



THE
RECORD

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WELCOME TO THE APRIL RECORD



PRAY THAT YOU ARE KEEPING WELL. WE PRESENTLY FACE UNUSUAL AND UNCERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES.

At least from our own perspective. As a result, some of this month's *Record* is given over to the impact coronavirus is having on us as a church, and we include a pastoral letter on the situation from the Moderator of the General Assembly, the Rev Donnie G. MacDonald.

However, the main focus of this edition is the victory won by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ over sin and death. We celebrate his resurrection, and the living hope it gives us as we look forward to the unfading, imperishable inheritance that is to come (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Easter Sunday is likely to be marked in a different way this year. But we worship the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Jesus told his disciples: *'Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world'* (John 16:33).

The disciples who were scattered in fear later went forth to boldly preach the good news. The Holy Spirit who strengthened them is the same Holy Spirit we rely on as we face the days ahead. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). •

If you have any news articles please send them to dayspring.macleod@icloud.com.

Yours in Christ

John

**That in all things he might
have the pre-eminence**
Colossians 1:18

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A PASTORAL LETTER MARCH 17, 2020

BY **REV. DONNIE G. MACDONALD**
(MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY)

T HIS IS A VERY STRANGE TIME FOR EVERYONE. THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS, COVID-19, HAS IMPACTED THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD AND INCREASINGLY IS IMPACTING OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES HERE IN SCOTLAND. Over the past 24 hours the advice that we have been receiving from our politicians and our health authorities has changed, and we as a church have had to consider how to respond to that advice in order to be responsible, and to show Christian love and care to our congregations and our communities. The Free Church has its equivalent of a COBRA committee which has met, and will continue to meet on a regular basis, and we will seek to give you weekly updates as the situation develops.

We have had to make big decisions today which will make the way we operate as a church different to what we have been used to. But we consider all the measures we have taken to be absolutely necessary, and I promise you they have been taken very carefully and prayerfully, guided not only by medical advice but also by God's Word. We believe that the decisions we have made are in keeping with the sixth commandment as we seek to actively protect others from harm. In addition, Jesus tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves; these measures seek to do that. We are instructed to have the mind of Christ and to put others' interests before our own; these measures also seek to do that. We are told to love one another; we believe that these measures express that.

So, what is it that we have decided to do in response to this current situation?

CHURCH SERVICES

You will be aware that we have been advised to avoid large gatherings and to reduce social contact. This advice now includes gatherings of faith groups. We therefore have no option but to suspend all church services throughout the Free Church of Scotland, both for Sundays and mid-week meetings. This includes fellowship meetings, Bible studies, youth groups, everything that would normally be held in church halls or people's homes. I cannot stress enough however that although we may be suspending our normal worship services, we are not suspending worship. We will have to 'do church' in a different way. We will miss physically gathering together, but we can still gather together in worship as we tune into services online. Many churches are able to broadcast their services and will continue to do so even in the absence of a congregation, and the Mission Board will collate details of congregations that have that facility so that you can join in worship with them each Sunday. We would also encourage local Kirk Sessions to think of ways in which technology can be used to minister the Word to the congregations

under their care. This is also an opportunity to realise anew the beauty of family worship, holding services together at home. And if you are alone, use the phone or social media platforms to worship together with a friend, even if it is to read the Bible and pray together.

PASTORAL CARE

We are also advising that pastoral visitation be suspended. This will be very difficult for ministers and elders who instinctively want to visit the elderly, the sick and the bereaved. But it is no kindness to visit someone if you are possibly carrying a virus that could seriously compromise their health. In these circumstances it is an act of love not to visit. However, remember that even if we are suspending pastoral visitation, we are not suspending pastoral care. We just have to do it in a different way. This is a time when, more than ever, we need to look out for each other and look after each other. We all have a role to play in this. Phone each other, message each other, use emails and FaceTime to interact with each other. Modern technology has its downside, but in these circumstances, it can be a tool for great good as we seek to love one another as Christ commanded.

PRAYER

It will seem very odd not being able meet with each other for prayer. But again, I remind you that although we may be suspending mid-week prayer meetings, that is not the same as suspending prayer. We will pray together but in a different way. It is a lovely thing to pray with someone on the phone, or on Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, or any of the social media apps. We also ask that you spend a time each day praying privately for the situation we are currently facing. Pray for those who have contracted the virus, pray for those who are scared of catching the virus, pray that people would take the right precautions not to spread the virus. But I would ask you also to pray for those who have to treat those who have, or are suspected of having, the virus. Pray for our doctors and nurses and all our medical services. They already have a tough job, but it is potentially going to get much tougher. A little virus has reminded us of just how weak we are, and how much we are dependent upon an Almighty God.

The next few months may prove to be very difficult. We may find our activities restricted and we will largely be confined to our homes, but use the time wisely and well. Often we complain about not getting time with loved ones. Use this time to enjoy their company. Think of the folk that you meant to be in contact with over the years but have always been too busy; use this time to give them a phone. But also think of all the times we have wished that we had the opportunity to read our Bibles more and to pray more. Spend the time in the company of Jesus and grow in your relationship with God.

I'll finish by reminding you of the words written to the church in Philippi during a time of uncertainty:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

Every blessing to you all and we will speak again soon. •

LIFE

THE STREETS ARE QUIET, BUT THE RETAIL PARKS ARE HECTIC. IT'S A BIT LIKE CHRISTMAS EVE, BUT WITHOUT ANY ANTICIPATION OF HAPPINESS TO COME.

Away from the supermarket, there is an uneasy peace. More like the stillness of a cell than the rest of a Sabbath. It is disorientating, unnerving even. In some ways, life goes on. In others, it is on hold.

The threat is unseen, and it seems unquantifiable. How worried should we be? What is the proportionate response?

My day-job is in social care. At work, we quickly discovered that there is no handbook for this scenario. Contingency plans are written, then re-written almost every day as the situation changes.

Now coronavirus has achieved what even World Wars could not – our churches are closed. How do we live as a community of believers in these days?

We, in the long-privileged UK, are in the unusual position of facing precisely the same trial as our sisters and brothers in Iran, in China, in Italy. Though we have never been more separated from family and friends, we have never been more connected to other believers around the world. There is encouragement to be found in the heroic and gracious ways Christians in other cultures are facing this pandemic.

Social distancing is an act of fellowship and service which will counterbalance physical separation with spiritual nearness.

There is also humility to be gained as we confront the reality that we have put too much trust in princes, in whom there is no

salvation (Psalm 146). Meanwhile, our fellow-believers in Wuhan continue in utter dependence on God.

We do not know for how long life will be like this. In God's providence, there may be bereavement to grieve for and financial hardship to walk through. But we trust that, in time, this pandemic will pass. We should prepare for that day because we have to make sure that social distancing is temporary.

TECH TEMPTATION

Live streams of services and recordings of sermons are an enormous blessing to us just now. Man does not live by stockpiled pasta alone. The technology which allows us to continue to hear preaching and to pray together is a blessing which would not have been available if SARS had reached our shores 17 years ago. In fact, many rural communities have only been connected to fibre broadband within the last five years.

Photo by Sasha Freemind on Unsplash



TOGETHER, APART

Christian fellowship in the
face of coronavirus

BY THE EDITOR



Praise God for his grace in preparing us for COVID-19.

But virtual worship must not become a new habit.

The writer to the Hebrews knew that neglecting meeting together was a temptation the church would face (Hebrews 10:25). In our day, we are beginning to learn that — used unguardedly — the online world can create problems. A study published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine found that the people who spend most time on social media are twice as likely to feel socially isolated. The researchers noted that social media can displace face-to-face interaction and make people feel excluded. Excessive internet use in general has been linked to relationship problems and less participation in real-

Coronavirus has achieved what even World Wars could not — our churches are closed. How do we live as a community of believers in these days?

world communities. Yet, spending time online is attractive. Internet addiction is a classified mental health disorder.

There is an ease to clicking a live-stream link — it demands very little of us. It requires no preparation. We don't have to hear about the stressful week or upsetting diagnosis our friends at church have had.

It is possible that, over the next few weeks, we'll get used to pulling the church service up on the computer, then turning it off again afterwards, like an episode of a TV show. Along with the rich fool, our hearts are always seeking opportunities for us to take our ease (Luke 12:19).

We have to remember that, while watching church from behind a screen is what we have for now as we try to keep each other safe, it pales in comparison to going to church for real.

FELLOWSHIP

We were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9). *'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'* (1 John 1:7).

John Piper has said that 'fellowship is a mutual bond that Christians have with Christ that puts us in a deep, eternal relationship with one another.' We express the significance of this relationship in our love for, and service of, one another. God uses fellowship to ensure his people persevere in their



faith (Hebrews 3:12-14). He asks us to sharpen each other, as iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). Fellowship is also a means of encouragement, in success and in sadness, and a means of protection when enmity arises.

'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken' (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

These blessings are enormous, essential, and not readily available online. They are not blessings which can be enjoyed apart from other believers.

We pray that the fellowship we have already established within our church communities will allow us to weather this pandemic using text messages and video calls, but we must come back together when the virus abates. We must guard against the joy of meeting being replaced with the comfort of separation.

SOCIAL DISTANCING, SPIRITUAL NEARNESS

IN THE COMING MONTHS, HOW ARE WE TO LIVE LIFE TOGETHER, APART?

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky interprets the Old Testament without the illumination of Christ's finished work. Nevertheless, his response to coronavirus strikes a chord:

'Every hand that we don't shake must become a phone call that we place. Every embrace that we avoid must become a verbal expression of warmth and concern. Every inch and every foot that we physically place between ourselves and another, must become a thought as to how we might be of help to that other, should the need arise.

'It is obvious that "distancing", if misplaced or misunderstood, will take its toll not only upon our community's strength and resiliency, but upon the very integrity and meaning of our spiritual commitment. And who knows if it was for this time that we have committed ourselves to walk in God's ways.'

We trust that, in time, this pandemic will pass. We should prepare for that day because we have to make sure that social distancing is temporary... virtual worship must not become a new habit.

We are remaining apart from each other just now, not to avoid catching COVID-19, but to avoid passing it to others. Done this way, social distancing is an act of love, as the Rev Donnie G. MacDonald points out in his pastoral letter. It is an act of fellowship and service which will counterbalance physical separation with spiritual nearness.

While we continue to serve each other through phone calls, dropping off shopping and leading family worship, we also pray that God would guard our hearts from coveting the ease and anonymity of virtual worship.

Thomas Chalmers taught us that there can be no vacuum in the human heart. If one desire is to be removed, it must be by replacing it with another. To hold on to Christian fellowship, we need God to maintain our love for each other and our desire to meet together during these weeks of isolation. Chalmers said, 'We know of no other way by which to keep the love of the world out of our heart, than to keep in our hearts the love of God—and no other way by which to keep our hearts in the love of God, than building ourselves up on our most holy faith.' For as long as we are unable to get together for church services and midweek meetings, let's renew our commitment to building ourselves up in the faith through Bible reading and prayer. And let's build each other up by keeping in touch to share the love of God, truth from his Word and by expressing our desire to meet together soon.

When this is over, if we are ever tempted to retreat into monasticism, to substitute Christian community for screen time, let's remember the joys and blessings we have been deprived of by coronavirus.

In the meantime, we must continue to pray for the eradication of COVID-19 and to long for the church closures to be lifted. We must look forward to seeing each other again, to shaking hands, and raising our voices together in praise of our Saviour. •

FREE CHURCH SERVICES ONLINE

YOU WILL BE AWARE THAT, FOLLOWING THE CALL FROM GOVERNMENT TO MINIMISE SOCIAL CONTACT IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE TRANSMISSION OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19), THE FREE CHURCH'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES ADVISED CONGREGATIONS TO SUSPEND ALL SUNDAY SERVICES AND MIDWEEK ACTIVITIES UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

While our longing is to be able to meet together as soon as it is safe to do so, we praise God for technology which allows us to keep in touch with each other; and to broadcast church services online. As well as live-streaming services, congregations across the Free Church are keeping midweek meetings running with free video conferencing applications. Livingston Free Church have already held prayer meetings using Zoom (zoom.us) and St Columba's in Edinburgh are holding home groups using Jitsi (meet.jitsi.si).

The Free Church website has a regularly updated list of Sunday services available online. You can join in with services from:

Bishopbriggs; 11am; facebook.com/bishopbriggfreechurch

Bon Accord; 11am & 6pm; live.bafreechurch.org.uk

Burghead; 11am; facebook.com/burgheadfreechurch

Covenant Church Newmilns; 10:30am; facebook.com/CovenantNewmilns

Cross; 12noon & 6pm; crossfreechurch.org/live-stream

Dowanvale; 11am & 6pm; dowanvale.org/live-stream

Gairloch, Kinlochewe & Torridon; 11am & 5pm; facebook.com/GairKinlTorrFreeChurchofScotland

Kiltarlity; 11am; kiltarlity.freechurch.org

London City; 11am; lcpc.org.uk

Roskeel; 11am; rosskeenfreechurch.co.uk

St Andrews; 10:30am & 6pm; standrewsfreechurch.co.uk/Sundays (via Podbean)

St Columba's; 11am & 5:30pm; stcolumbas.freechurch.org/livestream

Smithton; 11am & 5:30pm; smithtonchurch.com/live-sunday-services

Stirling; 11am; facebook.com/StirlingFreeChurch

Tain and Fearn; 11am & 6pm; tainandfearnfreechurch.co.uk

Visit freechurch.org/online-services for the latest index of live services. •

WORLD NEWS

AMERICAS AFRICA EUROPE ASIA AUSTRALASIA

KATOFlix

Vide Opera Dei!

POLISH CATHOLIC GROUP COMPETES WITH NETFLIX (EUROPE)



Studio Katolik, a media company run by the Catholic Salvatorian Congregation in Poland, has launched a video-on-demand streaming service which aims to use the power of film to 'lead to God'. The service, called *Katoflix*, offers documentaries, a series of interviews with Catholic priests and films including the recent adaptation of Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*. The company also intends to support the production of new content. ●

GENDER CLINIC JUDICIAL REVIEW (EUROPE)



A 23-year-old woman is pursuing legal action against an NHS gender clinic. Keira Bell told *BBC News* that she should have been questioned more by staff about her decision to transition to a male when she was a teenager. 'I should have been challenged on the proposals or the claims that I was making for myself,' she said. 'And I think that would have made a big difference... I was allowed to run with this idea that I had, almost like a fantasy, as a teenager...and it has affected me in the long run as an adult. I'm very young. I've only just stepped into adulthood and I have to deal with this kind of burden or radical difference.'

A second claimant in the case is the mother of a 15-year-old girl with autism, who is currently waiting for treatment at the clinic.

In March, the judicial review was approved. The case against the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust is due to be heard this summer. The clinic says it is always cautious in its approach to treatment, but lawyers will argue that children cannot give informed consent to treatment delaying puberty or helping them to change gender. ●

WORTHLESS PHYSICIANS (AMERICAS)



The controversial televangelist Kenneth Copeland has been criticised for claiming he can heal people of COVID-19. On a TV programme entitled 'Standing against coronavirus', Copeland prayed for people who are infected. 'Put your hand on that television set,' he told viewers. 'Thank you, Lord Jesus. He received your healing.' He concluded, 'I am not the sick trying to get healed. I am the healed, and the devil is trying to give me the flu.'

Another televangelist, Jim Bakker, has been issued an official warning by the Food and Drug Administration, a department of the United States Government, for selling an unapproved product which he claimed could cure COVID-19.

'The FDA considers the sale and promotion of fraudulent COVID-19 products to be a threat to the public health,' Commissioner Stephen Hahn told *CBS News*. 'We have an aggressive surveillance program that routinely monitors online sources for health fraud products, especially during a significant public health issue such as this one.' ●



ITALIAN CHURCHES CLOSED BY CORONAVIRUS (EUROPE)



More than six thousand people have died in Italy, the centre of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe. With more than ten million people in lockdown in the northern region of Lombardy, churches in the 'red zone' suspended their services in March. Giacomo Ciccone, president of the Italian Evangelical Alliance, told *Evangelical Focus*, 'There is fear mixed with a sense of resignation. In the North, many are seriously worried.' Ciccone wants Christians in other countries to 'ask the Lord that the COVID-19 challenge may represent a breakthrough for our spiritually asleep country. Pray that a spiritual and social revival with lasting positive effects may happen' and 'pray that Italian creativity will prevail against the many challenges we are facing'. ●

GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA RECOGNISES PERSECUTION (AFRICA)



Following protest marches reported in last month's *Record*, the Nigerian government has finally accepted that Christians are the target of terrorist attacks in the country. Lai Mohammed, the minister of information and culture, told a press conference that Boko Haram 'have started targeting Christians and Christian villages for a specific reason, which is to trigger a religious war and throw the nation into chaos.' Gideon Para-Mallam, formerly Africa ambassador for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, now an advocate for peace, told *Christianity Today*, 'The government statement represents tremendous progress, because Nigeria needs to walk in the truth in such trying times. To own up and say that indeed Boko Haram has changed tactics will make a difference. They need to be commended for calling out targeted attacks on Christians, and now we can join hands as a nation.' ●

BIBLE TRANSLATION IN ZIMBABWE (AFRICA)



[From Scottish Bible Society]
Zimbabwe's economic crisis affects everyone in the country. Only between 5-10% of the population is officially employed. 'We are going through a tough time,' says Chipso Maringe, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe (BSZ). 'It is very difficult to operate as a Bible Society when there is no cash available. This makes it very difficult for us to buy fuel for our vehicles and for our generator to give our office and shop electricity. Yet despite the many challenges that BSZ is facing, they are determined to make God's Word available to as many people as possible. Their Chikunda translation of the Bible is scheduled to be completed in 2023, meeting the need of around 160,000 native speakers in northern Zimbabwe, as well as those in neighbouring Zambia and Mozambique.' ●



COVID-19 IN SOUTH KOREA (ASIA)



Churches across South Korea closed in March in response to coronavirus. 'This is the first time that churches are officially postponing services in the 100 years of Protestant history and 200 years of Catholic history [in Korea],' said Won Jae-chun, professor at Christian Handong Global University, Pohang. 'Services and masses have not stopped—even during the Korean War.' The world's largest church, Seoul's Pentecostal Yoido Full Gospel, will instead broadcast services to its half a million members. 'The number of churches who are turning to online or family worship are increasing over the last two weeks,' said Choi Kyu-hee at the National Council of Churches in Korea.

Meanwhile, a controversial sect, whose founder claims to be an angel sent by Jesus, has been accused of worsening the crisis by instructing followers to continue meeting and to keep silent about having the virus. The first positive case of COVID-19 in South Korea was a member of the sect. More than one million people have now signed an online petition calling on the government to dissolve the group. ●

APR/MAY 2020 PRAYER DIARY

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalm 139:23-24

Wed 15th Give thanks for the life and witness of Rev. John MacLean and pray for Morag, Martin and Shivonne and the wider family circle as they come to terms with life without him.

Thurs 16th Give thanks for the life and witness of Rev. David Ford. Pray for his widow, Marianna, and all the family as they recover from the sudden bereavement and face the future without him.

Fri 17th Pray for the elderly in our communities and others who have compromised immune systems. Pray that the Lord would spare them from potential infection of the coronavirus.

Sat 18th Pray for our brothers and sisters in India as they look for additional funding for the construction project in Kahani, as prices keep rising.

Sun 19th Pray for the Wick & Keiss congregation and Rev. Howard Stone, their interim moderator, as they worship today. Pray for the development of the Lord's work in that needy area.

Mon 20th Praise God with the Fortrose congregation as Rev. Rory Stott and family settle into the life and work of their congregation.

Tues 21st Pray for the Ayr congregation as they begin the process of vacancy and look to the Lord for guidance for the future for the congregation.

Wed 22nd Today many around the world celebrate 50 years since the first Earth Day. Pray that as we work to protect our planet there would be a worldwide recognition of the Creator of the planet.

Thurs 23rd As the High Free congregation in Stornoway consider their plans for a new church building, pray that God will guide and direct all plans and decisions.

Fri 24th In March the Office for National Statistics released tragic statistics showing that a quarter of pregnancies in 2018 resulted in abortion. Pray that the unborn life would be valued more around the world.

Sat 25th Pray that God would give comfort and strength to those who serve our country in the Armed Services.

Sun 26th Remember the Duirinish congregation, and Rev. David Miller and Meg in his prolonged illness. May they all know the presence of the Lord through this difficult time.

Mon 27th Pray for all the students in ETS as they are on a reading week this week in preparation for their exams.

Tues 28th Pray for Mission International's Mighty Meals programme, which endeavours to feed needy children throughout the year.

Wed 29th Pray for confidence to always be 'prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you' (1 Peter 3:15).

Thurs 30th Remember the Govan church plant in your prayers as they continue to work hard in the community and face many challenges.

Fri 1st Pray for the induction taking place today in the Free North. Remember Rev. Angus MacRae and his wife Ann as they begin their ministry among the fellowship in Inverness.

Sat 2nd Pray for the Dingwall congregation as they look to the Lord at the beginning of their vacancy.

Sun 3rd Remember Rev. Roddie Rankin and the Glenelg & Arnisort, Lochalsh & Glenshiel congregation as they look forward to Mr Ken Macdonald completing his studies in the college.

Mon 4th The ETS students are in exam time now. Pray especially for those coming to the end of their studies as they look for guidance for their future work.

Tues 5th Give thanks for the amazing number of schools taking groups to Alltnacriche and Lendrick Muir. Pray for SU staff as they use this opportunity to share their faith with the youngsters.

Wed 6th Give thanks for God's blessing over the 60 years of Free Church camps and for the many friendships formed over that time. Pray for all the arrangements for this summer's camps.

Thurs 7th Give thanks for the peace we enjoy today due to the sacrifice of those who defend our nation, and that believers within the Armed Forces will know God's presence and peace.

Fri 8th Pray for all those living in turmoil and oppression. Especially remember persecuted Christians throughout the world.

Sat 9th Pray for all the preparations for the coming General Assembly, especially remembering Rev. Neil MacMillan and Rev. Donnie G MacDonald.

Sun 10th Pray for the vacant congregation of Trotternish and Rev. Gordon Matheson, their interim moderator. Give thanks for unity in the congregation and pray that they will know God's will for the future.

Mon 11th Pray for each Kirk Session as they reflect on mission and try to introduce something into the life of the church which will make the congregation more missionally minded.

Tues 12th Pray for all those in government, that our leaders would see the need to return to basic biblical principles as given in the Ten Commandments.

Wed 13th Give thanks that, despite all the evil and suffering in the world, the kingdom of God will ultimately triumph.

Thurs 14th Give thanks for Christians serving in our parliaments and assemblies 'speaking truth to power' and pray that God would bless and encourage them, and that they would know the support of the Christian community.

Prayer requests to: ian.macdonald57@btinternet.com.

Please take time to send requests for your congregation or ministry to be included in forthcoming Records. These prayer notes are prepared 5 weeks in advance of publication.

WFM ANNUAL MEETING

BY **FIONA MACASKILL**

WOMEN FOR MISSION'S 2020 ANNUAL MEETING WILL TAKE PLACE AT 2PM ON SATURDAY, 16TH MAY IN GLASGOW CITY FREE CHURCH. It would be lovely to see all ages join us as we give thanks for the funds raised through our current Mobilising for Mission project and as we launch our new project for 2020/21.

We look forward to hearing from our speakers, who will update us on their work in various places around the world. Karen MacPhail will tell us about the work of Esperanza in Moyabamba, Muriel MacLeod will speak to us about her work in Cambodia with OMF,

and we are also pleased to welcome Maria Cockburn talking about the outreach in the Govanhill area of Glasgow. We hope too to hear from some of the young people who received a grant from our Support a Volunteer fund.

We would like to encourage people to make use of the discounted public transport available from other areas this year instead of having a private bus, but please contact Marion Gray by email at marion.macaulay@hotmail.co.uk or by phone on 07717452226 if you need any assistance with this. •

GLENURQUHART AND FORT AUGUSTUS INDUCTION

BY **ANDREW MURCHISON**

ON THE AFTERNOON OF SATURDAY, 11TH JANUARY 2020, THE INDUCTION OF REV. SEAN ANKERS TO THE CONGREGATION OF GLENURQUHART & FORT AUGUSTUS TOOK PLACE. The congregation had been vacant for just over two years following the retirement of Rev. Dr John Ross in September 2017. Throughout that period and under the guidance of the Interim Moderator, Rev. Alec Stewart (Maryburgh), the congregation had listened to a number of ministers as potential candidates. Sean preached on two occasions in August and September 2019. At that time he was assisting in the Hope Church congregation of Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill. Following these two visits, the congregation were unanimous in their decision to invite Sean to be the minister of Glenurquhart & Fort Augustus Free Church. The signing of the call took place on Wednesday, 20th November 2019, and Sean was there in person to not only receive it, but also to accept it. This was a matter of much thanksgiving for the congregation and for the Presbytery, which at that time had a number of vacancies.

Despite the wet weather a good number of people attended the induction service, which was led by Rev. Calum Iain MacLeod (Urquhart and Resolis). In his address, based on 1 Timothy 6 verse 20, Mr MacLeod reminded us of the wonderful privilege

of serving the Lord, and that with such privilege comes great responsibility not only to serve one another within the church family, but to reach out to those in our neighbourhood and community with the gospel message. This was followed by the relevant questions from the Practice of the Free Church being put to Sean, and, on being inducted, he received the right hand of fellowship from the Presbytery and the gathered ministers associated with the Presbytery. Thereafter Rev. Alec Stewart was invited to address Sean and the congregation in his last duty as their Interim Moderator. He stressed the importance of prayer; of seeking God's



Sean and Virginia Ankers

help and guidance; and that this applied to each one of us as individuals, as families and corporately as part of the church family. Following the service, an afternoon tea was served in the Blairbeg Hall in Drumnadrochit. Gifts from the congregation were made to Sean and his wife, Virginia (including a shinty stick, as he is expected to support the local team!) and to the retiring Interim Moderator. In response Sean thanked the congregation for the kindness already shown to himself and his wife and said that they were looking forward to this new chapter in the life and ministry of the congregation.

Mr Alan Court from the Blackwood and Kirkmuirhill congregation shared words of encouragement for both Sean and the congregation. Having seen how Sean and Virginia both became involved in the work of that congregation, Mr Court expressed his confidence that their commitment and enthusiasm would be a real blessing in this new ministry. This happy occasion was closed with the uplifting singing of Psalm 23. This was a day of thanksgiving for the congregation of Glenurquhart & Fort Augustus. We pray this new ministry would be blessed to the communities around us. •

WHAT'S YOUR STORY? GOVAN FREE CHURCH

BY **REV. NORMAN MACKAY**

WHEN PEOPLE ASK HOW TO DESCRIBE OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHURCH PLANTING IN GOVAN, IT IS THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED THAT COMES TO MIND. There is lots more besides that, but certainly this parable is one that unpacks the realities of how God has been at work in this Glasgow housing scheme which is dear to our heart. From a starting point of zero resources, God has brought into being a new local church of first-generation Christians, which is widely known and respected within the community.

Allied to this is the astonishing provision of finance which has enabled us to purchase and renovate property, rent offices, employ individuals, and support the minister's stipend whilst investing huge sums of money into the care and welfare of the Govan community.

PRINCIPLES

Several principles were foundational to the vision as we commenced the work. Firstly, we would not commence any service or public event until local people were converted or in attendance. Secondly, we would shape the fellowship around the existing urban culture of Govan so that locals felt at home socially as well as spiritually. Thirdly, we would seek to integrate into the local community whenever and wherever possible, being willing to serve, sacrifice and share with, and as, members of the Govan community.

INTERACTION

The café at Govan Cross runs every Tuesday with an average of 30-40 locals coming along. This has often been our first point of contact with people and many folks who have come through the café are now good friends. Quite a number are now part of our church fellowship.



ADDICTION

[photo of Robert] 'My name is Robert and I became a Christian after being introduced to the Free Church guys here in Govan. For 30 years I was addicted to street and prescription drugs, as well as alcohol. Prison was often my home. Now through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, this lifelong cycle of addiction has being broken and I am actively involved in helping others in Govan break free through our Christian-based recovery program.'



TRAUMA

Closely related to and intertwined with addiction is the issue of underlying trauma which is often at the root of the addiction. As a fellowship we provide a confidential trauma counselling group that seeks to help people address such issues as loss, bereavement, abandonment or betrayal, yet without us causing further harm. Only God can bring healing, but he often uses people with an understanding of how our emotions heal to do so, along with the light of his Word and with support from a loving Christian community.

COMMUNITY

We don't have an official social programme, but we seek to cultivate a social conscience and a compassionate heart. Over the last few years we have engaged the community in photography exhibitions, magazine production, house renovations and other educational projects. Representation to housing associations, hospitals, schools and other official bodies is also something we are happy to help with. If anybody comes to us in need of help or support, we seek to provide that in whatever way we can. We ask for nothing in return, but simply try to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Small group Bible study is the engine room of our ministry here. Many local folks struggle with dyslexia and other difficulties or have suffered greatly from hurtful and damaging experiences of

school. Within a loving, caring and understanding fellowship, people are able to overcome these inhibitions and hurts while opening up to and engaging with the teaching of God's Word.

PEOPLE

Govan Free Church is all about people – people in whose life God is at work. The last seven years have been costly, but the blessings of transformed lives and the experience of God's grace at work all around us makes this all worthwhile.

The greatest spiritual need in our day is found in the areas of repeated deprivation. These are the communities and people that were heavy on the heart of Thomas Chalmers, our founder, and supremely on the heart of Jesus our Saviour. ●



AUTISM, THE CHURCH AND THE BIBLE

BY JOCELYN HAMMER

O N 29TH FEBRUARY, I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF HELPING LEAD A WELL-ATTENDED SEMINAR ON AUTISM WITH PROFESSOR GRANT MACASKILL OF ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY, HELD IN BUCCLEUCH FREE CHURCH IN EDINBURGH. It was a great opportunity to spend a couple of hours exploring what is an important and pertinent topic. This article is a whistle-stop tour, to give you the main points and whet your appetites for further action and discussion. The first half of the seminar involved looking at autism as a condition and how it affects us, and the second half looked more closely at what the Bible has to say about autism. Then we spent some time discussing what it all might mean practically for churches and individuals.

In common with other conditions, autism has only been identified in the last half century, but individuals have had autistic traits for millennia. As it has become more of a recognised condition within society, autism has increasingly been portrayed in the media. However, Grant was

quick to rebut *Rain Man*-style portrayals of autism, which usually describe individuals with amazing abilities but very poor social interactions. He spoke about the autism spectrum, and demonstrated that it is like a multi-coloured spectrum of different abilities and capabilities, rather than a linear greyscale spectrum ranging from high-functioning to low-functioning. Grant outlined differences in systematising, social interactions and sensory issues.⁰¹

Grant pointed out that church could be reassuring for an autistic person, because of the set structure of most services; and also very difficult, due to the social and sensory elements. He challenged us to imagine finding certain smells painful, and to think of the tea and coffee and crowds after a service as potentially overwhelming to an autistic person. He reminded us that a *meltdown* differs radically from a *tantrum* because it is a person's reaction to being overwhelmed in some way. ▶▶

He moved on to talk about how mental health issues are common in autistic people, and stressed the importance of good pastoral care and support from within the congregation. After an enlightening interview with an autistic Christian, Grant talked about how we can approach autism biblically. He focussed on the image of the Body of Christ as found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26. Using these verses, he highlighted the dangers of buying into societal norms. He illustrated this using the idea of a congregation praying for people for a church plant, suggesting that a friendly enthusiastic family might be seen by society as a better answer from God than an autistic person. He challenged this, saying that autistic people, and others with additional support needs, should be seen as gifts, irrespective of their productivity. He spoke further about accommodating the needs of others in the context of autism, thinking about the effects that our choices might have on others.

For the last part of the seminar there was a time of discussion in groups, thinking about practical issues. We thought about a typical church event, identified things which might be stressful for autistic adults and discussed ways we could help.

We also considered a scenario where one spouse in a marriage has recently been diagnosed with autism, thinking about the issues the couple would face and how we could support them.

There were many good, practical suggestions such as encouraging late arrival to avoid crowds, and having quiet spaces available. However, the advice we heard most was simply to get to know the autistic person and their family. This is the best way to find out what they might need and what would help them.

The seminar highlighted the need for a new way of looking at autism in particular and disability in general. This new way looks at individuals as God sees them, and not as society sees them. Each person is made in God's image and is valuable to him and to the church. It gave us a chance to learn about autism in a biblical framework, but also to think practically about the implications for our congregations. Presbyteries which are interested in learning more about autism can contact Professor Grant Macaskill at Aberdeen University. ●

⁰¹A fuller description of autism spectrum conditions can be found at www.autismeurope.org

COVID-19 YOUTH CAMPS UPDATE

BY **BOB AKROYD** (CHAIRMAN OF THE MISSION BOARD)

IN LIGHT OF THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) OUTBREAK, THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND IS KEEPING ALL OF ITS ACTIVITIES UNDER REGULAR REVIEW. Some activities and events have been cancelled for a period of time while others have been rescheduled. At present it has been decided to delay a decision concerning the programme of Free Church Youth Camps planned for summer 2020. Please be assured that careful consideration is being given to the viability of the camps and all available information and advice will be taken into consideration when a decision is made. That decision will be communicated directly to all parties concerned including campers, parents, leaders and supporters.

In the meantime, please pray for the church and for the work of the gospel especially among young people. For 60 years Free Church Youth Camps have been a great source of blessing for our denomination and its young people and we look forward to the next chapter in the history of our youth camps to bless, encourage and equip our next generation. ●

'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.' (Ephesians 3:20-21)

QUOTATIONS:

When he is told to love God supremely, this may startle another; but it will not startle him to whom God has been revealed in peace, and in pardon, and in all the freeness of an offered reconciliation... We know of no other way by which to keep the love of the world out of our heart, than to keep in our hearts the love of God—and no other way by which to keep our hearts in the love of God, than building ourselves up on our most holy faith.

Thomas Chalmers, The Expulsive Power of a New Affection

As the Nation prepares to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe this May, join us for 40 days of reflections on war, peace, and God's amazing plan of salvation.



For a FREE Copy and for more information on the resources we are offering to assist churches organising events for the VE-Day weekend please visit our website www.peace2020.org.uk.

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**ANNUAL
MEETING
2020**

SATURDAY 16 MAY | 2.00PM

Glasgow City Free Church



WOMEN FOR MISSION

**WOMEN'S
CONFERENCE**

WITH GUEST SPEAKER ANN ALLEN

SATURDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Culloden-Balloch Baptist Church, Inverness



DR. IAN R. MACDONALD (1930-2018)

BY **PROF. DONALD MACLEOD**

FIRST MET DR IAN MACDONALD IN JUNE 1963. I was on a student-placement in Lochcarron and was about to begin the mid-week meeting when I walked into two of the best-known figures in the Free Church, Professor R. A. Finlayson and Dr Ian MacDonald. My heart sank. It was bad enough having to face the venerable elders of Lochcarron, but the presence of two such eminences really notched up the pressure.

In the event they couldn't have been kinder, and, in the case of Dr Ian, the encounter was the beginning of a life-long friendship which ended only with his death on Monday 16th December last.

A SCIENTIST

Born in Inverness in 1930, the son of a self-educated railway clerk and the grandson of an Abriachan crofter, Ian MacDonald was a man of many gifts and wide interests.

First and foremost, he was a scientist, with a PhD in Botany at a time when PhDs were few and far between; and this degree, awarded by Aberdeen University in 1955, launched him on a career as a plant physiologist. His original research was into the absorption of phosphate by sugar-beet and, having secured his PhD, Dr Ian began work as a research scientist at the MacAulay Institute for Soil Research in Aberdeen. There he would pursue his interest in the theoretical aspects of botany for the rest of his professional life.

Apart from one brief interlude. In 1960, supported by a Fulbright Fellowship, and accompanied by his wife, May, he spent a year at the University of California, conducting research into the way plants absorb anions (negative ions). The plant he chose for his experiments was potato-tubers, and throughout his life he remained an expert not only on the cell-chemistry of these humble plants, but on their taste and table quality. Over the years I tasted, appreciatively, virtually every variety of spud at Sunday dinners at the ever-hospitable home in Cults. Though they always lived up to my expectations, they didn't always live up to Dr Ian's, and now and again there would be a sigh of disappointment: 'May, where did you get these potatoes?'

On his return home he took up what would be a life-long research project, exploring the relative influences of light and gravity on the germination and development of seedlings; and pioneering, for the purposes of this research, the use of infra-red and video-camera photography. What the research showed (in laymen's terms) was that, however weighed-down and compacted the growing medium, the seedlings always made for the light. The question was, What features of the cell chemistry accounted for this pattern?

Towards the end of his professional career, Dr Ian was working with UK colleagues assessing the feasibility of conducting their research under the conditions of

micro-gravity. Although working at the cutting edge of a rapidly moving discipline, he never betrayed any sense of a tension between science and religion; or indeed any interest in the issue. To him, the question of evolution was a non-question, and the impression I had was that, far from viewing evidence for design as evidence against evolution, he regarded evolution as itself a tool of the Great Designer.

A HISTORIAN

But science was not his only interest. Dr Ian was as much a man of the Humanities as a man of Science. He was an avid collector of books. He also loved, and even revered, words, whether spoken or written, and used them with elegance and precision, especially in public prayer. He could also, on occasion, use them to the consternation of those they were addressed to. There is a well-attested story of the first time an overhead projector was used in the local prayer meeting. 'What,' asked a fellow-elder, 'did you think of the OHP?' 'There's not much unction in an epidiascope,' came the reply.

His great love, however, was history, and especially church history, and this, along with his literary skills, became apparent in two major publications, *Glasgow's Gaelic Churches* (1995) and *Aberdeen and the Highland Churches* (2000). Each traces the fortunes of Highland religion in a major urban setting, and according to no less an authority than Professor Donald Meek, these ground-breaking studies offer a social, spiritual and cultural biography of the communities whose stories they tell.

But Dr Ian's interest in church history was not confined to the Gaelic diaspora. He had a comprehensive knowledge of the story of Scottish Presbyterianism, and it was through this historical lens that he viewed our growing tendency to distance ourselves from our past. He knew that all traditional practices had begun as innovations, but he knew, too, that behind every historic 'innovation' there lay rigorous thought and keen theological scrutiny. There had been good reasons for the traditions; there had to be equally good reasons for change.

A LIFETIME OF SERVICE TO THE CHURCH

But above all, Dr Ian was a man who gave a lifetime of service to the church, and this service was never narrowly denominational. He served on the committees of both the local YMCA and the Aberdeen Evangelistic Association, and he could count among his friends such stalwarts as the Reverend William Still and Professor Howard Marshall. Nor did his loyalties blind him to the merits of other traditions. Much as he loved the Free Church form of worship, he also admired the disciplined liturgy and magnificent prose of the Book of Common Prayer. Indeed, so deeply was Anglican language imprinted on his mind that once, when giving the Intimations in Bon Accord, he announced (in my hearing) that a certain

event would take place not 'after the Benediction', but 'after the Nunc Dimittis'.

He had a similarly catholic attitude to versions of the Bible. To almost the end, he conducted family worship every evening; but, while deeply attached to the Authorised Version, it had long been his practice to read successively through different translations, and over the years I heard him use the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, Today's English Bible and the NIV. I even have a vague memory that one year the version of choice was the Jerusalem Bible, the translation officially sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church.

But yes, he was a Free Churchman, and for well-nigh seventy years he loved and served her, not for her own sake, but as an instrument of Christian good.

Much of this service was devoted to the Church nationally. As early as March 1954, he was the Convener of the first residential Free Church Youth Conference, and in the years that followed he served both as a General Trustee and as a member of innumerable boards and committees. But I remember him best as a speaker in the General Assembly, where, in an era of outstanding contributors, he always commanded attention and respect. He had, too, his own brand of humour. I especially remember an occasion when the Assembly was discussing the standards expected of new candidates for the ministry. Dr Ian clearly thought the bar was set too low: so low, indeed, that it reminded him of a recent visit to his bank, where he had noticed a collection box inviting contributions to the Aberdeen Soup Kitchen. Attached to it was a notice, 'No one ever turned away.' That, he suggested, might be a very good principle for a soup kitchen; it was not a good principle when it came to selecting candidates for the Christian ministry.

But his main contribution to the Church was through his commitment to the Aberdeen congregation. In the years after the War, things there were at a low ebb: so low that its contributions to central funds fell below the level normally required before a congregation could call a minister. The powers that be, however, wisely overlooked this irregularity, and Rev. Hugh G. Mackay was inducted to the charge in 1948. Had they not done so, the whole subsequent history of the Free Church would have been very different.

Ian MacDonald arrived in Aberdeen a few months after Mr Mackay, and his arrival was an immediate encouragement. He gave his wholehearted support to every congregational venture, he taught in the Sunday School, and he became an enthusiastic member of the local Free Church Students' Association. Then, after his marriage to May Salmond in 1958, the hospitality of their home was extended not only to students, but to visitors from near and far, including generations of preachers who supplied the pulpit during successive vacancies.

In 1959, Dr Ian was ordained to the eldership, and for the next sixty years he provided continuity in a congregation where there was a constant turnover of students, communicants, elders and even ministers (he served under five in all). For forty-two of those years he was

also Session Clerk, and it is safe to say that no one in the Church, not even its successive Clerks of Assembly, had a better grasp of Presbyterian Practice and Procedure.

And then there was the part he played, along with the Reverend Hector Cameron, in securing the building which is now home to Bon Accord Free Church. By the 1970s, under the ministries of Douglas MacMillan and Mr Cameron, the congregation had grown to the point that the old Dee Street premises were no longer adequate. The new building, purchased in 1977 for the remarkable sum of £22,000, was ideal. It was central; it could seat 700 people; and having been originally constructed as a Free Church, it was well adapted to the congregation's form of worship.

Dr Ian enjoyed many blessings in his long life, but foremost among them was his marriage to his beloved wife, May. A gifted musician, and a pioneer in her own profession as a specialist teacher of children suffering from impaired language development, May was nevertheless prepared to sacrifice her own professional aspirations to his; and, though born and brought up a Baptist, to commit herself wholeheartedly, and from deep personal conviction, to the life and work of the Free Church.

In her final years, vascular dementia took from May her ability to engage in conversation and deprived Dr Ian to a large extent of her companionship, but he was determined that she would be cared for at home to the very end. The physical demands were exhausting, and he had to learn domestic skills he had never needed before, but with the help of dedicated professionals and a committed family, his wish was granted. Yet the parting, when it came suddenly on 19th October, was a shock from which, already terminally ill himself, he never recovered.

In my last conversation with him, our thoughts turned to the hope and assurance with which we face the end. 'I have no fears on that score,' he said firmly.

Dr Ian is survived by his sister, Nan; his daughters, Fiona and Ann; and his sons, James, Robert and Fraser. ●



Dr Ian MacDonald with his wife, May, and their granddaughter, Ishbel



JOIN THE CHORUS,
SING WITH THE REDEEMED;

Photo by Edwin Andrae on Unsplash



CHRIST IS RISEN,
HE IS RISEN INDEED.

JOY AND THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

BY JOHN ANGUS MACLEOD

HOW CAN YOU HAVE JOY WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE, AND YET AT THE SAME TIME, INTENSELY YEARN FOR THINGS TO BE BETTER? Wouldn't the yearning cancel out the joy? Strangely, no. Take Paul, for example. He was rejoicing in the Lord Jesus, even in his prison life — and telling others to do the same. He clearly had learned the secret of contentment: joy in the Lord's provision, the Lord's plan and the Lord's presence (Phil. 4:12). Yet, he was longing to be a better person than he already was — longing to be perfect and mature in every way. The reality is that the longing to be perfect never cancelled out the joy. In fact, that longing was at the core of his joy. It's probably the same for all Christians — if they took the time to think about it like Paul does.

There were some people of whom Paul was very aware — people whose joy was really based on their own achievements. They had real confidence in their pedigree, ancestry and obedience to the law. They believed they were numbered among the most distinctive people in the world, standing out of the crowd of humanity in the eyes of God; a bit like the Pharisee who prayed at the temple in the parable of Jesus (Luke 18:9-14), these people thought that somehow, God was in their debt. The measure of their joy and contentment at the end of each day corresponded to their own attainments — what they had done, all by themselves.

Paul knew such people very well. After all, he had been one of them — a dyed-in-the-wool, self-righteous, bigoted Pharisee. He was different now, though. A huge change had occurred. He couldn't change his ancestry, pedigree, or his love of the law, but he would no longer close his days with the Pharisee's prayer — *'Lord, I thank you that I am not like other people...'* (Luke 18:11-12). Why? Because he began to find all his joy in knowing Jesus Christ, a brand-new, out-of-this-world relationship with the Son of God who became the Son of David. Paul knew that this life-transforming relationship was undeserved, unbreakable and unending. What he came to be in Christ was all of grace, and it would define who Paul was, forever and ever.

What is it that Paul got from this relationship?

First, he came to possess a righteousness that was never of his own making. This right standing with God, which would enable God to declare him 'righteous', was indeed his by possession, though not his by achievement. It was Christ who had lived the perfect life and died the sinner's death — all in obedience to God. But he did it not for himself, but for God's glory, so that God could give that 'righteousness' to all of his undeserving people. Paul was one of these undeserving people. He placed his faith in Christ, and received the righteousness of Christ. Not only had Jesus died for the sins of Paul, he had gifted the perfect life of righteousness to Paul. This meant that he would never have to be ashamed before God again.

It is important to note, of course, that Paul did not place his faith in a Christ who lived long ago, now long dead. No, he placed his faith in the Christ who still lives — the Christ who was raised from death. Paul entrusted himself to the resurrected Christ who had lived and died once, and now lives forever to save all who trust in him. That clearly brought Paul joy and contentment.

Second, Paul now began to experience a new power in his life, a power that had not been present before. You see, the Christ with whom Paul was now in a relationship had lived his own historical life. The historical life of Jesus now shaped Paul's core, God-honouring ambitions. Jesus always loved the commands of God and the will of God (*'I always do what pleases him'*, John 8:29) — in his earthly and in his heavenly life. Now,

What is the greatest proof of the Christian's longing to live a holy life, and to serve God forever? Surely, it is a longing to be perfect — in spirit, soul, mind and body — where our wretchedness will be a thing of the past.

Paul began to love God's commandments as well. He started to love God's law as much as the heavenly resurrected Christ does.

Of course, Jesus always loved the law of God. While he was tempted to sin, he never sinned. Christians, like Paul, were different. They were sinners — with a long history of sinful deeds and a sinful human nature. How could people like them change? How could they possibly live out a new life of obedience to be like Jesus, and reverence their new heavenly Father? Well, that's where the 'power of the resurrection' (Phil. 3:10) comes in. You see, Jesus experienced the single greatest operation of God's power since the creation of the world. When was that? When his death was reversed. He was raised from the dead, made alive, exalted to heaven and placed as ruler of the whole universe. Nothing less than God's divine authorisation and mighty, all-surpassing power could have made such a thing happen!

This is what Paul calls 'the power of Christ's resurrection', and it is what Paul wants to experience as he battles with sin and temptation, when he suffers repeated difficulties as a committed servant of God (like Jesus), and even as he faces life-and-death situations. He needs to rely on the willingness of God to empower him with resurrection power for holy living and faithful Christian service. Strangely, he even needs the power of Christ's resurrection to lay down his life as a Christian martyr — if that is what God requires him to do.

Third, there is something even greater than that. Yes, Paul was clothed in the righteousness of the crucified, resurrected Jesus. Yes, he embraced the love of the crucified and risen Jesus for the law of God and the will of the Father. Yes, he even learned to rely on the resurrection power of God to live out his holy life and Christian calling before God. What could be greater than all of that?

Well, strange though it may seem, this same Paul saw himself as the '*chief of sinners*' (1 Timothy 1:15). He lived in a body that was shaped by sin, and longed to experience one further, climactic stage of Christ's historical life: he wanted to be raised from dead with a body that will be transformed into the glorious likeness of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:21). Why does he want this resurrection? The question really is, Why wouldn't he? After all, what is the greatest proof of the Christian's longing to live a holy life, and to serve God forever? Surely, it is a longing to be perfect — in spirit, soul, mind and body — where our wretchedness (Rom. 7:24) will be a thing of the past.

Of course, Jesus had to wait for his own resurrection. He had things to do for his Church first — especially his life and death on the cross. Resurrection life came three days after that. Paul also had to wait. The Church still needed him on earth (Phil. 1:24). Only when the race that God had given to him was over could Paul say that the '*time of my departure has come*' (2 Timothy 4:6-7). It will be the same for all God's people: a longing to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23), tempered by our commitment to God's purposes on earth.

Still, we have to be careful. Paul was not simply longing to go into the resurrected Christ's presence in heaven — which is better by far (Phil. 1:23). He was longing for something which to this day has not yet happened to him — not even in the last 2,000 years. He was longing — and still is — for the morning of the resurrection. That will bring the perfection of body and soul. Remarkably, God's people will enjoy that experience of perfection on the same day, on the same morning — together. There will be no selfishness at all. In fact, the unity of the perfected people of God in their resurrection oneness will be the most remarkable moment in human history under the headship of Jesus Christ. That's when they will all perfectly rejoice in the Lord — together (Phil 3:1). •

Rev. John Angus MacLeod is Professor of New Testament and Greek at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

THE WONDER OF THE RESURRECTION



RODDIE RANKIN sees the first Easter morning through the eyes of its first witness.

Photo by Chad Madden on Unsplash

AS WITNESSED BY MARY MAGDALENE

Voices, urging me to loathe
Life, mocking my will to breathe,
Wooing me with death's embrace;
Lying voices, promising an end
Of torment, inviting me to think
Oblivion a thoughtful friend;
Seven voices, choking on their own
Incorporeal misery, claiming
The dead do not remember
Their suffering. Those voices
He cast out⁰¹, and in the ensuing silence
I remembered my name:
Miriam, who sang as the eager sea
Devoured her enemies,
When Israel fled Egypt's tomb.⁰²

At first I feared the quiet of my mind
Could not last; from each imagined noise
I recoiled, startled, cowering from abuse.
His presence soothed my fears; His words
Commanded peace. I wept, for sheer relief
When He revealed the way
The demons might return
Was barred: A Stronger One, with keys
To open and to shut, had come!⁰³
My past, in ash no longer written;
The way ahead was His to show.

All that I'd thought I never more could be:
Clean, whole and free, I was.
Ready for home, but no one there,
And no home to share. My family
His own: they took me in; my shelter
Under His wings, a vagrant's life,
Begging from none but our Father
To rescue us from evil day by day.⁰⁴

We served His needs while He served us:⁰⁵
Buying and preparing meals
(Although He made fine bread and wine Himself!)
To feed the Word whose words fed us.
Those mysteries and parables,
Were like the living joys a garden holds,
But dimly seen as day prepares to break.
What now is clear we then feared to admit:
Which temple He'd rebuild;⁰⁶ what dark event
A prophet in a fish could possibly portend,⁰⁷
Or how He must depart for distant realms
To gain a kingdom, and then only be a king.⁰⁸
When Peter voiced our faith, He spoke
More often and more plainly still:
The Son of Man must suffer, be rejected,
Killed and raised to life.⁰⁹ We placed a heavy stone
Across the entrance to our minds.

While He taught us to walk, we ran ahead
To futures we desired. On the wrong side
Of that great stone we lacked the light
To read the signs. When Jairus burst with joy,
Our coming joy which would exceed
His, we could have seen;¹⁰ or when at Nain
The widow's hope revived,¹¹ we should have learned
The Son would never our hopes disappoint;
And as He wiped away the sisters' tears,¹²
Our tears too, we should have let Him dry,
Through faith, which needlessly we shed.

We thought raising the dead was difficult:
He said it was impossible, but could be done,¹³
(And who more apt to raise but heaven's Son?)
From dust,¹⁴ from stones,¹⁵ Elisha's bones,¹⁶
From nothing — from which all else came.¹⁷
We thought there was no need; no grave. ▶▶

His triumph, we assumed, might bring
Others to their graves, not Him.

Until they placed a crown upon His head,
Whose thorns punctured that brow
So often furrowed in concern,
Which bled into those eyes,
Accustomed to be filled
With compassion. Flayed to shreds
The back which turned on no one,
On which they laid the crossbar soon
Crimson with ebbing life.
He stumbled, oppressed
By loathing voices;
The crushing, malign burden
Of mankind's hatred without cause,
Which laid Him on that cross.
Impaled, hoisted, jolting into place
Just where they wanted Him —
The Saviour who could not save
Himself. Discarded, dead:
The final act, to stand upon
Frayed flesh and bone
And offer His surrender.

All of this we saw, as
The world span; lurching
Sickeningly we clutched
Each other, hearts torn,
Choking, sinking
Into the dust, the dark
Trackless wilderness
Where all ways lead away
From Jerusalem
And the festering voices
Mount, like the shadows
Swallowing our last glimpse
Into the tomb
Where resting
He grew
Cold.

This would be called
A good day's work
By all concerned.

If we claim we did believe,
The interdict of death
Would be broken
Like an alabaster jar,¹⁸
The pointless purchase
Of perfumes and spice¹⁹
Proved the opposite:
When we were helpless
It was to Him we turned,
Who now seemed helpless too.²⁰
A spark was all the help it took;
A glint of new-creation power
Before the rays of the rising sun²¹

And the angel's lightning descent,
Who, with a showman's flourish
Rolled back that stone, revealing
The vacant tomb to small creeds
And the guards' panicked flight.²²

We arrived when we did,
Not from anticipation, but
By the ingrained Sabbath, the rest
Of the Lord we no longer understood.
In the east, twilight began as silent
As the sleeping garden. Pulses racing
We approached and found nothing
As it was. Even in death was sacred rest
Denied Him by His enemies?

Later I returned to where He disappeared,
And saw, through tragic, swollen eyes,
Two angels. Why are you shedding tears?,
They asked, intoning incongruity.
It makes me laugh I tried to tell them!
The gardener asked the same,
Then softly spoke my name:²³
And shook the world beneath my feet
And changed the course of nature.
That instant there was shown to me
The Father-love of God,
The healing of the nations,
Our eternal victory!

Now here I am at the end of days²⁴
Among apostles, the Lord's brothers,
The blessed Miriam.²⁵ First
Among witnesses²⁶ in heaven's court:
The woman who listened to serpents,²⁷
To many a marvel and portent.
See my cry of expectation;
My faith ready for His new life
As the heavens roll away
And from His seat of power
Pure fire in person pours
Into our hearts; His breath of glory
Bursts the temple doors!²⁸ ●

Rev. Roddie M. Rankin is minister of Kyle and Plockton
Free Church

⁰¹ Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2

⁰² Exodus 15:21

⁰³ Luke 11:22; Revelation 3:7

⁰⁴ Matthew 6:13

⁰⁵ Luke 8:2,3

⁰⁶ John 2:19

⁰⁷ Matthew 12:39-41

⁰⁸ Luke 19:12

⁰⁹ Mark 8:29-32

¹⁰ Luke 8:56

¹¹ Luke 7:15

¹² John 11:44

¹³ Luke 18:27

¹⁴ Genesis 2:7

¹⁵ Luke 3:8

¹⁶ 2 Kings 13:21

¹⁷ Hebrews 11:3

¹⁸ Mark 14:3

¹⁹ Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1

²⁰ Matthew 9:36, 27:46

²¹ John 20:1

²² Matthew 28:2-4

²³ John 20:1-16

²⁴ Acts 2:17

²⁵ Acts 1:13,14

²⁶ Mark 16:9

²⁷ Genesis 3:13; Luke 8:2

²⁸ Acts 2:33; Psalm 24:7-10

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor

I very much enjoyed Rev. Roddie Rankin's article, *The Wonderful Gift of Water*, in the January issue of the *Record*. However, there is one point I would like to raise. Mr Rankin states that 'God separated land and water, and water in the sky from water below', but says that 'we cannot be dogmatic about the timescales and processes he used' (page 22). However, later on the same page he then exercises precisely such dogmatism. He speaks of the record of chaotic changes for life on Earth and states that this record 'goes back half a million years'.

There is a very large body of Christian believers, very many of us being in the Free Church of Scotland, who do not accept that to be the case, whether it is being alleged on scientific or on biblical grounds, and who believe that the only biblically consistent interpretation of the record of creation is one which points to a young earth and which excludes the view that the processes referred to therefore occupied a period of the length stated.

Yours sincerely

Professor Tommy MacKay
(Dumbarton)

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Professor MacKay's comment on my article *The Wonderful Gift of Water*. I am thankful for his measured tone. I am sorry if I have caused offence or upset. Wonder was the response I was aiming at, as well as an appreciation of God's gift of science, which is often the casualty in discussions of the kind Professor MacKay raises.

There is a place for attempting to explain the very technical details of determining both the age of ice cores, and the right approach to interpreting the days of Genesis 1. This is not it, and I am not the right person to attempt it. I have been very dogmatic in the past (on both sides of the age-of-the-earth debate), but now understand that views on this need to be held in such a way that they do not intrude on our fellowship in the risen Christ. It is all too easy to embitter the debate by attributing motives of unbelief, irrationality, intellectual pride or virtue-signalling to views with which we disagree.

It struck me in reading Professor MacKay's letter that a mirror-image letter could have been written by an old-earth advocate thinking me dogmatic had I stated the earth was 6,000 years old. (I invite readers to attempt this and see what I mean!) One man's dogmatism is another's self-evident fact. This debate will continue inconclusively until our heavenly Father shows us what actually happened in his creation of the cosmos! Let us hold these discussions while honouring one another's love for Jesus, and let us keep mostly in the faith and truth of the gospel. Jesus called people to faith in him, and that is our primary task too.

Yours sincerely

Roddie Rankin

THERE'S A FUNNY THING ABOUT HAVING TO WRITE MAGAZINE ARTICLES AT LEAST TWO WEEKS BEFORE THEY GO INTO PRINT — ONE TRIES TO IMAGINE WHAT WILL BE HAPPENING BY THE TIME THE ARTICLE MAKES IT INTO THE READER'S HANDS. Is there a holiday coming up? An election? What will people need to hear a month from now?

If I'd sat down at the start of March to predict where I'd be four weeks in the future, I would have written all about my long-awaited trip home. I'd tell you I was in the desert, splashing in a pool, drinking root beer, my parents basking in the glow of their grandchildren while I read the new Hilary Mantel — no worries except how to work off the half-pizza and three donuts I'd just eaten.

In fact, the weekend I'm writing this is the one where the coronavirus crisis suddenly seems real. Churches are live-streaming services; toilet roll (and, oddly, kitchen roll) is an endangered species; it's uncertain whether schools and workplaces will last the week. I'm guessing that by the time you read this, the idea of popping out to Starbucks for a coffee and a cake will feel like a bizarre half-remembered dream. A lot of people will be lonely, without much personal contact outside of phone calls. A lot of people will be worried about money, with no work. A lot will be stressed, living in tense families with no escape. A lot will be disappointed, missing weddings and holidays and the everyday buzz of social life. A lot — a *lot* — will be really scared. Scared for themselves, for their parents and grandparents, for the seeming impossibility of normal life ever resuming.

I don't exempt Christians from the sadness and anxiety. There's a human element in us which recoils from change, especially the extreme and unexpected variety. The world changed so quickly that I didn't even take the children's welly-boots home with me from school on Friday; now, I suspect they'll grow out of them before I get them back. I had to excuse myself from the creche rota at church two weeks ago because of a vomiting bug; it looks like I won't be able to make it up anytime soon. My children's medical check-ups and jabs are all up in the air; speech therapy and allergy consultations feel like luxuries now (though meningitis doesn't, so I'll see if the jabs are still possible). I'm devastated that 'going home' seems to have slipped further away than ever, but with my whole family in isolation for the foreseeable future, at least there's not too much time to dwell on it. Anyway, I'm too busy endlessly checking the news headlines.

I'm not alone in that. Coronavirus has become a global obsession. And probably if this whole magazine had been written in the last few days, it would have been dominated by the pandemic. Instead, this Easter issue is preoccupied with the Resurrection. And isn't that perfect? Because in all the ways that we walk blind

in this world, unable to see the looming sudden halt to much of our civilisation, as Christians we do have the benefit of telling the future. Rather, the future has been told to us. We know that He who lives is coming again, and instituting a new world.

For those with eyes to see it, there's a certain poetry in the projection that the UK epidemic will peak at Easter. As we face mass deaths — very likely of some people we know — we celebrate Christ's victory over death. Our victory over death. Among all the horror, there is the sweetness of spring and the shattering of the grave. In Italy, we hear of sick people dying alone in hospital corridors. The Christian does not die alone. The Christian 'goes home'.

It has often amazed me that humanity puts so much money and brainpower into cures for all manner of specific illnesses, and so little effort into preparing for the hereafter. Cancer research and heart bypasses have prolonged millions of lives — but it is always a temporary reprieve. The fact that there is no vaccine or cure for coronavirus feels outrageous, scandalous. *There must be something we can do!* But there isn't. We are helpless now, so helpless that we must stop

society in order to stop the virus. Even then, many thousands will die. This, then, is the time to have that difficult conversation with a friend. People are looking for answers. They are looking for hope. Please

offer to them — as a gift, not a threat — the hope that is within you. They need to know that, if it comes to the worst, there is life, abundant life, available to them even in the corridor of an overstretched hospital.

I saw a prayer chain letter going around recently inviting all Christians to pray for God to stop the virus altogether in its tracks because he is 'powerful enough' to do so, and it would surely bring him glory. But I don't think God is interested in using coronavirus to show off his mighty power over sickness. I think, if we will allow him to teach us through it, he will be glorified in another way: in the Church flowering through a time of repentance, self-sacrifice, patience, courage, and a renewed trust and dependence on the God who saves. I think he is allowing this disease in his grace, knowing that we need to be awakened from our complacency. In our inordinately busy lives, he is giving us time — more time than we know what to do with! — to seek him anew.

A friend sent me a blog post today that said 'Don't waste the hard.' This is my new coronavirus motto — I invite you to adopt it with me! Let's learn humbly from the Lord and take what comes from his hand. On the glorious Easter Sunday, let's praise him. On the very darkest days when we lose our precious ones, let's praise him. Our world is changing, but our dear Saviour is not. *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be continually in my mouth* (Ps. 34:1). Even through the tears. •

*My times are in Thy hand;
My God, I wish them there;
My life, my friends, my soul, I leave
Entirely to Thy care.*

-W.F. Lloyd



DON'T WASTE THE HARD

DAYSPRING MACLEOD looks
to a future beyond coronavirus

ANNUAL LECTURE IN SCOTTISH CHURCH HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

EACH YEAR, ETS HOLDS A PUBLIC LECTURE IN SCOTTISH CHURCH HISTORY AND THEOLOGY.

These annual lectures began in 2016 and are held to recognise the Seminary's commitment to the study and preservation of Reformed Theology in the history of the Church in Scotland. There is an immensely rich heritage of theology found in the history of the Scottish Church, and ETS seeks to continue to serve as an institution where this heritage can be preserved, studied and appreciated. This year's lecture was delivered by Dr Mark Elliot, Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow and part-time professorial fellow at Wycliffe College, Toronto. Dr Elliot has recently co-edited, with David Fergusson, the three-volume *History of Scottish Theology*.

Prof. Elliot's lecture was entitled 'Covenantalism: Scotland's Red Thread'. In a fascinating lecture, he traced the central role of covenant in the Scottish Church's understanding of God's outworking of salvation across the ages of biblical history. This focus on covenant was an immensely strong

emphasis in Scotland, tied in with the 17th century's National Covenant, which gave rise to the Covenantor movement. This focus on covenant has perhaps faded in the consciousness of much of the church in Scotland in the past 100 years, but Prof. Elliot's lecture was a timely and very helpful reminder of how central the concept of covenant has been in the Scottish understanding of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

The lecture was well attended, with both students and members of the public coming to Presbytery Hall for the occasion. Scottish Church History and Theology is a key part of the teaching programme at ETS, with opportunities to study our ecclesiastical and theological heritage available at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Please see our website if you would like further details of these study opportunities. ●



Principal Iver Martin Welcomes Prof Mark Elliot to Presbytery Hall for the 2020 Annual Lecture in Scottish Church History and Theology.jpg

SEMESTER 2 CONTINUES

TIME KEEPS MARCHING ON IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR, AND SEMESTER 2 IS CONTINUING TO PROGRESS WELL. Students are currently just past halfway through the second semester, which means they are three-quarters of the way through the whole academic year. Right now, there are lots of essays due, so it is a busy time both for students writing and for lecturers marking. Once the essays are done, attention has to turn very quickly to the exams, which are at the beginning of May. For the final-year students, these are the last steps in a long journey which, all being well, will result in graduation after the exams are finished. The annual ETS Awards Ceremony will this year be held on Friday, 15 May. This is an opportunity to recognise the hard work of all our students and to commend our graduates to the next step of their lives. The Awards Ceremony is a public event held at St Columba's Free Church in Edinburgh, and all are warmly invited to attend. ●

BOARD MEMBERS COMPLETE PERIOD OF SERVICE

FOUR MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDINBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY WILL REACH THE END OF THEIR TENURE AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN MAY. Usually, Board members serve two 4-year terms on a Board, after which they have to step down. Two of our members, Dr Graham Keith and Mr Murdo Macphail, have both reached the end of their second 4-year terms, during which they have provided very valuable input into the life and work of ETS. We are immensely grateful for their commitment and support. At the General Assembly, two new members will be appointed. These must be elders in the Free Church (as both Graham and Murdo are), and over the past couple of months, Presbyteries have been asked to provide nominations for suitable individuals to serve on the Board. The third member of the Board to finish his period of service is Rev. Angus MacRae. Angus has served as Chairman of the Board of Ministry for the past eight years, and will complete his time in this role at the General Assembly. The Chairman of the Board of Ministry is automatically a member of the Seminary Board, so Angus' time on the ETS Board will also come to an end, and the new chairman will join us. Angus has provided huge support to the Seminary during his time as Board of Ministry Chairman and we are deeply thankful for his commitment, wisdom and help. Finally, the fourth member to complete his service is Donald M. Macleod, who has been the student representative for the past twelve months. Each year a student (usually in their final year) will serve as a member of the Board, and Donald has provided a hugely valuable link between the Seminary Board and the student body currently studying at ETS. The other members of the Board are currently Dr Malcolm Maclean (Chairman), Dr Fergus Macdonald (Vice-Chairman), Principal Iver Martin, Dr Alistair Wilson and Rev. Thomas Davis. They will all be staying on for the time being. ●

DR ALISTAIR WILSON SPEAKS AT ASET CONFERENCE IN KENYA

ETS LECTURER IN MISSION AND NEW TESTAMENT, DR ALISTAIR WILSON, RECENTLY SPOKE AT THE AFRICA SOCIETY OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY (ASET) CONFERENCE IN NAIROBI, KENYA. ASET unites scholars, pastors and students across Africa to provide opportunities to exchange ideas and promote the study of evangelical theology among pastors, theologians and church members. Dr Wilson spoke on the topic of 'Christ's Lordship of Mission in African Theology'. In his address he discussed a statement made by Prof. John Mbiti, who famously said that missionaries did not bring God to Africa, God brought them. This emphasis was later echoed by Dr Kwame Bediako, who modified Mbiti's statement to say that missionaries did not bring Christ to Africa, Christ brought them.

Dr Wilson explored the emphases of these claims, and moved towards highlighting the key biblical truth that Jesus Christ is Lord of Mission. Every missionary endeavour is undertaken under the lordship of Jesus, emphasised of course by Jesus' own statement in the Great Commission of Matthew 28 that all authority on heaven and earth has been given to him.

Dr Wilson previously served in Dumisani Theological

Institute in South Africa, and this 2020 ASET conference was an excellent opportunity for him to maintain his close ties with the continent. Moreover, the opportunity to speak at the conference is an encouraging expression of the Seminary's commitment to global mission through the work of the ETS Centre for Mission. ●



Africa Society of Evangelical Theology Conference, Nairobi, Kenya

Please continue to pray for the staff and students at ETS. We are so grateful for your ongoing, prayerful support.

WHY DID GOD RAISE JESUS FROM DEATH?

BY IAIN GILL

A series of short articles about Jesus' resurrection

WHO RAISED JESUS? Paul always speaks of God raising Jesus. It is usually understood that the Holy Spirit is God's agent in such matters. And Jesus spoke of having the authority to raise himself. So we accept that all persons of the Trinity were involved. Magnificent! But we've missed something; something very important.

The resurrection story does not start at the grave. It starts in eternity in the plans and purposes of God. The focus of this article is the succession of choices made by Jesus, linking the Incarnation and Resurrection. For us, Easter starts at Christmas.

We know the story. Jesus agreed to take human nature and to suffer a lifetime of humiliation. Bearing in mind the contrast with his previous life in heaven and the indescribable intensity of bearing the sin of the world at Calvary, such sacrifice was astonishing and enough to bring us to our knees in worship and adoration. The Son of God agreed to become the son of Mary, born as a human in the line of David. Jesus agreed to take human nature, and he did it for us.

Jesus spoke of having choices. The gospel accounts of the servant of the high priest getting his ear sliced off demonstrate Jesus' choice to die at Calvary. In John 10:17-18 he says: *'... I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.'* Jesus agreed to his resurrection. By agreeing to his resurrection, Jesus committed himself to retaining human nature for all eternity. God did not just intervene in human history. God committed himself to a 'forever' change. That's massive.

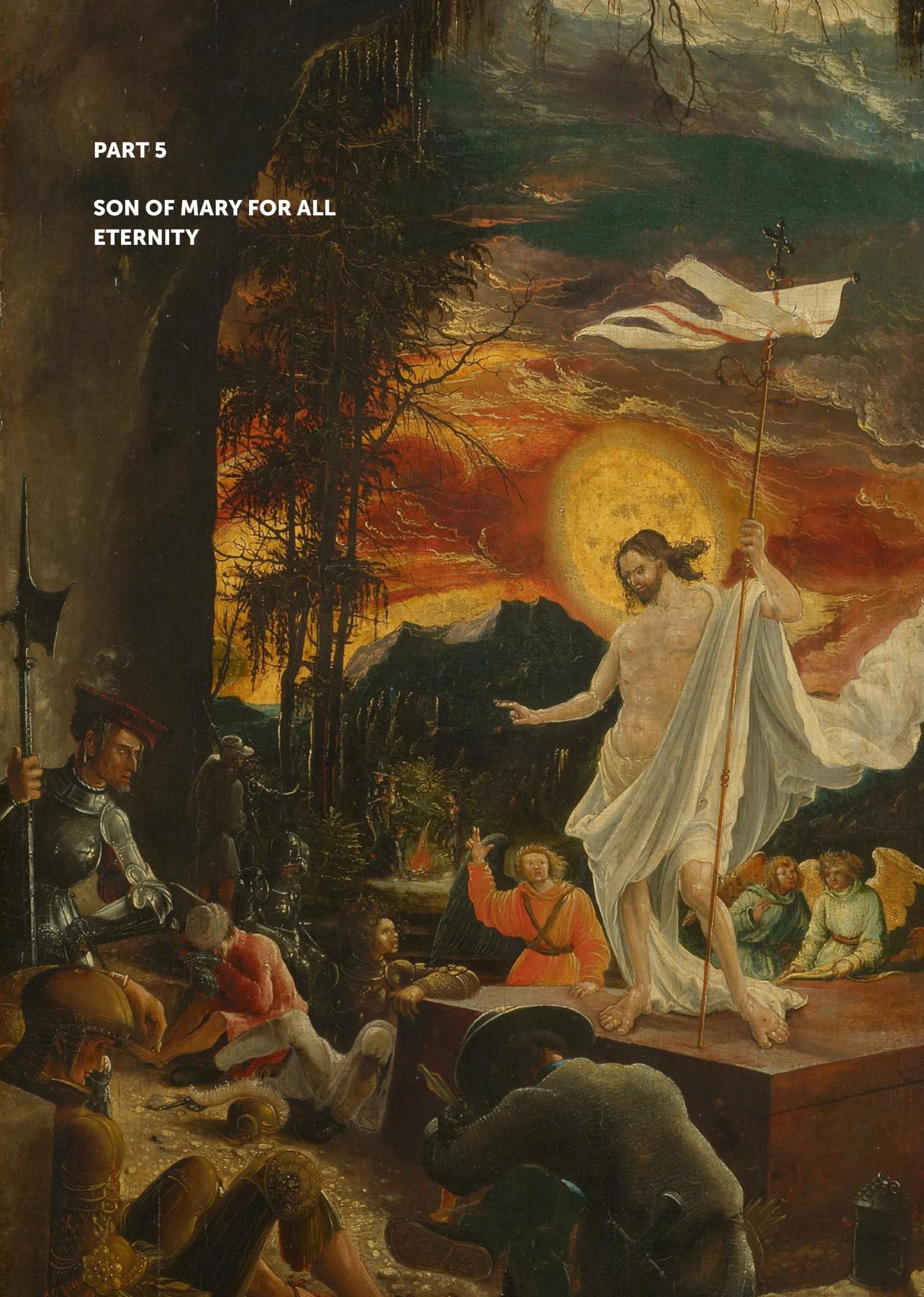
Jesus' motivation for his choices lay in a divine plan to which he was committed. In his humiliation Jesus regarded that plan as the will of his Father. Incarnation, Calvary and Resurrection were essential parts of that plan. Starting from his conception in Mary, Jesus took human nature. Note the careful balance in the key passage of Romans 1:3-4. Paul says, *'regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David ... declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.'* Even post-resurrection, the One who sits at the right hand of God is the son of Mary and the Son of God.

Jesus had choices. He chose to die for us. He chose also to rise for us. Both in their own way were huge decisions, but both were for us and both were in obedience to the will of the Father, leading to a glory beyond our comprehension. All the benefits that flow from Jesus' resurrection, including our future physical resurrection and eternal blessing, are a result of his choice to carry out his Father's will. What a wonderful Saviour we have!

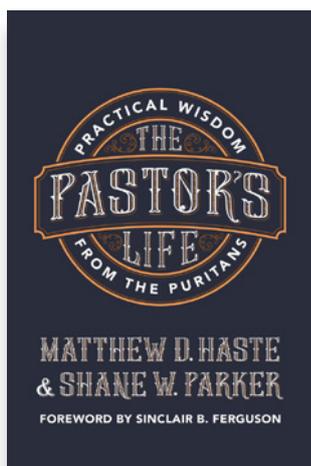
The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! •

PART 5

**SON OF MARY FOR ALL
ETERNITY**



Easter is coming this month. In the midst of the chocolate and springtime celebrations, it's important for us to keep hold of the gospel truth we are truly celebrating. Any of our books this month will help you do that, whatever your age, stage or literary preference.



BRAHMIN REBORN

BHASKAR SREERANGAM WITH ESTHER SANDYS (2019)

Beware of looking at a book like *Brahmin Reborn* and writing it off as just another missionary biography, perhaps with nothing new to offer on top of the other excellent biographies already out there. I've made this mistake before, and sadly made it again with this book. How wrong I was!

Bhaskar Sreerangam's book, written with his daughter-in-law Esther Sandys, is a captivating exploration of his youth as a high-caste, and extremely religious, Hindu in South India. The story is told with remarkable self-awareness, and gives a fascinating insight into a man who instinctively seemed to know that his religion was ultimately false, despite not knowing what the true religion was.

We can all relate to the tales of seeking divine reward for religiosity, and the increasingly frustrated desperation for heavenly reassurance in the face of confusing experiences. And in Bhaskar's first encounters with Christians, and his subsequent conversion, we are given many examples of open-hearted discipleship we would

do well to learn from. This book is an easy read, and it's one I highly recommend. In a 'Christianised' culture, it is sometimes hard to remember how radical the message of the gospel is. But we must remember, if we are to realise how desperately our society needs the gospel. Read *Brahmin Reborn*, and you'll not forget again in a hurry. ●

Miriam Montgomery, Free Church Books

THE MIND MUDDLER

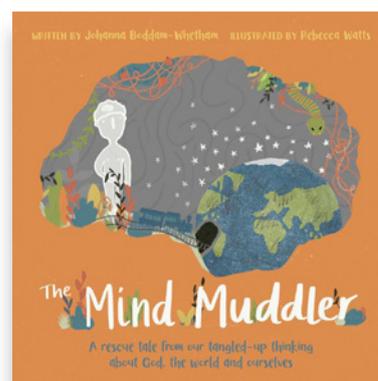
JOHANNA BODDAM-WHETHAM & REBECCA WATTS (2019)

I have to admit, when I was given this book to review, I was a little nervous. I have always been very aware that young children's minds are delicate and are obviously not as mature as older children's or adult's minds. They therefore process information differently and I have always felt we need to be careful about how we feed these young, delicate minds. I guess I didn't want a book named *Mind Muddler* to muddle their little minds!

The *Mind Muddler* is a short rhyming book which begins with the Fall and explains how God's enemy hated us thinking straight and caused our minds to run off track and the lights to go out. It explains how we are tied up in knots and our lives are tangled in lies. It goes on to explain how God is bigger than all our mess and how Jesus came to put things right: 'All his straight thinking as if it were mine, my knotted mind tangle considered His crime.' Good theology bound up in rhymes and fun pictures. It's like the Bible in miniature, explaining why our thinking still misses the mark and we still go off God's track. It encourages prayer and dependence on those who will guide us in the right way and explains how ultimately King Jesus will carry us through.

I felt this book was a little above my eight-year-old's level. The rhyming can over-complicate the message the book is trying to portray. But it was better understood by my eleven-year-old son, who found it clear and fun. ●

Una Davis, St Columba's Free Church, Edinburgh



These books are only a small proportion of the ones we review.

You can find all our reviews online at <https://books.freechurch.org> or sign up to our monthly email to get them directly to your inbox: <https://thefree.church/books-sign-up>

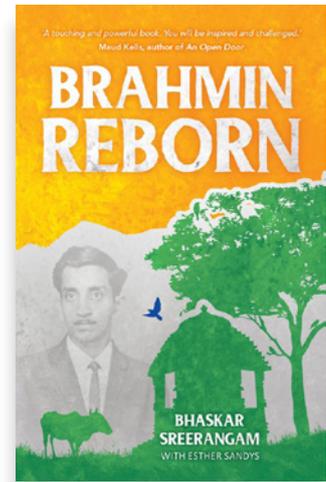
THE PASTOR'S LIFE

MATTHEW D. HASTE & SHANE W. PARKER (2019)

Haste and Parker are both professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this book, they have provided some treasures from their studies in the Puritans to resource and strengthen those in pastoral ministry. They explore twelve themes, using different Puritan figures as the locus for each chapter. Some are well known, like Jonathan Edwards and John Owen, while others less so, such as William Gouge.

It is a short book, with concise and zippy chapters. Their appreciation for the Puritans is obvious, and while there is some critical engagement, their aim is to resuscitate the image of those alleged fun-sponges of yore. In fact, these were men who were serious about God and desperate to know and make known his joy in every facet of life. There are many helpful insights, and while it might prove a nice quick refreshment for the seasoned pastor, this might be best to first put into the hands of someone who is considering ministry and wishes to hear the counsel of our forebears. ●

Ciarán R Kelleher, Broughty Ferry Presbyterian Church



PREACHING WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

DAVID SEARLE & ROBERT BRUCE (2019)

It is impossible to surpass the superlative commendations this volume has already received: *'We are indebted to David Searle'...* *'David Searle has provided a very valuable resource for the church today'...* *'David Searle has done us a great service.'*

Bruce preached through Hebrews 11 between 1590 and 1592 while he was minister of St Giles in Edinburgh. The manuscripts have been kept in the special collections of New College Library and are only now being published for the first time as the result of three years of painstaking work. First, David had to transliterate the old Scots lettering in Bruce's own handwriting into our familiar alphabet. He then had to translate the sermons from the Braid Scots into English, and finally edit them into something publishable. To make the sermons even more accessible to a modern audience, David has compiled copious notes on the historic and ecclesiastical context in which they were preached.

Although delivered 400 years ago, these sermons are remarkably relevant for 21st-century Scotland. We forget how recent and therefore how precarious the Reformation settlement of 1560 was. Bruce preached to people who still hadn't grasped the full implications of justification by grace through faith alone. So he hammers these precious truths home time and time again—just as preachers must still do.

I would challenge anyone hearing the following sentence from the fifth sermon not to think that Bruce had said it today: *'Again, every one of us also knows the strong influence of something that becomes accepted as normal; even though some vice appeared odious when someone first started to practice it, people gradually became accustomed to it, until what at first had shocked them ultimately became enjoyable and commonplace.'*

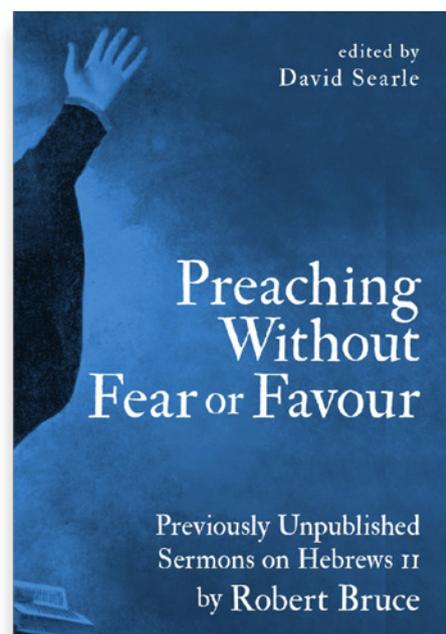
Bruce has a lot to say about how Christians should respond to opposition. James VI was a particularly nasty character who persecuted Bruce when he spoke out against the king's immorality. I found the sermon on Moses' parents, 'who feared not the king's command', prophetic in its application to the situation the modern Scottish church faces.

Anyone used to reading the English Puritans will find these sermons easy and enjoyable. There is a certain Scottishness

about Bruce's style. His material is well organised and systematic without the seemingly endless points of applications so beloved of his southern contemporaries. And though many of his applications are of historic interest only, he clearly knew the human heart well in all its sinfulness, pride, weakness, and fears. Here is a perfect example of pastoring the flock from the pulpit.

Christian Focus are to be commended for publishing this book in such an attractive and accessible format. As Stephan Williams says in his commendation: 'We owe much to David Searle; more to Robert Bruce and most to the Lord whose word to his people comes through so clearly in these pages.' I heartily agree. ●

Ian Watson, Hope Church
Blackwood & Kirkmuirhill



EASTER: GIVE LIFE!

FREE CHURCH BOOKS HAS A PARTNERSHIP WITH 10OFTHOSE. This means that when you shop online at thefree.church/shop, a percentage of the profits comes straight back to the Free Church. You can use our link to access the full 10ofthose catalogue. Rev. James Ross explains how Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church are using this partnership to support discipleship and evangelism.

At Buccleuch, we typically use both Christmas and Easter as an opportunity to provide free books and tracts that we feel will be helpful both to members and to visitors.

Thanks to the affordable, quality stock available through Free Church Books (in partnership with 10ofthose), on a modest budget it is possible to provide a range of attractive and readable titles. We typically purchase both books and booklets, knowing that some read more than others. One advantage of the 10ofthose website is that it is sometimes possible to download samples to get a general 'feel' for both the content and the design.

In gearing up for Easter, we will again be giving away a range of evangelistic and apologetic materials including:

Lee Strobel, *The Case for Easter*. A well-known and respected journalist and author, Strobel is able to pull together strands of evidence in a compelling way. We are in the middle of a Christianity Explored course, and the question of the Resurrection never ceases to be central to our faith, but also to the challenge for accepting Christianity.

Lee Gatiss, *The Forgotten Cross*. This book will be of benefit to our members as a devotional-style look at how the finished work of Jesus on the cross serves to impact our identity and daily life.

Val Grieve, *Your Verdict on the Empty Tomb*. We got some stock of this last year and found her clear and direct presentation of the facts of the resurrection very helpful. It is nice and short but packed with strong evidence.

Carl Laferton, *The Real Easter*. This is a short tract which focuses on different reactions to the death of Jesus and gets right to the heart of the gospel.

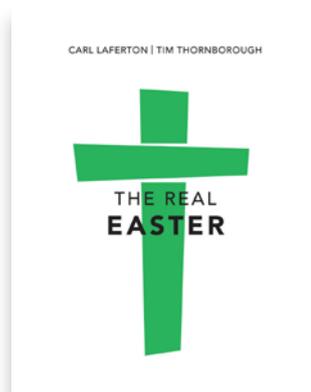
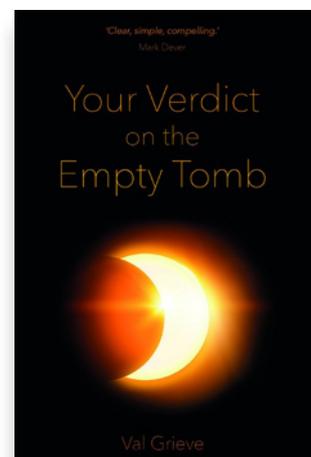
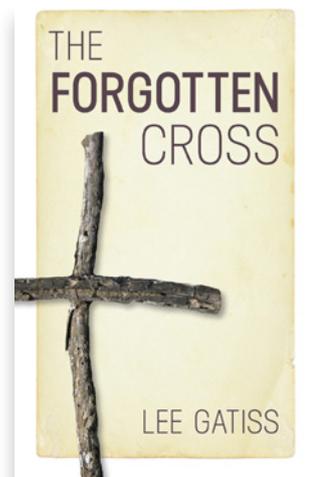
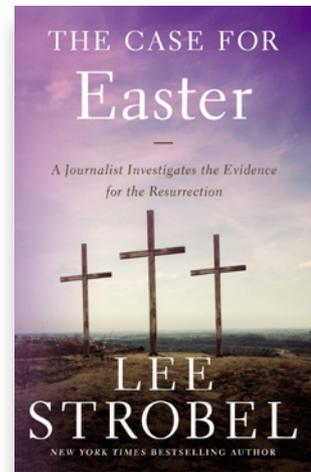
Roger Carswell, *Christ Died for our Sins*. Following the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15, this short tract again looks ideal for giving away at Easter in helping people to think through the significance of the cross and empty tomb

We hope our members can read these for the sake of worship and spiritual growth. It is also one way for us to equip one another to share the gospel or answer the hard questions our friends might have. We try and encourage each other to read and share with others if a particular book is helpful.

We like to offer our visitors a gift to show that their being with us matters to us, and that we want to help them as they grapple with some of the biggest questions of faith and life.

From our experience I would definitely encourage others to think about making 'book give-aways' part of your plan for discipleship and evangelism. ●

Rev. James Ross is minister at Buccleuch & Greyfriars Free Church, Edinburgh



POETRY PAGE

EASTER WINGS

BY GEORGE HERBERT

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne
And still with sicknesses and shame.
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

George Herbert (1593-1633) was a priest in the Church of England, and a poet whose work influenced later writers such as Samuel Coleridge, T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden. His 'shape poem' Easter Wings describes the devastating effects of sin on humanity. Herbert asks the Lord to lift him from sin's decay so he can enjoy the victory of the resurrection. ●



MISSION MATTERS

A monthly take on some of the mission work the Free Church is involved in by our Mission Director, **DAVID MEREDITH.**

C **COVID-19. WELL, THERE'S A SET OF LETTERS INTRODUCED TO THE CANON OF ABBREVIATIONS.** It will not be forgotten as the pandemic of Coronavirus disease 2019 sweeps the planet.

As I write the Chancellor has pledged £30 billion to fight the virus, thousands of flights have been cancelled and the world economy has been thrown into chaos. On a more serious level, the case fatality rate (CFR) is estimated between 2 and 3%. In practical terms, that is high.

People are talking about this. In the early days the media is discussing very little else. When the public discourse is diverted from the flippant to the serious there is an opportunity to carry our conversations further.

What can we talk about?

THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

For the last few decades people in the west have been talking and acting as if we had finally become masters of the universe. 'Progress' was the key word and there seemed to be a growing consensus that we could beat almost anything. As we drove around in sound-proofed cars, amused by the latest BOSE system and personally escorted around in our opulent mobile armchairs by TomTom and Garmin, we were given a false sense of invincibility. COVID-19 advances at an alarming rate and is blind to class and borders.

Discuss with your secular friends the concept of control. James' letter tells us that those who simply assume business as usual have their heads in the sand. James reminds us, 'you do not even know what will happen tomorrow', and he offers an alternative: 'you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that"' (James 4:13-15). If the world can be flooded by a virus which can't even be seen by the human eye, do we really have control?

If we ally COVID-19 to the massive changes in the environment and the effects that they have on our planet through flooding and drought, we ought to suggest adopting a position of humility to both ourselves and our friends. Suggest that we are not autonomous, powerful beings but, although possessing God-given dignity, we depend on the Almighty Creator for our very breath.

THE REALITY OF DEATH

It's not normally polite to discuss our earthy demise over vol-au-vents and sherry, but in a context where this

virus could take out a significant number of people, it is difficult to avoid this particular elephant in the room. Use your highly tuned emotional intelligence in this situation, but if the conversation turns to the afterlife, then we have an opportunity to tell why death may be the last enemy but it will be the last one for a good reason. The Christian faith abounds with hope. Charles Wesley wrote a meditation on the art of dying. One of the doctors who tended to the early Methodists on their deathbed said, 'Most people die for fear of dying; but I never met with such people as yours. They are none of them afraid of death, but [are] calm, and patient, and resigned to the last.'

Mission is much more than populating the kingdom of God and plundering hell, as the old fundamentalists used to say, but it is not less than that. Evangelism used to raise the solemn reality of eternal perdition; now it's hidden away. The eternal welfare of souls motivated our Puritan mothers and fathers who ministered in a context of plague and disease. There is the dark curtain of death and hell, but the light of the gospel hope shines so bright that the darkest set of circumstances can be illuminated by hope.

THE LOVE OF GOD

The early believers lived in a context very similar to the one we have been introduced to. Medicine in New Testament days had barely risen beyond that of the Stone Age. There was minimal knowledge of anatomy, and surgery as we know it was unheard of. Christians were known for their care of the sick, and latterly for being pioneers of progress in medicine and surgery. As children of God we have had love lavished upon us (1 John 3:1) and we are called to use that as an example to pity and help those in need, revealing that we do not simply love with words and speech but 'with actions and in truth' (1 John 3:16-18).

COVID-19 is now upon us. It is a new opportunity for mission. Our contribution may be tiny, as small as a mustard seed. You know how the story goes. The seed grew into a plant which became one of the largest plants in the garden. But, the man planted the seed. The seed will not flourish in the packet. In this worried, unsure, sick society, don't be consumed by worry: go plant a seed.. ●

Fosgail ar sùilean

(Open our eyes)

LE JANET NICPHÀIL

NUAIR A THA LUS NO DHÀ A' NOCHDADH, TUIGIDH SINN GU BHEIL IAD FHATHAST BEÒ. Bheir seo oirnn' a bhith a' smaoinichadh air cho feumach 'sa tha sinn fhìn air a bhith a' sealltainn dhan t-saoghal gu bheil beatha annainn, beatha a thàinig bhon Chruthaidhear Fhèin. Nuair a bheothaicheas Esan sinn, chì sinn saoghal mòr le iomadh seòrsa feum.

Tha mòran anns an t-saoghal nach cuala an Soisgeul a-riamh, gu dearbh chan eil Bioball aca nan cànan fhèin, agus sinn air ar cuartachadh le iomadh Bioball 's iad gu tric dùinte; chan eil ùidh aig a' mhòrshluagh annta, ged is e seo an Leabhar a threòraicheas sinn gu facail a labhair an Cruthaidhear, agus cuideachd gu gnìomharan a rinn E, 's a dh' fhàg E againn gus an tuigeadh sinn beagan mu thimcheall A mhòrachd.

Tha iomadh eaglais a' fàs gu math falamh 's na daoine a bha a' lìonadh nan eaglaisean air bàsachadh.

Nach iongantach 's an Cruthaidhear air a bhith cho math dhuinn, nach eil sinn ag iarraidh taing a thoirt Dha airson nam beannachdan a tha gar cuartachadh.

Bheir sinn taing do dhaoine airson nì math sam bith a nì iad dhuinn. Nach mòr gu mòr is còir dhuinn taing a thoirt dhan Chruthaidhear airson an dìon a th' Aige oirnn', am pailteas a tha E a' frithealadh oirnn', agus tha mi cinnteach gur iomadh ùrnaigh a chaidh suas ann an linn a dh' fhalbh gun atharraicheadh Esan a' bhochdainn a bh'aig daoine an uair sin.

Rinn E sin, ach chan eil iomradh air gur E a tha a' riaghladh, 'na shuidh am-feast na Rìgh'. Is e Dia mòr a th' ann, agus is lèir Dhà-san ar cridheachan, gach car is cleas a th' annta, agus chan eil dì-chuimhn' maille Ris.

Nuair a tha an saoghal gu nàdarrach a' smuaiseachadh, agus cadal a' gheamhraidh gu bhith air ar cùlaibh, an dùil nach e leasan a th' ann dhuinn fhìn a bhith a' coimhead ri feuman an t-saoghail, agus a bhith a' ceasnachadh dè a tha nar comas-ne a dhèanamh gus seo atharrachadh?

Bhiodh e math gun dùisgeadh an Cruthaidhear iomadh cridhe gu bhith a' tuigsinn gur ann, 'Annsan a tha ar bith 's ar beath' agus comas ar gluasad'.

Tha an Cruthaidhear, mar deagh Athair sam bith, ag iarraidh nan nithean as fheàrr d'A theaghlach Fhèin, ach tha mòran a' diùltadh seo, oir tha e cho toinnte nar nàdar fhìn gum biodh làmh air chor-eigin againne fhìn ann an cùisean.

Is e a chanas Esan rinn, 'A Mhic, thoir dhomh-sa do chridhe', 's mur dèan sinn seo, chan eil sinn idir air gabhail a-steach gur E Britheamh an t-saoghail-sa.

Nuair a dheàlras a' ghrian 's a thig blàths dhan aimsir, fosglaidh na sìtheanan a-mach, agus bidh iad de dheifir cumadh agus dath.

Nuair a thig Facal Dhè le Solas bho na h-Àrdaibh, stadaidh an duine, èistidh e, agus le cumhachd an Spioraid, gabhaidh e ris na tha am Facal-sa ag ràdh.

Nach e ar n-ùrnaigh gur e seo a thachras, gus am bi slugh mòr a' tighinn nar là a thoirt taing agus moladh Dha?

'Is e dùrachd mo chridhe, agus m'ùrnaigh ri Dia airson Israeil, gum biodh iad air an tèarnadh'. B'iad sin facail an Abstoil anns an litir gu na Ròmanaich.

Nach e sin dùrachd ar cridhe do mhòran choitheanalan faisg oirnn' no fad air falbh?

Seall dhuinn leasain bho shaoghal nàdair beath' à bàs chithear seo ann an gàrradh.

Le cumhachd do Spioraid, dùisg Thusa an-àird' sinn gu bhith èasgaidh nar latha le beath' a bheir gràdh dhut. ●





BY CATRIONA MURRAY

POST TENEBRAS LUX

THERE IS A FAMOUS AND SOMEWHAT HILARIOUS SCENE IN THE FILM *WHISKY GALORE*, WHERE A YOUNG BOY STANDS UP IN SCHOOL TO READ OUT HIS COMPOSITION.

He is, like the whole island, preoccupied with the lack of strong drink available to them, and his essay culminates in the line, 'and when there is no wheesky, we are all very sad'.

The film, and the book on which Hollywood based it, depicts a community united in its comic devastation. All human drama on the island is rendered flavourless because there is not one drop to be had of that most fortifying drink. Neither wake nor wedding can be properly marked until a few bottles be obtained, through either fair means or foul. When fate — in the form of a sinking cargo vessel — presents them with an opportunity, then, the ensuing adventure is entirely predictable.

In Uig, Lewis, in the 19th century, the Rev. Alexander Macleod was horrified to hear an elder praying for a ship to be wrecked soon so that the poor people round about might benefit from its bounty. It was the way in which their meagre subsistence had been supplemented for many years, but it struck a jarring note for the minister to hear one of his own office-bearers actually petitioning the Almighty in this manner. Quite apart from anything else, it demonstrated a real want of compassion, and suggested that islanders only thought of the benefits to themselves created by disaster, with no thought whatsoever for any victims who may have suffered loss of either property or life.

Christians are called on not to act or view the world in this egocentric way. Indeed, we are repeatedly told in the Bible that we should subdue, or even crucify, self. Before Christ's ministry was underway, John the Baptist expressed it perfectly: 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' Our selfish desires, and even our needs, should always be subordinate to our obedience.

This is easier said than done, of course, and I certainly fall far short of the ideal every single day of life. If, however, I were better at it — if we were all better at it — what would our essays and our prayers sound like? What would we lament as absent from the community, and what would we ask God to send us?

We should be good at this game, because we play it every day. Some people view prayer as a chance to list their needs, expecting God to supply them like a department-store Santa at Christmas. At some point, we have all probably asked him for specific things that he did not see fit to grant. Why? Because he's mean and capricious? He delights in disappointing us? No, but because he knows best and his ways are not ours.

So, in prayer, do we actually need to specify what it is we want? See, the wee boy in *Whisky Galore* and the old man in 19th century Uig both thought that they understood exactly what was required to ensure everyone's happiness and security. It is so typical of our fallen human condition that it mattered to neither of them that

disaster befalling others would be the means of fulfilling these claims on the Lord's bounty.

There is actually just the one thing needful, from which all other blessings flow: that we should know Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Accepting his overlordship, though, means accepting it completely. We don't require to tell him how to act because, apart from anything else, we frequently call it wrong. The greatest and most rewarding challenge, therefore, is that of handing the controls to him, and not feeling the need to guide or wheedle for the result we want. It's a hard discipline to learn, but when we do it, the benefits are immeasurable.

So, if we put all of that misplaced energy into addressing the real problem faced by all our communities — faithlessness — is it not just possible that something much more seismic, and much more bountiful than a shipwreck, could come the way of mankind? There is nothing wrong, I believe, in praying for the sick, for example, nor in asking that they will be healed. Neither do I think that petitions for the homeless, the bereaved, or the friendless are anything other than a proper use of our time in God's company.

In all of those situations, however, we say with our mouths, 'in accordance with your will'. What a difference I think it would make if we meant it the way that Christ, hanging from the cross, meant it, having first asked the bitter cup to pass from him — 'not my will, but yours'. ●

Photo by Dylan de Jonge on Unsplash