

# 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)

## February & March 2023

4 Welch Way Witney Oxon OX28 6JF  
Tel: 01993 709992

[www.witneycongregational.org.uk](http://www.witneycongregational.org.uk)  
Office: [witneycongooffice@gmail.com](mailto:witneycongooffice@gmail.com)



This is the first edition of the magazine for this year, and notwithstanding the world events and the UK unions and political issues, I hope this is a much better year, and as stated in previous editions, I hope this edition of the magazine will keep reminding you that you are not forgotten; may God bless us for He alone is our refuge and strength when times get tough. May we continue to do our work for Him in the grace which He alone can provide.

I now turn to some of this month's contents: along with the standard contributions, now that we have a new Minister, Bryan Doyle gives us his first Minister's letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study; Pip Cartwright gives us the history of WCC 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:

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

[jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net](mailto:jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net)

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

The next 2-monthly edition, covering April & May 2023 is due on **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April**

Your Editor

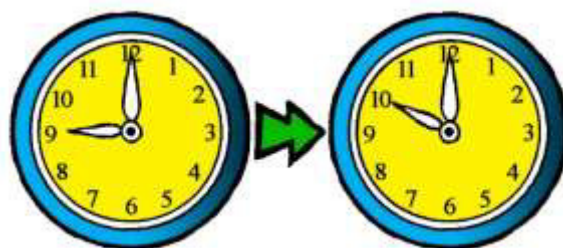


## Fairtrade Fortnight 2023

This year Fairtrade Fortnight runs 27<sup>th</sup> February to 12<sup>th</sup> March. It comes with a sombre reminder: climate change means that soon some of our favourite foods, such as bananas, cocoa and coffee could be harder to grow. And if that is combined with deeply unfair trade, then communities growing these crops will be pushed to the brink. This makes Fairtrade all the more vital – for all of us.

For more information, visit

<https://www.fairtrade.org.uk>



**BST starts on 26<sup>th</sup> March**

## Present

For their elderly vicar's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, the congregation at St Mary's decided to give him a present of a new suit. The vicar was so moved by the gift that the following Sunday he stood before everyone and began his homily with a tear in his eye, "Today I am preaching to you in my birthday suit."

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# February & March Diary

## February

4 <sup>th</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
5 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin		
	pm	Nanna Blackman	Communion	
12 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
19 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	Communion	
26 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway		

## March

4 <sup>th</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
5 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
	pm	Hi5's Café Church 3.30pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
12 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle		
19 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle	Communion	
26 <sup>th</sup>	am	Rev Judi Holloway		

## April

1 <sup>st</sup>	11.00am	Saturday Praise		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	am	Rev Bryan Doyle & Rev Judi Holloway		
	pm	Rev Bryan Doyle & Rev Judi Holloway	Communion	

The following events are given for your particular attention:

## Feb

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Safe Place and repeated on 9 <sup>th</sup> & 23 <sup>rd</sup>	12.00 – 4.00pm
5 <sup>th</sup>	Hi 5's Lunch	12.30pm
7 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
16 <sup>th</sup>	Jo Matthews thanksgiving service	2.00pm
25 <sup>th</sup>	Witney Book Circle	10.30am

## March

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Safe Place and repeated on 9 <sup>th</sup> ; 16 <sup>th</sup> ; 23 <sup>rd</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup>	12.00 – 4.00pm
3 <sup>rd</sup>	World Day of Prayer	10.30am St Mary's Cogges 7.00pm Witney Congregational Church
5 <sup>th</sup>	Hi 5's Café Church	3.30pm See above
7 <sup>th</sup>	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
25 <sup>th</sup>	Witney Book Circle	10.30am

## Rotas

### WELCOMING TEAM

<b>February</b>	05	Joan Currie
	12	Jacqui Powlesland
	19	Pat Smith
	26	Janet Hayes
	<b>March</b>	05
12		Joan Currie
19		Jacqui Powlesland
26		Pat Smith
<b>April</b>		02



## FLOWERS

<b>February</b>	05	Rita Hayes
	12	Pat Brent
	19	Joan Currie
	26	Janet Hayes
<b>March</b>	05	Jacqui Powlesland
	12	Judi Holloway
	19	Mothering Sunday
	26	Rita Hayes
<b>April</b>	02	Pat Brent



## SUNDAY COFFEE

<b>February</b>	05	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	12	Elaine Kinchin & Glen Ryan
	19	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	26	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
<b>March</b>	05	Jean Hodgson & Ann Clack
	12	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	19	Elaine Kinchin & Glen Ryan
	26	Jacqui & Terry Powlesland
<b>April</b>	02	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward



## THURSDAY COFFEE

**(10 – 12)**

**Soup Lunch (12 – 2 & 2 - 4)**

<b>February</b>	02	David Kinchin
	09	Pat Smith
	16	Jean Hodgson
	23	Elaine Kinchin
<b>March</b>	02	Ann Clack
	09	Judi Holloway
	16	David Kinchin
	23	Pat Smith
<b>April</b>	06	Elaine Kinchin

See Rota in kitchen



**Nanna Blackman as standby - We would be extremely grateful for other people to join**

## SOUND SYSTEM

<b>February</b>	05	Nanna Blackman
	12	Terry Powlesland
	19	Nanna Blackman
	26	Terry Powlesland
<b>March</b>	05	Terry Powlesland
	12	Nanna Blackman
	19	Terry Powlesland
	26	Nanna Blackman
<b>April</b>	02	Terry Powlesland

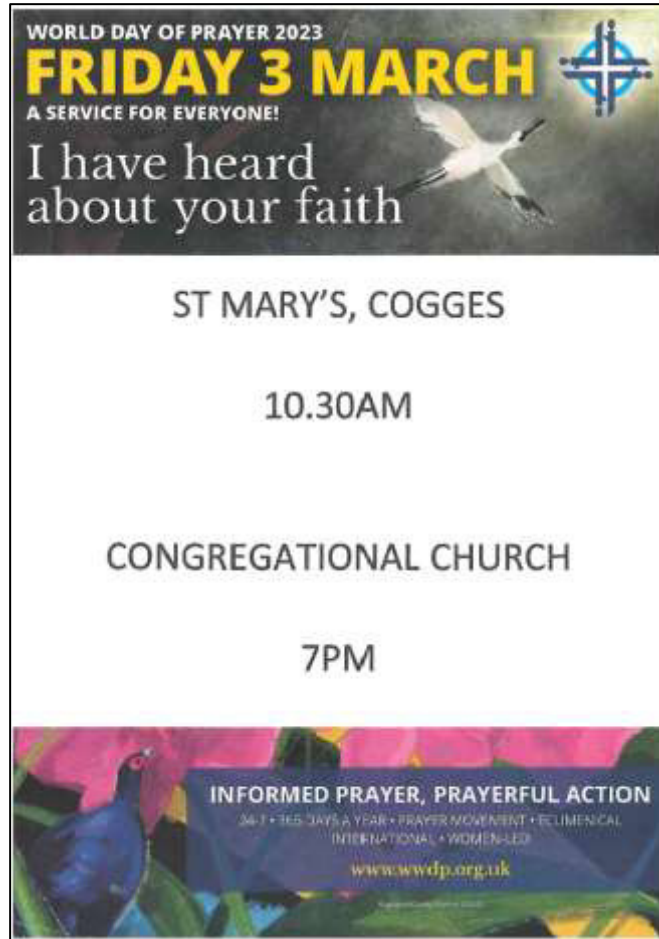


**For ALL the Rotas, every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances.**  
However, if the dates are not convenient for you, please change with someone else

Feb 04 Elaine Beechey  
08 Pat Brent  
13 Judi Holloway  
16 Leah Cotton  
22 Dave Wesson  
24 Marian Kew



Mar 08 Joan Currie  
11 Lesley Barter  
17 Willow Birdseye-Hartshorn  
22 Peter Sellman  
28 Wendell La Fortune



### From the Friendship Book, 2011

There is a story by an unknown author of a sick man who asked his doctor what lies on the other side. His doctor said he did not know.

The man replies, "You are a Christian, yet you do not know what is on the other side?"

The doctor stood by the door of the sitting room; from the hall came the sound of scratching and whining. When he opened the door, a dog leaped into the room, barking joyfully and wagging its tail.

Turning to the patient he said, "My dog didn't know what to expect in this room, only that his master was here and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side, but I do know one thing. I know my Master is there and that is enough".

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2)

## Minister's Letter:

There are many ways to describe our life here on earth. One of them is to see it as a journey. Let's expand on that theme and put it like this, "Life's a journey – enjoy the ride!" Let's appropriate it for ourselves, as we journey together as a church, with Jesus Christ as our Leader, Guide and Shepherd.

We are fellow pilgrims on a journey – not with any airline or travel company, where the destination is known to us, and the travel and holiday plans are all predetermined and predictable (well to some degree, given the chaotic state of travel and the leisure industry *post Covid*).

We're on a much more exciting and fulfilling journey, *an adventure* with many surprises and challenges, and an ultimate destination which is *indescribable!*

What words would we use to describe *life in the Spirit* (the journey) and how would we describe *heaven (the destination) and eternal life with God*? No pamphlet or brochure could adequately accomplish this!

Let's use a biblical metaphor - let's be *sheep* who are led by our *Shepherd, Jesus Christ*. What shall we call our journey together? Some suggestions include, *Kingdom building with God, Good News agents, spreading His love...*

The truth about this *journey* is that Jesus is *everything to us (our Saviour, Provider, Protector, Guide, Shepherd, Teacher, Carer, Healer, and Friend)*.

He *has everything we need for life's journey (love, joy, peace, power, and a good, pleasing and perfect plan for us)*. He even tells us that when we are weary and burdened, He will give us rest. He also promises never to leave us nor forsake us – that's an incredible *promise!* It means

He will be with us, every step of the way, every moment each day.

On this journey with Jesus, we will encounter an assortment of terrains, *mountain tops and valleys, desert-like areas and others well covered with foliage*. Even though the going may get tough sometimes, He will equip us and provide for us to overcome. Even in dark places, which at times can be frightening, He will provide the necessary light – His light! He will comfort us and assure us, with His abiding presence.

Jesus invites us to *remain in His love*, by keeping His commandments. If we do this, we will experience *complete joy!* Isn't that an incredible thought, *the joy of the Lord with us on our journey together?*

There's so much to say about this journey together in Christ Jesus, way too much to cover in this short letter.

However, let me encourage you all, as the body of Christ, the church, to draw near to God, so that He will draw near to you. This can be done through regular times of Bible reading and prayer, and corporately through times of worship and fellowship. *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* (Hebrews 10:24-25)

As we embark on this *exciting adventure with God*, let us *keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus Christ, our ears attentive to His voice, our hands ready to serve and our hearts set on Him!*

Life's a journey with Jesus and one another – let's enjoy the ride!

Much love and God's richest blessings,  
Bryan



## PRAYER LETTER No 206

Dear Friends

In these dark winter months, it is easy to become a bit morose. Although as I am writing this the winter sunshine has made a welcome appearance. Have you noticed that when it is sunny, people smile more?

My prayer focus for the last month has been on Jesus as the Light of the World. However, when reading Matthew 5: 14-16, I was reminded that we are also called to be the light of the world. The NIV version reads:

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Therefore, as we travel towards longer days and spring, I thought this prayer would stand us in good stead. It is by Vaughan Jones and taken from the URC Prayer Handbook of 2017:

We pray that you enlighten the hearts of the People of God, to lead them in joy and hope of the Way of Jesus.

We pray that you inform the mind of Christian believers, encompassing the length and breadth and depth and height of God’s love for the world.

We pray that you strengthen the will of faithful followers of the one we call Christ to honour Him in works of mercy and passion for justice.

We pray for situations where the Light of the Gospel is dim.

For forgiveness when the church colludes with violence; when Christians cause hurt and pain to others, and inflict wounds on their sisters and brothers in faith.

We pray with gratitude for those whose dedication to the forgiving and peaceful path of the Saviour is a guiding light, in the shadows of our day, bringing hope, making peace, and amplifying the voices of all who need God’s justice.

May our light illuminate the path of those who stumble, and the image of your grace and resurrection be our guide.

Thus may your light be our light, shining before others, so that they may see the good works of your people and give glory to the father in heaven.

Perhaps we can all bring a little sunshine into the world and make people smile.

Bless others and the Lord blesses you.

*Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Elaine Kinchin (07534 879449)*

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

## **History of WCC: 1985**

Since moving from the old Church along the High Street in 1970 there was never a dull moment, especially for the Minister and Deacons.

In October 1984, owing to problems with the 'new' Ducklington Lane Manse, the Deacons decided to look for another Manse. In July 1985 this property was sold and the Church purchased a modern detached house at 67 Pensclose for approximately £60,000. From studying some Church accounts an additional £11,500 had to be found and thus I conclude the Ducklington property must have been sold for approximately £48,500.

At this time there was correspondence with the Congregational Federation regarding our 'lost' Trust Deeds and the financing of our new Manse. As regards the Trust Deeds, this was not an issue as the Minister, the Church's Solicitor and the Charity Commission all had copies. It appears that the Rev. Bob Henry was coincidentally selling his house, near Bicester, and had offered a loan to the Church to cover the extra cost. I believe the Congregational Federation advised against it and in the end other means were considered. In addition repairs to the roof and guttering and legal and professional fees were to cost nearly £7,000.

The Midland Bank enabled the Church to borrow a further £20,000 on the understanding that the Gateway (International) Supermarket site rent was to be favourably reviewed in December. Thus our loan rose to £88,000. Before the rent review, the interest paid per annum was £12,000 and we were only able to repay £9,400. Thus, the loan account was

increasing. Since 1971 the Gateway site was only paying £4,500 rent per annum. As I have explained in previous episodes, the Church was under the impression that the rent was to be reviewed after 7 years, only to be told that our advisors at the former Congregational Union had made an agreement for the rent to be revised only after 14 years. When I relate that the revised rent was increased to £17,000 per annum you can see how much revenue the Church lost over the years. With rent from the Citizens Advice Bureau our revenue had increased to about £20,000

With our increased membership, giving increased by 25%, however the Church was not happy to be burdened with so much debt, so it was passed by Church Trustees, Deacons and members that the sale of the Gateway site be considered.

In March we welcomed several new members who were to be influential, viz John and Maureen Hardcastle (and 3 children), Ernie and Sheila Gascoigne (with 2 children) and Dr Richard and Mary Paradine.

The Upper two Rooms were joined and made into one larger, longer room, which was used by the Church for Sunday School parties, YPF, Harvest Suppers, Concerts and other social events. Later on it was to be used for Evening Services.

The Church 'Newsletter' was a team effort. Daphne Turner was the typist/stencil maker, whilst Ann Henry was the collator and in charge of postal distribution. The Witt family (Jim and Mary) organised the general distribution and collectors of the subscriptions.

Mr John Wilcox (General Secretary of the Congregational Federation) visited Witney and suggested that it was ill-advised for the Church Secretary (Mr Philip Turner) also to be a Trustee in case of conflict of interest. As a result Mr Philip Turner relinquished his position as Church Secretary on March 31<sup>st</sup>



1985 but would remain a Deacon and because of his experience in Estate Agency he would continue with his responsibility dealing with Pensclose and with our other properties.

If I remember correctly Mr Cliff Puleston was persuaded to become a temporary Church Secretary and remained so until the September 1986 AGM. In May Mrs Enid Griffin resigned as 'organist' and Church Member. She was the last of the Lee family who were staunch Congregationalists for over 60 years. We were fortunate to have four organists – Doreen Richards, Jackie Goodbury, Mary Witt and Judi Keates who were willing to continue.

In June the Church Outing led 40 of us to Hampton Court which included a boat trip down the Thames.

Mrs Kathleen Collis, our longest serving and much loved Sunday School Teacher retired in August. She was responsible for the nurture and loving care of the youngest in our Church for over 30 years. She was a real pillar of our Church.

During August the Rev. Bob Henry attended the International Congregational Meetings in the USA. One of our young people, Andy Lord, who was studying Theology at Westminster College and training for the Ministry became our Student Pastor for the month.

Mr Philip and Mrs Daphne Turner resigned their membership in September 1985. For some time they had been living at Adderbury, near Banbury, and had been travelling backwards and forwards from there, to worship in Witney and carry out their duties to the Church. Apart from being a Trustee, Sunday School Teacher and Youth Leader, he was our Church Secretary during the important years when we became established at 33 High Street. He was a major force in purchasing our Church site and in dealing with all the problems we

had with our properties and the eventual purchase of the Manse in Pensclose. Daphne was a Junior Church Teacher, a member of the Fabric Committee, the Catering Committee and Editor and typist of our Magazine. They, and their family, gave many years of committed service to the Lord's work in the Church.

The year ended on a sad note with the death of Mrs Dorothy Sellman, mother of Daphne Turner, Peter Sellman and Rita Hayes and wife of Albert Sellman, who had been the Church Secretary for 20 years.

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

### **Starfish Malawi**

At the end of November Malawi was hit by a devastating hailstorm and strong winds.



The locals had never seen anything like it. It left many houses and the school badly damaged. This has left the village without much hope of a Harvest next year. This will impact on the school because lots of the children look to the harvest to provide them with good grain and vegetables for the coming winter.

The container is arriving May 23 so some support, will get to them in time.

 **starfish malawi**  
MAKING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

The following article, written by the Ven John Barton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

## Ukraine – one year on

On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine without warning. Ukraine had been part of the Soviet Union 1922-1991 and even before that had been overshadowed and often overpowered by its larger neighbour. In 1932 millions of Ukrainians were deliberately starved to death in a famine, contrived by Joseph Stalin. This genocide, or Holodomor, is commemorated every year on the fourth Saturday in November.

The area had been overrun for centuries by successive external forces, until absorbed by Russia. In 1991, when the USSR was dissolved, Ukraine voted for independence, by a huge majority. There are still pro-Russian minorities in the East of the country, as there were in Crimea before 2014, when it was annexed by Russia.

In the last 12 months, one-quarter of the civilian population of Ukraine has been displaced, with 5+ million refugees escaping for temporary sanctuary in other countries. 95% of them are women and children. They have had to learn new languages (and a new script), find jobs and schools, and become accustomed to foreign cultures. When it seems safe, they want to return home and some have already done so.

The UK government, in partnership with County and District Councils, launched the Homes for Ukraine scheme last year. Would-be homes were inspected, and prospective hosts checked out for suitability and safety. A young Ukrainian woman lived in my home for six months before returning to Kyiv. In that time my pantry and fridge made room for bulgar wheat, lots of mushrooms and Salo, which is the name for slabs of cold cured pork fat, and much tastier than it sounds!

Most Ukrainians count themselves as Christian, including a number of Greek-Catholics, but the majority belong to what was the Russian Orthodox Church, and is now the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The two churches separated after the Moscow patriarchate backed President Putin.

The Archbishop of Canterbury visited Kyiv in December and had to take cover in a bomb shelter when air raid warnings were sounded. He said the people of the West needed to realise the costs of this war were not short term, adding “there must be no way in which we force peace on Ukraine ... Peace is always better than war. But there are times when justice demands the defeat of an evil invasion.”

One year on there is still an urgent need for British people to open their homes to Ukrainian refugees:

**The Disaster Emergencies Committee (DEC)** is an umbrella group of UK charities. <https://www.dec.org.uk/appeal/ukraine-humanitarian-appeal>

**Christian Aid** was founded in 1945 by British and Irish churches to help refugees after the Second World War. Sadly, with war back in Europe, it is now back at work on the Continent. <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/ukraine-humanitarian-appeal-2022>

**Barnabas Fund** distributes food through local churches to Christians in the poorer areas, both in Kyiv and in rural regions. <https://www.barnabasfund.org/gb/latest-needs/help-ukrainian-christians-in-their-hour-of-need/>

**Samaritans Purse** has been airlifting medical supplies into the country, distributed more than 45 million kilos of food, and built water systems providing more than 30 million litres of water. <https://www.samaritans-purse.org.uk/idr-crisis/crisis-in-ukraine/>

## 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.*

### 26. Mark 10:1-16

"He left that place and went to the region of Judaea and beyond Jordan." Thus does Mark introduce the beginning of the climax of his Gospel. Jesus leaves Galilee and sets out on the journey which is to reach its culmination in Jerusalem. Mark, as so often in his record, is a bit hazy about the exact itinerary, indicating that his personal knowledge of the lands of Galilee, Samaria, Transjordan and Judaea was not extensive. Had he been more familiar with the area he might well have expressed his meaning by writing, "Jesus crossed into the region beyond Jordan to travel to Judaea." This was the normal pilgrim route from Galilee to Jerusalem, avoiding Samaria. From this point on, Mark presents a picture of Jesus moving on with an inexorable purpose towards an inevitable climax. The time for leisurely teaching is past; from now on the teaching is done in the context of the journey - as they walk or when they rest for the night. But teaching is still very much part of the ministry of Jesus for the crowds

still flocked around Jesus and, says Mark, "as was his custom, he again taught them."

Once again, some Pharisees appear among the crowd. They pose a question concerning divorce. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife." We may wonder what was their intention in asking such a question. Were they trying to catch Jesus out by getting him to contradict the Law of Moses, or were they indeed wanting to know what his thoughts were on the controversy, which was then a current topic among the "experts", as to the terms and conditions under which divorce was permissible? The relevant text (Deut.24:1-4) is far from clear on the subject. Two extreme opinions were current. At one extreme were those who would not permit divorce under any circumstance while at the other extreme were some who would allow a man to get rid of his wife on the flimsiest of pretexts. And, as always, there were many holding views between the two extremes. It seems that these Pharisees who question Jesus are not concerned with the terms under which divorce might be legal but only with the question as to whether it can ever be legal. Jesus refuses to be drawn into legal arguments; he is concerned with relationships between people. So he thrusts the legal question back to them: "What did Moses command you?" They reply with the stock answer which dodges all reference to the conditions under which divorce might be allowed. "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her." Jesus, without getting involved in arguments about terms and conditions, has compelled them to answer their own question; it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife.

Having confronted the Pharisees with the inadequacy of the purely legal approach Jesus challenges them to think less about what is legal and more about the intention

of God for people, and about why Moses found it necessary to legislate for divorce. He says to them: "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you." The "your" refers to the Pharisees who have asked the question, and yet it surely also refers to all those men who at any time had wanted to find a legal pretext to get rid of their wives. Because some men are like that, Jesus is saying, Moses had to make some provision for your hardness of heart, but this is not what God intended for men and women. Jesus takes their thoughts back to the old story of creation (Gen.2:4ff), the story where God has just made Man - Adam, and has set him in the world which he has created. Adam was all alone there, the only living zoological creature in a wonderful botanical living world. God sees that this is not good, and decides to make a suitable companion for Man. So God makes all animals and brings them to Man, who names them. But none is a suitable companion for man. Finally God makes from Man, Woman and brings her to Man and she is indeed a suitable companion, a helpmate for him. So Jesus goes on to re-iterate the old words: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." We notice here that in a patriarchal society, in which the woman is basically seen as an adjunct to the man, Jesus is emphasising that it is the man who leaves the existing family situation to be joined to the woman. The relationship of the two, of the new family is centred upon the woman, not the man. This, says Jesus, is what God intends, so what God has joined together, let no one separate. The marriage relationship is not meant to be a matter of law, but a matter of the gift of God for the good of both man and woman.

What the reaction of these Pharisees was to these words of Jesus we do not know. All Mark tells is of the reaction of the disciples

who, when they got Jesus to themselves, questioned him on the subject. They were puzzled, as Christians have remained ever since, about the practical implications of what Jesus had said. Mark only records one startling sentence of Jesus's reply to his disciples questioning: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." The words are quite uncompromising - to divorce and remarry is adultery. Adultery was a sin punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22.). Is Jesus here condemning all who divorce and remarry to death? We do not want to think this is so, and such an attitude would not fit well with his earlier condemnation of the legalistic hardness of heart of the Pharisees. Nevertheless, the extremeness of these words does emphasise the seriousness with which Jesus regards divorce. The sentence also shows how Jesus takes an existing law which was entirely in favour of men and opens it out for equal treatment of women. Under the Law only a man could divorce his wife, and only a man could have adultery committed against him; Jesus speaks of a woman, a wife having adultery committed against her and of a woman divorcing her husband. Why should Jesus introduce this new equality concept if there were not going to be circumstances in which it was possible for a woman to divorce her husband and remarry? In terms of legal rules and regulations there seems no way out of this quandary; maybe the answer lies in terms of the grace of God and the Kingdom of God.

It is to this that Mark moves on in his Gospel story as he tells of people bringing children to Jesus that he might touch them. The word "little" included in many translations can convey the wrong impression for it does not occur in the Greek. The word used, "παιδια", is used for all children up to

twelve years of age, that age at which the boys would become "Sons of the Law", responsible for their own spiritual life. Again, the lack of reference to what change in status there may have been for girls at this age reflects the still subordinate position of women which the attitude and teaching of Jesus does so much to alter. Similarly, Jesus alters the attitude to children. The disciples rebuked those who brought the children, trying to turn them away. When Jesus saw it, he became indignant. The word used is a very strong word which is not used of Jesus elsewhere in the Gospels. His disciples had got their whole approach, their whole values wrong, and Jesus corrects them. "Let the children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." Children have a place with Jesus, they matter. We need to ask as to what the word "such" means in the phrase "Such as these". It could mean "all children", all those who are not yet of age to be considered adult, responsible for their own lives, their own relationship with God. However, in view of the next sentence spoken by Jesus, it seems more likely that it means all who have a childlike approach to life, an approach of acceptance, of dependence, of wonder at all the possibilities of life which are opening up before them. "Truly I tell you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a child will never enter it." How is one to accept "as a child"? Surely it is without questioning as to whether one deserves that gift which is given, that opportunity for greater richness of life which is offered. There is no question of having earned the right to enter the kingdom; it is a gift to be received with joy and thankfulness.

Having spoken his words, Jesus now enacts them as he takes the children into his arms, lays his hands upon them and blesses them. "People were bringing children to him that

he might touch them". And he did - and he also blessed them. They had not had to do anything other than come - they had not had to comply with any laws, any rules and regulations, any particular expression of faith by form of words, they had just been brought for his touch. That is what they were given - and more! Many scholars have seen in this action of Jesus the justification for the Christian practice of Infant Baptism. Certainly these words and actions of Jesus do not preclude infant baptism but neither do they, by themselves, seem to justify the practice. There is here an imperative to give the blessing of God to all children who may be brought to the disciples of Jesus, regardless of their faith or the faith of those who bring them seeking such touch, such blessing. Jesus would have none turned away empty. As to whether all such children should be baptised, that is a matter with which Mark, in writing his Gospel, was not concerned. He simply wanted people to see Jesus and to decide for themselves who he is and whether they would seek to follow in his way, a way which was far more about grace, about the free gift of God than about any law. "Let the children come to me", said Jesus. There were no conditions except that of wanting to come; whoever came, Jesus blessed without saying to them "Follow me!" It is to such a call that Mark is next to turn in his challenging story.



## **The following articles have been extracted from Parish Pump:**

The following article, written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith, and has been extracted from Parish Pump and is part of the **God in the Sciences** series, and is entitled:

### **Fearfully and Wonderfully Made**

Every person who ever lived was once a sperm and an egg. Those two cells fused together, and in nine months they turned into a living, breathing, human being. Each of us emerged from this same embryonic development process, which is highly complex and organised, but variable enough to turn out a unique individual every time.

If you like order – such as neat piles of stationery, or tidy colour-coded files – you will enjoy this story. One of the most important stages of an embryo's development is when each section of the body, from head to rump, takes on its identity. Each part is told what shape to take, and which limbs or internal organs to grow: legs or arms, lungs or kidneys, and so on.

The most beautiful part of this body-patterning process is that it brings the dimensions of time and space together in such a neat way. The DNA instructions for the procedure, known as genes, are organised in the order in which they are needed during development *which is also* the order in which they appear on the body. No other sets of genes are known to be arranged in such a tidy pattern.

So, as the embryo develops, the tissues near the head end activate the first sets of

genes. Those active genes then make all the proteins needed for that part of the body to grow and develop in the right way. The tissues just below the head then switch on the second set of genes, and so on. A wave of activation passes down the embryo, specifying each section of the trunk in turn.

The Wisconsin-based developmental biologist Jeff Hardin often quotes Psalm 139 to express the wonder of embryonic development. The Psalmist did not understand how this process happened, but he knew that it was a marvellous thing. *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb...your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.”*

The story of the tidy genes brings out the hidden beauty in the very early stages of embryonic development. The more biologists get to find out about how we came to be born, the more we can say, *“I am fearfully and wonderfully made”!*

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### **Discovering the double-helix of DNA**

Seventy years ago, on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1953, British scientist Francis Crick and American James D Watson announced that they had discovered the double-helix structure of DNA.

Crick described this as finding the secret of life, but his wife did not believe him, because he was “always saying things like that”. Nevertheless the discovery was revolutionary, leading to huge advances in biology and genetics.

The breakthrough came from a mixture, it was said, of “intuition, persistence and luck”: it was based on wide knowledge of different fields of science rather than their

own experiments. Crick had a background in physics and x-ray crystallography, while Watson's speciality was viral and bacterial genetics.

They owed a great deal to the pioneering high resolution x-ray imagery of Rosalind Franklin who, being a woman, did not receive enough credit initially and who died in 1958 of cancer, before she could receive the Nobel Prize awarded to Crick, Watson and her colleague, Maurice Wilkins.

Watson and Crick's findings appeared in a one-page item, with the understated title *A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid*, in the British scientific weekly *Nature*. The impact of it was not felt immediately: it was not widely talked about until near the end of the 1950s.

Neither man was spiritually inclined. Crick, a humanist, was taken to church as a child by his parents, but by the age of 12 decided not to go any more as he preferred a scientific search for answers. Watson described himself as "an escapee from the Catholic religion".

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## Tutankhamun

100 years ago on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1923 the archaeologist Howard Carter broke the seal on the tomb of Tutankhamun. When he and the Earl of Carnarvon had peered through a small hole in November 1922 Carter had described seeing 'wonderful things', as indeed they turned out to be. Such treasures, laid up with the mummy of a dead pharaoh were intended to provide security in the afterlife, the tomb of Tut was unique in that it hadn't been plundered previously by thieves. But Jesus had advice on this very subject, which we can find in Matthew 6:19-21:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and

where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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## Remembering the Munich Air Disaster

The Munich air disaster took place 65 years ago, on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1958, when a plane carrying the Manchester United football team (known as the Busby Babes), plus support staff and journalists, crashed while attempting to take off from a slush-affected runway at Munich-Riem Airport.

Altogether, 23 people were killed, including eight players.

The Elizabethan-class Airspeed Ambassador, British European Airways Flight 609, crashed on its third attempt to take off. It had landed at Munich on its way from Belgrade to Manchester because a non-stop flight was beyond the range of the aircraft. The Babes had just beaten Red Star Belgrade in a European Cup match.

Engine problems had caused the first two take-off attempts to be aborted, but the pilots decided to try again because of scheduling issues. This time the plane was slowed by slush and failed to take off, smashing off the runway and into a house. A parked fuel truck was hit and exploded: only 21 of the 44 on board the plane survived

The pilot began evacuating passengers, and star goalkeeper Harry Gregg helped pull survivors – including a baby, its pregnant mother and two of his teammates – from the wreckage. A devout Christian at the time – he was said to have lost his faith when his wife and daughter later died of

cancer – he became known as the hero of Munich.

His courage has been hailed by many, particularly in Serbia – home to the rescued Lukic family – but also back at Old Trafford, and at his own home in Ulster. He died in 2020.

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## What the temptations mean for us

Immediately after His baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus faced and resisted three powerful temptations during 40 days in the wilderness of Judea. This time of testing and temptation was His preparation for the work God had sent Him to do on earth. It's the principle behind the season of Lent, which begins on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Although the temptations were personal to Jesus, many of us will recognise their relevance in our own lives.

The first was simple. 'You're hungry. You can do miracles. Well, turn these hot stones at Your feet into loaves of bread'. It sounds quite plausible, but in fact it's an invitation to put one's own needs first. Temptation rejected.

Then came the second: 'throw yourself off a pinnacle of the Temple. You know that God will send His angels to catch you before you hit the ground'. Again, it's plausible (there was even a verse from the Bible to back it up). But this would be to substitute one spectacular publicity stunt for the hard slog of travel, preaching, healing and touching individual lives. Temptation rejected.

The third was outrageous. 'Fall down and worship corrupt and evil power, and You will have infinite worldly power and success'. In other words, the divine Son of God should deny His Father and worship the devil, to glean success without going to

the Cross. For the third time, temptation resisted.

I know these temptations were tests of the Messiah Jesus, but can't we see in them temptations that come to all of us from time to time? Look after number one, and all will be well. Take the short cut to success and avoid all the hard slog. Compromise your integrity, in order to fulfill your ambitions. Or choose the hard way: walk the narrow path of honesty, commitment, and truth. That's really the Lenten choice.

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## Disturb us, Lord

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,  
When our dreams have come true  
Because we have dreamed too little,  
When we arrived safely  
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when  
With the abundance of things we possess  
We have lost our thirst  
For the waters of life;  
Having fallen in love with life,  
We have ceased to dream of eternity  
And in our efforts to build a new earth,  
We have allowed our vision  
Of the new Heaven to dim.  
Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,  
To venture on wider seas  
Where storms will show your mastery;  
Where losing sight of land,  
We shall find the stars.  
We ask You to push back  
The horizons of our hopes;  
And to push into the future  
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

*Attributed to Sir Francis Drake, 16th Century*



## **Burnley ministers tell their stories via TV**

At the height of the Covid pandemic, the work of two Christian ministers in Burnley, Lancashire, moved TV viewers across the world. They were filmed by a BBC crew handing out food parcels and seeking to help people suffering deeply because of the lockdown.

The two men – Pastor Mick Fleming and Father Alex Frost – have now published books telling their remarkable stories.

In 'Blown Away: From Drug Dealer to Life Bringer,' (SPCK) Mick Fleming tells how he struggled with a traumatic childhood and turned to drugs and to crime, but ultimately came to faith following a series of events that many will call miraculous.

He explains how he launched 'Church on the Street' in Burnley – one of the poorest parts of England – after he sat on the ground outside McDonald's "with a suitcase of clothes, tea and coffee in flasks, and sandwiches, and a packet of cigarettes in my pocket."

Pastor Mick tells how angry he felt when the churches closed their doors during the Covid lockdowns. People were suffering, going hungry and the Church was, he writes, nowhere to be seen.

In 'Our Daily Bread' (Harper North), the Rev Alex Frost gives telling insights into what Christian ministry is like in Britain in the 2020s, serving some of the country's poorest people. He shows the role played by one Church of England priest, and his church, in serving the people of his Burnley parish, as they face life's challenges and setbacks.

He writes "Here, in a deprived northern town, where the headlines usually scream poverty and destitution, there is also an undaunted spirit and an unwavering survival instinct. People here are stronger than you could ever imagine."

Father Alex tells the stories of some of the people with whom he ministers, under headings such as Love, Broken, Calling, Grief and Transformation. As he tells their stories, he reveals his own, including working as a football referee, stand-up comic and an Argos store manager. Father Alex weaves his own story among those of the parishioners he serves.

He writes, with passion, "I want to see the Church of England change dramatically, coming out of its middle-class bubble, its 'Waitrose worship' and start to represent who we are as a nation now."

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## **World Water Day is 22<sup>nd</sup> March**

We take clean water for granted. After all, when did you last turn on the tap and expect filthy water to come out?

But sadly, bad water is still a daily reality for billions of people. The United Nations wants to help them by ensuring that everyone can access clean water by 2030. It is part of the so-called '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', and it is an enormous challenge.

Meanwhile, this year each one of us can do at least something to help on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. A donation to Water Aid will help provide safe water to marginalised communities worldwide. Simply go to:

[www.wateraid.org/uk](http://www.wateraid.org/uk)

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## **GO!**

A teenager was always asking his father if he could borrow the family car. Pushed to the limit, the father asked his son why he thought that God had given him two feet. Without hesitation, the son replied, "That's easy, one for the clutch and one for the accelerator."