

Christward

The magazine of



July – August 2023

~ Is he still on the go? ~

Is he still on the go? Yes, I'm still here keeping an eye on Union Chapel from afar. I was intrigued by Geoff's article in the last edition. He is not the only person to think as he does.

I read the following review (I do tend to read more reviews than books these days). *"The book is about ordinary people who reached the end of their (predominantly) evangelical road and had the courage to keep walking...which reveals a picture of deeply committed believers, including clergy, who reached a breaking point with the certainties and doctrines they spent years and even decades professing. Some tell stories of abuse while others describe a slow unravelling in the face of exclusionary, politicised or harsh theology. Far from simply walking away, the deconstruction stories reveal the breadth and nuance of a carefully considered expansion of faith."* (The book is (Un)certain: A Collective Memoir of Deconstructing Faith. Olivia Jackson. SCM £19.99).

Interesting that the same edition had an advert for a conference on "Honest to God" which the Coventry Ministers' Meeting invited me to review for them. I was scared to death. It was 1963, only my third year but I suppose it set me on a journey of thirty years or so towards a position not after all so far from the above.

Contradiction is an abiding state of consciousness to keep you off the straight and narrow. Don't worry, the straight and narrow is a way, not a set of beliefs. Note that there are few that find it so it can't be orthodox doctrines can it?

Eric Bray

~Notes from the Service at Union Chapel on Sunday 1 1th June~

Hosea 6: 6 *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."*

Matthew 9: 12-13 *Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this*

means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Sacrifice

One of the themes the lectionary compilers were clearly pointing us to today is the text we opened with – God desires mercy, not sacrifice. Inconveniently, it's also one of those times when the translation of the Bible we usually use in church – the New Revised Standard Version – has a different word in the Old Testament passage from the wording in the New Testament passage which is there to quote it. In this case, the word which in most translations is rendered as mercy, or sometimes kindness, appears as "steadfast love". In commenting I'm going to stick to mercy as this is the best known expression of the idea – and from the context, must be more what Jesus meant when he quoted the passage. This isn't the only word in today's readings I'm unhappy with, but we'll come on to the other later.

In thinking about today's readings it's important to bear in mind that when these passages refer to sacrifice, they are talking about a very specific part of the Jewish religious life of the time. The word doesn't mean at all what we mean, of giving up something you want for the sake of someone else, or even for the sake of your future self – for example, saying that parents sacrificed their free time to take their child to sports practices, or that someone sacrificed her social life for her career. It also doesn't carry the undertow of martyrdom and resentment that the word often has in English – "after all I've done for you...".

In Jewish terms, sacrifice was a ritualised way of drawing close to God, and was very much a God-facing activity – unlike showing mercy or kindness, which is something that happens in relation to other people. Sacrifice was highly codified, and once the Temple had been built, it could only be done by the priests in the Temple.

Consequently it came to an end with the destruction of the Temple in the first century CE, though some Jewish people still hope for the resumption of the practice of sacrifices when at a future time the Temple is rebuilt. There was a prescribed list of acceptable sacrifices. Even though concessions should have been made for the poor, I suspect that just like any other compulsory expenses

such as fuel bills, the costs that some struggled to meet were trivial for others.

Sacrificing was a very central element of religious life, and consequently, if a prophet suggested that God didn't want it, this was a very radical position. Several commentaries I read suggest that Hosea didn't mean that God wanted mercy but didn't want sacrifice – He wanted both, but mercy was more important. And although sacrifice was intended to bring the person making the sacrifice closer to God, like any other ritual, it could be done in a spirit of going through the motions without the mind being engaged, which is what Hosea is criticising.

The section of Psalm (Psalm 50: 7-15) set for today, which is one we don't read often, takes the line that as everything is God's anyway, He doesn't need it to be given to Him in sacrifice.

Matthew 9: 2-8

And just then some people were carrying a paralysed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.' Then some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.' But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he then said to the paralytic—'Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.' And he stood up and went to his home. When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

“Jesus heals a paralytic”

That's the heading to the section in the online version of the Bible translation we usually use, the New Revised Standard Version – and it gave me a sharp intake of breath. You don't say that! You don't define people by their medical conditions! But unfortunately the Gospels usually do. The people who are healed by Jesus don't generally have names, they have problems – the paralysed man, the woman with haemorrhage, the ten lepers. Even one who is named, Bartimaeus, is generally called in church “Blind

Bartimaeus". "Paralytic" seems particularly offensive, perhaps because the usual connotation is now extreme drunkenness. But Jesus doesn't just heal this man's paralysis. Indeed, it almost seems to be an afterthought. The first thing he does is tell him that his sins are forgiven. Why? Well, it seems to be pretty well established that in Jesus' time, it was commonly believed that disability was a punishment from God for sin. In the story of the man born blind – there's another nameless one – people ask Jesus whether the blindness resulted from the man's own sin, or that of his parents. Jesus of course replies – neither. Incidentally, I was pretty horrified to discover from an online talk during Covid that there is a strand of evangelical Christianity in this country which still connects disability with sin and lack of faith. My shock at finding that staff at a reputable college seemed to think that refuting this position was worthy of a PhD, was offset by the bafflement and incredulity of numerous comments in the online chat from the lovely ordinary Christians who knew unchristian rubbish when they heard it.

But back to our reading. Why is Jesus' first response to this man to tell him his sins are forgiven? Perhaps Jesus knew that what was tormenting the man was not his physical disability but the thought that he was being punished for sins, or that others were unjustly suspecting him of some grievous sin he believed he was innocent of? Was it the forgiveness that the man needed to restore his peace of mind and contentment rather than the ability to walk? It is a common failing of "normal in quotes" people to assume that everybody wants to be alike. They don't. Probably most people who have had good health and lost it would like to have it back, but not everyone. And some people who are different in some way from childhood can see advantages to their way of being. There was shock about 15 years ago when some deaf couples expressed a wish to use genetic testing of embryos to ensure that their children were deaf rather than hearing. One father said; "We celebrated when we found out about [our daughter] Molly's deafness. Being deaf is not about being disabled, or medically incomplete - it's about being part of a linguistic minority. We're proud, not of the medical aspect of deafness, but of the language we use and the community we live in." Clearly these are deep

waters and I don't propose to discuss the ethics of the debate now – just to note that it exists. Disabled activists often suggest that people who are alert to racism and homophobia still fall into stereotyping when it comes to disabled people. Try googling “tragic but brave” or “Supercrip” if you want to follow this up. Can we rename this passage “Jesus forgives someone”?

Is it easier?

Sometimes what superficially sounds easier is in fact the harder option. When Jesus asked the question of, is it easier to say “Your sins are forgiven,” or “Take up your bed and walk” he must have meant that the second option is the easy one, however strange that seems, and that true forgiveness is harder. Similarly, to learn that God desires mercy, not sacrifice, means that you can't take refuge in the thing you know how to do, and have to push yourself out of your comfort zone and see another point of view.

We all know of examples where long term friendships have ended in acrimony and those involved never speak to each other again or where long harboured grievances still rankle even after the death of the offender.

I don't know if other worship group members have the same experience, but quite often when I'm thinking about a set of readings it feels as if the world at large is engaged in the conversation. We went to a gig on Monday night by a drummer-led quintet who played without breaks and without comment and it was great. As is my wont, I bought the CD and when I read the sleeve notes they included this thought from the group leader Graham Costello – “I think it's much easier to chase perfection than it is to be real, and accepting the honest human moments”. Again, what seems harder is in his mind the easy option.

So:

Is it easier to say “Your sins are forgiven,” or “Take up your bed and walk”?

Is it easier to be magnanimous and show mercy, or to perform a religious ritual?

Is it easier to forgive and let go of a wrong done, or to bear a grudge?

And for us as a group: Is it easier to carry on trying to do all the things we've always done, feeling burdened and disconnected from each other, and storing up tough decisions for our future selves, or to put some serious work as a group into how to do things differently?

Just asking.

~ Snippets of Hebrew ~

In a recent service Gwyneth talked about a phrase in one of the lectionary readings, in which God says through Hosea 6 v 6, "I desired mercy and not sacrifice".

The word in Hebrew, translated here as mercy, is Chesed. The pronunciation is nearer to hessed, with a throaty ch. It means kindness, goodness, and faithfulness which includes mercy. It is very often used of God. But also includes kindness towards God. In other words it is a two way street.

Another idea from that service was that God declared he was Israel's God. At the beginning of the Ten Commandments in Exodus, God says "I am God, your God, who brought you up out of Egypt". A Rabbi points out that there should have been a simple response from Israel to "I am God, your God", and that response would have been, "And we are yours". Something mutual is going on here.

So what does God want? We have asked this question before. And we have explored this answer before!

Micah 6 v 8

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

So the Ten commandments which follow the opening statement "I am God, your God who brought you out of Egypt", are his way of telling us how to reciprocate.

At this year's Church Weekend, we explored how sometimes this aspect of reciprocating God's mercy or loving kindness, can be seen as demands God makes of us. And our response can be demands we make from him, for a less difficult life, to the exclusion of all else. God is not our valet, and we are not his valet, because the interaction is on a different foundation. They are not demands. It is not a contract but a relationship. God is not like a father for whom there is no pleasing him!

Geoff Walker

Beryl Dykes



13th September 1945 - 3rd June 2023

**Address from the Funeral and Thanksgiving Service for the
life of
Beryl Dykes 27th June 2023**

As we meet to remember Beryl and commend her to God's eternal keeping, we have so much to be grateful for that smiles accompany our tears. We picture her cheerful presence with us whether at home, in a cafe, here at church, and on her last days in the home where she was cared for - she has featured large in the lives of so many people in so many wonderful ways, but especially in the life of her family - Susan, and Del, and Abigail, Alex and Lily who will be sharing their own special memories in a few moments.

As I've been talking with Susan and Del, and church friends, as well as recalling and treasuring my own memories when for several years I was a member here, certain themes in Beryl's life seemed to emerge.

The first and perhaps most important for her was family. Born into a hard working family, in Llangoed, Anglesey in September 1945, Beryl Myfanwy Thomas grew up with some of the hardships experienced by the baby boomer generation as we've become known, in the immediate aftermath of the 2nd world war - and for the Thomases, living where they did, the absence of electricity until she was 18 added to a lifestyle in which making and mending was the norm. This grounding in close family life meant that when in 1973 Susan was born, and in due time her beloved grandchildren Beryl devoted herself to their care in ways disciplined but unstintingly generous.

Beryl had an adventurous and courageous spirit, another theme in her life story. On leaving school, proud as she was of her Welsh identity and despite her father's opposition, she decided to train as a teacher gaining a college place in Shrewsbury specialising in the skills she loved, cookery and needlework. Although choosing not to

return to Wales to teach - she worked first near Wolverhampton - she went back regularly. Beryl told with relish the story of a time when with Paul she went into a shop and everyone suddenly switched to speaking Welsh; their comments weren't complimentary. After a few minutes, Beryl let rip in Welsh with a sermon on good manners. She could be very outspoken as I think we all experienced!

It was the same spirit that initially brought her and Paul together. While teaching, the challenge of a blind date was set up for her, and she took a train destined for, of all romantic places, Crewe Station, and there on the platform met her date, Paul Dykes. They hit it off, Beryl moved to Manchester, they married in Bangor in 1972, and moved to Cheadle in 1973, into the treasured home which became the base of their family life. In later years after Paul's death her adventurous spirit took her to many different places on cruises - and she regaled us here with her adventures on her return. Beryl was always good company, wherever she was, laughter was rarely far away.

Another theme to emerge from the stories was Beryl's generosity. She gave of her time to others, and in commitment to the projects she was involved with, using her teaching and leadership skills when for example she worked with the toddler group at Linton House next door when it was home to International Students, and Beryl and Paul (and their dog!) used to staff ASSIST, the Withington neighbour care group office, where on a Friday Beryl put people at their ease, made them tea and worked out how their questions might be answered. She also served the local WI as President for 12 years, and still attended their meetings held here until a few years ago

Brought up to a life of faith, it was always important to her and with Paul's family's link here, she became an invaluable part of Union Chapel entering fully into its life and work. With Junior Church and so many other activities some already mentioned, she joined in with reliability and practical support - especially where food and hospitality were concerned. She's renowned for her love of cake as

we'll be hearing, and her Victoria sponges here at UC are legendary, insisting they were filled with raspberry jam and had no icing.

Her generosity was expansive in using the creative skills she both inherited and learnt: embroidery, lace-making, and knitting which she was able to do even towards the the end of her life when her memory was failing. UC treasures some of her craft work which beautifies the building and its worship. *(For the service, the lectern, and Beryl's coffin, were placed centrally before her framed lace cross on the wall)*

So just some glimpses of Beryl's rich life, its themes and values through which she has left us with precious memories and tangible legacy. No one is perfect of course, and if there are painful memories too we pray they will be eased and hurts forgiven, We don't know what lies beyond death, but we do believe we are safe in the hands of an infinitely gracious God who entered in Jesus every struggle of our life with us and who deeply understands the journey we've travelled, its good choices and its mistakes. Grounded in faith and in the music with which we celebrate the wonder and beauty of God and world in our worship, music very dear to Beryl's heart, she is now at rest - and however heaven may be, that dwelling place Jesus promised for us all *(the reading had been John 14 .1-6)* it is surely full of the music of love, and however far beyond our imagining, that love embraces us and our reunion with those from whom we on earth are parted for a while.

So Beryl, God bless you and welcome you as you journey home; our love goes with you.

Anne Phillips

Memories of Beryl by her grandchildren Abigail, Alex and Lucy

Abigail: Beryl was our Nain. One thing about her is she was the only Nain we knew, meaning we had to explain to everyone what it meant - Grandma in Welsh. When we grew older, much to her dislike we all started calling her Beryl!

Alex: She fully embraced her role as Nain from the minute we arrived. Our trips to Bruntwood Park always stood out as she would always treat us to a grated cheese baguette and a packet of Pom bears from the cafe. She'd happily sit there with her newspaper whilst we ran away and played in the forest. Looking back I doubt she even read the paper, maybe she'd attempt the crossword but even then she'd never make us leave early. She'd sit and wait for hours until we were ready to go.

Abigail: As we got older she instilled in us all the need for a coffee and a cake at every outing we have. Every Tuesday from the week I started secondary school to finishing my GCSEs we went to Sainsburys' cafe for a coffee and a toasted teacake. It got to the point where we knew everyone there from the regulars to the cleaner of the cafe. Eventually we upgraded to Costa Tuesdays when we both felt that Alex and Lily were mature enough for the exciting outing. I'm sure that most of you here have a specific date, time of the week or place that reminds you of her the most.

Lily: One of my favourite memories with Nain is when she locked both her door keys and car keys in the house when she was looking after me.. So this meant we had to go on a very long walk to Auntie Pat's house because we were supposed to be meeting her. She always told people I was very quiet on that walk which later turned out to be because I had a broken toe.

Abigail: Nain was always doing things for or helping people around her. For us, she was especially good when it came to being handed a pile of badges to sew on Alex's scout necker or to knot cardigans that we have asked for. I have learnt that it is a lot harder than she made it look after it took her three attempts to teach me to make one very holey square. Whenever I had had enough of Mum and Dad or even Sammy, Nain was the person I would go to. However, this usually never went in my favour as she was very good at balancing an argument and mostly taking the other person's side. I should probably have learnt this early on when Nain gave Sammy the nickname 'His Lordship'

Alex: Another thing she was she was incredible at storytelling. I'm sure everyone here has at some point had to listen to a riveting, yet slightly confusing, story that she would have memorised religiously. For example, her fun facts such as pineapples growing on bushes not trees or the odd, but interesting fact about the family she knew on Anglesey that got kidnapped in Bogota. Whether it was because they were so strange or because you had heard them a thousand times I'm sure we will never forget Beryl's tales.

Lily: Truthful is another word to describe Nain, she always told us her very honest opinion. From 'Dear God' if our school skirts were too short and calling us 'silly girls' if our problems were ridiculous to shouting across Stockport precinct, whilst waving her stick in the air, to Andy Burnham that he missed out on becoming the leader of the Labour Party giving it to the 'daft twit Jeremy Corbyn' the incident being published as an article in The Guardian back in 2016.

Abigail: From the Picasso role to the green machine Nain always had a very interesting taste in cars. Her motto was 'well you'll never lose it in a car park'. which was true you could always see the bright green roof. When she stopped driving I was gifted the green machine and all the scratches which came with it. I will now forever live by that motto and will be unable to have a normal coloured car.

Alex: Cooking lessons with Beryl every Thursday was another 'Nain duty' which she lived up to perfectly. She made sure that I was set up for life in terms of what teas I could cook and she made sure that I could never burn anything as badly as she could. Now I am proud to say that after much practice and years of training I'm an expert in the art of cooking frozen chips and chicken kiev, all thanks to one incredible Nain.

Lily: Hopefully from this you will have gathered that Nain did and would have done anything for us. From walks in the park to fashion advice she did it all. So from every ball of wool and knitting needle to every cafe we see Nain will be with us.

~ Church Weekend, 23rd-25th June 2023 ~

Glenthorne, Grasmere



Is everybody happy?.....



.....Yes we are!

(However an odd metamorphosis seems to have occurred between the question and the answer.)

Nestled amongst the mountain ranges of the south lakes, a stones throw away from Wordsworths' home is Glenthorne- the site of this year's church weekend. The loveliest spot that man hath ever found - and it was a truly lovely spot. We arrived on Friday evening not quite two by two but certainly all to get out of the rain. By the following morning the storm had passed and the sun shone down. The sheep had returned to the adjoining field (which some of us were very excited to note).

While some people shared their spiritual journeys (stories that frequently ended with “and that’s how I found myself at Union Chapel”) other people took the opportunity to hone their football



skills or explore the local playground in Grasmere.

A sit down lunch was replaced with a packed lunch and everyone took the opportunity to seek some adventures.

A large walking party set off to Easedale Tarn along a narrow bridge and large cobbled paths. While some people stopped by the river to have their packed lunch and a game of Pooh sticks



other people carried on to the tarn and further still.



Other members of the party went to sample the delights of Grasmere and Ambleside.

People regathered for tea and cake after the end of their walk although David Redhouse continued walking on the fells and didn't return till the evening. (He had spent the afternoon photoshopping himself on the top of several mountains according to some sceptics.)



There was time to sit and talk with people to share news and share current interests. Elaborate train sets were created weaving in and



out of chairs, penalty shoot outs took place on the lawn and some of us were educated on the finer points of DogMan (a fabulous cartoon series of books by Dav Pilker- see Rory for more details).

On Saturday evening there was the opportunity for music making after dinner.

On Sunday some of the group continued their talk about spiritual journeys. People spoke about the dichotomy between the church being a group that people want to feel is particular to them and yet also being open and welcoming to those who might join it.

While this was going on some people went to explore the playground in Grasmere



and others went to Allan Bank, a National Trust property where Wordsworth lived for a short time. It is a beautiful place with lots of opportunities to explore your own creative impulses with a whole room set up for budding artists. (It also had a table with holes in which is brilliant for those among us who like posting objects and seeing them drop on the floor.) It also has what can only be described as an incredibly deceptive woodland walk- not a gentle walk through a bank of daffodils and more of a Helm Crag style ascent.



Our time together drew to a close and we came together to share some songs and reflective words and finally listened to a beautiful duet of *Spiegl Im Spiegl* by Avro Parr and performed by David and Margaret Redhouse.

Then it was time for packed lunches and people's journeys home began.



"Just what I wanted another packed lunch!"

There were some familiar faces who were unable to make the weekend and we send our love to them and some familiar faces who we have recently lost. We send our love to them and their families and friends too.

Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make the weekend possible. To the next one!

Rachel Eecklaerers

~ News of the Family ~

It was good news to hear that **David Garner** had his operation on Thursday morning and is doing well. He is back on the main ward and is reasonably comfortable.

~More from the Church Weekend - for those who like photos~



**The guru and his
disciple.....**



...the cult grows



**It's just an easy walk to
Easedale Tarn they
said.....**

**Was this descent a
good idea?.....**





**.....don't you just hate
older brothers?**

**The Easedale Tarn
party together**



**When you're a
celebrity there is no
escaping the
paparazzi.**



Not sure aerial football will catch on but ... if anyone can make it work, it'll be Quinn !

Buddies





**We are upper
class**



**They are
middle class**




**God knows who
let those two in!**

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