

Witney Congregational Church

R CROSS A D S

Witney Congregational Church is a crossroads where we:

meet God in worship

meet one another in friendship

meet our community and world with the love of Jesus



WHAT'S ON GUIDE

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

MINISTER

Rev Dr Jason Boyd

ASSOCIATE MINISTER

Rev Judi Holloway

WORSHIP

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

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

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

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

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

OTHER ACTIVITIES

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

SUNDAY LINK

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

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

Opening Hours: Monday – Saturday



01993 709429

09.00 am – 5.00 pm

CHURCH WEBSITE

For further information, please visit our website:

www.witneycongregational.org.uk

MAGAZINE EDITOR

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



We have now reached the greatest of all Christian feasts in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. So let us not forget the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice made for us all on the cross



Turning now to the magazine, and to come in line with the latest update to the Data Protection Act, which from May will be known as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), some changes have been made to the magazine content, Viz: data relating to those who serve the Church, in whatever capacity, have been removed – which used to be the page on the inside of the rear cover; additionally the Rotas have been omitted and a copy for those on this rota will be available from the Church Office

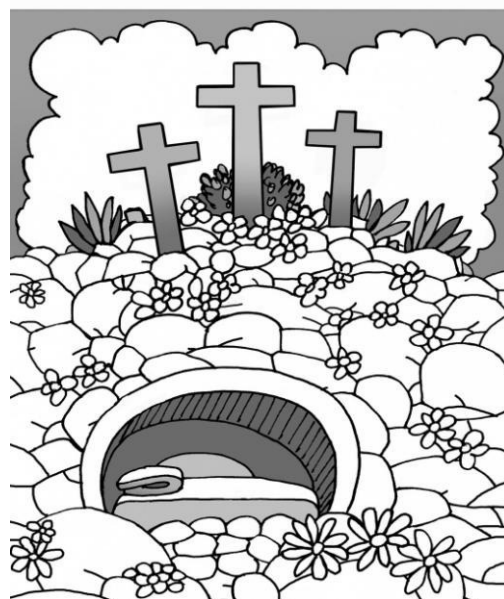
Taking that into consideration, let's turn to those who have contributed to this edition; alongside the standard pages, there is the

continuation of the Bible Study series; there is an article on victory over the dragons; Feedback from Worship Workshop & Cafe Church; Why Easter will never go away and CTiW Safety & Security 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 via E-mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net or just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up.

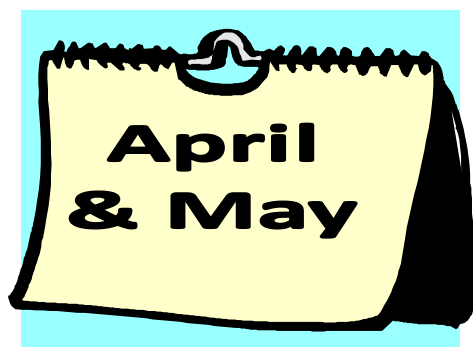
The next 3-monthly Summer edition, covering June, July & August is due on **Sunday 3rd June**

Your Editor



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Daily Prayer Time:

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Services

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

Apr

1 st		Dawn Service	6.30am	
		Service with Communion	8.00am	
		Breakfast	8.45am	
7 th	am	Morning Worship	Communion	
8 th	am	Saturday Praise	11.00am	
15 th	am	Morning Worship		Rev Elaine Kinchin Communion
22 nd	am	Morning Worship		
29 th	am	Morning Worship		
		Madley Park Residential Home	3.00pm	

May

5 th		Saturday Praise	11.00am	
6 th	am	Morning Worship		
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion	
13 th	am	Morning Worship		
20 th	am	Morning Worship	Communion	
27 th	am	David Kinchin		

June

2 nd		Creative Church	10.00am	
3 rd	am	Cafe Church		
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion	

The following events are given for your particular attention:

April

3 rd		Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
		Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
10 th		Encountering the God of Surprises	7.30pm
14 th		Prayer Chain Meeting	9.15am
16 th		Thy Kingdom Come: Family Prayer pots	7.00 – 8.30pm
17 th		Encountering the God of Surprises	7.30pm
19 th		Thy Kingdom Come: Family Prayer pots	10.00 – 11.30am
21 st		GDPR Training - Junior Hall	9.45am – 12.30pm
		Memories Afternoon: Parties & Weddings	2.00 – 5.00pm
22 nd		Youth Group	12.30pm
23 rd		Thy Kingdom Come meeting	7.30pm
24 th		Encountering the God of Surprises	7.30pm
29 th		Youth Group leaders meeting	12.15pm

May

1 st		Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
		Deacon's meeting	7.30pm

12 th	Prayer Chain Meeting	9.15am
	WRAG Sewing Group	1.00 – 5.00pm
13 th	Youth Group	12.30pm
27 th	Church Meeting	12.00pm (Subject to change)
June		
5 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm

April 12 Andrew
26 Sonya
Simon
Joyce
Seren
28 Jo



May 04 Graham
16 Jean
21 Terry
24 Pip
25 Bill
30 Pat S

The following article, written by Rev Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers Easter and St George's Day, and is entitled:

Victory over Dragons

'Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.' (2 Tim 2:8)

This month we remember the story of St George defeating the dragon. Although this is the stuff of legend, we face our own dragons today. We are engaged in a spiritual battle against the powers of sin, Satan and death. In this Easter season, we remember that the great battle has been won. By His cross and resurrection, Jesus secured the victory over sin, Satan and death. The resurrection is the proof that they are no longer too powerful to resist. *'Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory?'* (1 Cor 15:54,55). *Where is your power, dragon?*

The story is told of a village in India, terrorised by a great bear looking for food each night. Eventually, the villagers decided to take action, and tracked down the bear to his cave.

One man, stronger and braver than the rest, ventured into the dark cave. The villagers outside could hear nothing; eventually they heard a loud shrieking cry and then silence. They waited to see what had happened. Finally, the man emerged from the dark cave victorious! The bear was dead, and the villagers were safe.

The victory was won deep within the cave. They could only be confident and celebrate when the champion emerged. For us, this happened when Jesus rose from the grave. The finality of death is no more and so we need fear death no longer. Also, the power of sin and Satan no longer controls us. The devil, the biggest dragon, is helpless to prevent Jesus taking us home. When Jesus beckons us through death, away from the dragon's power, will you follow him?

The victory is complete: *'Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead.'*

Pastor's Paper

In my last letter I spilled my heart out. I know that this was unsettling to some. I revealed to you my sense of uncertainty and hope as we enter a time of expectant waiting for the birth of God's vision for us as a congregation.

On the 25 March, the Church Meeting met over lunch to begin wrestling with 'Waiting and Vision'. Those who were gathered in that meeting were invited to think about the feelings, thoughts and actions of expectant parents **waiting** for a baby. Then we reflected on the moment of birth itself. What does the experience of birth feel like? Once we are holding that baby, what dreams do we have for that child? What are our hopes and fears? We proceeded to make connections with our church life.

One thing that leapt out of our conversations was that we needed to grow. We not only needed to grow spiritually but we need to grow in the number of people in our church family.

Growth means change and change can be challenging. We want more people to join us but what happens when they actually turn up and try to be part of us?

People identified that waiting is active. Waiting does not mean that we are not involved in doing things or inviting people to explore faith with us.

Waiting is expectant and involves an active time of exploring, "Who are we as Witney Congregational Church?" It is an intentional time of listening to God and listening to one another. It is important "That we take the time to listen rather than hearing what we want to hear – and be willing to act on it" and "that all voices are heard and we see the need for all to be part of the vision."

We identified important aspects of waiting and vision as we thought of birth and the links to church:

- We might be overwhelmed. Is it too much to handle? Are we up to it? Our fears must not stop us.
- Be prepared!
- We need to know the likely outcomes of what is going to happen.
- We need to know the timing of events.
- We need to have a support network.
- We need to pray for the future.
- Part of the preparation is to have a sharp vision and identify ways forward. We need a clear plan with targets and dates. ***This involves knowing the 'Why' as well as the 'What'!***
- We need to arrive at a common understanding and purpose of what we want to achieve so that we are all pulling in the same direction.
- We have to cherish our hopes and acknowledge our fears.
- We have to be prepared to risk failure.
- How do we manage the changes we need to make?
- We may need outside help to prepare for the future.

Labour is painful. There was recognition that if we want to grow, if we want to change, if we want to see God acting in our church community, there will be pain. It was pointed out that after the pain of labour follows an overwhelming joy.

There was strong agreement in the meeting that there had to be 'buy-in' from everyone in the congregation. There has to be a strong commitment to one another in worship as we seek to draw others into the fellowship.

This was a positive meeting in the sense that I detected that we all know that things have to change. One of the areas of growth that the diaconate identified and which was echoed in the Church Meeting was our

need to deepen our fellowship. It seems like an important area of growth is for us to get together in one another's homes, to tell our life stories to one another and in the process to share our faith stories.

So what are the next steps? First, the deacons will be meeting on the 3 April to discuss the feedback from the Church Meeting. I hope that as a leadership team we will be able to identify concrete 'next steps'. One of the things that we need to do as we are waiting is to pray. Pray that God will direct us to see the gifts and graces we already have. Pray that God will give us the courage to invite people to explore faith with us in Sunday worship, at Noah's Ark, the coffee mornings and so on. How can we begin now?

There are further items which I need to highlight. First, please read through Kathy Shaw's contributions from her Worship Workshops and Café Church. I think these may feed into our wider waiting and vision process.

Second, on the 25 May 2018, the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) comes into force. Training is going to be offered on the 21 April 2018 from 9:45 am – 12:30 pm. Failure to conform to GDPR carries enormous financial penalties. Importantly, we need to respond because it is right that we treat information about people with the greatest of care and with full consent.

You will notice some immediate changes in our Church Magazine. We will no longer publish names, addresses and phone numbers of those who hold positions in the church. Rotas will be published with a Christian name and the first letter of the surname where there is a duplicate first name.

Over the next couple of months, we will be preparing an "Information Consent Form" for all members and adherents. You will be

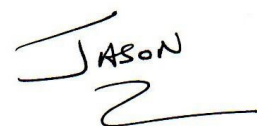
asked whether you consent to your information being held in a secure manner in the church office.

A noticeable change will be the removal of the First Steps Roll in the church lounge. This is a difficult move because the intention of the display is to value those who have been baptised or dedicated in our church fellowship. The reason that we have been advised to destroy it is because it has the names and dates of birth and has the potential for identity theft. For example, a person could enter the lounge and take a photo on their mobile phone and take that information away to steal the data on that person. I know that this will seem draconian to many of you but it does make sense. Our priority must be to ensure that no harm can come to those individuals through a misuse of their personal information. Be assured that there is a record of baptisms and dedications kept securely in a register on the church premises.

You will understand that GDPR has enormous implications for us as a church. I hope that you will be supportive in developing the processes that we need to put in place to ensure that we are acting in the best way possible to minimise data breaches.

You will receive this magazine on Easter Sunday. Easter coincides with April Fool's Day. My prayer is that your faith in the message of the foolish message of the crucified and risen Christ has been strengthened. Paul writes, "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Through the weeks of Easter to Ascension, may we encounter the risen Lord again and again.

Shalom

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



PRAYER LETTER

No 184

Journeys Joy Sorrow Joy

Jesus' triumphal journey into Jerusalem was one of joy, anticipation for a new regime overruling injustices. The injustices were not just from the Roman Occupying Authorities but also from the strict Jewish Authorities. Jesus' teaching throughout his ministry gave hope for the outcast, the downtrodden, the unclean, the beggar. Thus it was clear when Jesus rode into Jerusalem in peace on a colt, Jewish onlookers knew that scripture was going to be fulfilled but not in the way they expected. The jubilant crowds were unaware of the unjust and cruel events that would follow.

After the arrest and trial, then condemnation from the crowds, Jesus starts his last journey enduring physical pain as he is flogged and beaten carrying his heavy wooden cross until relieved of the burden by Simon of Cyrene. Are we aware that when we go through painful difficult times God does send people to help us?

The disciples experienced and witnessed the joy of Jesus' reception on Palm Sunday then the pain of seeing Jesus' journey through the crowded cobbled streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha the following Friday.

On the Sunday morning after the Sabbath three women friends of Jesus had a grieving reflective journey from their lodgings to the cave outside the city walls where Joseph of Aramathia had obtained permission to have Jesus' body lain. The women were going to prepare and anoint Jesus' body for burial as was the Jewish custom. Their sad journey turned to horror when they found the tomb empty. They thought Jesus' body had been stolen. It wasn't until later when Mary returned and gave them the news that Jesus was alive. Their sorrow turned to amazement and joy. When we are in the depths of grief, whether through death or other situations, Jesus gives us hope to turn that sorrow into joy.

The journey of the two followers of Jesus on the road to Emmaus must have been a disturbing and sorrowful one as they talked to each other about the horrific events in Jerusalem. Then to have to recount these dreadful happenings to a stranger who suddenly appeared alongside them must have been gruelling. At the end of their journey it was natural to give hospitality to this 'stranger'. However at the meal as soon as the 'stranger' broke bread, as was the custom, the two followers realised that their companion on the road and in their home was Jesus. Then they immediately left and rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. A journey of despair turned to a journey of joy.

Many times in our lives when we experience tragedy or very difficult times we try to cope on our own. Jesus is there to walk alongside us if only we recognise him. Whatever your journey, whether difficult or smooth, open our eyes to see Jesus. He is waiting for you!

Every Blessing - Beryl

At Ben Smith's memorial service, there were large number of people in attendance and because of this some moved into the Lounge but unfortunately the sound system failed and they were unable to hear what was said. The following eulogy given by Ben's niece, Dawn McNulty, has been re-produced with kind permission from Pat Smith

I've been asked to tell you a little about my uncle Ben's life, so let's start at the beginning, 11 O'clock on Sunday the 16th March 1924 at Syde in Gloucestershire. Benjamin Andrew Cyril was born the 4th child for William and Salome Smith; a brother for Bridget, Betty and Mary and three years later Dennis William Patrick, known to all as Jim. Ben was a typical young boy and would frighten the family by jumping off the shed roof over the cesspit at Harts Hill, or by sitting on the axle of a pair of wheels to whizz down the hill.

Mum and Auntie Mary used to call him "Jamin", apparently he wanted to be called Benjamin, so when they called him Ben he added Jamin, so of course they ended up calling him that.

The family moved to Bibury where Ben spent a lot of his long life. He went to Bibury school and left to work as a farm hand, working mainly with a dairy herd. During the war he was a L/Cpl in Bibury Home Guard.

I was born in May 1945 at the Smith family home in Arlington Corner, Ben looked in on his new niece before going milking, "What you going to call her?" he asked. "Dawn Mary" was the reply, he went off to work singing "Marie the dawn is breaking" and Dawn Marie I became.

Ben fell in love with Marjorie from Hatherop and they married in St Nicholas' Church on the 20th September 1947. I was one of their bridesmaids and caused quite

a stir! When the vicar asked "Does anyone know of any just cause or impediment as to why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony?" A little voice piped up, "I've got flowers!" Ben and Marg settled happily into married life in Bibury Farm Cottages where, in 1950, Andrew Charles was born, followed in 1951 by Anthea Clare. When Ben was promoted to farm manager they moved in to Bibury Farm where many a happy hour was passed with family celebrations and Christmas. It was here that he proudly operated the largest corn dryer in the country.

Ben contributed to Village life in many ways. He sang in the church choir. He played drums in a band with the Bartlett boys at the village hall dances. He loved his amateur dramatics, and was in several plays with Mary and John. He was proud of his achievements at the Agricultural shows, winning many prizes for his animals. His tug-o-war team was very successful. He was one of the first people I know that sold things at boot sales; mind you, he sometimes brought home more than he sold.

Life was good and he was so happy when Andy and Anthea found their partners Ronnie and Alex. He was delighted with his grandchildren; Craig, Damon, Kirsty and Iain and adores his 8 great-grandchildren (Jacob, Ned, Harry, Lauren, Erin, Iona, Oban and Ella.)

When his aunt became unable to look after herself he and Marg took her into their home where she lived happily until her death and she left her bungalow to them in her will. After much discussion Ben retired from farming and moved to Carterton and a job keeping Witney verges tidy. After Marg had a second leg amputated they moved to Aldsworth to be nearer family. Auntie Marg used to say she couldn't win arguments any more as

she hadn't got a leg to stand on. Her condition deteriorated when she was diagnosed with cancer and Ben became her carer until she died.

Ben was lost for a while, but was rescued by Pat who he married in September 1993. He moved to Witney where he spent many happy days with his beloved nurse. He gained three step-children, Martin, Jo and Kathryn, their partners and later 7 more wonderful grandchildren, (Naomi, Isaac, Eloise, Tom, Benjamin, Bertie and Madiy)

He and Pat loved walking and gardening, they had some lovely holidays in this country and abroad. Later they took up bowls as a shared hobby. Their church was the focal point of their lives.

Further heart break came in 1999 when Anthea died from leukaemia and without Pat he would have found life very hard, but with her excellent nursing care and steadfast love Ben found contentment and happiness in his own little home.



So now we must say goodbye to my dearest Uncle Ben; just think of the wonderful reception waiting for him in heaven where the Smith family will be ready to welcome him.

Dear Church Friends

Thank you so much for all your prayers, cards, phone calls, flowers and kind messages over the past few weeks. The care and support I have felt from this church family as Ben became more frail, and when he died, has been such a comfort.

Several of you played a part in making the service of thanksgiving for Ben's life such a special occasion. My thanks go to you and to those who baked cakes and helped in the kitchen. What a blessing and privilege it is to belong to a loving, caring church fellowship.

Ben loved this church and the many friends he made over the 25 years he worshipped here.

God bless you all - Pat

Thank you!

I would like to thank Jacqui and Terry for all their help in transporting the laptop to me at home, work in the office and PowerPoints when I have been unable to do them.

I would also like to thank the Church Fellowship for their love, prayers and support during my recent illness. I am much stronger now and I am beginning to walk much better albeit with crutches. Thank you too, to all the people who have covered the office for me in the week.

Your help has been much appreciated and I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Love - Sue

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.

4. Mark 1:35-45

What is the next step, the next stage in this ministry to which Jesus is called? He knows his calling. He has proclaimed his Good News of the Kingdom of God. He has called a few men to come with him. And he has suddenly become popular, much sought after as a source of healing help. Would it not be sensible to "set up shop" in Capernaum and build a secure base there from which later, possibly much later, to send out others with the news about this Jesus and the message of the Kingdom? Surely such would have been a good "business plan"! Maybe such thoughts flashed through the mind of Jesus as the crowds went away into the darkness and the time came for sleep. Certainly here is a crisis moment, a moment for the making of a judgement, the taking of a decision. The night was short for Jesus. "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out." So Mark records. Dawn has not yet begun to lighten the sky. Maybe the pre-dawn chorus of the birds had started

up, proclaiming that the new morning was soon to come. Jesus goes to a deserted place, "and there he prayed."

Mark gives us no record of the content of Jesus's prayer at this time. We could speculate as to the thoughts involved and the words uttered in this time alone with God. Yet such would merely be speculation and could easily lead us to miss the central importance of that which Mark records, that this was time alone with God. It is this sense of Jesus experiencing the need of being close to God, of it being necessary for him to lock-in afresh with that One who had acknowledged him as "my Son", so that he might be renewed by the one source of life and power. Jesus needed time alone with God; how much greater must be our need of such time! Prayer is not so much speaking to God as it is giving of time to God, of consciously devoting ourselves to listening to him, to feeling his living presence before all others.

This time alone with God is cut short - Simon and those with him arrive with the message; "Everyone is searching for you". We might be inclined to think that this is joyous news. Lots of people want to find Jesus. Surely this is desirable! But why are they looking for Jesus? For what purpose do they want to find him? Mark gives us a clue in the particular word which he uses for the "seeking". Elsewhere in his writing it is a word which he uses again and again to indicate that the seeking, the looking for, the searching is in order to obtain something which the seekers want, often to the detriment of the person sought or of that which that person is trying to achieve.

The searching for is self-centred, for the purposes of self and not for the good of the one sought nor of the community at large. To emphasise this yet more, Mark says of Peter and the others that they *hunted* Jesus. Mark uses a word not used

anywhere else in the New Testament, the word καταδιωκω which bears the meaning not just of following but of pursuing with determination. Jesus was looked for in order to bring him back to Capernaum so that more of the good which he had brought to that place might be theirs. It was not so much Jesus who was looked for as it was that which they, and their neighbours at Capernaum, could get from him. But Jesus is not to be contained in one place, by one set of people, nor is he to be used as either those people of Capernaum nor as we may desire. Jesus seeks only to do the will of God and so his response to those who found him was "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." Jesus moves on and he invites those whom he has previously called, to move on with him. To be a disciple is to be one who is called to move on, to move on with our Lord.

Jesus moves on through Galilee. Did the disciples accept his invitation to go with him? The Four had followed Jesus around Capernaum and, led by Simon, a group of potential followers had come out hunting for Jesus, but when Jesus refused to return to Capernaum with them they were faced with a moment of decision; did they rise to the challenge, or did they fail? We assume that some of them, if not all, rose to the challenge and went with Jesus. Could it be that here we have the first time in the Christian story when some would-be followers of Jesus find the cost too high and turn back? Mark gives us no indication; Mark just pictures Jesus moving on with whosoever will go with him. And he goes to the synagogues - the meeting houses of the people of God. His message is of "The Good News of God" and so he takes it to those places where people are specifically trying to relate to God, to experience communion with him. And it is

in these places that he casts our demons. How strange it is that it is within the religious community that there are so often to be found those mentally unbalanced or possessed by forces beyond their control, whose lives are marred by "demons"! Could it be that it is *religion* itself which mars some peoples lives, that comes between them and the Good News of God? Does it not sometimes seem like this in our day, that organised religion, the church, mars people's lives rather than lead them into the liberty of the children of God. Mark's witness is that when Jesus is present, the Good News is really good and the "demons" are banished from people's lives. It was in the presence of Jesus Christ that the Good News was made real; it still is made real by his presence. The Gospel still is of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Somewhere on this preaching tour of Galilee, there comes to Jesus a man who is a leper. This encounter must have been out in the open because lepers were unclean and were not permitted in the synagogue nor, indeed, in any place where they might come into physical contact with other people. Once a person was diagnosed as leprosy, he or she was excluded from contact with anyone other than fellow lepers. Somehow this man has heard of Jesus as one with healing powers. In his desperation he risks the wrath of the "clean" and comes to Jesus, begging him, kneeling before him in earnest supplication: "If you choose, you can make me clean." I cannot help but wonder how much previous rejection this man must have suffered to use such words. He seems to have no doubt as to the ability of Jesus to heal him; what he doubts is whether Jesus can be bothered to do so, whether he is important enough to Jesus to be given any attention. Had this man been turned away by other healers on previous occasions, or perhaps driven off by their

overprotective followers? Could it be in our day that people are kept away from Jesus by some of us who claim to be his followers? Mark gives us no information on such matters concerning this man but simply records the immediate reaction of Jesus. Jesus was "moved" by the man. "Moved with pity" say some manuscripts; "moved with anger" say others. I like to think that both pity and anger were present in Jesus's reaction; pity for the man in his need, anger at the rejection which had so obviously been this man's experience in life. Jesus accepts him just as he is by reaching out and touching the man. Oh the wonder of that touch! How long had it been since anyone deliberately touched him? Not since he had been pronounced a leper, a person too unclean for anyone to touch. No one would touch him. Jesus did. Jesus still does; he touches the untouchable, the unacceptable, the unclean, the unwanted and says, as he said to that leper: "I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately it was so; the man was clean for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had touched him.

The man was clean. He knew it and Jesus knew it but that fact had yet to be accepted by the community at large. Jesus sends the man off to the priests to do two things: to be certified as cured, as clean, and to offer the thank offering to God for that cleansing. The man would have been pronounced a leper by a priest, acting as what we might now term "Medical Officer of Health". This decision needed to be reversed for the man to fully accepted again within the community. Further, in the Law, it was laid down what sacrifice should be offered as a thankoffering for cleansing. Jesus encouraged the man to make this response to God as the source of cleansing and health, to abide by the accepted practices of the age. However Jesus also gives the man one other

instruction; he sternly warns him, "See that you say nothing to anyone". Jesus is here presented by Mark as not wanting publicity for his healing acts. Healing of the body is not the main thrust of the ministry to which Jesus is called, important though such healing is to fullness of life for many people. Good though such healing is, this good can get in the way of the total richness of the Gospel message. So it is in Mark's story. The healed leper either cannot or will not contain himself; he tells lots of people, he proclaims what has happened to him. Can we really blame him? I suppose that in our day he could have sold his story to the tabloid press for quite a large sum; he at least proclaimed it "freely"! However the adverse result of this man's actions is that Jesus is now even more sought after for what people may obtain from him. "Jesus" says Mark, "could no longer go into a town openly". Yet perchance there also came some good from this, for those who did come to Jesus had to make real effort to do so, they had to seek him out in the country. And people came, they came from every quarter. The picture is of the news about Jesus spreading far and wide and crowds flocking to Jesus.

What else happened during this preaching tour of Galilee? How long was Jesus travelling before he returned to Capernaum? What were the details of his preaching? How many other people did he heal and of what diseases? None of this does Mark record. Mark has shown Jesus as a teacher with authority and with power, a person who is now known about over a wide area and who is sought for by many for what they hope to get from him - healing. Mark has also affirmed that the ministry of Jesus is about much more than healing, that there are more important matters with which he has yet to come to grips. So far the ministry of Jesus has been

acceptable to both religious and political authorities for the challenge of "Repent and believe in the good news" has not presented itself to them in all its stark reality. Such acceptability is not to last as from now on Mark begins to illustrate the controversies which arise from the teaching and actions of Jesus. A new phase in Mark's story of Jesus is about to begin.



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

Safety and Security Training for Churches Together in Witney

On Saturday 10th March a collection of representatives from Witney churches gathered at Witney Congregational Church for a morning of training and discussion about the safety and security of our churches.

On the agenda were risk assessments, managing risk, evacuation planning and communications networks. With participants from a diverse range of churches, including Minster Lovell Methodist, Open Doors, High Street Methodist, Welcome, Oasis and of course WCC, we engaged in a rich discussion of the different types of threats we are currently facing and strategies to deal with them. Examples of existing good practice were shared between the participants, and some really creative and practical new ideas were posed.

One exciting decision was to create a Witney churches security network to share real-time information of events or incidents that could affect our churches. We also agreed to add safety and security to the CTiW standing agenda, in order to allow

time to discuss emerging threats and update each other on incidents and actions.

If you are interested in getting involved with the security network, please let Jason know.



The following article has been extracted from Just one Year, Prayer & Worship through the Christian Year and edited by Timothy Radcliffe, and has been submitted by Beryl Cartwright, and is entitled:

Easter

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you'. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you' (John 29: 19-21)

When Jesus appears to the disciples, 'he showed them his hands and his side'. In fact the whole of this account of the appearance of Jesus in John's gospel appears to focus more upon the wounds of Jesus than his resurrection. When Thomas comes back and hears about the appearance of Jesus, all he wants to do is

to touch the wounds. 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in his side, I will not believe'.

Why does a story about the risen Christ focus so much on his wounds? It is because he is wounded and raised. When we think about the resurrection, we may be tempted to think that it is a stage in Jesus' life. He died, and then he rose and put hurt and death behind him. One might think that being wounded and dead are things of the past after the resurrection, just episodes from an earlier moment in his story

But in the resurrection the Father gives back to Jesus the whole of his life, all that he has lived. He is now the wounded and risen Christ. One might even say he is now the killed and risen Christ. That might sound rather paradoxical but it is, in every sense of the word, vital. In the Latin of the Preface which Catholics use at this time of the year it says that he lives 'for ever slain', *semper occisus*

This is vital because it means that the risen Lord is now in touch with wounded humanity. All over the world, human beings are being wounded and killed. Some 20,000 people die a day just because they are too poor to go on living. Millions of others are wounded by torturers, in the conflicts between gangs, by inhuman labour in sweat-shops. Good Friday goes all over the planet. If the resurrection was Jesus simply putting all that behind him, like a man who leaves hospital recovered from his wounds, then he would have nothing to do with us now. We may hope for the resurrection as future comfort, but now we would be stuck in the hurt and the pain, remote from God

A friend of mine, an American Dominican, went to work for a few years in Peru. At first he was rather horrified by how the religion of the indigenous people in the Andes seemed to be dominated by images

of the crucified Jesus, with hideous wounds. He asked himself whether they really believed in Easter. Did their faith stop on Good Friday? As he got to know them he realised how wrong he was. They were indeed expressing their faith in the risen Lord, but the one who still shared their pain so that they might share his life

The disciples are locked in the room for fear of the Jews. They dare not go outside, in case they get lynched. They have seen what happened to Jesus and they fear that it might happen to them too. But it is the wounded Lord who says to them, 'Peace be with you' and sends them on their way. They will get hurt. The tradition is that nearly all of them died as martyrs. They can embrace that risk with courage because they have seen the wounded Christ and he is raised.

We all have our secure upper rooms in which we hide from hurt. Every one of us has his or her fears, against which we lock the doors. This fear of getting hurt may mean that we do not even want to know too much about the injustice and suffering of the world. We dread that if we get to know about it, then we shall have to leave our protected environment and take the risk of getting hurt or even killed. The disciples saw the wounds of the risen Lord but we have not. Jesus says to Thomas. 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.' How can we learn courage?

One of my brethren, Henri Burin des Rozières, is a French lawyer. He too has a reflection in this book on Easter, but he does not, of course, talk about himself and so I shall! For the last few years he has been fighting slavery in the Brazilian Amazon. There are enormous estates, some of them the size of Wales. The landowners lure the poor to work for them,

promising wages and work and security. But once they have arrived, they find that they have to pay back the costs of their transport, and so slowly they discover that they are trapped and can never escape. If they try to, then they are usually hunted down by dogs and shot. One landowner admitted that he boiled up the bodies and fed them to his pigs. He could afford to make the admission because the police are in his pay

Henri tries to take these landowners to court. It is often futile since the judges too are corrupted by the landowners. But he is beginning to get results. He frequently receives death threats. A few weeks ago they did kill his friend and collaborator, Sister Dorothy, of the Notre Dame Sisters. Anyone who kills Henri has been promised \$30,000, an unimaginable fortune in the Amazon. When I was in contact with him recently, he said, 'I'm not afraid of dying. I have lived a long life.' When I stayed with him he lent me his room for the night. He did not sleep because it suddenly occurred to him that if they tried to get him that night, then they would kill me instead, which would be embarrassing. Fortunately the same idea did occur to me

All over the world there are tens of thousands of Christians, sometimes working with people of other religions, who daily take the risk of getting hurt or killed. Charles Peguy, the French writer, told the story of a man who dies and goes to heaven. When he meets the recording angel he is asked, 'Show me your wounds.' And he replies, 'Wounds? I have not got any.' And the angel says, 'Did you never think that anything was worth fighting for?'

If we do venture out of our safe places in this dangerous world, and risk getting hurt, then we shall surely be afraid. Courage is not being without fear; it is refusing to be enslaved by it. The brave admit their fears.

The risen Lord is with us now. Christ has died; Christ is risen, Christ will come again. We can dare to open the doors of our secure places and go out into the dangerous world, not without fear, but not ruled by it

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

Tell me why

1 Peter 3:13-22

"I hear you enjoy fishing. What kind of fishing do you do? Fly, casting or netting? Have you got any good stories to tell?"

"I hear you've done a lot of travelling. Could you tell me about some of the places you've been? I'd love to know."

"I'd love to know a bit more about you. Have you any family? What do you do you work at?"

"I hear you're a Christian. Would you tell me about what you believe? Why you have faith and why is it so important to you?"

How do you feel about the first three questions? How do you feel about the last question? Which questions would be easier to respond to?

The writer of the letter tells his hearers to tell their story – to give an account of the hope that is in them. It seems as if the first hearers were routinely asked to defend their faith. They were under social pressure. Being a follower of Jesus could be very costly. But before we consider how to give an account of the hope within us – to tell our story – let's look at what kind of lifestyle the author is challenging his hearers/readers to live.

The writer asks, "Who will quibble with

your way of life or give you a hard time if you are keen 'to do what is good'?" The logic is that if you go out of your way to be a fantastic group of people then those in the wider community will be more likely to admire you and leave you alone.

This letter was written to followers of Jesus Christ who are described as 'exiles' scattered throughout modern day Turkey. We are not sure who first read this letter. Were they Jewish, non-Jewish or a mixture? What is clear is that as followers of Jesus they were a minority group within society.

If they were Jewish then they would be noticed by their appearance and perhaps their language too. If they were non-Jewish then they would not stand out for these reasons. What would be true for Jewish and non-Jewish hearers alike is the strangeness of their 'religion'. Following Jesus Christ who was crucified by the Romans and whom they claimed was alive was pretty odd.

These followers of Jesus were known for claiming 'Jesus is Lord'. This seems a harmless statement to us today. Non-Christians may think us strange for our belief in a man named Jesus who is supposedly God. There are few who would get too bothered about whatever strange ideas we hold. But for those early followers of Jesus living within the Roman Empire, calling anyone 'Lord' was politically dangerous. Only the Roman Emperor was to be called 'Lord'!

So these early followers of Jesus were at risk for a number of reasons: their strange beliefs in a Palestinian Jew named Jesus; their insistence that this executed criminal was alive; and their politically destabilising claim that "Jesus is Lord". Were they living in fear of persecution? Had they already suffered for their faith?

Those who first heard this letter were

encouraged to make sure that their enthusiastic doing of good would attract admiration. What does this 'doing of what is good' look like? In the preceding section (vv. 8-12), a number of features are outlined. First and foremost, they are a community united in love for one another. They will not play 'tit for tat' by evening up scores. They will respond to evil and abuse with a blessing. They will speak good not evil, truth not deceit, and they will seek peace and continue in pursuit of it.

Who can argue with a life like that? Who will want to do you harm if you live a life of doing what is good, blessing others rather than cursing them?

But even if you do suffer for doing what is right then you will be blessed. We do not fear what they fear. Who is 'they'? Those who do not follow Jesus. We who follow Jesus are not intimidated by those who would do us a wrong turn. Instead we 'sanctify Christ as Lord'. We set him apart as the only one who has authority over us. It is not the Emperor or the powers of the state that have the final say in our lives. Jesus is Lord of life and death through his own death and resurrection.

If we are dragged before the authorities...If we are called upon to defend ourselves from accusations of political insubordination... If we are asked to argue our case for Jesus of Nazareth, crucified risen Lord... then we are to construct our case for our accusers to hear. To anyone who asks we are to give "an account of the hope that is within you." Indeed, our whole defence rests on our living hope which comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1:3). This hope is within us, the hope that has given us new birth. It is a hope that we experience within and between us in community. The manner of our defence is a far cry from being adversarial and arrogant. Rather it is done

gently and in a spirit of reverence.

The words of this letter are a challenge to all those forms of Christian witness that are aggressive and focus on the negative. We are called to give an account of the hope that is within us and our words should have the ring of hope and not of dark threats. We are not called to Bible thump. We are not called to preach hellfire and damnation. We are called to speak of the living hope that is within. We are called to speak of the living and enduring word of God (1:23) that gives new birth. We are called to speak of the wonderful things that God has done – of how he called us out of darkness into his glorious light!

As we bring our defence of hope within we ensure that we live our lives with a clear conscience. If we are abused and persecuted whilst living exemplary lives 'in Christ' (3:16), then it is our persecutors who will be put to shame. Suffering for doing what is right is far better than suffering for when we've done wrong.

Our suffering is following in the sufferings of Christ for our sins. His suffering and death dealt a final blow to the power that our sins have over us. He was the man who followed God's right ways and died for those who did not follow his right ways. He did this to bring each one of us back to God. We like sheep have gone astray (2:25) and we have come back to our Shepherd.

The writer then speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection in ways that are not easy for us to apprehend. Jesus died in the flesh and was made alive in the spirit. This is not suggesting that Jesus rose as spirit rather than a body. Instead 'flesh' expressing all that was not love. The flesh denotes evil turned against Jesus and putting him to death. The flesh did not have the final word. That he was made alive in the spirit points to the way in which Jesus was raised to life through the power of God. It is

certainly not suggesting that Jesus was raised in a spirit body.

It is impossible to understand exactly what is meant by Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison. It conjures up a picture of Jesus going to those who disobeyed God and did not board the ark that Noah built. Were these spirits in prison all those who refused to heed the warnings and were swept away in the flood waters? Or is this a reference to the spiritual world that influenced human beings to be disobedient? What is clear is that only eight people boarded the boat and were saved from the deluge.

The deluge is now compared to baptism. The deluge was a forerunner of baptism. This is not an easy comparison for, as we know, the deluge brought death. The writer tells us what baptism isn't: it is not a washing away of dirt and grime from the body. It is conjured up as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ascended and having authority over all.

What is meant by this? Is it that Jesus goes down into the waters of death (baptism) and through his rising from death and taking up power over all things, that he has done this for us? When we are baptised we are participating in his death for our sins and in coming out of the waters we rise to new life in him? Whatever the particulars of this image, it is clear that baptism saves us in that it is a physical demonstration of what Christ has done for us through his death and resurrection. Our baptism is the new birth into the living hope that we have through the risen Christ.

What is our story? Are you ready to tell anyone who asks the reason for our hope? How are we sharing this living hope of our risen Lord with those around us?

Kathy Shaw is a student on the Congregational Federation's Integrated Training Course where she is studying Practical Theology. She has been spearheading a number of different gatherings including a Worship Workshop and our last Cafe Church. Kathy has brought together a summary of the feedback from those meetings. These summaries are included here so that those who didn't attend have an idea of what was discussed and for those who did attend to have a reminder. Thank you Kathy for all that you are doing! Please remember Kathy in your prayers as she balances work, family and studies.

Feedback summary notes from the Worship Workshop March 2018

I planned the worship session to encourage everyone to contribute views and ideas. Firstly, I asked them to talk to someone else present and posed the following questions:

- What do we mean by worship?
- Have we got a collective view?
- How do we worship and what do we use to help us? (currently and in the future).

During the discussions it became obvious that we had some collective views but there were other elements that only some people felt were important in worship. People felt it was important that we had a direct line of communication to God, unlike other Christian denominations.

I had structured the workshop so that people could consider the different elements within worship. I then divided people into two groups and gave them a selection of cards saying ie. Prayers; hymns; music; scripture; etc. and asked them to decide if these items needed to be in every worship session – always, sometimes, never. We then went through people's responses.

A good discussion took place about the need for different types of services and forms of worship at different points in the week to engage different people with different needs.

Need for some informal types of worship less structured and formal than a normal Sunday service as well as a variety of lengths of services.

Taking services/worship into the community.

Use of both visual and engaging activities as some people learn and engage when there are visual cues eg. Video clips, pictures, objects. Also learning by doing.

Don't always need formal prayers.

Use of candles and worship in different areas of the building. Services in different locations away from the church.

Informal worship in community locations.

Do we need a formal structure for services?; Would non church people know what to do? It's good for the skills of different people to be used.

Saturday Praise – Should it be more often? Suggestion – every other week.

How do we promote ourselves as a church? How do we encourage people to come and worship with us?

Should Café church be more like an informal café with worship happening throughout the morning on a rolling programme so that people can dip in and out throughout, rather than being expected to come at the beginning and stay to the end?

Should we try something like café church on a Saturday when we have coffee morning?

Use of internet to broadcast worship that people can link into – remotely.

Should we be developing tools to help people worship and develop their prayer life?

Do we always have to have hymns? Could quietly played music be used instead sometimes?

Do we have enough opportunities for silence and reflection? Sometimes we need to be quiet in the presence of God so that we can allow Him to speak to us and guide us.

Children's worship – we have a lack of willing adults to help children worship at their level and in their way. What more can we do? Any ideas?

Different ways of praying, use of different resources to help us. An opportunity to learn how to pray.

Different ways of accessing Holy Communion -as part of a meal; all round a table; people helping themselves to bread and wine; Picnic style etc.

Feedback from Café Church March 2018 Theme: Children and Young People

Areas of discussion

Worship

Questions asked:

- How do people and young people shape how we worship as a church?
- What tools/resources do we provide to help children engage in worship
- What do children get out of our services?
- What can we do/change for the future?

Feedback from discussions:

- *Should we have shorter children's worship at the start and they go out after 10 minutes for own worship and study?*
- *Children love activities and being in own groups.*
- *Use of computers and Minecraft bible.*
- *Need to balance children being children with other people's needs.*
- *Holy disorder- More life in worship including more upbeat songs.*
- *Should we have a children/youth groups service. Maybe different churches host youth services.*
- *Churches often reflect school and always some personalities who dominate and discourage children.*
- *Children need to feel comfortable to say what they feel.*
- *Ecumenical Youth Forum? As of CTiW*

Mission

Questions asked:

What activities do we currently provide to encourage Mission and outreach to children and young people?

Feedback from discussions:

- *ie. telling re. God, therefore ultimately making Christians/member*

Outreach

Feedback from discussions:

- *Noah's Ark*
- *Young people "difficult to reach" says one teenager*

- *Free Food – brings anyone.*
- *What are Coggs and Hillsong? doing right*
- *Modernising worship*
- *Separate services*
- *Sonya has loads of ideas!!!!*

Voice

Questions asked

How do children and young people:

- get their voice heard
- Influence decisions
- Shape what happens

Are we good at this? If not, why not? What more can we do? What does God/scripture say?

Feedback from discussions

- *Café church allows children to speak their voice*
- *Are people allowed to embrace their views?*
- *Doing church meetings differently – with small groups so we feel more confident to speak.*
- *Improving our listening skills so we are truly listening.*
- *Children giving ideas to an adult who becomes a youth representative at a church meeting.*

Faith

Questions asked:

How do we help children and young people to find and encourage their faith?

How do we support them on their faith journey?

Feedback from discussions:

- *They are given opportunities but not sure how this translates to Faith development.*
- *Hong Kong – Arrange young people's worship happening alongside main worship.*
- *Early foundation in church may not be lost – seeds are sown early on. Still come back to church for weddings, deaths etc.*
- *Challenge with people willing to change and adapt.*
- *Can encourage by a) setting an example; b) service to fit way people think/learn.*
- *Can do differently? We do a lot not necessarily on Sundays. Sundays clash with other things.*
- *Not just limited to Sunday worship but other opportunities – Noah's Ark.*
- *Different cultures; eg. Chinese taught to be respectful at all times; Less of a problem for children to sit down and listen*
- *Worship/Faith can be different in different places*
- *What do we provide?*
- *Encourage participation. Need to be careful that we don't patronise or pressurise and be aware of personalities.*
- *Concept of All Age Worship is difficult as can't satisfy everyone.*
- *Lack of young leaders- enthusiastic and closer in age to the young members.*
- *Challenge of attracting young people at the expense of older members.*

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

Why Easter will never go away

How do you make sense of the Resurrection? Dead men don't rise, so why believe that this particular dead man did rise?

At the end of St Luke's Gospel we read that: "they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement" (Luke 24.4). This is highly significant. The Gospels do not show us a group of disciples who were in a receptive frame of mind. After the crucifixion, they were in hiding, frightened and scattered. Then suddenly, they came out of hiding and were totally different; excited, joyful. By Pentecost they were confident, with one firm message: "You crucified Jesus, but God raised him up!"

How did they know this? Because of direct personal experience. Some of them had visited the tomb of Jesus: it was empty. Others claimed to have seen and touched the risen Lord. Were they hallucinating? People can hallucinate in groups – when taking drugs, for example. But, of course each one will see a different hallucination. But the disciples all saw the same thing. Or rather, the same person. Jesus.

Were they lying? Jesus had died a humiliating death as a criminal. Perhaps they wanted to rescue His good name. So did they pretend they had seen Him?

This theory has a big problem. Their preaching led them into trouble with the authorities. They were beaten and imprisoned and some of them killed. People will die for ideas and causes which they believe in passionately. But not for things they have made up. We might suffer for our convictions, we will not suffer for our inventions.

What about the 'swoon' theory? That Jesus

didn't die on the cross, despite terrible wounds. He recovered in the tomb, and then escaped. The disciples nursed Him back to health. But Roman soldiers knew when a man was dead; and there was the guard on the tomb. Also, the events which followed simply don't fit. If the disciples had been hiding Jesus, they would have kept very low-key, and out of the way, so that the authorities did not come after Him again.

Besides, to preach that God had raised Jesus from the dead – which is exactly what they did preach – would have been a lie. Beatings and threat of death would soon have loosened their tongues. Inventions crumble under pressure; convictions hold fast.

Another reason for believing in the Resurrection is this: Jesus' continuing impact. Thousands and soon millions of people in every generation since have shared an inescapable sense of being 'accompanied' through life. Though unseen, they identify this presence as the Risen Lord.

Sometimes this experience of meeting Jesus is gentle and fitful. Sometimes it is dramatic and life-changing. This reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus is not just an interesting historical puzzle. It is a vital, present day reality. It brings wonderful comfort, assuring us of the central Christian truths: death is dead; Jesus is alive; God is love.

This central notion was captured, most movingly, by the great Albert Schweitzer: 'He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me", and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is.' Have a joyful – and a challenging – Easter.