



The Teesdale Worm

**Magazine of the Barnard Castle and Teesdale and
Darlington Circuits**

Issue 10 - August 2021

Circuit Celebration Service

To celebrate the merger of the two Circuits, Darlington and Barnard Castle and Teesdale from 1st September, we are holding a joint Celebration Service at Barnard Castle on Sunday, 5th September at 3pm.

The service will be led by Rev. Richard Andrew

Everyone is invited and refreshments will be served from 2pm

Please be aware that you will need to wear masks and keep socially distant from folk outwith your family bubbles within the Church.



Holiday at Home

Activities to Include

*Games,
Flower Arranging, Trip to
the Seaside, Mystery Trip,
Movie afternoon, and the
best tea you will ever
have.*

*Shake off your
lockdown dust, grab your
sun hat and bring a mask,
let's make the most of the
summer while we can and
get out this year for*

Holiday at Home



*6th—10th September
For information and
bookings,*

Contact:

Pastoral Mission team

Lyn: 07561224861

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News from the Churches

Barton

A short while ago whilst out for a walk, I stood to watch a combine harvester cutting the corn. These huge machines are worked by a computer in the driver's cab which means the driver has to have a knowledge of technology. How different the harvest of eighty years ago, when as a small girl I watched my father cutting the corn with a binder pulled by a large horse. His working day started at 6am and finished at 9:30pm after which the horse had to be taken back to the stable and bedded down for the night. The only breaks in the working day were half an hour for breakfast and half an hour at 12noon for dinner.

Tea had to be taken out in the field, the food usually consisted of sandwiches, home made teacake and cake. I loved this as it seemed like a picnic, although they worked hard for little reward, my father loved his job and was a happy man. It's wonderful the progress we've made over the years. The downside being we've lost many hedgerows which provided homes for birds and wildlife. I'll finish with this prayer I learnt in the Infant class at the village school: 'Thank you for the world so sweet, thank you for the food we eat; thank you for the birds that sing - thank you God for everything!'

Marjorie Brentley



The Well

Hi and a very warm welcome from your returning contributor on all stuff Wellies this month, so lets crack on.

This month we changed the theme of our services and even started having them return to the venue that is *The Well* and the theme for this month was 'Courageous with faith'; illuminating and growing being the topic for each of our well attended services. No doubt everybody who was interested in all things 'Football' could not escape the momentum that the National team of England had set as they progressed throughout the tournament and 'Lit up' our lives as we kept the 'Faith' and as our 'Growing' optimism turned the nation's eyes on the pride, passion, belief that the team showed all the way to the final, only to fall at the final hurdle with the dreaded penalty shoot-out. You did us and your Nation proud boys, we will be back!

We also had guest and regular spots from Ben Connor, Morvyn Sanderson and Chris Russell and a visit from Graham Cutler with contributions on each theme which is always really refreshing and it gives you a different slant on the subject matter and always reminds me of the saying, 'Everybody brings something to the table' and these occasions were no different. Thanks all for your contributions.

We also started the Summer holidays with activities organised for the children and these included 'Make Lunch' and lots of other activities including arts and crafts, with the theme being Superheroes.

We also had the announcement of 'Awesome August' which meant that on each Sunday throughout August a different activity would be organised instead of the usual church service, but prayer stations would be able to be accessed between the hours of 10-11 and then the alternative activities which included trips to parks for picnics and BBQs planned. Stay tuned and check out the FB page for more details.

Since the slow release of the restrictions that everybody has lived under since the pandemic took hold of our entire world in March of 2020 have finally resulted in what the tabloid press and any news outlet are dubbing 'Freedom Day' on the 19th of July has come and gone, we at *The Well* have still taken the use of face masks as a matter of choice and continue to ask that people still sign in and use hand sanitizer when

entering the building, but only as a precaution if there was to be another spike in the overall spread of the different variants that are cropping up.

The Well Charity Shop, Baby Bank etc are as usual open Tue, Wed and Thursday from 10-2 with Thursday operating 10-12.

Finally I want to say a huge thanks too my predecessor Richard McElheran for filling in for the previous two additions as I took a small break from my duties. Thanks a bunch Richard.

May God walk with you through your troubles and strife and let Him lead you in this thing that I call my beautiful and amazing life.

Blessings from my heart to each and everyone of you.

Fred Tennant



Elm Ridge

Things seem to have become a little quieter for a short time – the uniformed groups and Tiddlywinks are away for the summer vacation, however “Coffee in the Garden” continues to attract people down the drive – some days very few, other days quite a few! We have taken the

decision to be there whatever the weather, so if it is raining and you don’t know what to do with yourself between 10.30am and 3pm on a Friday or 10.30am and 12.30pm on a Saturday just call in – our coffee stall will be there – outside the hall if fine, and inside the porch if wet, and there will be plenty of seating and good chat available. The re-planted borders around the building are open to view and if you haven’t ventured along the prayer walk as yet, here is your chance!

After the easing of some of the restrictions on 19th July we eased a few of our own too: it is no longer necessary to book to come to church, although Test and Trace naturally remains in operation, and for the safety of all we request that masks are worn indoors. We no longer “supervise” leaving the worship area after service, we have opened up extra seating, and we have recommenced post-service fellowship – a few steps in the right direction.

We are looking forward to Harvest Festival at the end of September, following which the worship area will be closed for repairs, refurbishment and re-decoration. During October Sunday worship will take place in the hall. We hope too that in September we will be able to re-commence the Monday morning and Thursday afternoon Coffee Drop-ins.

News will shortly be circulated to all those involved with Journey to Bethlehem in 2019 that a “get together” has been arranged for Monday 6th September at 7.30pm at Elm Ridge, so that plans for this year can be discussed. Please pass on this information to all who would like to be involved. This is a whole Circuit event and last time around no-one involved was left unaffected by being part of the production, and it would be great to see interested people at the get together to learn more about the arrangements and various roles available – from sitting knitting to being a “Wise Man” or “Wise Woman”!! – or a shepherd round an open fire guarding the sheep.

Mary Everitt

Haughton

Here at Haughton we have been taking small and cautious steps towards some semblance of normality. Our first service of the year was at the end of June in which we were able to celebrate socially distanced Holy Communion, what you might call 'a contradiction in terms' but, nonetheless, much appreciated after such a long time. And for our first Sunday service post "Freedom Day" we took pleasure in removing the 'Do Not Sit Here' signs and the tape barring access to certain pews. Those who felt comfortable to do so were able to sit a bit closer to each other, but these are small steps ... face coverings are still encouraged, Test and Trace is still in place, no post-service refreshments and all socialising must be undertaken outside. At the time of writing, case numbers are steadily reducing so we pray it won't be too long before we can enjoy worship and fellowship as we should.



The next big step for us will be to re-open our café, *Coffee@Haughton*. We know that our café has been hugely missed and regular customers are disappointed at the delay, but they understand our reasons. We prefer to wait until we have confidence that the covid situation is sufficiently improved so that we can operate as normally as possible. We prayerfully hope that this will be possible when we get to September.

On a happier note, at our service on Sunday 18th July we had the joyous occasion of a presentation by Rev Tim Boocock of a certificate to Barbara Carter in recognition of her 50 years' service as a local preacher. In actual fact, we applauded Barbara for 51+ years' service because she had reached the 50 year milestone at Easter 2020. Sadly, a Circuit service to honour Barbara's achievement could not be arranged last year for obvious reasons. On receiving the certificate, Barbara mentioned the she and John had celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary last summer – quite a year.

Val Tooth and Ann Thubron



The Well have a supply of chairs that are surplus to requirements and free to a new home. There are approx 140 chairs and would need to be removed by 4th September. If anybody is interested, please contact Graham Bright 07927 852 038





Holiday at Home

Just a month to go, it will be here before we know it, so it's time to sign up and join us for a fabulous week of fun, friendship, cups of tea, outings, crafts, cups of tea, games, treats and maybe the odd cup of tea and biscuits too of course.

Put the dates in your diaries 6th September – 10th September and share the dates with your friends.

We will be based at *The Well* this year and will be there on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons and on Tuesday and Thursday we have organized coach trips and we will leave from *The Well*.

Posters will be available soon but in the meantime it is very important that you let us know you will be joining us. Our contact details are below and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Please don't leave it till the last minute we really do need an idea of numbers as soon as possible.

If you are able to help us that week with transport or accompanying someone, helping with tea or just being there as a helpful pair of hands, then we'd love to hear from you too.

Lyn Cookson	07561 224 861	lyncookson.dmc@gmail.com
Chris Russell	07561 224 869	chrisrussell.dmc@gmail.com

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Lyn and Chris



'May hope blossom in your soul. When your life's soil feels arid or barren, may God's grace and presence remind you that there is nowhere that you go that God does not go with you, and there is nothing that you face that your need to face alone. God is always there.'

#niteblessing

Reflections on Holiness (part 2)

or

Start at the beginning and go on until you reach the end...

People come into the Methodist Church in different ways. For me there was never really another choice. I am a sixth generation Methodist, not that this is particularly special (God can make Methodists from the stones along the way, and sometimes I wish he would!). It does however, give me a deep sense of our histories and traditions. Take the *Deed of Union*, one of our foundational documents. In this document our founding purpose is described as “the proclamation of scriptural holiness”, yet you could be forgiven for not knowing this. Holiness is either hijacked into special issues, or ignored and forgotten with a slightly embarrassed shrug. Holiness is not popular and no one wishes to be known as holier than thou. This is an acute problem for Methodists because it is the reason we exist, the reason that we were “raised up”. In truth it is the very centre of our calling. In this article then I want to explore how we might think helpfully and biblically about this often neglected and forgotten topic, and wonder what it might mean to place it at the heart of our Circuit life and vision.

Questions to Discuss

Go on, be honest, how many of you knew that Methodists were “raised up for the proclamation of scriptural holiness.” Who first explained it to you? How does this sound to you? How do you understand it? If you didn’t know why might you have not heard about it?

Start at the beginning... as it turns out this is a very good place to start. In the Jewish tradition, the first five books of the Old Testament are named Torah and are the most sacred scriptures in Judaism. Many scholars agree that they were likely conceived as a unity, carefully constructed from pre-existing texts and stories to give the emerging Jewish tradition shape and guidance following the return from exile in Babylon. This process was most likely shaped by priestly theologians whose characteristic fingerprints are all over these stories and the heart of their theology was holiness. This can be seen in the very first chapter of Genesis.

Chapter one of Genesis is well known to most of us, telling as it does the story of the seven days of creation. The chapter is neatly structured and words and phrases are repeated giving a profound sense of order. All is created and separated, proper boundaries are put in place. This is the heart of priestly understandings of holiness. Order, boundaries, separation. That which is ordered is moral, pure and holy. Indeed God repeatedly affirms that creation is Good, that is ordered and moral, pure and holy. This story then is offered to us as a theological key to understanding these first five books not least the priestly theologian’s masterful work in the book of Leviticus. Holiness in scripture then is understood as the hallmark of God, woven into the heart of God’s creation and as a key calling of the people of God. Let me offer a few brief reflections on what this might mean.

A Holy Creation

First is the recognition that holiness is woven intricately into the creation. Its corollary is also important. Creation declares the glory of God that is creation reveals the nature of its holy creator and the divine order that underlies it. To be holy then, is, at least in part, to find ourselves in harmony with the grain of the universe. To be participating in the order, rhythm, structure and boundaries of the holy creation. Such holiness places us side by side with modern scientists especially ecologists who argue that we must live in harmony with the rules and patterns and limits of our created order. It seems then that to be holy is in part to be green!

Questions to Consider:

The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth proclaims his handiwork... Does it? how? What about nature’s darker side?

The priestly theologians linked holiness to order, patterns, boundaries and separation. We still understand creation as very ordered but we also recognise that it is far more complex than we might realise. What about quantum physics, weather patterns, genetics, global warming? How might these challenge, expand and develop our understanding of holiness?

A Holy Community

The second recognition is that scriptural holiness is rooted in the calling to be a holy community.

⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation... Exodus 19:6

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,... 1 Peter 2:9

In the book of Exodus this holy calling shapes and forms a distinctive people. The words that follow this text are the ten commandments and their expansion in the covenant code of the next few chapters. This is further expanded in the later chapters of Leviticus. A holy creation therefore means that human life is holy and must be protected. A holy community therefore is by definition an ordered and just community wherein the weakest are valued and protected. Holiness, safeguarding, jubilee and justice are hallmarks of the holy community.

Questions to Discuss

How do you understand the church to be a royal priesthood or a holy nation? What might this mean?

The king had special responsibility for defending the weak. He was the first safeguarder of the realm! What do you think of the connection between safeguarding and holiness? What if safeguarding failures are failures in holiness? What might this say about our churches?

How well do you know Leviticus? What Levitical themes about justice can you name? Does Jesus quote Leviticus? When? *

A Holy Person

The final recognition is that holiness is also a personal calling and demand.

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Leviticus 19:2 (see also Leviticus 20:26)

for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 1 Peter 1:16

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

The Levitical phrase quoted above is often understood as the mission statement for the book of Leviticus and its priestly authors. Indeed the first five books of scripture can be understood as moving from holy creation to holy community to holy conduct as they explore what it means to be children of a holy God. Likewise the quote from Matthew's gospel is taken from the Sermon on the Mount, generally accepted as one of Jesus' most important teachings. Jesus here echoes the Levitical instruction though our translations translate the Greek as perfect rather than holy. Methodists often talk about Christian perfection as an alternative or synonym for holiness. (Mind you seeking perfection is as popular as seeking holiness!) In each setting there are personal as well as communal instructions. It perhaps should also be noted that Jesus encourages his listeners to specifically reflect on the created order, considering lilies and birds as a clue to God's care.

It is also important to be reminded that holiness is not understood here as austerity or anaemic, passion less existence as later Greek inspired Christian scholars often saw it. Rather it is understood as a properly ordered, fully human and deeply effective existence as per its Hebrew roots. Holiness in this regard is closer to fullness and abundance of life, wellbeing, just as a holy creation overflows with beauty, life and energy and a just community flourishes in diversity and creativity.

Questions to discuss

What images do you think of when you hear the word holiness? What places or people do you think of as holy and why?

What do you think of/how do you feel when Methodists talk about the call to Christian perfection? How did early Methodists pursue Christian perfection? In what ways do our practices differ today?

Summing up

Holiness then can be seen to have three profound dimensions: The holy creation, the holy community, the holy person, all of which overlap and interlink. Ecology, justice and wellbeing combine to give a balanced and broad picture. Likewise all three find themselves rooted in and returning to the mystery of our holy God.

Questions to Discuss

“Holiness matters because it goes to the heart of our world’s problems with the environment, economics and poverty but also human wellbeing. All three are interconnected and each one is vital.”

What do you think of this statement? How helpful or unhelpful might the language of holiness be as a way of thinking about our circuit’s life and mission?

If you had to name the most important issues with regard to holiness in our world at the moment what would your list be?

Rev. Tim Boocock

“Now, that would be an ecumenical matter!”¹

Last month I gathered with Anglican colleagues to celebrate, socially distanced, the Induction of Father Thomas Mason as Parish Priest of the Roman Catholic Churches of St. Mary’s Barnard Castle and St. Osmund’s, Gainford. The service was a special time for the congregations and for Fr Thomas as he begins this new chapter. The worship engaged on many levels, with visual input from the red liturgical robes to symbolise the Holy Spirit and the six large candles for the Light of the World, the preaching of the word in the aural sphere and incense again symbolising the presence of the Spirit in the olfactory sense.

To sit in a different context, experiencing the worship of another denomination: hearing, seeing and smelling their unique emphases, challenges us to look afresh and appreciate the presence of our Lord in the lives and ministries of our Christian brothers and sisters all the while, appreciating freshly our own.

At one point we were able to bring a welcome from the congregations we represent. It was commented upon by the preacher, the Episcopal Vicar for South Durham and Cleveland, that he wished every Priest had the ecumenical support expressed to Fr Thomas by his colleagues.

We committed to pray for Thomas and to work with him where and when the opportunities arise. And we will. In the best understanding of the words of John Wesley:-

Love me not in word only, but in deed and in truth. So far as in conscience you can (retaining still your own opinions and your own manner of worshipping God), join with me in the work of God, and let us go on hand in hand. ²

¹ © Father Ted, Channel 4 Television

² John Wesley, Sermon on the Catholic Spirit

Rev. Graham Cutler

'Three of a kind'

John Wearmouth writes: *'In March of this year I entered the Methodist Recorder short story competition for an 800 word story on the theme of Lockdown. To my amazement, on my return from our celebration holiday, I discovered a letter informing me that I had been awarded first prize of £50. A celebration indeed!'*

The Methodist Recorder describes John's story: *'This is a story with some great detail about the minutiae of life under lockdown whilst struggling with grief and loss, but ultimately ending with hope.'*

"It's a week today!" Perching on a settee, with phone in hand, Raymond was gazing towards a carved wooden fireplace. On the mantelpiece was a large framed photograph of a woman in a vibrant ruby-red dress. Raymond had first met her at a dance in the works canteen. Five years later, they had been married, having saved enough for a mortgage on a semi-detached house in which they had lived for almost fifty years.

They dreamed of a family. "All in God's time" was Christine's response to Raymond's impatience, but as the years had passed, it seemed it was not to be. Then in Christine's fortieth year, Sarah was born. Her picture was also above the fireplace the toddler in dungarees, grinning while cradling a piece of fencepost. Raymond enjoyed family life as the three of them had gelled well together, but as they had waved Sarah off to University on the London train, he feared she would not return North to settle. Sarah went into teaching and was now Deputy Head of a large secondary school in Hackney.

Once over initial "empty-house" feelings, Christine and Raymond had found life more fulfilling than anticipated. They rediscovered ballroom dancing; Raymond had more time for fishing and woodworking and Christine for her Church activities. Following redundancies, Raymond assisted a furniture restorer and Christine helped at the foodbank.

Overseas holidays, antique auctions, country pubs and teashops.... all of this had come to a shattering end last Christmas with Christine rushed to hospital, paralysed by a stroke, from which she did not recover.

Raymond looked closely at Christine's picture on the mantelpiece, as he did when talking to her on his way to bed each evening. Someone had suggested this would help with sleeping; at first it had but now he was feeling uneasy about it. He was also worried about Sarah living in London. She phoned every Sunday, but because of the pandemic, he had not seen her since Summer, when she had come with Peter, her partner, bringing news of her first baby. Even then, Raymond could tell she wasn't well. The strain of responsibility was weighing heavily. Indeed, diagnosed with exhaustion and depression, she did not return to school after the Summer break. The baby was due soon, but Raymond feared things might not go well.

Hearing the sound of an engine, Raymond turned to the window; a van was delivering a parcel at a house along the street. He had no idea whose parcel it was. Once he had known everyone in the street, but over fifty years people had moved away or died. When Christine was alive, their interests lay in other parts of town, but the virus had put an end to any thoughts of that.

A girl, over the way, had offered to do some shopping for him, but he had declined. People should stand on their own feet, he maintained. Not that shopping did much for Raymond's self-confidence these days; misting spectacles, juggling with gloves, mask and money, and people stepping aside lest he do them harm. Sarah suggested online deliveries, but he had resisted her efforts to teach. Using his phone to speak to her was enough for him.

Raymond had no clear picture of three national lockdowns, the first shortly after Christine's death, the second in Summer when he had not strayed far from her favourite garden seat and the third one now unfolding. Local restrictions had confused him as to which was which and whether he should stay in or go out. Anyhow, where would he go? Even when it was over, trips to the pub, the auctions and the bowls in the Park could never be the same again. Would he want to be part of this new world?



He had told Christine that he was coping, but the truth was that he wasn't. The pain had not eased, he missed her more not less every day, and now all this Covid business was threatening to overpower him. Even his zest for woodcraft had waned. He had not been in the shed for months. Indeed he had lost the key, and with it the will to search.

It had rained almost every day for weeks..... now it was starting again. Raymond watched the raindrops sliding down the window, in sequence with the tears on his face. Reaching to a shelf below the window, he gently ran his hands along the flowing lines of an Otter and Cubs, a present he had made for Christine. "It's no good" he told the Otters.... "I have to find that key!"

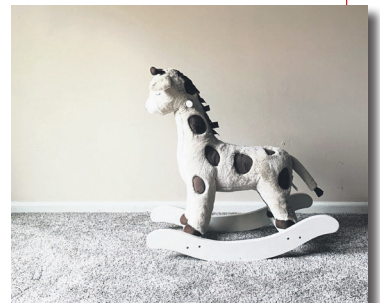
"If it's not where it should be, it must be where it shouldn't be" Christine often said. So that afternoon Raymond looked everywhere, once again without success. He even opened Christine's special drawer where he noticed a small paperback titled "Growing old gratefully." Curious, yet anxious to respect her privacy, he removed it gently, closed the drawer silently, and took the book to the settee to read a few pages each day.

The night before the vaccination appointment it snowed heavily, but Raymond should not have worried. A volunteer taxi arrived on time and helpers at the Centre cleared the snow, welcomed him and led him to the nurse. All less painful than he had feared, he was home within the hour.

As he opened the door, the telephone was ringing. It was Peter, Sarah's partner. The baby had been born two weeks earlier than expected. Mother and daughter were fine. "Wonderful!" spluttered Raymond, and "Wonderful" again when he heard the new name was to be Tina Elizabeth. "But..." Peter interjected before Raymond could continue. "Must go now Raymond but don't you be worrying yourself about Sarah remember I'm on furlough for the next six months."

Raymond took off the old coat he kept as a spare for colder days. As he folded it for return to the top shelf, a key fell from an inside pocket. Seizing it in triumph and almost tripping in his excitement he rushed into the front room. "Good news Christine.... a granddaughter...a vaccinationand a key!" Recounting details of all three, he slowly moved backwards to perch on the settee. Rather hesitatingly, he began to speak again. "There's something else I need to say..... I've been doing some reading and thinking about how you and Sarah have loved me over the years..... I'm sorry I sometimes resented the amount of time you spent caring for other people..... But I've made a decisionit really is time for me to stand on my own feet." Slowly closing his eyes, he let the picture fade from his gaze.

The security lock on the shed was frozen solid. Cradling it in his hands, Raymond breathed on it until eventually it opened. Once inside the shed, he stretched to the farthest corner to remove a sacking cover, revealing a dust- covered rocking horse with a damaged head. As he pulled it towards him, it tipped forward and struck his hand. Patting its tangled mane, he chided playfully: "Steady on Sarie.... All in God's time!"



(Printed in the Methodist Recorder - 30.07.21)
Submitted by John Wearmouth (Elm Ridge Methodist Church)

The Methodist Recorder is an independent weekly newspaper that examines events and current affairs within the Methodist and other faith communities in Britain and worldwide. It has been published continuously for over 150 years. In addition to news, it features editorial and theological reflections from a wide range of people, a lively letters page, book reviews and coverage of the creative arts. It can be ordered from newsagents or on subscription by post.



Deadline for items for the August issue is: Friday, 3rd September.
Please send to admin@darlingtoncircuit.org.uk or
Circuit Office, c/o Elm Ridge Methodist Church, Carmel Road South, Darlington. DL3 8DJ
Thank you!

Fat is a Feological* Issue

Once upon a time as a final year nursing student, I was doing my final management placement when a shadow was cast over the ward. 'John' was huge, he blocked out the light at well over 6ft high and about the same wide. Admitting him to the ward his weight registered 22 and a half stones and you might have thought he was deeply unhealthy. In fact the last time I had seen him he had been on television winning a strongman competition. We chatted about training routines and cardiovascular endurance. 'Harry', I met a year later as an earnest young staff nurse. He was smaller than 'John', a farmer with a beautiful Gloucestershire burr yet, he weighed in at 25 stones. My efforts to help him stand and use the toilet are indelible. Praise God we were not required to pick either gentleman off the floor.

Weight and particularly obesity is a major issue in our society. It has been for a while and it is getting worse. Back in the days when I was at school, obesity was rarer. Malnourishment was just as frequent. Nevertheless if someone in the minibus on the way back from a football match asked, 'Who ate all the pies?' All eyes would have turned to the doughy centre half I used to be. (I reckon I was pretty doughy too, anyhow...) It was of course only banter, yet repeated daily, year upon year, like water dripping on rock it begins to carve shapes. Slowly protective strategies become complex and often unconscious pathologies. Television and the media don't help. Unattainable images and expectations abound. If I thought it was bad as a teenager in the 1980's how much more challenging must it be for young people today with the internet and Love Island. Have you seen Love Island? Oh dear...if only braincells were as popular as six packs. (Please note that my children are back from university and are apparently contractually committed as under 25's to watch every episode. I do not watch it voluntarily.)

Weight has become a massive issue for me personally throughout my life. I have been dieting and generally failing to diet on and off for nearly forty years. Years of 'banter' have left deep imprints and a reservoir of self hatred which God is having a tough time getting rid of. Like many people I prefer baggy clothes, worry about going out in public and I am allergic to mirrors. For many weight loss is assumed to be a simple mathematical equation and personal choice. However for most of us it is a much more complex and intricate weaving of practical physiology and personal stories, compulsions, coping mechanisms and comfort that are not so easily unpicked and healed. Even when God is your dietitian. (Clearly this doesn't work the other way round, trust me I know.)

Weight is also a theological and religious issue as we struggle with what it might mean to be made in the image of God and what it means to be called to a distinctive depth of holiness, health and wellbeing. These theological and spiritual issues name the tension in our society well. How do we affirm difference and diversity whilst recognising that obesity has major health consequences and matters? How do we honour our God given bodies whilst recognising the need for a journey of healing as grace works its way into the nooks and crannies of our lives? Speaking as an obese person I can confirm that we have plenty of nooks and crannies for grace to work on! In truth we all do but they cannot always be seen.

One of the most enlightening and supportive insights into weight and theology came when I began attending a twelve step group for compulsive overeaters. Here were people who understood the same challenges and struggled to find a different way forward. I was blessed by their honesty and compassion but profoundly impressed by their understanding of grace. They helped me articulate a better understanding of human brokenness but also the need for an absolute dependence on grace as the key to healing. It is not of course a magic wand, rather it is a journey of healing. I praise God that today grace has got me in its grip. I pray likewise that I will stop struggling and trying to escape. Hopefully I will stop searching the cupboards and sighing. One day I shall pass the shop in Hurworth and not think only of pork pies.



If weight is a part of your spiritual journey, know that you are not alone. God has not and will not abandon you. There are many disciples in our modern world struggling with exactly these issues and more. If you would be interested in exploring them further send me an email or ring the Circuit Office. No judgement, just grace, always, grace. As Wesley said so simply and beautifully, 'T'is mercy all'.

Now, whats for lunch...

Tim

(*our title refers to a famous book entitled *Fat is a Feminist Issue*.)



News from the Youth

We have had a great start to the summer holidays! We have had our first Super Thursday which was very hot! We learned all about Noah's super powers and how we could find our own super powers. We are looking forward to the next 2 afternoons where we will be meeting Deborah and finding out all about the most awesome of all superheroes- Jesus!

Messy Church returned in July in our first in person service since the lockdowns began. It was so lovely to be together, to see new faces there and also to be able to worship in such a joyful way. We can't wait to be back in September!

Make Lunch has begun, and although we started small at the end of our second week we have had 20 people in our Wednesday lunch. We have had an outdoor experience as much as possible which has been great to be in the garden.

3GENERATE

Our national youth conference has had the go ahead for October 2021 in Birmingham. So we will be taking 18 young people along this year which we are really excited about. We are looking forward to planning our trip and getting together with Methodist young people from all over the country to share views and opinions on what they think should be priorities for the church.

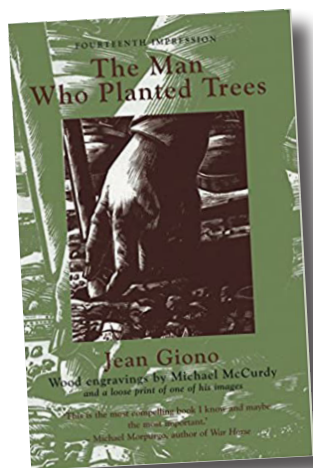
Morvyn and Emma

Did you know?

- Our High Street fashion retailers often delay paying their overseas producers for as long as 3 - 4 months?
- Overseas workers often suffer from appalling working conditions, for very little pay, even by local standards
- Delivery dates are brought forward or orders cancelled, with no consultation

Traidcraft Exchange is currently campaigning for the appointment of a Fashion Watchdog, to oversee the relationships between retailers and overseas producers. It's on the Government's 'to do' list, and if we support the campaign it could encourage them to action it. Churches together in Upper Teesdale are signing up to the petition (on traidcraftexchange.org) and have written to their local MP. Could you do the same?

Mary Howard



The man who planted trees...

'The man who planted trees' is a short story by the French writer Jean Giono, published in 1953 and according to Christopher Pramuk, it is said to give us a vision of hopefulness. It's a story that our suffering planet badly needs today, a prescient parable for coming to grips with climate change and the call to "environmental conversion." Interestingly, I once observed that Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council were trying to get to grips with that idea, because in the late seventies, there was an impressive tree planting program, but then they built the Metrocentre.

I was introduced to this work through a video and it seemed to me like a parable, that's how it initially struck me, a story with many layers and levels, which we can go back in to and examine time and again, and like Godly Play, can wonder about. For me, it is like a parable box, there is something inside there, it needs to be opened, but not everyone can or is ready to open it at the same time. Nor will they all wonder in the same way.

The writer of one article says, '*It is like the parables of Jesus and Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of the Beloved Community, it is the poetic word, the storyteller's vision that can break open the human imagination to possibilities not yet realized*'. (Christopher Pramuk September 13, 2019. America, The Jesuit Review)

The video was made much later, by an animator In 1987, Frederic Back and he brought to life "*The Man Who Planted Trees*" when he made the story into a short film. The film itself is stunning and those who watch are very quickly drawn into the story by the artwork and animation which is truly beautiful. I have shared this video recently with one person and had the opportunity to see their face change from almost scepticism to pure enjoyment and a belief that the story is real and eventually, inevitably, ask: '*Was Elzéard Bouffier a real person?*'

Since then, I have shared it with the Tuesday Bible study and fellowship group, where it has engendered similar responses and much discussion. Indeed there are dates, locations and even measurements which give the story its sense of time, place and size, making it seem real.

So let me give you a brief synopsis of the story;

'*The Man Who Planted Trees*' is a short story or video short. It spans three decades and covers the period shortly before World War I until shortly after World War II. It begins with a young man, an unnamed narrator, who goes out on a walking trip in the Alps, where after some time and after passing some desolate places, he realises he is running short of water. The landscape looks bleak, he sees only crumbling, long abandoned houses and a chapel. However he continues on his journey, until he sees in the far distance a shepherd, a 50 year old man, surrounded by his thirty sheep.

The shepherd, a man named Elzéard Bouffier, silently offers him a drink of water and the narrator follows Bouffier back to his home, a sturdy stone house. The next village is at least another days walk away, so the narrator is invited to stay the night. The villages all around are populated with people living despairing existences, working as charcoal burners. At night, after they have shared a meal, the narrator watches as the shepherd takes out a bag of acorns and separates out 100 of the largest and best nuts, claiming he needs no help when it is offered, it is something he will do himself.

The following day, the narrator asks if he can stay another day to regain his strength, though really, he wants to see what the shepherd does with the acorns. Using a long steel rod, Bouffier creates deep holes in the ground in which he plants the acorns. Over the past three years he has planted over 100,000 acorns this way. From those, he expects around 10,000 to grow and survive as oak trees.

Perhaps this is where my parable thoughts originate, as I think about the Parable of the Sower. The

shepherd tells the narrator that he began his planting shortly after the death of his wife and only child. The following day, the narrator continues his journey.

When the war breaks out, a year later in 1914, the narrator serves as an infantryman for the next four years, forgetting all about the shepherd and the oak trees amid the horrors of war, particularly those he witnesses during the Battle of Verdun. In 1920, two years after the war ends, he goes back to Provence—longing for the peace and quiet of that landscape.

Re-tracing his steps of five years earlier, he finally remembers the shepherd and recalls, “*I’d seen so many people die in the last five years I could easily imagine that Elzéard Bouffier must be dead too.*” But Bouffier is alive, and so are his trees, now taller than either of the men. The reappearance of trees changes the landscape and has caused a renewing of an ecosystem.

Each following year the narrator returns and by 1935, the forest is under the protection of the French State, whose officials believe this invigorated landscape has happened naturally, while the shepherd’s work continues until the outbreak of World War II in 1939. War and the demand for fuel causes loggers to cut down trees, but the forest is isolated and they can’t make much profit, so they abandon the work.

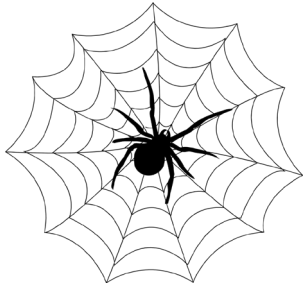
The last time the narrator sees Bouffier is in June 1945, and he is 87 years old. Those surrounding villages, now teem with young families, though they were once desolate and the charcoal burners have abandoned their former work to live off the land. In one village the people build a fountain and plant a lime tree next to it, which the narrator calls “an indisputable symbol of resurrection”. The narrator estimates that 10,000 people now live happily in the vicinity of the forest Bouffier willed into existence. Two years later, Bouffier dies in a nearby hospice.

Like all good Godly Play, Stories for the Soul and Deep Talk stories, I invite you to take this story, to watch the video, available on Youtube or to read the story, available from Amazon and then begin to wonder. Pick out the themes that are meaningful to you.

I wonder where the shepherd got the acorns from?
I wonder if you see yourself anywhere in this story?
I wonder how this story makes you feel?
I wonder...

Lyn Cookson

Acknowledgement: Christopher Pramuk: Christopher Pramuk is an associate professor of theology and the University Chair of Ignatian Thought and Imagination at Regis University in Denver.



‘Arachnid’

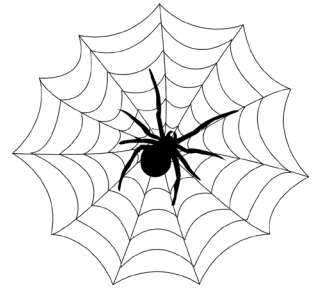
A spider is a wondrous thing
It's works do mystify us,
But to be honest there are times
When it simply terrifies us!

A spider is a scary thing
When we see one cross our path,
But oh the screaming horror
When we find one in the bath!

The spider is a skillful thing
When it's intricate web it weaves,
Placing dainty silken threads
So carefully twixt the leaves.

Take time to stand and wonder
When the morn is damp with mist,
And see the diamonds glistening
Where the dew the web has kissed.

The spider is a wondrous thing
It's works do mystify us
We see the beauty in the web,
So why, why does it terrify us?



Another poem by our good friend, the late Margaret Day. This is one of the many that she has writted
- Ben and I hope it makes you smile!

*Jean Beadle
(Cockerton)*

(Please accept my apologies. I unfortunately credited this article to the wrong person last issue, and it seems it was missing from the emailed copies of the July magazine - Lindy)