

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



APRIL 2019

Covering Thoughts

Looking back at my childhood I remember the importance of family gatherings. My mother was one of five and she and her sisters met regularly. As an only child I appreciated the little group of 7 cousins. We shared birthday and Christmas parties and often holidays too. Over the years we have grown apart but we decided that we should meet up occasionally for fun rather than wait for the next funeral!

One of these occasions took place in March just before one cousin's Diamond Jubilee. There were so many old photos to look through and shared memories to enjoy, but more important it was an opportunity to find out more about each other's lives in the present. Many of the next generation and their young children had come too.

Afterwards the question remained with me: What is success?

There were those who had been very successful. Their children were in well paid jobs with families of their own. But one cousin and his wife admitted they had no grandchildren. Their daughter was struggling to provide a service, not funded by the NHS, for families whose children have speech and other problems. Their son who was an enabler for teenagers with autism and other learning difficulties was too poorly paid to leave home and set up on his own. As they spoke about the caring nature of their children I said 'You must be so proud of them.' There was a long pause as my cousin's wife struggled against tears. 'Yes' she said, 'but no-one has ever said that to me before.'

As we journey towards Easter perhaps we can reflect on true success. The example of Jesus set a pattern of values in contradiction to the accepted ones of his and our day. What are these upside down values, where do we see them, and when we do can we affirm those who show us the way?

Christine

Pastoral letter - Seeing Jesus

In John's gospel, we read how some Greek pilgrims approach the disciples; "We wish to see Jesus," they say.

There are different ways of "seeing Jesus". I have a book called *The Face of Jesus*. It "traces the way in which believers in many lands throughout the ages have imagined and portrayed his image," it says in the blurb. It's quite a fat book, and mainly pictures. Yet we have no idea what Jesus looked like, except perhaps as a general idea of what middle eastern men tend to look like - but still people down the centuries have painted and sculpted Jesus, such that we almost think we **do** know what he looked like.

But is that what it's about? Seeing is about more than just catching a glimpse. Did the Greek worshippers in the gospel just want to see what Jesus looked like, or was it more than that?

People wait hours to "see" the Queen. Generally they know perfectly well what she looks like – even in far-flung parts of the globe she is a well-known face. But still they come – they want to see for themselves, to be part of the experience and the celebration when she visits.

I used to work with blind colleagues some years ago. Somewhat surprisingly they enjoyed events we might think of as visual – sports matches, firework displays – the experience of being there was about more than just "seeing". Perhaps this is getting closer to what the Greeks are asking – "we've heard so much about this teacher, Jesus. We want to meet him, to see for ourselves." Perhaps also we are reminded of the disciple Thomas. He gets rather a bad press, being described as "doubting Thomas". Whereas, like many of us, he wants to experience for himself what others have told him about:

"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (John 20:25).

Think too about the other appearances of Jesus to the disciples, after the resurrection:

Mary Magdalene in the garden sees Jesus and thinks he is the gardener, but she doesn't recognise him until he speaks her name; two disciples on the Emmaus Road walk miles with Jesus and he talks with them about the

scriptures, but they don't recognise him until he breaks bread with them; a "stranger" on the shore offers Peter and the others breakfast, and he is not recognised straight away. Physical seeing doesn't seem to be all that important. It is what Jesus does, it is when they engage with him that they recognise him and say to one another - "We have seen the Lord". Perhaps it should have been "we have MET the Lord."

For us too, we are invited to a personal encounter, to meet and know Jesus for ourselves, to experience his love in our own lives.

Returning to art, where we started - my book isn't just random pictures of Jesus; it takes us through Jesus's story, from nativity, to cross and resurrection, to images from around the world, to modern depictions such as in films.

Christopher Howse, a Roman Catholic journalist, comments, "... people are barking up the wrong tree if they think that El Greco, for example... was trying to portray what Jesus looked like. El Greco's face of Jesus is intended to do several things. It is meant to evoke sympathy, since it shows him suffering under a crown of thorns before his death. In that way, it is a devotional tool. El Greco started off as an icon painter in Crete. That convention is very distant from individual portraiture. Icons are meant to be windows into heaven."

Christians gradually came to feel, he says, that Jesus could be depicted in art, and his image revered as an act of worship of the unseen God. A painting would show a man, but that person, Jesus, is also God. The point of the image was not what Jesus looked like, but that he had a human face: he is one of us, God with us.

So – pictures of Jesus are not about "what Jesus looked like" but help us to see and experience God.

A final point!

Art speaks to many of us, but not to all. The important point is the experiencing for ourselves. For many that will be through music; for others, poetry; for some it will be a walk in the garden or the countryside; for me, the sea helps me to feel close to the majesty of God.

Hopefully for all of us, there are times also when we experience God through one another – a word, a kindness, an inspiration.

I pray that we may all find ways of “seeing Jesus” this Eastertime.

Your minister, Pauline

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Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Laurence Devlin’s pastoral group; Ann & Roger Bettess, Martin & Emma Jee, Moira & Jim Watson, Allison & Colin Towner and Ellen & Bob Webster

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Communications Team; Phyllis Williams, Christine Bainbridge, Zena Knight, Bobbie Stormont, Moira Watson.

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Holy Week

Palm Sunday, 14th April:

Pre-service procession. Start at The Merry Bells at 9.45am.

Maundy Thursday, 18th April:

Joint Service with St Marys at URC 7.30pm. Communion and Tenebrae with Colin Thompson and Nigel Hawkes.

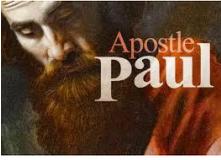
Holy Week meditations and a simple breakfast, organised this year by St Mary’s. Details to follow.

Good Friday Procession, 19th April: Starting at 9.30 am at Our Lady of Lourdes, 10.00 am in Crown Square (URC) and processing as before with stops via Mulberry Drive, Beech Road, Farm Close Road, Co-op forecourt, Memorial Garden, High Street to Shops, High Street back to King & Queen PH, up to Church Road and St Mary's for hot cross buns and drinks by about 10.45 am.

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Lent Bible Studies - What did Paul really say?



This is the last in this Lent series of bible studies looking at Paul's teaching. He can be a controversial figure, so there has been plenty of opportunity for discussion!

Thursday April 11th at 7.30pm at Liz and Tony Barry's - **13 Beech Rd**

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Christian Aid Week



Christian Aid Week will once again be 'envelope delivery' only, with collection points at the Churches, and Merry Bells. More details to follow next month

There are no organised Lent Soup Lunches this year, but folk are encouraged to hold their own at home inviting friends and neighbours to join them and donating some money to Christian Aid.

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Weekly Walkers

I would like to suggest forming a group of walkers who wish to enjoy a weekly walk on Monday afternoons. Although I can't take on the planning, I hope some of our readers might wish to join this venture.



Perhaps we could try about 3 miles somewhere in the Wheatley or Thame areas – starting and finishing near a 280 bus stop. This might even include a café en route! If you are interested, please have a chat with me.

Bob Webster

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OASIS of PEACE – URGENT APPEAL

The Care for the World team wish to bring to your attention the situation that has arisen recently regarding financing for the 'School for Peace', work of the *Oasis of Peace* organisation in Israel. Extracted below are details from a letter by their Executive Director. Many of our congregation have supported this venture in the past and others may wish to learn more of its far-reaching work.

"The US Government has cancelled its 1million dollar USAID grant to the School for Peace at *Neve Shalom - Wahat al Salam* in Israel. This move, part of the US administration's decision to cease all aid funding to Palestinian recipients, has threatened vital peace-building programmes. Since 2017 the success and importance of the School were recognised by USAID's awarding of a \$1 million, 3-year grant. In December 2018 this award was unilaterally cancelled mid-grant - no more of the promised funds would be provided.

The School has long been recognised as one of Israel's most effective centres of conflict resolution – some 70,000 graduates have passed through its doors, having participated in programmes which have helped bridge the divide between Jews and Palestinians. Schoolchildren have been given a safe space to begin to understand each other, lawyers have been trained for careers furthering human rights and environmental activists have been equipped with the skills and knowledge to effect real change.

The directors of the School have now re-designed some of their programmes, but other courses have had to be withdrawn completely. An emergency fund-raising target of \$150,000 has now been launched and the UK branch of 'Oasis of Peace' is committed to assisting this task."

If you would like further information, please take a look at

www.oasisofpeace.org.uk

from Ellen Webster on behalf of the Care for the World Ministry Team

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR APRIL 2019

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

Date	7 th April	14 th April	21 st April	28 th April
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service PALM SUNDAY	Morning Service with H.C. EASTER SUNDAY	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Rev. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Rev. Colin Thompson	Laurence Devlin
Vestry Elder	Robert Harding	Moira Watson	Laurence Devlin	Peter Devlin
Welcomer	Charles Bennett	Pauline Shelley	Catherine Harding	Tom Goss
Steward	Sybil Beaton	Bobbie Stormont	Ellen Webster	Ann Gadjia
Reader	Bob Webster	Paulline Shelley	Phyllis Williams	Wendy Benson
Prayers	Liz Barry	Bob Webster	Barbara Joiner	Christine Bainbridge
Flowers	LENT	LENT	Team Decoration	Jean Boxhall

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 14th and 28th April

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COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS leaders may use other readings

Date	7 th April	14 th April	21 st April	28 th April
First Reading	Isaiah 43: 16-21	Isaiah 50: 4-9a	Acts 10: 34-43	Acts 5: 27-32
Psalm	Psalm 126	Psalm 118: 1-2 and 19-29	Psalm 11: 1-2 and 14-24	Psalm 118: 14-29
New Testament	Philippians 3: 4b - 14	Philippians 2: 5-1	1 Corinthians 1: 19-26	Revelation 1: 4-8
Gospel	John 12: 1-8	Luke 19: 28-40	Luke 24: 1-12	John 20: 19-31

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN APRIL 2019

1 st April	Monday	2.00 – 4.00pm	Not So Young Club
4 th April	Thursday	10am – 12 noon 7.20pm	Coffee Morning Elders Meeting
7 th April	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm	Foodbank Afternoon tea in the Hall Pulse Group – Easter Break for April
9 th April	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club Two
11 th April	Thursday	7.30pm	Lent Bible Study – 13 Beech Road
14 th April	Palm Sunday	9.45am 7.30 pm	Joint procession. Meet at Merry Bells Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
15 th April	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
18 th April	Maundy Thursday	7.30pm	Joint Service with St Mary's at URC Communion and Tenebrae
19 th April	Good Friday Procession	9.30am 10.00am	Our Lady of Lourdes Crown Square – URC. Route details on page 6 of the newsletter
21 st April	Sunday	8.30 am	Morning Meditation
23 rd April	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild
28 th April	Sunday	6.30pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Group – Games in the Church Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
29 th April	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club

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 8.30 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: Friday 10th May is the deadline for the April Newsletter. Please always send copy for the newsletter, link or website to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk - everyone who needs to see it will get a copy. This means you **do not** need to know who is covering at any particular moment. A paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont.

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Charitable Giving

At the end of February, the Finance Ministry Team met to consider which charities we would support with the balance of our charitable giving for our financial year ended December 2018.

As I am sure you are aware, we pay 12.5% of our income to charitable causes each year. We had already paid away £3,010 to charities in 2018, but only £1,100 was actually from Church funds, with the balance being from personal donations. We therefore had a further £4,000 to distribute. We discussed various suggestions put forward by our congregation and our decision, as reported to the March Church meeting, was as follows:

Commitment for Life - £800. This is the world development programme of the United Reformed Church, in partnership with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now.

Sobell House - £900. Offers physical, psychological, social and spiritual care to those facing life threatening illness, death and bereavement. They have been providing care for the people of Oxfordshire for over 40 years.

Homestart Oxford - £900. Offer support, friendship and practical help to parents who are having difficulty managing parenting for a variety of different reasons. At least one child in the family must be under 5 years of age.

Restore - £900. Oxford based mental health charity that supports people to take control of their recovery, develop skills and lead meaningful lives.

They offer recovery groups, training and employment coaching to make this possible.

Gatehouse Oxford - £500. Have been operating for 30 years as a local drop-in centre for Oxford City homeless and vulnerably housed. They provide a place where companionship, dignity and refreshment can be found in a warm, safe and therapeutic environment.

We would also like the Church to take a more strategic approach to our giving in future and to tie it in to our annual theme which for 2019 is 'God's World In Our Hands'. It would be good to decide on our charities earlier in the year, so more focus may be given to those charities during the year.

We already have some ideas on charities related to refugees, asylum seekers and overseas aid. **Please let me have any suggestions before the next Church meeting, particularly environmental/ecological charities.** We will also consider making a further loan to the Oxfordshire Credit Union.

The full details of our charitable/outreach giving for last year will be shown in the 2018 financial accounts.

Chris Shelley

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View from the Allotments



The sap is rising, forks and spades are out, sheds are tidied, autumn friendships renewed, planting plans discussed, the older allottees

dispensing advice on potatoes to the keen newbies. Like an adrenaline shot, the smell of spring with its promise of growth jolts our sleeping senses. We confide to our neighbours that - this year will be the year! The elusive year of bumper crops, of ideal weather with no late frosts. This will be the year!

Old friends return; the curious robins watching the spade turning over worms, the kites quartering the Howe and the squawking woodpecker. The landscape stretches before us to Brill and Beckley. A beautiful back cloth to our work. The allotments present a surreal view with canes and nets, improvised bird scarers, bits of wood, tarpaulins, upturned plastic containers and pots. To the untrained eye the detritus is flotsam and jetsam washed up on the shore by a high tide but to the allotment gardener, the tools of the trade, the collective wisdom of the generations. A Maginot line against deer, badgers, insects and rabbits.

On a warm day, the tribe appear. Like a church congregation they are all varied but have one thing in common; in this case a love of the earth and a joy in growing and country lore. Nostalgia for the old days, of food rationing, exercise, green vegetables and meals taken round the family table goes hand in hand with camaraderie, a quiet sympathy expressed in deeds not words for those suffering the “thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.”*

The allotments are a place of informal medical consultations and legal advice, they are a place of learning better than Google, about old Oxfordshire, the war, football, the Cowley works. They are a place of the future too where the younger allottees mingle with the old and learn the trade with YouTube How To videos.

The allotments are a place of remembrance; where friends no longer with us are remembered by the planting of a tree, a sign of growth and renewal.

The weather varies little but at this time of year we think of March; ‘in like a lion out like a lamb’ and the “uncertain glory of an April day,”** giving way to the “darling buds of May.”***

(* Hamlet ** Two Gentleman of Verona *** Shakespeare, Sonnet 18)

Peter Devlin

Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

Many women who appear in the Bible have been maligned, misunderstood or misrepresented. Figuring highly among those is number 7 in our series on biblical women: Mary of Magdala (a small town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee), most commonly known as **Mary Magdalene**. Described sometimes as “the tart with a heart”, she remains in popular Christian piety the repentant sinner, lifted from the depths of whoredom by her devotion for Jesus. Several famous films have reinforced that image even more, like the musical, *Jesus Christ, Superstar* or Martin Scorsese’s controversial film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

But that character has little to do with the Mary Magdalene of the Gospels.

So, let me first correct a very common misconception or confusion: Mary Magdalene is NOT the woman who anoints Jesus with expensive perfume and who dries his feet with her hair. In the three canonical Gospels where the episode appears, (Matthew 26:6 –13; Mark 14:3 –9; Luke 7:36 –50) the woman is indeed a “sinful woman” but *she is not named* and there is no indication whatsoever that it is Mary Magdalene. There are significant differences in the anointment story as told by each of the 3 canonical Gospels, but it is the same story and *the sinful woman is anonymous in all of them*. However, there is little doubt that the woman IS indeed a prostitute: prostitutes in ancient Israel used to wear a small vial of perfume around their necks with a small hole in it, to release a bit of the perfume at a time, to tell passers-by what she was selling i.e. herself for sex. For the prostitute in Luke’s account, to break the vial is a sign that she has destroyed the sign of her trade, and that she has left that life behind.

The common confusion between Mary Magdalene and the sinful woman who anoints Jesus, is due to the “conflation”¹ of the story as it is told in the 3 canonical gospels with John’s version (John 12:1–8). This is what John writes:

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about

a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair".

There the woman is indeed named but *it is not Mary Magdalene but Mary of Bethany, Martha and Lazarus's sister!* Besides Mary Magdalene, there are quite a few Marys in Jesus' entourage: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany, Mary mother of James and Joseph and Mary of Clopas. So, we need to know who we are talking about! Now you may well wonder why Mary of Bethany would have such expensive perfume in the house and in such quantity. Simple: she and her sister probably purchased it to anoint Lazarus, "dead for 4 days and already smelling" before Jesus came and raised him. With Lazarus alive, the perfume was redundant but still there! Let's also note two other common "conflations" that modern scholarship has endeavoured to correct: the false link established between Mary Magdalene and a woman caught in the act of adultery (John 7:53-8:11) and between Mary and a Samaritan woman who had five husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband (John 4: 4-26). These are totally different women!

What about the real Mary Magdalene then? She is mentioned in all four Gospels as we saw, but it is only in Luke (8: 3) that she appears *early in the story* when we are told that Jesus was accompanied in his travels in Galilee by the twelve and by ***"some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna and many others, who provided for them out of their resources."*** So here you have it, Mary Magdalene was healed of demon possession, not of sexual immorality and there is no mention whatsoever of her being a prostitute! The next time we meet her is at Jesus' execution: all four evangelists name her as a witness to the crucifixion, "looking from a distance" with the other women "who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem". She watches as Jesus is laid in the tomb (Mark 15:46-47; Matthew 27:59-61; Luke 23:55) and returns with the other women to the tomb on the Sunday, "taking the spices they had prepared." It is only in John however, in one of the Gospel's most beautiful passage in its simplicity (John 20:11-18) that, having stayed behind at the empty tomb, Mary, lost in grief, becomes the first one to meet the risen Lord:

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said: "Sir, if you

have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," meaning Teacher.

How on earth then did such a faithful woman who travelled with Jesus and was the first witness to the fundamental event of Christianity, become known as a prostitute? As we have seen, the conflation (whose initial motives might have been benign) certainly contributed to degrading Mary Magdalene. But according to Jane Shaberg, a scholar from the University of Detroit, there is a much more profound and highly regrettable reason: "*This identification of Mary with prostitution fulfills the desire or the need, to attach to female sexuality the notions of evil, repentance and mercy*"² a long-established theme in the Church tradition ... This is confirmed by another very well-known English scholar, Marina Warner, who believes that the legend was "brought into existence by *the powerful undertow of misogyny in Christianity*, which associates women with the dangers and degradation of the flesh"³. It is revelatory indeed to read that Origen and John Chrysostom, two of the most famous theologians of the early centuries of the Common Era, both thought that Mary Magdalene was "a wholly unsuitable first witness to Jesus' resurrection" ... Really? They obviously knew better than Jesus himself who chose Mary to be his first witness!!! This dreadful bias was further reinforced and given authority in the 6th century by Pope Gregory in a famous series of sermons.

We have certainly moved on since then but, as we have seen all along our series on Biblical women, there is still a long way to go to redress the balance!

¹ *Conflation* is a technical term used by New Testament scholars to explain how in the tradition of the church, the different versions of the Gospel story have been "harmonized" and "fused" to create a single narrative. Beginning in the 19th century, modern scholars began to "de-harmonize" the Gospels and, instead of trying to make them consistent, they began to appreciate their rich differences and the great theological significance of those differences.

² Jane Shaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha and Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

³ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1976)



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