

metconnexion

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FEATURING

ED MACKENZIE, JACQUI PARKINSON, GARY GRANT, ANDY FROST, JO GORDON,
MARIAN IZZARD & AIMEE NOTT

The Gospel

**GOOD
NEWS**

for all!





EDITORIAL

Marian Izzard

As we steadily emerge out of lockdown with the easing of restrictions, we face a world that has changed dramatically over these last 14 months. Things are different, and we have had to adapt to a new normal. We've been bombarded by news briefings, daily statistics and charting the trend of the COVID-19 virus and its variant strains. The whole pandemic has shaken us, causing the world to wonder and many of us to ponder and reflect on what really matters.

The truth is that, when things are thrown out of kilter and all is stripped away, it is only the word of God that stands firm and secure. We have a God who changes not. He is the one in whom we can depend and trust. The good news is that his word reveals the gospel - the Good News of Jesus.

So we thought that it was fitting to focus the theme for this spring edition of the magazine on 'The Gospel: Good News for all.' We have a variety of contributors on this theme, as well as our regular features.

Ed Mackenzie, lecturer in Biblical Theology and Mission at Cliff College considers the nature of the gospel: what it is and its importance for discipleship and mission today.

Gary Grant, Founder and Executive Chairman of the Entertainer toy shop chain shares some insights on living the Good News in the High Street.

Andy Frost, Director of Share Jesus International (SJI) reflects on 20 years of faith sharing and draws on some thought provoking insights and challenges from his new resource on culture.

Jo Gordon, CEO of 'Daniel's Den'- a parent and toddler charity based in Wembley in North West London shares how Daniel's Den is Good News to the community of Wembley.

Aimee Nott, All We Can's Communications and PR Manager explores, from a global perspective, how social responsibility and the Good News of the gospel go hand in hand.

As SJI celebrates its 20th anniversary, I have taken this opportunity as former Deputy Director of SJI, to look back a bit further and see how the Good News was celebrated and shared in a brief snapshot of the ministry of the late Revd Dr Rob Frost.

Our artwork in this edition features the latest stunning and powerfully creative work by Jacqui Parkinson on 'Threads Through Creation' which tours the country this summer.

Our Bible Study is part one of a three part study on Paul's letter to Titus which Gareth Higgs, our new Vice-Chair has compiled. This first section is a focus on the need for godly leadership.

Please do send in any of your own Good News stories to me at admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk

The next edition of MET Connexion will be available in the early autumn.

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FROM THE DEVELOPMENT WORKER

The Revd Derek Balsdon



On the window sill in my study, I have a wooden cross. On Ash Wednesday, I swap the empty cross for a crucifix, and swap them back again on Easter Sunday. The crucifix is a profound reminder to me of Jesus' willingness to suffer and die for the whole world, including me. He knows what suffering and death is like, and he understands the pain and suffering that the COVID-19 pandemic and other troubles have brought into our lives. The empty cross is a significant reminder to me that Jesus is our risen Saviour and living Lord, and that death is not the end. Jesus' death and resurrection are at the heart of the gospel, and offers Good News to all, but sadly many people have not yet received the gospel. To experience new and eternal life, we first have to experience something of the cross.

Some people, even some within our churches, are not taking enough notice of the cross, and are failing to accept that Jesus died to take the punishment for their wrongs. Once we believe that Jesus died for us and confess our sins to him, and then we surrender our lives to him, we can experience new life now and have an assurance of eternal life to come. This should also birth within us a desire to share his Good News more effectively. Part of my role within MET involves growing disciple-making disciples, and I do this through the weekly Bible studies and other teaching opportunities, either in person or online. Most of the online activities which we are currently offering can also be accessed via ordinary phones. Please contact me for further details.

For well over a year, we have hosted a 7pm prayer meeting every Sunday, and two Bible studies most weeks. These are continuing to provide wonderful

opportunities for Biblical teaching, corporate prayer and Christian fellowship. Hosting and leading these has been a regular part of my work over the past year. Most of the conferences that I would have attended with a MET stand this year have either been cancelled or moved online. For the Cliff College Festival At Home (28-31 May), we have again produced an inspiring video for their seminar stream. It is entitled Sharing Jesus Today, and includes interviews with Carolyn Lawrence, Andy Frost, Jacqui Parkinson, David Hull, Marian Izzard and myself.

The *God In Love Unites Us* report is being debated and voted on at most district synods this spring and at the Methodist Conference (24 June - 1 July). While this is being supported by many Methodists, there are also a considerable number of Methodists who are against it. Part of my time is spent communicating with, and offering support to, those who are questioning their future within Methodism, and with some individuals and congregations who have already left our denomination. I empathise with those who are struggling within the denomination that has been such an important part of their lives.

Upholding the authority of scripture is one of our core values, and the restrictions caused by COVID-19 have provided fresh opportunities for Bible teaching. This year we are offering a number of online Bible Teaching Days. The first one was led by Carolyn Lawrence, the Vice-President of the Methodist Church, on the theme of Growth. Carolyn's first session was Personal Growth, and the second session was Church Growth. The theme of the next Bible Teaching Day was Exploring the Spiritual Battle. I spoke

about struggles with powers, strength in praise, and strategies for protection, and Roz Addington spoke about signs of coming under attack. In early May, the Revd William Porter spoke on The End Times and the Rising Up of the Church. Videos of these Bible Teaching Days have started to be uploaded onto our website. Go to methodistevangelicals.org.uk/videos. Equipping for Ministry was also held online for a dozen diaconal and presbyteral participants. The Revd Chris Briggs' theme was Click STOP and RESET: Mission and ministry beyond COVID-19.

Our autumn Bible Teaching Day will be Digging for Treasure, our annual expository preaching day-conference. After the success of last year's online event, we have decided to run it online again this year. It will be on Saturday 2 October 10am-4pm with the theme Opening Up the Bible's Big Picture. We have a great line up of speakers: Andrew Ollerton from the Bible Society, Kristi Mair from Oak Hill College and David Hull, Chair of MET. Even though this conference is focussed on preaching, anyone who wants to dig deeper into the rich truths of the Bible is welcome to join in. For more information, and to book, go to methodistevangelicals.org.uk/dft.

We are very hopeful that REVIVE: The MET Prayer Weekend will be able to take place at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Friday 22 - Sunday 24 October. The theme is Living Through Forgiving, and I will be speaking about how forgiveness enriches our lives. We are privileged again to have Paul and Tracey Critchley leading the worship. There is a £20 per person discount for early bookings. See the enclosed flier for further details. This weekend should be a wonderful opportunity for Christian fellowship. Perhaps I will see you there.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Derek

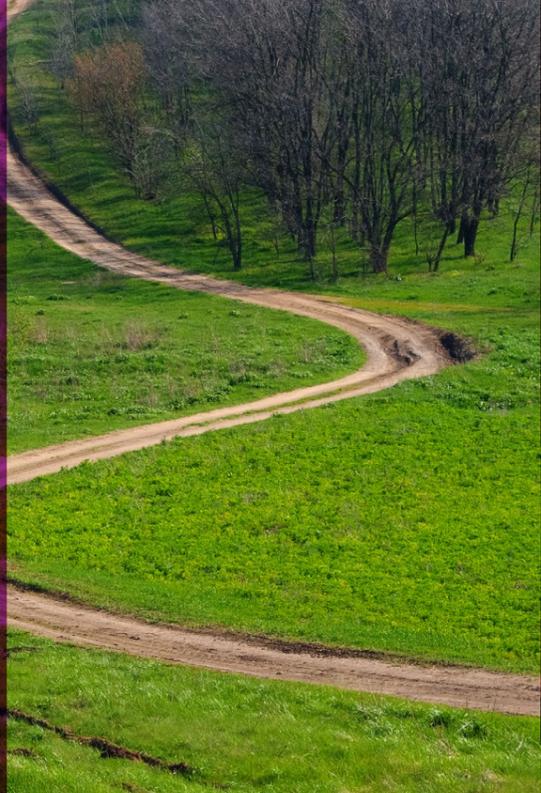


REMAINING FAITHFUL: MOVING FORWARD

Saturday 17 July 2021

Meeting on Zoom from 10.00am - 4.30pm
Reviewing Conference Decisions and Exploring
Options for Moving Forward

Please register at
development@methodistevangelicals.org.uk



**REMAINING
FAITHFUL**
www.remainingfaithful.network

THE GOSPEL IN DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Ed Mackenzie

**CLIFF COLLEGE LECTURER
ED MACKENZIE CONSIDERS
THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL
AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR
DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION
TODAY.**

All Christians talk about the gospel, and all seek to share 'Good News', but what exactly does the Bible reveal about the nature of the gospel? And how might that gospel shape us today?

Whatever the gospel is, it is supremely important - Paul describes it as the 'gospel of your salvation' (Ephesians 1:13) - and so knowing its nature is vital for the church. In this article, I will unpack the nature of the gospel and suggest some ways in which it shapes discipleship and mission, both in the New Testament and today.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The gospel is not simply any kind of good news, nor is it even general Good News from God. Instead, the gospel refers to the announcement of God's work in Jesus, the way in which Jesus' life, death and resurrection bring about the reality of God's reign.

In the New Testament, the gospel has its roots in the teaching of Jesus, who proclaimed the 'Good News' that the 'Kingdom of God has come near' and invited people to faith and repentance (Mark 1:14-15). Through his teaching as well as his miraculous deeds, Jesus

revealed the nature of this kingdom, a topsy-turvy reality in which the poor are blessed, the pure in spirit see God, and those who suffer rejoice (Matthew 5:4-12).

In Luke 4:16-21 Jesus also identifies himself as the servant of Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus is the one anointed by the Spirit to bring 'Good News to the poor,' release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Crucially, then, 'the gospel of the Kingdom' is closely linked to Jesus' identity and mission. Jesus invites people to follow him, as this is the way to the Kingdom (Luke 18:28-30). Jesus also points to his death and resurrection as playing a key role in God's plan (Mark 8:31-33) and invites his followers to lose their lives for his sake (Mark 8:35).

The apostle Paul uses the term 'gospel' more frequently than any other New Testament writer, both as a noun ('gospel') and a verb ('proclaim the gospel'). Paul assumes that his readers will know what he means by the 'gospel', but he also offers brief summaries of it throughout his writings. In the opening of Romans, Paul introduces himself as 'set apart for the gospel of God' and explains that this gospel is 'concerning his Son... Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 1:1, 3-4). And in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, Paul refers to the gospel which he has received (vv.1-2) and explains that it focuses on the story of Christ's death and resurrection in fulfilment of the scriptures (vv.3-8).

Paul also sees the gospel as God's means of salvation. In Romans 1:16, he famously describes the gospel as the 'power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith', while in 1 Thessalonians 1:5 he explains that the gospel came to the Thessalonian believers 'in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.' The gospel does not just inform, but transforms through the power of the Spirit.

The gospel in the New Testament, then, is the wonderful announcement that God in Jesus is working to redeem the world. Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God brings reconciliation and salvation. This message about Jesus needs to be at the heart of the church's 'Good News' today - both for Christians and for the world.

THE GOSPEL AND DISCIPLESHIP

For Christians, the gospel is at the heart of our faith and the means by which we continue to grow. For this reason, Paul wished to 'proclaim the gospel' to believers in Rome (Romans 1:5), and elsewhere referred to the gospel as 'the boundless riches of Christ' (Ephesians 3:8). Like the love of God (Ephesians 3:18-19), the gospel is deep and broad and wide!

The gospel shapes us as disciples by rooting us in God's incredible grace. Salvation, it reveals, is due not to our own works or merit, but rather to God's generosity (Ephesians 2:8-9). Christ died for us not because of our friendliness

LIVERPOOL 200

The earliest this event will take place will be
Spring 2022.

We will announce plans as soon as we have them. Please check the website for updates or phone us on 01983 642024



MET SW CONFERENCE

This will be taking place from 28 - 30 January 2022 at the Livermead Hotel in Torquay and will be led by Revd Steve Wild.

Details and booking form available in the autumn edition of MET Connexion.

or good character, but simply because of his love for us (Romans 4:6-11). Discipleship involves growing ever more deeply in the love and grace revealed by the gospel and allowing its presence to change us. The 'means of grace' which Wesley described remain ways of opening ourselves to such grace today.

The gospel also shapes our discipleship by inviting us to live consistently with the way of Jesus, doing the 'good works' that God prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). While we are saved by grace, the announcement of the gospel always invites a response and we are empowered by the Spirit to live new lives. The sermons of Acts, for instance, frequently call for faith and repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30), while Paul shows that those who are saved by grace are united to Jesus, and so live a new life no longer defined by sin (Romans 6:1-14). To put it in Wesleyan terms, the grace that justifies, is intimately connected to the grace that sanctifies. The Christ who comes as Saviour reigns as Lord.

Another way in which the gospel changes us is by placing us in the community of the church. In the New Testament, there are no 'solo' Christians, an insight echoed by John Wesley in his teaching on 'social holiness.' It is in the church that we encounter the riches of the gospel through communion with others. It is in the church that we rehearse the story of the gospel in sermon, song and sacrament. As we allow the word of Christ - the message of the gospel - to dwell richly within our communities (Colossians 3:16), we find transformation.

The centrality of the gospel for discipleship also explains why the New Testament writers remind Christians to 'stand' in the truths of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1) and to 'contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (Jude 3b). The gospel, it seems, can be easily distorted, as Paul warns so forcefully in Galatians 1. Discipleship, today as in the New Testament, involves holding firmly to the gospel and rooting our lives and ministries within it.

THE GOSPEL IN MISSION

The world as well as the church needs the gospel, and so sharing the gospel is a key part of the church's mission. 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News', writes Paul in Romans 10:15 (citing Isaiah 52:7), and Paul's own

desire was to share the gospel wherever Christ had not been named (Romans 14:20). Sharing the gospel remains just as crucial today, especially in a context where fewer and fewer people know the story of Jesus.

In the New Testament, sharing the gospel leads to the growth of the church. In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses agricultural images to show how God blesses and brings to fruition the planted seeds of the gospel (1 Corinthians 3:5-9), while in Acts there is a link between the growth of the church and the spread of the 'word' about Jesus (Acts 6:7; 8:4; 12:24; 13:49). In both Paul and Acts, prayer is also central for ensuring that the seeds of the gospel bear fruit in the lives of others (Acts 4:31; 16:25; Ephesians 1:15; 6:20).

Sharing the gospel can also be pursued in creative and flexible ways. In Acts, Paul's sermons to Jews tend to highlight how Jesus fulfils Old Testament scripture (Acts 13:13-43) while sermons to non-Jewish audiences build on the common ground of God's existence (Acts 17:16-33). In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains that in his mission he desires to 'become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some' (1 Corinthians 9:22b). For Paul, the 'gospel' remains centred on God's work in Jesus, but there is flexibility in how best to share Jesus in culturally persuasive ways. Today's post-Christian environment similarly calls for creative and innovative ways of sharing the gospel.

Christians are called to live as witnesses to the gospel as well as sharers of the gospel. Jesus calls believers to be 'light' and 'salt' so that others can praise the heavenly Father (Matthew 5:13-16), while Paul invites Christians to live 'in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Philippians 1:27). When 1 Peter 3:15 calls believers to give a response to those who ask about their hope, the context shows that such believers are called to a distinctive way of life which follows the way of Jesus. In the same way today, lives that witness to the way of Jesus create opportunities to share the Good News.

While the New Testament calls Christians to share the Good News of Jesus and live as witnesses to the Kingdom, it also recognises that proclaiming the gospel can lead to suffering and persecution. Jesus warned his followers that just as

the world hated him, so too they would hate them (John 15:18-21), and Acts shows that spreading the gospel led to frequent persecution (Acts 5:17; 8:1; 12:1-5). Paul also writes that 'all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Timothy 3:12). The persecuted church in the first century and around the world today reminds us that sharing the gospel can and often will be costly.

CONCLUSION

The gospel is central for the New Testament and central for us today. Within the New Testament, the gospel focuses on God's work in and through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This is the message that has changed and continues to change our world!

The gospel is key for discipleship because it is at the heart of our faith. As we grow more deeply into the knowledge and love of God's work in Jesus, so we are transformed to be more like him. As we grow in faith we see ever more clearly 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Corinthians 4:4b).

The gospel is key for mission because it is the means through which God reaches out to the world. It is as we speak and announce God's work in Jesus that the Spirit draws others to him. And it's as we reflect the way of the gospel in our lives and communities that we can show something of the Kingdom and of the transformation that Jesus brings.

Dr Ed Mackenzie is the lecturer in Biblical Theology and Mission at Cliff College (www.cliffcollege.ac.uk).



THREADS THROUGH CREATION

STITCHING SPECTACULAR SCENES FOR THOUSANDS OF VISITORS

Jacqui Parkinson

Jacqui Parkinson is an artist whose medium is textiles - more precisely, thread and silks. And she works on a huge scale. For the past three years she has been working on an extraordinary sequence of twelve massive panels, entitled 'Threads through Creation'. It will be starting a tour of cathedrals this summer (COVID-19 permitting).

Jacqui introduces this extraordinary project:

'Until 2016 I'd never worked on a huge scale, but felt inspired to create 'Threads through Revelation'; fourteen panels taking the viewer through the book of Revelation. It toured fifteen cathedrals, and was seen by half a million visitors. It clearly made an impact on many of them - including quite a few MET Connexion readers!

'Already as I was working on it, I was thinking of creating two more sequences of panels, making three exhibitions. Here's the second - 'Threads through Creation' - scenes from the opening story of Genesis. So with Revelation and Genesis, I've presented the first and last pages of the Bible!

YOUR SNEAK PREVIEW !

'This is your sneak preview of some of 'Threads through Creation', before anyone sees it on tour. It is very easy for visitors of all ages and background to understand at different levels. It is a celebration of life on earth. There is a brilliant creation story, including many

mysterious truths for reflection, and lots of different creatures to spot.

'I hope to convey the uniqueness of this world and the wonders of creation. Millions of people have recently enjoyed the BBC TV series called 'A Perfect Planet'. I think it should have been called 'The Perfect Planet'. The great TV series shows us the wonder of creation but then say it's all down to a series of extraordinary coincidences. Coincidence? Chance? I can't believe it!

IN THE BEGINNING

'I've picked out six panels here for you to see. If you come to the exhibition, you'll find that it starts with three panels with very strong, apparently simple elements. The first is a visual imagining of the very first words of the entire Bible, that put everything else into context: 'In the beginning God ...'. But how to convey God? I puzzled over a solution for months! In the end I decided to present a never ending spiral, stretching beyond the panel, into eternity. The colours of the rainbow show the hope of the Creator that all would not only be created good, but remain good - and also with flashes of gold leaf to represent the holiness and pureness of God. Look closer and you'll see that the silk which makes up the rainbow spiral is made of three pieces, suggesting the Holy Trinity. And stitched on top of the silk are barely perceptible, tiny patterns of what is to come in the future creation: everything birthed from within the Creator.

'From here on spirals are my symbol for God's presence, and you can spot them on most panels. Panel 2 - God spoke 'light!' - is deceptively simple, enormous triangles dividing the sheet. Look closer, and you'll see spirals stitched all over. Next, panel 3 - God spoke 'water!' - is my expression for a watery, wet world! So wet that you'll see the water falls outside the frame.

EXPLOSIONS OF LIFE AND COLOUR

'Then we move through the creation of all vegetation and the whole of the solar system, to panels 6 and 7 - an explosion of life, colours and patterns. I've filled them with birds, sea creatures, animals and insects. The panels are intended to be both thought-provoking and fun. There are lots of things to see, some especially for children to spot. Sometimes people laugh over the details (for example here on panel 7 you might make out a very well camouflaged chameleon, and a dog trying to catch the attention of a monkey!). And enjoying all the fun at the bottom of panel 7 are Adam and Eve.

THE SEVENTH DAY

'How do you depict the seventh day, the Sabbath day of rest, an important day but one where nothing seems to happen? My solution was to imagine God looking over all he had created and knowing 'it was good', and that's what's summarised here in panel 8: squares of designs revisit all six days of creation.

And here the cross is in central position - a reminder that Jesus will come as the Sabbath Rest - and over the cross, the gold leaf spiral representing the Trinity at the centre of all activity and all rest.'

MAJOR UNDERTAKING

So 'Threads through Creation' is now complete and ready to tour - it consists of twelve panels, 2.7m high, and varying in width between 1.3m and 3.5m. 'Threads through Revelation' will be going to Lille Cathedral in France this spring and summer (COVID-19 permitting). And now Jacqui will start work on 'Threads through the Cross', mainly following the key scenes around the death of Christ. This exhibition will connect the beginning and the end of the story together in Jesus.

The set of three exhibitions put together will represent the greatest Story ever in 40 panels stretching over 80 metres. That's as long as the Bayeux Tapestry - and 5 times the height! These projects are a major undertaking and Jacqui is so grateful to be supported in prayer and financially by a wonderful group of friends. Each project has been a leap of faith, with no funding at the outset, yet each has been fully funded by the time each exhibition started touring. God has indeed been good. With 'Threads through the Cross' Jacqui is again stepping out in faith. God willing, it will be finished in 2024. Your prayers and any financial support would be gratefully received!

To see more of 'Threads through Creation' and the touring schedule visit www.creation-threads.co.uk.



Jacqui Parkinson



Panel 1



Panel 2

Panel 1
In the beginning
(Genesis 1:1)

Panel 2
God spoke - light!
(Genesis 1:2-5)

Panel 3
God spoke - water!
(Genesis 1:6-10)

Panel 4 (Not included)

Panel 5
Universe - sparkle with lights!
(Genesis 1:14-19)

Panel 6
Water and sky - splash with colour!
(Genesis 1:20-23)



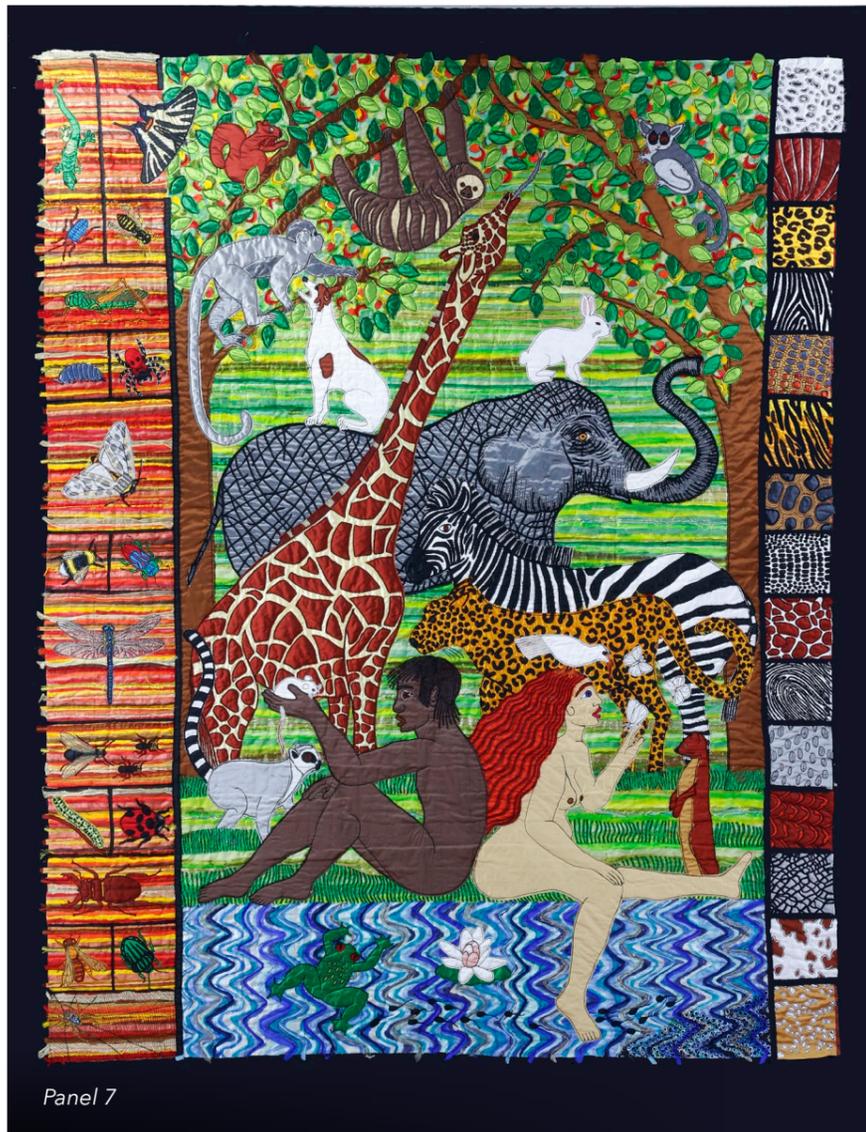
Panel 3



Panel 5



Panel 6



Panel 7

Panel 7
Earth - dance with creatures!
 (Genesis 1:24-31)

Panel 8
God rested - and it was all good.
 (Genesis 2:1-3)



Panel 8

GODLY LEADERSHIP

Gareth Higgs

INTRODUCTION

The next three editions of MET Connexion will be reflecting on this wonderful letter from Paul to Titus and the gems that it contains. In Chapter 1, Paul's primary focus is on the need for godly leadership - something that our Church and world so desperately need.

Titus is a Gentile (Galatians 2:3), an apprentice of Paul, visiting Corinth with him amongst other places (2 Corinthians 7). Now he's on Crete (Titus 1:5) seeking to establish good leaders for the church. Paul has visited Crete (Acts 27) and on the day of Pentecost, Cretans heard the gospel (Acts 2:11).

Paul (Titus 1:1), an apostle i.e. 'sent one' is sent by a reliable and trustworthy God to God's people to further and build up their faith. As knowledge of this faith increases, it may lead to godliness. What matters for Paul is not that people have 'right' belief, but rather that being informed of the truth of the gospel might lead to a godly life worked out in the life of the community. We are to live out the truth of what we believe and apply it in every aspect of our lives, so that the world is transformed to God's glory.

Paul emphasizes the truth and reliability of God (v.2). This isn't just a passing description, but an important evangelistic and theological statement. In the Greco-Roman world, where paganism was the dominant worldview, there were lots of gods for different purposes - for weather, fertility, health, financial prosperity - and one sought the relevant gods and appealed them to gain favour. The gods were notoriously unreliable and unpredictable. Yet Paul states the One true God can be relied upon. His character is true, his behaviour is true, his nature is true, he is thoroughly reliable, and Paul is saying 'I represent that God. That's whom I'm sent by; that is the One who sends me to you; that's the One of whom I write'.

REFLECTION

To what extent do you feel sent under the command of God into your mission field?

GODLY LEADERS

I have the privilege of serving on the Ministerial Candidate's Selection Committee which assesses all of those who believe they are called of God to serve as an ordained person in the British Methodist Church. I never cease to delight in the people that we meet who are offering themselves to God. Occasionally I hear people objecting to the need for training. 'The disciples didn't need it', they say. I am very much pro-training, and theological education, but Paul is making clear that the best education will never, ever make up for a lack of calling, commissioning or a sense of anointing from God.

V.3 sees Paul speaking of his commission and authority. We too are appointed to herald the message and proclaim the gospel by the command of God our Saviour. People can have a strong sense of anointing or commissioning from God, but without proper discipline, accountability and training they would be a disaster and probably cause harm to themselves and others. What's clear is that Paul would rather have no leader at all than somebody ill-fitted for the role. That's a good lesson for any of us in recruitment. Sometimes we can feel like it's better to fill a role with anyone. Whether it's in a community organisation like the church or whether it's in employment, it's better to have no-one than to have the wrong person. Paul agrees.

In v.6 we hear about the role of elder from the Greek 'presbyteros' where the term 'presbyter' originates and, in v.7, the word overseer, literally 'episkopos', meaning 'oversight' but sometimes translated as 'bishop'. Paul is more concerned about the character that is needed to inhabit those roles.

In the ordination service, there is a wonderful moment when the congregation is asked whether we consider the ordinands worthy of the role to which we will ordain them. The congregation replies, 'they are worthy'. Paul sets out what a worthy leader is like. He is concerned with the fledgling Christian movement and doesn't want Christians to be scandalised, brought into disrepute, or misunderstood, so there's a responsibility, particularly on the leaders of this

community to conduct themselves well (v.6). They must be above accusation, faithful, with no 'skeletons in the closet'. We need to be able to rely on the character of such people.

Paul goes on to speak about an elders' family (v.6). In the context of the first century AD, when the church is just beginning to make its way, Paul is saying: don't select people who may end up drawing the wrong sort of attention to the church, because that's only going to bring them and others harm.

Although this is a highly patriarchal society, we live in a very different context now and I'm grateful that in Methodism, we see these gender-specific requirements as contextual for the first century and not universal. It's important to remember all of that as we hear these words.

Paul continues the character requirements in v.7. 'Overbearing' is sometimes translated 'arrogant' and, if you are that, as well as the other qualities to be avoided in v.7, there's no way of being 'blameless'. For Paul, it's vital that the character of church leaders is reputable. In fact, it's not just about not doing some things but actively doing others - church leaders must be hospitable, must be people that love what is good and must be able to lead themselves before seeking to lead others.

All this reminds us that we should choose character over competence in leaders. We would have both if we could, but if I had to choose, I'd always have godly character over high competence. I would much rather have godly people who are at the Lord's disposal than highly gifted people who aren't godly. The church needs good and godly leaders like it has never needed them before.

If you are a church leader, I hope you sense a fresh challenge. If you are not, then pray for those that are, and that God would raise up more godly leaders for our church. Pray for your church leader; pray that they would increase in godliness and increase in the sense of the anointing of God that they carry. Pray even if you don't think that they anywhere near match up to what the New Testament requires of elders. Pray for them before you criticise them. Pray that God would raise up people, lay and ordained, who would also carry some of these competences and carry some of these character traits, that the church might be equipped, built up and strengthened with godly leadership. We need it for such a time as this.

REFLECTION

When was the last time you prayed for your Minister or church leader?

LEADING FOR UNITY

Leadership was much needed in Crete because there was division in the church. It came by way of the 'circumcision

group' (see also Galatians 2:10) - a group of Christians who were insisting that Gentiles needed to become Jews first, and then become Christians; they needed to take up the Jewish cultural laws and food laws, as well as accepting Christ. The next logical step was for separate groups to form within the church. Some, who considered themselves the 'true believers' because they set themselves apart from people for religious purity and because they only ate certain foods, considered themselves the 'really pure Christians' and so therefore began to isolate and distance themselves and became an increasingly elitist bunch.

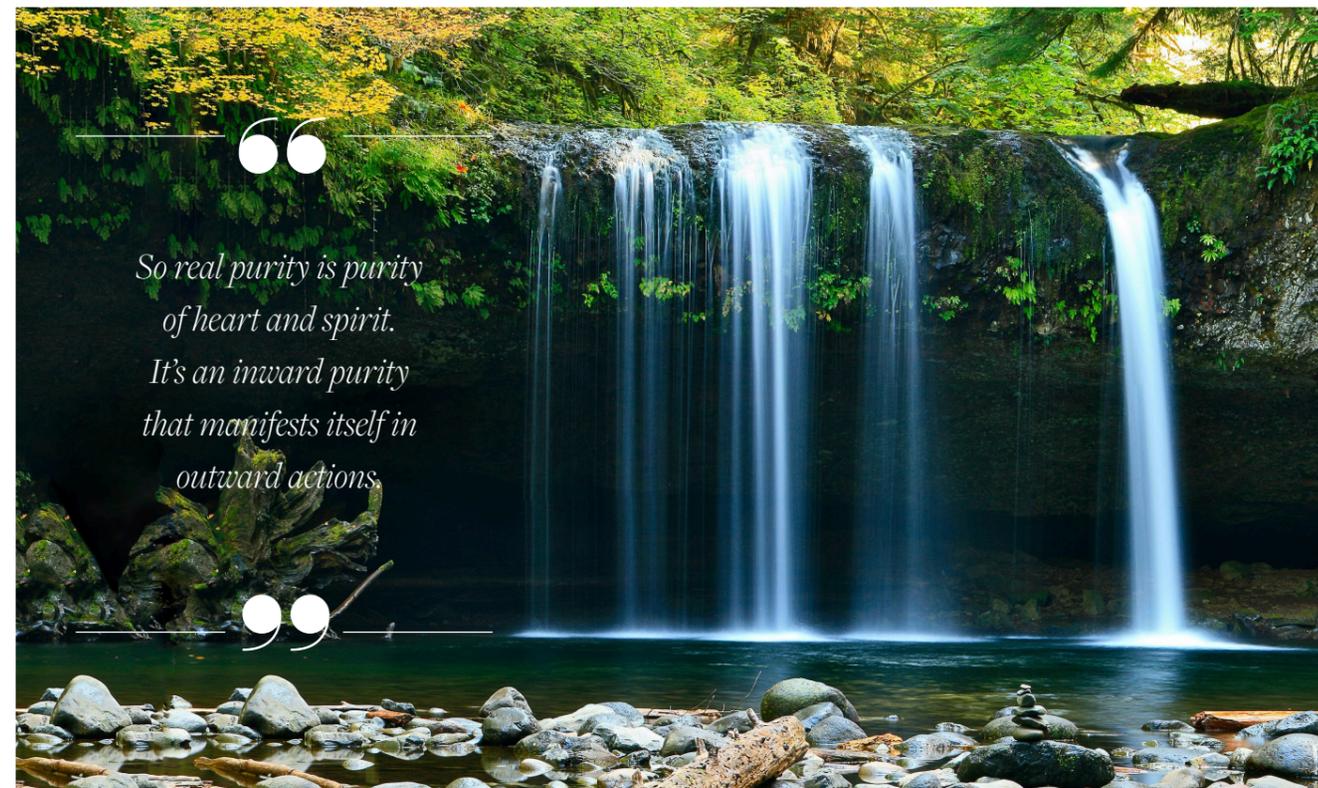
This is false in Paul's eyes because it 'adds to Christ' in terms of that which is needed for salvation. It is not Christ and eating certain foods, or Christ and keeping certain company. Salvation is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and pleading that over our lives; it is that which causes us to be adopted into the family of God and accepted as God's children. We bring nothing to the party. We cannot do certain things to make us more acceptable to God. Any sense of trying to add to what Christ has done by keeping certain religious rituals begins to deny the unique sacrifice of Christ. So, it falsifies the gospel and it creates this elevated group of Christians which leads to division. Paul wants the body of Christ to live together in unity and to express such unity to a world that is full of different cults and sects and divisions. It's worth just pointing out that, centuries on from this letter, we too can unwittingly add our own cultural laws to the gospel. How many people have been put off the life of faith because Christians have expected certain things of them that perhaps they weren't expecting of themselves? How many folk have been kept from the church because of unspoken 'laws' about dress, conduct, etc?

REFLECTION

Does your church have any 'unspoken rules' with which people have to comply before fitting in? Think hard about this before moving on.

Paul calls these errant believers 'rebellious' (v.10) - the same word used to describe children in v.6. In other words, don't be seditious or undermining or chaotic. These false teachers are disruptive (v.11) for their own reward. They need to be silenced because they don't have at heart the concern for the unity of the church. Rather they have a concern for their own power, their own status and potentially for receiving some kind of offering from people. Contrast that with the qualities listed in v.7. Leaders are not to pursue dishonest gain. They are to be hospitable. They are to be disciplined. It is the opposite of the qualities that Paul points out, that are present in these false teachers.

V.12 is curious because Paul appears to collude with a stereotype. He is being ironic, being tongue-in-cheek even. He's saying, 'you know everyone says this about the Cretans



“
*So real purity is purity
of heart and spirit.
It's an inward purity
that manifests itself in
outward actions.*
”

and it's proved to be true'. A TV comedy sketch recently derided 'northerners' from the perspective of 'Londoners'. It was a subtle cultural portrayal of people in London who have largely kept themselves to themselves and northern people being outgoing and not reading cultural cues 'down south'. Cultural stereotypes exist. V.12 seems to be saying: 'everyone knows that the Cretans are like this' and Paul is piggy-backing on that to say the Cretans need strong leadership and guidance. They need to be clearly rebuked when they step out of line, in order that they might become sound in the faith (v.13). The false teachers also need a prospect of redemption. Those that have been sharing a false gospel, perhaps those that have been taken in by it, need to have a way back. So is it the task of all of us to rebuke those that we consider false? No, because that would also lead to chaos and just as much division. That's why Paul has set out to Titus why godly leadership needs to be established (v.5).

Paul returns to the issue of Judaising Christians in v.14 by addressing what he calls 'Jewish myths'. By the first century AD, there were stories circulating of old Jewish biblical heroes. The Jewish diaspora meant that there was plenty of culturally applied Judaism present in the region. Jewish stories were well-known and sometimes the story was embellished and become somewhat apocalyptic. These stories were falsely applied to justify the need for certain religious and cultural laws. This whole issue, although ostensibly it's about what you eat and with whom you associate, isn't the real issue. This is less about religious purity and more about power and control (v.15). If people were really pure of heart, they would be much less obsessed with which meat they can eat and more concerned about the centrality of the gospel and the heart of the Christian message. But because they're obsessed with these external and peripheral things, this shows they don't really have a concern for the gospel, and are not really pure of heart.

So real purity is purity of heart and spirit. It's an inward purity that manifests itself in outward actions. Whereas the people who were pressing this kind of Judaising cause were more worried about the outward purity, Paul says, 'No, it's the other way around'. When you are inwardly pure, that overflows into an outwardly pure life. How often have we become very fixated about peripheral matters, that just happened to be our own hobby horse and the things that we care about? We can end up elevating them to a level of importance that God has never intended, whether it's about church music, the gender of church leaders or matters of sexuality. We can get so focused on those things that we miss the main thing. Paul is saying: make sure that you focus on what matters here, and the role of godly leadership is to make sure that the church focuses on its primary mission of keeping Christ front and centre. In the famous saying attributed to St Augustine, 'in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity'. In other words, let's focus our energy and effort on what is central, that is: Christ and Christ alone.



The Revd Gareth Higgs is the Superintendent Minister at Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and Vice-Chair of MET. He is married to Laura with three young children.

LIVING THE GOOD NEWS ON THE HIGH STREET

Gary Grant

GARY GRANT, FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF THE ENTERTAINER TOY SHOP CHAIN SHARES WITH MARIAN IZZARD SOME INSIGHTS ON BEING A CHRISTIAN IN RETAILING

ORIGINS

The Entertainer began when Gary and his wife Catherine took over the 'Pram and Toy Bar' in Amersham, Buckinghamshire in May 1981. They saw this as an opportunity to make the shop into somewhere where children and adults alike would come and visit, have fun, find something to 'entertain' their time and want to come back again and again.

The business has grown and has gone from strength to strength over the years to be a nationally recognised and well-loved toy shop by children and adults alike. It currently has 172 stores up and down the country. It also owns the Early Learning Centre. In May this year, the Entertainer celebrates its 40th anniversary on the high street.

Gary says: 'We think we are a unique retail business - like a signature that cannot be copied. Our vision is every childhood filled with wonder. Our mission is to be the best-loved toyshop: one child, one community at a time. Life is made up of experiences and memories. We love creating memories, creating happiness for a child and delivering an outstanding service.'

CHRISTIAN ETHOS

The Entertainer has a Christian ethos at the heart of how the company is run. In Gary's words: 'It has Christian fingerprints all over it.' In his role as Chair of the company, Gary shares that his Christian faith is evidenced in all that they do.

Those of us that have an Entertainer store nearby may well be aware of how it makes a special feature of their window displays for Christmas and Easter. At Christmas they display an attractive child friendly nativity scene in the windows, alongside the offer of a free copy of 'The Christmas Story' booklet as you step through the entrance and a free copy of the Christmas HOPE magazine. At Easter, the stores communicate the message of new life and hope for all, through its window displays.

All of the employees are aware that The Entertainer is a family run Christian business. They don't open on Sundays - unlike most other retailers - believing that Sunday is a special day, which affords the opportunity for families to gather together. They also have a policy of not opening any of their stores on Good Friday.

Most customers are respectful of the store's mandate to keep the doors firmly shut on these days. Remaining closed on a Sunday has not dented the profits of the business; in fact, they are just busier Monday to Saturday! The company also follows the biblical principle of tithing 10% of its profits every year.



'For me, as a Christian in retailing, it's about treating people well and running an honest business; that says it all. It's about walking the walk as well as talking the talk.'



Gary states: 'For me, as a Christian in retailing it's about treating people well and running an honest business; that says it all. It's about walking the walk as well as talking the talk.'

The Entertainer has a policy about being selective in the items that they stock in their shops. They want to be comfortable with what they stock ensuring that all that they sell fits with the Christian values of the company. Gary clearly states: 'Our motive is honouring, not stocking. For example, we don't stock any products associated with Halloween. We want to be true to the Bible. One passage that resonates with me is from 1 Samuel 2:30 "those who honour me I will honour".'



ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

Gary shared that May this year is not just a celebration marking 40 years of The Entertainer, but it is also a celebration of 30 years of his being a Christian. He speaks of it as an amazing journey, which has been fun, challenging and certainly an incentive to pray when under pressure! Gary recalls that when he became a Christian in May 1991, it was at a Men's Breakfast. It was there that he heard for the first time that following Jesus is about a relationship: not just knowing about him and being familiar with the Bible stories - but knowing him as a personal friend in a living, active, and transformational relationship. Becoming a Christian impacted how he ran the business, and sweeping changes were made from that time onwards to reflect the outworking of his faith in Jesus.

COMMUNITY LINKS

The Entertainer is not just part of a national high street chain. It is a store that wants to make a connection with the community, wherever they are

located. 'Community is very important to us and we seek to be active in that community supporting and engaging with them, and in turn we hope that they will support us' says Gary.

CHALLENGES

'Being a high street retailer is not without its challenges. The 2008 and 2009 financial crisis presented a challenging time for us as a family business'. The COVID-19 pandemic - just like for everyone else - has been the greatest challenge. We have been closed for seven and a half months of this last year and our finances have taken a hit. However during that time we have seen a big jump in our web business and online sales and have increased our fulfilment capacity to meet demand.

As we emerge out of the pandemic and reopen our stores, it's about dusting ourselves down, taking stock of where we are and taking one step at a time. We are all going to have to adapt to a new normal, whatever that looks like.

Going forward, it's so important to encourage people to support their local businesses - whatever they are - which will be essential for their recovery'.

Gary Grant is the Founder and Executive Chairman of The Entertainer, the fastest growing family-owned High Street toy retailer in the UK. Mindful of giving back to the communities in which he trades, 10% of profits each year are distributed by way of The Grant Foundation, supporting hundreds of smaller charitable initiatives. Gary is also Patron of several charities.



20 YEARS OF SJI AND SOME GOOD HABITS

Andy Frost

ANDY FROST REFLECTS ON WHAT SHARE JESUS INTERNATIONAL HAS ACHIEVED AND, DRAWING FROM HIS NEW RESOURCE ON CULTURE, PROVIDES SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP US THINK THROUGH THE HABIT OF FAITH SHARING.

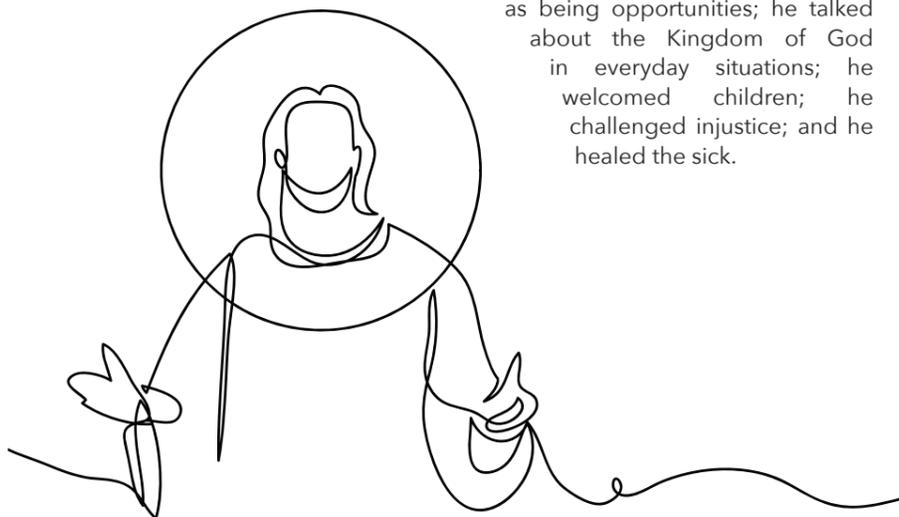
Twenty years! It is amazing to look back at what God has done over the last 20 years through Share Jesus International. There are the touring productions; the big festivals and events; the short term missions and intern programmes; and the multitude of resources and training programmes.

I became the director of Share Jesus after my father's death in 2007 and it's been a rollercoaster of a journey. As a small charity we often punch above our weight. And as we reach 20 years, it's given me a moment to reflect on the impact Share Jesus International has had.

It's often hard to measure impact. In local churches we often measure the A's, B's and C's - the attendance, the buildings and the cash flow, but these don't necessarily measure the D, discipleship. And in the third sector, we can look for similar measurable indicators. But as I look back on 20 years I don't just want to measure the size of our events or the sales of resources but ultimately how we

have sought to listen to God and see the Great Commission fulfilled.

This is much harder to measure because it is measured best in stories. I think of a recent conversation with a church leader whose faith came alive when she had her first taste of mission as a teenager. I think of a recent letter in which an evangelist shared how his time with us shaped his understanding of mission. I think of an email from someone who has joined our online Lent prayers this year who has been encouraged to keep sharing their faith even in these challenging times. These stories reveal that perhaps our greatest achievement as a charity has been helping to model what faith sharing look likes today.



CULTURE

As I've been reflecting on this, I have also been writing about culture and how we create a culture of faith sharing in the local church. We often talk about vision in church circles but as the adage goes 'culture trumps vision'.

Culture is often defined as the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people or society. In the story of the early church, there was a clear vision, to make disciples. However on top of that, Jesus had created a culture with his disciples that enabled them to blossom. He had modelled a way of life. Just think about the way Jesus shared life with his apprentices - he valued relationship over itineraries; he took time to share meals; he saw interruptions as being opportunities; he talked about the Kingdom of God in everyday situations; he welcomed children; he challenged injustice; and he healed the sick.



turning on the radio as soon as we get in the car. Much of the time we are acting on autopilot. Interestingly COVID-19 had disrupted many of our habits and is partly why people have felt so disorientated when their normal rhythms of life are not possible. A habit is basically three things:

CUE ~ ACTION ~ REWARD

Before COVID-19, one of the most basic examples was that of the handshake. We meet someone new. That was the cue. We reach out a hand. That was the action. We shake hands. The reward was a sense of connection.

To unpack the concept of habit further, the cue is the prompt that leads us to an action. Charles Duhigg, in his book *The Power of Habit*, outlines that most common cues fall into five categories. Firstly, they can be a place. When you walk into your lounge, you may often sit in the same seat and when you sit at your desk, you might automatically fire up your laptop. Secondly, they can be a specific time of day, such as brushing your teeth just before you go to bed or saying grace just before a meal.

Thirdly, cues can be connected with other people. When I am with my children, by habit, I walk more slowly and when I am with my Polish friends, by habit, I slow my speech. Fourthly, they can be an emotional state. This is most commonly linked to negative emotions, so that when you feel tired in



These stories reveal that perhaps our greatest achievement as a charity has been helping to model what faith sharing look likes today.



The culture that Jesus created was powerful - it was able to serve the vision of the early church and to see the world turned upside down. But the question is: How do we create this kind of a culture in our churches today? How do we help ourselves and our congregations to share Jesus?

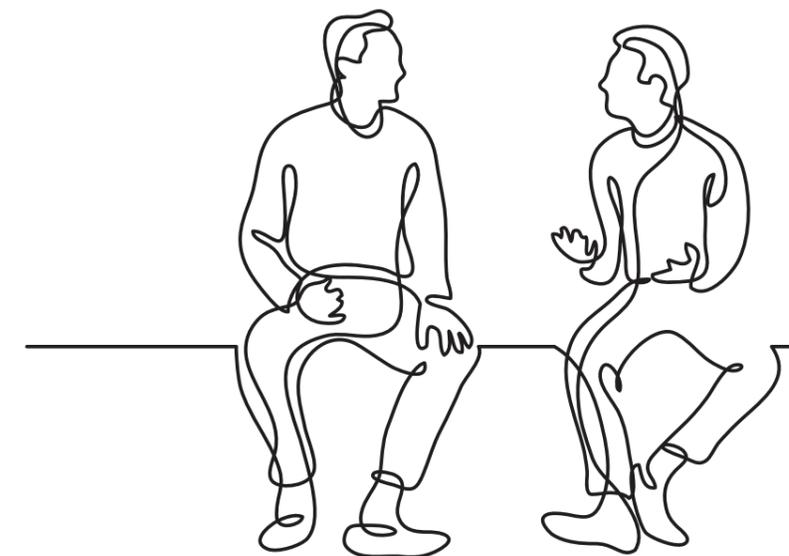
HABITS

Culture is shaped by shared habits, the things that we do subconsciously. Social scientists believe that almost 40% of everything we do isn't a result of a decision but a result of habits.

We all have habits, whether it is a coffee first thing in the morning or

The culture Jesus created was one of real freedom and learning for his disciples. He frequently took his disciples to one side to explain his parables and what was happening. He took risks on his disciples, sending them out in pairs on their first mission together with clear instructions. He modelled to them how to pray, giving them the Lord's Prayer as a template to engage with God.

Specifically, we can look at Jesus' relationship with Peter. Jesus called Peter out of the boat to walk on the water to him. Jesus rebuked Peter when he'd misunderstood what was going on. And after Peter's denial, Jesus cooked fish for Peter on the beach and asked three times, "Do you love me?" A beautiful picture as Jesus reinstates Peter. It's no wonder that it was Peter who got up to preach on the day of Pentecost.



the afternoon, we reach for a chocolate bar or when we are feeling fed up, we might indulge in some retail therapy.

Finally, the cue can be a preceding behaviour or action. For example, when your phone pings with a text message, the action is the preceding behaviour. You take your phone from your pocket but now your phone is in your hand, it acts as a cue to check Twitter and scroll through the latest news headlines.

In habits, the cue always provokes an action. That action can be as simple as smiling when someone smiles at us or as complex as reflecting on childhood memories when we smell a certain aroma reminiscent from childhood. Many of the actions I have used as illustrations are physical, but cues can also provoke mental or emotional actions too.

Then there is the reward. You somehow feel better having completed the action. Your teeth feel clean; the coffee gives you a burst of caffeine; the endorphins make the run worthwhile; you feel proud having received affirmation or you feel connected having hugged your grandchild.

It is this reward that helps to embed the habit into your life. It reinforces this behaviour. Your brain discerns that if this cue and action create this reward, then it is worth remembering for next time. The habit becomes part of your life.

Habits are powerful. When they emerge, the brain stops having to participate fully in every decision and lots of life is lived on autopilot. Just to point out here, there are obviously good habits but there are also bad habits!

One of the key ways in which we can change culture is by creating new habits. And as we look through the Gospel narratives, we discover Jesus had habits.

When a question (cue) was asked, he would often tell a story (action) and leave the listener challenged/ comforted (reward).

When a need was presented (cue), he would heal (action) and the person would be made whole (reward).

When he was busy (cue), he would take time out to pray (action) and would know what the Father was doing (reward).

So, here's my challenge; as I reflect on 20 years of Share Jesus, I am thrilled by the stories of people who have been encouraged and equipped to share their faith in so many different ways. I long to see the Church become better equipped to share Jesus. As we emerge from lockdown, I think we have an opportunity to create some new habits in our church families that will help us shift the culture in our churches and become more missionally engaged.

QUESTIONS

And so I leave you with for questions to think through:

- What habits do we need to create with our churches to disrupt the culture we have and to become more evangelistic?
- What are the cues that we need to be looking out for?
- What are the appropriate actions?
- And what is the reward for sharing our faith?

Andy Frost has been the Director of Share Jesus International since 2008, leading scores of projects including the Ekklesia conference. At the heart of all that he does, he wants to help people follow Jesus. He is married to Jo and has two daughters.



WE HAVE A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

Edward Joseph Burns (b. 1938)

We have a gospel to proclaim.
Good News for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.



GOOD NEWS STORIES



EKKLESIA 2021

Revd Andrew Pottage

It was with some anticipation that I looked forward to attending this year's Ekklesia Conference after finding last year so helpful. This year, it was branded as a roundtable discussion conference as it had moved online. The theme was 'I will build my church ...' Given that we are in a pandemic, and as lots of questions have surfaced about the future of our churches and mission etc, I thought this was a helpful theme.

There were helpful talks on being the church that Jesus is seeking to build, engaging with the media, 'being church' in the new normal, confidence in the gospel, mental and emotional wellbeing, preaching to a hybrid audience, the church on the margins and the future of youth work. After each talk there was a roundtable discussion, some were based on areas, others on denominations or church groupings and there was even one for MET members chaired by the Revd Derek Balsdon. For the two evenings, there was a talk with interviews of leaders from various kingdom-building initiatives. On the first evening, the Revd Joel Edwards gave a talk on the great liability, discussing an agenda for change and considering the challenges of combating discrimination. On the second evening of the conference, the final talk was a celebration of 20 years of Share Jesus International and Andy Frost gave a timely message on what God is saying in this moment.

Overall, the conference was engaging, uplifting, and encouraging. If you have not attended before, I wholeheartedly recommend you do so in the future, whatever role you hold in the leadership of the church. All the talks are available online under the Ekklesia tab on sharejesusinternational.com.

The Revd Andrew Pottage is a Methodist Presbyterian based in North West London.



GOOD NEWS TRAILS

Hilary Balsdon

Unable to run our normal children's ministry work for much of 2020, we decided at Wellspring Methodist Church, Congleton, to run a Nativity Trail for Primary school aged children, something we'd never done before. Our aim was for something of the Good News of the Nativity story to be shared with people who wouldn't normally hear it.

Using knitted Nativity figures, we printed large photos of the various characters of the Nativity Story. We then asked 13 different households on the estate adjacent to our church if they would 'host' one of our photos in their front window for the weekend before Christmas. Some of these were homes with whom we already had connections, others we just knocked on their door and asked if they'd help us - no one said no!

On the days we ran the trail, those participating came to the church car park, with their parents/carers, and we gave them a Trail Sheet, on which were small versions of the Nativity photos. They simply had to walk around the estate, looking for the photos, and when they found one, to write down the address at which that Nativity character was 'hiding'. It took people about an hour to complete, and everyone said how much they enjoyed it. When they returned with their completed sheets, they received their 'prizes' - A Nativity Storybook, an 'I completed the Nativity Trail' sticker, and of course sweets/chocolate.

Hilary Balsdon lives in Congleton, is a Local Preacher and Church Steward, and has been passionate about work with children and young people for most of her life. She is married to Derek Balsdon, the MET Development Worker.



THE LORD DIRECTS OUR STEPS

Ruth Meredith

The LORD directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way?

Proverbs 20:24

Around 2010 we were living on the border of Wales and Cheshire and looking for a local church. We ended up in a tiny village Methodist chapel with around 20 elderly members in a hamlet called Crewe by Farndon. Sometime later the circuit superintendent made official visits to all the small chapels to review them and he admits that he expected us to want to close. It appeared hopeless, with an elderly congregation mainly living out of the area, but my husband and I felt God was pointing out possibilities.

The chapel was small, in reasonable shape and in the nearest two villages they were building hundreds of new houses, which were getting closer to the chapel. There were a lot of young children locally and we started a Saturday morning club called Mustard Seeds. In 2017 we were appointed as lay leaders.

We had spent time praying that God would show us how to reach out to the community. We prayed and did what we thought God was telling us to do next.

Things began to move in surprising ways; a lady who lived in the tiny village asked to get married in the chapel; she later became a Christian and wanted to start a toddler group in the chapel. We got the opportunity to rent a field across the road from the chapel and I was inspired to turn it into a Bible garden. Another strand was that we bought a second-hand marquee for a local under 5's group, deciding it was something we should support.

Our chapel may be in the middle of nowhere, but it is on a very quiet lane which is great for walkers, runners and cyclists and during the first COVID-19 lockdown we spent that time planting the Bible garden and talking to passers by about it. We have a children's outdoor play area in the field amongst the fruit trees, sensory garden, vine, olive, palm, myrtle, pomegranate and cedar and signs explaining where they are mentioned in the Bible together with challenging messages.

We have used the field and the marquee to keep our mother and toddler group going as a support group over the past few months, and it has been very well attended. At a time when there is nowhere else to go it is really valued. Each week we have a Bible story and sing Christian songs. As a result two young families have started to come to our Sunday services.

We are trying to recruit a worker/minister now to take God's work forward. Incidentally the superintendent retired and joined our congregation.

I do not think I would have imagined any of it happening or made a plan for any of it to happen but when I look back I can see that the Lord has directed our steps.

Ruth Meredith is a lay leader with her husband Adam and lives in Crewe by Farndon, South Cheshire Circuit

BEING GOOD NEWS TO THE COMMUNITY

Jo Gordon

JO GORDON SHARES HOW 'DANIEL'S DEN' IS GOOD NEWS TO THE COMMUNITY OF WEMBLEY.

'I sense there is a real Wesleyan spirit about Daniel's Den,' were words spoken to me a couple of year ago and they made me smile in more ways than one as I thought about being Good News to the community. Hear our story and find out why!

BUILDING COMMUNITY

I run Daniel's Den, a parent and toddler charity based in Wembley in North West London. I started it 24 years ago having worked as a teacher for 12 years in the London borough of Brent. When I was pregnant with my first child I would pray for the baby inside my womb and God would give me a picture of their feet and how the birth of this child would change the direction of my life. Little did I realise how true that would be and here I am almost 25 years later being the CEO of Daniel's Den.

The mission of Daniel's Den is to encourage and enrich family life in order to build stronger communities. We have two key vision statements - one is for people to know and be known in their local community, and the second is for people to build relationships that matter within and beyond their cultural and ethnic group.

At present we run seven sessions each week in different parts of London, recognising the importance of offering a safe, welcoming community within walking distance of families. We want everyone who comes through the door to feel an unconditional welcome and the love of Christ in a language they understand using their five senses. Each year, we work with over 300 families from 45 different nationalities, many of whom only know their husband or wife in this country. We offer that network of support, that place to belong and that 'family' which can actually be seen and touched.

Building community is what Daniel's Den is all about. I grew up on a sheep farm in North Yorkshire where everyone knew

everybody. It was a close-knit community where life revolved around the chapel and farming life. This is so deep within my roots and having attended a Methodist chapel 2 or 3 times on a Sunday (they had afternoon services in those days so people could do the milking) the comment 'I sense there is a real Wesleyan spirit about Daniel's Den' made me quietly laugh inside because it was a real identification of my roots. Wesley got into the edges of society. He took the message out into the community and I guess that is the absolute essence of Daniel's Den - getting alongside families, wherever they are, at one of the key times in their lives. Offering support and help as people give birth and as they nurture their young resonates so much and I really sense that call to shepherd families in the streets of Brent - a million miles away from the fields of North Yorkshire.

Here is a picture of one of the groups we run in Park Lane Methodist Church, Wembley.



In this group there is: a Domestic Violence survivor, an asylum seeker, a pharmacist working part time, a grandma, a mum living in bed and breakfast with no recourse to public funds, a dad, a Post Natal Depression survivor, a child with autism traits, a potential volunteer and of course, children!

Being Good News for these people is paramount and it comes in all shapes and sizes.

CHANGING LIVES

Coming to Daniel's Den was a life changing time for Florence and Ruella. They were 'dumped' in a bed and breakfast with little food and no recourse to public funds. We found out about them from a contact in Maidstone who rang the local Salvation Army. Within 24 hours, we turned up on their doorstep with bags of food, kitchen equipment, toiletries and an invitation to our group. They joined us and became part of our family - visiting the beach for the first time and sharing lots of fun activities. Advice was sought and within 6 months the change in status meant they could be placed in a small flat, a place of their own.

Lisa was a shy local mum who lacked confidence when meeting people she didn't know. One day she plucked up courage to walk through the door and has never left. Her confidence has grown, and she is now the paid session leader and has also gained another job because of her experience. These are just three of the people in that picture, but at Daniel's Den we are here to offer Good News to the community. We aim to live this message out and who knows the countless lives that have been changed because of Daniel's Den!

When the pandemic hit in early 2020, we had to close our sessions early because many of our volunteers were elderly

and vulnerable and so were our families. We took our work online as we wanted to bring the Good News to people in their homes. I think when John Wesley talked about 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can' it meant in any way and this includes Zoom, Facebook and of course Funny Bunny - our ambassador.

DANIEL'S DEN AT HOME

Here are a couple of stories of lives impacted by 'Daniel's Den at Home' in the pandemic - this is the tip of the iceberg.

One of our mums had a college friend who had moved to Manchester from India in November 2019. They didn't know anybody in England and because of the pandemic her little boy had never met any white person face to face. The little boy had real stranger anxiety and would not speak to anyone on a Zoom call with family members. An invitation was offered to them to join Daniel's Den and I remember the very first day that this little boy arrived at our Zoom session - he screamed and hid behind his mum for the whole 30 minutes. He was terrified as he'd never met new people, but we smiled, we offered a warm welcome. He popped his head out in the next session and started to smile. Since then, he has blossomed and flourished and his mum says 'you offered a welcome and safe place for him and now he will talk to anybody'. A two year-old's life impacted by Daniel's Den.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Another day we were giving out craft packs outside a church in a really challenging community. We were starting to pack our things away when I noticed a woman walking on the other side of the street, pushing a buggy. I waved at her and beckoned her to come over to collect a pack knowing that it was full of Good News fun activities. I don't know what that woman thought when she saw this crazy woman waving at her, but she walked up to the traffic lights, crossed the road and came to see us.

As she approached us, we smiled and greeted her, and we noticed there was a sense of anxiety about this lady. We looked in the buggy and there was a four-month-old baby lying there and immediately we thought of the session we were running called 'Bumps, Babies and Brushes' - a session for people who'd given birth during the pandemic and who might be feeling more vulnerable because they hadn't had the opportunity to meet with other people.

This lady started to share how pleased she was to see some friendly faces - she was living in a women's refuge having had to escape domestic violence. She shared how stressed and anxious she was about the future and we asked if we could pray for her and she said yes. As we prayed, tears rolled down her face and she went on her way and we promised we would be in contact. Within a week she'd moved into temporary accommodation and we took a car full of gifts and clothing donated by our families. I contacted the local Methodist Church and the Salvation Army in that community who were running food banks to ask them to offer food support for that family. It's being there for the one - for one family - making a difference - that's what Daniel's Den is all about.

It's not just children or families - it's also our volunteers. We have an incredible team of volunteers, many of whom came to Daniel's Den with their baby and have never left. One mum was too nervous to come owing to postnatal depression, but plucked up the courage with an invitation from a friend. She came; she loved it, she grew in confidence and volunteered for 8 years. She then went on to study for a degree and now has a full-time job as the head of a data team in a secondary school. She says: 'Jo - you gave me the opportunity to have a go, to

meet new people and gain confidence.' This is about being Good News.

Another volunteer was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer four years ago and she was determined to live life to the full. Having a purpose and serving the needs of others encouraged her to get up each day. After her sudden death from COVID-19 earlier this year, her family were astonished to see all that she had achieved. Thank you Emma!

Creating memories. Impacting lives. Building community. Making a difference to one family at a time. Being Good News to the community!

Daniel's Den is one of 20,000+ toddler groups across the UK being Good News in the community and we have a vision to see a toddler group being within walking distance of every family of the nation (or small car journey in a rural situation). We recognise that people need a place where they can feel welcomed, supported, encouraged and loved.

Jo Gordon is the founder and CEO of Daniel's Den, a parent and toddler charity. A Yorkshire lady at heart, Jo came to London to be a primary school teacher but is now devoting her time into bringing about her vision for having a parent and toddler group within walking distance of every family in the UK.



danielsden.org.uk



GOOD NEWS TO BE CELEBRATED AND SHARED!

Marian Izzard

MARIAN IZZARD, FORMER DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF SJI, TAKES A LOOK BACK AT A SNAPSHOT OF THE MINISTRY OF THE LATE REV DR ROB FROST.

As SJI (Share Jesus International) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year (see page 16), we thought that we should also take this opportunity to look back a little further as we reflect, give thanks and celebrate the ministry of the late Revd Dr Rob Frost and how his ministry has impacted many lives and left a deep and lasting legacy. I have been asked to write this as I was very much involved at the hub of the many and varied touring projects, Easter People, missions and events that took place over 20 years. So, it's a bit of a trip down memory lane! There is much to be said and this article will not be able to do justice to the wide

and ranging ministry in which Rob was engaged, so I will just be looking at a snapshot - taking a look at the touring projects and Easter People.

HOW IT ALL STARTED – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Rob had a passion for evangelism ever since he was a student at Cliff College prior to theological college in Manchester where he trained for the Methodist Ministry. It was during his training that he gathered around him a group of evangelical students and, during the college holidays, he would engage them in missions - including beach and village missions.

In his early years of ministry he toured parts of the country with the Gospel Roadshow in 1981. This was a presentation of drama sketches, with a small team conveying the gospel in a creative and imaginative style in Methodist churches.

Rob then began a ministry of presenting the gospel nationally by touring the country with a number of tours. It started with Daybreak which presented the Easter story in music and drama and toured in 1983. This was followed by Visions which focussed on the work of the Holy Spirit - and was presented to a 'sold out' venue at the NEC in Birmingham.

In 1986, Rob was released by the Methodist Church to work as a full

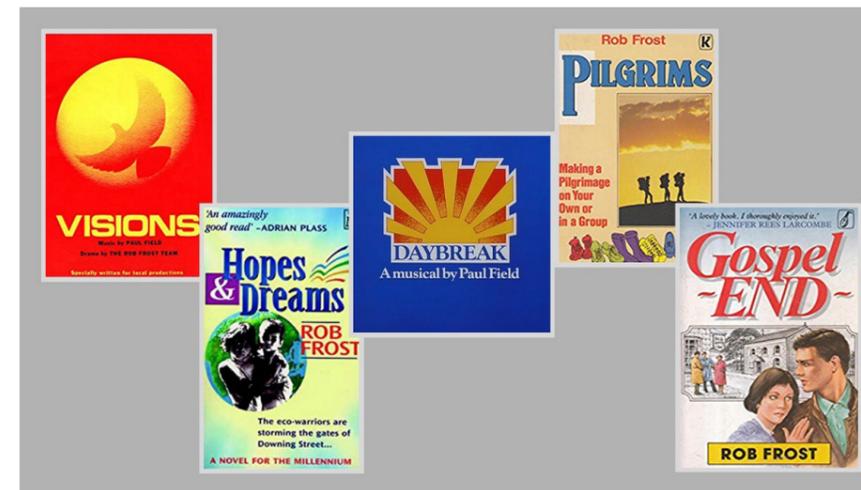
time national evangelist. From then on, a whole string of touring projects, missions, events and initiatives such as Easter People emerged which would span over the next 20 years.

AN OPPORTUNITY

It is amazing to look back and to see how God lines up people, places and opportunities to enable things to happen! I happened to be in the right place at the right time when I was asked if I would like to work on a venture with Rob Frost and his team back in September 1987. I was told that this was a short term opportunity that would be for around 6 months to a year. Little did I know then, that this 'short term opportunity' would span out to be 22 years!

It was a rollercoaster of an adventure, with many highs, lows, interesting twists and turns, 'living on the edge of your faith' stuff - but also an immense privilege and an incredible opportunity.

I was initially asked to work as a project co-ordinator for the touring project: 'Breaking Bread' - which was the liturgy of the Methodist communion service, set to music and interspersed with drama sketches, dance movements and poetry. The whole purpose was to bring a little more life and meaning to the act of communion by engaging in the creative arts. Breaking Bread became a national tour, touring to over 80 church venues up and down the country at weekends in 1988 & 1989.



TOURING PROJECTS

The vision for all the national touring projects was to present something on a particular theme which was creative, imaginative and engaging, which would ignite enthusiasm amongst church folk at each venue to get involved. Much of this involvement was as 'a local cast' - in some aspect of the presentation whether it was in drama, dance or as part of a local choir. Folk were drawn from across a circuit or several circuits for one of the venues. A whole package of resources was produced to accompany each tour so that local people could then take these and use them to put on their own presentation using some or all of the elements at a later stage. This enabled the gospel message to be communicated in an engaging and accessible way.

The key to the success of each tour location was to ensure that the local co-ordinator was 'one of Rob's mates'. This term referred to a whole band of men and women up and down the country whom Rob knew and could rely upon. These 'mates' were his 'movers and shakers' who could mobilise and make things happen at the local level and who believed in Rob's vision and trusted him.

Rob toured with a small team to every venue on a tour and his role was to present an evangelistic message at some point during the presentation. The touring projects that followed Breaking Bread were:

- **Pilgrims** (1990 & 1991) explored prayer as a journey, by way of a pilgrimage. Local leaders at each venue were assigned to lead small pilgrim groups along a short walking route and to pray together at
- **Gospel End** (1992) was staged as a play and toured to around 50 large theatre venues. It was the story of a newly appointed minister to a very traditional, small congregation in a Methodist chapel with plenty of recognisable characters! Following the sudden collapse of the chapel roof, the congregation were forced to move their worship to a function room in the nearby pub. This provoked challenge and change to discover what faith and worship was really all about.
- **Burning Questions** (1993) was an evangelistic resource - featuring questions often posed by not yet believers. Each question was addressed using a Bible passage to convey truth in a creative mixture of songs written by Paul Field and sketches by Stephen Deal. The gospel was presented in a lively, entertaining and non-threatening way as a national tour and then made available for church groups to use themselves.
- **Jubilate** (1996) retold the story of Jesus, staged in large open air spaces up and down the country. Its style was similar to a Passion Play and drew audiences of hundreds of people. Each local coordinator had to source a donkey for the Palm Sunday procession, but some venues had to make do with a horse!
- **Hopes & Dreams** (1999) was a musical for the millennium. This was based on the Lord's Prayer which featured music from Paul Field, drama sketches from Stephen Deal,

particular points. This culminated in a prayer celebration at the end of the pilgrimage at each venue.

along with dance movements from Jacqui Frost. This toured to around 50 venues in the UK and was hugely successful in terms of the 'buy in' to the concept. All venues were filled to capacity, and in Truro the take up was such that they put on two shows on a Saturday! Afterwards, many churches then used the resources to put on their own presentation locally and very successfully in the year 2000.

- **Dangerous Journey** followed in (2000) and was the story of John Bunyan and how that related to the pilgrimage of faith for us all.
- **Here and Now** (2002) was the follow on to Hopes and Dreams, based on the teaching of the Beatitudes.

Rob always saw his work as a movement - having life, energy and purpose, with Jesus at the centre. Rob's vision was to see renewal in hearts and lives of individuals, in the life of the local Methodist church and nationally in the Methodist Church across the Connexion.

EASTER PEOPLE

I am sure that Easter People - as an annual event - taking place just after the Easter weekend, meant different things to different people. Whether it was the solid Bible teaching, Spirit-led worship celebrations, interesting seminars, late night fringe entertainment, quality fellowship, sharing together with thousands of others, or a time out with family or friends beside the sea.

For many, this week long event was a time of refreshment, blessing and sharing with like-minded Christians from all around the country who were keen to see renewal in their own local churches. It was also a time to have fun, make new friends and to be challenged, changed and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a place where God touched the lives of individuals, couples, families, youth groups and churches, leading them into new areas of faith, mission and ministry.

The first Easter People was in 1998 at Camber Sands holiday camp in Sussex. It was thought to be a 'one off' event for people in the Methodist Church to attend with their families as there was no other all age event for Methodist people at the time. The event had the blessing of the Methodist Church and the late Revd





Dr Donald English led the Bible Studies on the 'Four Alls of Methodism'. This first event attracted some 1200 people and it was clear that it wouldn't be the last! The following year Easter People returned to Camber Sands attracting 1800 people. Faced with a growing event, a brave, bold and radical decision was made to move the event to a seaside town and to host the event in the town rather than in the confines of a holiday camp. In 1990 Easter People moved to Llandudno, utilizing the conference centre, local churches and schools. This enabled the event to engage with the local churches and serve to be a witness to the town. Folk had the option to choose their accommodation to suit their budget, from 4 star hotels to 'kibbutz' style accommodation (sleeping on the church hall floor) - which was ideal for many youth groups.

From then on Easter People each year was located in a place beside the sea - alternating between the resorts of Llandudno, Torquay, Scarborough, Bournemouth and Blackpool. Many who sampled the event one year brought a few others the following year and soon large groups from churches were attending year by year.

The unique selling point or 'USP' of the event was that it was largely run by volunteers - who provided the basic infrastructure to make it happen. Some came with specialist expertise and experience to source and operate equipment such as the PA or lighting

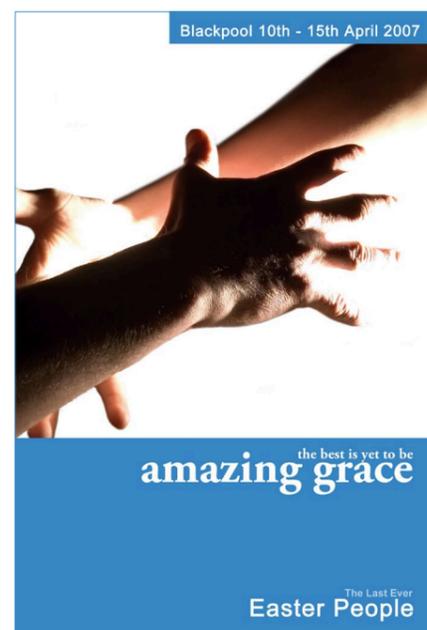
rig. Whilst others sourced toys for the children's work, brought together a worship band or made banners and backdrops for the various venues. People were also encouraged to volunteer and get involved in all aspects of the event, from stewarding, helping with children's or youth work, being part of a prayer or pastoral support team, to being part of the 'tech team' or the outreach team.

Rob was very much an investor in people, not only giving them time, but in offering them opportunities to develop their skill base, or to have a go at something new. He saw the potential in individuals, even if they couldn't see it themselves.

In 2000, the late Easter weekend ran into the early May Bank holiday, so an extended Easter People took place in Bournemouth and the event had grown to nearly 10,000 attendees. Multiple venues across the town and at the end of the pier were filled to capacity and folk had the opportunity of selecting different evening celebrations according to their preference: from 'quiet and reflective' to 'all age interactive' and 'radical and rocky' with all types in between.

As capacity for the event was at a peak, it was decided to split Easter People into 3 venues at Llandudno/Southport, Scarborough and Torquay from 2001. Each event was to be led by a team under the direction of a Site Team Leader. Rob was released to visit and preach at each of the venues during the Easter People week.

The final Easter People was held in Blackpool in 2007. It was decided that the 20th anniversary of the event would be a time to draw it to a close, before it became 'too stale'. Alongside that, the Easter school holidays were changing to be the first two weeks of April and the conference centres were no longer able to offer a discount to us as a trade off from the accommodation taken up in the town. The last Easter People was an amazing event which was stacked to capacity at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool. The theme that year was 'Amazing Grace'. Nobody knew then how timely that decision had been, since Rob died just 7 months later.



“
Rob was very much an investor in people, not only giving them time, but in offering them opportunities to develop their skill base, or to have a go at something new. He saw the potential in individuals, even if they couldn't see it themselves.
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A LEGACY IN PEOPLE

Rob always believed that the legacy of his work was in people - in changed hearts and lives who would be encouraged, equipped and enabled to serve God in so many and varied ways. Many folk have looked back at Easter People saying it was a pivotal part in their lives - whether it was at a particular event or over several years. Stories from countless folk have shared of how God met with them: either for the first time, by being called into full time ministry or a new direction in ministry or mission. Many have testified how Easter People was transformational in the lives of their churches too.

Two other major pieces of Rob's ministry which deserve at least a brief mention are the Share Jesus Mission Teams that took place every year from 1985 to 2004 involving hundreds of people working in teams for a week of mission and outreach alongside local churches in a designated area, and the Seed Team programme which ran from 1988 to 2000 enabling 268 people to be part of a year-long mission team.

So many people, including myself would not be where they are now if it were not for the opportunity that Rob

gave them in his ministry. Rob would be thrilled today to see the fruition of the seeds sown in the lives of countless individuals. He would be the first to give God the glory and then would probably say something like, 'Well, it was all worth it then!'

Marian Izzard is General Secretary, Administrator of MET and Editor of MET Connexion magazine. She currently lives on the Isle of Wight with her husband John who is the Superintendent Minister of the island.



RESOURCE REVIEWS

PURPOSEFUL SEXUALITY: A SHORT CHRISTIAN INTRODUCTION

Ed Shaw

London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2021
ISBN: 978-1-78974-283-1 | pp. 66, £7.99

This short and easy to read book by Ed Shaw is a great tool for us as we try to make sense of sexuality in a culture which, as Ed suggests, has quickly moved from inventing the very concept of sexuality, past the binary labels, to a world which now embraces a freedom of fluidity.

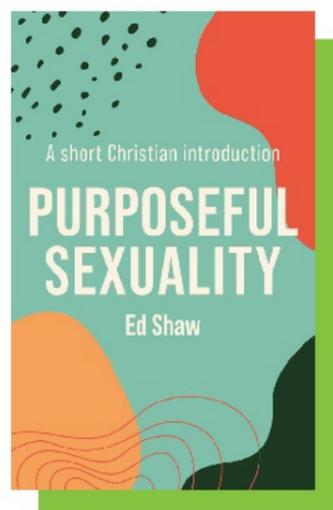
Ed intelligently argues that many Christians are asking the wrong questions about sexuality and his angle is to approach Scripture asking the question, 'What is our sexuality for?' Through doing this in the book, he quickly walks us past the popular secular responses into a much deeper and mature Christian response.

Initially he focuses on the value of sexuality to marriage, with the three traditional answers of marital union, child bearing and sharing pleasure. But as a same sex attracted Christian, Ed doesn't stop at the marriage explanation, being acutely aware himself that there has to be something more behind God's gift of sexuality to us all. He goes on to explore what the purpose of our sexuality is, trying to find an answer that would resonate with those who are single (whatever the circumstances behind their singleness) and this is where the book challenges us to think outside of the box.

Ed shares how two sentences from the writing of John Piper challenged him to explore how being a sexual being allows us to understand fully the total intensity of God's passionate and painful love for us. He explores this sensitively and opens up the mind to see the purpose of our sexuality, even for those who will never enjoy a sexual relationship with anyone. The book is an easy read, also practical with two chapters dedicated to considering how understanding the purpose of sexuality helps us to live our lives practically.

I would recommend this as a useful book for anyone in pastoral ministry, particularly those working with singles, but also as an essential book for anyone working with young people.

Reviewed by Sarah Sedgwick. Sarah is founder of Transformed Ministries, a ministry dedicated to supporting Christians with same sex attraction and the churches who support them.



50 LESSONS IN MINISTRY: REFLECTIONS ON FIFTY YEARS OF MINISTRY

Paul Beasley-Murray

London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2020
ISBN: 978-0-232-53468-9 | pp. 213, £12.99

The subtitle, 'Reflections on fifty years of ministry', is an excellent description. Paul Beasley-Murray was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1970. Over the past 50 years he has gained a wealth of experience, especially through the highs and lows of diverse contexts. So much of his wisdom is relevant to Methodism, as well as to other churches.

'50 Lessons in Ministry' is like fifty books in one. In both theological and practical ways, it touches on many aspects of church life and Christian ministry, and is engaging, thought-provoking and inspiring. Each chapter contains challenging things to consider for our own churches and ministries.

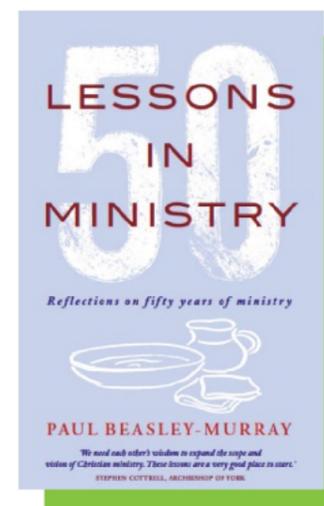
Paul Beasley-Murray acknowledges that life within the church and the world has changed significantly since he was ordained, and he has sought to rise to the challenge of learning new ways to serve God and his people, and to pass on the baton.

This book, along with his ministry, is firmly rooted in the Bible and upon faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has always sought to keep the gospel, with its requirement of repentance of sin and belief in Jesus' saving work, as an essential aspect of church life, wanting others to see Jesus. He considers that through focusing on growing disciples, numerical increase will take place. Christ-like disciples recognise that there is a world to serve as well as to win, so it is vital that they are equipped to fulfil their ministry in the world.

The book's end chapters are most important, as they set the scene for all that lies within. Ministry begins with being rooted in the call of God, and ends with being rooted in the grace of God.

With 50 chapters there are more themes than this review gives space for, including Church Power Games, Team Ministry, Monday Morning Blues, Spiritual Sloth, and Retirement to name a few. This book is certainly a worthwhile read.

Reviewed by the Revd Derek Balsdon, who is a Methodist Presbyterian, and serves as the Development Worker for MET



LOVE IN ACTION: BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO THOSE WE SERVE

Aimee Nott

A community tends to their crops in Manhokwe, Malawi

ALL WE CAN'S COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, AIMEE NOTT, EXPLORES HOW SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL GO HAND IN HAND.

Love. Collaboration. Integrity.

These three values are at the heart of All We Can - guiding principles which underpin all that we do, and imbue all aspects of our work. It might seem odd for a charity to list 'love' as one of its core values. After all, in modern culture the word can conjure up images which feel characterless and banal at best - love hearts, stuffed teddy bears, Valentine's Day cards. To some, the word 'love' can seem so closely linked to romantic notions that it may be perceived as an inappropriate value for a charity.

But all this misses the core of what 'love' truly is. It misses the unflinching, unwavering, unshakeable love that God, in Jesus Christ, first showed to each and every one of us. It misses the relentlessness of love: its grit, its determination and its resilience. The kind of love which compels us into a meaningful relationship with one another - which drives our actions - and is the very oxygen of the All We Can movement. We seek to express this love in all that we do - from our relationships with local partners across the globe, to our interactions with each other as staff members.

The love which All We Can seeks to embody is born out of the Good News of the gospel. We exist to serve those living in some of the world's most vulnerable and marginalised communities - and as a charity rooted in the Methodist Church, we are called to bear witness to this love. The place where these two intersect is how All We Can seeks to bring the Good News of the gospel to those we serve.

This thinking takes many of its cues from 'integral mission'. The Lausanne Movement defines integral mission as "the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ" and includes the affirmation that there is no biblical dichotomy between evangelistic and social responsibility in bringing Christ's peace to the poor and oppressed. It recognises both evangelism and social responsibility as essential, central aspects of the Good News, wholly indivisible from one another. The term originated in revolutionary 1970s Latin America, but simply names a much older understanding of the gospel rooted in scripture and the life of Jesus.

The Ecuadorian theologian René Padilla, often considered the 'father' of integral mission, compared evangelism and social responsibility to the two wings of a plane - both equally important, and both essential if passengers are to arrive at their destination. When we bear practical witness to the gospel, by embodying the call of Micah 6:8 - doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly - our work can have profound evangelistic

consequences, by demonstrating the love of Christ in action.

This isn't about forcing people to convert to Christianity - it is about meeting people where they are, and seeking to see their potential fulfilled. We embody the love and teachings of Jesus by putting the marginalised at the centre of our work, just as he did. We take seriously the command to love our neighbours - wherever they might live. The communities through which All We Can works are without a doubt some of the most under-served in the world. From disabled children in Ethiopia, to farmers reckoning with the climate crisis in Zimbabwe, to teenage mothers without education in Malawi - we work in challenging contexts, where physical needs are often unmet, and communities grapple regularly with hunger and extreme poverty.

In the face of these challenges, All We Can works with talented local partners from across the globe. Our calling is to see a world where every person's God-given potential is fulfilled; where each and every one of us can know life in all its fullness, and make the most of the gifts and opportunities with which they are blessed. We work with local partners who share this passion. Each of these local partners are deeply embedded within their communities. They know intimately the issues with which those they serve are faced, and are committed to walking alongside the most vulnerable in order to reach community driven solutions to these issues. All We Can is committed

to doing what Jesus did: to working with and serving people regardless of their race, religion and gender, and to meeting them and their need in a kind and servant-hearted way. Our local partners share this vision, and are from a variety of different backgrounds. In many contexts this work is driven by church based Christian partners.

EAGLES, a local partner with which All We Can works in Malawi, are one such partner. They are the outworking of the evangelical faith of the Living Waters Church denomination, Malawi. EAGLES serve communities through hundreds of local Living Waters churches, with work spanning a range of critical issues - including food security, livelihood development, caring for elderly community members, and working to protect the environment. Founded by Living Waters Church in Malawi, following a devastating food crisis in 2002, their work is driven by an understanding that sharing the Good News, without taking into account the needs of a community, is a fruitless endeavor. To put it simply - their work is faith in practice.

During a recent conversation, Victor, EAGLES' Director, explained: 'what does faith mean, if it is not relevant to people in need? If we turn a blind eye, what is the meaning of our faith?' There are several key passages of scripture which guide EAGLES' work - none more so than Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners

The Good News referenced in Isaiah is not just the promise of salvation; it is the meeting of physical needs, here on this earth. It is life-giving freedom. It is social justice. It brings with it the hope of joy, opportunity, and potential fulfilled.

But how does this inform the day to day work of our local partners on the ground? Guided by love, and their vision for the local church in every district of Malawi to work with their communities to bring change for those most in need, EAGLES train and support churches so that they in turn can help hundreds of communities. Through their 'church envisioning' process, churches of all denominations



Thilizi and her grandmother sift beans in Mchacha, Malawi

are taught about their important and influential position within communities. With a keen focus on scripture, churches grapple with their own identity, and examine the gifts, talents and skills they have at their disposal. They are asked the all-important question - what do you have to share with your community? Just as Jesus fed the 5000 by sharing what the crowd already possessed, so too can churches bring about remarkable transformation, by utilising the assets they already have.

The resulting impact is remarkable. For example, in each of the communities where EAGLES is working in Malawi, churches are sharing the Good News with the most vulnerable not only within their walls - but by bearing practical witness to it, and developing community driven solutions to local issues. The breadth of solutions devised is quite incredible. After EAGLES' intervention, churches have been known to set up HIV/Aids support groups in their region; organise savings and loans schemes for vulnerable villagers; provide school fees for children whose families are unable to afford their education; organise community based childcare; work together with local authorities to construct roads to otherwise impassable areas; provide support to those in prison and hospitals... the list goes on. All We Can supports EAGLES in their community and church mobilisation work, enabling them to train church leaders as community change agents. All We Can also helps EAGLES to strengthen and develop themselves as an organisation, so that the life-changing work they do with local churches can continue to transform the lives of those most in need.

EAGLES are just one example of how All We Can's local partners embody integral mission in order to share the Good News. Our commitment to sharing the Good News in this way permeates all aspects of our work - from our long term

development work with local partners like EAGLES, to our 'Church CAN' initiative with the Global Relationships team of the Methodist Church (which strengthens the capacity of churches across the globe to improve their effectiveness as agents of change in their own contexts) - to our work with churches and organisations in the UK who share our commitment to seeing every person's potential fulfilled.

We see God moving in phenomenal ways throughout our work at All We Can. From the outpouring of generosity for our Emergency Coronavirus Appeal, which has impacted the lives of more than 194,000 people (and counting!), to the incredible number of people drawn together in joy and worship through online events such as The Big Church Sing, there are myriad ways in which we can see the Holy Spirit moving. When we allow ourselves to be used by God in service of the most vulnerable, evangelism and social justice join hands to achieve astonishing ends.

At the core of the Good News is Christ's unshakeable, steadfast love for each and every one of us. With service to the most vulnerable and marginalised at the heart of All We Can's work, integral mission offers a framework through which to put this into action. It goes without saying that the gospel is good news for us all. But if practical love for our neighbours and care for their physical needs is removed from our understanding of the gospel - then as Jimmy Likagwa, EAGLES' Church Mobilisation Coordinator said: 'that is no longer Good News. That is something else.'

Aimee Nott is All We Can's Communications and PR Manager. Aimee has worked for All We Can since 2017, across fundraising, marketing and communications. Having grown up in South London, she now lives in Reading.



PRAYING ALWAYS

Roz Addington, MET's Prayer Secretary



WEEK 1 | THE CHURCH

- 1. Repentance:** For the church to fall to its knees, seeking God and his ways; for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit and a transformation of the church across our land (John 16:8 & 13; 1 John 1:9).
- 2. Church Leaders:** For the President and Vice-President of Conference, Richard Teal and Carolyn Lawrence, for Chairs of District and Superintendents as well as our Presbyters, Deacons, Lay workers, Local Preachers and Leaders of Worship (James 3:1; Micah 6:8; Joshua 1:7-8).
- 3. Scriptural Holiness:** For a return to Scriptural holiness and a renewed passion for preaching the gospel; for a thirst to read Scripture and for prayer to become central to everything happening in our churches (2 Timothy 4:1-5; Matthew 7:21).
- 4. Mission and Vision:** For renewed vision and a seeking of God's will for the church; for empowerment of the Holy Spirit, revitalising mission and evangelism to our communities without fear of discrimination and political correctness. Pray also for good decisions to be made at Conference in June (Acts 1:8; Psalm 118:6-7; Romans 10:13-14).
- 5. For the work of MET:** For the 3R's: re-kindling of the Wesleyan vision, renewing the Wesleyan vision and raising up of a new generation of Wesleys; for the Remaining Faithful network; for David Hull as Chair; Derek Balsdon as Development Worker; the Trustees; all on the Executive (Isaiah 41:9-13; Hebrews 10:22-24; 2 Timothy 1:7).
- 6. Children and Young people:** Pray for Nathan Veall and all those who work with children and young people, for God's inspiration and guidance; for our youngsters to learn the importance of putting God first and seeing the relevance of him in their lives; the initiative of WHOTWAY (What Happened On The Way) (Deuteronomy 11:18-21; Matthew 19:13-14; 1 Timothy 4:12).
- 7. Protection for our young people:** Pray that our young people would be guarded against wrong teachings given in secular society and for enablement to discern lies, deceit and erroneous philosophies and ideologies; for courage to stand firm on their beliefs and faith (Isaiah 43:1-3; Psalm 145:18-19; Deuteronomy 31:6 & 8).



WEEK 2 | THE COUNTRY

- 1. Repentance:** Pray for a realisation, nationally, that science cannot hold all the answers to the difficulties our country is facing and so turn to the Lord for solutions; for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin, repentance, and a transformation of lives (1 John 1:9; 2 Chronicles 30:9; James 4:7-10).
- 2. The Government:** Pray for Boris Johnson and all members of the cabinet in the policies they make. Pray for a seeking for God. Pray for Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Matt Hancock, Health Secretary (1 Timothy 2:1-4; Psalm 2:10-12).
- 3. COVID-19:** Pray for relief from this relentless disease and its effects; effectiveness in the vaccines; a discerning of false information; those suffering from 'long COVID'; for our health service workers and all other frontline workers (Isaiah 40:28-31; Matthew 11:28-29; Philippians 4:13).
- 4. Charities and Foodbanks:** For the necessary funding and support in reaching those who are struggling with many and varied needs; those reaching out to the marginalised and vulnerable; the homeless (Proverbs 31:8-9; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18).
- 5. Gangs, Knife Crime and County Lines:** Pray for youngsters who are caught up in gang culture and the related problems of knife crime and drug abuse; those trapped in working for County Lines; the police dealing with these issues; the breaking up these organisations and bringing to justice those exploiting the vulnerable (Psalm 140:6-8 & 12; Psalm 9:9; Psalm 34:18).
- 6. Brexit:** Pray for all trade deals, both new and ongoing; for companies to have the necessary paperwork required and for delays at borders to disappear (Proverbs 3:5-6; Proverbs 11:14; Isaiah 55:8).
- 7. Christians in the workplace:** Pray for Christians struggling to stand up for Christian values in their places of work, especially for those in Parliament and the media. Pray for courage and boldness to speak out, without fear of discrimination; pray for protection against false accusations and lies (Joshua 1:9; Psalm 27:1; 1 Corinthians 16:13).



WEEK 3 | GLOBAL WARMING AND THE NATURAL WORLD

- 1. Repentance:** Ask for forgiveness for not being good stewards of our planet: the human ravaging of its resources; destruction of its eco-systems; pollution of the land and sea, the resultant reduction in biodiversity, ruin of habitats and endangering animal and plant species (Isaiah 24:4-6).
- 2. Give thanks:** Give thanks for initiatives that are happening around the world to address some of the problems: the planting of new areas of rainforest; the great green wall across Africa, bringing life back to Africa's degraded landscapes; conservation areas on both land and sea and the many projects supported by A Rocha International. Pray for fresh such initiatives (Genesis 2:15).
- 3. Carbon Emissions:** Pray for a reduction in carbon emissions and for an urgency among governments to act collaboratively. Pray for new technologies to reduce drastically these emissions; for financial commitment from wealthier nations to enable poorer nations to make greener and more sustainable choices (Jeremiah 2:7).
- 4. Rising sea levels:** Pray for those whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by rising sea levels, especially those living in vulnerable areas. Pray for aid in re-location of sufferers to prevent climate refugees (Proverbs 31:8-9).
- 5. Rainforests:** Pray for those countries where illegal logging is rife. Pray for funding to tackle the problem and to save the loss of precious habitats and the prevention of the extinction of increasingly rare species of wildlife. Pray also for the resultant problem of increased carbon emissions and rising sea levels (Nehemiah 9:5b-6).
- 6. Plastics:** Pray for commitment worldwide to reduce and even eliminate all plastics; for new materials to be found that are environmentally friendly; for political will around the world to bring in legislation and funding to make this happen (Galatians 6:2).
- 7. Changing weather patterns:** Pray for areas where there is increasing hardship owing to flooding, drought and the associated problems of forest and moorland fires and crop failures. Pray for new strains of crops to withstand extremes of weather and for farmers across the globe who are coping with these extremes of weather. Cry to the Lord for mercy (2 Chronicles 7:14).

It is not COVID alone I feel God is using, but also natural disasters. As I was praying at the end of last year about all this, God gave me the following words. In the light of these, I fear that the whole situation could get worse before it gets better, unless people turn to the Lord in repentance.

'The country is being shaken. The people need to come to me in their distress, so I can come and heal their hearts. Pray, oh pray, for people to turn to me, to fall to their knees in repentance and come to my open arms. I long to comfort



WEEK 4 | WORLD ISSUES

- 1. The persecuted church:** Pray for those countries across the world where people are persecuted, detained and tortured for their faith. Pray for the perpetrators; for detainees to be released. Pray for change, enabling freedom for all people to worship as they choose (1 Peter 3:14; Roman 8:35-39; Jeremiah 20:11).
- 2. World poverty:** Pray for people across the world living in abject poverty; for governmental bodies to tackle these issues head on along with the associated problems of starvation, inadequate sanitation, disease and unsatisfactory shelter; for all refugees (Psalm 55:22; Proverbs 14:31; 1 John 3:17-18).
- 3. Relief and aid agencies:** Pray for aid agencies seeking to alleviate suffering across the globe. Pray for adequate funding; for permanent solutions to be found so that all peoples be able to find security and peace (Isaiah 58:9b-10; Psalm 18:1-2; Jeremiah 32:17).
- 4. America:** Pray for unity across the nation as the new administration begins to take hold. Pray for President Joe Biden; pray for people to set aside differences to build a united country and for truth to prevail (Romans 14:19; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Hebrews 12:14-15).
- 5. Hong Kong:** Pray for the people in that land as China seeks to take a tighter grip on the country. Pray for those detained and for the British government to take a strong stand against the injustices that are taking place (Proverbs 31:8-9; Amos 5:24).
- 6. Russia:** Pray for Alexei Navalny in detention along with the thousands of protesters standing up for democracy; for the exposure of injustices perpetrated by Putin; for truth and democracy to triumph; freedom for the church (Psalm 9:9; 1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 55:22-23).
- 7. Myanmar:** Pray for the election results of the country to be upheld and a return to the embryonic democracy in the country; the military coup to be overturned; the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the elected civilian leader, and President Win Myint. Pray for an end to the crack down and the use of live ammunition on protesters (Romans 1:18; Psalm 72:4; Psalm 103:6).

If you wish to contact Roz with any prayer requests then please email her at: roz.addington1@btinternet.com

them and hold them in my arms. They are my precious, precious children.'

We must pray for people to turn to God, seeking him for solutions to these multifarious problems. For people to realise their need for God, to turn away from the 'ways of the world' (Romans 12:2) and seek his face. God wants none to perish, but for all to reach out to him in repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Unless we do this, the consequences may not be all that we would wish, and further disaster may come upon us.

SEE HOW GREAT A FLAME ASPIRES

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

See how great a flame aspires,
kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesu's love the nations fires,
sets the kingdoms on a blaze.
To bring fire on earth he came;
kindled in some hearts it is:
O that all might catch the flame,
all partake the glorious bliss!

When he first the work begun,
small and feeble was his day;
now the word does swiftly run,
now it wins its widening way;
more and more it spreads and grows
ever mighty to prevail;
sin's strongholds it now o'erthrows,
shakes the trembling gates of hell.

Heirs of God, your Saviour praise!
He the door has opened wide;
he has given the word of grace,
Jesu's word is glorified;
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
he alone the work has wrought;
worthy is the work of him,
him who spoke a world from nought.

Saw you not the cloud arise,
little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,
hangs o'er all the thirsty land:
lo, the promise of a shower
drops already from above;
but the Lord will shortly pour
all the Spirit of his love!



FROM THE CHAIR

The Revd Dr David A. Hull

Dear Friends,

How wonderful to have an edition of MET Connexion focussed on the gospel! Of course, we seek always to be focussed on the gospel, but this edition is explicitly so. 'I am not ashamed of the gospel', the apostle Paul famously wrote, 'because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes' (Romans 1:15). I am sure the Lord is looking for - and calls us to be - people who are not ashamed of the gospel: the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel.

This gospel has ramifications for every aspect of life. I am fascinated by the fact that, having made that bold statement about the gospel, Paul immediately went on to pen one of the most controversial passages of the whole New Testament, describing how God is at work within the present age, as true today as it was then: 'the wrath of God is being revealed'. He described a downward spiral in which human beings turn away from God, exchanging his glory for idolatry and his truth for lies, and drift further and further away from him. It is a terrifying thought. It brings to mind science fiction images of an astronaut being cut free from the space ship and left to drift helplessly into space. It is a story that is illustrated daily in the pages of newspapers, on the airwaves and over the internet.

The gospel tells us how Jesus stepped into that downward spiral to reconcile us to God through his death and resurrection. It is because the gospel has ramifications for every aspect of life that Paul challenges all Christians everywhere: 'Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). Living in this world, we have been shaped by the pattern of that downward spiral more than we would wish, more than we realise. The Church can all too easily be shaped by it too and, because it is all so familiar to us, it is easy not to notice it happening. I'm always struck by the solution that Paul holds out: it begins with the renewing of our minds. May the Lord make us truly gospel-minded people!

Paul, both in Romans and in other letters, is clear that the implications of the gospel transform even our most intimate

relationships. This is the final edition of MET Connexion before this year's Conference, which is due to vote on the controversial God In Love Unites Us resolutions affirming cohabitation and same-sex marriage. Throughout these debates, we have encouraged evangelicals to remain within the Methodist Church for as long as possible - at least until the Conference makes its final decisions - though we recognise that some churches have found it necessary to seek to leave earlier if they are not to lose significant numbers of their members.

The strategy has been simple: 1) Speak out, calling the Church to remain faithful to its current teaching; 2) Build up, linking with others in your locality to strengthen one another in our common commitment to the gospel for all people and for all of life; 3) Count the cost, because there is often a cost for faithfulness; a number of churches, members and ministers have already discovered that the cost can be great indeed.

MET will continue to speak out and call the Church to remain faithful. When the Conference has made its final decisions, making it clear exactly what situation we face, we will then gather to seek the Lord's guidance for the next steps. We have been clear throughout that MET is committed to supporting all our members, whether the Lord leads them to stay in the Methodist Church or to seek to leave. For each, the all-important thing is to 'do whatever he tells you' (John 2:5).

The results of the Synod votes in these matters have been deeply concerning. They do at least show that there will be a very significant number of Methodists throughout the Connexion, even if a minority, who will be utterly at odds with the decisions, if the Conference votes the same way. There has been a strong feeling of bereavement shared by many as the results have become known. It is a feeling I have known for some time. I'm reminded that, towards the end of 2019, I attended a meeting about my own future within the Methodist Church at which I was clear that I had no intention of resigning, but I would not be able to continue to uphold the doctrine and discipline of the Church if it changed in the way that is proposed, and the response I received was greatly distressing. Afterwards, I had to drive across the country to my next meeting and hit heavy traffic. At one point we came to a complete standstill and I looked around. Following my satnav, I had just driven into Olney in Buckinghamshire and, amazingly, had stopped directly outside St Peter and St Paul's Church. It became a moment of wonderful comfort as I thought of the ministry of John Newton in that church and remembered the hymn written there by his great friend, William Cowper, 'God moves in a mysterious way':

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

May the Lord keep us faithful to the gospel in all its fullness.

At times 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' in our partnership in the gospel,

David



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