

Christward

The magazine of



March – April 2023

~ Remember Ukraine ~

At the vigil held in Trafalgar Square to mark a year since the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Helen Mirren recited the poem 'Take Only What is Most Important' by the Ukrainian poet Serhiy Zhadan. The translation from the Ukrainian by Virlana Tkacz and Wanda Phipps is printed below.

Take Only What is Most Important

Take only what is most important. Take the letters.

Take only what you can carry.

Take the icons and the embroidery, take the silver,

Take the wooden crucifix and the golden replicas.

Take some bread, the vegetables from the garden, then leave.

We will never return again.

We will never see our city again.

Take the letters, all of them, every last piece of bad news.

We will never see our corner store again.

We will never drink from that dry well again.

We will never see familiar faces again.

We are refugees. We'll run all night.

We will run past fields of sunflowers.

We will run from dogs, rest with cows.

We'll scoop up water with our bare hands,
sit waiting in camps, annoying the dragons of war.

You will not return and friends will never come back.

There will be no smoky kitchens, no usual jobs,

There will be no dreamy lights in sleepy towns,
no green valleys, no suburban wastelands.

The sun will be a smudge on the window of a cheap train,
rushing past cholera pits covered with lime.

There will be blood on your heels,
tired guards on borderlands covered with snow,

a postman with empty bags shot down,
a priest with a hapless smile hung by his ribs,
the quiet of a cemetery, the noise of a command post,
and unedited lists of the dead,
so long that there won't be time
to check them for your own name.

~ The 5th Sunday Challenge ~

Due to editorial incompetence this article now appears at the end of this issue of Christward. My apologies to Steve Roberts for mislaying half his contribution



Mea Culpa

The Other Side of the Wall

by Munther Isaac, of Bethlehem Bible College.

At the last meeting of the Book Group we discussed two chapters from the book 'The Other Side of the Wall' by the Palestinian Christian pastor and theologian Munther Isaac. The two chapters were headed 'My Jewish Neighbour' and 'My Muslim Neighbour'. Palestinian Christians find themselves in an isolated position not simply between Jewish and Muslim theologies of the land in which they live but also the theological views of a large part of the Western Christian Church. Nigel Jones has summarised the key points from the book and they are given below.

Theological and Biblical Base

1. Christians cannot maintain separation between their faith and politics or the affairs of society. Jesus and the first Christians inevitably became involved in society and its politics.
2. The right theology should always lead to the right path, the right justice; so the right practice is the test of whether you have the right theology. No good theology can justify hating, rejecting or even slightly discriminating against any people group. If your theology produces privilege and superiority, then there is a problem. If any theology trumps the ethical teachings of Jesus on love, equality and justice, then we must rethink our theology.
3. Many Christians still choose to ignore, silence and discredit us Palestinians which points to the sad and unfortunate state of these Christians. They create walls; this is very un-Christlike. They base their views on selected verses from scripture which are wrongly interpreted. For example, Genesis 12 about God blessing those who bless Israel, which is part of a mandate for Abraham to become a blessing to all nations, and which Paul takes to be fulfilled in Christ for all people.
4. Love for all our neighbours means we must not make the mistake that so many Christians do, of approaching other groups of people with an attitude of us versus them. If we do, then we shall continue to be part of the problem.

5. The land belongs to God (Lev 25, v.23) and the promises of God to the Jews formed a covenant conditional in its practical effects. In Lev 8 “if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” Also, the word ‘forever’ cannot be taken literally. St Paul interprets land in the OT as the whole earth, as does Jesus. In John 8, (and elsewhere) Jesus makes clear the kingdom is not about ethnicity, it’s about trying to do the will of God and the gospel is inclusive and universal, even including the earth.
6. Paul does not accept that God has rejected his people, so that Gentiles do not replace Jews in the covenant; they join in. Hence the mistake of anti-Semitism made down the ages by so many Christians.
7. We need to invest a lot as Christians into unpacking the monumental claim by Jesus that loving God and loving neighbour are of the same importance. Blessed are the peacemakers, so as Christians we are called to challenge structures of injustice even if we are not directly affected by the injustices ourselves and that goes towards people who are not Christians. It will not do for the church to focus only on the salvation of souls or on the sins of individuals. Let us avoid the false spirituality that detaches us from the world.
8. We are to love our enemies; that means we resist evil with love and our biggest challenge is not to defeat our enemies but to transform them into friends.
9. Love toward neighbour and even enemies is at the core of what it means to follow Christ, so (as it says in the Kairos document) it is a call to love and live together with differences and a call to reject the notion of any religious state.
10. The insight of Biblical faith is awareness that anguish leads to life, grieving to joy and lament is part of commitment to the kingdom of God and agents of change in this world. As in Is 43, v.2, God will be present with us in our trials and tribulations, sharing our suffering as Christ did on the cross. Blessed are they that mourn.
11. The bible is full of hope but hope is not an exercise of waiting while doing nothing; hope is what we *do* today.

12. Many peace-loving Christians remain within their comfort zones by giving to charities and donating to the poor but charity is not a substitute for justice as Bonhoeffer said “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself”.

Situation on the Ground and What We Should Think

1. The Palestinian/Israeli conflict is closely mixed up with religion; for example, recently the US ambassador to Israel said “Israel is on the side of God and we don’t underestimate that”.
2. Israel was established by force in 1948 when 530 Palestinian towns and villages were completely destroyed and removed from the face of the earth. Over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled, thousands were killed and 78% of Palestinian Land was taken. It was the Palestinian NAKBA (catastrophe).
3. The oppression has continued and is getting worse. “Should we Palestinians accept that a person who was born in Russia for example to a Jewish mother has more of a right to this land than the people who have been living here for hundreds or thousands of years?”. Refugees are not allowed to return; West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza are still under military control. Gaza is the largest open-air prison in the world, with Israel controlling all imports of goods and food while preventing exports. The total imbalance of power is clear. Many Palestinians married to international partners are not allowed to bring their spouses into the country. In March 2018 Israelis killed hundreds of people protesting peacefully without weapons; (we all know about the brutal establishment of Jewish settlements.)
4. We Palestinians are invisible. The slogan of the Zionist movement is “A land without people for a people without a land”. Likewise the Balfour declaration only refers to “existing non-Jewish communities” and likewise many American evangelicals and Messianic Jews who refuse to allow Palestinian Christians from speaking at any of their meetings. Similarly among other evangelical groups, for example, Munther was not allowed to speak at a conference in Ireland because, he was told explicitly, he is a Palestinian.

5. There are some Jews who are totally opposed to what Israel is doing, including some living there, and there are far more Christian Zionists around the world today than there are Jewish Zionists. It is time to declare Christian Zionism in its current expression as human ideology that strips the Word of God of its holiness, its universality and truth. It is not compatible with the gospel of Christ. In many ways it reflects characteristics of the wider evangelical world; the American evangelical movement is more American than Christian, glorifying in power and triumphalism and is indifferent to suffering. They use the bible to justify oppression of Palestinians, just as apartheid and slavery have been justified. As said above, passages such as Genesis 12, cannot be used to justify the modern state of Israel.
6. We are called to love our neighbours, the Jewish people, but the New Testament does not argue for a separate national redemption of the Jewish people, as many Christian Zionists claim. We do love Jewish people and do not call for the removal of Israel as a nation.
7. In 2018 the government of Israel passed a law that says “The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.” This is racial discrimination. In 2019, Netanyahu said “Israel is not a state of all its citizens... According to the nationality law we passed, Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people and only it.” That is racism and apartheid, (as Desmond Tutu said.)
8. As was said at a meeting in 2018 by two Baptist ministers in the USA, if you hate Jews, you hate Jesus too and if we love Jesus, we will love the Jews. However, too often Jews are seen as children of Abraham and Jacob, while Palestinians are children of Ishmael and Esau (implying second class people). We need to stop looking at people based on their perceived ancestors and judge people on the content of their character. From experience of Jewish-Christian dialogue, Palestinian Christians say (as in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2019) those Jews involved tend to be biased towards the Israeli government. Jewish journalist Peter Beinart wrote in 2019 “It is bewildering and alarming to be a Jew, both because anti-Semitism is rising and because so many politicians are responding to it not by

protecting Jews but by victimizing Palestinians...Anti-Zionism is not Anti-Semitism”.

9. There is also extremism among Muslims, of course, and among the factors encouraging this are the Israeli occupation and siege of Gaza, the failure of the peace process and corruption within the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian Christians do not like the Palestinian Authority's view that Islam is the official religion of their land, but hostilities of 'Christian' countries and people towards Muslims down the ages and today feeds this. Christians need a much better understanding of Muslims, the majority of whom even in the Arab world are against extremism as well as terrorism. Einstein commented that Jews should remember that they were treated better in the past by Muslims than by other groups. Fellow Muslims are always the first to suffer when extremists strike. It was mainly Muslims in Egypt who demonstrated in millions against the Muslim Brotherhood government in 2013. In any case, the call of Jesus is to love them as neighbours.
10. The global churches are part of the conflict, not innocent bystanders. The political and financial support Israel receives from Christian Zionists and other evangelicals, is causing direct harm to Palestinians and influencing how our Muslim neighbours perceive the Christian faith. The Western Church in particular has been part of the problem more than part of the solution and its theology is a big part in that.
11. Palestinian Christians are helped by the biblical acceptance of lament and the messages of the comfort of God and this gives hope. Hope also comes from certain events, like Pope Francis who on his visit to Bethlehem chose to spend most of the time seeing the wall and refugees, praying for Palestinians. Most politicians and tourists, including Christians, only visit the religious sites.

Nigel Jones

~ If at First We Don't Succeed ~

In the last issue of Christward Steve Roberts wrote an article titled 'New Year Thoughts'. In the article Steve quoted from the Chapel 1929 Trust Deeds

"... if at any time the membership of the said Church shall fall below twelve registered members who have communed with the said Church at the Lord's Table within the previous six calendar months ,...., then the Trustees shall stand possessed of the said land and premises..."

pointing out that we are now a very small church and, though it was unlikely that the BU Corporation would be interested in taking the land off us, perhaps it would be a useful exercise to consider what as a congregation we would do if we lost our buildings. Given a clean slate what would we want to do. Try to stay together or go our separate ways. He extended this thought by asking 'How a small congregation, like ourselves, should be managed'. What changes maybe needed in the next phase of our communal life.

Finally he asked that readers should send their observations, on a post card, to the Editor of Christward. I received two (digital) postcards from members who obviously value Union Chapel and are prepared to say briefly why they do and talk about the future.

Surely there must be others of us who could type out a brief response to Steve's questions. What do you value in our Church life together? What would you do if we lost our buildings? What changes need to be made for the size of our current congregation?

Postcards to the Editor please. If at first we don't succeed.....

Postcards received:

Thanks Steve, for opening a discussion on our current situation as a church. On reflection, the thing I am most drawn to about the church is the worship. I really appreciate the different voices and the work that goes into preparation. I get inspiration from the readings both Biblical and secular, the comments, the music (except for traditional hymns) and prayer. I am equally happy with ZOOM and face to face meetings. I also liked the last service where people could share their own thoughts on the service.

I think the face to face meetings are great for meeting up and chatting. This seems to have always been a very important function of our church but for me, the service and worship are the most meaningful.

I am aware that we are reaching a crisis point in the management of the buildings and the users. As a congregation, I do not think we can maintain this on our own and think we need an open and honest discussion on how to manage things.

Lorna Richardson

While reading the Magazine article New Year Thoughts, it occurred me that we have a well established pattern to follow on Zoom, and we are familiar and comfortable with it. So if we were to lose the buildings, we would not fall between the proverbial cracks, we could at a moments notice turn on our computers and meet. This would be much less of a black hole than suddenly trying to find an alternative venue.

As for missing the building, yes of course, but I have only been in the building for about 28 years, a shorter time than most, but I will soon adapt.

As for merging, I am not optimistic. I recognise that it may turn out very well indeed. On the other hand, it may not, and the idea of

leaving a merged congregation because of tensions or whatever, makes me tempted not to. I don't want any more stress.

If we folded completely, I would not seek out another church. I have had more than enough of weird churches in my time.

Geoff Walker

~ Chinese Brush Painting ~

Carole Frost, who organises the Chinese Brush Painting sessions at the chapel, has sent us some examples of the work done by the members of the group. The lovely paintings here were all drawn during one session.

Sylvia Tiffin aged 83 writes

I am a member of Fallowfield Chinese painting group called the INKSTONES and we meet once a month in the small hall .

We are a small group of around 8 to 10 people, mostly ladies.

We have all materials available and are lucky enough to have a highly trained tutor for each workshop.

We cover most styles of Chinese brush painting from traditional to modern. Beginners are very welcome.

This study, shown below, is painted on gold paper and is in free style.



Carol Frost writes

THE INKSTONES.

We are a small group of Chinese Brush Painters and we would love to have more members.

We meet every third Saturday in the month in the Small Hall of the Chapel from 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.

We have two excellent tutors. We can provide all the materials and paint which are very reasonably priced. The fee for the day is £25.

If you would like to join us please contact Carole Frost. My email address is Carole.frost@icloud.com.

Please come for the day if you would like to try it.

The paintings below are today's study.





~ Lent Meetings 2023 ~

The first meeting of the Lent Group took place on Thursday 23rd February. We have taken the theme around the words 'Wild, Wildness, Wilderness'.

Andy led the first session which was on 'Wild Places' - looking at our experience of being in places where we are not in control, feeling perhaps daunted, appreciative, overwhelmed, lost.

God: *where were you Job, when I laid the foundation of the earth?*

Job: *I am small.*

The next meeting will be on Thursday 2nd March and will be led by Gwyneth on the theme 'Wild Followers'

~ News of the Family ~

We are very glad to learn that **David Garner** has returned home after a stay in Wythenshawe Hospital. We wish him a speedy recovery.

A very enjoyable **social evening 'More than enough' was held at the Chapel on the 11th February**. A crowd of some 40 people, including friends from Newall Green, attended. We were entertained throughout the evening by the Union Chapel Jazz Band. A Hat Dance, for those willing to volunteer, was organised by the Opanka Dance Group. This required the dancers grouped in a circle to remove the hat from the person on their right whilst their own hat was removed by the person on their left to some extremely fast music. Of course, it all ended in chaos. Even trying to describe it is muddled. If only someone had sent me some photographs.

~ Minutes of the Church Meeting, Sunday, January 15th 2023 held at Union Chapel ~

Present: Andy H (chair), Alan R, Margaret R, Rose B, Enid W, Lorna R, Carole W, Geoff W, Nicola H, Margaret G, David G, Steve R, Gwyneth HR, Brenda M

On Zoom: Gwen M, Margaret E

No apologies had been received.

The Minutes of the previous meeting (in the current Magazine) were approved.

Matters arising:

- a. Gwyneth HR reported that the consent of the Charity Commission has been obtained for the transfer of assets from the existing unincorporated Church to the new CIO. However, more preparatory work is needed before this can proceed.
- b. Forthcoming Lent Series – Gwyneth HR said the only suggestion made to date was to follow the Christian Aid material on Climate Justice. This seems to be focussed on discussion and we have recently preferred a more meditative style. After a number of people had contributed to the conversation, the majority preference was for more quietness in Lent, with a different focus other than talking. Decided that meetings should be held on Zoom. Worship Group to finalise the details.

Date of Next Meeting: Sunday 19th February

Call for Any Other Business Topics:

Organisation of Church Lunches (David G), Church Weekend Housekeeping (David G), Security of AV Cabinet (Steve R)

Pattern of Worship:

Nicola H introduced this item. We are currently meeting on Zoom on the first Sunday of each month. Since returning to the Chapel, Church Meeting and Communion had both been on the 4th Sunday of each month but in response to concerns expressed, for the current cycle, Church Meeting and Church Lunch have moved to the 3rd Sunday, with Communion staying on the 4th Sunday. Was the Meeting happy with this pattern?

Gwyneth HR queried whether people still want four formal services each month. Gwen M does not currently feel able to lead services. The other worship leaders are not clergy and would appreciate more feedback about what does and doesn't work for the people attending.

Nicola H mentioned that the Baptist Union have prepared online services which we could use to supplement our own input.

After some discussion, Andy H proposed that we move forward for the time being with a pattern of:

- 1. a Zoom service on the 1st Sunday of each month,**
- 2. a service in the Chapel on the 2nd Sunday with the format at the discretion of the worship leader,**
- 3. a short service in the Chapel on the 3rd Sunday followed by Church Meeting and Church Lunch,**
- 4. a Communion service on the 4th Sunday,**
- 5. and something else on the 5th Sunday of those months which have 5 Sundays.**

This is to be reviewed again at the March Meeting with a view to fixing the pattern for the remainder of the year. **This was agreed.**

Easter Services: Anyone with views or ideas about the Easter services should pass them on to Gwyneth HR before the Worship Group meets on Wednesday evening. Margaret G said that we are invited to join Withington Methodist Church on Good Friday morning.

Climate Justice Project: Andy H said that following previous conversations about having a focus on a specific project, the Deacons had decided for this year to focus on Climate Justice. There are rich and powerful ideas around seeing our place on the planet as part of who we are as Church.

There was some concern expressed that this could just make us feel worse about a problem we are already very aware of, and we need to focus on action and hope. The general feeling was that this should not be the theme for the whole Lent Series but Andy H proposed that it should be a focus for 5th Sundays and the Church Weekend and should inform the worship as the worship leaders see fit. **This was agreed.**

Social Event Saturday 11th February: This has been advertised in the current Magazine and will be open to all from the wider Union Chapel community. It will be light on organisation and not have a programme as such. After some discussion about food to be provided, it was decided to get some trays of ready-made sandwiches and keep it simple.

Any Other Business:

- a. David G asked for a volunteer to help with the Church Weekend housekeeping. Offers to any of the Deacons please.
- b. Lorna R is OK to organise the church lunches but would welcome help with table set-up etc, on the day.
- c. Steve R raised the issue that others are using the AV equipment and leaving it so that it doesn't work on Sunday

mornings. He proposed a lock on the AV cabinet. Margaret G said it is understood that the users can use this equipment. No decision reached. **(Refer back to Deacons)**

The Meeting concluded with a sung Gloria.

~ The 5th Sunday Challenge ~

Andy issued the challenge for our 5th Sunday:

“I’m suggesting that we don’t meet together tomorrow, but do something separately, with the broad theme of *paying attention to our surroundings*. For example:

- Paying attention to something you usually take for granted.

Perhaps taking some pictures.”

I’ve been paying attention to moss and its variety of forms if you look closely...



e



f



g



h



;

And I have tried to put a name to these – no promises I have got it right!

a. Greater Fork Moss

b. Grey-cushioned *Grimmia* – our roof

c. Haircap - one of a number of similar species that you need to see fruiting to tell apart


d. Pincushion moss (One of the *Ulota* group of species with complex taxonomy!)

- e. Rough-stalked Feather Moss
- f. Common Feather Moss
- g. Forked Veilwort
- h. Springy Turf-moss - Our "lawn"

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