

Witney Congregational Church

R CROSS A D S

Witney Congregational Church is a crossroads where we:

meet God in worship

meet one another in friendship

meet our community and world with the love of Jesus



WHAT'S ON GUIDE

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

Further information can be obtained from the Church Administrator, Minister, Church Secretary or the leaders of the particular activities who are listed at the back of this magazine.

WORSHIP

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Daily Worship | 9.30 am | Mon-Fri | Short time of Prayer and Reading |
| Noah's Ark Service | 1.30 pm | Tuesday | For under 5's parents and carers |
| Saturday Praise | 11.00 am | 1 st Saturday of the month | |
| Sunday Services | 10.30 am | | |
| | 6.00 pm | 1 st Sunday of the month | |

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

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

Thursday 2.30pm Homes (2nd Thursday of each month)

YOUTH ACTIVITIES

| | | |
|--------|----------|--|
| Sunday | 10.30 am | Crèche, Noah's Ark & The K.I.C.K. on Sundays |
| Monday | 10.00 am | Noah's Ark – Infant Group for babies and pre-school children |
| Friday | 6.00pm | www. – Twice a month |
| | 7.00 pm | Y4J – Twice a month |

OTHER ACTIVITIES


| | | |
|----------|------------|------------------------------------|
| Tuesday | Monthly | Deacon's Meeting |
| | Bi-Monthly | Church Meeting |
| Thursday | 10.00 am | Rest & Chat (Coffee/Tea available) |
| Saturday | 10.30 am | Coffee Morning |

SUNDAY LINK

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

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

Opening Hours: Monday – Saturday

 01993 709429

09.00 am – 5.00 pm

CHURCH WEBSITE

For further information, please visit our website:

www.witneycongregational.org.uk



Welcome back! As all the magazines are now double-issue, this is the first edition of 2018; so may I take this opportunity of wishing you all a belated Happy New Year. I hope that Christmas and New Year were not too stressful and that 2018 brings great things for both you personally and the Church here at Witney.

Isn't it strange, that whenever there is a break in routine it is very hard, and sometimes very stressful, to get back into it. The paradox being that breaks are supposed to make you feel better and refreshed for the new start; when in reality, the reverse is often the case.

Turning now to those who have contributed to this edition; alongside the standard pages, Canon David Winter reflects on Red Nose Day; Lesley Barter asks the questionWhat sort of Church do we want? Theo Howells says take time to ...; Canon David Winter reflects on our alongside helpers; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study series first contributed to the magazine in 1999, and there is the 3rd in a series of 5 Sermons from Jason Boyd to name but a few.

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

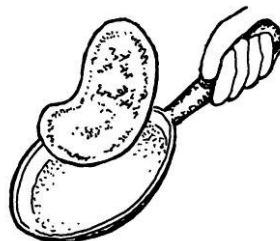
terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

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

The next 2-monthly edition, covering April & May, is due on **Sunday 1st April**

Your Editor



Shrove Tuesday
13th February



Clocks change
on Palm Sunday

25th March

Windows

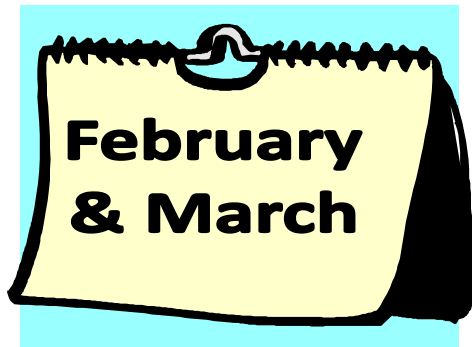
She texted her husband from home on a cold winter's morning: 'Windows frozen, won't open.'

He texted back: 'Gently pour some lukewarm water over it.'

She replied five minutes later: 'Computer *really* screwed up now.'

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20. The way I see it



Daily Prayer Time:

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Services

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

Feb

| | | | |
|------------------|----|-----------------------|-----------|
| 4 th | am | Morning Worship | |
| | pm | Evening Worship | Communion |
| 11 th | am | Morning Worship | |
| 14 th | | Ash Wednesday Service | 7.00pm |
| 18 th | am | Morning Worship | Communion |
| 25 th | am | Rev Judi Holloway | |

Mar

| | | | |
|------------------|----|---|-----------|
| 3 rd | | Saturday Praise | 11.00am |
| 4 th | am | Cafe Church | |
| | pm | Evening Worship | Communion |
| 11 th | am | Mothering Sunday All-Age Worship | |
| 18 th | am | Morning Worship | Communion |
| 25 th | am | Morning Worship | |
| 29 th | | Maundy Thursday Supper | 6.30pm |
| 30 th | | Good Friday Service | 9.45am |
| | | Meet at High St Methodist Church for Silent Walk of Witness | 10.45am |
| | | United Good Friday Service in the Market Square | 11.00am |

Apr

| | | | |
|-----------------|----|------------------------|-----------|
| 1 st | | Dawn Service | |
| | | Service with Communion | 8.00am |
| | | Breakfast | 8.45am |
| | am | Morning Worship | Communion |
| 7 th | | Saturday Praise | 11.00am |

The following events are given for your particular attention:

Feb

| | | |
|------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 6 th | Lite Bite piece of the Word | 12.15pm |
| | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |
| 10 th | Prayer Chain Meeting | 9.15am |
| 13 th | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |
| 20 th | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |
| 21 st | CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study | |
| | St Mary's Church Green | 12.30pm-2.15pm |
| 27 th | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |

March

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 st | CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study | |
| | Congregational Church | 12.30pm-2.15pm |
| 2 nd | Women's World Day of Prayer | |
| | St Mary's Church Green | 10.30am |
| 6 th | CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study | |
| | Congregational Church | 12.30pm-2.15pm |
| | Deacons Meeting | 7.30pm |

| | | |
|------------------|--|----------------|
| 10 th | Prayer Chain Meeting | 9.15am |
| 13 th | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |
| 14 th | CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study High St Methodist Church | 12.30pm-2.15pm |
| 20 th | Springfield School Easter Assembly | 11.00am |
| 20 th | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |
| 23 rd | CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study Our Lady & St Hugh | 12.30pm-2.15pm |
| 25 th | Church Meeting | 12.00pm |
| 27 th | Encountering the God of Surprises | 7.30pm |
| April | | |
| 3 rd | Deacons Meeting | 7.30pm |
| 10 th | Lite Bite piece of the Word | 12.15pm |

ROTAS

WELCOMING TEAM

| | | |
|------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Feb | 04 | Cecily Lau & Judi Holloway |
| | 11 | Lesley Barter & Pat Brent |
| | 18 | Irene St Clair & Susan Wass |
| | 25 | Viviane & Sonya Boyd |
| Mar | 04 | Viviane Boyd & Jo Matthews |
| | 11 | Beryl Cartwright & Joan Currie |
| | 18 | Beryl Cartwright & Nanna Blackman |
| | 25 | Cecily Lau & Susan Wass |
| Apr | 01 | Judi Holloway & Irene St Clair |
| | 08 | Viviane & Sonya Boyd |



COMMUNION

| | | | |
|------------|-------|---|----------------|
| Feb | 04 pm | Lesley Barter | |
| | | Preparation | Lesley Barter |
| | 18 am | Lesley Barter & Norline Martin Viviane Boyd & Beryl Cartwright | |
| | | Preparation | Rita Hayes |
| Mar | 04 pm | Viviane Boyd | |
| | | Preparation | Viviane Boyd |
| | 18 am | Beryl Cartwright & Norline Martin Viviane Boyd & Judi Holloway | |
| | | Preparation | Irene St Clair |
| Apr | 01 am | Beryl Cartwright & Norline Martin Viviane Boyd & Judi Holloway | |
| | | Preparation | Viviane Boyd |



FLOWERS

| | | |
|------------|----|-------------------|
| Feb | 04 | Rita Hayes |
| | 11 | Val Obriain |
| | 18 | Pat Brent |
| | 25 | Jacqui Powlesland |



| | | |
|------------|----|------------------|
| Mar | 04 | Beryl Cartwright |
| | 11 | Judi Holloway |
| | 18 | Sonya Boyd |
| | 25 | Joan Currie |
| Apr | 01 | Easter flowers |
| | 08 | Rita Hayes |



SUNDAY COFFEE

| | | |
|------------|----|-------------------------------|
| Feb | 04 | Claire Woodward & Susan Wass |
| | 11 | Sue Birdseye & Irene St Clair |
| | 18 | Susan Wass & Judith Bungey |
| | 25 | Viviane Boyd & Hilary Pratley |
| Mar | 04 | Cafe Church |
| | 11 | Claire Woodward & Susan Wass |
| | 18 | Sue Birdseye & Irene St Clair |
| Apr | 25 | Susan Wass & Judith Bungey |
| | 01 | Viviane Boyd & Hilary Pratley |



THURSDAY COFFEE

| | | |
|------------|----|------------------|
| Feb | 01 | Hilary Pratley |
| | 08 | Beryl Cartwright |
| | 15 | Hilary Pratley |
| Mar | 22 | Beryl Cartwright |
| | 01 | Hilary Pratley |
| | 08 | Beryl Cartwright |
| | 15 | Hilary Pratley |
| | 22 | Beryl Cartwright |
| Apr | 29 | Hilary Pratley |
| | 05 | Beryl Cartwright |



We would be extremely grateful for other people to joint he Thursday Coffee Rota

Every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances. However, please change with someone else if the dates are not convenient for you

| | | |
|------------|----|----------------|
| Feb | 04 | Elaine Beechey |
| | 13 | Judi Holloway |
| | 16 | Leah Cotton |
| | 22 | Dave Wesson |
| | 24 | Marion Walker |



| | | |
|------------|----|--------------------|
| Mar | 08 | Joan Currie |
| | 11 | Lesley Barter |
| | | Mel Knapton |
| | 16 | Ben Smith |
| | 19 | Beryl Cartwright |
| | 22 | Peter Sellman |
| | 28 | Wendell La Fortune |

Pastor's Paper

This was written for the deacons' meeting on Tuesday, 23 January 2018, which happened to coincide with the date of my induction to WCC 9 years ago. It was agreed that I would share it with you as members and friends of the congregation. I hope that you will respond to this prayerfully and that you will take the opportunity to talk to me and the deacons about what you think. I hope that we will be able to give this concentrated time at a Church Meeting in the near future.

Waiting and Vision

For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel:

In returning and rest you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

But you refused and said, "No!"...

...the LORD waits to be gracious to you;
therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you.

For the LORD is a God of justice;
blessed are all those who wait for him.

Isaiah 30:15 & 18

Waiting has been God's call to me since February 2017. It began as an ache underneath my heart, just below the ribs. It was neither joy nor sadness, just an ache. I tried to describe the sensation to Viviane as a feeling like excitement and anticipation. My spiritual director told me that she had heard of a saying of that one must carry things under the heart for nine months. The questions I wrote in my journal on the 27 February are still with me: "I wonder what is gestating below my heart? What is it that God is nurturing to birth? I wonder..."

It is almost a year now. At times I have been waiting patiently. At others I've

become fed up with it wondering what on earth I'm waiting for. In my impatience I have pushed doors and found them firmly shut. Time and again the voice of the Spirit in my inner life and in my outward circumstances persistently says, "Where you are is where you belong. I am not finished with you in Witney."

During Advent and Christmas I was profoundly challenged to say 'Yes' to God, 'Yes' to his call, and 'Yes' to all the risk, uncertainty and possibilities of this place and this time. Obeying the call and following Jesus by serving him in this congregation and community has been difficult.

I've been in Witney for 9 years. These have been productive and exciting years. The action research project energised us as a learning community and will bear fruit in the publication of 'The Naked Preacher' at the end of March. I have been privileged to grow in prayer alongside many. I have walked alongside folk in the joy of marriage and baptism and the sorrows of illness, old age and death. Youth ministry was an exciting phase in my ministry with the potential for further development. The pastoral work has been deeply satisfying. Churches Together and community involvement, especially work in schools has been rewarding.

For the last few months I have suffered with lack of vision and purpose. Post PhD I expected a lull, an inevitable time of recovery. However, since the green shoots of LEAF withered with the end of Suzanne's role with the Congregational Federation, I have been at a loss. I know that God is calling me to wait for the vision but I am concerned to make sure that I am waiting actively in prayerful anticipation.

During my ministry our membership has declined. New people often remain on the

fringes. People are irregular in worship. When people are visiting us looking for a church, I notice that many do not come back. Why is that? Inevitably I question my competence as a worship leader and preacher and minister.

2017 saw 5 members go to be with Jesus Christ. We celebrated their lives and are glad they are free from suffering. Yet we are faced with the stark reality that these were key folk who, even in their declining years, contributed to the life of the congregation with the weight of their prayers, encouragement and presence. We also face the reality that there will be a decrease in financial contributions which impacts on the ability of the congregation to meet its commitments.

The congregation offers a number of key ministries that have missional potential: Noah's Ark, Rest and Chat, Saturday Coffee Morning, Saturday Praise, Lite Bite, Creative Church/Café Church. The question is this: are these ministries sustainable? Are we maximising the potential of these to connect with people in the community? Do we do too many 'activities' and are our activities serving our mission of sharing the Good News? The most energising areas of church life have centred on prayer – in particular 'Thy Kingdom Come' (also known as the Global Wave of Prayer) and the Prayer Days led by Joy Hance; Lite Bite; Saturday Praise; and Creative/Café Church.

A number of years ago I challenged the deacons to take a sabbatical (I seem to think it was about 2011/12). Whilst there was an initial openness to the idea we pulled back from it because we were worried that if we stopped then we would 'drop' (or lose all those vital connections). I am convinced that our congregation needs to enter into a period of waiting. It will be a time of discernment and prayer. It will be a time of opening ourselves to

what the Spirit is saying to us. What is the vision that God has for us as an older congregation? What is God asking us to lay down – to cease doing? What is God asking us to take up – to begin?

My key concern is that we have a 'building centred' approach to mission. We do things to get people into our building. What about the church going out into the community and being church out there?

- What about increasing the frequency of Café Church? What about having Café Church in a Café (e.g. - Costa)?
- What about a regular Pub Theology gathering?
- What about developing small groups in homes meeting weekly for discussion and fellowship actively inviting and involving non-church people in activities?

Another area I think we need to address is the invisible barriers that may keep people from joining in. It is normal for congregations to have groupings that invite people to come and participate but not to hand over leadership responsibilities. Even where we sit in church and gather for tea & coffee can create invisible barriers.

On Thursday, 11 January, I was out and about doing pastoral visits. I had a profound sense of knowing that Witney is where God wants me to be. This was affirmed when I met with Ray Hall. Ray and Jenny are known to many of us. He is a retired architect though still very active. He has had a lot of experience in leading people through visioning processes. Would he and Jenny be folk who might walk the next few months with us?

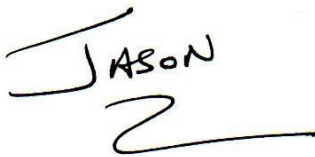
There is a gathering sense of excitement. That which I've been carrying under my heart is gestating and it seems as if the labour pains are about to begin. Being a

man I have not experienced birth first hand but know that labour is painful. It is a hard experience. I know that the next few months are going to be challenging. Are we willing to put into practice 'action research as a way of theology' to explore our identity, vision and strategy?

I cannot do this on my own. Depending on the reaction at the Church Meeting, I am hoping that we will begin to hold days of prayer and gather corporately to wait on the Lord.

What do you think?

Shalom



The following article, written by Canon David Winter, has been extracted from Church News Service, and is entitled:

Red Noses No Laughing Matter

Thirty years ago this month, on 5th February 1988, Britain experienced its first Red Nose Day. 'Comic Relief', an American idea, had crossed the Atlantic in a uniquely British form. So suddenly red noses were everywhere. Lenny Henry and comedy script-writer Richard Curtis were its first pioneers, movingly expounding its simple basic principle: poverty, exploitation and famine are not funny, but well-known funny people could help those who were their victims. The first Comic Relief drew an audience of 13 million and raised five million pounds. Over succeeding years, the audience has never

again been quite so large, but the amounts raised for the relief of poverty world-wide have hugely increased.

Getting a big TV audience is simply the first requirement of a telethon – a marathon televised charity project. Once Comic Relief achieved that audience, some of the most effective comedians in the UK did their stuff, sometimes live and sometimes recorded. Over Comic Relief's 30 years just about every well-known comedy performer in Britain', has contributed to the event. For several years a regular feature was an hilarious parody by Ian Hislop. The same comic stars also introduce films and interviews to remind viewers that this really is comedy with a purpose.

Once again, this month the red noses will appear – at school, at work, in shops and on the streets: a visible, bizarre reminder that the entire world is not happy, but our laughter is that of sympathy, not ridicule. When it is held again next year, in March 2019, the total raised by Comic Relief should pass a hundred million pounds, and that's no laughing matter.





PRAYER LETTER No 183

New, what is New?

A Happy New Year to you all.

A brief exercise for you; what comes into your mind when you think of the word 'new'?

Perhaps joy and delight in the arrival of a new baby. The good feel factor when you wear new clothes or the excitement of a new home or piece of equipment.

Are you for or against New Year Resolutions? Whatever Resolution one makes it takes time and determination to persevere with it. So often one falters or gives up on a resolution. God does not give up on us. He is there waiting. Each new day is a new beginning, find time to talk to God, to listen to God, to discover His purpose in your life.

A new year, each new day brings new beginnings, new opportunities, new horizons, new journeys, new birth, new life starting afresh, a sense of renewal by getting rid of old things, old ways and making a new commitment.

With today's 24/7 culture there is constant pressure to be active. We can learn a lot from Nature's 'cycle of life'. Our winter is nature's season of resting, sleeping, preparing for new life in the spring. Our winter days have less hours of sunlight and long hours of darkness which the seeds and plants need for their resting time. The resting time develops into a growing time with new shoots appearing then eventually the productive time of bearing fruit. How do we see this pattern in our lives? Do we recognise it? Can you find a time during the day of resting and listening to God?

God sent words to the Prophets to tell his people about changing their ways.

God sent a new star to guide the Wise Men to the new infant king.

God sent Jesus into the world to bring 'NEW Life' to all who believed in Him.

Jesus gave his disciples a **New Command**, '**Love one another as I have loved you**'. During the Last Supper Jesus took the cup saying, 'this cup is the **new covenant** in my blood, which is poured out for you'.

Use the hymn opposite written by John Keble to reflect on the new blessings of each new day.

May God be with you all as you continue in journey of faith

Every Blessing - Beryl

The following hymn is for use with the Prayer Letter

*1 New every morning is the love
our waking and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought,
restored to life and power and thought.*

*2 New mercies, each returning day,
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.*

*3 If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.*

*4 Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be
As more of heaven in each we see;
Some softening gleam of love and prayer
Shall dawn on every cross and care.*

*5 The trivial round, the common task,
will furnish all we ought to ask,
Lord, help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray*

John Keble

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

The BBC to increase coverage of religion

The BBC has recently pledged to 'raise our game' on religion by increasing the portrayal of all faiths in mainstream shows

The corporation said it would 'enhance' the representation of religion on TV and radio dramas and documentaries. It said it would also create a new global religious affairs team, headed by a religion editor, in BBC News. The BBC will also keep Thought for the Day on Radio 4's Today programme

The corporation recently published the conclusions of a review into its coverage of religion and ethics, and Director General Tony Hall said audiences of all faiths and none have said they want to learn more about those topics

'They recognise that, if we truly want to make sense of the world, we need to understand the systems of belief that underpin it,' he said. He added that he wants the corporation 'to do more about Christianity and other beliefs as well.'

The plans include:

- There will be more about non-Christian festivals like Diwali, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Ramadan and Eid on mainstream programmes like The One Show, The Chris Evans Breakfast Show and Newsround
- There will be landmark programmes to 'explore religion in all its forms', including a major TV series about the world's sacred sites, a Radio 4 series on morality in the 21st Century, and a Radio 2 initiative to encourage young people to discuss issues about peace
- 2019 will be 'A Year of Beliefs', with programmes looking at how people make big decisions and where they get their moral values from
- There will be more 'people-led stories that have warmth and depth', such as observing vicars working in local communities
- There will be tie-ins with music and comedy, and more digital-first video and social media content
- The role of the religious affairs correspondent - currently Martin Bashir - will be upgraded to religion editor, leading BBC News's new global religious affairs team. BBC News will also broaden the range of interviewees and contributors to represent a wider range of opinions and practices

Bible Study

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

MEANDERING IN MARK

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

3. Mark 1:16-34

Mark has proclaimed that he is writing concerning the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He has shown how Jesus himself is confirmed in his calling, empowered through testing and then comes into Galilee proclaiming his message. But would anybody take any notice of this man and his message? What, if anything, was there about this Jesus to call forth a response from people? At this stage Mark has recorded nothing obvious which would cause people to take any particular notice of Jesus. Yet there must have been something a little different about him as he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and saw the brothers Simon and Andrew fishing. He says to them: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people". Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. Why? This was surely a most extraordinary thing to do.

Fishermen on the Sea of Galilee made quite a good income, theirs was a fairly secure living. It had its hardships but it was secure. Why should they give it up just like that to go off with this man? Mark gives us no indication of "Why?" We can speculate that it was the pun in the words of Jesus, linking "fishermen" with "fishing for men"; but surely such would be far too trivial a reason! Or we can assume that Jesus had met with and talked with these men before this moment of his call although Mark gives us no indication that this had happened. Then Jesus moves on to call James and John the sons of Zebedee to follow him. This time his words to them are not given but his demand upon them seems more costly than on Simon and Andrew, for this second pair of brothers abandon not only a more prosperous business that employed hired servants, but also their father Zebedee. Jesus called and these four men followed him!

As recorded, the event does not make sense. Why then has Mark told his tale in just this manner? I suspect that it is because Mark wants to emphasise that the reason for following Jesus is simply because he calls us to follow him. These first disciples were given no obvious or overwhelming incentive to follow Jesus. All they were given was the sight of the person of Jesus, about whom they knew very little, and his call to them to come with him into an unknown future in which to be made into people who did something different from that which they had been doing. The call of Jesus is into the unknown. The call of Jesus means leaving the familiar and the secure. The call of Jesus requires an immediate response. The call of Jesus demands a new direction in life. The call of Jesus is

to be with Him. For Mark (and for us?) it is the person of Jesus that is important, not any deeds of Jesus which Mark may subsequently record: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God whose call is simply "Follow Me!"

"They went to Capernaum." Jesus is no longer alone; the four fishermen are with him. I picture them wondering what they had let themselves in for, what was going to happen. The first event Mark records must have been so reassuring for those men - on the Sabbath day Jesus goes to the synagogue. What else should one do on the Sabbath day! Here in the synagogue of their home town they were on familiar and safe ground. But then it all became different. Jesus began to teach. And, records Mark, he taught "as one having authority, and not as the scribes". Mark records nothing of what Jesus said; Mark records the impression he made saying "They were astounded at his teaching". Once again Mark reinforces his message that it is the person of Jesus which is important, raising the question as to "Who is this man?" This is the question to which each of us has to give our own answer as we come face to face with Jesus.

In the synagogue is a man who has an answer to that question. He cries out that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Holy One of God. Such is the vision, the insight of the man. However the source of such insight is said to be "an unclean spirit" which possesses and controls the man. This unclean spirit is afraid, afraid of the holiness which it finds in Jesus. This entity which has the power to control the life, the being of a man, recognises in Jesus a greater power which can set its host, the man possessed, free. "Have you come to destroy us?" asks this spirit,

knowing full well that the answer is "Yes".

Jesus responds directly to the uncleanness within the man: "Be silent and come out of him." With a furious and noisy struggle, the unclean spirit is gone and the man is made whole.

Mark goes on to paint a picture of consternation in the synagogue. "They were all amazed." The "they" here is presumably many more people than the four fishermen. One can picture the hubbub of questioning as those present seek to find an answer as to what all this means, as to who is this person who speaks with authority and commands even the evil spirits, commands in such a manner that they obey. The evil spirit had proclaimed exactly who Jesus was and yet no one seems to have even contemplated that what that spirit said might be true. The man was, as we might say today, "mentally unstable" and therefore nothing which he said was worth considering; both his words and the man could be put out of mind. How easy it is for us to dismiss those who are "different" and so miss out on one or more of the great truths of God. Simon and Andrew, James and John together with all those in the synagogue "missed out" on the truth about Jesus because it came from an unacceptable source. So it was that for them Jesus remained just another teacher, albeit a teacher with authority and power such as they had not known. News of that authority and power spread like wildfire throughout Galilee.

They leave the synagogue, Jesus and the Four, and go to the house of Simon and Andrew. Obviously this is a family home for Mark records that present in the house is Simon's mother-in-law. Who else lives there, or perhaps is staying

there, we are not told. We may assume that Simon's wife was present; maybe there are children besides other members of an older generation. Mark's record concentrates only on the one person present who has a specific need - Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever. Jesus is told about this immediately. Is he asked if he can do something about the fever or is he simply told of the situation to account for the absence of the lady from the company? Mark gives us no indication but simply shows Jesus as responding to a need. Jesus goes to this woman and takes her by the hand. Mark here introduces one of the great characteristics of the ministry of Jesus; Jesus touches people, all sorts of people in their need. Jesus is not put off from contact by who people are, by what state they are in, by any risk of contamination from them: he reaches out to them to help, to heal, to save. Here Jesus takes this woman by the hand and lifts her up. "Then the fever left her". Just like that. No fuss, no bother, just love enough to touch and strength enough to lift. In this is the power that heals. The woman is accepted, encouraged and, lo and behold, "she began to serve them". The response to healing is activity to help. We can picture the whole family, together with Jesus and James and John joining happily in the evening meal while mother-in-law bustles around keeping everything in order as only she knows how.

The family scene is rapidly disrupted however, for the Sabbath is over as the new day, in the Jewish calendar, begins at sundown. With the ending of the Sabbath the restrictions upon travelling and upon burden bearing are over so that suddenly people start flocking to where Jesus is, bringing with them the sick of

body and of mind. "And the whole city was gathered around the door." How literally did Mark intend us to take that statement? Probably not too literally. I well recall being told of certain events that "all the world and his wife were there". I suspect that Mark here uses a similar expression to indicate the very large numbers of people who arrived, arrived seeking healing from Jesus. And heal them he did, many of them. Again we can ask whether the word "many" indicates that there were some whom Jesus did not heal. Often, when we come to think on the healing ministry of the Church, we find ourselves asking the question as to why some people are healed and others are not. Perhaps we ask the wrong question; perhaps we make the wrong assumption, the assumption that all should be healed. Maybe what is required of us is that we should rejoice and give thanks that "many" are healed even as they were on Simon and Andrew's doorstep in Capernaum.

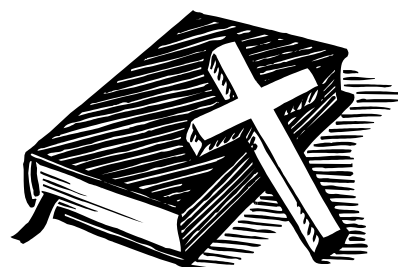
Let us pause for a moment to think what Mark may actually have meant here. The word he uses is one of six different Greek words used in the New Testament which are translated with the English word "heal" or "cure". Which of these two English words is used seems to depend on the whim of the particular translator or group of translators. However the actual Greek word which is used here, $\theta_{\rho}\alpha\pi_{\nu\omega}$, is the word from which we get the English word "Therapeutic" with the meaning of "treating medically". Maybe what Mark was actually saying was not that Jesus healed or cured many people, but that he treated them, he ministered to their perceived needs. Such ministering, such treatment would have effected healing in many situations even if

there was not a complete cure of the disease. It could well be that Alan Dale in his New World paraphrase version of the New Testament has hit the right meaning here when he records "Jesus made them all better, whatever their illness was." We have the picture of Jesus having time for people in their need, sharing of himself with them. As a result of such an encounter these people found that life was better; they were enabled to face the future with renewed strength: surely this is healing!

One last thought upon this passage; Jesus cast out many demons and would not permit them to speak because they knew him. Once again, it appears that those people who do not seem to be fully in control of their own lives are the ones who are enabled to recognise the truth about the person of Jesus. Did they really know, or is Mark here assuming that they, like the man whom Jesus healed in the synagogue, had such knowledge? As Jesus did not allow them to speak, how was it known that those possessed with demons knew who Jesus really was? Maybe Mark here follows the common belief of his day that demons, because they were spiritual beings, had spiritual insight denied to mortal beings? Certainly this silencing of the demons fits in with Mark's method of telling of the story of Jesus, where people are required to find out for themselves who Jesus really is.

The "casting out of demons" raises another question, that as to whether "demons" are real evil spirits, or is Mark here recording incidents of what we might well call "mental illness"? I incline towards the concept of "possession" being a form of mental illness because if "evil spirits" actually exist outside of the human mind, then I needs must ask

questions as to whether God created them, what purpose they have in his creation, and how they fit within the whole pattern of salvation. To these and similar questions I have as yet found no answers which would not destroy the picture of a self-giving God revealed in Jesus Christ. So I conclude that "demons" do not exist as distinct separate beings and yet I am well aware that to those "possessed of demons", the "demons" are absolutely real, so real that the person feels controlled by a being that is not truly their self. To be able to help a person so possessed, it is needful that the helper accepts that which is real to the person as being true. Mark shows Jesus doing just this. Jesus does not contest the reality of the belief which these people have in demons; he ministers to their needs. Jesus ministers to these people who are convinced of the existence of and possession by demons; he addresses the demons and casts them out, he sets the person free of mind and heart from that which oppressed and controlled them. Jesus enables people to become their true selves, to be free. "Who is this that can do these things?" As the crowd dispersed from outside Simon and Andrew's door that night, this question must have been in many a mind. It is the question each of us must still answer: Who is this Jesus?



The following article has been submitted by Lesley Barter, and is entitled:

What sort of a Church do we really want?

Perhaps that is the wrong question to start with....should we not rather be asking whether we want a church at all?

Would we prefer an exclusive fellowship group in which we feel comfortable and safe? Have we perhaps outgrown the need for organised gatherings that need expensive buildings, leaders, administrators, not to mention cleaning staff and caretakers. Which, if any of these things, is developing our relationship with God and helping us to serve Him?

In the past the Church was a focal point for the community. Not only did it provide sanctuary for the oppressed and a halfway house in the communication of the Word of God and the response of the masses – it also acted as a powerful political weapon for monarchs who believed themselves to rule by divine right. The church was part of the power hierarchy. However, once the word of God became intelligible to the common man (and woman) and people could read and interpret for themselves God's plan for them, the stranglehold of the church began to loosen. It regained influence in Victorian times via a strict (and often superficial) moral code, but with the two world wars of the twentieth century cynicism and disillusion were here to stay. We are now in an age where the Church is searching for a meaningful place in the lives of the majority.

Against this backdrop, Witney Congregational Church tries to find a meaningful way to serve its members, some of whom have seen it through good times and bad over many years – for

which the rest of us owe a debt of gratitude and understanding of their emotional ties to the past. However we must face the elephant in the room: if we go on as we are we shall eventually disappear altogether. There won't be enough of us who are able and prepared to keep things running and we shall not be nurturing our Christian lives. We certainly won't be attracting new members....but deep down, do we want to?

So this brings us back to the original question. Do we want a vibrant, living spiritual community that makes demands on both our time and our intellect? One that shows by what we say and do that we are followers of Christ? Are we prepared to draw others into our world and bear witness to our faith? Or do we want a comfortable club that happens to use God as its link.

Some of us aren't even appearing at Sunday services any more and we are looking more and more like a fellowship group with a strong emphasis on pastoral care. Nothing wrong with that, but it isn't really enough for God. Just like the first disciples, we are challenged to *...go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation*. The least we can do is invite people into our church family.

Are we brave enough to respond? Is that what we really, really want?



At our Café Church on the 26 November 2017, we were privileged to have Judit Brody join us. She is a regular at our Coffee Mornings and some of us had heard her story about being a refugee. It was fantastic that she was able to share her experience with the wider church at the Café.

Judit told us about being a Hungarian Jew during the war and of how a Swedish diplomat, Raoul Wallenberg, rescued her family and many others through granting certificates of protection. For more information please visit the website:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005211>.

It was moving to hear Judit tell of how on that very day, 26 November, 60 years earlier, she and her husband fled Hungary. With a rucksack and wool socks they had breakfast and left everything on the table. "Why do the dishes when you didn't have to?" she quipped.

Judit sent further reflections on what it means to be a refugee and asked that these were shared in the Crossroads. Here is what she wrote:

The word "refugee" has several definitions: Here is one: 1951 Refugee Convention
A refugee is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...'

I found a simpler definition online
Someone who has been forced to leave a country because of war or for religious or political reasons

Neither of these definition say that refugees were actually harmed or persecuted, nor that their country of nationality had closed borders preventing the population to leave, although they wanted to leave for one or more of the above mentioned reasons.

Our reasons were: we had the wrong political opinions, and we were intellectuals not part of the proletariat (see above definitions). There was the constant fear that we might drop a remark that was not "in line" and somebody would report it to the authorities resulting in prison or internment. In any case, we felt like prisoners in Hungary where the borders were closely guarded with watch towers and were undermined, we could not get a passport or an exit visa.

I have to add that we were told that in the "west" people were very poor. Brainwashing resulted in the opposite belief: we thought that one just had to "pick up gold on the pavement". So we were partially "economic migrants" – but are not all refugees in part that?

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 broke out on October 23. It was against the ruling communist party; the first visible sign at 6 am was truckloads of soldiers with the Hungarian red/white/green flag with a big hole in the middle where the 5 pointed star was torn out. My first reaction was to go and queue up for bread.

By November 3 we were free! It was a lovely autumn day and on the streets people were hugging each other. Then on November 4 the Russian tanks came in and freedom was over. But the country's borders were open because the guards stayed at home –though there were still some mines buried. However, people started crossing into Austria. It took us 3 weeks to decide that we should leave our parents (who were in their 50-s and considered to be too old) all our possessions, and our jobs behind and escape. My husband managed to obtain an alibi of why we should travel to the border: as a mathematician he had to go to do urgent mathematical work in a sugar factory. Would anybody believe that?

Anyway, our escape was smooth. So was mostly the other 200,000 people's escape. Our life in our new home was not easy, still isn't but that is another story.

The following is the third in a series of 5 Sermons submitted by Rev Dr Jason Boyd

Following suffering shepherd

1 Peter 2:19-25

In 1807 the slave trade was abolished. William Wilberforce was a driving force in bringing about the end of this barbaric trade in human flesh. He was up against mighty economic forces. Livelihoods and immense wealth depended on the slave trade. Wilberforce did not rest as he continued his quest to abolish slavery itself. It is poignant that he learned that the law was certain to be passed only a couple of days before his death in 1833. Every ounce of his energy was expended on this cause of freedom and his reputation and health suffered because of the enormous pressures he faced.

There is no slave trade. Slavery has been abolished. No one would argue for the subjugation of other human beings to be treated as little more than animals. Two hundred years after Wilberforce's initial victory no one would advocate for the 'rightness' of slavery. But is it as simple as all that?

On the 4 April this year, Keith and Caroline Baker were found guilty of unimaginable crimes. A woman with special needs had disappeared from her home in 2004 and was reported missing by her husband. In 2012 she was found in squalid conditions, having been forced to live in a room without a handle on the inside of the door. The available toilet was filled to overflowing. The sexual abuse she had endured was recorded on video. She was a slave.

Slavery was abolished in 1833 and yet we know that there are many who have their freedom taken from them in our own cities and towns. People are lured into situations in which their oppressor takes away their power by removing financial control or

passports and so on. Though few would argue for the moral rightness of slavery in our day and age, there remains a desperate need for us to continue to work to end the practice of slavery and human trafficking in the 21st century.

The evil of slavery troubles me. And so to find in this letter a message to slaves that says, "Accept your lot in life. Submit to the good and harsh slave master alike. When you're unjustly treated and you suffer at the hands of your master, endure it." I am troubled when the author goes on to tell the slaves that they will receive God's approval if they do what they do the right thing and accept unjust suffering without retaliation. I am troubled by the way these slaves are encouraged to tie their sufferings to the suffering of Christ. "When you accept suffering at the hands of your master then you are following the example of Jesus who also suffered on the cross." Does not the whole thrust of the argument in this letter condemn slaves to a life of tyranny? Are they now consigned to a life of drudgery, pain and punishment to the end of their days – and all because of Jesus?

There is no easy way around the difficulties that this passage of 1 Peter poses except to attempt to understand it in its own context. The reality of the ancient world was that people couldn't imagine the world without slavery. Imagining a world without slaves is like imagining a world without money, banks and lending. Imagining a world without slaves is like imagining a world that does not use fossil fuels. Imagining a world without slaves is like imagining a world without violence and wars. Imagining a world without slaves is like imagining a world without poor people in it. Yes, there are those who have dared to dream such dreams but few who have tried to make the dream come true.

Martin Luther King drew on the non-violent

resistance philosophy of Mahatma Ghandi. Through his leadership of the Civil Rights Movement in the US he demonstrated through his actions his belief that "Organised, non-violent resistance is the most powerful weapon that the oppressed can use in breaking loose from the bondage of oppression." Rosa Parks refusal to give up her seat led to thousands of acts of peaceful resistance which eventually led to dramatic change in America. It remains a partially realised dream.

The author of this first letter of Peter was writing to followers of Jesus scattered throughout modern day Turkey. We do not know their identities but it is possible that they were a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus living as minorities in a culture dominated by idolatry and innovative philosophies. The writer of the letter could not have imagined a world without slavery.

However, he did imagine the possibility of freedom. In 2:16 he describes those who follow Jesus as slaves of God. To be a slave of God was to be free. He warns against using this freedom of being a slave of God as a freedom to do evil. It's as if he is saying, "As God's slave you are free. Your freedom is to honour others, love your sisters and brothers in Jesus, to fear God, and honour the emperor." The freedom of a slave of God is a freedom to love and live and orderly life.

A slave demonstrates their fear of God by living well under the authority of their master. In a world where they could not change whether they were treated badly, they did have the freedom to endure their suffering with dignity – the dignity that comes of being part of "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (2:9). Being beaten for defying your master is well deserved as far as those in the ancient world were concerned. But if you were beaten for doing the right thing

then God would see it and approve of them even though their master despised them.

In our current time we would not use such a passage of scripture to encourage people to remain in abusive situations whether it be a bullying boss, a violent partner, or a manipulative friendship. There is encouragement here for those who find themselves enslaved in situations from which they cannot escape. For Terry Waite, chained in darkness to a radiator, he discovered the freedom of God as he recited passages of scripture from the Prayer book. For Corrie ten Boom, incarcerated in a prison for hiding Jews, she looked through her barred window which opened to the skies and knew that in Christ she was free even in that cell. For Martin Luther King, the gaols incarcerating them for non-violent resistance became houses of freedom. For Coptic and Syrian Christians living in fear of the violence of Daesh being slaves of God means freedom even when crushed by persecution.

So, if being a slave of God means we have truest freedom, where does that freedom come from? It comes through Christ who suffered for us. It is Christ who is the suffering servant. It is Christ who was crucified even though he had not said or done anything wrong. It is Christ who suffered without returning abuse for abuse or threat for threat. It is Christ who trusted God's right judgements. It is Christ who took our sins into his own body on the cross and in that way set us free from our sins. It is Christ who set us free to live in God's right ways. It is through Christ's wounds – his bruises that we have been healed. It is Christ who is the shepherd and we have returned to his care.

Though the writer could not imagine a world without slavery, he did imagine what freedom was for those who were slaves of God. God is the master who brings true life and wholeness through Christ. Our freedom

is under the guardianship of our Shepherd. The writer was imagining that though a slave could not be freed from the unchangeable order of society, they could still enjoy the freedom that they had in God through Christ.

Christ was not a victim of circumstance. He chose to suffer and in so doing took into himself our sins – the sins of violence and hatred. He chose not to abuse those who abused him. He chose not to hurl threats at those who threatened his life. Christ was actively demonstrating God’s grace and love. It was an action of non-violent resistance. Through his wounding we are healed.

Martin Luther King chose the way of non-violence and brought about lasting change. This involved living most of his life as an object of other people’s hate and violence. Even when his house was bombed he continued on. He suffered the ultimate price after his ‘I been to the Mountaintop’ speech when he was assassinated. His tragic death became a seedbed of healing and transformation.

We are called to follow Christ’s example of suffering to bring healing. So how can we resist evil through the freedom we have in God? How do we embrace suffering in order to set others free from the power of sin? In what ways are we able to show through our active acceptance of suffering that there is a way of freedom? How can we point people to return to the shepherd and guardian of our souls?

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

Our Alongside-Helpers

There are many words in modern English that begin with the prefix ‘para’, but nowadays undoubtedly the best-known is ‘paramedic’. We all know what they do. We’ve seen them in their green jackets on television, at road traffic accidents and terrorist incidents, kneeling beside the wounded and dying. We’ve also seen their work in many TV documentaries and dramas, so that their appearance on our door-step when we’ve dialled 999 is both unsurprising and welcome. Over sixty years ago during my national service I was, I suppose, for a while a kind of proto-paramedic - I and my colleague Taffy (still a friend) were the emergency medical team on a large RAF station in Berkshire. We had had some training, but nothing like the level of today’s paramedics.

The title intrigues me, because the ‘para’ bit always means something like ‘with’ or ‘alongside’. Think of parallel lines, or parachute. There’s an odd example in some of our more traditional hymns, where the Holy Spirit is called the ‘Paraclete’. That’s taken from John’s Gospel, when Jesus says He would send His followers a Helper - *paracletos*, in Greek. Split into its two parts, it simply means ‘alongside helper’, which is how for years I have thought of the Holy Spirit. A paramedic is literally someone who’s also an ‘alongside helper’ at moments of great need. So green jackets with PARACLETE on their backs? There’s a ‘thought for the day’!



Remembering the Munich air disaster

The Munich air disaster took place 60 years ago, on 6th February 1958, when a plane carrying the Manchester United Football team – known as the Busby Babes – plus support staff and journalists, crashed while attempting to take off from a slush-covered runway at Munich-Riem Airport.

Some 23 people were killed, among them eight players, including Duncan Edwards, widely regarded as the outstanding player of his generation and according to some potentially the best player in the world. He actually died a fortnight after the crash in hospital, and is commemorated by two stained glass windows in St Francis' Church, Dudley, his home town.

The team was returning from a successful European Cup match in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and the plane had to refuel. The disaster happened when it crashed on its third attempt to take off, following technical problems. Slowed by slush, the plane ploughed through a fence beyond the end of the runway, and the left wing was torn off after hitting a house – whose inhabitants survived.

Initially the captain of the plane was blamed, but he was cleared ten years later. The crash not only derailed the club's ambitions for that year, but it took them ten years to recover, with Busby rebuilding the team and winning the European Cup in 1968 with a new generation of 'Babes'.

The following article, written by Canon David Winter, and extracted from Church News Service, reflects that 1918 was the final year of the Great War, and will look back on highlights of those critical 12 months, when the very shape of modern world history was being hammered out on the battlefields, and is entitled:

Diary of a Momentous Year: February 1918: How long, O Lord, how long?

If there had been radio or television in 1918 the British public would have been more aware that events in northern Europe and the middle East were changing the history of the modern world. Of course, people knew – it was all over the newspapers – that Russia now had a Bolshevik Government, following the Revolution, and that British forces (including the eventually world-famous 'Lawrence of Arabia') were now deeply involved in a war to free the Arab peoples from Ottoman rule. But that all seemed far away, and there were more immediately pressing things to worry about at home.

The first, and for most people the worst, of these was the very effective German blockade. 'Britannia rules the waves' didn't seem very true when German submarines, the dreaded U-boats, could operate with impunity around our shores. During February, a British troopship carrying American soldiers was sunk off the Irish coast, and even more blatantly a hospital ship was sunk in the Bristol channel, both by German submarines. The city of Dover, in Kent, was shelled by the guns of a U-boat. The whole thing seemed to be getting out of hand – certainly the toll of freight ships sunk was drastically affecting food and other supplies in the shops.

The result of this was that the civilian population, whose war-time fears had hitherto largely concerned their loved ones at the front line, now felt the effects of war at close hand. Over the previous two years they had gradually become aware, largely through the bombing raids by Zeppelins on British towns and cities, that in modern warfare everyone is vulnerable. By the end of 1917, the Germans had largely abandoned Zeppelin raids, mainly because they had already lost the greater part of

their fleet, but the threat of raids by aircraft was very much in people's minds. The shelling of Dover was a reminder that modern war knows no borders.

Not surprisingly, February 1918 saw many tentative attempts to gather support for a peace-making programme, largely encouraged by US President Wilson. Politicians were talking peace at last, and there had been cease-fires agreed in several long-lasting disputes in eastern Europe, and the middle East. But for anxious British people, some resolution of the apparently endless conflict with Germany was the main topic of their prayers.

The following article, author unknown, has been submitted by Theo Howells, and is entitled:

Take Time

Take time to **think** – it is the source of power
Take time to **play** – it is the secret of perpetual youth
Take time to **read** – it is the fountain of wisdom
Take time to **pray** – it is the greatest power on earth
Take time to **love** and **be loved** – it is a God-given privilege
Take time to be **friendly** – it is the road to happiness
Take time to **laugh** – it is the music of the soul
Take time to **give** – it is too short a day to be selfish
Take time to **work** – it is the price of success
Take time to **do charity** – it is the key to heaven

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

The Way I see It: ENJOYING THE SINS OF OTHERS

The last months of 2017 produced a bumper crop of allegations of sins and 'inappropriate touching' (what, I wonder is 'appropriate'?) on the part of famous people. Hollywood icons, then British show-biz promoters, then public figures and prominent politicians and sporting figures were named and shamed, even if the stories were always described as 'allegations'. Even the serious papers and BBC news reported many of them. Some, if true, were horrible examples of the abuse of power, or fame, or wealth. Others, as reported, sounded like the sort of things that got sorted in my time at the BBC with a smack to the face. But there they were, and there is no doubt that readers and viewers lapped them up.

Why do we enjoy the sins of others? It could be, of course, that they provide a kind of popular pornography: many accounts were unnecessarily decorated with detail. But I suspect, mostly from my knowledge of myself, that an even stronger reason for the public's enjoyment of these stories is the sheer relief of knowing that if we are naughty from time to time, others (including some we should respect) are down-right bad. 'I may be bad, but I'm not as bad as so-and-so' sounds like the rehearsal of an excuse for the Day of Reckoning.

It isn't, of course. Each of us must answer for our own failings, and none is wholly innocent. But enjoying the sins of others is, surely, a rather tawdry kind of sin in itself?