

# 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> & 3 <sup>rd</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

E-Mail: [terrypowlesland@uwclub.net](mailto:terrypowlesland@uwclub.net)

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



We are now approaching 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

E-mail:

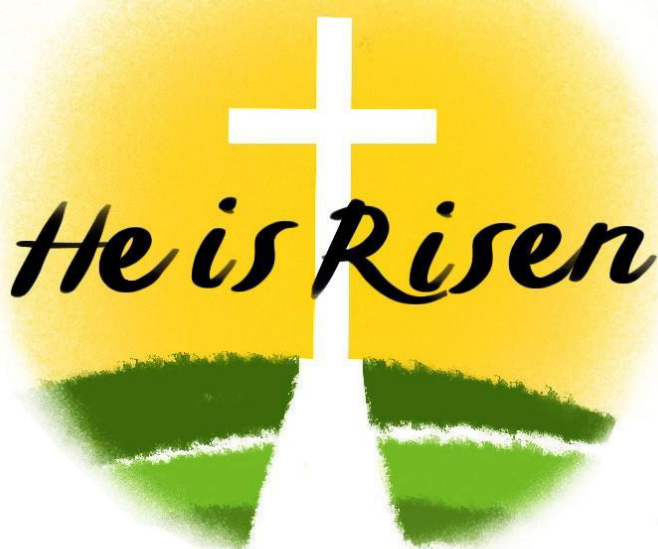
terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

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

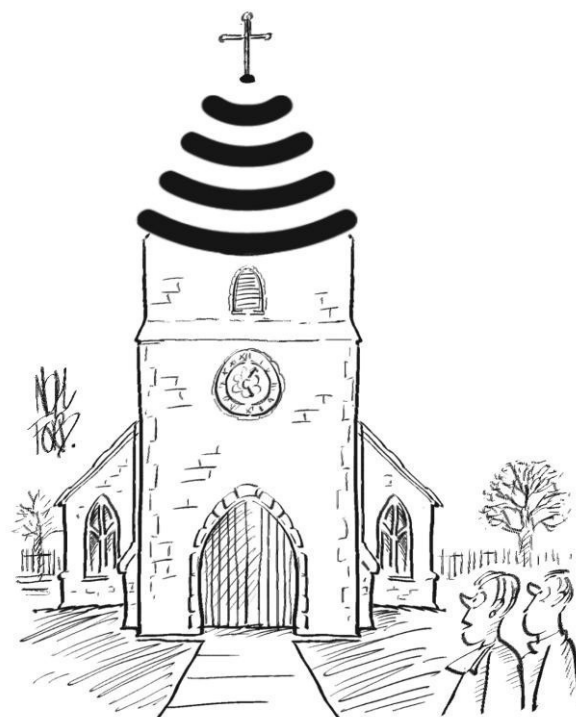
The next 3-monthly edition, covering June, July & August, is due on **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June**

Your Editor



Turning now to what has been contributed to this edition: Pip Cartwright continues in the short history to our Church, which was first published in this magazine in 2006; There is an article on Easter; Val Obriain has given us 'People are Gifts' and 'How do we go on?'; David Kinchin says 'Please Listen'; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study, to name but a few

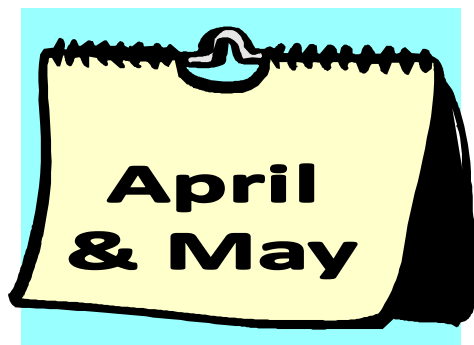
Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:



"Looks like they've introduced contactless payments for their collections."

## Contents

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16. Arts & Craft Exhibition



### 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

### April

6 <sup>th</sup>		Saturday Praise – Story Telling	11.00am
7 <sup>th</sup>	am	Karen Brusch	
	pm	Nanna Blackman & Judi Holloway	Communion
14 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
19 <sup>th</sup>		Good Friday Service	9.45am
		March of Silent Witness	10.45am
20 <sup>th</sup>		Saturday Praise – Reflective	11.00am
21 <sup>st</sup>		Dawn Service	5.45am
		Communion Service	8.00am
		Breakfast	8.45am
	am	Morning Worship	Communion
28	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	

### May

4 <sup>th</sup>		Saturday Praise – Story Telling	11.00am
5 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion
12 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
18 <sup>th</sup>		Saturday Praise – Reflective	11.00am
19 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	Communion
26 <sup>th</sup>	am	Morning Worship	

### June

2 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Morning Worship	
	pm	CTiW Thy Kingdom Come Worship	

The following events are given for your particular attention:

### April

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Springfield school Easter Service	10.45am	
	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm	
5 <sup>th</sup>	CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study	12.00 noon	Our Lady & St Hugh's RC Church
10 <sup>th</sup>	CTiW Lent Soup Lunch & Bible Study	12.00 noon	Davenport Rd Methodist Church
13 <sup>th</sup>	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
18 <sup>th</sup>	Maundy Thursday Supper	6.00pm	
27 <sup>th</sup>	The Witney Book Circle	10.45am	
	Movie Afternoon "Girl with a Pearl Earring"	12.15pm	

### May

7 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm	
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm	
11 <sup>th</sup>	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am	
18 <sup>th</sup>	WRAG Sewing afternoon	1.30pm	
19 <sup>th</sup>	Church meeting	12.00 noon	
20 <sup>th</sup> – 25 <sup>th</sup>	Arts & Craft Exhibition	10.00am – 5.00pm	

25 <sup>th</sup>	The Witney Book Circle	10.45am
30 <sup>th</sup>	Ascension Quiet Day	1.30pm – 9.30pm
<b>June</b>		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	CTiW AGM	
4 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm

## Rotas

### WELCOMING TEAM

<b>Apr</b>	07	Lesley & Irene
	14	Lesley & Pat B
	21	Lesley & Pat B
	28	Cecily & Nanna
<b>May</b>	05	Cecily & Susan
	12	Beryl & Judi
	19	Beryl & Lesley
	26	Lesley & Joan
<b>Jun</b>	02	Lesley & Pat B



### COMMUNION

<b>Apr</b>	07 pm	Lesley	
		Preparation	Lesley
	18 pm	Lesley & Viviane	
		Preparation	Lesley
<b>May</b>	21 am	Lesley & Viviane	
		Beryl & Judi	
		Preparation	Rita
	05 pm	Viviane	
		Preparation	Viviane
	19 am	Beryl & Lesley	
<b>Jun</b>		Viviane & Cecily	
		Preparation	Irene
	02 pm	Lesley	
		Preparation	Lesley

Maundy Thursday Supper



### FLOWERS

<b>Apr</b>	07	Beryl
	14	Jacqui
	21	Easter
	28	Joan
<b>May</b>	05	Rita
	12	Pat B
	19	Judi
	26	Val
<b>Jun</b>	02	Beryl



### SUNDAY COFFEE

<b>Apr</b>	07	Viviane & Hilary
	14	Pat S & Pat B
	21	Sue & Susan
	28	Claire, Irene & Judith



<b>May</b>	05	Viviane & Hilary
	12	Pat S, Pat B & Judith
	19	Sue & Susan
	26	Irene & Claire
<b>Jun</b>	02	Viviane, Hilary & Judith

#### THURSDAY COFFEE

<b>Apr</b>	04	Hilary
	11	Pat S
	18	Beryl
	25	Hilary
<b>May</b>	02	Pat S
	09	Beryl
	16	Hilary
	23	Pat S
<b>Jun</b>	30	Beryl
	06	Hilary
	Reserve – Pat B	



We would be extremely grateful for other people to join the Thursday Coffee Rota

#### SOUND SYSTEM

<b>Apr</b>	07	Terry
	14	Jonathan and/or Baz
	21	Nanna
	28	Baz and/or Jonathan
<b>May</b>	05	Terry
	12	Cecily
	19	Nanna
	26	Viviane
<b>Jun</b>	02	Terry

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

<b>Apr</b>	12	Andrew
	26	Sonya
		Baz
		Joyce
	28	Jo



**June** 07 Matthew

<b>May</b>	04	Graham
	16	Jean
	18	Wendy
	21	Terry
	24	Pip
	25	Bill
	30	Pat S

## Pastor's Paper

What happens when we lose God? What should we do? How do we find him again? The reality is that God is not lost it is merely that we imagine he is absent. Meister Eckhart, a 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic, writes about this state of mind and heart, 'I can give you no better advice than to find God where you lost him.' The only place to find God is to surrender our wills to the will of God. We will only 'lose' God when we exchange his will for our own will; his way for our own way; his thoughts for our own thoughts.

Eckhart points to Paul's surrender to the voice of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:6). Blinded, this proud man is led by the hand into the city and is met by Ananias. Eckhart also points to Mary and says of her encounter with the angel Gabriel, that all the talk in the world would not have made her the mother of Jesus. It was only when she surrendered her will, '...let it be with me according to your word' that she became the mother of the Son of God (Luke 1:38). Eckhart is sure that '...apart from complete surrender of the will, there is no traffic (communion) with God.'

Finding God means complete surrender of our will to his will. What does this complete surrender of our will mean? Eckhart says that when we surrender our will to God's will, we are enveloped with God. The only way to touch us is to touch God first, he who completely surrounds us.

However, great an affliction may be, if it comes through God, God is afflicted first. By the truth that God is! There never was a pain that befell a man [sic], no frustration or discouragement, however insignificant, that, transferred to God, did not affect God endlessly more than man and was not infinitely more contrary to him...If you are willing to suffer what God suffers, and to take what comes to you through him, then

whatever it is, it becomes divine in itself; shame becomes honour, bitterness becomes sweet, and gross darkness, clear light.

When our will is completely surrendered to God's will, then all our experiences come to us through him first.

When Jesus pleaded with his Father in Gethsemane to let the cup of suffering pass, he surrendered 'yet not what I want but what you want' (Mt. 26:39). Jesus' death and resurrection is God's participation in the deepest darkness of our lives. Tragedy, trial, suffering and death come to the completely surrendered will through God himself. God in Jesus is with us in the heights and depths of life.

If, with Paul, we want to know the power of the resurrection; if we want to sing 'Thine be the glory' on Easter Sunday morning; then we have to make our way to the cross; we join in Jesus' sufferings and his death. There is no Easter Sunday without the agony of Good Friday. We cannot find God if our wills are not completely surrendered to him, 'Not what I want, but what you want.' Eckhart is convinced that 'The truth is that the more ourselves we are, the less self is in us. That man who has denied himself will never lose track of God whatever his activity.'

In the days to come as we follow close to Jesus in his suffering, death and resurrection, may we pray the words of the old gospel hymn by Judson W. Van de Venter:

All to Jesus I surrender,  
all to him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
in His presence daily live.  
I surrender all.

Eric Liddell, famous for refusing to run on Sunday and still running through to an Olympic Gold, died with 'surrender' on his lips. When given the opportunity to leave

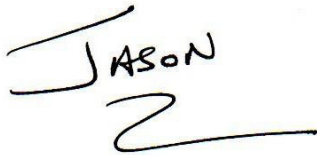


China for the safety of Canada, he refused. He sent his young family on and remained with his people. Eric became ill and did not know that a brain tumour was sapping the life out of him.

Annie Buchan, one of the nurses, was with him when he said to her, 'Annie, it's complete surrender.' She later reflected, "'Surrender'? Yes, that's what he said. I was holding him. I could hardly hear him. He started saying it. He could hardly get the words out, but he definitely said "complete surrender".'

What does surrender of our will to God's will mean for you and me?

Shalom

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

\*\*\*\*\*

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

## **EASTER:**

### **The most joyful day of the year**

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

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

It is on 21<sup>st</sup> April this year, so why does the date move around so much? Because the date of Passover moves around, and according to the biblical account, Easter is

tied to the Passover which celebrates the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and it lasts for seven days, from the middle of the Hebrew month of Nisan, which equates to late March or early April.

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

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

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

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





## **PRAYER LETTER**

### **No 189**

#### **Wait and See      Wait and Hope**

What do we wait for?

Why are we waiting?

How long do we have to wait?

It may be an event we are waiting for. The event may be personal eg; a special birthday, retirement or results from medical tests, from exams or an interview. It could be a family event, eg; a new baby, a house move, a holiday, a special family occasion. It could be a National/International Event eg; FA Cup, Commonwealth or Olympic Games , General Election.

Sometimes we are given a date and we know how long we have to wait for this events. Alternatively sometimes we do not know the exact date, it could be days, weeks or months for our waiting to be answered.

Whatever the event or occasion usually there are plans and preparations to make including short or long Journeys. Sometimes we may feel excitement during the waiting time or we may feel anxious about the future.

The Jews throughout their centuries of history were waiting for the 'the promised one from God, their Messiah'. Isaiah, one of the major prophets, prophesied his Birth in Chapter 9 and his suffering and death in chapter 53. When Jesus was born only a handful of people knew he was the son of God, the promised Messiah. Mary and Joseph were visited separately by the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of Jesus and who he will be. Then when Jesus was born in Bethlehem a host of angels appeared to the shepherds telling them of the birth of their Saviour and where to worship Him. When Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the Temple to present him to the Lord and be consecrated they met Simeon. Now Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel when the Holy Spirit revealed to him that he would see and recognise the Lord's Christ before he died. He took Jesus in his arms giving thanks and praise to God first, then prophesied to Mary and Joseph the destiny of Jesus. The prophetess, Anna, also at the Temple gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.(Luke 2:21-36) Both Simeon and Anna had waited all their lives for this news. The wise men from the East recognised Jesus as King of the Jews when they presented their gifts to him, gold for a King, incense for a priest and Myrrh for his destined suffering.

Years later just before Jesus started his Ministry John the Baptist recognised Jesus as the Lamb of God as he saw the Spirit come down and rest on Jesus. He told those around him 'that I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God'.(John1:29-34)

During Jesus' ministry his disciples gradually accepted that Jesus was the promised Messiah and eventually many other followers thought he was too. Although Jesus told his closest disciples of his imminent crucifixion it wasn't until the Resurrection that they really understood that Jesus was the Messiah. Then there was the waiting time when Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem when you will receive power from the Holy Spirit. This happened on the Day of Pentecost.

As a Church Fellowship we will be waiting for a new Minister after Jason leaves us at the end of August to take up his new calling as Minister of Cheltenham Congregational Church. The process for calling a new Minister maybe short or long and the 'waiting time' is unknown but we must be patient and listen to God and wait and see what God has for our next stage of discipleship and our Ministry in Witney.

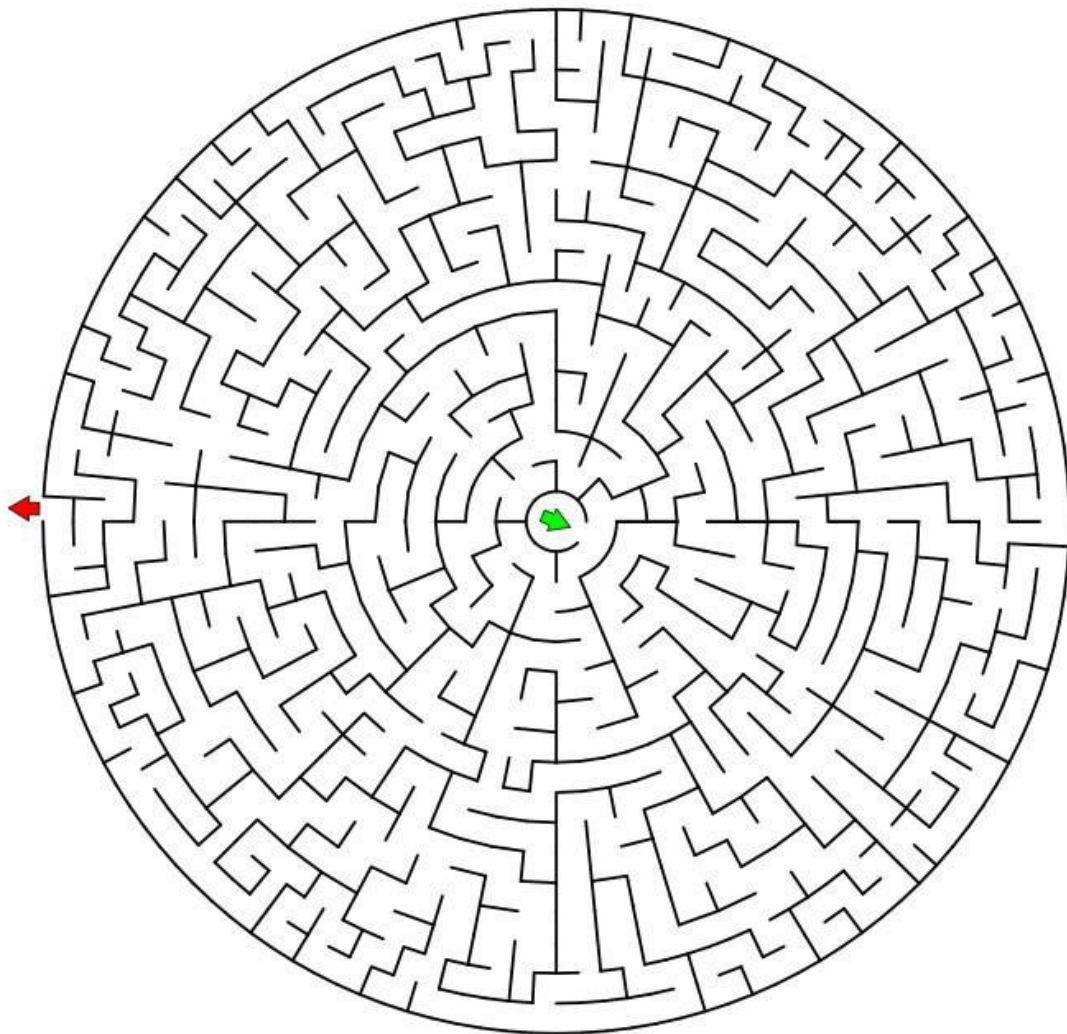
Jesus led by example by praying to his Father God. Paul and many believers of Christ in the centuries that have followed, encouraged praying to God asking for strength and guidance in proclaiming the 'Good News' of Christ.

In the weeks and months ahead as we wait I encourage you all to pray for God's guidance. This may be alone or in small groups or collectively in times organised for our Fellowship.

***'The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God'.  
Philippians (4:6,7)***

Every Blessing,  
Beryl

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



The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

### **The Growth of Witney Congregational Church (1690-1800)**

Following Rev. Francis Hubert in 1690, mention is made of Dr. Henry Cornish who was ejected from Christ Church, Oxford, settled in Stanton Harcourt and who preached at Cogges in 1669. In 1690 he preached at Bicester and also fortnightly at Witney. Written records of our early church do not seem to have been made or have survived, because the earliest surviving Witney Church record which mentions our history was made in 1806. We are indebted to Rev. Thomas Taylor for our first record of events and a mention of its previous history. Thomas Taylor's Book (Church Minutes 1806-1859) is lodged at the County Archives Office, Cowley, Oxford, for all to see. He, with the Rev. Nicholas Hellings, later tried to pencil in the development of our church in this all important formative period from 1662-1800.

From 1690 to 1712 the Independent (Congregational) Church appears to have been a "house church" and Staple Hall is considered to have been its main location (the home of the Townsend family). However in 1712 under the ministry of Samuel Mather (1712-1728) the first church building was built and still stands in Marlborough Lane (then called Meeting House Lane). Later, it was used briefly as a Baptist Church, then for the Sunday School. In 1910 it was let as a Health Clinic to Oxfordshire County Council and, more recently, it is in use as a Scout Hall. The early 18<sup>th</sup> Century was a boom time for nonconformity and in 1715 the Independent Chapel had congregations estimated at between 400 and 500 and of these, 30 were said to be:

"gentlemen, ye rest tradesmen, farmers and labourers".

Samuel Mather had quite famous relatives: his uncle, also Samuel Mather M.A., was one of the first graduates from Harvard University, U.S.A. His brother was a "celebrated New England divine and historian". Young Samuel Mather married into the wealthy Townsend family who, I believe, made their fortune from the wool trade and blanket making. The Townsends used to live at Staple Hall and obviously were supporters and benefactors of the Independent Church and it was with their money that the Marlborough Lane Church was built. On his decease, Mr Mather was buried in the Parish Church.

The information about the Ministers who followed is fairly scant, however, a Mr Blake (1728-1738?) followed Mr Mather and in 1738 John Ward, a leading Jacobite and friend of Philip Doddridge (a famous Congregationalist Preacher and Hymn writer from Northampton) led the United Church made up of Presbyterian, Baptist and Independents. He was followed by a Mr Proctor but in 1752 a Mr Blake was Minister of Witney... whether the same Mr Blake of 1728, we do not know.

It appears that the Independent Church went through a lean period between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Church had difficulty in finding suitable leaders and, at times, it closed for a short season or joined up with other nonconformist congregations. It is known that between 1752 and 1781 they had various ministers (including Rev. Dawson from Cirencester) and students. According to Anglican Visitation Returns of the time, in 1759 the Presbyterians were led by Mr Proctor (did the Church split up?) whereas in 1771 the Presbyterians (12 families) met together

with the Independents (5 families) and made one Congregation.

Between 1781 and 1800 the pastoral role was taken by Mr Wells (a Baptist), Mr Humphries, Mr Condor, Mr Noble and Mr Evans. Their initials and dates are not given. Despite the problems over the leaders there were devout and devoted families who maintained Independent worship in the town. Of these the Witts family seem prominent and span the period between 1712 to the building of the second Church in 1828, which was built also with money donated by the Townsend family.

Apart from the first church building still standing in Marlborough Lane, the only remaining relict from this period is the memorial stone to the Witts family. This tablet was erected on the Marlborough Lane Church wall and obviously rescued and kept when those premises were sold. It has since been returned to the descendants of the family.

For those interested and who have difficulty in deciphering the carved words, the text is as follows:

"In memory of Richard Witts of Witney, Gent, son of Edward Witts of the same place who, after a series of ten years illness, which he bore with Christian patience and resignation, he departed this life, December, ye 27<sup>th</sup>, 1755, aged 52 years, and is buried close to this wall. He was a tender and affectionate husband and

always good to the poor, beloved and esteemed by all his relations and acquaintances, and his loss was regretted by all that had ye pleasure of knowing him. Also in the memory of Jane Proctor relict

of the above-mentioned Richard Witts, gent who died January the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1770: aged 61 years. Also of Richard Parish Witts,

gent, son of the above-named Richard Witts and Jane his wife, who died August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1828, aged 80 years".

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The following article, author unknown, has been submitted by David Kinchin and been extracted from his book 'The Invisible Injury', and is entitled:

### **Please Listen**

When I ask you to listen to me  
And you start giving advice  
You have not done what I asked

When I ask you to listen to me  
And you begin to tell me why I shouldn't  
feel that way  
You are trampling on my feelings

When I ask you to listen to me  
And you feel you have to do something to  
solve my problems  
You have failed me, strange as it may  
seem

When you do something for me that I can  
and need to do for myself  
You contribute to my fear and weakness

So,  
Please listen and just hear me  
And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for  
your turn; and I will listen to you



The following article, based on Isaiah 49: 15b – 16, has been extracted from 'Encounter with God' by Dennis Wrigley, and submitted by Val Obriain, and is entitled:

### People are Gifts

The gifts You give me are people, Lord  
Gifts for a moment or for the years of my life,  
All from You, reflections of You if I but look.  
Each with a dignity, a worth imprinted with  
Your hand  
Your image clearly carved upon their being  
Behind each eye, each mask, within each  
package, beyond all hiding and camouflage,  
A precious one to be handled with the  
greatest care and sensitivity – a gift beyond  
all price,  
Never to be damaged or rejected or abused –  
a gift unlike all other gifts.  
A gift to love, protect and cherish with  
wonder and with awe; A gift of God

\*\*\*\*\*

The follow article, written by John Mark Green, has been submitted by Val Obriain, and is entitled:

### How do we go on?

How do we go on after the unthinkable happens?

How can we carry the burden of knowing the world can be cruel and dangerous and the future so unpredictable?

How do we grieve with empty arms and a head filled with echoing memories?

We are stronger than we know and this is how we show it:

Holding each other, giving comfort in the mist of pain

Loving more fiercely through our actions and things we say

Never taking life for granted, knowing it can be snatched away

The world may bring deep darkness but we are bearers of light

We will join our flames together and shine in the blackest of nights

\*\*\*\*\*

### CHURCH GIVING:

Those who give using the envelope system MAY notice that from the new Tax Year (7<sup>th</sup> April) you will have a different personal number. Nothing else has changed. This is simply to ring the changes in line with Data protection issues.

Remember to review your **giving** please. The new Tax year brings with it new tax codes and if you no longer pay income tax then please let me know as I will not be able to claim **gift-aid** on your giving. If you regularly give using a Standing Order then please inform me if your Tax situation changes and you no longer pay Income Tax. I can only claim Gift Aid from your giving at church if you are a regular Tax payer.

I would love for more members to GIVE to the church using either the standing order from the bank, or by using the Envelope System. See me if you have any concerns about anything at all to do with your Church Giving.

David Kinchin (treasurer)



## 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.*

### 9. Mark 3:19b - 35

"Then he went home." With these words Mark introduces a further change of scene. Exactly where is meant by "home" is not clear. It seems likely that a house in Capernaum is indicated. Similarly, it is unclear as to whether Jesus went alone or was accompanied by the newly named "apostles". If Jesus was alone, he was not allowed to be alone for long - a crowd gathered in the same way as it had when he had previously been "at home" in Capernaum. On that occasion people could not get near for the crush; now a similar picture is painted by the words "they could not even eat". There is an overwhelming demand being made upon the time and energy of Jesus, so much so that those who care deeply about him become worried for him and attempt to restrain him, to hold him back from giving of himself. They so failed to understand the imperative of the Gospel which drove him on that they were even led to think that he had gone mad.

Who are these worried people? What was

their concern? Mark's Greek here is far from precise, a lack of precision which is reflected in various alternative translations which are to be found. "His people" perhaps comes nearest as an accurate rendering of the "who?" Some translators express this as "his friends", others as "his family". Similarly, some translators say that it is those who come to restrain Jesus who are saying "He has gone out of his mind" while other versions imply that they come in response to reports that this is what is being said about Jesus. Whatever the precise meaning which it was Mark's intention to record here, his writing shows us how little those who had been closest to Jesus over previous years understood of the path in life to which God had called him. They went along with the diagnosis that he was mad, that he had become possessed by a demon and, for his own good, they tried to restrain him from following his calling. It was love for Jesus which directed their action, but that action was misplaced, not according the will and purpose of God. How often since then have those called by God to a path of service been considered "out of their minds" or, at the very least, "foolish" by their loved ones who have attempted to dissuade them from following that way of life to which God has called them. Satan does not always appear with cloven hooves and a forked tail; he is most persuasive in the garb of one deeply loved.

There were others present who had different reasons for pressing the charge of demon possession against Jesus. "Scribes from Jerusalem" are new characters in Mark's story. Previous mention of "scribes" appear to have referred to locally resident scribes; now Mark introduces this official or semi-official group who have arrived from Jerusalem. Perchance news of Jesus and his activities had reached the centre of Jewish religious life and caused sufficient concern to merit some investigation. These newcomers were not well disposed

towards Jesus and rapidly took up the allegations of demon possession against him. Such allegations had, we may surmise, often proved a good way to discredit someone whose actions could not be explained in ways which were acceptable to establishment thinking. The fact that Jesus had cast out demons could not be questioned. What could be questioned was ""by whose power and authority?" The obvious answer - "God's" - was not acceptable to these people from Jerusalem. They did however believe that demons have power and hence put forward the proposition that Jesus was possessed by a demon and cast out demons through the power of the ruler of the demons. Mark records that they said that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul. The name is spelt differently in different manuscripts. It might possibly refer to the Philistine god "Baalzebub" (II Kings 1:2) although this seems unlikely. The name can be interpreted to mean "lord of the dwelling" (cf. Matt. 10:25) or "lord of the flies". It is most likely that Mark just interpreted Beelzebul as an alternative name for Satan. Certainly the thrust of the accusation of the scribes from Jerusalem is that it is Satan's power which is at work through Jesus.

Jesus does not respond to this attack upon himself with a direct denial; rather does he tell a story, a parable. Parables are always designed to make people think; often they are capable of more than one interpretation. Sometimes the more obvious interpretation of the meaning can obscure a deeper meaning which may become apparent when the parable is viewed against the overall teaching and life of the person telling the story. Parables, and particularly the parables of Jesus, challenge us to think and think again - and to apply our thinking in our lives. The meaning of a parable can alter and broaden as our experience and understanding of God grows. The response which Mark

records Jesus as giving to the accusing scribes consists of a question and four statements. "How can Satan cast out Satan?" is the question. Those words must have instantly exposed the weakness of the scribes thinking. In order to "cast out" a demon the agent must enter into the possessed person in some manner. Hence, in order for Satan to cast out Satan, Satan would have to enter in as a form of replacement; he would therefore still be present. The whole idea is absurd. Perhaps, however, the scribes might have thought, a large, important, powerful demon might indeed cast out a lesser demon. Almost before such a thought had time to form, Jesus has followed up his question with three statements to show the ridiculousness of such an idea. All demons are "on the same side", all are part of the kingdom, the house of Satan which, if it has become divided against itself, surely will not stand. Perhaps there is here the thought that if such a thing has happened, then the scribes and all the people of God should rejoice because the days of any domain of evil are numbered. Jesus, however, does not take such an easy view as he goes on to speak of the need for a strong man to be tied up before anyone can plunder his property. Evil continues to hold many in strong bondage, and that power which is evil must needs be recognised and subdued before those held in bondage to Satan's ways can be set free. A greater power than that of the strong man is needed; that greater power needs to be recognised. This the scribes from Jerusalem were failing to do by refusing to recognise the goodness of God at work in Jesus.

As if to underline the seriousness of this failure of these scribes, Jesus goes on to make a statement which contains these terrifying words: "Can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin." There is something here which is unforgivable. It is put in contrast to "their



sins and whatever blasphemies they utter", which, says Jesus, will be forgiven, even that defiant hostility towards God which is the Biblical meaning of the term "blasphemy". But there is no forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. What can this mean? The Holy Spirit can be seen as the working, doing, acting presence of God through whom God's purposes are accomplished. Viewing these words in the context of the accusations made against Jesus we see those things which are of the goodness of God being attributed to evil; effectively good is being called evil; God's activity is not being recognised; God himself is not being seen. What a tremendous need there is here for forgiveness, but those who are in that need are absolutely sure that they do not need forgiveness. They continue to say of Jesus: "He has an unclean spirit". They remain wilfully blind to their need and, because they wilfully remain so, forgiveness cannot be given to them. The Holy Spirit cannot act in those who deliberately deny his presence.

We may picture the scribes departing, although Mark makes no mention of this. Maybe they went back to Jerusalem to report on their findings about Jesus. Certainly they did not seem to be present in the crowd seated around Jesus in the house, when outside of that place there came his mother and his brothers and sisters seeking for him. Quite why they came seeking him, we do not know; maybe it is linked with the tale of his madness but Mark gives no indication that this is so. Mark's record however is important because he mentions the brothers and sisters of Jesus, other children of Mary. When Mark wrote his Gospel, he was apparently not aware of any question concerning Mary's perpetual virginity. Mark recorded as a fact the reality of blood brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of the same mother. Mary and the siblings of Jesus come seeking him and the message is

passed through the crowd seated around him that they are outside looking for him. Jesus's response may well puzzle us. He asks the question: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Immediately he gives his answer as, looking at those seated around, he says to them "You are!" Jesus then expounds this statement further: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

With these words Jesus proclaims the basis for relationship with him; it depends upon the doing of the will of God. All who do the will of God are part of his family. This includes both men and women for among those gathered around Jesus at this time were those whom he calls "his sisters". Although the twelve apostles were all men, already at this stage in the ministry of Jesus there are women who are in that inner circle gathered in the house. Both men and women had responded to the call of Jesus and were learning of him the way of God, the way of the Kingdom, the Kingdom which is open to all who come to recognise for themselves who Jesus really is. Within that Kingdom there were places open for Mary and for Jesus's birth brothers and sisters; Jesus did not deny his family relationship to them but desired that they would also recognise the reality of whom he is and include themselves in the enlarged family of God by doing the will of God. It is as though here Jesus is posing to his birth family that question which occurs again and again, explicitly or implicitly in Mark's Gospel: "Whom do you say that I am?" It remains the question for all of us to answer. Who is this Jesus? Is he indeed the Christ, the Son of God? Mark will continue to present that question to his readers to answer, each person for themselves, as he goes on with his story of Jesus.



The following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump:

### **Church leaders give blessing to plastic-free faith Easter Egg**

The Archbishop of York and the lead Bishop for the environment have welcomed a 'plastic free' version of The Real Easter Egg.

Out of the 80 million eggs sold in the UK every year The Real Easter Egg is the only one which includes a 24 page copy of the Easter story in the box, is Fairtrade and supports charitable causes. And now, this year the Real Easter Egg is going plastic-free.

The change is in response to a survey which found that 96% of Christians think it is important for Easter Eggs to be plastic-free and news that 11.5 million tonnes of food packaging waste is produced every year.

David Marshall from the Meaningful Chocolate Company, who make the Real Easter Egg, said: "Easter eggs don't have to cost the earth. We have replaced plastic bags, tamper-seals and Best Before stickers with paper versions. There is still the same amount of chocolate in the Real Easter Egg and the box sizes are the same, but the redesign means our Dark and Original Egg will save at least 5 tonnes of plastic and 175 tonnes of card in the next five years."

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, said; "I am delighted that an Easter Egg, which shares the Story of Easter, is leading the way by reducing packaging."

The Bishop of Salisbury, The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, said; "As the lead bishop on the environment for the Church of England I am delighted that an Easter Egg, is taking seriously the care of our planet."

### **Why we are turning to soap bars**

It's official: we are buying more soap bars these days. And that is a good thing. It is all a part of the major consumer backlash against unnecessary plastic waste. More and more of us want eco-friendly versions of our everyday needs. Thus, we have 'bags for life', loose fruit and veg, and now – bars of soap.

Liquid soaps took off in the 1990s and was marketed as more hygienic than barred soap. But since then, numerous scientific studies have found this to be myth. And in the meantime, hundreds of millions of plastic bottles full of soap have been used once – and thrown into the environment. Whereas with a bar of soap, once it is gone, it is really gone.

### **Old as taxes**

As a new tax year gets underway, did you know that the men who collect our taxes are working in one of the oldest professions known? Archaeological evidence dating from 1900 BC includes a clay tablet recording a tax for public works and a papyrus scroll which reveals that even 4,000 years ago, tax-payers had some complaints. No surprise there!

### **Christian upbringing**

After the baptism of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wants us brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you and Mum."





# ARTS & CRAFT EXHIBITION

**Mon 20<sup>TH</sup>-Sat 25<sup>TH</sup>  
MAY 2019**

**10AM-5PM**

**WITNEY  
CONGREGATIONAL  
CHURCH**  
4 Welch Way, Witney  
OX28 6JF

To exhibit free of charge please contact  
Judi Holloway at  
[judiholloway49@gmail.com](mailto:judi.holloway49@gmail.com) or ring the  
Church office on 01993 709992.  
There will be an opportunity on the  
Saturday for you to sell your exhibits if  
you wish to do so.

**Come and join us.  
All are welcome.**