

# Christward

The magazine of



November 5<sup>th</sup>–December 31<sup>st</sup>  
2017

## **~ Musings from our Interim Minister ~**

If I asked you to guess the best-selling Playmobil figure of all time, I suspect unless you already know, that you wouldn't in a million years guess that it was the figure of Martin Luther. This Spring I had the privilege of attending an ecumenical conference in Berlin and everywhere I went there were reminders of Luther and the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his 95 theses. Yet here in the UK, there appears to be merely a nod to this historic event. Perhaps it is because, for us, there were many other protestant influences beside Luther (perhaps most notably Henry VIII's 1534 Act of Supremacy declaring him as head of the Church of England).

Perhaps our Baptist heritage owes more to other reformers such as John Wycliffe, Hudrych Zwingli, John Calvin and John Hus. But wherever we owe our influences, the idea that the reformation could be attributed to a single event, or even that we are now 'reformed' (past tense) is a misleading one. For me, the point about reformation is that it is a process not an event. If one of the tenets of reformation holds any weight – the idea that each person could read and interpret the Bible for themselves and respond accordingly – then we have to be continually reforming; reforming as individuals and reforming as church through new understanding and new responses to our ever-changing context.

Life itself, in all its forms, is about continuous reform. Nothing remains static; things grow, change, develop, and eventually some things die to make way for new life. And so it seems to me that if the church is to be alive and living, then it too needs to do these things. Sometimes reform can take place, where we hold on to things that remain helpful, but change other things to meet the new environment or culture. Sometimes something has to die and make way for new life. Discerning what is appropriate to hold on to, what to change, and what to let go of, is, I believe, part of on-going task of the church as a worshipping community.

And it is these issues that will form much of our discussions at our church away day on 11<sup>th</sup> November, which I very much hope those

of you who are part of the regular fellowship will make a priority in your diary to attend.

And so as we come to mark this specific event in history that we recognise has impacted on our lives today, I want to invite us all to think about how we continue to reform, now and into the future; what do we want to hold on to as precious and helpful? What can we let go of because it has ceased to be appropriate? And what new opportunities can reforming bring that will take us onward, Christward, together, as the fellowship of Union Chapel?

*Jane Henderson*

## **~Snippets from the Gospel of Thomas ~**

John Donne (1572-1631) wrote the following. It appears in *Devotions upon emergent occasions and seuerall steps in my sicknes - Meditation XVII, 1624*:

"All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated...As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come: so this bell calls us all: but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness....No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

There has always been discussion on the nature mankind, and the way we see the world. One view is that we live in what might be described as a non dual world, but because of the nature of living as a separate identity, we naturally see ourselves as separate beings, and fail to understand we are all connected. This is inevitable.

With all the mentions of unity in the Bible, one sometimes wonders what the authors were getting at. What did they understand, or was it a concept with limited scope?

In my first article about this gospel of Thomas, it was suggested that it was strongly influenced by the original author's Gnostic view of the world. (*Christward July-August 2017; [www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/magazine](http://www.unionchapelbaptist.org.uk/magazine)*)

Here, it might be seen that it could be possible to interpret it in a so called non dual way, or to put it another way, with unitive consciousness.

**Saying number 22 reads as follows:**

Jesus saw some babies nursing. He said to his disciples, "These nursing babies are like those who enter the (Father's) kingdom." They said to him, "Then shall we enter the (Father's) kingdom as babies?" Jesus said to them, "When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the kingdom]."

Whilst it may not be clear what the connection to babies is exactly, the non-duality, or oneness element seems fairly clear.

**Number 23 has echoes:** Jesus said, "I shall choose you, one from a thousand and two from ten thousand, and they will stand as a single one."

**Number 89:** Jesus said, "Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Don't you understand that the one who made the inside is also the one who made the outside?"

This saying is generally thought to mean that religious ritual of itself is not enough unless one's heart has to be in it.

**Number 106:** Jesus said, "When you make the two into one, you will become children of Adam, and when you say, 'Mountain, move from here!' it will move."

The mention of Adam seems a little puzzling, as does the mountain. I don't think the moving of large quantities of material is the height of the spiritual life.

**Number 114:** Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven."

This is the strangest saying of all, but it does appear to be emphasising unity, in a strange way. The Apostle Paul says 'There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ', which is a very odd thing to say, when he also thinks women should be silent in church. However, the letter instructing women to be silent in church was almost certainly not written by Paul anyway. Whether it was or was not written by Paul, it is obvious that there needed to be a committee to decide what was acceptable and what wasn't.

But I don't mind Paul being wrong, or confused or even if these words were penned in his name, but did Jesus really say "Every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven?" As they used to say, answers on a postcard, please!

*Geoff Walker*

**~What does the Lord require?**

**OR**

**What does it mean to me to follow Jesus? ~**

*As was mentioned in the last magazine over the last two months we have taken as our theme for the Sunday service 'What does the Lord require?' or 'What does it mean to me to follow Jesus?' Michael Welford had the daunting task of marrying this theme with our Harvest Festival. Given below is a summary of his comments on the theme.*

## **Discipleship led me to commit myself to follow Jesus**

I have always been a practical person. I did not have a great background of church. There were occasional trips to Sunday School but no family involvement. Later at my public school it was expected that one would attend daily service in the school chapel. I know it sounds as if the school had no influence on my subsequent faith but I am sure that it prepared me for the direction which I eventually took.

I came to recognise the hurt caused when people who don't fit the standard pattern feel they are rejected and there is no recognition of their needs.

I came to see the importance of commitment to a course of action and being ready to work for it.

I was baptised by immersion with all the symbolism of death and new life with which that was associated - a commitment to faith and action.

I believe in the incarnate God. The Kingdom is active here & now - changing things and people now - not in the future. And since I am trying to listen to Jesus talking I realised that some of his challenges are quite ridiculously out of line with the commonly accepted ideas of our society. Simply to take seriously the words of his prayer , 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.' It is a fantastic idea but I believe it is vital to take it seriously..God with us in our daily life with all the challenges and support that brings.

I make it sound as if I have worked on this on my own. No way. The church has had a huge place in my development, How do you put into practice the ideas of service and acceptance?

## **Discipleship involves adapting as God speaks to us now.**

Perhaps due to my practical background I have always been interested in outcomes. So I find it difficult to explain faith in

abstract terms. If I have ever led a service the question in my mind has always been 'So What?' I may not be able to answer it for others but in trying to answer it for others I find myself constantly challenged. At the minute I am facing the fact that I can't do the things I used to do. I'm looking for my way ahead with God. But I am certain that God is with me still.

In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus said, "Make your life a quest and don't give up until you find what you're looking for. What you find may upset your prejudices, but you'll discover much to wonder at and get to grips with what the world is all about."

Yes indeed. This has been a rather muddled account but that is because my faith and my way of expressing it is rather muddled. But I can certainly say that having committed myself to follow Jesus to the best of my ability, the journey which has followed has been something I have found exciting.

*Michael Welford*

## **~ Shadows ~**

*In Jane's musings which opens this issue she takes the theme of 'reformation'. Some time ago she wrote a blog reflecting on D H Lawrence's poem 'Shadows', ( a poem she will be using this Sunday 29th Oct). This election fits in well with the theme of 'reformation' and 'change'. The complete blog which includes some fine art work can be found at*

<https://janelydialoves.wordpress.com/2013/05/01/shadows-d-h-lawrence/>

*Shadows by D H Lawrence*

*And if tonight my soul may find her peace  
in sleep, and sink in good oblivion,  
and in the morning wake like a new-opened flower  
then I have been dipped again in God, and new-created.*

*And if, as weeks go round, in the dark of the moon*

*my spirit darkens and goes out, and soft strange gloom  
pervades my movements and my thoughts and words  
then I shall know that I am walking still  
with God, we are close together now the moon's in shadow.*

*And if, as autumn deepens and darkens  
I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break in storms  
and trouble and dissolution and distress  
and then the softness of deep shadows folding,  
folding around my soul and spirit, around my lips  
so sweet, like a swoon, or more like the drowse of a low, sad song  
singing darker than the nightingale, on, on to the solstice  
and the silence of short days, the silence of the year, the shadow,  
then I shall know that my life is moving still  
with the dark earth, and drenched  
with the deep oblivion of earth's lapse and renewal.*

*And if, in the changing phases of man's life  
I fall in sickness and in misery  
my wrists seem broken and my heart seems dead  
and strength is gone, and my life  
is only the leavings of a life:*

*and still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of  
renewal  
odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange  
flowers  
such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me  
then I must know that still  
I am in the hands of the unknown God,  
he is breaking me down to his own oblivion  
to send me forth on a new morning, a new man.*

The poem is about cycles and seasons, the ups and downs of life. It's about the presence of God renewing and refreshing us despite the things that life throws at us. As a Christian I believe I was created anew when I accepted Jesus into my life. And I live my life in that constant renewal and re-creation. I love that phrase 'I am



*dipped again in God.* It is God who is the source of all that I am and who walks alongside me in my journey through life's ups and downs.

I love the idea that even in times of Winter, when I might feel like a *'withered stem'*, I still experience new growth – things I've not experienced before ... *'new blossoms of me'*.

I am reminded of words from Lamentations that inspired a great hymn ...

*Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23*

You may think it strange that I identify with the phrase *'I am in the hands of the unknown God'*, but the point is not that I don't know who he is, but that I can never understand him fully until I am with him.

1 Corinthians 13:12 says ...

*For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then shall I know fully, even as I am known.*

I get great comfort from this verse. I don't have to have all the answers, because I will never know it all in this life. But I can rest and find peace because *'I am in the hands of the unknown God'*, and I can rise every morning, a new person, a new creation.

*Jane Henderson*

## **~ Spiritual Reflection, Spiritual Development, Renovare....~**

A Group with no Name ( at the moment).... is starting

Yes, six of us had a meeting with Jane this week to discuss setting up a small group to "promote spiritual growth" in an experiential

way, through reading the bible, prayer, discussion and mutual support. Jane related her experience of this type of group and three models they used: the Renovare Spiritual Formation Workbook, Lectio Divina, and the Ignatian Examen.

We decided to start the group with a trial of 8 sessions using the “Spiritual Formation Workbook – a Renovare resource for Spiritual Renewal” by James Bevan Smith and Lynda Graybeal with a forward by Richard Foster. This book provides a framework for each meeting as well as exercises from the six movements or traditions of the Church – contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice, evangelical, incarnational. It introduces us to “six dimensions of Christian discipleship – prayer, virtue, empowerment, compassion, proclamation and wholeness – as seen in the life of Jesus Christ”. Week one involves an overview and an assessment of a balanced Christian life. The next six weeks look at the six movements with week 8 focussing on practical ways for spiritual growth. Each member of the group will have a book and share in the leadership of the meetings.

As a newcomer, this is a brief description of a new and exciting process of which I have no experience. I am looking forward to sharing with others new and unfamiliar ways of approaching God, the teachings of Jesus, the awareness of the spirit or whatever words we choose to use for living a life closer to God! I look forward to hearing the reactions and perspectives of others on what we are experiencing.

I am hoping I may be able to give you a clearer description after the 8 sessions!

*Lorna Richardson*

## **~ News of the Family ~**

As far as we know **Anna and Owen** left the UK for Uganda on the evening of 16th October. Anna had had some trouble in getting the appropriate visa. We hope they are now safely at the hospital at which they will be working.

## **Hilda Linton**

A huge thank you to everyone who attended the Celebration of Hilda's long and eventful life. Especial thanks to the Revs, Henderson, Phillips, Mattocks and Geere for leading the service. To Enid & Alan for the readings. Leonie, Margaret G and Geoff for the wonderful music. Hilda I'm sure would have approved that all her wishes were met and that her life was celebrated at the very place that was so close to her heart and faith.

*Colin Marchbank-Smith*

## **~ Alan Dobbins 20th Sept 1930 - 26th Sept 2017 ~**

Alan was known to many of us at Union Chapel, Fallowfield.



He attended church for a number of years, with his place in the musicians' corner with his trumpet.

Outside the services he was often in action, mending, fixing and also visiting others who were unwell. He continued tutoring children until he was into his 80's, riding his bike until this became (really) unsafe, and then I think the tutees' parents organised a 'ring and ride' system for him taking him from his home and then back again.

In the last few years he had needed residential care before being admitted to Stepping Hill with severe infection, where he died in September 2017.

He had planned his funeral with instructions, including a CD, to be played during the service. This included a poem recited by him and a joke. His words from his email in 2013 state, “remember the disc is deliberately funny, intended to inspire laughter”. Indeed it did, as we heard once again his voice in full strength and his infectious laughing at his own joke.

As is often the way, the funeral service filled in parts of Alan’s life story we had not known. One of his sons, Keith, told of how Alan’s mother had been concerned for the misfortunes of others to the extent of extreme generosity- including giving away the shoes of Alan and his sister to someone in great need. He gave up a potentially prestigious academic career which involved working in the weapons industry and devoted his professional life to imparting knowledge to others. His passion for jazz trumpet was reflected in



his choice of music on the CD and Keith improvised a guitar solo in memory of his father. The jazz group that Alan had played with for many years played him into the Chapel with “Just a closer Walk” and played him out with “Oh When the Saints”- but not until, as

instructed by Alan in 2013, we had all shared refreshments in the Small Hall!

We extend our love and condolences to Alan's family. I am glad to have known him.

*Margaret Garner*

## **~ Barry Rawlins 28th Oct 1970 - 29th Sept 2017 ~**

Barry Rawlins, husband of Ruth (Parry, nee Land) and father of Joshua and Daniel, died on September 29<sup>th</sup>. He had been living with cancer for several years.

At the Service of Celebration at the end of October, we learnt a lot more about a remarkable person. Barry was an expert in soil and geology, leading the Sustainable Soils team at the British Geological Survey. This produced a national map of soil characteristics to assess, predict and allow enhancement of fertility. Barry was also into sailing, and belonged to Notts County Sailing Club.



*Barry sailing the leading boat, with son Josh crewing Jeff Peters (behind!) on 11th June this year.)*

Earlier, tennis had been a big part of his life, and latterly cycling with friends and relatives.

The photo below of him with his family says more than words can. Joshua's words at the service included the reflection that we should not be focussing on what might have been, but instead, on all that Barry had already achieved.



## **~ Fallowfield & Withington Food Bank ~**

October is always a very good month for donations of food. Of course we have Harvest Festivals at both Schools & Churches. We have also seen an increase in food donations generally, with many people preparing us for the difficulties which will arise from the roll out of Universal Credit. It's certainly a very worrying time for clients as the promised "4 weeks" is in reality something between 10 and 12 weeks. We are working very closely with our referral agencies to ensure no one goes hungry. An increase in donations does of

course mean our warehouse situation is now top of our list of concerns, if you know any suitable storage locally please do let us know.



This photo shows week one of a collection from Cavendish Primary School.

The next Tesco Collection takes place on Thursday November 30th 8am-10pm and Friday 1st December 8am-2pm could you spare an hour or may be two to ensure we have enough food to see us through Christmas and the long winter months?

*Colin Marchbank-Smith*

## **~ A Close Run Thing ~**

On Thursday evening two days before this magazine was due to appear I had just one article to include in this issue. I wondered whether I could fill the empty space myself with say an article on

Philip Pullman's new book 'The Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage' ( a great read even if you haven't read the Dark Materials trilogy). Perhaps also I could add my own diatribe against the institutional church and the way it has marginalised so many people in our society by its rigid adherence to beliefs and rules which Jesus would certainly not have owned. Then I could pad things out a bit by adding photos from the archive featuring members of the congregation at various events. People always like looking at photos of themselves.

Within 24 hours of these musings such a catastrophe was averted. So I want to thank Geoff Walker, Jane Henderson, David and Margaret Garner, Lorna Richardson, Colin Marchbank-Smith and Michael Welford for riding to the rescue with their contributions and making my weekend a happy one.

Just a thought - there must be others in the congregation who could give Christward a good start to the New Year by writing an article for the January issue. Contributions to me by Thursday 4th January but don't wait until then - do it now.

*Alan Redhouse*

## **~ Talking to Each Other ~**

*If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this magazine and so start a discussion or if you would care to write an article for us on a topic of your choosing such contributions would be welcome. Please send them by email to [alan.redhouse@virgin.net](mailto:alan.redhouse@virgin.net) or by post to The Editor, Christward, Union Chapel Fallowfield, 2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.*



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