

# 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 <sup>st</sup> Saturday of the month	
Sunday Services	10.30am		
	6.00pm	1 <sup>st</sup> 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 <sup>st</sup> 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](http://www.witneycongregational.org.uk)

## MAGAZINE EDITOR

Terry Powlesland

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



Doesn't time fly as we have suddenly reached the publication of the Autumn edition covering September, October and November!!

In contrast to previous years the weather has been extremely good over the last 3 months, and, even though some cannot bear the heat, hopefully most of you have managed to take a break of some kind, some possibly more relaxing than others, and are now feeling rested and refreshed, ready for the next church activities – Harvest, AGM, quiz, memories and WRAG sewing afternoons

If like me you like sport, there has been plenty to celebrate via the Football World Cup, where England exceeded expectations, Wimbledon and athletics all of which had good coverage on the television; which obviously for some, wasn't particularly good

Turning now to those who have contributed to this edition; alongside the standard pages, Canon David Winter reflects on What is health; Beryl gives us an article on Yemen and Andrew McLarty reflects on a welcome sound 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 December 2018 & January 2019, is due on **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December**

Your Editor

The following poem has been submitted by Hilary Pratley and is entitled:

### **How to find happiness through the year**

Everybody everywhere seeks happiness  
it's true  
but finding it and keeping it seems  
difficult to do  
Difficult because we think that happiness  
is found  
only in the places where wealth and fame  
abound  
And, so we go on searching in places of  
pleasure  
seeking recognition and monetary  
treasure  
Unaware that happiness is just a state of  
mind  
within the reach of everyone who takes  
time to be kind  
for in making others happy we will be  
happy too  
for the happiness you give away returns  
to shine on you

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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

### September

2 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Cafe Church	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion
9 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
16 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	Communion
23 <sup>rd</sup>	am	tba	
30 <sup>th</sup>	am	Harvest	Communion
		Madley Park Residential Home	3.00pm

### October

6 <sup>th</sup>		Saturday Praise	11.00am
7 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion
14 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
21 <sup>st</sup>	am	Morning Worship	Communion
28 <sup>th</sup>	am	tba	

### November

3 <sup>rd</sup>		Saturday Praise	11.00am
4 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion
11 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
18 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	Communion
25 <sup>th</sup>	am	tba	

### December

1 <sup>st</sup>		Creative Church	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Cafe Church	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

### Sept

4 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
8 <sup>th</sup>	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
	Ride & Stride	10.00am – 6.00pm
13 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
20 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Youth Group	12.30pm – 2.00pm
25 <sup>th</sup>	Church AGM	7.30pm
27 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm

## October

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
4 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
11 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
13 <sup>th</sup>	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
14 <sup>th</sup>	Youth Group	12.30pm – 2.00pm
18 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
25 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm

## November

1 <sup>st</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
3 <sup>rd</sup>	WRAG Sewing Afternoon	1.00pm – 5.00pm
6 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
8 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
10 <sup>th</sup>	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
15 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
18 <sup>th</sup>	Youth Group	12.30pm – 2.00pm
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
25 <sup>th</sup>	Church meeting	12.00pm
29 <sup>th</sup>	Bible Study & Prayer	7.30pm – 9.00pm
30 <sup>th</sup>	Christian Aid Concert	7.30pm

## December

4 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm

**Sept** 09 Judith  
28 John G  
29 Gordon



**Oct** 01 Naomi  
08 Rita  
10 Susan  
13 Luke  
15 Chris  
17 Anthony  
28 Karen

**Nov** 11 Anneke  
17 Elaine G  
18 AJ  
19 Nanna  
26 Ellie Rose  
Elaine K  
Hilary  
27 Jeremy  
29 Marina

## Pastor's Paper

"It's too ambitious," was the feedback that came to me following our Dreams and Visions meetings. I sent a letter sent to every member and adherent with a mind map of how we might 'Grow our hospitality'. These ideas arose out of the discussions we had as a congregation.

On the 8 July, the Church Meeting met and it was agreed that we would move forward with Dreams and Visions with an exclusive focus on 'Inclusion'. I proposed that Kathy Shaw, a church member and student on the Congregational Federation training course, lead us through this exploration as a part of her action research course. Kathy made a short presentation about how we might explore inclusion. She will begin exploring this theme with us through the Café Church on the 2 September.

In the Dreams and Visions discussions it was clear that prayer was at the heart of a growing congregation. From Thursday, 13 September, I would like to invite you to join in Bible study and prayer from 7:30 – 9 pm. If you cannot manage evenings for whatever reason, please join me for morning prayers at 9:30 am in the church. Would you participate in a time of seeking God and praying for the Holy Spirit to enliven and renew us?

In prayer this morning, I was struck by 1 Corinthians 2:2, "During my stay with you, the only knowledge I claimed to have was about Jesus, and only about him as the crucified Christ. Far from relying on any power of my own, I came among you in great 'fear and trembling' and in my speeches and the sermons that I gave, there were none of the arguments that belong to philosophy; only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup> It was as if the Spirit was saying to me, "Jason, sometimes you make things too complicated. It's a simple message. Stick to it. Tell them about Jesus, the crucified Christ. It's not about

the quality of your sermons but the power of the Spirit at work in your life and words."

The challenge for me – for you – is to know Jesus, the crucified Christ. To know the crucified Christ is to be crucified with him. In Galatians 2:19-20, Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in this body I live in faith: faith in the Son of God who loved me and who sacrificed himself for my sake."

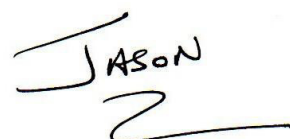
What a strange idea to preach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century! Surely it is repulsive to embrace crucifixion and sacrifice. These violent practices should be consigned to the past! How outdated and repulsive!

The truth is that crucifixion was feared then too. It was a gruesome tactic of oppression. Crucifixion was reserved for non-Romans and was a warning to anyone who might contemplate defying Rome. What madness it was for these Christ followers to revere a man who died the death of a criminal. Who, even then, would want to contemplate being crucified with Christ - even in the imagination?

The crucified Christ identified with the deepest human suffering and oppression. To be crucified with Christ is to give over the whole of our being and to die to self and rise to life, a life of love. This message about this man Jesus; this message of the crucified Christ; this message lived out by his crucified followers; speaks the power of God to bring life; life to the refugees; life to victims of injustice, violence and oppression; life to those racially abused; life to those bound by addiction; life to those trapped by hate.

**Prayer:** Jesus, crucified Christ, may we be crucified with you. By your power may we die to selfishness and greed; by your grace may we be freed to live by faith to love and serve you with our whole being. Spirit of God, renew us with energy to be faithful in our witness to the Good News.

Shalom

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

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<sup>1</sup>Jerusalem Bible.



## PRAYER LETTER

No 186

### Living Water

We have experienced and seen the results of the recent drought during May, June, July and August. The drought has left plants drooping and dying. Fields, grass and lawns are brown with deep cracks in the earth. Crops only half grown and farmers giving cattle their precious winter feed.

Rivers were drying up, hosepipe bans were imposed in some areas yet we expect clean running water from our taps to supply our thirst for water to drink and for our domestic cleaning purposes. We probably do not appreciate the skills of the water engineers who treat and maintain our supplies of clean water to our homes.

The plants, crops and trees need a steady regular supply of water to reach deep down in the soil. The odd shower before the heavy rain last Sunday hardly made any difference to the dry soil as I experienced when trying to weed our garden. The soil was still 'as dry as a bone' under the surface.

Sometimes, spiritually we are like the barren cracked earth, when the water comes in torrents it washes over the hard earth causing floods and the water doesn't sink into the soil. Like the plants we need the steady gentle rain to penetrate, feed and nourish our souls. Jesus refers to 'Living water' as the promise of the Holy Spirit which was given at Pentecost. (John 7:37) 'How can we take this water into our souls? God provides ways but sometimes we are too busy or we do not know how to access it. We can ask God through prayer to fill us with the 'living water' (The Holy Spirit). We can prayerfully read the Bible or other books for us to be aware of what the Holy Spirit can do in people's lives. Be ready to learn from others, being aware of how God is speaking to us through fellow Christians, neighbours, strangers and other situations. Jesus didn't stick with the religious elite. He met and associated with ordinary people, homeless people, people with many disabilities. Jesus was able to do this because God had sent the Holy Spirit to be with him. (Matthew 3:16-17)

For many of us in this country we are fortunate, for when we are hungry we feed our physical bodies. When we are thirsty we have easy access to water. We need food and water to survive physically and spiritually.

I read recently in the Book 'Grenfell Hope' of one example of practical kindness in the aftermath of the Grenfell disaster. A resident who lived close to the Tower left a jug of water covered with a cloth alongside a supply of paper cups and a note saying 'please help yourself'. There was a heat wave at that time too. This small thoughtful gesture was a gift of kindness to those in need at that time. (Matthew 10:42). Although this was a practical gesture meeting a need it was also a spiritual one of **love and hope** in the grief and anger of those affected by this terrible disaster.

Is your 'spiritual cup' dry, half empty or half full? Ask God through the Holy Spirit to keep filling your cup enabling you to do His work on earth showing compassion and love to others in whatever way you can.

Every Blessing – Beryl

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

The following article, extracted from Tear Times magazine, has been submitted by Beryl Cartwright and is a Question & Answer (Q & A) interview with Terry Waite, with a foreword by Beryl:

When Terry Waite was taken hostage in the Lebanon in 1987, many people throughout the UK prayed for his release during his 5 years horrific captivity.

Terry's brother, David, known to many of us in this church, as he lived and worked in Witney, throughout that time kept a lighted candle in the front room window of his house in Park Road; a symbol of hope and a reminder to those passing by to pray for Terry's release.

In the article below, Terry shares what he has learnt and what he is doing as a result of his solitary imprisonment. We have a lot to learn today from him. Pray for all Christians who are imprisoned because of their faith, may God sustain them during this time

### **What I took from my time of suffering**

Terry Waite is a Quaker and Anglican, humanitarian and author. He is president of the charities **Y Care International**, **Emmaus UK** and Patron of **AbleChildAfrica** and **Habitat for Humanity Great Britain**.

During his 5 years in captivity, Terry wrote his autobiography – later published as *Taken on Trust*. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition includes an updated foreword and new final chapter

**Q:** *When you revisited Taken on Trust and your captivity 25 years later, what new things did you discover?*

**A:** Looking back, I wondered how I survived for five years in solitary confinement. I was surprised with myself for getting through that. I realised that you never know what resources you have until you're put into a situation of extremity. I've tried to take the

experience and use it creatively. You can take something from times of suffering and learn from that. For a long time I didn't think I had learnt anything – in fact I learnt a great deal. And that experience has proved invaluable because it's an essential theme of Christian faith. The heart of Christianity is a symbol of suffering – the cross – beyond which lies resurrection. So out of suffering something creative can emerge

**Q:** *You are very involved in peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, is that because of your personal experience?*

**A:** I went back to Beirut a couple of years ago and met my former captors. I often asked myself what can be done to be reconciled and have a better understanding. I came up with a simple, almost naive answer. I believe that people who have opposing views should sit down together, agree to forget the past and build a future together. The way to create trust is to put the past behind. But I thought it was useless unless I was prepared to do it myself. So I went back to my captors and said exactly that; let's put the past behind and try to do something creative out of this unfortunate experience. They asked what they could do, so I suggested they provide heating oil for the refugees I'd met on the border – And they did it

**Q:** *Looking at the conflicts and crises across the Middle East, why do you think the region is in such turmoil?*

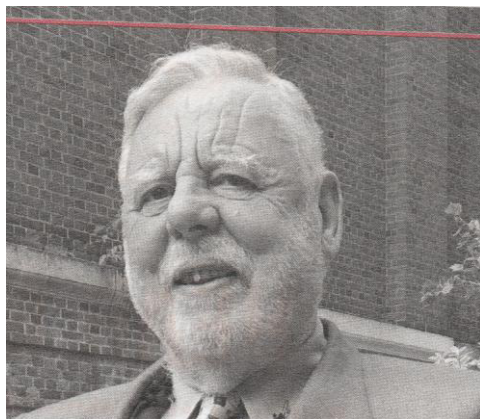
**A:** I think we have a lamentable understanding of the complexity that faces the people of the Middle East. If you look at history, the countries were formed by colonial powers. Ethnically and religiously disparate people were strung together and asked to form countries – where there had been nations before. So, we need to have a better understanding of the historical complexity of the situation. Too



often politicians take decisions against good advice

**Q:** *What advice would you give to people who pray for the Middle East?*

**A:** Prayer has to be put into action. I think that part of the function of prayer is to guide our thoughts into action. We need to welcome strangers into our midsts. We need to understand that people come from different backgrounds. The vast majority of refugees don't want to leave their countries but they have lost their homes, their jobs – lost everything. A whole generation of children are growing up without a proper education – which leaves territories rife for people to turn into terrorist groups. I don't think any one country can take unlimited numbers – we have to see this as a global responsibility now, which puts responsibility to the United Nations. But I think we should make every attempt to welcome and understand refugees and put our prayers into action by receiving and giving them a reasonable standard of living



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

### **THE WAY I SEE IT: What is 'health'?**

This summer we've been celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Health Service. I can recall, years ago, my GP pointing out that it was the National *Health* Service, not the National *Illness* Service. This was when our local practice changed its name from 'Medical Centre' to 'Health Centre'. It seems a pedantic point, but in fact it touches on a huge issue. What is 'health'?

In the Gospels the healing miracles of Jesus are sometimes called 'cures' and sometimes 'making well or whole'. These are attempts by the translators to convey a difference in the nature of what had happened. People who had 'conditions' (blind, lame, infirm) were 'cured'. Those with serious illness were often said to be 'made whole'. When Jesus was faced with ten people with leprosy, nine were described as 'cured' and one – the Samaritan who came back in gratitude, was 'made whole' (Luke 17:19). So was the woman with a long-term haemorrhage, who touched the hem of the Lord's garment: 'your faith has made you whole (well)' (Luke 8:45).

This suggests that 'health' is more than being free of sickness. Indeed, it seems to imply that health relates to *our whole life experience* – to be truly healthy, we are 'well' mentally, physically and spiritually. I think I would go further: I have ministered to people who were desperately ill but in the deepest sense of the word radiantly 'healthy'. That may sound odd, but just as 'peace' is not simply the absence of war, so 'health' is not just the absence of illness. I suspect many of those working in the NHS know the truth of that.

The following article has been submitted by Andrew McLarty, and the story is substantially true, but recalled from more than forty years, so there may be slight inaccuracies in the topographical detail, and is entitled:

## A Welcome Sound

Three days had passed since Jimmy parachuted from his stricken aircraft into the mountainous forest of New Guinea. Japanese patrols were searching but until now he had been able to evade capture. But he was weakening, his emergency food finished, and his only drink was from the almost incessant rain

Survival skills taught him to go downwards towards the valley floor where he would find a stream to follow. This would eventually join a river and sooner or later the river would be crossed by a bridge. But here things were greatly different. Mountain streams often rushed through narrow gorges meaning he had to climb over a ridge or a summit before again joining the stream. His fingers were bruised and bleeding from scrabbling over rocks, his clothing in tatters, soaked and caked with mud. Each ridge proved a greater challenge as strength waned and resolve lessened

Navigation skills told him he was more than sixty miles from the nearest base. Any search by planes of his unit would have been called off after one day – there was no choice but to continue. The glint of steel in the far distance confirmed the Japanese had not called off their search but each time he rested a greater effort was needed to resume and it became evident he would soon succumb to exhaustion. The next summit might well be the last he could cross

This time the slope became more gentle and he was able to walk rather than crawl the last few hundred metres, but abruptly he dropped to a crawl again when he saw what lay ahead. On a wide plateau some

distance below was a tribal village. During his initial briefing he had been warned against these savage people and told that they would either kill him, or more likely hand him over to the Japanese for reward. They must be avoided at all cost. In despair he surveyed the scene. This was the end; hunger and exhaustion had overcome him and now hope also was gone. He would go no further

As he watched it seemed the villagers were holding a council for a group were gathered in a circle at the edge and one was addressing the others. Then from the village he heard a sound that grew louder in the morning air. He dropped his jaw to listen better and cupped his hands to his best ear. The sound continued as he listened carefully before wearily struggling upright, then making his way on unsteady feet toward the village, knowing he was amongst friends. For the sound he heard was singing. The language was foreign but he recognised some words and well knew the tune. He was safe now for the villagers were singing ‘How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear’

## Book Review

### Book Review

#### Grenfell Hope

The following review is by Beryl Cartwright:

Gaby Doherty’s book entitled ‘**Grenfell Hope**’ is a poignant and powerful book with stories from the community. Amid the grief and anger it shows how different faith communities and those of no faith are working together bringing hope and positive outcomes in the aftermath of this disaster. It shows God working through the lives of everyday people in the outpouring of love and generosity to the community

## 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.*

#### 6. Mark 2:13-17

Mark now moves on in his narrative to relate what could well have originally been two separate events, the calling of Levi and the meal with tax collectors and sinners. Mark gives no indication of the relationship in time of these incidents to that previously recorded. He links the stories with the word *παλιν*, usually translated as "again", which conveys the unspecific meaning of "later" or "at some other time". Characteristically, Mark is not trying to provide an accurate chronological account of the life of Jesus but rather to show the good news of Jesus Christ and the reaction of people to it. So Mark now introduces Levi in the second of a series of stories concerning actions by Jesus which caused controversy and aroused opposition. The scene shifts to the open air, out beside the sea. Here there is room for the crowd which is pictured as gathering around Jesus as he walked. Mark says, "He taught them". The picture is of a fluid situation, where first one and then another person is closer to Jesus and hears that which he is

saying, perhaps asks a question and receives an answer. While they are thinking about what they have heard someone else takes the opportunity to move closer to Jesus in order to listen to what he has to say. As Jesus walks, so people come close to him and learn of his message about the Kingdom of God.

We can imagine a happy throng of friendly people following Jesus. As they move along the seashore they come to the tax booth or custom-house. Here sits Levi, the son of Alpheus. It seems likely that Levi would have been employed by the Tetrarch, Herod Antipas, to collect customs duties on imports coming across the Sea of Galilee or along the roads from Syria and the Decapolis. Then, as now, customs duties were not popular, people wanted imports duty-free; they disliked paying import tax and they disliked the officials who collected it. For the Jews the taxes were particularly abhorrent because they were paid to either the hated Roman occupiers or to their puppet administrators such as Antipas. Still more were the tax collectors ostracised because they had a reputation for dishonesty and petty extortion, of extracting more money than was due to feather their own nests. How true this reputation was for all tax collectors we do not know, any more than we know if Levi was dishonest in his work. Certainly however he would not be acceptable to most of the people in the crowd who followed Jesus. However, Levi is acceptable to Jesus; Jesus sees him and says to him, "Follow me". Levi followed. Mark makes no comment at this point as to any reaction of other people to this acceptance of the tax collector, but we can well imagine that there was quite a murmuring from some of those present.

Levi followed Jesus. For how far and for how long we do not know from Mark's account of events. The name of Levi does

not occur again in Mark's record. Later, when listing the twelve apostles, Mark names one of them as "James son of Alphaeus". We can speculate as to whether this might be a brother of Levi, or even possibly Levi himself renamed for a new life but we cannot be certain. Nor, so far as the Gospel of Mark is concerned, have we any justification for equating Levi with Matthew. Such identification is made, or implied, in the Gospel of Matthew but consideration of the reason for this will be left to a study of that Gospel. So far as Mark is concerned, Levi comes upon the scene and is picked out by Jesus as a person whom Jesus wants to follow him. Mark makes it quite clear that Jesus takes the initiative by calling to him one who is not acceptable to society at large, who is not wanted among respectable people.

Mark now recounts his second story, or perhaps the second half of the one story, concerning Jesus and tax collectors. It is the story of a meal in a house. Many translations say that the meal was at Levi's house. The Greek text, however, simply says that the meal was at "his" house, leaving it ambiguous as to whether the meal was at Levi's house or at Jesus's house. The location is not important. What is important is, firstly, that Jesus is very much shown as being at the centre of the company, that it is Jesus being there which is the reason for the gathering, and, secondly, that the guests include, beside Jesus's disciples, many tax collectors and sinners. It was a large company met for the meal. Mark records of the disciples that "there were many who followed him". We may assume that present were Simon and Andrew, James and John, the four disciples named so far by Mark, but there were also others. And with them were many described as "tax collectors and sinners". Tax collectors were such as Levi, but who were the "sinners"? They appear to be an identifiable category of people rather than

just any person who has sinned. We cannot be certain as to whom Mark means by this term but in the light of subsequent events, we can see them as people at the opposite end of the "religious scale" to the Pharisees. The "sinners" were people who viewed the practices of religious observance rather lightly, who were somewhat hazy about most of the content of the Scriptures, who didn't darken the doors of the synagogues very often. No doubt they would have claimed to be good Jews who believed in the God of Abraham, no doubt most of them would have been living kindly, honest lives as responsible citizens and good neighbours but they would have neither found the time nor had the inclination to be concerned with all the full ceremonial observance of the Law. So they were ceremonially unclean and regarded as sinners by the meticulous observers of the Law.

Such meticulous observers of the Law now appear on the scene, described by Mark at this point as "the scribes of the Pharisees". Precisely what Mark means by this term is not certain. It probably means "scribes who were also Pharisees", thus giving the reminder that not all those who were learned in the Law were Pharisees. The Pharisees had come into being as a distinct group during and following the period of Greek domination. They began as the religiously progressive party who represented the interests of the people rather than the interests of the aristocracy and the priesthood. They were not really concerned with politics but rather with the correct interpretation and following of the Law of Yahweh. So it was that they accepted the reign of Herod the Great without opposition because they regarded him as an instrument of divine wrath against the sins of the age and particularly against the corrupt practices of the priesthood, represented by the party of the Sadducees. Nevertheless the Pharisees

refused to take an oath of allegiance to Herod. Herod seems to have found it politically expedient to accept this situation because of the quietening influence of the Pharisees upon the ordinary people. The Pharisees were the champions of pure, wholesome religion particularly in terms of individual personal living. I suppose that we might say that they were the fundamentalists of Judaism in their day. They were good people, people who were striving to be right with God and who wanted others also to be right with God. As such they should have been the natural allies of Jesus and indeed they would have been such allies had they not become so caught up in the observance of the letter of Law as to lose sight of the spirit of the Law and of the Love of God which underpinned all the Law.

So Mark records that Pharisees appear at the scene of this meal where Jesus sits with tax collectors and sinners. They see what is going on and are horrified. One can feel the sense of horror in their question: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Such people were religiously unclean. It was one thing to say, as Jesus had done to Levi, "Follow me", thus enabling such a sinner to be within range of hearing sound teaching so that he might come to repentance. Sinners should be called to come within teaching distance but to eat with them was quite another matter for it meant becoming unclean oneself. No truly religious person would do such a thing. To do so was either to flout God's Law or, worse, to imply that the Law was being superseded. This is how it must have seemed to the Pharisees. They wanted sinners to be saved, to be brought back into the purity of the people of Israel, but there was a right, a correct, a proper way of doing this which was laid down in the Law, a way which involved cleansing rituals and sacrifice. If sinners wanted to be accepted by good, religious people, the sinners had to

make changes in their lives first. Jesus, however, appears to be accepting them just as they were. It was not right. So said the Pharisees - and so their spiritual descendents amongst us still say: let them change and we will welcome them. Jesus sat at the meal with tax collectors and sinners and said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." To call sinners meant getting in amongst them just as they were. It meant accepting them as people of worth in the sight of God and loving them in their needs. It meant saying to them: "Follow me" and leaving the change in life to take place in the following.

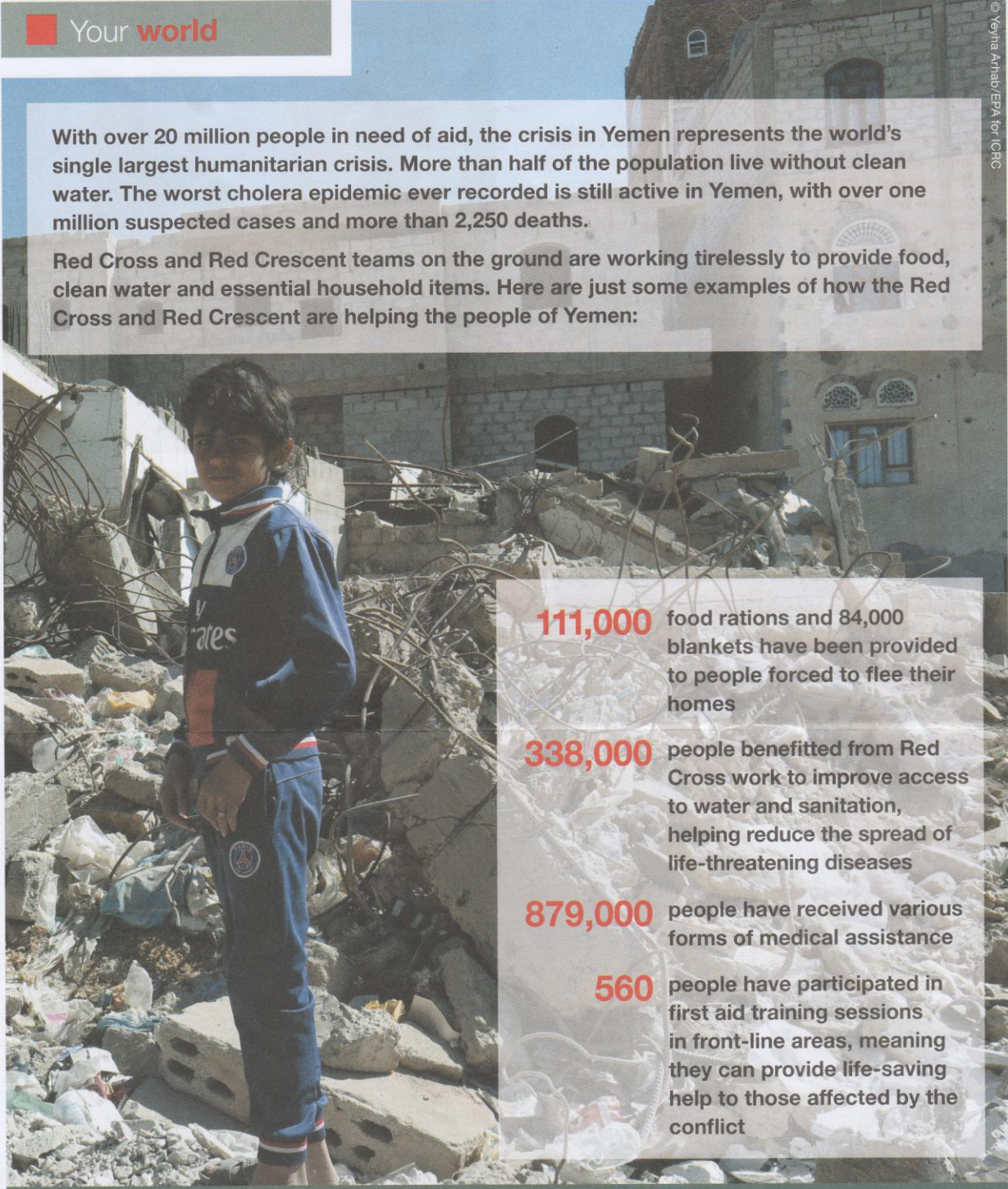
One further point is perhaps worth noting in the words of Jesus which Mark records. Jesus says he came "to call not the righteous". Does this mean that the righteous need no calling, that they will follow Jesus without being called? Or is this a reminder that, before God, there are none who dare to claim to be righteous, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? Is this perchance what the Pharisees most needed to come to realise, that it is only those who know their own sinfulness who can truly respond to the loving call of Jesus to share his table and his joy? By his actions Jesus has raised the controversial question as to how one is to react to and treat "sinners". Together with the question as to who can forgive sins this remains, as in Jesus' day, a source of controversy and division in the world and within the Church. Mark now moves on in his account of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God to tell of yet more actions by Jesus which caused controversy and opposition toward him as he presented the challenge of the Kingdom, a challenge which still faces all of us today.





The following article, extracted from British Red Cross magazine, Lifeline, has been submitted by Beryl Cartwright, and is entitled:

## Yemen



**Your world**

With over 20 million people in need of aid, the crisis in Yemen represents the world's single largest humanitarian crisis. More than half of the population live without clean water. The worst cholera epidemic ever recorded is still active in Yemen, with over one million suspected cases and more than 2,250 deaths.

Red Cross and Red Crescent teams on the ground are working tirelessly to provide food, clean water and essential household items. Here are just some examples of how the Red Cross and Red Crescent are helping the people of Yemen:

- 111,000** food rations and 84,000 blankets have been provided to people forced to flee their homes
- 338,000** people benefitted from Red Cross work to improve access to water and sanitation, helping reduce the spread of life-threatening diseases
- 879,000** people have received various forms of medical assistance
- 560** people have participated in first aid training sessions in front-line areas, meaning they can provide life-saving help to those affected by the conflict

Find out more about our vital work in Yemen, and how your support can make a difference, by visiting [redcross.org.uk/yemencrisis](http://redcross.org.uk/yemencrisis)

Please gift a gift today, as you have so generously in the past and help the Red Cross reach even more people in crisis in the UK and around the world.

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