

Glad Christmas comes, and every hearth
Makes room to give him welcome now,
E'en want will dry its tears in mirth,
And crown him with a holly bough;
Though tramping 'neath a winter sky,
O'er snowy paths and rimy stiles,
The housewife sets her spinning by
To bid him welcome with her smiles.
Each house is swept the day before,
And windows stuck with evergreens,
The snow is besom'd from the door,
And comfort crowns the cottage scenes.
Gilt holly, with its thorny pricks,
And yew and box, with berries small,
These deck the unused candlesticks,
And pictures hanging by the wall.

Neighbours resume their annual cheer,
Wishing, with smiles and spirits high,
Glad Christmas and a happy year
To every morning passer-by;
Milkmaids their Christmas journeys go,
Accompanied with favour'd swain;
And children pace the crumping snow,
To taste their granny's cake again.

Around the glowing hearth at night,
The harmless laughter and winter tale
Go round, while parting friends delight
To toast each other o'er their ale;
The cotter oft with quiet zeal
Will musing o'er his Bible lean;
While in the dark the lovers steal
To kiss and toy behind the screen

Old customs! Oh! I love the sound
However simple they may be:
Whate'er with time hath sanction found,
Is welcome and is dear to me.
Pride grows above simplicity,
And spurns them from her haughty mind,
And soon the poet's song will be
The only refuge they can find.

John Clare

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock,
"Now they are all on their knees",
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.
We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.
So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel
"In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know",
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so

Thomas Hardy: The Oxen

A CHRISTMAS HYMN.

Richard Wilbur based upon Luke 19, 39-40

Some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

He answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

A stable lamp is lighted
Whose glow shall wake the sky:
The stars shall bend their voices,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry,
And straw like gold shall shine;
A barn shall harbour heaven,
A stall become a shrine.

This child through David's city
Shall ride in triumph by;
The palm shall strew its branches,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry,
Though heavy, dull and dumb.
And lie within the roadway
To pave his kingdom come.

Yet he shall be forsaken,
And yielded up to die;
The sky shall groan and darken,
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry
For stony hearts of men:
God's blood upon the spearhead,
God's love refused again.

But now as at the ending,
The low is lifted high;
The stars shall bend their voices
And every stone shall cry.
And every stone shall cry
In praises of the child
By whose descent among us
The worlds are reconciled.

The Bells of Advent Ring

The bells of waiting Advent ring,
The Tortoise stove is lit again
And lamp-oil light across the night
Has caught the streaks of winter rain
In many a stained-glass window sheen
From Crimson Lake to Hooker's Green.

The holly in the windy hedge
And round the manor house the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that the villagers can say
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.

Provincial public houses blaze
And Corporation tramcars clang,
On lighted tenements I gaze
Where paper decorations hang,
And bunting in the red Town Hall
Says 'Merry Christmas to you all.'

And London shops on Christmas Eve
Are strung with silver bells and flowers
As hurrying clerks the City leave
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,
And marbled clouds go scudding by
The many-steepled London sky.

And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children's hearts are glad,
And Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!'
Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.
And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me?

And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissueed fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single truth compare -
That God was Man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

John Betjeman 1906-1984

Who would think that what was needed
To transform and save the Earth
Might not be a Plan or Army
Proud in purpose, proved in worth?

Who would think – despite derision
That a Child should lead the way?
God surprises Earth with Heaven
Coming here – on Christmas Day

Iona Community poem

Thoughts at Christmas.

Love is the greatest need on Earth,
Trembling, warring, starving globe.
Love, manifest in Jesus' birth,
No greater gift could be bestowed.

Love is the greatest force on Earth.
Come in faith and know that power
Evident in Jesus' life, that
Lifts you in your lowest hour.

Love, like the wind that bends the tree
Turns your heart from each mistake,
Removes the guilt and sets you free;
The bruised reed He will not break.
The Love of God calls out to you,
Respond to Him. No more resist,
Let joy flood in – His Word is true,
And know your life forever blest.

God's greatest gift is given to men
So greet this tiny baby boy.
Stay on the path that leads to heaven
And feel Him fill your heart with joy.

Let joyful music fill the air
From harp and organ, flute and voice.
Share gifts and greetings everywhere.
Rejoice! Again I say Rejoice.

-oOo-

'Dream-on' a whiter, better Christmas, hear
Rock Round the glitzy Santa Clock
Peal out from chintzy musak's
Surreptitious speakers hid so temptingly
Cram-dressed shop doors of stores -
Enticing and repelling at one time
And sense, rather than feel,
A kind of warmth and comfy atmosphere.
Why do we do it every year? -
Celebrate indulgence with such modicum of sanctity?
Perhaps because we really know and fear
You're frighteningly, excitingly, alarmingly
Fulfillingly - yet curiously unexpectedly - SO NEAR!

"Take 13 lines- Unlucky for some!"

[from Millennium Christmas by E.J.Elsey]

-oOo-

Lord, it's so easy to sentimentalize your story.

To let the drifts of Christmas snow - so clean, pollution free -
cover the rough edges of real life.

So tempting to recreate you in an image more to my taste.

To crystallize the fruit of suffering into something sweeter,
and clothe reality in silk rather than sackcloth.

Rewrite your gospel, and make your coming - and your going, Lord -
a charming tale acceptable in all the best circles.

The suffering and the violence removed,
a home video suitable for all the family.

The truth is different and it must be so
if it's to be relevant to life.

No yuppie, you, Lord. No census average,
the awkward corners smoothed away,
your lifestyle simplified to fit the market research.

The junk mail bouncing through your letter box.

You were a carpenter who knew the unplanned edge of things,
and felt the splinters of rejection.

Took rough with smooth - more rough than smooth, I think -
and welcomed suffering - not for its own sake,
but to identify yourself with those who suffer.

The rough handed poor who scrape their knuckles
in the stony soil of want.

At times, forgive me, Lord, in arrogance,
I think I have a God to share with them, something to teach.
But then I realize you're nearer them than me.
And learning has to be the other way.
Their God, rough handed, sometimes hungry,
without a place to put his head,
is calling me to face reality.

That's hard to take.
May I just think about it, Lord?

Eddie Askew: Breaking the Rules

An occasional sermon: 1 Timothy 1, 12 to 2, 8

1 Timothy 1, 12 to 2,8

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service."

In a period of our nation's life when cv's seem to be so important and head-hunting is the 'in-thing' for grasping young executives and potential managers, would your cv qualify you for service of the Lord?

Or would your record place you way down the list, in the pending tray, or immediately dismissed?

Surely, like some Apprentice candidates, embarrassingly found out, you would not fraudulently claim what the Lord has not done for you or what you have done for Him! Paul poses such a question and proceeds to 'down-credit' his own record. Who else, after all, had been shewn such mercy and forgiveness for the persecution he believed once was right and in accordance with God's plan. He talks of God's 'unlimited patience'. Have you felt that in your own life, as I have in my wilful resistance?

Timothy, a newcomer, although keen, might not have had the required experience, language, identification papers for full Christian leadership. Yet his straightforward purity in the new faith seems to challenge us: and if you haven't read the letters to Timothy recently, there's your homework for this week.

At Stapleton church in Bristol, alongside the school where I served as Chaplain, I used to give my congregations weekly homework from the pulpit. Some actually did it - one cheeky friend actually handed his in for marking!

A current phrase I came across was: GRADUATED DENIAL? It was first used I believe in connection with the Ministry of Defence's denial of a now obvious and proven Greenham Common disaster as a result of which a number of people died early and in pain. I think several politicians have also been guilty of this in respect of their own personal lives and sleaze. Many have alleged it in connection with the current Covid virus 'creation' or 'happening'. It is felt by some that more is known by 'people in the know' than is being released to the rest of us. Conspiracy theories abound.

Graduated Denial is 'admitting what you have to and no more'! I must challenge all of us, myself included, to ask if sometimes our Christian faith and witness to others is a bit like that, 'admitting what you have to and no more'!

I have been reading Martin Bell, the journalist who became a surprised anti-sleaze MP, still wearing his [lucky!] white suit from his Gulf War days. He relates this dilemma:

A journalist went to interview a sniper. Looking out through a crack between bricks he was asked by the sniper what he saw. 'I see two people, he said.'

'Which one do you want me to shoot?' came the startling question.

Too late the journalist realised what he had embarked upon.

'Shoot neither?' he suggested, tentatively.

The sniper sneered and laughed.

As the journalist turned to go he heard two shots ring out. The sniper packed his rifle quickly and casually turned to go.

'Pity', said the sniper, 'You could have saved one of them.'

I couldn't help thinking how easy it is to expect God in Christ to save lives and not realise that the responsibility, whether we like it or not, has been placed firmly and squarely - we may think not fairly - upon us as his hands, feet and voice on earth.

What a responsibility and what a challenge.

Now when you read what Paul says to Timothy it may carry a new sense of urgency for our task as members of this church and of the Christian faith. 'I was appointed a herald and an apostle', says Paul. 'I am telling the truth, I am not lying. I was appointed a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.'

He exhorts Timothy, as a young new Christian, to pursue faithfully what he has learned and been taught and not to be 'cooled' or deterred by those who have lost a sense of intensity they once had. Those who have rejected faith and a good conscience have, as Paul puts it, shipwrecked their faith. Shipwrecked Christians might be the title of a rather interesting book: those who have given up everything - and then lost their faith.

But here is the rescue package - and we seem not short of current examples of people trying to escape responsibilities of life or nationality - or of conformity; then drifting into difficulties they could not [perhaps] have imagined and needing expensive rescues, usually at public expense. Good practice for the emergency services, in spite of the danger placed upon others for their delightful recklessness.

Paul, persecuted, beaten, shipwrecked physically, pays testimony to the faithfulness of a God who perseveres with him and stays his constant companion. He urges Timothy to stay firm in the faith and experience this immense love - 'such love' as the charismatic song puts it.

Gordon Martin, formerly on the staff of Bristol Grammar School, in his fascinating book: St Paul's Tabletalk, poses a conversation between Tertius and Timothy.

Timothy says: Do you know what I saw yesterday? In the graveyard outside the Nomentana Gate, I saw a baby abandoned by someone, a live baby left among the graves.

'Did you do anything about it?' someone asked;

And Timothy answered stammering, as he sometimes does, 'I didn't myself. But somebody took it and handed it over to - to - somebody, and the baby from the graveyard is probably alright now'.

Tertius replies: 'You are right Timothy, that's just like us, alive from among the dead. It is daft to stay in the graveyard. But more than that; we belong to someone now. It's disloyal to go on living for ourselves. You can't serve two masters.'

Jason asks: 'But if we are under grace, not under the law, we are justified. Therefore we are not in sin. That looks as if the law equals sin.'

'Not a bit,' replies Paul, patiently, 'the law is right and good, but we are - I am - so sinful that all the law could do was to make me realise my sin and even make me want to sin.'

Paul then dictates half a page in which he speaks about himself failing and torn apart by internal strife - a prisoner to the sin in his human heart, rescued only by the grace of God working in him.

This helpful line of thinking I believe demonstrates how the members of the early church were having to work all this out for themselves: not with the benefit that we have of centuries of commentary, witness, martyrdom, testing, patience, meditation, and writing.

But with all these helpful aids, do we use them enough to better our understanding of what Christ our Lord is asking or commanding us to do - for Him?

A realisation of our sin, our vulnerability, our weakness leads us directly to depend upon the one who was sinless, for our sakes made weak, but raised to new life, as we have been promised, to be with God for ever. This is our faith. This is our belief. And we mustn't lose it.

'Because I acted ignorantly', Paul says in verse 13, 'in unbelief, I was dealt with mercifully - that Jesus Christ might find, in me, the first occasion for displaying all his patience, and that I might be typical of all who were in future to have faith in him and gain eternal life.'

For those who want to go into further depth on this one and who have a pencil handy, check out: 2 Corinthians 5 18-19, Romans 5, 20, Acts 8, 3, and most of Acts 9.

You will then see how - as I have decided to describe it for my own study: the mercy of God is manipulated for the management of man. [That is, of course, using the word manipulated in its strictest meaning - personally handled by God for me - rather like the countless images of the potter and the clay in the Bible]

The orthodox Jewish belief was that God was invisible, for to see him was death. His Almighty-ness put Him safely out of reach of ordinary mortals.

But that all changed at the death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

So Chalmers Smith's hymn:

*Immortal, Invisible, God only wise,
In light, inaccessible, hid from our eyes
Great Father of glory, pure Father of light
Thine angels adore thee all veiling their sight*

becomes, as William Walsham How wrote:

*O my Saviour lifted from the earth for me
Draw me in thy mercy nearer unto Thee.
Lift my earth bound longings: fix them, Lord, above;
Draw me with the magnet of Thy mighty love.*

So Paul ordains Timothy with what he calls 'this charge' [the charge is never specified but is implied in following verses as you'll see, if you do your homework!]

I Tim 4,14 : the spiritual endowment you possess, which was given you, under the guidance of prophecy, through the laying on of hands.

(Note, prophecy seems to have accompanied ordination, so Bishops of the Church of England beware - or awake!)

In the Didache, [literally 'the Teaching'] a Christian work not much later than these Pastoral letters, the Christian congregations have to be reminded that bishops and deacons are as important as prophets!

So, fight gallantly, Paul urges these young men, armed with faith.

The 'tranquil' life [and tranquil means settled, not peaceful, incidentally] - the tranquil life Paul visualises for the Christian community is not an inactive one: security, religious rights and confidence have to be fought for and fiercely defended, yes even sometimes, we are warned, against the locally appointed leaders of the church, if the appointment was wrong or has become corrupt or lost its focus.

Establish yourselves firmly in your faith, in 'full observance of religion, pure intention, and high standards of morality'.

Here goes Fr Ed again, you'll say. We know what's coming next.

Well, yes, you're right. I cannot now let any sermon go by without a determined attack upon our newspapers, magazines, advertising and media - especially children's tv - which I believe are quietly but persistently undermining our nations fabric. I'll stop there.

We need to be on our guard and without any sense of being prissy or old-fashioned or kill-joy or 'pi', balance what our families are seeing and learning with a constant if gentle diet of the love of Christ, infused and flavouring everything that is consumed in our homes. Maybe you don't agree.

It is not any right of ours, any worth or entitlement which draws us into the love of the Father.

With Paul we can say:

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.”

So may the newness of Timothy’s faith, the priesthood of all believers which was his ordination, the challenge and focus of faith today be ours, with the strength and power of our Lord Jesus Christ as we go forth into a new week, for many a new lockdown, witnessing in messaging and in phone-call or an old fashioned letter, especially as we prepare to write Christmas cards or send helpful greetings on e-cards - in whatever way the Lord gives us to speak to others, to work and witness for Him and as we seek in our Christian lives to draw closer to Him.

May it be so for His Name’s Sake. AMEN. Fr Ed Elsey 2020

-oOo-

The Christmas Story is well known but like all ‘good stories’ it attracts controversies that scholars still argue about. If you are happy to dig a bit deeper, the following article is for you. If you like the Christmas Story the way it is then you might want to pass the next article by.

(Editor)

The Christmas Story – untangling fact from fiction.

SECTION ONE

<p>Myth #1: Christmas on December 25th is found in the Bible.</p>	<p>There is no 'celebration' of the birth of Christ in the Bible on any day: it began through tradition in about 250 AD in the Spring; not in December until about 325 AD.</p>
<p>Myth #2: December 25 is the birthday of Jesus.</p>	<p>December 25 was the birthday of Mithra, the pagan God of light.</p> <p>In 325 AD, Roman emperor Constantine re-assigned the meaning to the birthday of Jesus, the true God of light. Christian traditionalists took it over as a suitable festival date.</p>
<p>Myth #3: Mary wanted to spend the night at an inn, but there were no "rooms" available because the inn was already full. Why?</p>	<p>There was no space [room] in an 'upper room' of a private house as other family members had arrived first, as booked on all main festivals and anniversaries, when families [big assembles] gathered. Weddings too, as at Cana.</p>

<p>Myth #4: Mary remained a virgin until the day of her death.</p>	<p>Although Joseph did not have 'relations' with Mary until after she gave birth to Jesus, Mary and Joseph had many other children: 'Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' [Matthew 13:55-56]</p>
<p>Myth #5: They spent the night in a barn where the animals were kept.</p>	<p>There was no room on the upper floor of the house so they spent the night on the main floor of the house where animals were kept inside the house.</p> <p>Many or most Jewish houses had a common area on the main floor, including a manger where animals ate and slept at night, giving rising heat to the upper floors as well as protection/security and an upper room where everyone slept and a flat roof for cooling in the warm Mediterranean nights - still used in Galilee to this day. It is possible that there was a separate barn, but this would often be attached to the house.</p>

<p>Myth #6: There were three wise men. Kings even, some 'report'.</p>	<p>Three gifts were mentioned and three names given to the visitors. Gold frankincense and myrrh. There may have been any number of visitors: these are the only named ones - not Kings, not wise men, Magi, mysterious astrologers - who knows? We don't know, but each of them likely brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. Since these were common currency items of value, each visitor, regardless of the actual number, brought a little of all three - something to honour a special birth.</p>
<p>Myth #7: The star of Bethlehem shone over the manger the night Jesus was born.</p>	<p>The wise men did not come to Jerusalem until after Mary had purified on Day 33 after the birth.</p> <p>It was at that point the star began to move slowly ahead of the wise men till it 'hovered' over or appeared to shine over, the place of birth. This means that the star was not hovering over Jesus the night he was born. The star shone over a house, not a barn or an inn. "And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother" [Matthew 2:11].</p>

It is never called "the star of Bethlehem", simply, "His star". The shepherds were directed by an angel [not a star] to the manger of Jesus, the night he was born. The star led 'wise men from the east' [West is the Mediterranean - a wet journey they would have 'had of it' [as Eliot might have reported], who travelled at least 700 km from the Persian or Babylonian Empires, to the house of Joseph and Mary. This trip would take at least 30 days after the birth of Jesus when you average 25 km per day travel time.

After Jesus had been circumcised on the 8th day in the temple, and Mary performed her purification on the 33rd day, Jesus may have been taken to Joseph's home in Nazareth and this is where the star more likely led the 'wise men': 'When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth'. [Luke 2:39].

The star, therefore, might more probably have shone over Nazareth, not Bethlehem.

	<p>The flight to Egypt [only into Egyptian 'territory' - not to Cairo!!], probably only into the Negev desert, maybe in protection of an old monastery - did not happen until after Mary's purification on the 33rd day.</p> <p>Only after this did the Magi arrive in Jerusalem to enquire of Herod. They were directed to Bethlehem, not by the star, but because Jewish leaders would have quoted Micah 5:2. The redirection of the Magi to an alternative return route, coupled with the urgent departure, both lend weight to the star leading the Magi to the same house Jesus was born. Timing conflicts.</p>
<p>Myth #8: The wise men arrived the night Jesus was born in a manger.</p>	<p>The shepherds came to the manger [Luke 2:8-10], but not the wise men, who came to Joseph's house. If, in fact, Herod does order the slaughter of the babies two years of age and younger, it means the child would be well under two years old, in order that no error could be made in killing Jesus, but it also indicates that Jesus was older than a newborn.</p>

<p>Myth #9: The Bible wants Christians to remember and celebrate the birthday of Christ!</p>	<p>The scriptures do not tell us to celebrate the birth of Christ, but to celebrate His death... and not once a year at Holy Week/ Easter but every Sunday/Sabbath through the Lord's Supper. [Acts 20:7]. With His Resurrection and Our Redemption.</p>
<p>Myth #10: Christ was born in 6 BC!</p>	<p>Josephus and other sources show Christ was born in 3BC/2 BC. [see details below]</p>
<p>Myth #11: Luke got it wrong because the census of Luke 2:1-3 occurred in 6 AD!</p>	<p>Josephus got it probably confused and wrong. Luke is right! The census took place 3 BC.</p>

SECTION TWO. A strict Biblical chronology of the birth of Christ.

a. Mary and Joseph were fully and legally married when Mary became pregnant. She is referred to as his wife and Joseph considered 'divorcing' her.

b. Joseph was called a 'just man' in wanting to divorce Mary privately because he was willing to pay the 'bride price', [a considerable sum] to divorce her for no cause... when he actually had cause! How many men would care about the reputation of their 'profligate' wife, whom they feel has committed adultery on him, then pay her father?

When he was willing to divorce his wife secretly, he, not her, would look bad. He had certain proof she was unfaithful and could divorce her with no cost to himself. 'Joseph her husband, being a 'righteous man' and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly'. [Matthew 1:19]

c. Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

d. Caesar Augustus takes a census around 3 BC which triggers pregnant Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. [Luke 2:1-3]

e. Mary and Joseph were members of the 'House of David' and Jesus was born in the ancestral town of Bethlehem where David was born:
'Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David', [Luke 2:4]

f. Joseph and Mary may therefore have tried to stay at a relative's house, not a public inn, but being no space left in the 'upper room' (often mistranslated 'inn' or hostel in many early Bible translations).

g. Joseph and Mary were forced to sleep on the 'ground' - floor [directly below the upper room of the private home] where animals slept.

h. Jesus was born on the main floor of a relative's two storey house because there was no room for them to stay in the 'guests' 'upper room',
[Matthew 1:25 & Luke 2:1-7].

2.1 Visitors

That same night, angels announced to the shepherds that the promised and proclaimed 'Christ' was born and they visited the newborn Christ at the manger [Luke 2:8-20].

- a. In this way, all shepherds, who as a class had a very low social status, would take a keen and early interest in the Chief Shepherd Jn 10:11; 1 Pet 5:4]. Jesus is the 'lamb ... who will be their shepherd' [Rev 7:17]
- b. It was maybe fitting that God designed shepherds to be first to hear the gospel. All the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were shepherds
- c. King David was a shepherd - not originally even considered a candidate as king. Jesus was the 'good shepherd' [Jn 10:1ff]
- d. The office of overseers of the local churches [1 Tim 3; Tit 1] uses two other interchangeable words to describe the single office: Elders and Shepherds. [Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-2]
- e. Jesus was circumcised when He was eight days old [Luke 2:21]. Then presented in the Temple 33 days later, after the 'days of purification' were completed = the 40th day after birth. [Leviticus 12:2-6 & Luke 2:22-38]
- f. This could lend support to the idea that Jesus would stay in that same family home until the 33rd day.

g. Given all the attention surrounding the birth, those living in the house would be pleased to accommodate 'the Holy Family'

h. Contrary to popular myth, the 'star of Bethlehem' is merely referred to as 'his star' which the Magi saw.

i. The star hovered over the same house where Jesus was born. See Matthew 2:11] Matthew 2:1-2,7,9 says 'Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him' Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared ... the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was'.

j. The Magi first saw the star at the time of Christ's Birth, then they saw the star long after Jesus was born and arrived at the house of Jesus, probably when Jesus was about 5-9 months old.

k. There is no evidence that the Magi were led to Jesus by a bright low hovering star. Such a star would have been quite noticeable by many people. The fact that Herod had to ask the Magi when the star first appeared proves that the star was not out of the ordinary to the untrained eye. Only the Magi, who studied the stars, would notice it.

l. On the other hand, the star the Magi were attracted by, has no acceptable natural celestial explanation and it is clearly a special miracle to

attract the Magi. Comets had then and have since been recorded on a number of 'famous births' as indication of 'Heavenly approval' or 'of the Gods'.

m. An unknown number of wise men [Magi], visited Jesus at his 'birth house' [Matthew 2:1-12].

n. This is probably the same house he was born in, but now the census was over [less crowds] he was living on the 'family' floor.

o. The angel warns Joseph to flee 'to[wards] Egypt' because of the impending slaughter of all male children under two [Matthew 2:13-15]

2.2 Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt:

a. The Magi provide a large sum of money in gold that is essential for a move to Egypt. [speculation] Maybe only into the Negev and obscurity

b. The Magi take a different route home which infuriates Herod who slaughters the children aged 2 and under.

c. King Herod kills all the male children out of fear that Jesus would supplant him as king [Matthew 2:16-18]. Genocide usually kills the male heirs.

d. Herod was ruthless: his cut-off age of 2 proves Jesus was no older than 1 [more likely 4-9 months] when they fled into the desert.

- e. Rachel weeps for her children from Ramah:
- f. Herod kills the children in about a 17 radius circle from Jerusalem, reaching Bethlehem [south] and Ramah [north].
- g. Just as Rachel wept for the exiled Jerusalemites in 587 BC when they passed her tomb to the staging ground at Ramah while on route to Babylon, so too Rachel wept for Jesus when he was exiled to Egypt.

2.3. Slaughter of the innocents

Lunar eclipse marks the slaughter of the children: 10 January 1 BC

- a. Herod died shortly after the total lunar eclipse of Jan 10, 1 BC.
- b. If Herod the Great died shortly after the total lunar eclipse of 10 January 1 BC, then Christ was born in 1-3 BC.
- c. The birth of Christ in 2 BC favours Friday Nisan 14, 33 AD as the day Christ was crucified.
- d. The approximate birth of Christ can be determined [2 BC] based upon the total lunar eclipse on 10 January 1 BC in conjunction with what Josephus said in Antiquities 17.167: 'But Herod deprived this Matthias of the high priesthood, and burnt the other Matthias, who had raised the

sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon. But now Herod's distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgment upon him for his sins: for a fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to the touch outwardly as it augmented his pains inwardly' [Antiquities 17.167-168]

e. This Eclipse would mark the slaughter of the children by Herod in addition to Matthias of the house of the High Priest.

f. The Magi who visited Jesus would surely notice the blood moon and directly associate it with Herod's attempted slaughter of the king of the Jews.

In 33 AD the same Magi would observe another eclipse where a second attempt to murder the Messiah was 'successful' on the Cross.

2.4 Signs

After the death of King Herod in 1 BC, Joseph returns to Nazareth with Mary and Jesus [Luke 2:39 & Matthew 2:19-23].

a. Jesus grows up in Nazareth.

b. There was another eclipse the night Jesus was crucified on 3 April 33 AD

- c. At exactly 6:00 PM Nisan 14 the sun set in Jerusalem and at exactly the same time the moon rose in eclipse.
- d. The lunar eclipse of 3 April 33 A.D. lasted 333 minutes and 66 degrees on the horizon.
- e. The Magi would notice this eclipse marking the death of Christ and connect it with the eclipse in 10 Jan 1 BC that failed to kill Christ and marked the slaughter of the babies [Holy Innocents].
- f. The same Magi who were attracted by the star at the time of the birth of Jesus would remember the lunar eclipse of 10 Jan 1 BC, 33 years earlier.
- g. It would be a stunning double marker where the first eclipse marked the failed attempt by Herod but the second eclipse marked the actual death of the King [of the Jews] they gave gold frankincense and myrrh to, when he was born. Too tidy? Maybe. Think on. God's planning or Man's?

2.5 The date of the birth of Christ

2 BC not 6 BC: There are a number of ways we can date the birth of Christ:

- a. A careful examination of the timeline of when Herod the great began to reign.

- b. Using 4 BC for the death of Herod actually creates a 3 year discrepancy in his chronology.
- c. Rodger Young solves this three year discrepancy by dating the death of Herod to 1 BC. (see discussion below)
- d. Two passages in Josephus give us specific details about when Herod died in 1 BC: Antiquities 17.149-181 and Antiquities 18.106.
- e. We know that Jesus was born 6-12 months before the death of Herod the Great in 1 BC.

2.6. HEROD DIED IN 1BC:

Three main mistakes are made in the Herodian timeline:

[researched by Rodger Young, Chronological scholar]

1. The date for the death of Herod the Great is 1BC not 4 BC.
 - a. According to Josephus, Herod reigned 37 years counting from his appointment by the Mark Antony and the Roman Senate, or 34 years counting from his conquest of Jerusalem. Josephus dates the first of these events in two ways: by the Roman consular date and by the Greek 184th Olympiad.

b. However, Appian's history [Civil Wars 5.8.75] places Herod's appointment in the next consular year, as does the history of Antony as recorded by Josephus himself.

c. Seeking to resolve these contradictory statements, we read that Josephus says elsewhere that the government of the Hasmoneans, which started in 162 BC, lasted 126 years until Antigonus was defeated by Herod in the conquest of Jerusalem.

d. Herod's victory was thus in $[162 - 126] = 36$ BC, in exact agreement with another passage in Josephus that places Herod's taking of Jerusalem 27 years to the day after the city fell to Pompey, which was on the Day of Atonement, 63 BC. The 34 years from the capture of Jerusalem thus ended in $36 - 34 = 2$, i.e. the regnal year that began in the fall of 2 BC and extended to the fall of 1 BC.

e. All of these figures work out exactly if Herod was appointed by the Romans in 39 BC, captured Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement in 36 BC, and died in early 1 BC, i.e. shortly after the total lunar eclipse of January 10, 1 BC.

f. None of these figures given by Josephus would be correct if Herod was appointed by the Romans in 40 BC, captured Jerusalem in 37 BC, and died in 5 or 4 BC, as maintained in the older, now superseded, scholarship largely based on Emil Schürer's work over a hundred years ago.

2. In failing to realize that Herod's successors, Archelaus, Antipas & Philip II were co-regent with Herod 3 years before he died which was 4 BC.
 - a. This explains why the first coins of Philip were dated 'year 5'.
 - b. He started minting in the second year of his sole reign after Herod died.
 - c. In a strange co-incidence, the two errors have the effect of not changing the traditional dates for the end of their 3 reigns.
 - d. So they began to function as administrative assistant governors in 4 BC and as "Caesar certified" governors [Tetrarchs] in 1 BC after the death of Herod.

The 29 days between the partial lunar eclipse in 4 BC and Passover that year was insufficient time to accommodate all the events Josephus describes related to the death of Herod, but there was sufficient time for them (89 days) between the full lunar eclipse of 10 January 1 BC and Passover that year.

SECTION THREE

1. HEROD DIES IN 1BC:

According to Josephus in Antiquities 17.149-181:

- a. shortly after he killed 42 men who were led by Judas, son of Saripheus to down the golden eagle that Herod had set up in the Temple as a personal memorial.
- b. shortly after a lunar eclipse that happened on January 10, 1 BC, the night that Herod killed the 42 men.
- c. shortly after Herod appointed Joazar in place of Matthias as high priest.
- d. shortly after the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem, echoing Pharaoh's slaughter of the babies at the time of Moses.
- e. at the time he killed one man from each of the leading families in Israel echoing the 10th plague where the firstborn of every family died at the time of the Exodus.
- f. shortly BEFORE Passover.

2. The lunar eclipse on 10 Jan 1 BC, therefore most likely marked Herod's slaughter of the children and the execution of the 42 rebels who tore down the Silver eagle from the temple.

It could also serve as a marker for the execution of the leading men once Herod died.

- a. Josephus is shockingly silent on the central story of the slaughter of the children when Herod had been tricked by the Magi

b. The Magi likely returned to Assyria by taking the route south of the salt sea at Wadi Zered, possibly passing through Petra (Kadesh Barnea).

c. The timing of Herod's slaughter of the children would be no more than 30 days after they visited Jesus in the same house he had been born in months earlier. Now he was living on the second floor instead of the main floor stable of the house.

d. Since Bethlehem is only 6 km south of Jerusalem [half day journey] Herod would know for certain after a maximum of 30 days that he had been tricked by them.

e. This triggered Herod's slaughter of the innocents 2 years and younger. This indicates that Jesus would be less than 1 year old because Herod would certainly leave a generous margin of "age error" giving us the birth of Jesus about a 1 year or less, before Herod died.

AND SO THE CONTROVERSY GOES ON....

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ edits 1998, 2005 and 2020

St Leonard's Family Midnight Mass:

Priest

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

(The nativity candle is lit.)

Reading 1:

Long ago, about 2000 years, when King Herod ruled Judea (now part of Israel), God sent the angel Gabriel to a young women who lived in the northern town of Nazareth. The girl's name was Mary and she was engaged to marry Joseph.

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: 'Peace be with you! God has blessed you and is pleased with you.'

Mary was very surprised by this and wondered what the angel meant.

The angel said to her 'Don't be afraid, God wants you to do something very special for Him. You will become pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to a baby boy. You will call him Jesus. He will be God's own Son and his kingdom will never end.'

Mary was very afraid but she trusted God. 'Let it happen as God chooses,' she replied to the angel.

CAROL: ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY Verses 1-4

Reading 2:

The angel Gabriel also told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth who everyone thought was too old to have children, would have a baby boy whom God had chosen to prepare the way for Jesus.

So Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah.

Elizabeth was very happy to see Mary. She knew that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of God's Son.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then returned home to Nazareth.

CAROL: O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL Verses 1-3

Reading 3:

Joseph was worried when he found out that Mary was expecting a baby before their marriage had taken place. He wondered if he should put off the wedding altogether.

Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: 'Don't be afraid to have Mary as your wife.' The angel explained that Mary had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son and told Joseph that the baby would be named Jesus which means 'Saviour' because he would save people.

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel had told him to do and took Mary as his wife.

CAROL: O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Reading 4:

At this time, the land where Mary and Joseph lived was part of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor Augustus wanted to have a list of all the people in the empire, to make sure they paid their taxes. He ordered everyone to return to the town where their families originally came from, and enter their names in a register (or census) there.

Mary and Joseph travelled a long way (about 70 miles) from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because that is where Joseph's family came from. Joseph and Mary

travelled very slowly because Mary's baby was due to be born soon.

When they reached Bethlehem they had problems finding somewhere to stay. So many people had come to register their names in the census, that every house was full and every bed was taken in all of the Inns. The only shelter that they could was a shelter with the animals.

In this poor place Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God. In those days it was the custom to wrap newborn babies tightly in a long cloth called 'swaddling clothes'. Jesus' bed was the manger that the animals ate their hay from.

CAROL: AWAY IN A MANGER

Reading 5:

In the hills and fields outside Bethlehem, shepherds looked after their sheep through the long night. As the new day began, suddenly an angel appeared before them and the glory of God shone around them. The shepherds were very, very scared, but the angel said, 'Don't be afraid. I have good news for you and everyone. Today in Bethlehem a Saviour has been born for you. You will find the baby lying in a manger.'

Then many more angels appeared, lighting up the sky. The shepherds heard them praising God singing: 'Glory to God in highest, and peace to everyone on earth.'

When the angels had gone the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem to see what has happened.'

So the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph. The baby Jesus was lying in a manger as they had been told. When they saw him, they told everyone what the angel had said and everyone who heard the story were astonished. Then the shepherds returned to their sheep, praising God for sending his Son to be their Saviour.

CAROL: HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Reading 6:

When Jesus was born, a brand new bright star appeared in sky. Some Wise Men in faraway countries saw the star and guessed what it meant. They were very clever men that studied the stars and had read in very old writings that a new star would appear when a great king was born.

They set out to find the new king and bring him gifts.

The Wise Men followed the star towards the country of Judea and when they got to the capital called Jerusalem they began to ask people: 'Where is the child who is born to be king of the Jews?' Herod, the king of Judea, heard this and it made him very angry to think that someone might be going to take his place as king.

Herod sent for the Wise Men to come to him. He told them to go on following the star until they had found the baby king. He said: 'When you have found him, let me know where he is, so that I can go and worship him.'

But Herod did not tell them that he really had an evil plan in mind to kill the new king.

Reading 7:

The Wise Men followed the star towards Bethlehem (where it said that the king would be born in the old writings). It seemed to stop and shine directly down upon the place where Jesus was.

The Wise Men entered the house where they now lived and found Jesus with Mary, they bowed down and worshipped him.

The Wise Men spread the gifts they had brought before Jesus. The gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Wise Men were warned in a dream, by God, not to go back to Herod. So they returned home to their countries in the East by a different way.

CAROL: WE THREE KINGS

Priest

Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

So the Word became like us and made his dwelling among us.



Words of welcome and encouragement

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

Almighty Father, you sent your Son to be light in our darkness, and as the eternal bond we need never again be parted from your infinite love: mercifully grant that in the partaking of these gifts of bread and wine, in remembrance of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, they become for us the indwelling pledge of eternal life.

Amen.

The Creed

This is our faith: we believe –

We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,

He is seated at the right hand of the Father,

and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,

The forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The Gloria

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,

we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,

you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;

For you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,

For you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Confession.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you

in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done,

and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent of our sins.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;

that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,

to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Absolution.

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

The Peace.

The peace of God be with you. **And also with you.**

(A sign of peace may be exchanged.)

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray. Using the words our Lord Jesus Christ taught us, we say

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,

thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

(other prayers may be added as is appropriate concluding with 'Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer')

The Preparation

(the elements shall be consecrated/blessed according to local tradition)

Scripture records that Jesus took the cup of wine and gave thanks, instructing that it should be divided up amongst all the disciples.

He took the bread and gave thanks and broke it, saying "This is my body which is given for you - do this in remembrance of me."

He took the cup after supper, saying "This is my blood which is given for you and many others for the remission of sins. It is the new testament."

The Invitation.

We are one body with Christ as its Head. No person of good faith with reverent intention shall be turned away. I welcome you all in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to share in these gifts.

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

During Communion.

The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, keep you in everlasting life. Amen.

The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, keep you in everlasting life. Amen.

After Communion.

Gracious Father, we give you praise and thanks

for being able to share together in these gifts of bread and wine.

We have shared in this act of love and remembrance in true fellowship.

OSJ (UK) Doxology

We honour God, the Father.

We honour God, the Son.

We honour God, the Holy Spirit.

We honour God, three in one. Amen.

Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord.

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour.

For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden:
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
He hath showed strength with his arm:
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat,
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things:
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy has helped his servant Israel.
As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

Nunc Dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles;
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

CAROL: Silent Night

(Sung as the youngest person present places the Christ child in the crib)

Closing Blessing

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ child be yours this Christmas;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

Our celebration is ended. Go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for **all** members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Forms of approved service are available with instructions to download using the two links below:

1. [Self-administered Communion](#)
2. [Last Rites \(Emergency Measures\)](#)

Also to be noted, services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice. This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle, Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ
OSJ Services, 2021.**



Unless otherwise stated:

Services take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

Covid-19 precautions in place: St Leonard's will remain closed until further notice.

3rd January, 2021

7th February, 2021

7th March, 2021

4th April, 2021

2nd May, 2021

6th June, 2021

4th July, 2021

1st August, 2021

5th September, 2021

3rd October, 2021

7th November, 2021

5th December, 2021

17th January, 2021

21st February, 2021

21st March, 2021

18th April, 2021

16th May, 2021

20th June, 2021

18th July, 2021

15th August, 2021

19th September, 2021

17th October, 2021

21st November, 2021

19th December, 2021

We use a non-alcoholic wine so children may take part too.

There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 7th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.