

PORTREE PARISH
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



EASTER 2025

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THE CROSS OF CHRIST

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

(1. Corinthians 1: 18.)

Since Easter, the CROSS is the centre of our Christian Faith. The Bible teaches us that **God the Father sent his Son to save the world, the Son submitted to the Father's will, and the Spirit applies the work of redemption to Jesus' followers. Redemption/Salvation is predestined by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Spirit.** (Ephesians 1: 3-14).

From its early stages, Reformation wanted to teach this heavy *dogma* – to the protestant believers - in a much more understandable way through *catechisms*. These were booklets with *questions and answers* based on biblical texts. For example:

Question: - *Does it have a special meaning that Christ was crucified and did not die in a different way?*

Answer: - *Yes. Thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay on me, for a crucified one was cursed by God. (Reference to: Deuteronomy 21:23 and Galatians 3:13).*

Question: - *What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?*

Answer: - *Through Christ's death our old nature is crucified, put to death, and buried with Him, so that the evil may no longer reign us, but that we may offer ourselves to Him as a sacrifice of thankfulness. (Reference to: Romans 6:5-11, and Ephesians 5:1,2).*

Question: - *How does Christ's Resurrection benefit us ?*

Answer: - *First, by His Resurrection He has overcome death, so that He could make us share in the righteousness which He had obtained for us by His death. Second, by His Power we too are raised up to a new life. Third, Christ's Resurrection is to us a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection. (Reference to: Romans 4:25, 1 Corinthians 15: 16-20, and 1 Peter 1:3-5). (Heidelberg Catechism publ.1563, Questions/Answers 39, 43, and 45.).*

The CROSS is not only where our SIN is paid for, but at the same time the shape of our TRINITARIAN Christian Faith, and the summary of *all those who believe in Him, to not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3: 16).

The account of Jesus Christ's CRUCIFIXION described in the Gospels began with scourging. The Roman soldiers then mocked Him as the "King of the Jews" by clothing Him in a purple robe and a crown of thorns and led Him slowly to Mount Calvary, or Golgotha; one Simon of Cyrene was allowed to aid Him in carrying the cross. At the place of execution, He was stripped and then nailed to the cross. On the cross Jesus hung in agony. The soldiers divided His garments and cast lots for His robe. Various onlookers taunted Him. Crucified on either side of Jesus were two convicted criminals, whom the soldiers dispatched before sunset by breaking their legs. The soldiers found Jesus already dead, but to be certain, one of them drove a spear into His side, from which poured blood and water. He was taken down and buried in a rock-tomb, from where His RESURRECTION emerged after three days. Crucifixion was regarded as the most horrible form of death, and to a Jew it would mean an

even greater horror because of the curse of God in Deuteronomy 21: 23 - ...**ANYONE WHO IS HUNG ON A TREE IS UNDER GOD'S CURSE**. This is how the CROSS is for us, in our place, and on our behalf. The fulfilment of what Jesus had promised, - **TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS SHEEP**. He is our Sacrificial Lamb: - **THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD** (John 1: 29). The "Message of the Cross" has never been attractive – as Apostle Paul said, – "foolishness for those who are perishing." Is it the **POWER OF GOD'S SALVATION** for you?

Since the beginning of time, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Europeans, Syrians, and Indians have used the CROSS to symbolize FAITH. For Christians, represents the **CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**. The most prominent Christian symbol is the so called: *Latin Cross*. Characterized by equal top, left, and right arms, and a more extended lower arm, the Latin Cross is at the same time the representation of the **HOLY TRINITY, ONE GOD**, and an *aid in prayer*. There are different types of crosses, among them: the Celtic Cross.

THE CELTIC CROSS essentially is a Latin Cross within a circle. Research suggests being dated before Christianity, emphasizing the sun's **LIFE-GIVING ABILITIES**, and probably used by St Patrick and St Columba to easier evangelize pagans to Christianity. It is a popular Christian cross-symbol representing Scottish, Irish, and Welsh roots, recognized as symbols of cultural and religious values for people of Celtic ancestry; often being depicted as artworks with Celtic knots, from massive structures to headstones in cemeteries.

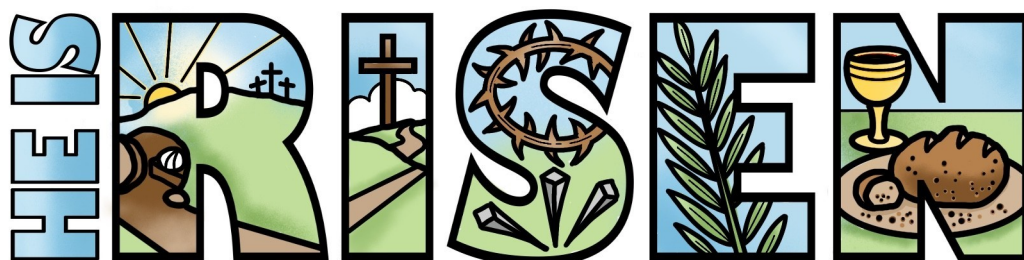


After the 16th-century Protestant Reformation, the Lutheran Church generally retained the ornamental and ceremonial use of the Cross. The Reformed Churches, however, resisted such use of the Cross until the 20th century, when ornamental crosses on church buildings and on communion tables began to appear. Used privately, or in churches, or just making the *sigh of the Cross*, can accompany a confession, a prayer, or a worship, representing **THE TRIUMPHANT DEFEAT OF DEATH IN RESURRECTION**.

Remember how many Christians are greeting each other at Easter : - " **CHRIST IS RISEN – CHRIST IS RISEN INDEED!**"

Happy Easter to you All !

Sandor, your Minister.



Session Clerk's Report Message :

At this time of year many of us, myself included, will be looking at our gardens, clearing away the dead foliage from last year and then preparing for the new season's growth.

I have planted tomato, cucumber, and various flower seeds in a spare bedroom at home and now the plants have become established, I'm about to transfer them to the greenhouse.

It's the miracle of growth from a tiny seed to a fully developed plant. If seeds of any particular plant species were not sown, then that species would soon become extinct.

I look out at the congregation every Sunday, and particularly at the Sunday School, remembering the numbers who used to attend regularly.

I think of Sunday School as the seed of the church. If the seed is planted in the minds of young people and given regular nourishment it will develop and grow into maturity. Like a plant it will flourish, be sturdy, upright, and able to withstand many external conditions and pressures.

Like many churches today, we do not have the fertile soil in which to plant the seed of the love of Jesus. That soil must be provided by parents – all of whom, I'm sure, would want to see their child grow up to be sturdy, upright, and able to withstand many external conditions and pressures of everyday life.

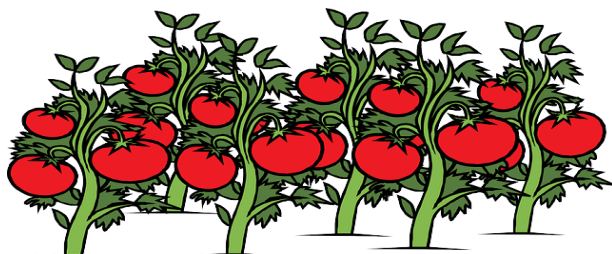
Sunday School not only provides a knowledge of Jesus, what he did when here on earth and how he loves each and every single one of us. It teaches them about the straight and narrow path which, if followed, will stand them in good stead throughout life.

Some might say this is indoctrination but, like all subjects taught at school, it aims to provide an education which will help a child to develop into a well-rounded person with the ability to navigate the trials we all face in later life.

When you are out in your garden, think of the growth given by planting in good soil and encourage parents to see the benefits of their children's attendance at Sunday School.

Let's help the church to flourish !

Bill



Treasurer's Report :

We are now a quarter of the way through 2025. Cast your mind back to the start of the year. What did 1 January 2025 mean for you ? A time to make New Year Resolutions ? A time to reflect on the previous year or to make plans for the following twelve months ?

For me, each first of January for the last 17 years has always meant that the Annual Accounts for the church have to be started. As a Registered Charity, this is an annual requirement without which we would not be able to claim back from HMRC the tax from your Gift Aid donations and offerings to the church. For 2024 this amounted to £11,500 – a wonderful sum without which our church would be having to use its reserves to meet its financial obligations. This is why I regularly stress to you all the importance of linking your offerings to Gift Aid

Last year, through a combination of your donations in the bi-monthly Retiral Collections and part of the wonderful, unexpected bequest made by the late Gordon & Betty Craig, we were able to make significant improvements in both our church and the church hall.

The Craig's bequest was an obvious indication of what the church meant to them during their lives. We do however recognise that not many people can help the church in this way.

Look around the church and you will see many aspects which have come about through bequests or donations - each of the stained-glass windows, the falls on the pulpit and lectern, the mobility access to the church, as well as the large screens and the IT equipment required to operate them and the refurbished kitchen in the church hall.

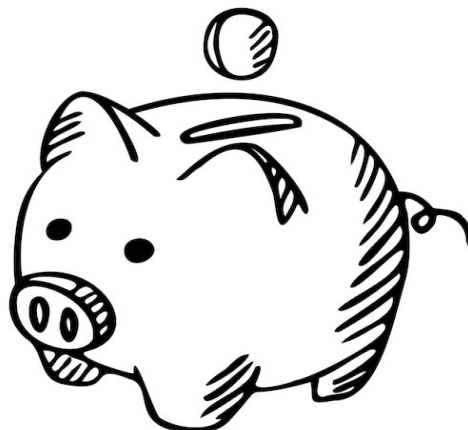
Our congregation has always been very generous in normal Sunday offerings and responses to local, National or International appeals. However, when we look around on a Sunday, we notice the number of places when well-kent folk used to sit. That fall in numbers obviously results in a fall in the church income.

We appreciate that inflation and the consequential increase in the price of so many necessities cause difficulties for so many people, but linking your offerings to Gift Aid benefits the church at no cost to yourself. Another means of helping the church would be for those who are no longer able to attend services to ask me for weekly envelopes which they can send to the church.

Please give a little thought to any way you could help the church in any of these ways.

God bless you all

Bill



EASTER MORNING, THE 'OTHER' MARY

As the traditional Easter story is rehearsed again this month, you may notice that there is one name that frequently occurs. It is that of the 'other' Mary – not the mother of Jesus, but Mary of Magdalene, who stood by her at the cross and became the first person actually to meet the risen Christ.

That's quite a record for a woman who, the Gospels tell us, had been delivered by Jesus from 'seven devils' – New Testament language for some dark and horrible affliction of body, mind or spirit. As a result, her devotion to Him was total and her grief at His death overwhelming.

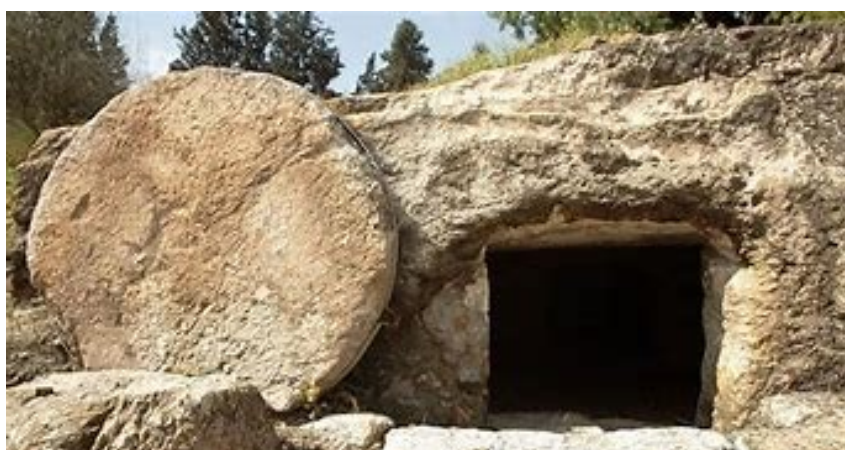
In church history Mary Magdalene became the 'fallen woman' a harlot who was rescued and forgiven by Jesus but there is no evidence to prove she was a 'fallen woman' but the contrast is sublime, Mary the virgin mother, the symbol of purity. Mary Magdalene, the scarlet woman who was saved and forgiven, the symbol of redemption. Surely, we all fall somewhere between those two extremes.

The dark cloud from which she was delivered may have been sexual, we are not told. What we do know is that the two Marys stood together at the cross, the Blessed Virgin and the woman rescued from who knows what darkness and despair.

The second great moment for her was as unexpected as it was momentous. She had gone with other women to the tomb of Jesus and found it empty. An angelic figure told them that Jesus was not there, He had risen – and the others drifted off. But Mary stayed, reluctant to leave it like that. She became aware of a man nearby, whom she took to be the gardener. She explained to him that the body of 'her Lord' had been taken away and she didn't know where to find Him.

The man simply said her name 'Mary' and she instantly realised it *was* Jesus. She made to hug Him, but He told her not to touch Him because His resurrection was not yet complete. She was, however, to go to the disciples and tell them she had met Him. She did – but they wouldn't believe her.

Her words – 'I have seen the Lord' – echo down the centuries, the very beating heart of the Christian gospel.



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE PSALMS

'The Psalms have a unique place in the Bible, because most of the Scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak for us' (Athanasius of Alexandria).

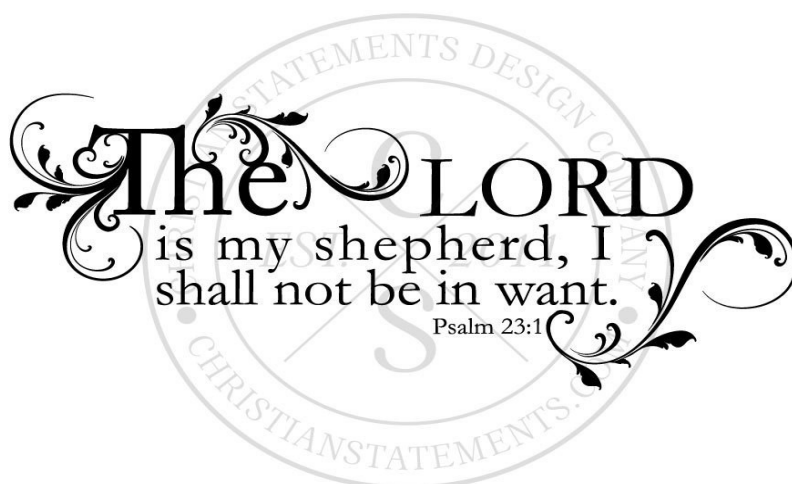
The Book of Psalms contains 150 prayers or songs of praise, the majority (73) attributed to David, although some were composed later. They were mostly composed for liturgical worship. There are songs of praise, in which people joyfully express praise for God's work of creation and sustaining (eg 135 & 136). In others, the psalmist recounts a desperate situation and gives thanks for God's answer to his prayers (eg 30 & 116).

There are a significant number of psalms of lament, both individual (eg 3-7; 22) and communal (eg 44), which begin with a cry for help. Some express deliverance from sin (51 & 130), or point to the certainty that the Lord has heard their prayer (7, but contrast with 88). The theme of trust is central in many psalms (23, 62 & 91).

The 'royal psalms' (eg 20, 21 & 72) point to the promised Messiah, fulfilled in Jesus. There are also psalms teaching wisdom (eg 37, 49); 'Torah' psalms, focussing on the law of the Lord (eg 1, 19 & 119), and psalms which celebrate the history of Israel and God's faithfulness (eg 78, 105 & 106).

The psalms can help us in our own prayers, by providing us with models to follow, as they express our own deepest feelings as we approach God: *'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul'* (Psalm 23:1-3).

Canon Paul Hardingham



POPE FRANCIS CALLS ON JOURNALISTS TO LOOK FOR GOOD NEWS

The Pope has urged journalists to look out for 'good news' stories among so much doom and gloom in global media coverage.

His call came during a gathering in Rome of media professionals from around the world that included an audience with Pope Francis.

The Pope said, "I encourage you to discover and make known the many stories of goodness hidden in the folds of the news, imitating those gold-prospectors who tirelessly sift the sand in search of a tiny nugget."

His words come as increasing numbers of people are turning away from news coverage, describing it as "depressing, relentless and boring" according to a recent global survey.

Almost four in 10 people worldwide said they sometimes or often avoid the news, up from just under three in 10 in 2017, according to the report by Oxford University's Reuters Institute.

To counter this, the Pope urged journalists and other media professionals to be 'communicators of hope' in a world where divisive disinformation abounds.

Pope Francis, who heads the world's estimated 1.4 billion Catholics called on all those involved in communications "to focus on beauty and hope even in the midst of apparently desperate situations" and to work to generate "commitment, empathy and concern for others."

He said: "Too often today, communication generates not hope, but fear and despair, prejudice and resentment, fanaticism and even hatred."

The message also, perhaps, had criticism for the power and influence being wielded by Big Tech companies, such as Elon Musk's 'X', and Meta – that recently announced it was removing fact-checkers from its US operation.

He said, "In these our times, characterised by disinformation and polarisation, as a few centres of power control an unprecedented mass of data and information, I would like to speak to you as one who is well aware of the importance – now more than ever – of your work as journalists and communicators."

He called on journalists to communicate hope, noting that "The hope of Christians has a face, the face of the risen Lord." His gift of the Holy Spirit "enables us to hope even against all hope, and to perceive the hidden goodness quietly present even when all else seems lost."

Rev Peter Crumpler

Let There Be Light

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said “Let there be light”, and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.” (Genesis 1: 2-4)

As the sun rises in Portree it is approaching noon in Mumbai and the sun is setting in Houston .If you were up in space orbiting the earth in the International Space Station you would see sixteen sunrises and sunsets every twenty four hours. From time immemorial, and all over the world, people have always looked forward to the light coming earlier in springtime and give a collective disappointed sigh when the nights draw in as autumn arrives. Light is so important to us all, in fact to the whole world as without it there would be no life. No plants, no animals, only a few micro organisms at best. Light is life. We need light to survive, and God in his wisdom provided Earth with this light. At no time in any twenty four hour period is light ever absent from the whole earth. It may be pitch black in Portree, but the sun is beating down in Sydney and when it's dark in Sydney it is light in Portree. It brings hope and security to mankind. It shows us all the good things on this earth. We see what a wonderful place it is, what it has to offer in all its fullness. But it also shows us where or what to avoid and warns us of any danger out there. But in the darkness we can't see what pitfalls there may be for us. Darkness brings fear and uncertainty, anxiety and death.

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8 : 12)

Just as light is important for our physical needs, it is also a sign from God how important it is for our spiritual well being. We all need Jesus, the light of the world, whom God sent to save us from evil, the darkness that is in us all and is present throughout the world. If we follow Jesus, He will lead us through every danger, a shining light before us, showing the way we should live, the path to salvation. We then as children of God can share this light of love and life with all those around us as Jesus commanded us to do.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.” (Matthew 5: 16)

As we approach Easter we think of the importance of light and darkness in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. It was at night when Jesus was betrayed by a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane, a shameful deed carried out under the cover of darkness. The Jewish and Roman authorities could have just quietly got rid of this so called troublemaker but instead Jesus had to undergo a public trial in broad daylight and be condemned to die so all could see what He had to endure and witness the agony of His death.

“ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ”

Light has disappeared just when it should have been at its brightest .As the hymn so

movingly says God turned His face away from his beloved Son and let Him die. There can be no greater darkness than separation from God. But that is not the end of the story. On Easter Day as Mary the mother of Jesus and three others approached the burial site they saw that the tomb was empty and were told the joyful news “He has risen!” And when was this? “Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise.” Sunrise, the dawn of a new day but more importantly the start of a new beginning for us all. In His death and resurrection we now have the sure and certain hope that there is a way back to be reunited with God. No more fear of darkness but the joy of walking in the Light of God once more.

Heather Quaye

Remembering Albert Einstein

Seventy years ago this month, on 18th April 1955, Albert Einstein, the German-born theoretical physicist, died. Considered the most influential physicist of the 20th century, he is known especially for developing the special and general theories of relativity.

He formulated possibly the best-known theory in the world – the special theory of relativity (including the iconic equation $E = mc^2$) – in 1905 while working as a technical expert, third class, at the Swiss Patent Office in Bern. He went on to become widely known and admired as a physicist of genius. He died in his local hospital in New Jersey of a haemorrhage, having become an American citizen. He was also a Swiss citizen.

Einstein’s family were secular Ashkenazi Jews. He was never convinced that God intervened on a personal level, regarding such an idea as naïve. But he had a firm belief in God as creator and sustainer of the universe.

He had an ongoing and never settled debate with Niels Bohr, the Danish theoretical physicist, about the way the universe was described by quantum mechanics, holding that chance could not be behind it because “God does not play dice”.

Einstein was clear that he was not an atheist – more a “religious nonbeliever”. He was disappointed in the end by his failure to prove non-randomness and to come up with a unified field theory by including electromagnetism in his geometric theory of gravitation. He did receive the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics for his theory of the photoelectric effect.

Not long before he died, he wrote in a letter to physicist David Bohm: “If God created the world, His primary concern was certainly not to make its understanding easy for us.”

Albert Einstein was married twice and had three children by his first wife, Mileva Marić. He also played violin – hence the subtle reference to him “playing electric violin” in Bob Dylan’s *Desolation Row*.

TO MY DEAR OLD MOTHER

*I vaguely remember, the house where I was born.
The little bothan yonder, a blackhouse it was called.
The roof thatched with turf and straw, to make it snug and warm
The fireplace on earthen floor and peat stacked by the fire
T'was in this blackhouse be it called, I first set eyes on Mum
And my sweet memories of those days, that you were strong and young
And now behold you're 96, in bed and cannot move
Oh, would that if I just saw you there, that blackhouse ben the room
It would indeed be foolish to say, what age you will attain
For young as well as aged, go our lives from day to day
But oh, if I could just for once, before we part our ways
Revive the spirit that was yours in the blackhouse where we stayed
Your lips were sealed with human love, no sacrifice was at stake
T'was fending for those bonnie bairns, that on your bosom laid
Depending on their mother's love, to feed then day by day
Many hardships you went through, the larder often bare
Replenishments were hard to find, for money it was rare
But having faith and strength and will, provision was in store
You worked and prayed and paved the way, for the bairns you did adore
'Tis in this light I see you now, as you went about your chores
And yet was time for you to think about the folk next door
And then the Sabbath day would come, no work was done by you
Except the bare necessities of mercy and love
Then to the church you loved so much and seat yourself in pew
To render our thanks unto your God, for all he did for you
Then I see you start the day, in faithfulness to him
Bible reading and in prayer, to which you were akin
You'd pour your heart to God above, that all of us had sinned
And on our knees we all would go, to hear you plead with him
The evening ere we went to sleep, we were all gathered round
To hear with joy the solemn way, the Psalm you read about
A chapter read, a prayer made and each of us would bow
On our knees before his throne, comfort there you found
Oh, Mother dear, I'm glad to say, that age will nor remove
My sweetest memory of those days, that I've acclaimed to you
Though far away from you I stay, my thoughts are oft on you
A mother in her golden age
Unable now to move*

The poem printed on the opposite page was written by my father 70 years ago for his mother.

Norman Bruce

MOTHERS DAY IN THE CHURCH :

As is now a Mothers Day tradition in Portree Church, posies of fresh flowers were made up by 3 members of the congregation - Margaret Meikleham, Donna McEwan and Sandra Beaton.

The posies were distributed to the ladies of the congregation by members of the Sunday School.



EASTER, THE MOST JOYFUL DAY OF THE YEAR

Easter is the most joyful day of the year for Christians. Christ has died for our sins. We are forgiven. Christ has risen! We are redeemed! We can look forward to an eternity in His joy! Hallelujah!

The Good News of Jesus Christ is a message so simple that you can explain it to someone in a few minutes. It is so profound that for the rest of their lives they will still be 'growing' in their Christian walk with God.

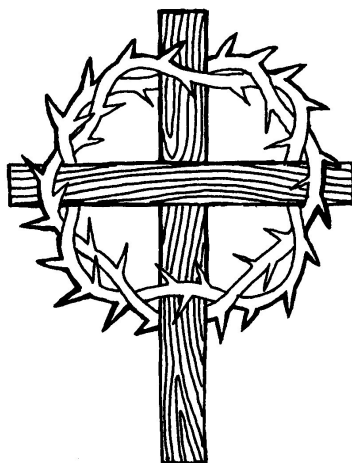
Why does the date move around so much? Because the date of Passover moves around, and according to the biblical account, Easter is tied to the Passover. Passover celebrates the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, and it lasts for seven days, from the middle of the Hebrew month of Nisan, which equates to late March or early April.

Sir Isaac Newton was one of the first to use the Hebrew lunar calendar to come up with firm dates for the first Good Friday: Friday 7th April 30 AD or Friday 3rd April, 33 AD with Easter Day falling two days later. Modern scholars continue to think these two Fridays to be the most likely.

Most people will tell you that Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox, which is broadly true. But the precise calculations are complicated and involve something called an 'ecclesiastical full moon', which is not the same as the moon in the sky. The earliest possible date for Easter in the West is 22nd March, which last fell in 1818. The latest is 25th April, which last happened in 1943.

Why the name, 'Easter'? In almost every European language, the festival's name comes from 'Pesach', the Hebrew word for Passover. The Germanic word 'Easter', however, seems to come from *Eostre*, a Saxon fertility goddess mentioned by the Venerable Bede. He thought that the Saxons worshipped her in 'Eostur month,' but may have confused her with the classical dawn goddesses like *Eos* and *Aurora*, whose names mean 'shining in the east'. So, Easter might have meant simply 'beginning month' – a good time for starting up again after a long winter.

Finally, why Easter eggs? On one hand, they are an ancient symbol of birth in most European cultures. On the other hand, hens start laying regularly again each Spring. Since eggs were forbidden during Lent, it's easy to see how decorating and eating them became a practical way to celebrate Easter.



Nigel Beeton writes: Hidden within the Passion story is a glorious illustration of Justification by Faith. The 'Penitent Thief' may or may not have been a thief, but up until his crucifixion he doesn't seem to have been a good guy, he is quoted as saying that he felt that his crucifixion was a 'just punishment' for his deeds. He must have done something pretty bad to have felt that way about one of the cruellest forms of execution ever devised by man's sick mind. But he recognised Jesus as his Lord and put his faith in Him, and Jesus responded by promising him paradise, despite the fact that this thief could do nothing in the way of good works in return!

A COMMON THIEF

I've lived a life of emptiness
A common thief am I;
Of no great use to man or beast
And now I have to die.

They've nailed me to a wooden cross
They took my clothes as well;
The pain and shame is all I have
And soon I'll be in Hell.

But this man nailed next to me
He's done no evil thing!
His innocence is clear to see –
They say He is a King.

There hangs, beyond, another thief
Just hear him swear and curse!
Demanding that He saves us all
He's making all this worse!

"We knew that this would be our fate!
"We've known it all along!
"But have respect for this poor man
"For He's done nothing wrong!"

"O Jesus, when Your Kingdom comes,
"My Lord, remember me!"
He looked at me with tender love,
Responding to my plea:

"The truth of what I say to you
"You'll shortly come to see
"For you will come, this very day
"To Paradise with Me."

I wept upon my painful cross
No thing I had to bring;
But yet He looked upon this wretch
And gave me everything!

By Nigel Beeton

STANDING ON THE EDGE OF ETERNITY

Blessings to you brothers and sisters and I pray the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be eternally upon you. It seems in our world currently; peace seems to be ever elusive. We hear of nation rising against nation, we hear of wars in distant lands, we hear of misguided men forever choosing to use guided missiles and we hear of a multitude falling from the faith.

It can be difficult being a follower of our Lord Jesus Christ in a fallen world such as ours. We can wonder why such evil and wickedness can be so prevalent throughout the creation. In our own lives, we carry the scars of our own traverse throughout the world. These scars can become great weights on our backs and can cause us to stumble and fall. Where then does one find hope amongst such darkness?

I have a picture in my study. Occasionally I stand and look at it and I find peace within my soul. It is a black and white image of a nameless beach, the waves in the image breaking upon the perfectly flat shoreline. In the exact centre of the image there is a cloud where the sun nestles behind it. Beams of glorious sunlight penetrate the cloud and cast themselves outwards.

The beach image has a centric perspective – because of this, when one looks at it, it makes the viewer feel as if they are the one standing on the nameless beach. A beam of light from the sun casts perfectly centrically and directly towards the observer of the picture.

When I look at this picture, I imagine myself at the end of my days standing on this beach, a man of advanced years, as his final breaths begin to draw, reflecting on the life that God has given him. I search deep within my soul all the pains, joy, and sorrow that I have accumulated that have led me to this sandy shore.

As I search these pains and joys, I find myself drawing ever closer to God. I feel great shame and thankfulness in equal measure. I begin to realise that through all these moments I have come to not just understand who I truly am spiritually, but who God is and how much he loves me. And I then close my eyes and begin to hear the sound of the sea and the waves hitting the shoreline. I hear the wind forming a symphony with the waves and I begin to feel a peace form upon my soul.

In this moment I pray to God:

“Lord Father in Heaven, maker of the Heavenly lights, maker of the stars in Heaven, maker of the Earth and all that lies upon it, hear my prayer. Lord I was a wretched sinful man, cast far from the light of Heaven to the very depths of the Earth. From that darkness I was afflicted and tormented and sorrow became my daily partner. My soul was in agony, for I had lost the light of life. In this pit of despair, I lost hope, I lost joy, I lost peace, and I stood on the edge of death itself.

Lord my soul carries the pain of these years. I was cast so far from your glorious light that I could not see a way out of the darkness. But Lord Father in Heaven I have come to see that in this darkness you gave me a great gift. For in this darkness, I came to realise when all had abandoned me, and death

was knocking at my door, that you were there with me. You came to me when my soul was fading away and said, "Do not fear."

And you Lord have saved my soul from the pit. You have put my feet on firm ground and restored my life. Who is greater than you Lord? Who is more righteous? Who is more forgiving? Who is more loving? Who can claim to be a King of Kings? I pray to you Lord there are none but you. You are the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You and you alone are deserving of all the praise, and all the glory.

Lord, you raised me from a dark pit, and have grown my soul in spirit, and in truth. I have come to know you in a way that is not common amongst the sons and daughters of men. You have let your peace that passes all understanding rest upon my spirit. A peace in knowing that you will forever love me, and should I stumble, I will repent, and you will raise me up.

As I search my soul on these shores Lord, my very breaths nearing their end, the initial pains in my soul have grown to thankfulness. Thankfulness that in all these years you have never left me. Thankfulness that despite all life's hardships and the many times I have fallen short, you have never ceased from loving me. How can I thank you Lord? All I can offer you is my life. And Lord, I have come to understand, all you desire is my life, and my love.

I stand on this beach, on the edge of eternity, and finally I understand why I fell so far from grace. You have grown my soul in ways I cannot even begin to comprehend. I understand that spiritual growth only possible through all these initial days of darkness, all these trials, all these afflictions, all these moments of joy, moments of pain, moments of love, moments of gratitude, moments of trust and moments of faith. You have cultivated me like a stubborn flower, who struggles to grow. You have provided the sunlight and water I needed to become a loved member of your family.

Lord Father in Heaven, I would not have chosen the early years of my life, filled with such sorrow and suffering. But now I can see as my life nears its end, that I would not be the man I am today without these pains and sorrows. I have had to search deep within my soul to endure and make sense of these pains. But in these dark moments, somehow, I found you Lord. An enduring strength that no matter what I faced, you were always with me.

I feel my life seeping away Lord, on these shores where the sound of the waves begins to become gradually quieter. I have peace and contentment in my soul. I will be forever grateful Lord, that you let me know you. That you have been the greatest of all friends throughout all these many years you have blessed me with. And where pain once resided, now I feel only gratitude and joy. Gratitude for the patience and love you have shown me to grow my spirit, and joy for the knowledge I have, that soon, I will join you in eternity – and I will become one with you, and know a fullness and completion only possible to those who know the love of God. Thank you for saving me Lord."

I complete my prayer and open my eyes one last time, standing on the shoreline, looking towards the sun beaming through the clouds above the sea. I have one final look at the splendour of God's

creation. I close my eyes and begin to listen to the waves impacting the shoreline. Slowly the sound begins to fade, I feel my breathing begin to slow. The sunlight comforts me as it rests upon my face. I prepare myself for my final breath, in gratitude and thankfulness for all God has done for me during my long life.

And I realise that even on these shores, standing on the edge of eternity, with my life fading away, the love of God has never left me.



An Article by Hugh Campbell

Portree Church of Scotland

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

- *James A Francis*

The death of Christ was the most dreadful blow ever given to the empire of darkness. - *William Plumer*

The world cannot bury Christ. The earth is not deep enough for His tomb, the clouds are not wide enough for His winding-sheet. - *E Thomson*

The empty tomb of Christ has been the cradle of the church. - *WR Nicoll*

The Christian Church has the resurrection written all over it. - *E G Robinson*

Christianity is the revelation of God, not the research of man. - *JA Stewart*

GOD IN THE SCIENCES

This series is written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge.

Just breathe

*You show your majesty
In every star that shines,
And every time we breathe.
Your glory, God revealed
From distant galaxies
To here, beneath our skin.*

These words from the song *Magnificent* by Matt Redman and Jonas Myrin speak volumes to me as a scientist. Redman is an astronomy geek who has ‘an appreciation for the universe that surrounds us, particularly its unique ability to lift our hearts to see how massive and mysterious God truly is’.*

The microscopic level on the other hand – what goes on ‘beneath our skin’ – is less available to ordinary people. I have had the privilege of exploring this world to my heart’s content, and what I’ve seen has given me such a sense of awe that I want to share with others.

Every time you breathe, a series of air pockets with a combined surface area the size of a tennis court is bathed with oxygen. These minute air pockets are covered with blood vessels. The boundary between air and blood is so thin that oxygen and carbon dioxide can diffuse freely from one to the other.

When your heart beats at a normal rate, a single red blood cell takes about three quarters of a second to travel through the small blood vessels in your lungs. But in just one third of that time, a quarter of a second, that cell has already received all the oxygen it needs from the air. So, when you exercise, causing your heart rate to increase and the blood to flow faster, you’re still getting plenty of oxygen, as long as you keep breathing!

Redman and Myrin wrote in their song, “*You are higher than we ever could imagine, And closer than our eyes could ever see.*” The universe demonstrates God’s awesome power. This is a place made by a Being whose imagination is not limited by time and space.

Biology, on the other hand, helps to remind me of God’s creativity and closeness. I am a product of a long and painstaking process of continued development over aeons of time. Beneath my skin are incredibly detailed, beautifully regulated processes that give me life. Jesus said that ‘even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.’ The knowledge that God intentionally made me and knows every detail of my physiology is both amazing and humbling.

**Indescribable: Encountering the Glory of God in the Beauty of the Universe, Matt Redman & Louis Giglio (David C. Cook, 2011) .*

It can be hard to pray sometimes, and most of us need all the help we can get! This is the first of a series of articles by the Revd Dr Herbert McGonigle, formerly of the Nazarene Theological College, Manchester aims to offer some help.

PRAYING WITH THE PRAYERS OF THE BIBLE

In this series of articles we will be looking at prayers found in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. Some are prayers for personal circumstances, while others relate to family or church or nation. In studying the prayers the emphasis will be on what we can learn about prayer and how we can be encouraged to pray more regularly, more fervently and more expectantly.

Praying about the Unknown Future: “O Sovereign Lord , what can you give me, for I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” Genesis 15:2-3.

This is the Bible’s first prayer. That doesn’t mean that no one before Abraham had prayed, but this is the first time we have a record of someone praying to God.

We learn as early as Genesis 4 that “men began to call on the name of the Lord” (v.26) but it does not explicitly say that they prayed. We can hardly believe that godly men like Enoch and Noah never prayed. Enoch ‘walked with God’ and in his long pilgrimage of three hundred years of fellowship with God (Genesis. 5:22) he must have prayed many times.

Even before Abraham’s first prayer is mentioned ,we are told that God appeared to him, that he built an altar for sacrifice and worship and that he called on the name of the Lord (Genesis . 12:7; 13:18). But now he faces a real crisis in his life.

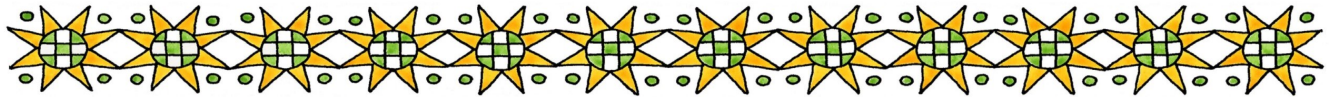
When God first appeared to him, he had been promised that from his family a great nation would emerge (Genesis 12:1-3). Now many years later he still has no children and custom dictates that his chief servant, Eliezer, will inherit everything. Has God forgotten him? Were all those promises of being a father just make believe or self-delusion?

So he cried to God, “What will you give me?” It was a desperate prayer from a desperate heart. What was God doing? Why had He not kept His promises? Had He forgotten? Was He not able to do what He had promised? We have all been where Abraham was when he prayed that prayer. We want to believe but *why is nothing happening?*

Then God answered! “Your *own son* shall be your heir” (v.4). This wonderful answer was sealed with a dramatic illustration. God directed Abraham to look up into the night sky. “Number the stars if you can,” God said. “So shall your descendants be.” Abraham would one day have as many offspring as the stars in the sky! Impossible? Incredible? Far-fetched?

But it happened! The next chapter records the birth of his son Ishmael, and two chapters later we read of the birth of Isaac, the son of promise. And history, both biblical and secular, confirms that the illustration from the stars was no exaggeration!

So, the Bible's first prayer helps us in several ways. First, when our hearts ache because of fear or doubt or uncertainty, take it to God in prayer. Second, God's delays are not denials. Third, with Abraham who 'believed the Lord' (v.6), let us trust quietly in our sovereign and



MATTHIAS THE APOSTLE, THE CHOSEN ONE

Have you ever been in the position where someone is desperately needed – and you fit the bill perfectly? It is almost as if all your miscellaneous qualifications that never made much sense before now make PERFECT sense. And you sense that you have been chosen by God for the task....

Matthias came into the picture shortly after the suicide of Judas. The early Church was missing an apostle, and so the remaining 11 apostles prayed for guidance on who to choose as a replacement for this key role.

The qualifications for the job were specialised: the person had to have been a follower of Christ from His Baptism to His Ascension, and a witness of the Resurrection. There were two possibilities: Joseph Barsabas and Matthias. How to choose?

Again, Matthias' experience may mirror yours: the decision was out of his hands, and up to others. In this case, the apostles drew straws – and the 'lot' fell to Matthias. He had been chosen to replace Judas! The tragedy of Judas' betrayal had led to an opportunity for service by Matthias – and he was well prepared for the task. Are you prepared for any task that God might suddenly open before you?

Like the other apostles, Matthias had been in Jerusalem and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and he went on to do a good job. It is said he preached the Good News first in Judea, and then maybe in Cappadocia and by the Caspian Sea. It is thought he was martyred by the axe or halberd, and his relics eventually ended up being taken to Rome by the empress Helen.

Matthias is an encouragement to us to be faithful in small things - because you never know what the future might hold!

SMALL TALK BY THE RIVERBANK

“... The next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us. - Acts 16:11-15

One of the great things about going to church on Sundays is the chance to chat with people.

Of course, there are some topics on which you need to tread lightly, especially when you meet someone for the first time. For example - their beliefs in religion and politics.

For this reason, I have known people in my congregation for years and still have no idea about which party they support or who they vote for. (I presume they believe in God, because they keep coming to church.)

Why are some subjects so loaded with potential trouble?

The reason is that the answers can be divisive. They will put you in one camp or another. I met a visitor from America recently and wondered if I should bring up politics. This was just before the inauguration of President Trump. Fortunately, the American brought it up, and was quite open, and we were able to discuss it without worry about giving offence.

So – people chat in church. And according to the verses given above, they have been doing that for 2,000 years – since St Paul began to start churches.

I like this particular conversation between two strangers, St Paul and Lydia. I expect politics and religion were not easy topics for small talk even then. Talking to a stranger was risking being misunderstood. It was a casual chat, but Paul skilfully used the contact to lead Lydia to faith in Christ. She became the first convert in Greece, which of course meant she was the first Christian in a church in Europe.

One good thing about Christianity, is that it is about breaking down barriers, not building them up.

David Pickup

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905 – 1961) gave the impression of being an agnostic humanist while he was serving as Secretary-General of the United Nations. So, it was a surprise when after his death in a plane crash, his private papers contained some notes entitled “negotiations with myself – and with God”. His prayers have a naked honesty which is deeply moving. This one is from 1961, written the year of his untimely death.

NEGOTIATIONS WITH MYSELF – AND GOD

Have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon our efforts,
That we before Thee, in love and in faith,
Righteousness and humility,
May follow Thee,
With self-denial, steadfastness and courage,
And meet Thee in the silence.

Give us a pure heart that we may see Thee,
A humble heart that we may hear Thee,
A heart of love that we may serve Thee,
A heart of faith that we may love Thee,

Thou whom I do not know
But whose I am.

Thou whom I do not comprehend
But who hast dedicated me
To my fate.
Thou –

By Dag Hammarskjöld



WHY EASTER WILL NEVER GO AWAY

How do you make sense of the Resurrection? Dead men don't rise, so why believe that this particular dead man *did* rise?

At the end of St Luke's gospel we read that: "they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement" (Luke 24.4). This is highly significant. The Gospels do not show us a group of disciples who were in a receptive frame of mind. After the crucifixion, they were in hiding, frightened and scattered. Then suddenly, they came out of hiding and were totally different; excited, joyful. By Pentecost they were confident, with one firm message: 'You crucified Jesus, but God raised Him up!'

How did they know this? Because of direct personal experience. Some of them had visited the tomb of Jesus: it was empty. Others claimed to have seen and touched the risen Lord. Were they hallucinating? People can hallucinate in groups – when taking drugs, for example. But of course, each one will see a different hallucination. But the disciples all saw the same thing. Or rather, the same person. Jesus.

Were they lying? Jesus had died a humiliating death as a criminal. Perhaps they wanted to rescue His good name. So, did they pretend they had seen Him?

This theory has a big problem. Their preaching led them into trouble with the authorities. They were beaten and imprisoned and some of them killed. People will die for ideas and causes which they believe in passionately. But not for things they have made up. We might suffer for our convictions, but we will not suffer for our inventions.

What about the 'swoon' theory? That Jesus didn't die on the cross, despite terrible wounds? That He recovered in the tomb, and then escaped? That the disciples nursed Him back to health? But Roman soldiers knew when a man was dead; and there was the guard on the tomb. Also, the events which followed simply don't fit. If the disciples had been hiding Jesus all along, they would have kept very low-key, and out of the way, so that the authorities did not come after Him again.

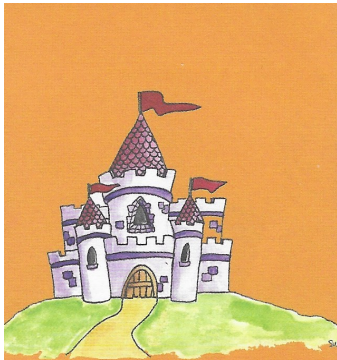
Besides, to preach that God had raised Jesus from the dead – which is exactly what they did preach – would have been a lie. Beatings and threat of death would soon have loosened their tongues. Inventions crumble under pressure; convictions hold fast.

Another reason for believing in the Resurrection is this: Jesus' continuing impact. Thousands and soon millions of people in every generation since have shared an inescapable sense of being 'accompanied' through life. Though unseen, they identify this presence as the Risen Lord.

Sometimes this experience of meeting Jesus is gentle and fitful. Sometimes it is dramatic and life changing. This reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus is not just an interesting historical puzzle. It is a vital, present day reality. It brings wonderful comfort, assuring us of the central Christian truths: death is dead; Jesus is alive; God is love.

This central notion was captured, most movingly, by the great Albert Schweitzer: 'He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me," and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is.'

Have a joyful – and a challenging – Easter.



INTRODUCING OUR NEW HOLIDAY CLUB, *A TALE OF TWO KINGS*

The Bible tells God's story, revealing who He is, and SU Scotland's new holiday club resource, *A Tale of Two Kings*, highlights key stories from King David's life, pointing us toward King Jesus. This five-day, Bible-based resource is designed for children ages 5–11, with engaging sessions, each lasting 2.5 hours.

As children journey to the castle, meeting knights, princesses and bards, they will be introduced to the story of these two kings. With a medieval theme designed to spark young imaginations, this holiday club material engages children with the events of 1 and 2 Samuel, ultimately revealing how the stories of King David find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

JOIN THE ADVENTURE!

[suscotand.org.uk/
taleoftwokings](http://suscotand.org.uk/taleoftwokings)

suscotland.org.uk | 9

SCRIPTURE UNION

The February edition of the Scripture Union magazine contained articles on their new holiday club “A Tale of Two Kings” and “Working with Churches, Scripture Union aims.

If you would like more information about SU Scotland the link is :-

Suscotland.org.uk/mailling

It is encouraging to hear that Portree High School has a Scripture Union group.



WORKING WITH CHURCHES, SCRIPTURE UNION INTERNATIONAL AIMS TO:

- ✓ make God's Good News known to children, young people and families
- ✓ encourage people of all ages to meet God daily through the Bible and prayer

SU International does this in order that people may:

- ✓ come to personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ
- ✓ grow in Christian maturity
- ✓ become both committed church members and servants of a world in need

SU International pursues these aims through a variety of ministries around the world in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ in reliance on the Holy Spirit.

scriptureunion.global

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EASTER CROSSWORD

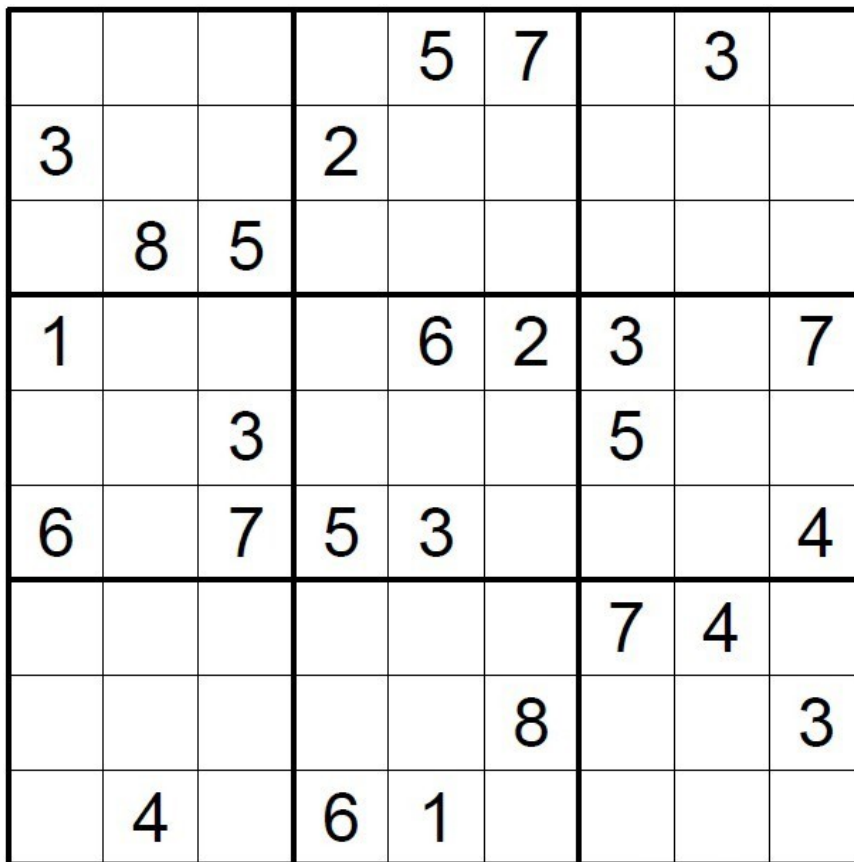
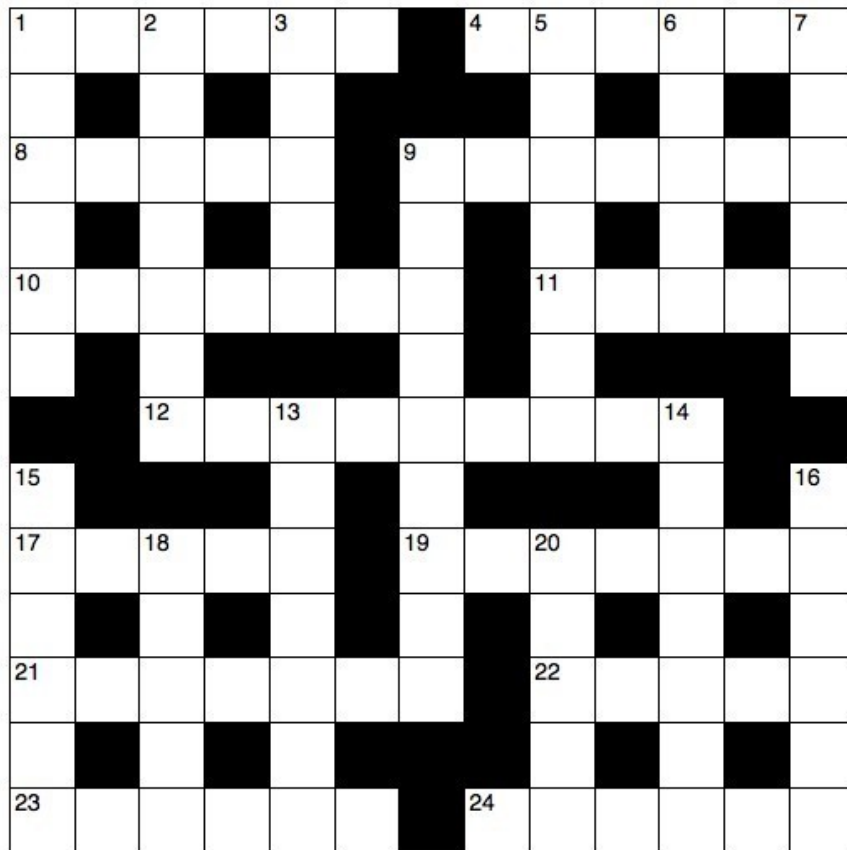
Across

- 1 Relating to the whole universe (6)
- 4 The disciple who made the remark in 8 Across (John 20:24) (6)
- 8 'Unless I see the nail marks — — hands, I will not believe it' (John 20:25) (2,3)
- 9 He urged King Jehoiakim not to burn the scroll containing Jeremiah's message (Jeremiah 36:25) (7)
- 10 Baptist minister and controversial founder of America's Moral Majority, Jerry — (7)
- 11 'Look, here is — . Why shouldn't I be baptized?' (Acts 8:36) (5)
- 12 Repossessed (Genesis 14:16) (9)
- 17 Port from which Paul sailed on his last journey to Rome (Acts 27:3–4) (5)
- 19 'Moses was not aware that his face was — because he had spoken with the Lord' (Exodus 34:29) (7)
- 21 Roonwit, C.S. Lewis's half-man, half-horse (7)
- 22 Grill (Luke 24:42) (5)
- 23 'The lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the — apostles' (Acts 1:26) (6)
- 24 'I was sick and you looked after me, I was in — and you came to visit me' (Matthew 25:36) (6)

Down

- 1 Coastal rockfaces (Psalm 141:6) (6)
- 2 Academic (1 Corinthians 1:20) (7)
- 3 Publish (Daniel 6:26) (5)
- 5 For example, the Crusades (4,3)
- 6 11 Across is certainly this (5)
- 7 He reps (anag.) (6)
- 9 Liberator (Psalm 18:2) (9)
- 13 Man who asked the question in 11 Across was in charge of all her treasury (Acts 8:27) (7)
- 14 They must be 'worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine' (1 Timothy 3:8) (7)
- 15 The human mind or soul (6)
- 16 'O Lord, while precious children starve, the tools of war increase; their bread is — ' (Graham Kendrick) (6)
- 18 'We played the flute for you, and you did not — ' (Matthew 11:17) (5)
- 20 Bared (anag.) (5)

C R O S S W O R D



S U D O K U

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Solutions to these puzzles can be found on Page 42

MOTHERING SUNDAY:

There is an old Jewish saying: *God could not be everywhere, and therefore He made mothers.*

Mother Church, Mother Earth, Mother of the Gods - our human mothers - all of them have been part of the celebration of 'Mothering Sunday' - as the fourth Sunday in Lent is affectionately known. It has been celebrated in the UK since at least the 16th century.

In Roman times, great festivals were held every Spring to honour Cybele, Mother of all the Gods. Other pagan festivals in honour of Mother Earth were also celebrated. With the arrival of Christianity, the festival became one honouring Mother Church.

During the Middle Ages, young people apprenticed to craftsmen or working as 'live-in' servants were allowed only one holiday a year on which to visit their families - which is how 'Mothering Sunday' got its name. This special day became a day of family rejoicing, and the Lenten fast was broken. In some places the day was called Simnel Day, because of the sweet cakes called simnel cakes traditionally eaten on that day.

In recent years the holiday has changed, and in many ways, now resembles the American Mother's Day, with families going out to Sunday lunch and generally making a fuss of their mother on the day.

THE GULF OF MEXICO? OR AMERICA?

As well as Greenland and the Panama Canal (and perhaps Canada), President Trump wants the Gulf of Mexico.

On his very first afternoon in office, he ordered that the name be changed to the Gulf of America.

Apparently American Presidents can do these things. And so, the US Board on Geographic Names was given 30 days to change the gulf's name on all official maps throughout the US. Some navigation apps, including Google Maps, were under pressure to change it immediately.

Trump's reason for changing, he says, is that the ocean basin is "ours" and that the US does "most of the work there".

But President Trump cannot dictate what other countries call the gulf, as it is an international body of water, with coastlines in the US, Mexico and Cuba. And Mexico and Cuba have no plans to follow Trump's lead.

With that in mind, Britain has politely declined to change the name. In the UK, it will remain the Gulf of Mexico, unless and until Trump's new name for it gains "widespread usage" in English.



EASTER: A NEW WORLD IS USHERED IN

‘Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple... and said “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”’ (John 20:1,2)

No one was ready for Christ’s resurrection. On the Friday, two sympathetic Jewish council members - Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – had taken the body of Jesus down from the cross, burying Him in a new tomb before instructed guards had moved into place.

Thirty-six hours later the tomb was empty and the guards were scattered – to be paid off with hush money by the chief priests (Matthew 28:12).

The account rings with authenticity. Here is no ingenious attempt at a carefully-contrived scenario, with Pontius Pilate or Caiaphas the High Priest falling back in confusion before a resurrected Christ and a crowd of impressive witnesses. The whole account has feet running everywhere - *yet ushering in a new world that would never be the same again*. At this stage it is a complete jumble:

1. The right actions, but the wrong deductions Mary Magdalene witnesses the empty tomb and then runs, rousing Peter and John, having concluded that her Lord’s body had been taken away. She then returns to the tomb - Peter and John presumably outstripping her on the way. It was only then that she met the risen Lord for herself.

2. The quick feet, but the slow minds As for Peter and John, they breathlessly reach the tomb - and are gazing at the grave clothes, still twirled together and collapsed under the heavy spices. How long did they wait? John eventually perceives what has happened - and believes (v.8). In his account he admits his slowness to take in the truth of the resurrection (v.9). *Has that been so for you? Read John’s Gospel for yourself, friend - and get into the flow today!*

3. The new era, but the familiar routine Verse 10 gives us an interesting statement: ‘Then the disciples went back to their homes.’ There was Jerusalem outside - just the same. Perhaps Peter’s mother-in-law would like a cup of tea? Before long they’d go out fishing again (John 21:3). Life looked unchanged – for the present.

Yet, from now on, Christ’s gift to them of Resurrection to eternal life would captivate hearts, loyalties and energies for ever.

OYSTER BAY

The little church in Oyster Bay
Had borne for many and many a day
It's testimony clear and bright
But now it's grateful, cheering light was done-
It seemed as though its end had come.
Church meetings, once a time of grace
Now seemed to be a meeting place
For folks with other folks to differ
And make their stiff opinions stiffer!
Three pastors in one year had they-
And each one glad to get away!



Old Jacob Cheerum, from whose face
Shone out the light of inward grace.
One night in a Church meeting rose
As though some secret to disclose.
Dear friends, said he, it seems to me
That God's more grieved than we could be
To see our lack of love and trust...
We must get right with Him -we must
And if we try to do His will
There's hope for this His vineyard still.
My best suggestion is to write
To our old neighbour Farmer Bright
Whose head and heart alike are packed
With wisdom, kindness and tact.
His best advice he'll give I'm sure
As he has often done before.

The dear old farmer, after prayer
Sat down to pen with thought and care
Something to stir the hearts and minds
Of neighbours he had left behind.
That done, he scrawled a hasty note
To Brown, his bailiff, short and plain
And then - let those folks explain
Who care in mysteries to grope-
Placed each in the wrong envelope!



The letter sent to Oyster Bay duly arrived.
The next Church Meeting night came round
And quite a record number found
That to a weeknight meeting they could actually get
away!
The letter had arrived 'twas said
And all must go to hear it read!

Keep all the fences in repair
Give the young stock your constant care.
Plough up that piece of fallow ground
The busy time is coming round!
Your hands are doubtless pretty full!
But don't forget the old black bull!!
A pause ensued.....
The Miss Fitwilliams sat up straight!
Old Father Dickson scratched his pate.
The old folks stared, as well they might!
The young folks tittered with delight.



I've read it out, just as it came ..
I've tried my best but all in vain
I don't know what it's all about..
If some folks know -then let us hear'm
What's your opinion Brother Cheerum?
What's my opinion? .. this my friend
God knows what messages to send!
Let's take the letter line by line
And I believe the light will shine
Just now upon the word we read
And we will find the help we need!

"Repair the fences"- that must mean
That we should keep our Church Roll clean!
Those who serve with life, not lip
Should form our membership
The young stock? That means you see
Our school, the Church's nursery!

Plough up that piece of fallow ground?
Said to backsliding Israel's fold
It means repentance, as of old ...
If we repent and mend our ways
Our mourning will be turned to praise!

And then our brother bids us
Keep our eye upon our sleepless enemy
who brought us down to this low level!
The Old Black Bull- that means
The Devil!!!!

A Springtime of Revival came -
Putting the ancient days to shame!!
Sinners were saved! Saints comforted!
And Zion lifted up her head.
So to the Church in Oyster Bay
There came the breaking of the day!!

And still to Church and Christian home
In many ways God's angels come
Bidding us daily do our part,
Keep up the fences of our heart..
Maintain our service-free and full,
And not forget The Old Black Bull!!!

Submitted by Jan MacDonald



MARK, DISCIPLE, APOSTLE, WRITER OF THE SECOND GOSPEL

Mark, whose home in Jerusalem became a place of rest for Jesus and His 12 apostles, is considered the traditional author of the second gospel. He is also usually identified as the young man, described in Mark 14:51, who followed Christ after his arrest and then escaped capture by leaving his clothes behind.

Papias, in 130, said that in later years Mark became Peter's interpreter. If so, then this close friendship would have been how Mark gathered so much information about Jesus' life. Peter referred to him affectionately as his 'son'.

Mark was also a companion to Paul on his journeys. When Paul was held captive at Rome, Mark was with him, helping him. Mark's Gospel, most likely written in Italy, perhaps in Rome, is the earliest account we have of the life of Jesus. Mark died about 74 AD.

Early in the 9th century Mark's body was brought to Venice, whose patron he became, and there it has remained to this day. The symbol of Mark as an evangelist is the lion, and is much in evidence in Venice.



Nigel Beeton writes: We read the Gospel of St John, and the Epistle of St James, both of which contain intensely beautiful and meaningful passages of scripture. But I wonder how it came about that these two brothers, both so godly, came to be referred to by Jesus as the 'Sons of Thunder?'

SONS OF THUNDER

Have you ever come to wonder
Why James and John were 'Sons of Thunder'?
It seems quite strange, because you see
The two were sons of Zebedee!

In truth, it seems that, very sadly
They didn't suffer fools that gladly.
And if somebody caused them grief
Their temper blew beyond belief!

So when a village caused them gloom
Refusing flat to give them room,
So terrible was these men's ire
They wanted God to send down fire!

But Jesus told them, "Don't be mean!"
And for their plan He was not keen.
Along the road they went ahead
And found another place instead,

These Sons of Thunder learned that day
Revenge is simply not the way.
Jesus showed them how to live
To show great mercy, and forgive.

So if through anger you may blunder
Think about the Sons of Thunder
And up to Jesus lift your face
And know, like them, His gift of grace.

By Nigel Beeton

A TRIBUTE TO ALEXANDER FLEMING

Seventy years ago, on 11th March 1955, the Scottish bacteriologist Sir Alexander Fleming died. He was joint winner with Ernst Boris Chain and Sir Howard Walter Florey of the 1945 Nobel Prize in Physiology/Medicine for discovering penicillin.

Fleming was not the tidiest researcher, and his discovery of penicillin came about more or less by accident, as he said himself. He regarded his earlier discovery of lysozyme, a mildly antiseptic enzyme which is present in body fluids, as his best scientific work.

The discovery of penicillin was much more significant in practical terms, but for some years he was unable to persuade fellow-experts of its importance – another example of the scientific consensus being wrong. In the end Chain and Florey were vital to its success, having discovered a method of turning penicillin into a practical, useful treatment.

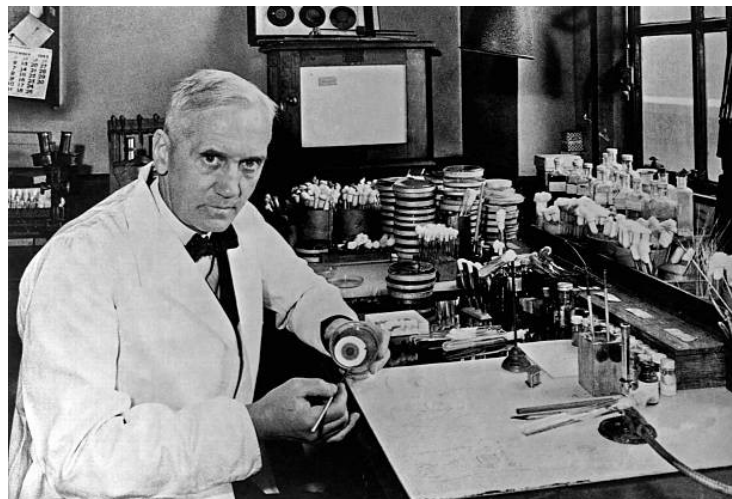
Fleming came from a Presbyterian background but was described as “not particularly religious”. He served through the First World War in the Royal Army Medical Corps, working in battlefield hospitals in France, where he observed that closed wound treatment often had adverse effects.

He was a member of the rifle club at his medical school, St Mary's, which led to his joining the research department there.

The discovery of penicillin and its subsequent development as a prescription drug marked the start of modern antibiotics. Fleming was knighted in 1944. In 1999 he was named in *Time* magazine's list of the 100 most important people in the 20th century, and three years later as one of the 100 Greatest Britons in a BBC poll. He was also voted third greatest Scot in 2009.

When he heard that penicillin production had been patented in the US in 1944, he was furious that his discovery, given free, should become a profit-making monopoly in another country.

Tim Lenton



ALL IN THE MONTH OF APRIL

It was:

250 years ago, on 18th April 1775 that American silversmith and folk hero Paul Revere made his famous midnight ride on horseback from Charleston to Lexington to warn residents that the British were about to attack.

Also 250 years ago, on 23rd April 1775 that J M W Turner, the British artist was born. Known for his landscapes and turbulent marine paintings.

150 years ago, on 17th April 1875 that the game of snooker was invented by Neville Chamberlain, a British army officer stationed in India.

80 years ago, from 1st April to 22nd June 1945 that the Battle of Okinawa, Japan took place. The largest amphibious assault in the Pacific War, it was an Allied victory.

Also 80 years ago, on 30th April 1945 that Adolf Hitler, Austrian-born German Nazi Party Leader, Chancellor of Germany (1933-45) and dictator (1934-45) committed suicide along with his wife, Eva Braun.

70 years ago, on 5th April 1955 that Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced his retirement because of failing health. He was succeeded by Anthony Eden on 7th April.

Also 70 years ago, on 10th April 1955 that British nightclub hostess Ruth Ellis shot and killed her lover, David Blakely. On 13th July she was hanged at Holloway Prison, the last woman to be executed in the UK.

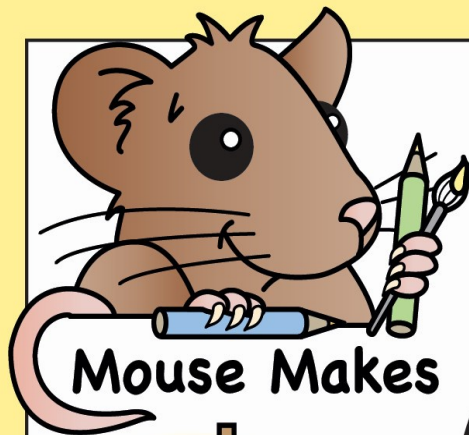
50 years ago, on 4th April 1975 that Microsoft, the computer software/hardware company, was founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in Albuquerque New Mexico.

Also 50 years ago, on 23rd April 1975 that US President Gerald Ford gave a televised speech in which he announced that the USA's involvement in the Vietnam war was over, and all US aid to South Vietnam had ended. The war itself ended on 30th April, when North Vietnamese forces captured the South Vietnamese capital Saigon.

40 years ago, on 23rd April 1985 that the Coca-Cola Company changed the formula of Coca-Cola and launched it on the market as New Coke. The public were out-raged, and the original formula was restored within three months.

25 years ago, on 12th April 2000 that Queen Elizabeth II awarded the Royal Ulster Constabulary the George Cross in recognition of its collective and sustained bravery during the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

20 years ago, on 9th April 2005 that Charles, Prince of Wales, married Camilla Parker Bowles, who gained the title the Duchess of Cornwall.



Mouse Makes



On the cross Jesus opened wide his arms for us.
Jesus put an end to death by dying for us,
and showed us the resurrection to
come by His raising to new life!



Jesus is risen!

The angel said:
"Jesus ...is not here, for He
has risen, just as He said."
Matthew 28:6

Jesus is here

Jesus said:
"Where two or three
come together
in my name I am
there with them."
Matthew 18:20



READ the story of
the resurrection in:
Matthew 28:1-10
Mark 16:1-19
Luke 24:1-49
John 20:1-29
and **21:1-14**



R E D E E M E R
E A S T E R P I
S A V I O U R S
U L T I M J A E
R I E D E L I N
R V J E S U S S
E E W B S P E P
C C L O I S S N
T H O S A N N A
I R R O H Y E U
O I D N P P W S
N S G O T E L L
K T A F O A I O
I Y O G J C F R
N U J O Y E E B
G O O D N E W S



**Jesus will
come again!**

Jesus said:
"I will come back
and take you to
myself so that you
will be where I am."
John 14:3



JESUS • ALIVE • RISEN
LORD • SAVIOUR • KING
RESURRECTION
PEACE • NEW LIFE • JOY • GOOD NEWS



MESSIAH • REDEEMER
CHRIST • SON OF GOD
HOSANNA • PRAISE
GO TELL • EASTER



A Self-examination

This is based on the eight destructive passions which Celtic Christians, in the tradition of the desert fathers and mothers, constantly struggled to overcome:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Gluttony | What do I excessively feed on? Food? Alcohol? TV? The Internet? Talk? What else? What will I give up in order to create spaces for true nourishment? |
| Avarice | What are the signs of this? Excessive hours of work or shopping? Dishonest practices? Accumulation of unnecessary possessions? What will I give up in order to create spaces? What alms or actions can I give to others? |
| Rage | What are the signs of my over-controlling ego? Temper? Abusive language or actions? Worry? Violence? Abortion? Misrepresentation of others? How will I let God meet my true emotional needs? What acts of patience and kindness will I perform? |
| Self-pity | Am I complaining, inward-looking? Thoughtless towards others? What actions will I take to look to the needs of others or to promote justice? |
| Lust | What cravings that do not bring wholeness to me and to others do I indulge in with my thoughts, eyes, or actions? How have I abused my bodily organs? What things that I crave for shall I abstain from in order to gain self-mastery? |
| Laziness | What duties do I neglect, whether in the family or household, in work, in study or recreation, in friendships and society? What are the priorities I must take action on? |
| Vanity | In what ways am I promoting myself at the expense of others? How am I failing to reflect the unity of the Trinity in the way I relate to others? What should I stop doing? What acts of apology and reconciliation can I make? |
| Pride | Who do I envy, avoid or defame? Which rightful authorities do I disregard? What acts of service can I make? |

Read Psalm 119

*From Prayer Rhythms
By R Simpson*

I picked up this Self Examination leaflet while visiting a church on holiday. Now I use it in the morning as part of my "quiet time". I daily choose one topic to think about and hope others might find this useful too.

Mairi Nicolson

It's Friday, But Sunday's Coming!

Abridged from 'It's Friday but Sunday's comin'' by Tony Campolo. Word Books, 1985

Tony Campolo, Baptist pastor, sociologist and former spiritual adviser to the Whitehouse, writes –

"One Good Friday there were seven of us students preaching one after the other. When it was my turn to preach, I rolled into high gear, and I want to tell you I was good. The more I preached the more the people in that congregation got 'turned on', the better I got, I got better and better... I was absolutely thrilled to hear the hallelujahs and the cries of joy that broke loose throughout the place. I sat down next to my pastor [an African American] and he looked at me with a smile...

"You did all right, boy!" he said. I turned to him and asked, "Pastor, are you going to be able to top that?" The old man smiled at me and said, "Son, you just sit back, 'cause this old man is going to do you in!"

I didn't figure that anyone could have beaten me that day. I had been so good... But the old man got up, and, I have to admit, he did. The amazing thing was that he did it with the use of one line. For an hour and a half he preached one line over and over again. For an hour and a half he stood that crowd on its ear with just one line. That line was "It's Friday but Sunday's comin'!"

That statement may not blow you away but you should have heard him do it. He started his sermon real softly by saying "It was Friday; it was Friday, and my Jesus was dead on the tree. But that was Friday, and Sunday's comin'!"

One of the deacons yelled, "Preach, brother, preach!"

It was all the encouragement he needed. He came on louder as he said. "It was Friday and Mary was cryin' her eyes out. The disciples were running in every direction,

like sheep without a shepherd but that was Friday, and Sunday's comin'!"

People in the congregation were beginning to pick up the message. The women were waving their hands in the air ... some of the men were yelling "Keep going! Keep going!"

The preacher kept going. He picked up the volume still more and shouted, "It was Friday. The cynics were lookin' at the world and sayin' 'As things have been so shall they be. You can't change anything in this world; you can't change anything' But those cynics didn't know that it was only Friday. Sunday's comin'!"

"It was Friday! And on Friday, those forces that oppress the poor and make the poor to suffer were in control. But that was Friday! Sunday's comin'!"

"It was Friday and on Friday Pilate thought he had washed his hands of a lot of trouble. The Pharisees were struttin' around, laughin' and pokin' each other in the ribs. They thought they were back in charge of things but they didn't know it was only Friday! Sunday's comin'."

He kept on working that one phrase for half an hour, then an hour, then an hour and a quarter, then an hour and a half. Over and over he came at us, "It's Friday but Sunday's comin'! It's Friday but Sunday's comin'!"

By the time he came to the end of the message, I was exhausted. He had me and everyone else so worked up that I don't think any of us could have stood it much longer. At the end of his message, he just yelled at the top of his voice "IT'S FRIDAY!" and all 500 in the church yelled back "SUNDAY'S COMIN'!"

That's the Good News. That's the word the world is waiting to hear."

Sunday's Coming! (Martyn Joseph, a Welsh singer songwriter, took this theme too and wrote a song about the hope of Easter Sunday coming after Good Friday)

War makers have their heyday on Friday
Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah
Peaceful voices crying mayday on Friday
Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah
Fear is everywhere, hope is dying
Bombs are ready while the planes are flying
Sunday's coming

Pride and prejudice do the dance of the hour
Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah
Seems like the bad guys hold the places of power
Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah
Hate is everywhere and love is dying
People are crying while their leaders are lying
Sunday's coming

Open up your Sunday eyes
And look with wonder and surprise
You'll see the truth, you'll see the lies

Because Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
Well, I'm sure that Sunday's coming
Well, I know it's coming, hey
The wheel of fortune turns and the rich get their favours
Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah
The poor and hungry go on looking for a saviour
Oh yeah, yeah yeah yeah
Prophet calls for justice, he ends up dying
But you can't silence truth 'cause it will keep on crying
Sunday's coming, Sunday's coming, hey

Open up your Sunday eyes
And look with wonder and surprise, yeah
You'll see the truth, you'll see the lies

Because Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
Well, I know that Sunday's coming, yes
Well, I believe it's coming
Oh, Sunday's coming
Sunday is coming
Sunday
Sunday, Sunday, Sunday's coming

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,
Oh yeah (Oh, sing), yeah yeah yeah
Prophet calls for justice, he ends up dying
But you can't silence truth 'cause it'll keep on crying
Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
You know it's coming
Sunday
Sunday's coming

You know it's coming
Yeah, I know, I know
That Sunday morning will arrive
I wipe the tears straight from my eyes
I know Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
And I couldn't stand another day
If I didn't know it wasn't on its way
Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
Yeah Ooh
Sunday's coming
I know it's coming (Sunday's coming)
'Cause I have a dream (Sunday's coming)
It's not so far away (Sunday's coming)
'Cause it seems (Sunday's coming)
Sunday's coming (Sunday's coming)
Ooh (Sunday's coming)
Sunday's coming (Sunday's coming)
Hang on there, child (Sunday's coming)
I know, I know (Sunday's coming)
That Sunday morning will arrive (Sunday's coming)
I wipe the tears straight from my eyes
Sunday's coming
And I know, know, know, know, know
Sunday is coming (Sunday's coming)
Sunday (Sunday's coming)
Sunday's coming (Sunday's coming)
I believe it's coming (Sunday's coming), hey, hey
It's coming
That's news
Fly high
Sunday's coming
It will arrive
So wipe those tears
From your eyes, eyes
Sunday's coming
Sunday's coming
It's coming, I know
'Cause I'm standing on that promised land
Sunday will arrive
Sunday

Submitted by Donna McEwan

ISRAEL

The primary source for the history of ancient Israel is the Bible. The Bible gives a great deal of space to history compared to other historical books. The biographers of the bible were not just interested in the recital of facts but were concerned about the moral and theological implications of events.

The book of Genesis traces Israelite origins back to Abraham and particularly to his grandson Jacob, who was also called Israel, and his twelve sons, the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is important to reflect that these accounts in Genesis are not just historical but more importantly deal with persons and families and not primarily about the nation.

The book of Exodus opens with the Hebrews as unorganized slaves in Egypt. With the Exodus, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites became a nation and entered a 'progressive' period which is recorded in the Bible.

After the death of King Solomon, around 930 BC, the 10 tribes formed the independent Kingdom of Israel in the North and the two remaining tribes, Judah and Benjamin, set up the Kingdom of Judah in the South. This split was prophesied in 1 Kings 11 because of Solomon's sin.

In 722BC, the 10 Northern tribes i.e. Israel, were attacked and taken into captivity by Assyria.

The name Israel disappeared as a geographical entity until 14 May 1948 when the state of Israel was established, marking the end of a time of British rule in Palestine.

What is the importance of Israel? We hear about its history in church, it is never out of the news, or indeed do we get confused by the politics of this small state? As followers of Christ, we look to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbour as ourselves. Through these commandments we look to that great promise of salvation. That promise was first made to the people of Israel. If we look through Romans 11, we see though Israel as a nation rejected Christ, a remnant of Jewish Christians remained by God's grace. God indeed has hardened the rest in their unbelief until enough Gentiles had come to him through Christ.

It is important that we support and bless Israel. We can look no further than Genesis 12 v 2 and 3 where we have these words:-

'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you'.

The history of Israel is very complex, politics at present are hard to understand and indeed some actions taken are difficult for us to accept. When we go through periods of uncertainty, periods we find challenging it is important to clasp our hands and make it a matter of prayer. We long for a time of peace and stability. These are God's chosen people and we long for their rightful place in a peaceful world.

I was recently visiting a church in Appin and the minister talked about the following note 'A note on the use of Israel in the Liturgy', which his daughter had forwarded to him. I thought it was worth sharing with you.

May you all have a blessed Easter.
Roddy

A Note on the Use of Israel in the Liturgy

The name "Israel" first emerged as a name for the Holy Land under the early kings—Saul, David, and Solomon. However, following Solomon's death in 931 BC, the land was divided into two: the northern kingdom was called Israel, with its capital at Samaria. This northern kingdom was conquered and disappeared in 722 BC under Assyrian attack, and the name "Israel" did not reappear as a geographical entity until the modern state of Israel was established in AD 1948.

However, theologically, the name "Israel" has never disappeared. It is rooted in the personal and covenantal story of God's relationship with His people. After Jacob wrestled with the angel, he was given the name "Israel," which means "God perseveres." This name was passed on to the twelve tribes, who are descended from Jacob's sons and who are the embodiment of Israel. Even after the northern kingdom of Israel was lost, the identity of Israel continues in the Jewish diaspora.

When we encounter the term "Israel" during Advent and Christmas, it is not referring to a long-gone territory, but rather to the ongoing covenant God established with His people—first the Jews, and ultimately including Gentiles as well. "Israel" in liturgical and scriptural contexts signifies the community of God's people. It represents the enduring promises God made to God's people, a covenant that remains and continues to unfold through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when we speak of "Israel" in church, we are not referring to the modern nation-state but to the spiritual heritage and theological significance of God's people. It invites us to reflect on God's covenantal love, the hope of salvation, and our place in the larger story of redemption.

SOME MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS ON LIFE...

People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing. - *Will Rogers*

Material abundance without character is the surest way to destruction. - *Thomas Jefferson*

People will not care what you know until they know that you care. - *Anon*

How amazing it is that we have so few tears these days when there is so much to weep about! - *Isaac Ababio*

Wars to end wars are an illusion. Wars, more than any other form of human activity, create the conditions which breed more war. - *John Foster Dulles*

Four freedoms: The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want.... everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear... anywhere in the world. – *Franklin D Roosevelt*

At the rate that things are changing, anyone nostalgic for the 'good old days' is yearning for last week. - *Anon*

Solutions to the Puzzles on Page 27

C	O	S	M	I	C		T	H	O	M	A	S
L		C		S				O		O		P
I	N	H	I	S		D	E	L	A	I	A	H
F		O		U		E		Y		S		E
F	A	L	W	E	L			W	A	T	E	R
S		A				I		A				E
		R	E	C	O	V	E	R	E	D		
P				A		E				E		S
S	I	D	O	N		R	A	D	I	A	N	T
Y		A		D		E		E		C		O
C	E	N	T	A	U	R		B	R	O	I	L
H		C		C				A		N		E
E	L	E	V	E	N			P	R	I	S	O
												N

9	6	4	1	5	7	2	3	8
3	7	1	2	8	6	4	5	9
2	8	5	3	9	4	1	7	6
1	5	8	4	6	2	3	9	7
4	9	3	8	7	1	5	6	2
6	2	7	5	3	9	8	1	4
8	3	6	9	2	5	7	4	1
5	1	9	7	4	8	6	2	3
7	4	2	6	1	3	9	8	5

ARTIFICIAL OPPONENTS ?

Wordles and Quordles and Octordles too,
Who can be bored with so much to do?
Puzzles online, and less now in print
Is it surprising that I'm starting to squint?

Crosswords and lost words in a grid you must find
Sudoku, Kakuro for the numerate mind,
Backgammon or chess, if that is your sport
And card games of every conceivable sort!

Deep in my cupboard is a box full of games
And a beautiful chess set, abandoned – a shame!
But do you remember (long ago as it seems),
When we played games with people,
and not these machines?

By Nigel Beeton

A PRAYER FOR APRIL 2025

Living Lord Jesus, We, your Easter People of today, thank You for the Easter People of the Gospel accounts.

For the women, who loved You so much that they went to the tomb, early in the morning, while it was still dark. Thank you especially for Mary, who wept, then rejoiced, then ran to tell the others, "I have seen the Lord!"

Thank you for Thomas, who doubted, then devoted his life to You, his Lord and his God; for the disciples who ate breakfast on the beach with You; for Peter, who was forgiven and re-commissioned by You.

Thank You for them and Your witnesses through all generations. Thank you for Your true and living written Word, proclaiming You, our true and living Lord, who lived and died and rose again to offer us forgiveness and life.

Thank you, Lord that because You live, we have hope and assurance, whatever challenges the world might bring.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Hallelujah!

By Daphne Kitching

AND FINALLY

AN AFTER-EASTER PRAYER

Don't leave our Lord amidst the lilies
Within a hallowed sphere
Don't praise Him only in your churches
In Easter hymn and prayer...

Keep Him beside you through
The business of ordinary days,
In the common place encounters
Along the humdrum ways.

Our Master told us very simply
What He would have us do....
He taught: "Love one another
Even as I love you."

By Elsie Campbell

