

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



MARCH 2019

Covering Thoughts

Lent is a time when our imagination takes us to Jesus' experience in the barrenness of a bleak rocky landscape, so my picture for this month is that of a quarry.

Recently visiting Portland Bill I was able to spend two half days wandering through the rocks and sculptures of Tout Quarry. It was quite different to the dry desert of Palestine as the rain fell relentlessly and the mist swirled softly both concealing and then revealing the distant views.

I was on a mission. I knew that somewhere there was a sculpture by Anthony Gormley called Still Falling, but I failed to find it on the first day and had to return in the rain to look again. Due I suppose mainly to the winter weather I had the place to myself and walked and climbed trying to spot the sculptures amidst the quarried rocks. It was a little like being on a treasure hunt where there were scattered jewels along the path as well as an allusive goal. For me it became a pilgrimage, mind centred on the quarry with its richness of history. The men who had blasted and fashioned the stones, the stonemasons who had worked on the impressive buildings such as Buckingham Palace, then more recently the sculptors who were transforming the old quarry into an open air gallery.

I found Still Falling at last. It was on the cliff face itself, a figure falling head first, held in the stillness of the stone.

Stones are so full of mystery and symbolism. We touch them in the present but they hold all the antiquity of the past and they will outlast each of us far into the future. We may be awe inspired by the enormity of the quarried rocks and leave our marks on them for the future, but in the presence of eternity they are as passing clouds.

Christine

Pastoral Letter

Dear friends,

Recently I have had cause to reflect on our commitments as Christians. How do we manifest our love of God into tangible actions? We come to church (usually) and contribute to church finances and may even hold some form of 'office'. However our mission is broader than that and is encompassed by two tasks; those of service and witness. Service to those around us is relatively easy to define and recognise and although it may involve an element of self-sacrifice, is achievable and rewarding. (See pastoral letter July 2018). Having said that, service is not the sole prerequisite of Christians. There are many of other faiths and of none whose humanity leads them to help those whose needs are greatest. Service may be a gateway to witness but its value is diminished if it is the prime motive.

How we witness to our faith is perhaps a greater challenge and where we often feel inadequate. When I was a youngster, I sometimes accompanied my father when he led open air services in the East End of London. He played the accordion and I was expected to lead the singing! The 'congregation' was a motley one of local Christians and a few curious hangers on, most of whom were there for the free food and tea. From memory, hell and damnation featured prominently in the sermons. I never felt very comfortable in this setting and am not sure it had much impact.

Most of us feel inadequate when it comes to preaching the gospel although sharing our faith journeys and learning from each other can be very powerful. It is when we are challenged by 'nonbelievers' that we may feel threatened and often change the topic. Trying to persuade someone to accept all Christian doctrine at face value, especially if it flies in the face of their experience or scientific evidence can be counterproductive. What is more powerful is to acknowledge that our faith exists **despite** the fact that we may share in some of those doubts. There is a mystery to our faith that cannot be resolved by rational debate or scientific experiment. It is by "experience that we shall learn as deepest mystery who he is". (Hymn 525). That is a message which we can share.

With every blessing, Malcolm Benson



World Day of Prayer

A Women Led Global Ecumenical Movement

Friday, 1st March 2019

2.00 pm at Wheatley United Reformed Church
and 7.00 pm at St Mary's Church



Logarska in the Kamnik Alps, Slovenia

Come -
Everything is Ready!
Prepared by Christian Women of
Slovenia

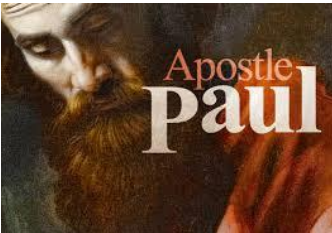
Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Tom Goss's pastoral group; Laurence and Peter Devlin, Colin Thompson, Joel and Kit Rasmussen.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Children and Young People's Education Team: Malcolm Benson, Ann Hardiman, and Mark Williams.

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Lent Bible Studies - What did Paul really say?

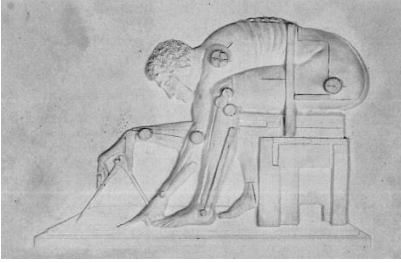


During Lent there will be a short series of bible studies, led by Pauline, Laurence and Cara, looking at Paul's teaching. He can be a controversial figure, so there will be plenty of opportunity for discussion!

Thursdays March 21st and 28th and April 11th at 7.30pm

Liz and Tony Barry have kindly agreed to host again this year at
13 Beech Road

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Technology and the Human Spirit

illustrated talk and discussion

'What is it that is driving the technological revolution
and where exactly is it heading?'

*'Is there an endpoint towards which it is taking us, and if so what
does our human future look like?'*

And, most importantly, do we have any choice about it?'

Tuesday May 14th 7.00 – 9.00pm

Wheatley United Reformed Church

Speaker: Jeremy Naydler holds a PhD in Theology and Religious Studies, and has written several books on religious life in antiquity and on the history of consciousness. His most recent book is *In the Shadow of the Machine: The Prehistory of the Computer and the Evolution of Consciousness*

This is an **open talk** for people of all faiths or none, organised by the
Wheatley United Reformed Church

Book your **FREE** place on 'Eventbrite'-*Technology and the Human Spirit*
or contact Bobbie Stormont on bobbiestormont@gmail.com

There will be a retiring collection to cover expenses

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR MARCH 2019

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10 am Sunday services

Date	3 rd March	10 th March	17 th March	24 th March	31 st March
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am	10am
Worship Leader	Rev. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Rev. Colin Thompson	Stephen Thornton	Rev. Pauline Main
Vestry Elder	Malcolm Benson	Moira Watson	Moira Watson	Pauline Shelley	Tom Goss
Welcomer	Peter Devlin	Catherine Harding	Phyllis Williams	Charles Bennett	Malcolm Benson
Steward	Angela Holdaway	Christine Bainbridge	Bob Webster	Liz Barry	Ann Hardiman
Reader	Ann Hardiman	Laurence Devlin	Robert Harding	Barbara Joiner	Zena Knight
Prayers	Bobbie Stormont	Ann Bettess	Richard Wood	Ann Hardiman	Joel Rasmussen
Flowers	Allison Towner	LENT	LENT	LENT	LENT

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize at 3 Barns Close at 7.30 pm on
Sundays 10th and 24th March

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COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS leaders may use other readings

Date	3 rd March	10 th March	17 th March	24 th March	31 st March
First Reading	Exodus 34: 29-35	Deuteronomy 26: 1-1	Genesis 1: 1-12 & 17-18	Isaiah 55: 1-9	Joshua 5: 9-12
Psalms	Psalm 99	Psalm 91: 1-2 & 9-16	Psalm 27	Psalm 63: 1-8	Psalm 32
New Testament	2 Corinthians 3: 12-42	Romans 10: 8b-13	Philippians 3: 17 – 4:1	1 Corinthians 1: 1-13	2 Corinthians 5: 16-21
Gospel	Luke 9: 28-36	Luke 4: 1-13	Luke 13: 31-35	Luke 6: 13-19	Luke 15: 1-3 & 11b-32

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN MARCH 2019

1 st March	Friday	2.00pm 7.00pm	World Day of Prayer – Wheatley URC St. Marys
3 rd March	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm 6.30pm	Foodbank Afternoon tea in the Hall Pulse Group, Discussion, 17 Bell Lane
4 th March	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
7 th March	Thursday	10am to noon 7.20 pm	Coffee Morning, church open Elders Meeting
10 th March	Sunday	6.30 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group – games URC Church Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
12 th March	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
17 th March	Sunday	8.30 am 7.00pm	Morning Meditation Pulse – Worship Service URC Church
18 th March	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
21 st March	Thursday	7.30pm	Lent Bible Study – 13 Beech Road
24 th March	Sunday	6.30 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group – games URC Church Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
26 th March	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild
28 th March	Thursday	7.30pm	Lent Bible Study – 13 Beech Road
31 st March	Sunday	6.30pm	Pulse Group – film night - venue TBA



WEEKLY EVENTS (NB several activities are term time only)

<i>Brownies & Rainbows (term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (term time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (term time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>

Disclaimer: The Editors of this Newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations but reserve the right to publish or not, and to edit.

Deadline: Wednesday 13th March is the deadline for the April Newsletter. Please always send copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk and not to individuals. But paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont.

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Refreshments after Worship – Request 😊

Thank you to the hospitality team who have ensured that our social time over tea and coffee after our Sunday morning service will continue in the light of the upcoming building works. There will be no washing up facilities so the request is **bring a cup & take it home with you to wash!** There will be some paper ones available but if you can bring your own – china, pottery, bamboo – whichever you have, that will be great. Thank you. 😊

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Tree Competition – How did you do?



Answer!

The 'Dragon Blood Tree' or *Dracaena cinnabari* It grows on the island of Socotra off the coast of Somalia in the Arabian Sea. Its densely packed crown reduces evaporation and allows it to thrive in arid conditions. It has red resin that gives the tree its name, which is prized as a medicine and dye.

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Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

For the 6th instalment of our series on Biblical Women, we will concentrate on the fascinating and controversial episode of “**The Syrophenician woman**” as Mark describes her, while she is called a “Canaanite woman” by Matthew (Mt 15: 21-28). While it is obviously the same story, the two versions present several minor differences but also a HUGE one: The reason why Jesus decides to exorcise the woman’s daughter after his initial refusal. For Matthew, it is the strength of the woman’s faith which convinces Jesus while in Mark’s account, faith is not mentioned. As Mark’s Gospel was written first (what is called “the Markan Priority”, for which there is now an almost unanimous consensus) most scholars agree that Matthew knew Mark’s version and modified it to suit his theological agenda and the priorities of his community.

Let’s concentrate then on Mark’s version, most probably the first one in existence:

“Jesus left this place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “But Lord”, she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” And so, she went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone”. (Mk. 7: 24-30)

This passage prompts us to ask 3 questions: **Firstly**, why does Jesus initially refuse the woman’s request, in total contradiction to his ministry of helping people in need? **Secondly**, why does he accompany his refusal with the sharpest of rebuffs, arguably an insult, contrary to a silent snub in Matthew? And **thirdly and most interestingly**, what is so special about the

woman's answer that makes Jesus change his mind, *a unique occurrence in the Gospels?*

The woman is an ethnic Greek from Phoenicia, therefore for the Jewish Jesus, an outsider and a Gentile but she bows down as she is convinced that he can help her daughter. In this, she is not unusual as it was not uncommon for Gentiles to seek healing from Jewish holy men.¹ But what is highly unusual is that Jesus, whose great fame as a healer is attracting crowds, refuses her request. Why? Is it simply because she is a Gentile? But he has healed a Gentile demoniac from the Decapolis in 5:1-20. It cannot be either because she defies social conventions expected of a woman by speaking first, as Jesus was notorious in defying social and religious conventions. Is it then because he has been trying to get away and is tired and exasperated so he simply snaps? But then he could simply have ignored her like he does in Matthew. The explanation provided by Gert Theissen² seems slightly more convincing: she is a Gentile but not *any* Gentile as she represents an oppressing "colonial" class, that Jesus would have strongly disapproved of. There was bad blood between the Tyreans and the Galileans, because much of the agricultural production of Jewish Galilee ended up in Gentile Tyre, while the Jewish peasants often went hungry.

But is that reason enough for Jesus to call her a "dog", a highly derogatory term? Dogs evoked the scavenging dogs feeding outside the cities on *unclean* animals and that might be why it had apparently become quite common in first century Palestine among Jews to call Gentiles "dogs." As it shows Jesus in a very unflattering light (a sure sign that Mark did not invent the episode) it has posed understandably a big problem to generations of Christian interpreters who have tried to explain it away. Christopher Tuckett for example remarks that "these dogs were little pets and therefore not thought of as distasteful"³ but as Alec Burkill wryly remarks, calling a

¹ Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003)

² Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1992)

³ Christopher Tuckett, *Mark, chapter 58 in The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. by John Barton and John Muddiman, (Oxford OUP, 2000)

woman “*little* bitch is no less abusive than bitch”⁴ !!! Other explanations include the possibility that Jesus was just testing or teasing the woman, “had a twinkle in his eye” during what Tom Wright calls a “good-natured banter.” Really?!!! Very doubtful as there is absolutely no textual evidence for this, and such an insult was no joke.

A more likely explanation which might appear very shocking and improbable at first, is that Jesus being fully human, was, as such, embedded in his Jewish culture and in his Jewish religion, with a certain worldview, certain inherited traditions, certain language and certain biases—biases like for example the exclusion of Gentiles from the circle of those deserving compassion... Having internalized those biases, he expresses them verbally including calling Gentiles names! May be ... but the important difference here is that Jesus doesn't cling to these biases, he listens, changes his mind and *he learns... from a mere woman!* And this is indeed the most remarkable element of the whole episode: In Mark, *it is because of what the woman says that Jesus changes his mind.* “For such a reply” he says...

As the great scholar, Elisabeth Shuchlerr Fiorenza explains so perceptively, the woman does not appeal to standards of compassion, fairness or even ... common courtesy but displays instead witty intelligence by accepting Jesus' metaphor used against her and reverses it to her own advantage: She transforms the street dogs that are *outside* the house (of Israel) into pets living *inside*, admittedly under the table so in a position of inferiority to the children but still fed and still inside. “The cleverness of her response is that she honours his rejection and still finds a place for her request. By countering Jesus' argument, the woman affirms that the abundance of God has no limit and there will be enough for everybody in His kingdom. So even if she recognizes the primacy of Israel, she nevertheless makes the theological argument against limiting the inclusive table community of Jesus to Israel alone, and the privileges given to the children of Israel do not preclude benefits also falling, *at the same time*, to Gentiles⁵”

⁴ T.A. Burkill, *Historical Development of the Syro-Phoenician woman*, *Novum Testamentum* 9: 173 (1967)

For both characters, this episode is therefore about *crossing boundaries* and stepping into new territory. It is also, even in Mark, about faith and trust: Note what Mark says “and so she went home” indicating that she does not ask for any proof of her daughter’s healing (remember: done at a distance) but she trusts Jesus and leaves without another word. So even if the reason given by Mark for Jesus’ change of mind is different from Matthew, the woman does demonstrate remarkable faith. In a way “Matthew’s account makes explicit what is implicit in the Markan account.”⁶

⁵ Elisabeth Shuchlerr Fiorenza, *“In Memory of Her”*: 10th Anniversary Edition, (New York, Crossroad, 1998)

⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark, a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, (Grands Rapids, Michigan, Eersmans, 2002)

ROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE

FRIDAY MARCH 29TH 1 – 4pm



Join us for food and friendship

3 Barns Close, Holton

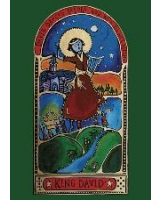
Supporting

Maggie’s Oxford

RSVP Christine and Richard 01865 872868



Dancing with Monks and Mystics



Come and join me, learning together, short, prayerful and participatory dances inspired by monks and mystics through the

ages, including Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Bridgid of Kildare, Brendan the Navigator, Rainer Maira Rilke, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton.

Each monk and mystic has an invitation to prayer for us, eg;

- Hildegard of Bingen: “Let my soul be greening.”
- Benedict of Nursia: “Welcome in the stranger through the door of your heart.”
- Brendan, the Navigator: “Help me to journey beyond the familiar and into the unknown.”
- Francis of Assisi: “The world is my monastery.”
- Dorothy Day: “We must bring about a revolution of the heart.”
- Thomas Merton: “Join in the joy of the cosmic dance.”

Movement can be a powerful way of connecting with the Divine and dance, part of our spiritual path. Let’s explore together an alternative, embodied way to pray and have fun. Yes fun, that word we most often associate positively with children or for adults with childishness. But prayer and fun can be ‘serious’ partners and fun comes easier with company. Dance connects us to the movement of life and is for every - body.

If you’re thinking, “But I’m not a dancer” or “I feel awkward,” or “I can’t even walk very well,” I hope to reassure you. You don’t need a special talent to move. You don’t need to be “graceful” or especially co-ordinated. You don’t need a body “that’s in shape.” You can sit down. If you can move a finger, your head or hand you can dance. You can dance simply by imagining yourself dancing. There is no right or wrong way.

In the old testament David danced before the Lord, Miriam went out dancing with all the women, and in Isaiah, they go out with joy, are led forth

in peace, the mountains and hills burst into song, and all the trees of the field clap their hands.!!

Why movement and prayer?

Two years ago I went on a retreat at The Bield in Scotland with Abbey of the Arts. The retreat was called 'Awakening the Creative Spirit'; working with the arts and the imagination to enrich our own spiritual lives and offering other ways to encounter the divine presence within. Dance brought me such joy and deep connection to myself and God. It changed the way I thought about and approached prayer and sought the presence of God.

Each morning we began with prayer, movement and song – from the monks and mystics - led by Betsey Beckman, a dancer, choreographer and spiritual director rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition.

I so enjoyed dancing again and praying in this way, with all of myself that once I got home I began to learn a couple of the songs and the dances. I thought, how much more fun this would be to learn these with other people, especially those in my worshipping community. And the bonus - it's healthy to keep moving – good for mind, body, soul and spirit.

So I invite you to join me, one step and one monk or mystic at a time! We would prepare with a gentle warm up, (seated or standing), learn a little about the history and charism of a particular monk or mystic and slowly learn the accompanying song and dance.

When and where I don't know yet. But let me know if you are interested or would like to know a bit more so we can keep on dancing and praying – together! If we have just a few people we can make arrangements to begin. **Contact Bobbie Stormont 07867927966 or email bobbiestormont@gmail.com**

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