

the TREASURY

MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES



by Phil Heaps

Not what it seems

The incident on the Emmaus Road is not just early evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. It is also a fascinating episode in its own right, tinged with humour. In particular there are three striking ironies in the story: three great reversals of expectation, and understanding them helps explain the significance of the event.

The *first* irony is the obvious one. I was once at a social event and found myself chatting to a very polite lady that I hadn't met before. It wasn't long, however, before the conversation turned to the latest piece of local news: there was a new leader in the nearby church. The lady had only heard about him, but she was already mildly dubious at the new approach that the leader was supposedly taking. What she didn't realise, of course, was that I was that new leader. You can imagine that I found it most

revealing to listen to what she said, and it was embarrassing when she realised who she was talking to. And yet, quite amazingly, that is exactly what happens in this episode.

Here are two travellers on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a town some seven miles away. As they walk, they talk about all that has happened in the last few months. They remember the miracles that Jesus had performed and the mighty words he had spoken. They remember his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey: humble yet kingly, fulfilling the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament. They remember his arrest by night, the trial before a kangaroo court and the trumped-up charges. They remember the horrific execution, just a few days before. Even the strange events of their morning cannot dispel the air of gloom and finality.

The fact is, their great hopes have been dashed. Not that they write Jesus off as a fraud.

They still refer to him as a *prophet*, a messenger from God – after all, history had shown that being lynched was an occupational hazard for a true prophet – but obviously Jesus could not have been the *Messiah* they hoped for. Messiahs don't get crucified.

So there they are, travelling along, discussing together and, as they walk, a stranger joins them and enters into their discussion. That is the great irony! The very stranger whom they meet and talk to is himself the very Jesus whom they're discussing as they walk along the road. Later perhaps they would see the funny side ... Then there is the *second* wonderful irony of this account. As it turns out, Jesus's death was not the *end* of their hopes, but the *fulfilment*.

'We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel,' they say. But, 'the chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.' They saw Jesus's death as the very opposite of redeeming Israel, the undeniable end to all their hopes: 'We had hoped that he would redeem us, but he was crucified.' But how did *Jesus* see his own death?

'Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' he says to the

two travellers.

Jesus saw his crucifixion as an absolutely essential element in all that he had come to do. Even more than that, this was the very way that Jesus would redeem his people.

Another Gospel writer called Mark records that earlier in his ministry Jesus had explained that he would 'give his life as a *ransom* for many' (Mark 10:45). His life was the price he paid to set people free from a life-long slavery to selfishness, fear and rebellion against God.

So this is the second irony: in the mind of the two companions, Jesus's death had prevented him from redeeming his people. But in Jesus's mind, it had accomplished that very thing.

But how could Jesus think that way? Because this is what was taught in the Jewish Scriptures, what Christians call the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible. It was here that Jesus turned to explain to his two companions what it all meant: 'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.'

We're not told exactly where Jesus turned in the Scriptures, but we can guess that it was to those very places that his followers later quoted when they

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Kitchen maid with supper at Emmaus by Diego Velázquez c.1617-18. Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Ireland. [The maid is experiencing a spiritual awakening as she witnesses Jesus breaking the bread in the room behind her].

were writing what would become the New Testament. If that is the case, then we can be pretty sure that Jesus would have referred to words from the prophet Isaiah, since these are quoted time after time by the early Christians.

Hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, the prophet Isaiah had written about someone he calls 'The Servant':

*He was despised and rejected
by mankind,
a man of sorrows, and
familiar with pain ...
Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering ...
But he was pierced for our
transgressions,
he was crushed for our
iniquities; the punishment
that brought us peace was on
him,
and by his wounds we are
healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone
astray, each of us has turned
to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all ...
for the transgression of my
people he was punished ...
Yet it was the LORD's will to
crush him and cause him to
suffer,
and though the LORD makes
his life an offering for sin ...
[the] righteous servant will
justify many,
and will bear their iniquities
... For he bore the sin of
many, and made intercession
for the transgressors.*

(ISAIAH 53:3—12)

This prophecy of Isaiah is remarkable for two reasons. On the one hand, it accurately describes the crucifixion of Jesus centuries before it actually happened. Like the transformed followers, it is yet another convincing evidence as to the truth and supernatural origin of the Bible.

But on the other hand, this prophecy also has explanatory power. In it we see clearly that Jesus suffered and died as a *substitute*, in the place of guilty people. Time and again Isaiah describes 'The Servant' as actually *experiencing* what his people *deserved*.

So it was when Jesus was despised and rejected and pierced and crushed and punished and wounded and stricken: at that very moment Jesus was *redeeming* his people. *He* was carrying *my* sins, paying the debt of *my* rebellion, suffering in *my* place. *His* pain is the price of *our* freedom. 'We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and

'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross'

by Marcus Robinson

The opening line of Isaac Watts' well-known hymn leads us to what should always be central in our Good Friday reflections and I invite you anew to join me in making time to contemplate the Cross of our Saviour.

What do we see?

On the surface we observe the usual brutality of the Roman practice of crucifixion – a body stripped and whipped until bloody and weakened. The executioners holding the body in position until the nails have been driven into place and the cross brought to a vertical position allowing the very weight of the body to slowly suffocate the victim. Some reading this may find it difficult, even in the mind's eye, to 'look' at such an horrific scene – man's inhumanity to man. If we can hold our gaze we realise that this is the capability of humans at their worst when we revile others and hate them to such an extent that we will not rest until we have slaughtered those who oppose us. It would be marvellous if we could feel that mankind had

improved since the days of Jesus on earth – the reality is that in every generation, including our own, a power-crazed bloodlust is perpetually apparent. Calvary invites us to observe a power more profound than human evil!

Behind the physical pain Jesus is experiencing the turmoil of his spirit as He ultimately expresses the despair and hopelessness of humans facing death – "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) before being able to express: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46) and conclude with: "It is finished" (John 19:30).

The scene we survey is full of a tremendous and fascinating mystery and every time we consider the Cross new depths can be revealed to us. "See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down." Who but our Saviour could survey the mob around him and declare: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34) and we can only pray that He remains as gracious as he surveys our

lives at this time!

Will we only see the superficial during Good Friday this year or will we 'survey' until we observe the profound and eternal love of our Saviour facing the deepest darkness, and evil at its worst, so that He could establish our salvation, once and for all. To look aright is to know that we see Jesus "now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9). We often understand things by contrast, and we must feel the true darkness of the Cross if we are to truly rejoice in the light of resurrection on that first Easter morning.

Let us pray that all of us, and some for the first time, will survey the Cross and be touched by the Holy Spirit to give thanks for our real salvation and join with Isaac Watts in the last two lines of his hymn: 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.'

Revd Marcus Wyn Robinson is Moderator of the General Assembly.

the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

So far we have seen a double irony in this encounter between Jesus and these two disciples on the Emmaus Road. First, the very stranger whom they meet and talk to is himself the very Jesus whom they're discussing as they walk along the road. Second, Jesus's death was not the *end* of their hopes, but the *fulfilment*: it was the means by which he would redeem his people.

The *third* irony in the account is more subtle, but it hooks us into the great overall story of the Bible. At the climax of Luke's description, when they finally arrive in Emmaus, Jesus takes some bread, thanks God for it, breaks it and begins to give it to them. Then we read that 'their eyes were opened and they recognised him.'

If you are familiar with the sweeping narrative of the Bible, these words may sound vaguely familiar. There is another famous account of two people whose eyes are opened to recognise something. Do you know what it is?

Right at the beginning of

human history, God put the first human pair in a 'garden paradise' in the land of Eden. They had everything they needed, and above all, a friendship with God their Creator. All they had to do for that wonderful situation to continue indefinitely was to recognise that God knew what was right and wrong; that God knew what was good and bad for them.

That knowledge and choice was encapsulated in the single command that God gave them, which was not to eat fruit from a certain tree in the garden. This was their acknowledgement of God's right to be God and their glad submission to him. But tragically they disobeyed God and took the forbidden fruit. And the moment they did, we are told that 'the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked' (Genesis 3:7).

By choosing to live their lives without and against God, the safety and joy of the human race had been replaced with vulnerability, misery and shame. That was the beginning of everything going wrong, everything being spoiled. All the

hurting, pain, evil, and sadness started there, with the human choice to disobey God. And that human trajectory led down through a bloody history to the moment when human beings took God's perfect Son, Jesus, and nailed him to a cross.

But now that terrible moment was being reversed. And this is the significance of that echo in Luke's account. When Jesus died for sins, it wasn't just for the Old Testament nation of *Israel*, to redeem *her*; rather, it was the ultimate redemption: the long exile of *the human race* was over at last.

Cleopas and his companion were perhaps the very first people to truly have their eyes opened to all this – not just when Jesus broke the bread in front of them, but earlier, when he explained this great plan from the Scriptures, and their hearts, as Luke says, burned within them.

An excerpt from a recently published book, What a Comeback!

It is reproduced here with the permission of the author, Phil Heaps.

A year in my Study!

It's been a whole year now since we took the decision to close the Assembly Office in Cardiff and have instigated our work from home policy. Although some staff go in occasionally to sort the post etc. in effect, the place has been 'mothballed', and everyone has sought to find space, and, in the case of some of the staff, find time in between home-schooling, to undertake the work that continues to come in and has to be done in a timely manner. The response has been generally positive, and although the staff miss the company and camaraderie of working together, many have found that they can be as productive, or even more productive during this period.

I note this because I believe that the life of the Assembly Office reflects so much of life during these twelve months, and I include the life of our churches in that reflection. It has been a steep learning curve for many, and I now see faces of people on Zoom, Teams and Facebook which would have been unimaginable a year ago. Ministers, workers, Elders and members have found a way of ensuring the work of Gospel Ministry in a variety of ways, and there are numerous positive examples of getting to grips with the possibilities of technology. Not that this is 'new', the Church throughout its history has reacted to and utilised developments in a way which furthers its mission. Would the Protestant Reformation have witnessed such a transformative influence were it not for the development of the printing press? At the same time, new congregations have flourished, and whatever is said of new people, there are new worshipping communities. I am reliably informed that the worship of our churches in London has been supplemented by new 'congregants' from Colwyn Bay, Tregaron and even the USA!! I wonder, apart from the arrangements made by your own church/pastorate, how much you have benefited from being together with other churches virtually over the past twelve months. And there are other meetings – our prayer meeting at 7.30 on a Tuesday morning has seen the number of faithful attendees increase, as has our Bible study and our

children's work and youth work. In addition, because we spend so much less energy on our building, this has freed up the time of our people to be involved in other community ministry.

All this we know, what we do not know is what comes next. I note from the news that it is expected that the advice around social distancing and wearing face mask etc. might continue until vaccine distribution around the world has been realised, with one government advisor talking in terms of years. Will this mean that the restrictions on numbers, singing, youth and children's work, having a cuppa at the end of the time of worship will continue to affect us as churches? The other unknown is the attitude of our members and Elders. When will people feel it is safe to re-gather? Will people who are now used to the freedom to 'join' the worship live from home, or listen back to the recording, turn up at 11.00 or 6.00. Will that small congregation of 5 or 6 suffice, when people have now become used to worshipping with a group/pastorate, or with other churches? Will people continue to contribute to ensure their building when they have experienced the ability to worship without a building?

It also affects our perception of our needs as a Denomination. Following the virtual Assembly last year, will our churches continue to accept that it is necessary to spend time and money on three days away at Assembly, or away at Association. Will they ask that Presbytery is accessible virtually? In the same way as the Connexional Trustees meet virtually every month, will we think that it is a wise use of our resources to insist that people spend a working day travelling to Aberystwyth for our Board and Departments/Committees? Personally, my annual work mileage was around 40,000 per year, there was the associated cost, but there was also the 'cost' of having me sitting unproductively in a car for 5 of



by Meirion Morris

the 8 working hours in my day!

I wonder if you have ever heard of Joannes Trithemius? He was a sixteenth century lexicographer. The development of the printing press was an unwelcome development:

'He who ceases from zeal for writing because of printing is no true lover of the Scriptures'...
There are similar voices today. Douglas Adams, the author of The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy famously quipped: *'everything that exists before you were born is just normal, the way things should be. Everything that is invented from your birth until you're about thirty is cool and neat and innovative. And everything invented after you're thirty is "against the natural order of things and the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it".'*

I am convinced that there are 'luddite' tendencies which will accompany the new reality of what we will face. However, there are elements of our life and witness as churches which seem to me as essential. I believe that the gathered congregation is an essential, because I believe that the essence of God's covenant relationship is primarily with His people as opposed to with His persons! Don't misunderstand, the Gospel demands a personal, individual response, however, life in the Gospel is lived out in the community of God's people. It is the means by which God builds up, strengthens, encourages and ensures that our walk is one we share with all of God's people. It is where we are taught together by God's word, by the gift of various ministries He has given to His Church. It is where we worship together, where sacraments

are administered and received, where we rest in Christ and the fruits of His Gospel before we work.

Apart from this, I concur that most attempts to revive or return to our practises pre-covid will be sentimental at best and luddite at worst. I know that we have to change as a Denomination, we have to change locally. I pray that we will be changing in a way which ensures and supports those gathered congregations of God's people where they will continue to come together, to support their mission, and instigate new mission in Wales and beyond. I say this primarily, because essential to our biblical understanding is a sovereign God who, *"When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keep steady its pillars."* Those things that must pass away should be allowed to go, indeed, we are willing to say this all of the things which this particular season has rendered unnecessary to our Gospel work. Our energy should rather be directed on preserving and making more room for that which is essential. We are a people who confess that we have *'decided to know nothing..'* about buildings, courts, departments, committees, cultural habits etc., *'...except Jesus Christ, and him crucified'.* We are people who wish to discern, by prayer and godly conversation, and be as the sons of *'...Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...'*

Revd Meirion Morris is General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Wales. He lives in Llandysul where he is associated with the PCW church plant, Ffynnon.

Exploring Prayer

Speaking and Listening to God

Almost out of lockdown, but not quite. Make the most of your time between Easter and Pentecost by joining us to find out more about prayer.

Exploring Prayer is just 5 weekly sessions looking at different aspects of prayer - asking God, learning to lament, saying sorry, giving thanks, expressing wonder.

Each week there will be a short, thought provoking video by the Rev Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, followed by questions and discussion.

For those in the Mid-Wales & Border area, we will be running this course on:

TUESDAYS, 1.30—2.30pm,

starting on Tuesday 20th April 2021

[Completing the course on 18th May]

The course is open to all - members & friends, far & near

For more information, and to register for the course, contact:

Rev Monica O'Dea ✉ monicaodea@btinternet.com ☎ 01686 430988

You can get a taste of the materials by going to:

homegroups.org.uk/topics/prayer

home groups

Remembering the Reverend Dr John Robert Walmsley Stott CBE

(27th April 1921 - 27th July 2011)

by David W. J. and Caroline Gill

This year marks the centenary of the birth of the globally renowned and exceptionally-gifted preacher and Bible-teacher, the Reverend Dr John Stott, hailed by *Time* magazine in 2005 as one of the world's 100 most influential people.

BACKGROUND AND ALL SOULS

'Uncle John', as Stott was affectionately known, had a keen international outlook coupled with a deep love for Wales, and for Pembrokeshire in particular. For many years Stott gave an annual Bible reading in Dale, arranged by the Evangelical Fellowship of the Church in Wales (EFCW). This highlight of the EFCW calendar, known as the 'Dale Day', was followed by a group picnic around The Hookses, Stott's clifftop writing retreat. The day eventually moved to Hubberston and Carmarthen, to accommodate the growing numbers.

Stott, the son of a Harley Street physician, was taken to church at All Souls, Langham Place, next to BBC Broadcasting House. Stott followed his father to Rugby School, where in 1938 he came to know Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour during a talk by Mr E. J. H. Nash, often known as 'Bash'. After a (first class) degree in Modern Languages and Theology at Cambridge University, Stott followed his call to ordination by training at Ridley Hall Theological College.

In 1945 Stott returned to All Souls, Langham Place, as curate. The Crown as patron appointed him to the role of Rector in 1950. Stott was made a chaplain to the Queen in 1959; further honours would follow. In 1966, during a congress in Oxford, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones intimated privately to Stott that he would like Stott for his successor at Westminster Chapel. Stott was honoured, but felt no call to leave All Souls or the Anglican church. He became Rector Emeritus in 1970 to enable him to fulfil his overseas commitments.

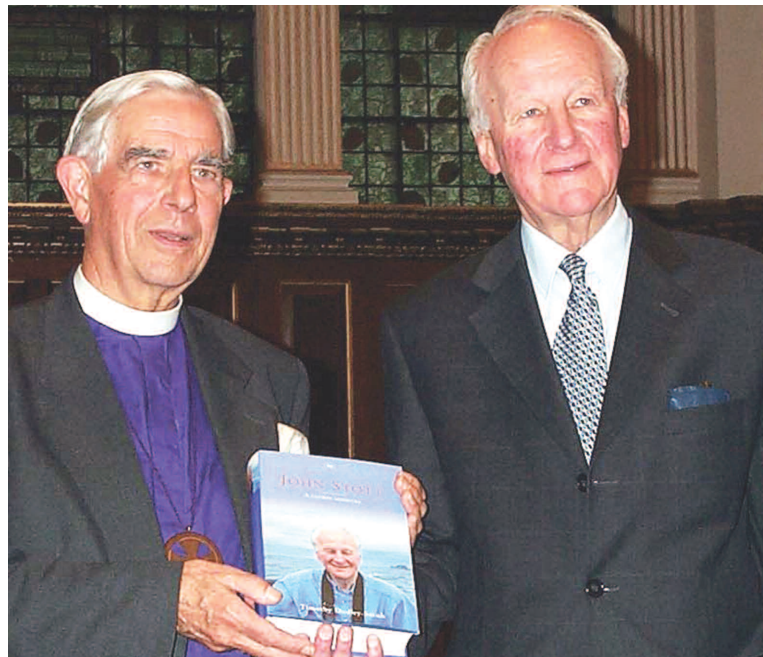
MISSIONS

Stott was involved with university missions around the world. Starting in North America, 'Uncle John' addressed students in South Africa, South America, and Australia. He was a key supporter of Billy Graham's Greater London Crusade at Harringay Arena in London in 1954.

Alongside Billy Graham, by then a close personal friend, Stott was involved with the Lausanne Movement for world evangelization; he was deeply committed to the mission of the

Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC). His book, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1984), emerged from this time. Stott exhorted his readers to practise 'double listening', encouraging them to draw from a biblical framework while paying attention to contemporary culture, thereby adopting a relevant and authentic discipleship.

Stott wrote over 50 books. *Basic Christianity* (IVP), offering a Bible-based picture of Jesus Christ, is a best-selling Christian classic. Caroline recalls the



Dr John Stott (right) with Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith, who holds a copy of *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (IVP, 2001).

Photo copyright David Gill.

worldwide church, and held this stance in tension with his Christian concern for a fairer society.

LITERATURE

Stott's prolific written output was significantly aided by Miss Frances Whitehead, his secretary for well over fifty years, and by a succession of study assistants. Stott longed to see evangelical Christians engaging with the world, and in 1982 he formed the London

clarity of Stott's words in *Understanding the Bible*, which she studied in her Anglican Confirmation classes. Stott contributed several volumes on the New Testament to the *Bible Speaks Today* series. David remembers working through *God's New Society* (1979), Stott's study of Ephesians, in his student group. *The Cross of Christ* (1986), one of Stott's most influential books, has been widely translated and continues in print.

ORNITHOLOGY

Stott was a keen birdwatcher. Caroline remembers sharing the news that she had seen her first Dipper on a recent holiday. The wind was graciously taken out of her sails when 'Uncle John' replied with a wry smile, 'And what kind of Dipper?'

Stott was delighted when he eventually encountered and photographed the avian object of a particularly long quest, a Snowy Owl in the wilds of Canada. 'Ornithology', Stott's term for looking to the birds for biblical insight (Matthew 6:26), was celebrated in the illustrated volume, *The Birds our Teachers* (1999). Stott served on the Council of Reference for A Rocha, the Christian community-based conservation movement.

LEGACY

Caroline transcribed numerous interviews that her father, Timothy Dudley-Smith, conducted prior to writing the two-volume biography, *John Stott: the Making of a Leader* (IVP, 1999) and *John Stott: a Global Ministry* (2001). A shorter biography appeared as Roger Steer's *Inside Story: the Life of John Stott* (IVP, 2009).

The rich Gospel legacy of John Stott continues, not least through the work of the Langham Partnership. This facilitates the training of preachers around the world, through teaching programmes and postgraduate studentships. In December 2019 David and Caroline attended the opening of a dedicated facility for Langham students at Tyndale House in Cambridge; it was thrilling to hear about, and join in prayer for, these Gospel projects. The Partnership provides theological books for international preachers, in part supported by royalties from the sale of Stott's books. A notable initiative has been the publication of the influential *Africa Bible Commentary*. The Langham Partnership website records that in 2018 'more than 200,000 copies' had been sold 'in more than six languages, with two more translations in the works'.

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Not the Sunday Sermon

by Mike Ward

If I hear another politician say the word “roadmap” I shall scream into my face mask! But maybe I should be shouting “Alleluia!”? Never has a winter felt so long. Never has hair grown so long. But the end is in sight because we have – fanfare of trumpets – a government roadmap. Instead of towns on this metaphorical map, we have dates. Easter may not be on this map, but The Emerald City of 21st June is there even if the exact coordinates are a bit vague. So too is 17th May and 12th April. (Note for travellers: the Welsh and Scottish maps are different.) We’re off to see the Wizard! Follow the yellow brick road of AstraZeneca or Pfizer and will all be able to get home. Ding, dong, The Wicked Witch of Covid is dead! (Let’s hope its not all smoke and mirrors.)

I hope you can follow the roadmap. I hope we can trust it. I need a roadmap of the manse just to find my way to the kitchen. If the hippocampus is that tiny part of the human brain which provides your sense of spatial awareness and direction, then God forgot to give me one. So there is no denying that roadmaps are extremely useful things to have around even if these days they are most likely to be found on your car sat-nav or your smartphone than on paper.

The first roadmaps of England and Wales were published by the Scottish cartographer John Ogilby in his *Britannia* of 1675: an atlas of one hundred maps (oddly omitting Liverpool) showing the roads as linear unrolled scrolls from north to south (wherever north is – don’t ask me). Ogilby began his career as a dance instructor – I kid you not – in the days when every barrister had to learn to dance because dancing put them in harmony with the universe. So from an early version of *Strictly Come Dancing* emerges our first

roadmaps. Remember John Ogilby next time you put on your dancing shoes.

But roadmaps can have a hidden agenda. (Ask Dominic Cummings.) Recent evidence in *The Nine Lives of John Ogilby* by Alan Ereira suggests Ogilby’s *Britannia* contained secret codes and cyphers: information that may have been designed to lead to a Catholic uprising in England. The moral of the story is that roadmaps cannot just be taken at face value.

There are lots of roadmaps for Christians to follow at this time of year. The roadmap to Jerusalem will end for Jesus at Easter, a green road of palm branches at the city walls and no vaccine against the suffering in the city that will follow. Then there is the roadmap to Emmaus. A short journey, just a few miles, but for two tourists a life-changing one. No doubt others had followed that roadmap with very different results! And there is a roadmap offered to Jesus’ friends to take them to Lake Tiberias for a spot of R&R. Different people looking at the same roadmap arriving at different conclusions. *X does not mark the spot: it marks enlightenment – for some.* X marks a cross. Death for some observers at Calvary, eternal life for others.

So roadmaps do not tell us everything. It’s what you do with them that matters. *It’s what you see on the road that matters.* Take the roadmap to Jericho. If you thought the Westminster government’s Covid-exit roadmap was fraught with problems, that is a three-lane motorway compared with the impossible terrain for Biblical travellers on the road to Jericho!

In his exposition of The Good Samaritan, *On being a good neighbour*, Martin Luther King reminds us that the road to Jericho was extremely dangerous, with a descent of over three thousand feet in less than twenty miles along a twisty road and no shortage of hiding places for robbers. Not for nothing was it called “The Bloody Pass”. A roadmap would be of little help. Dr King offers an intriguing explanation of why the priest and the Levite did not stop to help the wounded man. “Perhaps”, he wrote, “they were on their way to an organisational meeting of the Jericho Road Improvement Association. Certainly this would have been a real need,

for it is not enough to aid a wounded man on the Jericho Road.” And he goes on to say that the priest and the Levite were doubtless aware that roadmaps would not help them either if they stopped to help. The fact of *being* in a very dangerous place remained. Better to move on quickly to that important meeting; better to do something about *that road*.

And yet... as we head towards the elusive destination date on the government roadmap, we can look back over the last year to those who stopped and helped us along the way, whose concern was not the end of lockdown but what to do now. *It IS enough to stop and help.* I have been humbled time and time again to hear of doorstep visits, phone calls and acts of kindness by church members, to those who have felt most vulnerable on their own Jericho Road. Nobody has been forgotten. Long after life has returned to normal and the roadmap has been binned with our face coverings, an empty packet of yeast (the contents of

which had been delivered to the manse following my plea in a church newsletter, in those days of home baking when yeast, like loo roll, was scarcer than gold) will always remind me how church members have responded with kindness to the needs of others in lockdown.

The Jericho Road will always remain in one form or another. Life is a dangerous journey. Easter has no map co-ordinates and no fixed date. The end of the roadmap to the Kingdom may come for you tomorrow. It may come on Easter Sunday or next month or next year. But you will know it when you see it. And you will not have got there alone. You will have been guided, encouraged, prayed for, loved. I do not need a roadmap when I have a packet of yeast to remind me of that.

May God Easter in you. Follow his green palm leaf roadmap – who knows where it will lead you?

Revd Dr Mike Ward is minister of the churches at Moreton, Clubmoor and Two Mills.

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CONCLUSION

Just over a decade ago, Caroline joined friends from the Gower Pastorate for the *Open Home: Open Bible* series. The course includes searching interviews with international Christians on DVD and study material. The introductory disc has John Stott answering questions on the Bible and its interpretation.

Stott died aged 90 and was buried, according to his wishes, at Dale, in Pembrokeshire. He is remembered for his prayerful work as an ‘Ambassador for Christ’, exemplified in his frugal lifestyle and personal humility. Stott loved to lead people into a relationship, or into a deeper

relationship, with Jesus, through the rigorous exposition of Scripture. ‘Uncle John’, who often addressed vast congregations, would undoubtedly have been overjoyed to hear about the enriching *Open Home: Open Bible* sessions that were equipping Christians on a peninsula in South Wales.

David and Caroline Gill lived in Swansea for 20 years before returning to East Anglia in 2011. David is an archaeologist, author, and licensed lay preacher in his parish church. Caroline is the daughter of Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith; her first full poetry collection will be published in 2021.



David and Caroline Gill at the Hookes

Ensuring justice for people like Rose



Christian Aid Week 2021

Climate justice. Two words which have come to mean a great deal to Christian Aid. And though many things have disappeared from view during this terrible Covid year, climate justice has not disappeared at all.

The crisis is as big as ever. This is especially true for Rose Katanu Jonathon from Kitui, Kenya. She only needs a little water. A dependable supply and close to home. It's not much to ask.

And yet, it is not available to her. She has to walk for hours each day to carry what readers of this article take for granted. To us, we need only turn a tap for what we need. For her, a long, dangerous journey faces her every day.

For Rose's sake, her community and its residents in Kenya and many another poor country, Christian Aid is asking for your support during Christian Aid Week this year.

Florence's dam

Florence Muthiani is from Kenya too. Her life used to be similar to Rose – a tiring, daily journey to carry water. But Florence's life has been transformed as Christian Aid's partner in the country supported her community to build an earth dam near her village.

This meant that it has been possible to conserve the infrequent rains for the drier times. It's close to home too and does not require the loss of



several hours each day.

'My life has changed,' said Florence to us. 'I am very happy. I have strength and power.'

She is able to grow crops to feed her family and sell. She

also keeps bees and sells the sweet honey in her local market. The donations made by Christian Aid supporters has made it possible for Florence's community to build the dam and to lift itself out of poverty.

Your crucial support

By supporting Christian Aid Week, you can help more people like her, people like Rose and the millions of others around the world who know climate justice is first hand. £6 can buy a bag of cement, so necessary to build a dam. £27 can buy a wheelbarrow – a crucial piece of kit for the work. £335 can be used to train a dam committee, giving them the skills needed to maintain the dam for years to come.

More information about this year's Christian Aid Week is available on the website, or you can phone the team in the national office in Cardiff on 029 2084 4646 or email wales@christian-aid.org

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>

Keeping nourished and spiritual hunger satisfied at St Thomas's Denbigh

by Mark Jones

If you had told me, just over a year ago, that church would be closed for over a year then I would simply have not believed it. But that is the reality we have faced. Like all churches back in March 2020 we were confronted with the heartbreaking decision to close the doors and be separated physically. We had all become so accustomed to attending church on a Sunday morning, listening to the preacher, singing the hymns, praying together, sharing a cup of tea and a biscuit after the service however in one fell swoop that had to stop.

Nobody disagrees that the actions we all had to take were to protect each other but, just as much as we have to keep ourselves nourished, our spiritual hunger still needed to be satisfied. We all agree that the 'church' is more than just a building; yes the bricks and mortar are what protect us and give us a focal point to worship together however the "church" is really a group of

people who have the common purpose of worshipping the Lord our God.

At the very start of the first lockdown weekly service sheets were produced, with accompanying music, by our minister and circulated via email to the church members and friends. Paper copies were hand-delivered to those who did not have Internet access. Additionally, a weekly prayer service via Zoom, led by church Elder, Andy Smith, has been a great blessing to so many. All this has been a very welcomed however as the year went on and we came closer to Advent, we took the next big step in our digital worship!

The Sunday before Christmas has always been the day when we hold a service of lessons and carols by candlelight. What is special about the service is that it is attended by so many members of the community who do not usually attend church services. We can have in excess of 100 people all crammed in trying to avoid knocking the candles(!) but enjoying the Christmas account

and beloved carols. We just had to do something this year to fill the void. So, thanks to great support from the Elders of St Thomas's, we produced a virtual service which had been all pre-recorded and was shown via YouTube and Facebook at the same time it would normally be on that Sunday before Christmas.

Wow! The response from the community and further afield was humbling. Facebook and YouTube are very good at giving statistics and it showed that just shy of 2,000 people had watched the service. So many people hearing about the birth of our Saviour, really putting the 'Christ' in 'Christmas'.

This urged us on and given we were all back in a national 'Stay at Home' lockdown we were keen to provide a regular recorded video service from the church. And so, with much prayer and much encouragement from the Elders, at the end of January we have started producing a weekly Sunday morning service of worship. Recorded from the pulpit, hearing the familiar

"sound" of the church, singing the hymns we love, this is the closest we will get to being together on a Sunday morning. We have been blessed to have a different visiting preacher each week and are so fortunate to have such loyal friends to St Thomas's, willing to come and lead our worship.

Streamed simultaneously on our YouTube and Facebook channels, we are reaching an average audience of just under 300 people each week. This has been a consistent number and interestingly a number of viewers are unknown to us and are clearly receiving comfort from this new way of worshipping.

It has been a steep learning curve, quickly understanding how to record and edit the services via an iPad, getting to grips with uploading videos to YouTube and Facebook, but, it is all in the Lord's service, doing His will, doing His work.

People have commented that they have enjoyed rewatching services in the week, worshipping at a time that is

continued on next page

The Seeing Eye

by
Jonathan
Hodgins



To Touch the Face of God is a line from a poem by John Gillespie Magee.

***I've topped the wind swept
heights with easy grace
Where never lark or even
angel flew.
And while with silent lifting
mind I've trod
the high un-trespassed
sanctity of space
Put out my hand and touched
the face of God.***

That poem captures the optimism of the Wright brothers, and Charles Lindbergh touching down on Le Bourget field. Within a few years however aviation had been incorporated into the war machine of the European powers refined over the years from biplane to bomber, until the *Enola Gay* flew eastwards to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an angel of death.

Magee's poem is better known today as the inspiration for the Ronald Reagan's speech after the *Challenger* disaster. He movingly spoke of the astronauts who had, that morning, 'waved goodbye, slipped the surly bonds of earth to touch the face of God'.

It was moving, heartfelt, perhaps one of the most memorable Presidential speeches but it was slightly disingenuous. The flight was meant to be routine and while the astronauts may well have waved goodbye, barely anyone was watching to wave back. The interest in space travel was, by 1985 waning, most people had little interest and in fact many believed that, with the moon conquered and Mars beyond reach, there were better things to do with time and money.

And it was ever thus. In *To Touch The Face of God: The Sacred, the Profane and the American Space Program* Kendrick Oliver points out that

even in the heyday of space travel there was a distinct lack of interest in the conquest of space.

Oliver argues that there were only three times when 'the world was watching'. One was Apollo 8 when, on Christmas Eve 1968 Anders, Lovell and Borman recited Psalm 8. A second was Apollo 11 when man landed on the moon. The third was when an oxygen tank on Apollo 13 exploded prompting Congress to pass a resolution calling for a national day of prayer. Aside from that, journeys to space were observed with mild interest. Indeed even the moon landing was not the eye catching moment we sometimes think it was. Journalist Norman Mailer says that 'the moonwalk was not even over and reporters packed up their things and went home'. Meanwhile in bars in Harlem the televisions were tuned to the baseball, the moon landing being seen as a white man's adventure.

It's amazing to think isn't it, that this pinnacle of human achievement was treated with such disinterest. Or is it? *To Touch The Face of God* brilliantly captures the sacred and profane elements of the space program. When John Glenn returned from his journey on *Friendship 7* three times around the world (asked afterwards about his trip he replied 'what can you say after seeing four sunsets in one day?'), he was greeted with three and a half tonnes of ticker tape in New York. And yet when the *Apollo 12* capsule touched down at sea the stench of sweat, urine, faces and vomit was so intense that the first responder on the scene opened the hatch, took one whiff, and promptly shut it again!

Even in those moments when everyone was watching, there was no unified feeling of spirituality. That Christmas Eve reading of Psalm 8 was preceded by great debate about what should be said or read. More Christocentric readings were dismissed as too divisive, excluding those of other religions, but as Oliver points out, even Psalm 8 caused anger and protest from secularists.

But if earth was somewhat surly, surely the astronauts were moved by what they saw? Well not so much! For one reason, they didn't see as much as we imagine. The early space flights were conducted in rockets with

thick plastic windows, susceptible to fogging up so that the astronauts complained about lack of visibility. They saw little more of space than you or I might on a clear, dark night in the desert. And of course, by nature of the mission, the rockets were pointed at the moon, away from earth and into the dark void. Then there was the work. Astronauts would check and recheck controls, working long days with little time for personal reflection. As *Apollo 11* astronaut Michael Collins pointed out, 'journalists would probably have preferred a philosopher, a priest and a poet to three tight lipped astronauts' when reflecting on their journey to moon. However, 'they probably wouldn't get them back to the press conference because this trio would probably emote all the way back into the atmosphere and forget to push in the circuit breaker which enabled the parachutes to open.'

Yet these were men interacting with the heavens. And even with the work and the physical restrictions and the single minded nature of those men deemed 'the right stuff' there was still time to be amazed. Alan Bean returned to earth and took up painting trying to capture what he experienced. Jim Irwin splashed down, opened the hatch washed his face with water and was baptised two months later; he would go on to become an evangelist working for a time alongside Billy Graham. And yet David Scott, on the same flight, had no such sense of revelation commenting afterwards, 'maybe I was transformed and didn't notice'. More interesting still was Charlie Duke. Astronaut with *Apollo 16* he returned to earth and a sense of a life unfulfilled: his experience of the Divine was not a lunar landing but by the example of his wife's conversion, a couple of years earlier and by a Bible study course that had presented with a choice: did he believe or disbelieve Christ's claim to be Son of God? Duke made his decision and then remade his life. His subsequent walk with God was, he said, more exciting than the walk on the moon had ever been.

CS Lewis observed early in the space age that whether or not an astronaut found God depended on the 'seeing eye', who that astronaut was and

what he already believed. It was Lewis also, who when a cosmonaut declared in his thick Russian accent that 'we went to space and we did not find God' responded that 'this was like Hamlet going into the attic of his castle and looking for Shakespeare.'

In other words the race to space afforded humanity an opportunity to reflect on its place among the stars. Some took that opportunity to think of and even meet with the one who 'flung stars into space'. But others saw nothing more than a journey to a lifeless rock, one more journey to tick off the celestial bucket list. Should we be surprised? Perhaps not. Why should we expect those who go into the heavens to find God when so many missed God when He came to earth?

Revd Jonathan Hodgins is a minister in Deeside and Chester. He preaches and leads school assemblies each week on YouTube as well.

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convenient for them, not dictated by tradition, and being able to praise the Lord whenever and wherever they may be.

We all hope, and pray, that we will soon be reunited in person but this experience of serving a virtual audience has inspired us to continue in providing a regular online service as well as in person.

For those churches who may be considering 'dipping their toes' into trying online worship then we wholeheartedly encourage you to do so. There will be nerves, there will be uncertainty as you go into uncharted waters but as we know and believe: 'with God all things are possible.' (*Matthew 19:26*).

If you want to watch any of our services then visit our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTY1VrrgYhPK2gPu298ZT-Q>, 'Like' us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/StThomasDenbigh>.

Finally, if you would like more information or help in getting set up for online services, do drop us a line: stthomasdenbigh@gmail.com

Mark Jones is an elder and liaison for the online services.

David's Census

by John L Dowber

I was booked to preach in Mancot on the third Sunday in March. Some days prior to this one of my sons said that he had



completed his Census form online. My reply was that he was early as Census Day was the 21st March. Then it dawned on me that the Sunday and Census day were one and the same thing. There was my Scripture Reading and Sermon Topic in 1 Chronicles chapter 21 – 'David took a Census.' The following is an outline of my Sermon that morning.

No doubt there is one story in

the Bible about a census that we are all familiar with and that is found in Luke 2, where we are told that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed (*census*). Some scholars tell us that in the realm of the Jews this did not happen immediately, perhaps for various reasons, one of which was that Herod was nervous of a Census because of the events recorded in 1 Chronicles 21.

David was tempted by Satan to count how many fighting men he had so that he could sit back in pride at the extent of his power. He was advised that this was sinful for it was God who had given him all the power and might with which he reigned, and he ought to recognise this in humility – but he would not listen and the census went ahead. The prophet, Gad told him of the Almighty's displeasure at what he had

done and warned him of the punishment that was to come. There were three choices offered to David. They were three years of famine, three months of attacks from his enemies, or days of a plague in the land. David chose the latter.

The plague came upon Israel and raged until it reached Jerusalem where the angel of the Lord was instructed to stop the destruction of the people. Then Gad instructed David to build an altar on the threshing-floor of Araunah and sacrifice a burnt offering to the Lord. The owner of the piece of land wanted to give it to David as a gift, but King David insisted that a price had to be paid for the stopping of the plague.

We shall shortly be celebrating Easter when no doubt we will be singing the words (behind your mask) 'There is a green hill far away outside a city wall, Where the dear Lord was crucified who died to save us all'. Here is David just outside Jerusalem talking of a price being paid to

stop the plague. Apart from Covid the world is gripped by another plague – sin. Jesus paid the price for its removal by laying down His own life on the cross. The hymn continues "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, He only could unlock the gate of Heaven and let us in."

The Bible teaches us that "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life" (Romans 6: 23). Whenever an individual accepts the death of Jesus on the cross as the price paid for his or her sin the plague is halted in that person's life, and the grave no longer has power over them.

May each one of us praise God and rejoice in Him this Easter-time as we think again that Jesus died to take away our sin and rose in triumph proving the glorious victory over sin and the grave.

Revd John Dowber is a native of Liverpool. He has been serving the church at Penrhyn Bay since 1964.

Book Review

What a Comeback!

The small thirty-two page evangelistic book had just dropped through the door in the post as I was making myself a coffee mid-morning. Having known the author when we attended the same church in Cambridge over thirty years ago I was keen to read what he had written, especially as we were looking for an Easter resource to distribute at church. With coffee in one hand and the slim volume in the other I began to read, and was easily and quickly drawn in.

Invited to imagine the biggest game of the season where the transformed followers of the home team prove the amazing comeback of their side's

winning goal after their anticipated drubbing, 2-0 with five minutes left to play. It was so with Jesus who looked absolutely defeated on Good Friday. At the time it looked like it was enemies 1, Jesus nil. Yet within eight weeks all Jerusalem was abuzz. Dr Luke researched the events of that first Easter weekend, talked to eyewitnesses and recorded a factual account of what happened. Phil Heaps challenges his readers to ask themselves which explanation better fits, 'Positive thinking' or that 'Jesus really rose'.

For those unfamiliar with Luke's Gospel the author provides the text within the book of Luke 24: 13 - 35 to enable his readers to discover the details about the two who took the road to Emmaus that first Easter Day. As his Cambridge counterpart, Professor Sir Norman Anderson does in 'Evidence for the Resurrection' (although Anderson is of an earlier generation than himself), Heaps proceeds to provide brief evidences for the resurrection

before launching into an explanation of the conversation and events on the way to Emmaus. At the end he even surmises that Cleopas and his companion were the first to have their eyes opened to the truth that the long exile of the human race from God was over at last.

The penultimate chapter of the book highlights a second journey, that of the transformed pair retracing their steps to share the Good News with their friends in Jerusalem. But it is the author's prayer that the reader may begin a journey of faith too.

To any who may be moved to explore the true story of the resurrection further, the final chapter is an invitation to read Luke's brief two volume introduction to the Christian faith in Luke and Acts. In fact, he gives a very brief personal testimony of his own faltering prayer as a teenager. Although he says it was hardly a prayer of faith, he is living proof that God answers even a prayer like that. He concludes that whenever

anyone comes to God in Christ, that truly is an amazing comeback!

Even if you are as familiar with the story of the two on the road to Emmaus as I am, having heard it read each Easter for almost seventy years, I was refreshed and excited enough by the author's use of the story in affirming the resurrection to order a hundred copies to give away this Easter. Clearly 4,700 other people thought so too, since there are only 300 copies left of the initial 5,000 printing. And by the way if you are a slow or reluctant reader, apart from chapter 1, I read most of the remainder of the book while standing in the queue to receive my second Covid vaccination, and the conclusion while sitting for the requisite ten minutes afterwards!

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What a Comeback!

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