

# Christward

The magazine of



March – April

2021

## **~ Noah: A troubling story ~**

[This is a response to the lectionary reading for the first Sunday in Lent. Genesis: 9 7-17 – the nice bit at the end of the story of Noah where, after he has destroyed everything in the flood, God puts up a rainbow and make a covenant not to do it again. Alan requested a reprise for the magazine so here it is]

### **1. God did *what*?**

Our story says it was God who caused the flood. God deliberately destroyed all humankind, except one family. Nice. I gather this isn't a problem for Jewish readers who take it more as a scene setting for their story of the origins of the Hebrew race. The story is almost exactly the same as a Babylonian story with just the argumentative Babylonian Gods edited out. But we have the God of Christendom, the God who needed the sacrifice of Jesus to prevent him (definitely male this God) from condemning each and every one of us. So, when we tell this story we see a cruel, vindictive, punishing God – not the saving God who rescues humankind from the flood. The Church has spent a lot of time and energy over the centuries frightening people with hell-fire and damnation, with the cruel God. Good for keeping people in line. When Christians tell this story, the rainbow and the animals may take centre-stage, but the God who punishes people is always there lurking in the shadows.

### **2. About that promise....**

Then there is the rainbow. The promise. "...my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh..". Try telling this to the people of Bangladesh who suffer repeated devastating floods, to the people of Indonesia, Malaysia and southern Africa suffering catastrophic floods this month – floods which make our recent adventures seem puny. Now we can – and we must – talk about the role of human activity in these disasters. Forcing the poor and marginalised into vulnerable places, felling forests, removing natural flood defences, destroying natural coastal

vegetation. Some of this destruction from flooding is most definitely man-made. And will get worse given global heating and rising sea levels and more intense storms. Every time we tell this story it shouts out “but we still get floods, people still lose lives and homes and livelihoods”. Yes what we do makes these worse, what we do makes sure that the burden of these events falls on those least able to endure them, but we don’t make the rain.

### **3 And the rich family escaped..**

An ark – a big box - 300 by 50 by 30 cubits of gopher wood, 3 decks. Covered with pitch. Not exactly the sort of thing your average subsistence farmer could conjure up. Noah must have been pretty well-off! [Not to mention the birds-eye-maple at three ha'pence a foot! \*] Should we really be telling a story about how one well-off family escaped the disaster that befell all those less well-off? I know that’s not the point of the story but, given the inequalities in our world, what are we saying? What would those who barely exist, those who have no chance of escaping destruction say?

### **4. Which brings me to the bit they left out....**

And finally, and it seems inevitably, to the bits of the story the lectionary compilers left out. Just before the verses we had, the message to Noah began with these words:

**Genesis 9 1-3:** *God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything....*

We certainly have been good at multiplying, with all the consequences for the health of the planet. There is a school of thought that this part of the pronouncement represents a conversion from vegetarianism to meat-eating -which seems reasonable. But the phrase that leaps off the page is “The fear and

dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea". These words seem prophetic given the impact of our much-multiplied race on the flora and fauna of our planet – what has been termed the "Anthropocene extinction" – the 6th mass extinction event our planet has suffered. This one human-made. The animals, the birds and the fishes certainly have reason to fear us.

As it says: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you..." We are to be in control, nature is there for us to exploit. I think those of us who read the Bible and have shared its stories down the ages have to bear some responsibility for this narrative of our power over nature, of our right to subdue and exploit it. It's in there.

Having said that, I did come across a nice Jewish reading of the story which observes that God gave equal prominence to both humans and animals in the Ark, with the humans having the role of caring for the animals – and the Jewish tradition has stories of the toll this placed on Noah's health and well-being. Humanity and the rest of nature as equals. If only we had followed that path.

"The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth..." We need to keep our eyes and ears open; we need to feel. that dread and respond.

*\*If you don't know the Stanley Holloway monologue "Three Ha'pence A Foot" look it up! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NaIKHFXEIN8>*

## **A Postscript**

Even the most casual search for material around the story of Noah will unearth vast cesspools of fake facts and crazy arguments for the literal truth of the ark and its contents. Every generation has its own myth about the discovery of fragments of old wood on mountains in the Middle East – and there are some great stories of old beams being transported to mountain-tops to please the gullible. There is even a conspiracy theory that regularly does the rounds that various governments know the location of the Ark but are keeping it from us. Clearly to some at what used to be the extreme

end of the fundamentalist world (now sadly infiltrating much more of the church), this is a very troubling story. Its complete unrealism, impossibility and impracticality clearly worries these people as they are prepared to spend inordinate amounts of time and energy in trying to prop up a literal reading against all rationality. As if admitting that one story in the Bible is fictional will bring the whole edifice of their faith crumbling down. But this is not history, it's far more than that – it's a story – be careful how you handle it.

*Steve Roberts*

## **~ Two Paintings of Miracles ~**

*During a Zoom service a few weeks ago we looked at some paintings of miracles occurring in the Gospels. Jess and Andy discussed the paintings, straight after the service and below are their comments on two of them.*



*Jess, remembering the little girl, called back to life by Jesus:*

Some of this seems like mentality – to have a calming hand on your head, telling you that it's OK, can have a really big effect. Touching her head, she would have felt the support from someone else as well, other than her parents. Her parents would have been there the whole time, but there is a place for someone else to reassure, and to help her to see and believe that it is possible that she will be fine. Then you start to tell yourself that, and feeling better. I feel some connection to my own experience, but it's more than that, it's important to see it from different people's point of view, I think.





*Andy, on Van Gogh's painting of the raising of Lazarus:*

I find this painting much harder to empathise with - it might almost be a commentary on the near invalidity of this miracle. ie - if you take Jesus out of it, then who benefits from it? Certainly none of those in the painting, by the look of them. So perhaps the painting is an invitation to come to terms with death, as part of life, and to contemplate the awfulness of a refusal to accept death in this way. From this perspective, the only person who stands to benefit from this resurrection story is 'Jesus the miracle worker'. By painting the reality of the this miracle without including Jesus, Van Gogh really brings this home....

## **~ Vaccinations at the Chancellors Hotel, Fallowfield ~**

Out of 'retirement' again...

I am joining the army of vaccinators and Alan has asked for an article for the magazine.

Not much to say yet, I am afraid. The story so far is that I attended for induction a couple of weeks ago on a Saturday and was struck

by the friendly, efficient but almost family- like atmosphere amongst the staff. I had been greeted by several sets of volunteers before getting to the main entrance: the first two were positioned just a few yards in from the main road asking whether I was 'for vaccination or testing' and directing me to the left turning; then two more pointing the way to the carpark, then another two, confirming I had reached the staff parking area.

Then two more waited at the approach to the door and a further two at the entrance itself. By then I had my appropriate phrase off pat: 'new staff for induction' and was glad to see a familiar pair of eyes above the mask of another retired GP, 2 metres ahead of me in the foyer.

We were steered to the 'GP lead vaccinator' who instructed us in the lateral flow tests we needed to confirm we were safe to stay for the morning. She then explained how it all works. We had, I hasten to add, done the preparatory on-line education about general Covid vaccination, specific vaccination issues for Pfizer and Astra Zeneca, and, of course, Basic Life Support and anaphylaxis training.

We were then allocated to our trainers and went to our pods- the individual cubicles, each with one vaccinator and their equipment- both for giving the vaccination and for recording it. It is surprising how quickly one returns to the patter of the vaccination session. The overall atmosphere was cheerful and positive with almost everyone glad to be there with the opportunity either to have the vaccine or to provide the facilities to give it. The only dissenting voice I heard while I was there, transpired later to be Matt, Brenda and Ned's son, who had unfortunately noticed the needle just before it slid painlessly into his arm. He was not pleased.

The vaccination routine is straightforward: the trickier bit, as ever, is the IT!

I have now completed the induction and had the training sheet signed off (a few years since that last happened).

My first session is on Saturday- sadly after the deadline for the magazine, so you will have to wait for the next instalment! By then, I

hope many of our readers will have had their own positive experiences of vaccination to recount.

*Margaret Garner*

## **~ On Paul ~**

Reading the letters of Paul it is clear that he is awaiting the Messiah and a time when no one will learn war anymore but will turn the swords into pruning hooks. However when exhorting us to progress our spiritual life he frequently uses metaphors of armour and weaponry, for example the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, the Sword of the Spirit. Modelling the spiritual life on the military life of the oppressing power, Rome, from whom all Jews seek deliverance seems inappropriate to say the least.

Rome had been brutal with the Jews, some estimate that 80,000 Jews were crucified by Rome. Indeed the Romans ran out of wood and had to ship timber in to continue executions. Pontius Pilate's brutality sickened even Rome and they recalled him and gave him a desk job. This brutality is compounded by the action of the Roman Emperor who wanted to erect a statue of himself in the Temple a blasphemy reminiscent of the Greeks in around BC 160 who sacrificed a pig in the Temple.

New Testament authors often wrote in code to deflect Roman attention from themselves by appearing not to criticise Rome, referring to it as Babylon. They did this because Rome was reading letters that were in circulation as Rome was on the lookout for insurrections. They also used literary tricks of the time like ascribing their work to other better known authors. They were not averse to lying about themselves whilst condemning the practice in others. So where does Paul stand in all this?

Paul makes great claims for himself claiming to have had visions seen whilst in heaven (2 Corinthians 12: 3 ) similar in kind to those of a great apocalyptic prophet like Daniel. Despite Rome's



treatment of the Jews, he tries to say that Rome is not a threat and is a force for good writing the following in Romans 13: 3 - 7

*For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:*

*For he (the ruler/Emperor) is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.*

*Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.*

*For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.*

*Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*

I suspect Paul could only get away with saying "Rulers are not a terror to good works" etc, because his audience was in Rome and possibly knew nothing of tribulations of the Jews.

But then in another letter he actually calls the Emperor who wanted to put his statue in the Temple 'a man of sin' (2 Thessalonians 2: 3ff.)

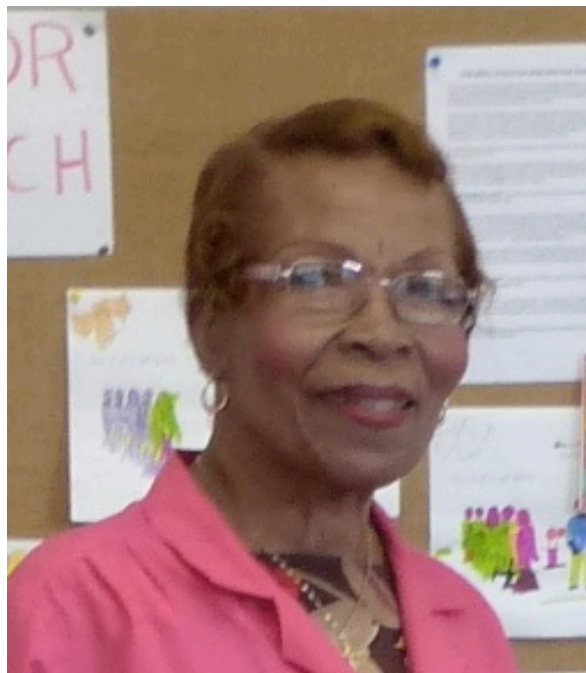
So who was Paul? He is a Roman citizen (although to be fair he only claims this in Acts, a book written by another author). He is a Jew but how many Jews would write about Rome as he does? Indeed, how many Jews were Roman citizens? There are inconsistencies in his feelings about Rome although he seems to be comfortable with the status quo. He makes unsubstantiated claims about his experiences. He seems unfamiliar sometimes with Hebrew e.g. in Galatians he chooses to use the word 'seed' in reference to God's Promise to Abraham in its singular meaning to indicate that God's promise to Abraham pointed towards Christ rather than the usual plural for this passage thus meaning Abraham's many descendants. Is he just manipulating the language to suit his argument or is he ignorant?

Paul remains a mystery. Is he a Jew, a Roman citizen, both or even a literary device?

*Geoff Walker*

*Margaret Garner sent the following to Carmen's family on behalf of us all.*

**~ Our memories of Carmen Bowman  
from her time at Union Chapel ~**



I am writing this on behalf of our congregation at Union Chapel, knowing that we have lost a very well loved, independent-minded, caring and warm person from our community. We offer our condolences to you, her family and friends, and share some of our memories of her time with us.

We currently meet on Zoom and when we were discussing what we wanted to tell you, we were fortunate enough to have Carol Bodey sharing worship with us.

Carol usually worships at Trinity Community Church (previously known as Moss Side Baptist Church) and she knew Carmen from when she attended Moss Side Baptist, when Roger was young and came each week with her.

Carmen was baptised at the Moss Side Swimming baths in 1985 along with Carol's two daughters, Sara and Ruth, who were baptised on the same day.



Carmen transferred her church membership to us at Union Chapel in 1991, came regularly and shared fully in the life of the church.

I remember her as being quick to help with the coffee and tea rotas, and one of the first to be clearing tables and washing up at church lunches. She was happy to take her turn with the supervision of the children during the 'second session' when most of the adults had a discussion after the coffee break.

The young people- as they are now- recalled with great fondness and amusement that Carmen and another church member with a strong personality, Michael, used to differ in their approach to the



session some years ago, with Michael encouraging den-making while Carmen was encouraging a tidy- as -you- go policy! She had her own favourite music tapes that she used to bring to play in the sessions for the children and had a lot of pleasure with them.

She had her regular place to sit, with two friends Beryl and Paul. When Paul sadly died, Carmen insisted on keeping a seat between herself and Beryl, "for Paul".

Over the years she developed a game, of joking about her age, initially asking if she could get away with taking 10 years off her age and then stretching the limits by suggesting that maybe she could take 20 years off her age and still get away with it!



Although most members have been able to gather on Zoom during the pandemic, Carmen was one of the few whose face we have missed, and it has been good to keep in touch by phone. She welcomed a chat and retained her sense of humour. She always reminded me that she would never open the door to me if she was in her nightclothes, and sadly our chats had to remain on the phone anyway because of Covid.



*Carole and Geoff Walker have written their own reflections about Carmen.*

I loved the Sundays when Carmen was doing one of the readings. She would walk to the front full of confidence, and with her strong, clear voice would bring the stories to life, just as if she were telling us what had happened last week. She had a way of making them real, which to me felt comfortable and also very special.

*Carole Walker*

I realised one day at church that I had not spent much time talking to Carmen. My exchanges with her had not gone very much further than greetings and weather, as we all do!

One day, I went and sat next to her at coffee time and engaged with her in something a little more meaningful, like family, health and all the things that make up life. Still relatively small talk, because being comfortable with the small things opens the way to bigger things. And we soon started to share the things that concerned us, which was mainly our families, about nothing in particular, just the normal things. How children grow up, have to find their own way, and we feel helpless sometimes. We wish we could stop them making mistakes. We wish we knew how to make life go right for them. But it was never a complaining session. She marvelled at how life worked out even when it seemed as if it wasn't working out. This memory doesn't run into anything profound, and there isn't a funny ending to it. It is just a way of saying, I had the pleasure of feeling a connection with a lady about whom I had known almost nothing, but yet through a shared emotional connection knew something special.

*Geoff Walker*

## **~ News of the family ~**

Quite a lot is happening.

**Jess Howes** is applying for children's nursing courses and has had an interview at Hull (on Zoom) and has a further interview at Chester. We wish her well.

**Rachel and Matt Eeckelaers** are looking forward to the arrival of their baby at the end of March- and so are we!

**Nicola** has a new job, still on the site at Alderley Park, and we wish her well as she transitions, with all the work that entails in tidying up the loose ends of the one job before moving to the next.

**Gwyn** retired just before Christmas and we wish her well! **Steve** has reduced his hours-in theory. **Jonathan** is back in Oxford, which makes life more straightforward for accessing materials for his research.



**Carmen and Wouter** have moved and are settling in well: details available from Carole and Geoff.

**Beryl** has had a time in hospital recently but is now well-established back at home and in addition has access to Zoom! Church Zoom afternoon teas (alternate Saturdays at 3pm) are a good place to catch up with each other and chat.

**Margaret Edmonds** and her dog, Soss, had an unexpected overnight away from home in January when the threat of the Mersey flooding meant she had to leave her flat. Fortunately, all was well and they returned home next day, once the managers had turned the heating and water back on!

**Ted Land** sends greetings from his residential home in Nottingham, looking forward to the relaxation in restrictions so he can get to know the local area and collect his own newspaper from the newsagent. There is a Baptist church in walking distance which he is looking forward to visiting. Family members are visiting within the guidelines and he welcomes phone calls (*ask Margaret G for details*)

**Carmen Bowman's** funeral was held at the Southern Cemetery on Friday 19th February and the service was streamed on Zoom. There may be a recording available later. It was a loving, appreciative occasion, celebrating someone who will be both dearly missed and gratefully remembered. We, as a church, sent our tribute to the family (this is found elsewhere in the magazine). Son Chris and daughter Deanne expressed their gratitude for the tribute and have circulated it among the family.

**Richard and Rosemary Kidd**, in Whalley Bridge, have had a very difficult month. Richard came off his bike on black ice in January and spent several days in Stepping Hill with a head injury. During this time, both he and Rosemary contracted Covid and although Richard managed to avoid re-admission, Rosemary was taken into

hospital with a chest infection for several days. We are very glad to report that they are both now home and recovering well.

Of our friends at Newall Green Baptist, **Sarah Purdy** continues to be very unwell and we hold her and husband Chris, and Elsie Purdy, in our thoughts and prayers.

*Margaret Garner*

## **~ Minutes of Church Meeting held on Sunday 17th of January at 11.15am (Zoom Meeting)**

**Present:** Steve R (chair), David G, Margaret G, Geoff W, Carole W, Enid W, Alan R, Margaret R, Andy H, Brenda M, Lorna R, Gwen M, Margaret E, Leonie E, Gwyneth HR, Jonathan R

**Apologies:** Nicola H

1. **The Minutes of the November Meeting** (in the current Church Magazine) were approved.
2. **Since the last Meeting** we have lost Michael W. There was a pause to remember with gratitude his contribution to the Church over very many years.
3. **Matters Arising:** It was felt that the Christmas services had been very creative and contained much that was uplifting. Andy H summarised a meeting held on Zoom by a group of the Deacons with GM Commoners, a group who have expressed interest in developing social housing on the Linton House site. The co-operative housing personnel present were Selina, Tom and Sarah. Selina represents the (currently small) GM Commoners group who would take on this site. Tom and Sarah were from the government-funded community-led housing hub based in Wigan. They would be looking to develop a mix of owner-occupied, standard rented and affordable to rent units.

Because they use the co-operative model, they can avoid the “right to buy” issues which can affect rented housing. The discussion was positive and they are going to work on an initial proposal – they are upbeat that funding will be available. The meeting took place a month or so ago and we would hope to be hearing back from them soon. It was emphasised that these are very early days and at present there is nothing for the Church to look at.

4. **Possible Lent Series:** there was a positive response to the suggestion of an online weekly Lent series, probably meditative in focus rather than discussion. It was agreed that people should think about possibilities and review on another occasion. Feedback to Steve & Gwyneth please.
5. **Easter Services:** the Deacons felt that there would be online or televised services for Holy Week and Good Friday which people could watch/join. All encouraged to circulate details of anything they become aware of. We will have our now usual online service on Easter Sunday. Lorna R said she had always valued the Maundy Thursday service. Query whether this could be the culmination of the Lent Series.
6. **Christmas Collection:** Because there were no services in the Chapel for Christmas, we did not have a collection for a specific charity. Agreed that we would not organise a church collection but people are encouraged to review their own giving and decide if they wish to make any personal donations.
7. **Fabric:** David G reported that the Church roofs had been checked and are generally in good condition. Repairs have been undertaken to the gutters and the pointing. Additional wifi has been installed which boosts into the car park and Large Hall. An air purifier (belonging to the Garners) has been taken to the Chapel to avoid having to open doors so much. Work has been done on damp and a defective chimney at the Manse. The lean-to garage at the Manse needs removing and

replacing. This will be quite expensive and quotes will be brought to the Church Meeting in due course.

8. **Finance:** David G reported that we have a substantial amount of capital, albeit getting very low rates of interest. Giving by the Church congregation has been largely unaffected by the pandemic. Income from use of the premises is substantially down, although some users have continued to pay despite being unable to meet, and we received a generous capital sum when O&A closed. We are still paying our caretaker and cleaners. Heating costs are down, as are contributions to the BU Pension Scheme. Insurance continues as normal, and is a big expense. We are continuing with our 10% donations to other charities. The only big non-recurrent item of expenditure was the pointing of the wall behind the Large Hall. Roughly speaking, we are breaking even. Copies of the accounts are available to Church Members from the Treasurer on request. Thanks were expressed to David for all his work.
9. **Date of Next Meeting:** 21st February if there is anything to discuss, otherwise 21st March.

## 10. The Meeting closed with the Grace at 11.45am.

*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.*

**Christward Number 509. Published 28th February 2021**

**The magazine of Union Chapel Fallowfield(Baptist),**  
2b Wellington Road, Fallowfield Manchester, M14 6EQ

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