

# CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of  
**WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**



Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple,  
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)

**April & May 2022**

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As I look back over the last 2 years, I don't think anyone would have imagined what a profound impact COVID would have on our lives and for so long; we managed to get a vaccination established very quickly with a high uptake of the vaccines, and from May, initially for those aged 75 and over, there is an additional jab and I hope people take this up as even if you are fully jabbed you can still get Covid !!

Sadly, there seems little hope that the war in Ukraine will be over soon and charities and communities have been established through which, along with prayers, you can support Ukraine. Sadly, this is a worrying time for the whole world

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



Once again, I hope this edition of the magazine will remind you that you are not forgotten by God, and that as Christians, we are praying for you at this difficult time.

So, on that note, I now turn to some of this month's contents: Pat Brent gives an update from Starfish Malawi; Lesley Barter, once again, gives us the Deacon's Letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study; Pip Cartwright gives us the growth of WCC; David Kinchin gives a reflection on recent events

and some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, 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:

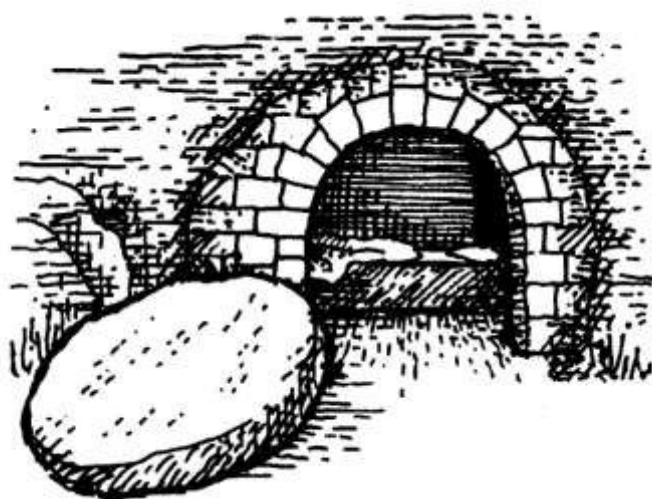
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or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 3-monthly Summer edition, covering June, July & August is due on **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June**

Your Editor



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# April & May Diary

## April

3 <sup>rd</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin		
	pm	David Kinchin	Communion	
10 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Jayne Taylor		
14 <sup>th</sup>	pm	Rev Judi Holloway	Maundy Supper	6.30 for 6.45
15 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Good Friday 10.00	
		Followed by CTiW Silent Walk of Witness		10.45 for 11.00 at High St Methodist
17 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion	
24 <sup>th</sup>	am	Gillian Warson		

## May

1 <sup>st</sup>	am	tba		
	pm	No Service	Communion	
8 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway		
15 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion	
22 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Chris Huffadine		
29 <sup>th</sup>	am	tba		

## June

5 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway		
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion	
12 <sup>th</sup>	am	Dr Dave Adams		

The following events are given for your particular attention:

## April

5 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
30 <sup>th</sup>	Witney Book Circle	10.30am

## May

3 <sup>rd</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
4 <sup>th</sup>	Zoom Bible Reflection to resume with further details on the Sunday link	
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Church meeting	
28 <sup>th</sup>	Witney Book Circle	10.30am

## June

7 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
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## Rotas

### WELCOMING TEAM

<b>April</b>	03	Janet Hayes
	10	Pat Brent
	15	Lesley Barter
	17	Pat Smith
	24	Joan Currie
<b>May</b>	01	Beryl Cartwright
	08	Janet Hayes
	15	Pat Brent
	22	Pat Smith
	29	Joan Currie
<b>June</b>	05	Jacqui Powlesland
	12	Beryl Cartwright



## FLOWERS

<b>Apr</b>	03	Beryl Cartwright
	10	Rita Hayes
	17	Easter
	24	Pat Brent
<b>May</b>	01	Joan Currie
	08	Janet Hayes
	15	Jacqui Powlesland
	22	Judi Holloway
	29	Beryl Cartwright
<b>June</b>	05	Rita Hayes
	12	Pat Brent



## SUNDAY COFFEE

<b>Apr</b>	03	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	10	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	17	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	24	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
<b>May</b>	01	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	08	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	15	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
	22	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	29	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
<b>June</b>	05	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	12	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland



## THURSDAY COFFEE

<b>April</b>	07	Beryl Cartwright
	14	Judi Holloway
	21	Pat Smith
	28	Jean Hodgson
<b>May</b>	05	Beryl Cartwright
	12	Judi Holloway
	19	Pat Smith
	26	Jean Hodgson
<b>June</b>	02	Jubilee Bank Holiday
	09	Beryl Cartwright



**We would be extremely grateful for other people to join**

## SOUND SYSTEM

<b>April</b>	03	Terry Powlesland
	10	Nanna Blackman
	17	Terry Powlesland
	24	Nanna Blackman
<b>May</b>	01	Terry Powlesland
	08	Nanna Blackman
	15	Terry Powlesland
	22	Nanna Blackman
	29	Terry Powlesland
<b>April</b>	05	Terry Powlesland
	12	Nanna Blackman



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

## Deacon's Letter

Dear Friends

If you have been able to get outside to enjoy the March sunshine you will have seen primroses, hosts of golden daffodils and heard the birds singing their joyful love songs. Spring is at our door. Easter approaches and with it all the elation of the Resurrection. If ever we felt in need of a fresh start and the opportunity to do things differently, better, it is now.

Have the events of the last year or two changed us? If they haven't, they have certainly given us pause. I think we have all felt the need to take stock and re-evaluate. Most of us have thought hard about which things really matter to us. And we have sometimes been surprised to find that we spend a lot of time on things that really don't. It has been a Spring Clean of our lives and now we must discard what we don't need or like.

Those of you who were at Lite Bite in March may remember that we examined the question 'What is the point of Lent?' In a nutshell it is a time of regret over our sin and commitment to change. We are required to focus on what God expects of us - which can only be achieved with His grace. Now we have to put it into practice. And here are three of the questions that might point us in the right direction:

When I wake up on Easter morning, how will I be different?

What steps can I take to carve out time for prayer and reflection?

How can I contribute to the regeneration of my church?

Now that we have identified what we feel is most important to our future as a church we must recognise that it will not magically come about when we appoint a new Minister. WE have to make it happen, by putting time and effort in; and not

simply on Sunday mornings. We have to live our faith. Christ's resurrection was not just a bodily one. He lives on in each one of us and it is our challenge to live accordingly.

If that challenge sometimes feels overwhelming and if you are feeling helpless in the face of world events, let these words from the late Desmond Tutu inspire you:

***Easter means – hope prevails over despair. Jesus reigns as Lord of Lords and King of Kings... Easter says to us that despite everything to the contrary, his will for us will prevail, love will prevail over hate, justice over injustice and oppression, peace over exploitation and bitterness.***

May God bless you all and fill you with the joy of the season



<b>Apr</b>	04	Sarah Murrey
	12	Andrew MacLarty
	23	Jo Rudd
	26	Joyce Kearsey
	28	Jo Matthews

<b>May</b>	04	Graham Beechey
	16	Jean Stanley
	21	Terry Powlesland
	24	Pip Cartwright
	30	Pat Smith

A conference is a gathering of important people who singly can do nothing; but together can decide that nothing can be done.



## PRAYER LETTER No 202

### Creation and Creating

In the natural world we see and recognise God's creation but do we see it in ourselves? Every one of us is unique having different personalities, different abilities and different skills. Our abilities and skills need to be practised, honed and, with God's help, used in the right situations.

We often give thanks to God for the 'beauty of the earth' but rarely give thanks to the vast number of people who use their creative God given abilities to give us so much pleasure and enjoyment through the 'Arts' (music, paintings, sculpture, the written word).

People create things with their hands and feet, with their minds, whether it is in concrete objects; listening to people who have composed all kinds of music, write plays, novels and poetry. We are all different.

We enjoy other people's creative abilities, their paintings, sculptures, music, the written word but do we appreciate and give thanks to God's creation all around us. We, as humans, create objects, families, communities.

Creating anything takes time. Mistakes made sometimes means going back to the beginning stage and starting again until gradually a 'finished piece' is produced whether it is a sculpture, painting, music, novel, etc.

We, as a Fellowship, have opportunities to create loving relationships with the people who attend our Church Services or activities in the week and other facilities we provide for the benefit of others in the Community. We can be creative in the gifts that God has given us whether it is in cooking, gardening, sewing, knitting, singing, writing, praying. Opportunities to be creative come and go and we should recognise ours. Recent examples of some of these collective creations is the amazing blanket knitted in rectangles by several people and creatively sewn together and sent to the Malawi Starfish Appeal for children and also the stunning 3D sewing Banner showing activities which take place in the Church Lounge. Both of these examples used the creative ideas of some and the co-operative work of others sewing and knitting with all using abilities that God has given us for the benefit of others.

Every week we experience the creative examples of musicians and writers as we sing hymns and songs in our Sunday Services. When a pianist isn't available to accompany our singing, the you tube songs background to the words on the screen illustrate the meaning of the hymn/song and show the beauty of creation.

Life is a work in progress.

Pray that God will show us how to use our abilities and skills as we journey through life.

Every Blessing,

Beryl

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



## Report for Cornerstone Magazine: April 2022

On 18<sup>th</sup> March I agreed to sign onto a ZOOM meeting with other church treasurers within the Congregational Federation. It was to be a pooling of thoughts and ideas. I was anticipating that perhaps a handful of people would join the meeting.

I was truly surprised to be greeted by no less than 33 other treasurers from around Great Britain, as far afield as Cornwall to the south, The Orkneys to the north, Swansea to the west and Ipswich to the east. So the full length and breath of the country was represented.

The general consensus of opinion was that we were all very much '*the last man standing*' in our respective fellowships. There was no long queue of people keen to step into our shoes. Having served almost four years as treasurer to Witney Church I was almost the baby of the group. Some had served in the role for fifteen, twenty or even (in one case) fifty years. This meant that some were open to new ideas while others thought there was nothing you could teach them about the task of monitoring church finances.

**Internet banking** was talked about a lot and many, like Witney, had moved towards standing orders for our giving, and BACs payments for outgoing monies. Cash was being used less and less.

There was an issue about **auditing accounts**. Most were in favour of this while a few thought that it was a waste of money. When I pointed out that I saw it as a way of safeguarding myself against any accusations of fiddling the books, a few ears were pricked and heads nodded. Maybe other treasurers don't see the same number of criminals as I do, in my other role as a magistrate!

I did pick up some very useful tips and suggestions. Firstly, there is an **Association for Church Accountants and Treasurers** (ACAT) and for an annual fee of £10 we could join this and receive regular advice and updates on a wide variety of money saving schemes. I took the liberty of signing up to this.

Secondly, I learned that CWM (Council for World Mission) are offering **grants** to churches to cover their affiliation fees to the Federation for 2022. I immediately signed up for this thus saving us £432.00

Finally, I learned about a scheme for "**Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme**" to reclaim the VAT paid on any repairs and improvements to the church. I need to investigate this further but it should help us recover a significant sum of money – once I have completed the paperwork. Thinking of the running repairs we have made already this year, and the forthcoming necessity to replace the church boilers; this could be a tidy figure.

So, all in all, my two-hour meeting was very worthwhile. I was also able to catch-up with a few people around the country who I had not talked to for several years. Perhaps being a member of the Congregational Federation does have some significant advantages after all.

*David Kinchin* (treasurer)

## The Italian pasta diet that really works

You walka pasta da bakery  
You walks pasta da sweet shop  
You walka pasta da ice cream shop  
You walks pasta da table and fridge  
You gonna lose da weight!

The following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to which the church has a subscription:

## **An Easter reflection:**

Canon David Winter

“When you die, that’s it. Nothing. Out like a light.” That’s what the man in the pub said, and his mates all nodded, though the one whose mother had died the week before wasn’t really quite so certain. Still, it seemed to make sense.

After all, we know what ‘dead’ means: dead leaves, dead batteries, dead fish, dead pets . . . and dead people, to be honest. While we recognise that it’s all too easy to go from alive to dead, we’ve got serious doubts about the possibility of any return journeys.

Which is why Christians have an uphill task at Easter. Jesus was a great man, and people want to remember how He died. Fair enough. But it starts getting complicated when Christians insist that Jesus died - but didn’t stay dead - in fact, that He’s alive now. That ‘return journey’ has happened, they say.

That’s the problem about Easter, Christians persisting in what sounds like a ridiculous belief. If they just dropped the resurrection bit and concentrated on the wonderful teaching of Jesus and His example of generosity, compassion and love then everybody would find Christianity much more believable. Wouldn’t that make sense? And wouldn’t that fill the churches again?

Well it might (or, more likely, it might not). But in any case, the trouble is that it wouldn’t be Christianity at all. The faith of Christians actually depends on the resurrection of Jesus, and always has done, right from the earliest days.

After the crucifixion the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross by some of His

friends and put in a rock tomb with a heavy stone rolled across the doorway. Yet the following Sunday, the third day after His death, His followers claimed that they had met Him, seen Him, talked with Him.

So certain was their belief that nothing could make them recant it. Not ridicule, not torture, not even death itself. They couldn’t deny His resurrection, because they were absolutely convinced that it had happened. Plenty of clever and powerful people at the time had a vested interest in proving them wrong. It shouldn’t have been difficult to prove that a dead man had stayed dead, especially when you have at your disposal the resources of the greatest empire in history. Yet they didn’t do it, because it couldn’t be done.

Still today millions of people all over the world believe that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead. They include brilliant scientists and philosophers as well as plenty of ‘ordinary’ men and women of all ages. They believe it because they respect the witness of those first Christians, and because in many cases their own lives have been transformed by a relationship with Jesus - a relationship that wouldn’t make sense if He were dead!

Christians don’t put their faith in a dead hero from the past, but in someone who is alive and *active in their own lives and in the world*. That, in a nutshell, is the real message of Easter.

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## **What about Maundy Money?**

Every year the Queen distributes silver coins at a special service on Maundy Thursday. It is part of a tradition dating back many centuries, where the Royal



Family took part in ceremonies washing the feet of poor people and giving gifts.

The Royal Maundy Service itself began in 1662, when Charles II gave out coins. The ones that the Queen gives out each year bear the portrait of Her Majesty designed for her coronation in 1953, even though the image on ordinary circulating coinage has since been changed four times.

According to the royal.uk website, the Queen decided early on in her reign that Maundy money should not just be distributed to the people of London. And so, for many years she has visited various cathedrals or abbeys to give gifts to local people. Recipients of Maundy money are nominated by their local dioceses for contributions to their local church and community.

During the service, the Queen distributes gifts according to the number of years she has lived: for example, when she turned 80 she distributed 80 pence worth of Maundy money to 80 men and 80 women in recognition for their contribution to community and to the church.

Last year, in 2021, the service was cancelled because of Covid. Instead, the Maundy money was blessed at the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace, before being posted to recipients alongside a letter from The Queen.

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## **Palm Sunday**

*Canon Paul Hardingham*

It must have been a dramatic sight on Palm Sunday when Jesus approached Jerusalem to the adulation of the crowds. The Bible tells us that *'A very large crowd*

*spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*' (Matthew 21:8,9).

But not everyone in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus; in the very next verse we read, *'the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"'* (10). But by the end of the week, the crowds had turned against Jesus and were demanding His crucifixion. (Matthew 27:22).

Why did they turn against Jesus so quickly? Perhaps they were disappointed because He refused to fulfil their expectations in establishing a new political kingdom. Instead, He came to change our hearts and save us from our sins by His death and resurrection. As He said during that week, *'My kingdom is not of this world.'* (John 18:36). This deeply disappointed those who hoped that He would throw out the hated Roman occupiers.

Where would we have been on that first Palm Sunday? *Among the disciples who welcomed Him or among the sceptical crowds?* It's easy to judge those who condemned Jesus, but would we have acted differently? We too can be disappointed when Jesus fails to meet our hopes and expectations of Him?

The message of Easter is that God still loves and accepts us, and because of Jesus we can be forgiven. He came for one simple reason: *'For Christ also suffered once for sins...to bring you to God.'* (1 Peter 3:18). May we welcome Jesus afresh into our lives this Eastertime.

This article is written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, & writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

## **The Wonder and the Sorrow of PCR Tests**

PCR tests are a fact of life for most of us at the moment. As a biologist who was doing this procedure long before most people had heard of it, I take secret delight in people's use of the acronym. Let me open the laboratory door and share the wonders it conceals.

The swab that you, or someone else, pokes down your throat and up your nose goes into a tube containing a little liquid. That liquid is then heated or mixed with a chemical to kill any live virus particles, then purified to get rid of every part of the virus except ribonucleic acid (RNA)

The test is actually RT-PCR, the first step being Reverse Transcription by an enzyme that converts any RNA present into Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Multiple copies of that DNA are then made using the Polymerase Chain Reaction. Reverse transcription produced one half of a DNA helix, like one side of an unzipped zip. The enzyme DNA Polymerase is a little like the zipper, except as well as zipping up it also manufactures the other half of the zip using DNA subunits that have been added to the tube. This process works because a bit like a zip, the two sides of the DNA helix are mirror images of each other. If that new helix is unzipped, DNA polymerase can then make a new strand on both sides.

The beauty of PCR is in its simplicity. Multiple rounds of heating (which melts the DNA helix strands apart) and cooling (which allows the enzyme to make new DNA) produce more and more mirror-image DNA strands.

Scientists often have stories to tell about the wonders they study, or make use of, in the lab. Sadly, if this particular process works it means that there was probably COVID-19 in the sample, and someone may be about to become quite ill.

Do you live with similar tensions in your own life? Perhaps you sell a fantastic product that most people in the world can't afford. Maybe you love taking care of people, but your role only exists because others live with great physical or mental challenges.

For the Psalmists, a relationship with God was forged in the confusing space where the struggles of life mingled with praise for creation and trust in Him. How can we learn from these inspired ancient writers, celebrating the wonders we experience in our day-to-day lives while also lamenting the world's brokenness, praying for healing and justice?

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## **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, but we will not suffer for our inventions.

What about the ‘swoon’ theory? That Jesus didn’t die on the cross, despite terrible wounds? That He recovered in the tomb, and then escaped? That 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 all along, 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.

## Glastonbury full moon



## 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.*

### 22. Mark 8:31 - 9:1

Jesus of Nazareth is "The Messiah". At last the disciples, through their spokesman Peter, have stated whom they believe Jesus to be. They have made the discovery for themselves. Jesus has neither confirmed nor denied their belief; he simply told them not to tell other people who he is. The question, "Who do you say that I am?" demands a personal response made as the result of personal experience and discovery. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah is to come through first-hand experience not through being told what one ought to believe. Teaching has its place in knowing of God and of his ways but a living faith comes through experience of God in life.

Mark has set this great confession of faith, this discovery by the disciples as to whom Jesus really is in the Gentile dominated region of Caesarea Philippi, at almost the most northerly point to which Mark

records Jesus as travelling. This confession of faith marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus, a change of direction both in his travelling and in his teaching. From this point Mark shows Jesus heading towards Jerusalem and beginning to teach his disciples concerning the climax which is to happen there. So Mark goes on with his gospel story with the words "He began to teach them." The only previous occasion on which Mark has used this phrase is when Jesus began to teach the crowd before the feeding of the five thousand (6:34). Then Mark gave a reason for Jesus teaching the crowd; he wrote, "He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd." Can we not see like compassion now as Jesus begins to teach the disciples just what it means for him to be the Messiah?

For the disciples, as for most devout Jews, the Messiah was the kingly figure who would restore the people of Israel to their true, God-given place among the nations, raising them up above all the other nations who would then flock to Jerusalem to worship the one true God and give glory to his chosen people. This was the popular view, the expectation held despite the teachings of the prophets concerning the suffering servant of the Lord (e.g. Is. 53). Jesus now began to teach his disciples what it really meant to be Messiah. Significantly he describes himself by the title "Son of Man", a title not used in Mark's Gospel since the early controversies concerning authority to forgive sins and to determine the use of the sabbath (2:10,28). Perchance Jesus is pictured as using this title here to emphasise once again the identification of God, through his Messiah, with humanity. It is almost as though Jesus is saying: "The

Messiah is not going to get any special help or privileges from God which are not always available to all people of faith, to every son of man."

The teaching Jesus now gave to his disciples hit them right between the eyes for he spoke of great suffering, rejection and death for himself. Such was unthinkable for the Messiah! Perhaps even more unthinkable was that the rejection should be at the hands of the religious leaders of the Jews. How could this possibly be? If ordinary men such as the disciples could see Jesus as the Messiah, how much more must the great religious scholars and leaders be able so to do! Suffering, rejection and death could not happen to the Messiah. Such was the disciples immediate reaction, a reaction which once again it was left for Peter to articulate, rushing in where others feared to tread. But Jesus had not spoken only of suffering, rejection and death. These "must" happen but also, and covered by the same word "must" were the words "and after three days rise again." So Mark records, and yet there is apparently no reaction on the part of the disciples to these even more startling words. The dark side of the coming events of which Jesus speaks seems to have almost obliterated the one ray of hope, almost but not totally, for the record of these words remains, words which were to become more and more significant as events unfolded.

Meanwhile, Jesus seems to have been insistent that his disciples took note of what he was saying. "He said all this quite openly." These words indicate a frankness, an attempt to drum home the truth, to convince that what is said is to be. It all gets too much for Peter who takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Mark

gives no record of what Peter said but rather paints a picture (as it might have been) of Peter grabbing hold of Jesus, looking him straight in the eyes and saying "No, it can't be like that." Words weren't really necessary, actions and looks said it all. Jesus looks from Peter to the rest of the disciples. What did he see there? The same mixture of bewilderment, disappointment, disbelief, anger even as he saw in Peter? We don't know but it seems more than likely. Jesus turns again to Peter and rebukes him with the most stern of rebukes recorded in the whole of Mark's Gospel: "Get behind me, Satan!" Peter is called "Satan" - the Adversary, the One who raises the possibility of a way that is not God's way, an alternative to that which is God's will and purpose. As the Adversary, Satan serves God and God's purposes well, for unless there is an alternative presented to taking the right path there is no merit in choosing to walk along the way which God desires. At this moment, Peter has become Jesus's adversary because, as Jesus tells him "You are setting your mind on human things, not on divine things." The choice of which of two ways is always present to every human being; Jesus faced it again in the protests of Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" How did Jesus speak those words? Surely it can only have been with great compassion, and with sorrow that Peter and the others had not understood the way that the Messiah must go.

Nor too had they understood the way that those who would be his disciples must go. It is to this Jesus now turns his attention, bringing into his teaching a note of warning, a warning to count the cost before following him along the way he is to tread. According to Mark Jesus now calls the crowd to him together with his

disciples. Where exactly this takes place, Mark does not record, nor does he give any indication of from where the crowd came. Maybe it is still in the region of Caesarea Philippi, or perchance the location is to the south-west in Upper Galilee, or maybe even to the north-east towards the lower slopes of Mount Hermon. Wherever it was, Mark pictures Jesus giving to both the disciples who know who he is (the Messiah) and the crowd who do not know, the same teaching about following him. Effectively Jesus gives to them all a choice. He does not now say to them "Follow Me"; rather does he tell them what may be the cost to them of following him. The disciples are given a chance, now that they know who he is and what his way ahead involves for him, to cease from following him. The crowd are given the terms upon which they can choose to follow him, terms which are starkly demanding.

Jesus says to them all "*If anyone wants to follow me then this is what it involves.*" For the disciples the words which followed must have been very difficult; for the crowd almost incomprehensible. To become his follower a person must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. What could such words mean? In his Gospel Mark uses two different Greek words which are translated into English as "deny". One of the words is relatively mild in meaning, such as when one says, "I do not know him". The other word, which Mark pictures Jesus as uttering here, is much stronger, more emphatic and bears the meaning of "to renounce, to disown, to deny utterly." Jesus calls those who would be his followers to renounce all claim to ownership of themselves and to follow him. He alone is to be the one who determines the direction their lives should

take; self has no longer a place in determining how the follower of Jesus is to live. Such following could well involve a shameful and excruciatingly painful death. The words concerning taking up a cross, which occur between the commands concerning self-denial and following, bore none of the holy, religious overtones of today; the only people who ever took up a cross were those on the way to their own execution upon that cross. Could there possibly be any reason for following Jesus on such terms?

Yes, there could be. Mark pictures Jesus as going on to speak of what is to be gained by following him, as to what things are of real value, of real worth. "Is life of itself what matters, or is it what a person does in their life and with their life?" This seems to be the question behind the words of Jesus. "If you are only concerned with hanging on to that life which you have got, what use is it? But if you spend that life in following me and in making real the good news about the love of God which I am showing, then you will find a richness in life. Life is meant for living, even though not everything goes smoothly and often there is injustice and wrong." Such might be a way of paraphrasing what Jesus was saying. Then come echoes of the controversies with the Pharisees, and of the continuing unbelief of God's people from generation to generation as once again the term "this generation" is used (8:12), this time with descriptive adjectives. The choice is again presented, of being ashamed of Jesus and his words or of accepting and following in his way. This choice will make a difference "when the Son of Man comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." These concluding words of this challenge of Jesus must have aroused very



different thoughts in the minds of the disciples to those going through the minds of the rest of the crowd. For the crowd this would have just been a recollection of ancient prophetic words (Dan. 7:13) but for the disciples, remembering how Jesus had used the term "Son of Man" of himself, would there not have been the beginning of a wondering as to what might be in store beyond the rejection and suffering when "after three days" he would "rise again"? Was it at this point that they first began to grasp some significance in those words "After three days rise again"? Could it be, perchance, that only through the acceptance of the way of suffering would there come the glory?

Such must have been some of the questions pouring through the minds of the disciples, questions which still confront us as we strive to grasp something of what all this may mean and when it will come about. Mark records one further statement by Jesus at this point: "There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come with power." Much ink has been consumed covering many sheets of paper in consideration of this one sentence. Jesus had already said right at the beginning of his ministry (1:15) that the kingdom of God is as near as where he has come, as near as where the rule of God is accepted. All those hearing the words of Jesus could see the kingdom of God, be part of that kingdom if they chose to follow Jesus. In Jesus the kingdom was and is present. And yet - how does this fit with a Messiah who is to suffer and die? Where is the power? Where is the kingdom of God come with power? Maybe the problem is that we do not understand what is the nature of the

power of the kingdom of God. Certainly those who heard these words from Jesus must have wondered - and yet also become expectant, expectant that the time for the Glory of God to be revealed was not far away. Maybe, each one could have thought, they would live to see it. Some certainly did, while others lived through the time of that glory and failed to see it, for the seeing of it requires denying oneself, taking up the cross and following Jesus all the way. Once again Mark leaves his readers with questions still to answer for themselves. Perhaps not only now the question "Who is this Jesus?" but also questions like "Do I want to follow him?", "Can I follow him?" or even "Can I possibly turn away from him?"



## Two donkeys

Two donkeys were walking the streets of Jerusalem. One said: "Just a few days ago I came down that hill carrying Jesus, and the people were all singing and shouting and throwing down their cloaks and palms for me to walk on. But today they don't even recognise me."

The other donkey replied: "That is how it is, my friend. Without Jesus, none of us amounts to much."

The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

## **History of WCC: 1969 Decision Time**

The Rev. Clementina Gordon decided to buy a property in Witney. If I remember correctly, her father having died some time previously and her mother suffering from old age and ill health, she felt the need to provide a more suitable home for her mother and herself.

Miss Gordon decided to buy a beautiful old house near St Mary's Parish Church, overlooking Church Green, called St Mary's Close (now renamed St Mary's House). According to the Rev. Angela Robinson (nee Pedlar), who eventually joined Miss Gordon to live at the house "the property was owned by a vet who had sold up most of the back of the property, which used to go down to the River Windrush and boasted a meadow, tennis court, 'ha ha' and rose garden. At the third time of asking, the vet had got planning permission for a bungalow for one of his partners, that bulged into the back garden. This reduced the size of the back garden considerably, but still provided a decent area for children to play in. In addition there was a small old barn along Farm Mill Lane (which bordered the south side of the property) which the Church eventually bought for storage, despite aggressive, stubborn opposition from the owner of the Bungalow. The vet retained a small part of St Mary's Close along Farm Mill Lane for his surgery. It is still used for this purpose today.

Miss Gordon bought St Mary's Close at auction for £10,000. What she had in mind was that the building was big enough for a flat for her Mother and enough rooms to

house a Church if the High Street site was sold and the Church departed the building. In the meantime the Church agreed to sell the (99 year) ground lease on the High Street site for £3,500 and as 'uniting' with a local Church was not now contemplated the St Mary's Close offer was the only solution. However life never runs smoothly, especially regarding house purchase, despite good intentions.

In June 1969 the Church accepted the Rev. Gordon's offer with relief and gratitude and so she wished to know if the Church was willing to deposit £3,000 as part purchase of St Mary's Close. With little money in the Bank the Church was reluctant to go that far, especially as we didn't know what lay ahead in the future. When the Church Secretary Mr Wright contacted our Trustees in London they recommended that £3,000 be lent to Miss Gordon instead, and as a Mortgage at 7½% interest.

I believe Miss Gordon paid her side of such a deal before she went away on holiday assuming that all would be signed and sealed on her return. However she was unaware of the Trustees conditions of the interest to be paid on the Church's loan.

When she returned, she found that no money had been paid by the Church and so she paid it all herself using a bridging loan. I am informed that Miss Gordon would have returned the money anyway as she could not possibly accept a loan unless interest free. Although the Church had given instructions for the money to be paid a 'misunderstanding' between the Trustees Solicitor and Miss Gordon's Solicitor meant that no money was paid until after Miss Gordon had returned.

Whatever the reason, Miss Gordon's attempt to involve the Church in this investment came to nought. Not surprisingly Miss Gordon was upset as she felt it was in the Church's interest to be

part owners of their new 'place of worship'. It is interesting to note that three years later she sold the house at great profit (£40,000).

Despite all this upset and possibly unnecessary complications the Rev. C Gordon, true to her word offered part of her home as a place for the Church to continue their worship.

In the Rev. A Robinson's words "the beautiful back Dining Room made a lovely Chapel and the front 'Library' was a room for Church Meetings and Sunday School and a large cosy kitchen with a beautifully restored AGA behind which crickets lived in winter... for Mrs Collis' class" (The infants).

Miss Gordon and her Mother moved into her new house and the Church continued to worship in the Old Church throughout 1969. During Witney Feast 1969 the Church put on an exhibition of old documents and John Collis gave an organ recital (I believe the organ was bought by Combe Methodist Church, where it is still today). It was during the summer of 1969 that I (Pip Cartwright) became a Deacon. The last Service in the High Street was held on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1970 and the Church moved to St Mary's Close. Miss Gordon offered a lease to the Church, on the basis of £225 a year (towards heating and lighting), and payment of the Manse Rates. As our Minister, the Church was bound to provide a Manse for her. On reflection I believe the Rev. Gordon was most generous and with this as a foundation, the Church started its nomadic journey to where we are today.

## **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.

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. Passover 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 the first Good Friday: Friday 7<sup>th</sup> April 30 AD or Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 33 AD with Easter Day falling two days later. Modern scholars continue to think these two Fridays to be 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<sup>nd</sup> March, which last fell in 1818. The latest is 25<sup>th</sup> 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.

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The following article has been submitted by Pat Brent, and is entitled:

## Starfish Malawi

In February Malawi suffered catastrophic floods; As you can see from the photos the water was half-way up the single storey homes.

The result of this is that now the buildings are falling down as the "bricks" are made of mainly dried mud!

In a country where roads are mainly stones and dried mud this makes getting aid to them very difficult.

Our contact from Starfish, Chris Knott, is out in Selima for two weeks, on his return he will let us know the situation.

Keep praying for the people and the aid workers, as disease is bound to rise in the wet conditions.

If you are a member of the knitting group keep going I'm sure they will need them. So far we have finished 1 Double, 2 singles

and another well on the way.. Well done everyone.

Please continue to hold Starfish in your hearts and your prayers. 🙏



## No sunbeams

A small boy returned from Sunday School in tears. When questioned by his anxious mother, he explained: "This morning they told me that Jesus wants me for a sunbeam. But I want to be a train driver!"

## Our knit and natter group have been very busy as you can see



The group are now on their third blanket – each one will be sent over to Malawi sometime in the summer. For more information about the children's work in Malawi please speak with Pat Brent.



And here is the first of our banners. It was decided to make one for the lounge area first and hopefully this will be one of many – some to go in the sanctuary – eventually.



## Getting ready for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> June

The UK and Commonwealth will celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a four-day Bank Holiday from 2-5 June 2022, and churches throughout the country will join in on the celebrations. Here's the programme of coming national events:

### Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> June

The Queen's Birthday Parade - Trooping of the colour - London

Lighting of beacons – around the country and Commonwealth

### Friday 3 June

St Paul's Cathedral Service of Thanksgiving - London

### Saturday 4 June

The Derby at Epsom Downs, attended by members of the Royal Family



Platinum Party at the Palace – a concert broadcast from Buckingham Palace

### **Pentecost Sunday 5 June**

Pentecost Sunday services in churches around the country – linked to the Platinum Jubilee.

Platinum Jubilee Street Parties / Big Jubilee Lunch – around the country

The Platinum Jubilee Pageant on The Mall - London

Two special books have been produced by HOPE Together, to commemorate the event, and you can order them now:

*Our Faithful Queen* - a gift book using rarely-seen prayers the Queen prayed as she prepared for the Coronation.

*The Girl Who Grew Up To Be Queen* (for under 5s)

You can order copies of both from [cpo.org.UK/Queen](http://cpo.org.UK/Queen)

Witney & District Churches -  
Musical for Witney Well 2022

**'Called to Follow'**  
— the musical

**Performance:**

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April at 7.30pm  
Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April at 2.30pm and 7.30pm  
High Street Methodist Church, Witney, OX28 6HG  
Tickets cost: £6; Concessions £5; under 16s £2.50  
To book go to: <http://www.calledtofollow.co.uk> or pay on door

*'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?'  
Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. Jn 1:46*

Tony Houghton 01993 359584 or 07770 538298 [tony.m.houghton@gmail.com](mailto:tony.m.houghton@gmail.com)

All songs composed by  
Witney resident  
Heather Houghton  
[www.heatherhoughton.co.uk](http://www.heatherhoughton.co.uk)



