



The Teesdale Worm

Magazine of the Darlington and Teesdale Circuit

Issue 12 - November 2021

Touchlines!

Some of you know that sport is one of my great passions and enjoyments in life. I extend my apologies in advance to the residents of Neasham and also Hurworth for the loud shouts that will emanate from my home as England take on their opponents in the Autumn Rugby Union Internationals, especially if they beat South Africa. There will be a special staff meeting after this auspicious event Brian Hutton, should we lose though, Staff meetings are cancelled for the foreseeable! Another of my memorable moments on holiday recently was the opportunity to watch my daughter play rugby for her University side. Playing Oxford University they won 98-0. There will be tougher games to come.



Touchlines are important places for me. There is something about the smell of turf and the white lines. It takes me back immediately to my younger days playing football and every other sport I could find. In particular it takes me back to the moment when God found me in a way that I cannot deny. Playing in a local derby in the first round of the cup we were up against it. The rain and wind were coming in sideways. We had just gone down one nil. The opposing centre forward had just signed forms with Leeds United and it was cold. There in that moment I knew that God was present, on the touchline, and He loved me and supported me. I would say that I had the wind knocked out of me but to be perfectly honest I never had much wind in me to start with. As I came to from this experience my coach was screaming at me to go forward for a corner. I never did this. I wasn't fit enough to cover the ground if our opponents broke away and counter attacked but you obey your coach. As if to confirm my experience I scored, a first goal in four years. (I was a defender, give me a break!)

This was the beginning for me. Fat, soaked and covered in mud but loved by God. Of course there are questions, deep theological questions. Why was God watching the football when he is a rugby fan to start with? And yet there is also a simple, deep and profound moment of mud soaked grace. For those who are interested in these things, we lost on penalties after extra time, in a replay. Yet something took root in me and whilst I have tried hard to get rid of it at times I have never been able to shake it. Every touchline I stand on, each and every time, every moment I smell the turf and the mud, lineament, no holier incense exists, no holier place. God can and does reach us in the ways and the places that make most sense for us.

Its nearly time for rugby.... I am so excited.... Crouch! Bind! Set!

Please pray for lots of conversions.

Take care

Tim

Ps: Please note that if we lose, please don't say, "Its only rugby", unless you wish to be excommunicated!



Elm Ridge Methodist Church

Christmas Coffee Morning

Saturday, 20th November
10-12:30pm
Admission £2

Home Produce | Gift Stalls | Traidcraft
Cake Stall | Craft items

All proceeds will be donated to local causes

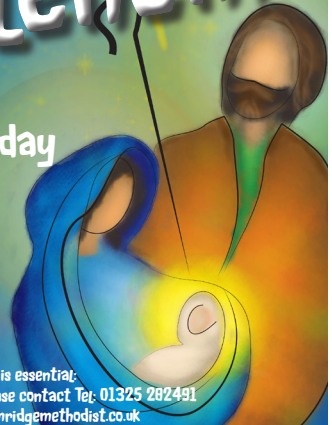


Elm Ridge Methodist Church,
on behalf of Darlington and Teesdale Methodist Circuit



Presents

Journey to Bethlehem

Saturday and Sunday
11th and 12th
December
4-8pm




Booking is essential:
For more information please contact Tel: 01325 282491
Email: office@elmridgemethodist.co.uk

Antenatal Awakening!

*A Service to celebrate the
Holy Season of Advent*

Friday 26th November 2021
at Barnard Castle Methodist
Church,
DL12 8PW
10am Coffee
10.45 Service




**YOUR COMMUNITY
CAFE**

Open
9am - 3pm Mon-Fri
9am-2pm Sat

ALL ARE WELCOME!



THE MUSTARD TREE at Hurworth Methodist Church is ideal for families, friends, walkers, cyclists and anyone in between. A community meeting place for all to enjoy. Hope to see you soon!






Deadline for items for the December issue is: **Monday, 6th December**
Please send to admin@darlingtoncircuit.org.uk or
Circuit Office, c/o Elm Ridge Methodist Church, Carmel Road South, Darlington. DL3 8DJ
Thank you!

News from the Churches

Harrowgate Hill

Our Church life is continuing to get back to normality, we were very pleased to welcome back our wonderful choir led by David Hogg in our service and they will be supporting our Services once a fortnight. They may be a small choir but they make a large sound and are greatly appreciated as they enhance our services.

The much needed roof repairs have been completed and our property team continue to ensure the Church buildings are maintained.

Harrowgate Hill have recently registered as a 'Sight Loss Friendly Church' with the *Torch Trust* and will be using the information from the Trust to put in place any necessary changes. Also at our service on 28th November, Brian Simpson will be including the issue of violence against women and girls in this service as the Soroptimists are promoting the United Nation's Orange the World campaign. It will also feature the use of orange ribbons as a reminder.

We are looking forward to our Carol Service on 19th December at 10:30am when Rev. Brian Hutton leads the service which will include a Parade and the Church choir.

Our coffee mornings are doing well and we are now having refreshments in Church after some of our Services. Rev. Brian Hutton is continuing to lead Bible study group meetings on a Wednesday morning at 10am and all are welcome to join in.

Our article in last month's worm featured the celebration of Judith Porteus being a Girls brigade Captain unfortunately it didn't mention that it was to celebrate 40 years of service.

God bless

Harrowgate Hill Stewards

The Pathway

Services and activities are all up and running now. We had our first afternoon tea service on 1st Sunday in October, it is always very popular, especially the fellowship and lovely tea afterwards. We also put up boxes to deliver to our members who are unable to join us. Afternoon tea is always the first Sunday in the month at 2:30pm.

Chat and Play is every Monday morning lead by Debbie and Leanne with a rota of helpers. We welcome children of all under school age, the youngest being 3 days old when she joined Mum and her older brother. It is welcome company for parents, childminders, and grandparents and there are always lovely refreshments for all.

Weekly baking for Middleton in Teesdale School's staff room continues on a rota, always greatly appreciated in these trying times. Also *Pray, bake and Chat* continues for our members who no longer are able to attend Chapel.

Our Holiday Club and *Chat and Play* members joined us for a Pumpkin Party. The first time the Holiday Club had met in person. The afternoon was filled with crafts, games and of course a lovely "orange" themed tea ably led by Debbie and a team of helpers. The parents, grandparents enjoyed it as much as the children and we have been asked to do something similar for Christmas. Checkout the photos on the Pathway website. www.thepathway.org.uk

Our coffee mornings are also back on every Friday 10:15-11:45am if ever you are visiting up the Dale. Christmas planning is underway both at *The Pathway* and in the village. Lookout for what's happening in the next edition.

Dorothy Matthews

Haughton

When my father died,
I never cried.
But when my geraniums looked wilted and sad,
I thought,
I'll phone my Dad.
And then I cried.
By Denise Hopkins

We are cautiously but steadily getting back to some form of normality at Haughton. On Sunday 31st October our chapel was fuller than normal as we held a Memorial Service to remember family members and friends who have passed away, but still live on in our hearts. The service, led by Rev Brian Hutton (helped by Lara, Emily and Rachel), was a thoughtful and touching service. Emily and Laura handed out cards which they had beautifully decorated and we were given time to write a note about our loved ones. The cards were collected and hung on a "memory tree" – see the photo. During the service we were especially glad to have the opportunity to pay tribute to two of our church members who passed away whilst restrictions were in place.

A number of years ago, our Church Council accepted a suggestion by one of our members, the late Christina Bibby, to tithe ten per cent of our annual giving to distribute to charities. Every year since then, an important item on our Autumn Church Council Agenda has been to choose which charities to support. This year, it was pleasing to be told by our Treasurer that, despite the challenge of Covid, we had an amazing £1,160.00 to donate. We decided to distribute this as follows:

Dystonia UK	£100.00
All We Can	£200.00
Salvation Army Christmas Appeal	£200.00
Northgate United Reform Church Appeal	£200.00
St Andrew's Foodbank	£160.00
Methodist Homes for the Aged (MHA)	£100.00
Methodist Connexional Funds:-	
Mission in Britain	£50.00
Church Property	£50.00
Fund for Presbyters	£50.00
Leaders of Worship & Local Preachers	£50.00



NB At time of writing, our Christmas Fair is still going ahead on Saturday November 20th from 10-12.30pm.

Valerie Tooth

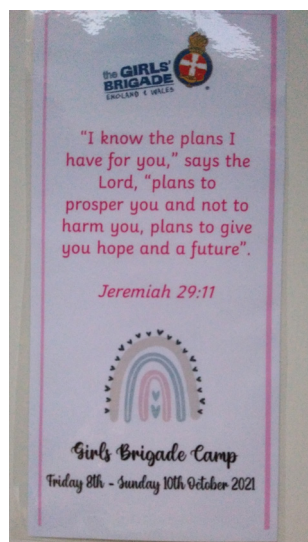
Elm Ridge

On Sunday 14th November (Remembrance Sunday) we look forward to holding our first Parade Service for two years. We give a warm welcome to the uniformed organisations and their leaders, family and friends to this service. It will be great to see them all.

Saturday 20th November sees our annual Christmas Coffee Morning – please see the flyer elsewhere in this publication! We welcome guest stalls – Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY), Traidcraft, the United Reform Church and Harrowgate Hill Methodist Church, which will be alongside our own Cake Stall, Bits and Bobs stall, Book Stall, and Crafty Bits. Admission will be £2, which will cover refreshments and a second cuppa if you so wish! The event commences at 10am and the proceeds from our own endeavours will be directed to Methodist Homes. This is always a happy get together and we look forward to seeing everyone.

On Sunday evening 28th November we are looking forward to joining once again with our friends at All Saints in Ravensdale Road for their Advent Service of Light.

Mary Everitt



Cockerton

On the 8th of October and for the 3rd time lucky, Cockerton Church Girls Brigade arrived at *The Jonas Centre* in Redmire, Wensleydale for a weekend away.

We had to cancel twice previously due to Covid, firstly in March 2020 and again in March 2021, but finally, several negative lateral flow tests later, 50 excited girls, boys and leaders ... and 2 dogs, arrived in time for tea and birthday cake as one of the girls was celebrating becoming 12.

It is the third time GB have stayed at *The Jonas Centre*, which is a Christian Organisation specialising in providing holiday accommodation for groups or individuals to enjoy a relaxing stay in the most beautiful surroundings.

We stayed in cosy log cabins in groups of around 6 and we enjoyed lots of laughs, playing games together, chats with friends, hot chocolate and marshmallows, and all of us had late nights and lack of sleep!

Our stay was filled with activities arranged for us by their fantastic, friendly outdoor pursuit staff, including a walk to Bolton Castle by the side of the Wensleydale railway, team building games in which everyone learned some important life skills, for example building a waterproof shelter, leading each other blindfold along a pathway, and an epic tug-of-war which the leaders lost much to the joy of our young people! All the time bathed in the warm sunshine, we had such good weather all weekend.

Our leaders arranged craft activities including decorating bottles with glass paints and filling with fairy lights, they looked great and are a pretty reminder of the weekend.

We shared in tasty food prepared by a lovely lady called Bev and helped by all the staff and enjoyed a BBQ on Saturday night followed by toasting marshmallows after collecting wood earlier in the day.

We also shared in fellowship, singing our favourite Christian songs and prayers together focussing on Jeremiah 29:11 – “I know the plans I have for you” says the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”.

Christian teaching is at the heart of Girl's Brigade at Cockerton, and we truly believe that God is with us as we guide our young people on our journey together and are all looking forward to our next visit to *The Jonas Centre* next year!

Gillian Kane

Hurworth

Well here at Hurworth we are pleased to say that we have restarted our monthly coffee mornings on the second Saturday of the month from 10-12 noon and that our friends from within the local community have returned to support us. If you are in Hurworth why not pop in for good company and home baked produce.

The community lunch held every Wednesday is open to all. If you would like to attend please let Andy Robinson know.

We have been in conversation with our friends at All Saints Hurworth and are very happy that we are able to share services again; we will be worshipping at All Saints on Sunday 14th November at 10 am with an act of witness at the Cenotaph afterwards. We will also share a Carol Service on the 19th December at 10am and a Christingle Service on Christmas Eve. We will also be delivering a joint Christmas card to all 1,800 homes.

Hazel Neasham



'Theology on Whitley Bay'



One of the highlights of my two weeks holiday recently was getting to meet up with my closest group of friends who had travelled from Oxford to holiday in Beadnall. I am not sure what the café thought when six adults and four dogs entered and proceeded to laugh loudly as they ate their bodyweight in scones and millionaire's shortbread. At least the dogs were well behaved. The food was important though as we walked for the next couple of hours on the beach.

As we walked, one of my best friends told me of an occasion recently when he had been worried by a local arrangement service where he had responsibility for the 'tech.' His worries centred however, on the fact that another of our friends who is now wheelchair bound, was bringing a friend. This friend had not been to church in a long while and when the music list arrived Steve panicked. Why would anyone put a nine minute Requiem on the order of service for a local arrangement. Gently he suggested to his friends that it might not be the best 'first service' to come to, the week after, he promised, would be much better. Nevertheless the invited guest said she would come anyway.

The day of the local arrangement arrived, and the piece of music Steve had worried about was played and God, well God moved. The recording was of the very choir that the invited guest was a member of, and she had been part of the recording. Even more, our other friend had attended the concert where it was recorded. Tears all round. It was exactly the right piece of music, on the right day, at the right time, in the right place. Steve even managed the tech without a mistake. Of course it could just be a coincidence. But then again it could also be that God was moving in gentle ways we might well have missed. Steve said, "Just goes to show, what do I know?" At which I reminded him not to beat himself up, he does come from Stoke after all.

I wonder where God has been at work in your life recently? What moments or glimpses of grace might you testify to given the chance? Please pray for my friends, not least my friend who is wheelchair bound and whose prognosis is terminal. Pray too for a young women returning to church, and for Steve, he does come from Stoke and needs all the prayers he can get!

Go well,

Tim

Book Clubs?

Are there any book clubs in the Circuit or people who love books and reading? I believe this was a question which appeared in a previous edition of the *Teesdale Worm*.

Barnard Castle Methodist Book Club has been meeting regularly (apart from during the Pandemic) for the past 11 years. Started by our previous Circuit Administrator, Penelope, for meeting socially to discuss our shared passion for books over a cup of tea and cake.

The first books we read were “*The Other Hand*” by Chris Cleave, followed by “*The Shack*” by Paul William Young. To date we have read various authors, genres, (although mostly fiction), some classics and a political autobiography which didn’t go down very well (politics and religion best to be avoided!!). We introduced a secret Santa a few years ago where we buy a book for another person, wrap it and open on Christmas day and then share them around the following session.

Usually we are able to borrow the books from our local library who have been very supportive over the years. We are currently reading “*A Gentleman in Moscow*” by Amor Towles which was recommended to us by the library staff. This book is written in a very elegant style about a Count who is charged as a social parasite before a Bolshevik tribunal and placed under house arrest for life, in the Metropole Hotel in Moscow where he is a resident. The book is centred on all his contacts, observations and past acquaintances and with his restricted freedom he has plenty of time for self-reflection.

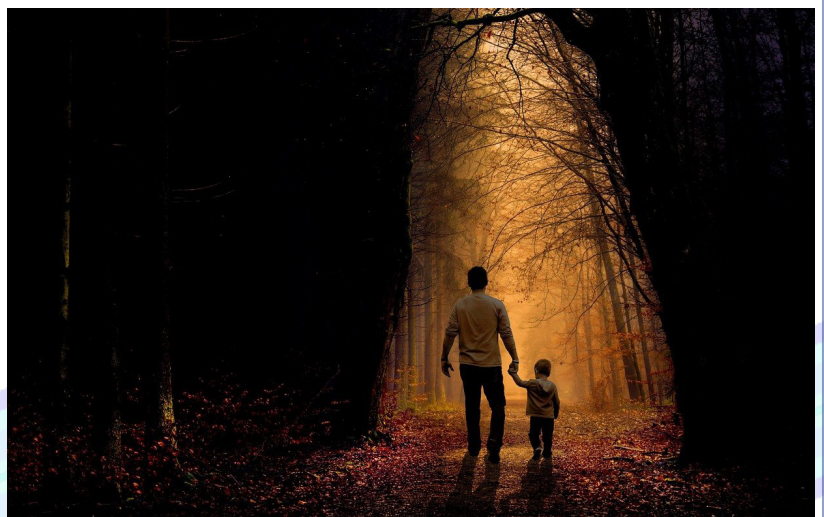
Haven’t we all gone through a period of self-reflection in recent times? We have now begun to meet regularly again in person (about every 6 weeks) at a local café. There are about 10 of us and we really missed the personal contact and social interaction that our group gives us when we couldn’t meet during lockdown. Any other groups out there or recommendations for good reads??

Alex Thomson, Barnard Castle Methodist Church

Circuit Office

The Circuit Office is based at Elm Ridge Methodist Church and is open every day except Thursday.
If you need to be in touch, please ring Lindy on 07803 989 528

‘Trust your cause to Christ and
leave your fears, insecurities and
uncertainties in His hands. As you do,
may He whisper courage to your heart
and hope to your soul. Courage to
pursue the call He has placed on your
life and peace to keep your heart’s
hope set on Him.’
#niteblessing



News from the Pastoral Team

Is it just me or does Christmas start earlier each year? I'm sure that some shops waited until their Halloween scary stuff was off the shelves before they brought out their Christmas goodies.

Still, with so much to do I suppose it's good to get preparations under way as soon as possible.

Could you help us with some of our Christmas 'doings'?

We are able to offer nonpaid but highly prized and even higher valued volunteer positions in the run up to Christmas.

We would love to take a few people into some of the Care Homes we will be visiting in December, to sing Carols. No auditions necessary, just a willingness to brighten the day for the residents and a big smile, even if it is behind a mask. We will need to ask you to do a Lateral Flow Test beforehand, but we can arrange that. So please get in touch if this is something you'd like to do.

Again, this year we will be sending out Christmas gift bags to those who will perhaps be on their own at Christmas - or might just be blessed by receiving one. There will be a devotional booklet as well as gifts, card etc included in the bags.

Here's where you can help.

Would you like to suggest someone that you feel would be blessed by these little Christmas gifts?

Could you donate a small gift to go in a bag?

Would you be able to help with the delivery of the bags?

We plan for them to go out at the end of November this year as the devotion booklet is designed to be used during Advent.

We know that these bags were greatly appreciated last year and made a huge difference to Christmas day for many of the recipients which is why we would like to do them again this year.

We really do appreciate the help we receive from around the Circuit, so if you are available to help this year please do get in touch as soon as you can.

Please note our new phone numbers.

Blessings

Lyn Cookson Tel: 07468 881 876 / lyncookson.dmc@gmail.com
Chris Russell Tel: 07468 881 907 / chrisrussell.dmc@gmail.com



JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

10th, 11th, 12th December

Appeal for volunteers

The following roles remain to be filled. If you can help at all please telephone Mary Everitt on 07971 638 361.

Role	Day/Time	No. Required
Car Park attendant (part of a team of 4)	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1
Meeting and Greeting (part of a team of 3)	Saturday 11th 4-6pm	1
	Sunday 12th 4-6pm	1
Wise Man/Woman (Guide on the journey)	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1
	Saturday 11th 4-8pm	2
	Sunday 12th 4-8pm	2
Angel Gabriel (speaking sitting behind screen and operates light)	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1
	Saturday 11th 4-8pm	1
	Sunday 12th 4-8pm	1
Innkeeper's wife (and 2 children (optional))	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1 (+2?)
Joseph in his Workshop (interacts with Mary)	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1
	Saturday 11th 4-8pm	1
	Sunday 12th 4-8pm	1
Joseph in the Stable	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1
	Saturday 11th 4-8pm	1
	Sunday 12th 4-8pm	1
Shepherds (outside)	Friday 10th 6-8pm	2
	Saturday 11th 4-8pm	2
	Sunday 12th 4-8pm	2
Modern woman/man	Friday 10th 6-8pm	1
Stallholders in the Market Place	Friday 10th 6-8pm	3
	Saturday 11th 4-8pm	3
	Sunday 12th 4-8pm	2
Volunteers to make sweets etc. in advance (recipes provided)		8

PLEASE NOTE – If anyone is available for more than 1 session that would be great, and if anyone can commit to all 3 that would be absolutely wonderful! PLEASE REMEMBER that this is a CIRCUIT EVENT and that it is a major outreach project giving people the opportunity of making the *Journey to Bethlehem* in a real way, enabling the whole Circuit to work together.

Mary Everitt

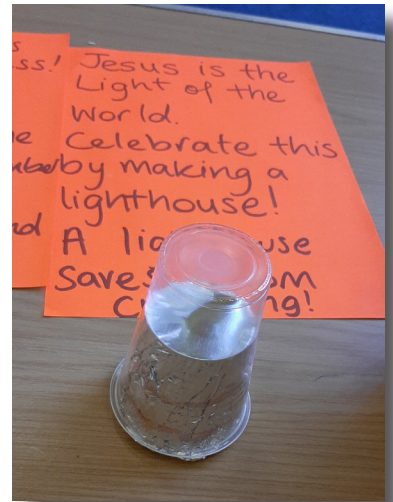
News from the Youth Team



We had an amazing weekend at 3GENERATE at Birmingham NEC. Our young people had an opportunity to do lots of activities, a cobra room, football, debates, comedy shows and circus workshops. There was an inflatable chapel, a park and health and wellbeing tent. The young people got a chance to meet with others from across the Connexion, have fun with each other and explore their relationship with God and the church. It was a privilege to take them, they are a lovely bunch and they all managed to find things at the event that interested them and engaged them. It was also great to see so many young people participating in voting for their youth president - love that the Methodist Church has a youth president. Thanks to Emma, Graham and Donna for coming along and sleeping in a tent.

Messy Church this month had a light theme. We had fun making stained glass windows lighthouses and traffic light biscuits. Families were thinking about how Jesus is the light in the darkness and how they can shine in their communities just like Jesus.

The babybank has grown! We have opened a new outlet at Skerne Park Community Centre. The babybank is always busy and has lots of visitors every week, however it is difficult for people who live at the other side of town to collect from *The Well*. We are so excited to see how this goes. They are eager to be involved and are managing their side themselves with support from us. Thanks to Phil for helping to make it happen.



Morvyn Sanderson

Taking it in your stride

Travelling across our new Circuit, stretching from Hurworth in the east to Middleton-in-Teesdale in the west (approximately 30 miles) may seem a daunting prospect to some, but it certainly wouldn't have deterred the Wesley brothers and the band of lay preachers who assisted them.

By 1761 an enormous and thriving Dales Circuit had been established, based on Barnard Castle, stretching from Tynedale in the north, to Wensleydale in the south and from Darlington in the east to Penrith in the west. It was in that year, at the age of 58, that John began a regular series of pastoral and preaching tours of the dales, returning every two years until his last visit in 1790, almost thirty years later. The sheer size of the territory would have daunted lesser men. John, quite literally, took it all in his stride; even at the age of 65, as this extract from his Journal shows:

Wednesday, June 1st (1768): I preached at Teesdale. The sun was scorching hot when I began, but was soon covered with clouds. Many of the militia were present at Barnard Castle in the evening and behaved with decency.

Thursday 2nd: I preached, at noon, at a farmer's house near Brough, in Westmorland. The sun was hot enough, but some shady trees covered both me and most of the congregation. A little bird perched on one of them, and sang without intermission from the beginning of the service unto the end. The evening congregation in Swaledale was far larger, and equally attentive; and the society was one of the most lively which I have met in England. Many of them do rejoice in the pure love of God, and many more are earnestly seeking it.

Friday 3rd: I rode to Richmond, intending to preach near the house of one of our friends; but some of

the chiefs of the town sent to desire me to preach in the market place. The Yorkshire militia were all there, just returned from their exercise; and a more rude rabble rout I never saw, without sense, decency or good manners. In the evening, at Barnard Castle, the commanding officer gave orders there should be no exercise, that all the Durham militia (what a contrast) might be at liberty to attend the preaching. Accordingly, we had a little army of officers as well as soldiers; and all behaved well. A large number of them were present at five in the morning. I have not found so deep and lively a work in any part of the kingdom as runs through the whole circuit, particularly in the vales that wind between these horrid mountains. I returned to Newcastle in the evening.”

John Wesley's stamina was legendary. That journey from Barnard Castle to Brough, down Swaledale to Richmond, then back to Barnard Castle, took him from Thursday morning to Friday night. And he had to eat, sleep and preach as well. And by Saturday night he was back in Newcastle. Three days to travel 118 miles on horseback - and this at a time when there were reported to be only three good roads in all of England. They obviously made them tough in those days!

(With thanks to Geoffrey R Milburn's excellent booklet, *'The Travelling Preacher: John Wesley in the North East 1742 - 1790'*)

Peter Collins

On Taking the Darkness Seriously

Pumpkins, pumpkins everywhere. Halloween seems to mark that unofficial boundary where harvest gives way to winter. The days are colder, the nights darker. In recent times Halloween has grown in popularity. For some churches it is the cue for light night celebrations and prayers. Others choose to focus on All Saints and All Souls that follow and the themes of remembrance that preface our coming Advent season. There are good reasons of course for all of these things but I find myself wondering whether we pass over too quickly the reality and power of darkness.

Questions for reflection: How does your family recognise or celebrate Halloween? What are your childhood memories? How has Halloween changed? Pray for children who long for treats but fear or know only trickery and deceit.

In Matthew's gospel, following the Sermon on the Mount there is a series of nine healing stories in three sets of three. They are easy to miss, but let me draw your attention to the middle three. Here on short order Jesus stills the storm, exorcises the demon possessed man elsewhere named Legion, and heals a man by forgiving his sins on the Sabbath. This threefold sequence offers us an interesting way of thinking about darkness and evil.

Task: look up the series of nine healings, in Matthew Ch 8 and 9 and read them through. What themes do you notice? Pray for someone who longs for healing.

First up is the stilling of the storm. I know, it's not technically a healing but bear with me! Jesus' contemporaries knew the destructive power found in nature. Earthquake, volcano, storm perhaps especially flood. These destructive powers were understood to be part of that chaotic realm that God subdued when He spoke the very first words of creation, bringing order to chaos. Yet these destructive chaotic realities prowl at the edges of our lives looking for an opportunity to wreak chaos and destruction. More often than not the sea (or in Genesis the Deep) were understood to be the home of these threatening powers. When Jesus stills the storm He calms these elemental forces of destruction with a word just as God did so in the very beginning. In this moment the darkness and the destruction of a chaotic creation unleashed is calmed.

Reflect: how do you make sense of these powerful experiences of creation when you hear about them on the news or perhaps experience them first hand? How do you understand God to be present or not in such experiences? Does God unleash such powers or is God the one who holds them back until we in our freedom demand that they be unleashed or that we be allowed to take control? Hold a region of the world you know is struggling with the destructive power of chaos before God in prayer. How and what might you pray?

The second story is an exorcism. More often than not, we modern folk are hesitant about swords like exorcism and

there is much to be careful about. Yet such stories are more prevalent in the Bible than we would care to admit. Two quick observations must suffice. Often when the Bible speaks of the demonic it describes institutions and empires. The book of Revelation is the most obvious example where the Roman empire is understood in powerful and vivid demonic images. Demonic power and influence on groups and institutions is a particular concern. The second is that whilst modern science and health care can explain a great many human behaviours and problems there remain a small number of cases which stubbornly refuse to be simplified out. We might and perhaps must however reluctantly conclude that such cases are rare but to the best of human understanding real. The demonic is dangerous and destructive. It is not to be messed with.

Reflect: “Rare but real” what do you think? How do you feel about the Bible’s portrayal of institutions, governments and empires as demonic and destructive? What might this mean for Christian people and the Church? Pray for our government and its opposition.

Finally our third story is more familiar, a Sabbath healing through the forgiveness of sins. Sin is the final expression of destructive evil. The power of broken relationships, fear and defensiveness to shatter and destroy human life as our mistaken choices lead us away from the presence and power of God and the person God has designed and longs for us to be.

Reflect: If sin is so destructive, why is the church not more urgent in its evangelism? Evangelism is an act of love which seeks the healing of the broken. Pray for someone you know and love to encounter grace and come to faith in Jesus Christ. Note the subject of this prayer must be someone you love! You cannot bring to faith people you do not love!!

Such are the powerful and deeply destructive powers that human beings experience and encounter. Any single one is destructive enough, but experienced together as they often are they represent powerful threats to our common life and communities. Indeed as we reflect on the COP26 talks and the increasingly chaotic nature of our nature, or on the problems that we see across all manners of governments let alone the challenges of our common life of communities and families we may reflect on the apostles words once again:

“For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:12.

Reflect: What do you think of this verse from Ephesians? Memorise the verse. How helpful is the image of struggle and battle as an image of discipleship for you? Pray for the COP 26 conference and the ongoing negotiations re climate change.

Perhaps it is time to take the destructive power of the darkness more seriously again. To find in its recognition and destructive power a new urgency for our proclamation of grace, freedom and peace. Our three stories from Matthew’s gospel are told not just to offer us a threefold typology of evil and destruction but to emphasise the power and authority of Christ. Without ceremony and grand gestures, Christ speaks and chaos finds its boundaries, he speaks and demons flee new freedom found in their leaving, Christ speaks and a man is healed and made whole. Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of Shalom. One prominent Professor of Psychiatry writing after a long experience of consulting with cases of demonic influence, notes simply that it is love which conquers evil, only love. That perfect love which drives out fear, and conquers sin and death. Love revealed, love incarnate in the life death, preaching, teaching and healing, loving, living and dying of Jesus, the Christ. As one modern hymn writer puts it, *“No power of hell no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand.”*

Rest: Rest in these words of Stuart Townend. Or meditate for a time on the phrase “Perfect love drives out fear.” 1 John 4:18. Pray that Jesus will continue to fill you with grace, light and healing.

In these autumn and winter days we must learn to take the darkness seriously. Yet we may do so only because we are rooted and grounded in that perfect love. There is nothing to fear, but there is much to be careful and serious about. May God fill you with light and love in the days ahead. Amen.

Rev. Tim Boocock