

Martin Way Methodist Church

Newsletter – November 2004

Minister – Rev John Nyota

MINISTER'S LETTER

Jambo rafikis

It is that time of the year when we take stock of the days past, weeks and months. As a church we have been through an awful lot. We remember with nostalgia some saints who have passed on leaving us the legacy to remain faithful to Christ. How about those celebratory moments like Godspell and the 70th anniversary? Lest we forget, as a church we have worked out our direction together promising to work towards enhanced personal spirituality, to do all we can to be a friend to someone other than our current friends in church, to be all inclusive in the church and to tell others about Christ. We call this SOFA. And with you I say "I DO WITH GOD'S HELP".

But it has not been the same outside there, has it? I do not know about you but so many things have happened in the world to leave me wanting to check the graph of my faith. I still have questions as to why Ken Bigley had to die in a war that seems senseless. I still cannot understand how Kerry lost to Bush at a time when it seemed to many that Kerry had a global outlook while Bush looks internally to the all-powerful America to fix the ills of the dark world. So where is God in all this? I got chatting with one Christian about this when he said, "Come on padre, bring on Christmas, we need some good news!". Some good news? Christmas is about Christ the saviour of the world. He brings all the good news there has been, is or ever will be.- the only good news that lasts for ever.

Forget all the pessimism and cynicism around you. Christianity still makes sense! At least the last time I checked it did. That is the message we get from the word of God. And if you are looking for something more radical, I mean more revolutionary, the God we believe in, as Christians, is the only one who never becomes meaningless. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His word is eternally trustworthy. All of us who have grown up in this culture know how challenged Christian virtues are by those in the

scientific world. The psalmist (119) explains that he has vigorously engaged his mind to it, meditated on it day and night, analysed the data and submits the following:-

- Metaphysically Christianity is solid, objective, dependable and real.

Vs 96 we read, "To all perfection I see a limit but your word is boundless". It has an enduring quality. It has come to us through many people and different historical times so as to be enduring yet always sharp and relevant, transcending times and places.

- Ethically, Christianity gives us an objective nature to morality and righteousness.

God's word is the norm, the moral standard (measure) by which our opinions and actions are to be judged. And it is not abstract. God chose to speak to a specific people, in a specific land with a specific culture at a specific time. By picking the Israelites, he set a paradigm for his righteousness that shows us what he wants, his priorities and values.

- Epistemologically, Christianity is real and the God it proclaims is real.

He is the creator of human beings, me and you, and the earth which we can touch and feel and live in. Truth is not about accuracy but reality. Thus far therefore we can trust in it and rely on it as ultimate in what it refers to.

- Emotionally Christianity is a joyful act.

For one reason did God create man, to have fellowship with him. Obeying him is freedom par excellence. The psalmist has fallen in love and can do anything happily that his lover asks of him.

- Behaviourally, Christianity is doable!

The psalmist has decided to live Christianity. He is not going to shout from the rooftops but is going to let his whole life be dominated by this word. He is wholeheartedly committed to his new lover.

Why is it so important to restate this at this particular time? We are living at an age in history popularly known as post-modernity. It is an age where nothing is true and everything is relative. After the age of

modernity where science and technology failed in eliminating all the problems and managing the world, a new fallacy has been born that you let me stay with my opinion and I respect yours provided you do not attempt to convert me to your own. It is a merry-go-round era: sample every culture but do not expect anything, religion included, to give you certainty; a worldwide view that asserts there is really no reality only image (cf. Ginger Spice), no morality only opinion, no eternity only the circus of the present. How deceived! It is an attempt to live on the staircase. Unfortunately Christians are being sucked into this mode in their millions.

I hate fundamentalism and would never want to be counted as one. Any claims that there should be no rapprochement with other religions is unchristian to say the least. Nevertheless the other extreme that moves to claim that Our God is anywhere equal or one with the rest is something I am worried about. It is that which has made Christians lose their stamp and glamour. In their thinking that watering the truth would make them more fashionable they have lost any standing. Give me back that colourful old religion. Now didn't I get carried away by that conversation? May the Lord help us to have the fullest joy this Christmas, a joy that stays with us individually as we go on working out our faith. And may there be cause to celebrate in the new year as we move out to become a SOFA church. Amen!

John

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH - DECEMBER

I heard on the "Today" programme an interview with Bob Geldorf about the twentieth anniversary of his Live Aid effort to help the starving in Africa. It was said that the song "Do they know it's Christmas?" which was top of the charts then, is being revised this year to be released again in December. Perhaps a more appropriate question would be, "Do they know what Christmas is really about?" It may well be that some people would be quite surprised to discover that Christmas has any association with religion. To confuse things even more, hot cross buns are being sold at the same time as mince pies. No doubt Easter eggs will be around soon! Our local Safeways started selling Christmas goods at the end of August, but I'd been receiving Christmas catalogues a couple of months before

that. What a contrast to my young days when Christmas preparations did not begin until December and the Christmas holiday consisted of Christmas Day and Boxing Day - then straight back to work. There was no talk of stress in those days!

But despite the changes and however commercialised Christmas may become, Jesus will never be completely excluded.

If you strain your ears you can catch the sound of sleigh bells; and if you have sensitive hearing, you may even catch the sound of church bells. And if the ears of your spirit are tuned correctly, you may even hear the infant cry of a baby in a manger.

What is the real meaning of Christmas? God became one of us so that we might find the way to become something like him.

Bill Cox

The smoother the water the clearer the reflection - and that's our life in Jesus

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SW DISTRICT

October 2004

Dear Friends,

As I write the days are drawing in and the autumn leaves are falling. The year is coming towards its end. In the Church's calendar, there are a number of significant commemorations. 31 October is for many Protestant churches observed as 'Reformation Sunday' - commemorating the date in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg and sparked the movement for the reform of the mediaeval Church. On 1 November we celebrate All Saints' Day and on 2 November All Souls' Day. Quite a number of churches hold services around this time, to which they invite those whose loved ones have died during the previous year to join in a time of worship, reflection and commemoration.

All Souls' Day offers an opportunity to remember that 'we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses', and that the saints are real women and men of every age in whose lives we can glimpse heaven in our midst. And whatever reservations some of us may have about 'praying for the dead',

All Souls' Day allows many people to do justice to their feelings of loss for those they have loved and what is often the ongoing work of grieving. Even that great Puritan divine, Richard Baxter, can write - and we can sing:

As for my friends, they are not lost;
The several vessels of thy fleet,
Though parted now, by tempests tossed,
Shall safely in the haven meet.

(Hymns and Psalms, 495)

There is a further secular echo of this theme later in November when we observe Remembrance Sunday. And, as the author of the Letter to Hebrews writes, I could go on. On 27 January, we now have Holocaust Memorial Day; and the events of 11 September 2001 have now evolved a new commemoration of their own.

All this intrigues me. In Victorian times, death was ever present, and extravagant and very public ceremonies surrounded it. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have a very different attitude. It is not that our feelings of grief are any less raw and real; but they have become less public and shared. Perhaps we have privatised death, as we have privatised so much else. It is as though the British disease is terminal embarrassment. People from other cultures and countries can offer us much here in terms of communal solidarity and what it means to affirm the harsh realities of death in the midst of life. Central to this is our understanding of hope.

Over the last few years Christian Aid has adopted the slogan 'We believe in life before death' in its advertising and publicity. It is a neat reversal of what non-Christians would expect as a fundamental Christian claim: that we believe in a life after death. Such faith is rooted in what we know of the loving purposes of God through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, and how the encounter with the risen Christ became the driving force galvanizing those earliest Christian communities in worship, mission and service. This restless, surging power of God touches all of life. This means for me that grace and the celebration of life, rather than dread and the fear of death, become the motivators of life and action. The Christian message does not warn people how to be saved out of this wicked world; it invites them to feel at home in it, to

reverence it, and to practise the disciplines of sharing its good things with others, particularly with the poor of the earth.

A theology of death, which postpones hope to the epilogue, has always been a tool in the hands of the powerful to make us think less of this vale of tears. Why bother to pray and struggle for change, they say, when your reward is to be discovered elsewhere? But a theology of life claims our attention in the here and now in the light of God's call to us to live as God's grateful people - with joy and hope and love for the world and our place in it. A few words of the American poet Walt Whitman say it in a nutshell:

This is what you should do:
Love the earth and sun and animals,
despise riches, give alms to everyone who asks;
stand up for the stupid and crazy;
devote your income and labour to others, hate tyrants;
argue not concerning God,
have patience and indulgence towards the people,
re-examine all you have been told in school or church or any book,
dismiss what insults your very soul,
and your flesh shall become a great poem.

With best wishes,

Yours ever

John Swarbrick

THE TUG OF GOD

There's a lovely little story about a boy who bought himself a kite for his birthday. He'd got his birthday money and went running to the shop to buy this big red kite he'd had his eye on for some time. The happiest boy in the world, he hurried off to the park to try it out. The wind was very strong that day, and he let out some string, and a little more string, and a little more string, until the kite was so high and so far away you couldn't even see it any more. When you looked at the boy, all you could see was a very happy child running along with some string in his hand.

A very respectable and rational-looking man in a business suit was walking past and asked what the boy was doing. "I'm flying a kite", said the boy.

"Flying a kite?" replied the man, "I don't see a kite and you don't see a kite. How do you know there's a kite?". The little boy looked at the man very sternly. "I know there's a kite, sir, because I can feel the tug!"

The same could be said of belief in God. There are those who would say you can't see him: how do you know there is a God. What better reply than, we know there's a God because we can feel the tug.

But how often we lose the wonder of the tug in the busyness of our everyday lives. Sometimes it's as if we've even dropped the string. As we get close to Christmas life can become even more frantic and the time of year when we should be especially thinking of God and celebrating his love for us becomes the very time he gets pushed further away. God is always trying to draw us to himself, gently tugging at our lives, letting us know he's there. How important it is that we make space in our busy lives to feel that pull, to sense the joy and wonder of it.

*Rev Stephen Bailey
"Buckland Parish Magazine" December 2003*

A little fellow in a slum in Bujumbura, Burundi was being teased by another boy. "If God loves you, why doesn't he take care of you? Why doesn't God tell someone to bring you shoes and a warm coat and better food?" The little boy thought for a moment. Then, with tears starting in his eyes, he said "I guess He does tell somebody, but somebody forgets"

Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable

David Augsburg

JUST A LITTLE RED TAPE

The Lord came to Noah, in Canada, in the year 2003. Earth was wicked and overpopulated. The Lord instructed Noah to build another Ark and save two of every living thing along with a few good humans. "Here's the blueprint," said the Lord. "Hurry - in six months I start the unending rain for 40 days and 40 nights".

Six months later the rain started. The Lord looked down and saw Noah weeping in his flooded yard - and no Ark. "Noah", He roared, "Where is the Ark?" "Forgive me, Lord," begged Noah. "Things have changed, I

needed a building permit. I have been arguing with the inspector about the need for a sprinkler system. My neighbours claim that I have violated the neighbourhood zoning laws by building the Ark in my yard and the height limitation being exceeded. We had to go to the Development Appeal Board for a decision, then Transport Canada and the Department of Highways and Hydro wanted a bond posted for the future costs of moving power, trolley and other over-head obstructions, to clear the passage for the Ark's move to the sea. I argued the sea would be coming to us, but they would hear nothing of this,"

"Getting the wood was another problem. There's a ban on cutting local trees in order to save the spotted owl. I tried to convince the environmentalists that I needed the wood to save the owls. No go! I gathered the animals, but then I got sued by an animals rights group. They insisted that I was confining wild animals against their will. As well, they argued the accommodation was too restrictive and it was cruel and inhumane to put so many animals in so confined a space.."

Environment Canada decided that I could not build the Ark without filing an environmental impact statement on your proposed flood. I'm still trying to resolve a complaint with the Human Rights Commission on how many minorities I'm supposed to hire for my building crew. The trades union wants me to hire only Union trades-people with Ark building experience. To make matters worse, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency seized all my assets, claiming I'm trying to leave the country illegally as well as with endangered species. So forgive me, Lord, but it would take at least ten years to finish this Ark".

Suddenly the skies cleared and the sun began to shine. A rainbow stretched across the sky. Noah looked up in wonder. "You mean you're not going to destroy the world?" he asked. "No", said the Lord. "Your government beat me to it"

Robert Haigh

"St. Cuthbert, Wells parish magazine" September 2003

Evangelism as listening is incredibly important in this day and age.

Martin Cavender

THE DIFFERENCE

I got up early one morning
and rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish
that I didn't have time to pray.
Problems just tumbled about me,
and heavier came each task.
"Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered.
He answered, "You didn't ask."
I wanted to see joy and beauty,
but the the day toiled on, grey and bleak.
I wondered why God didn't show me.
He said, "But you didn't seek."
I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock.
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child you didn't knock."
I woke up early this morning,
and paused before entering the day,
I had so much to accomplish
that I had to take time to pray.

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless you with Discomfort...

At easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships

May God Bless you with Anger...

At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with Tears...

To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their
pain into joy

And may God bless you with enough Foolishness...

To believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can
Do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen

QUOTES FROM OUR ARCHIVES - DECEMBER/JANUARY

17 January 1935 Envelope system: Mr Lawrence proposed and Mr Tigg seconded that the Envelope System of contributing to Church funds should be adopted

20 January 1936 Sunday School had commenced 1935 with 84 scholars; 74 joined and 44 left, making total for 1936 114; staff 27; cradle roll 19

18 January 1937 21 enrolled Guides: 1000 eggs were collected for local hospitals and 8 large stockings were made and filled for the poor children in the East End; 18 enrolled Brownies; 9 Scouts, 30 Cubs and 2 Tenderpads

2 December 1946 Mr Gostelow had approached the minister at St. James with a view to holding a United Service on Good Friday and had received a favourable reply. He suggested that the Society Stewards should endeavour to seek the cooperation of the Baptist ministers in this respect

12 December 1949 the Sunday School was purchasing a Pullin Film Strip projector and screen £37-15-0.

A total of 419 hours had been worked by Mr Mead on the redecoration of the rooms and the outside of the church, giving an amount of £41-18-0. It was agreed to increase the Christmas box from £1 to £2-10-0 in appreciation of his work

30 January 1950 Now the debt on the present building had been cleared, it was proposed to start an Extension Fund.

4 December 1957 agreed that in future the monthly Church Newsletter should be distributed free of charge and that each member of the Leaders' Meeting should pay one shilling per month to cover the cost of its production

11 December 1957 Mr Inman reported that he had received an offer through Mr Hibberd for a Display of Dancing to be given by the pupils of Mrs Phyllis Atkins in aid of our Building Fund

1 January 1959 the organ builder was to start installing the new organ on 5 January

20 January 1964 The choir had 33 members, mostly ladies; they had given three concerts - a performance of "Merrie England", a Gilbert and Sullivan evening and a Sacred Concert in November which raised over £20 for the Ruxley Fund.

TRUE SPORTSMANSHIP

A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry.

The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back, then they all turned round and went back. Every one of them.

One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line.

Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down we know this one thing: that matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course.

Evesham News July 2002

PASTORAL TRAINING COURSE

6 NOVEMBER LED BY JOHN VANEK

The theme "Could you be loved?" roused much discussion by members from all our circuit churches on such aspects as defining ourselves as 'Christian', owning up to the challenge of witnessing our faith in a secular society and of daring to venture outside our comfort zones.

After a break we divided into two groups to discuss ways of building pastoral bridges. There was a strong feel that as churches we need better media profile, that we should not be watering down our vision but communicating what we are about. Building bridges involves taking risks and also looking at 'us-ward' in a healthy way.

As a summing up and sharing there was a keen emphasis on the need for prayer and teaching, generally to build ourselves up spiritually and affirm each other in order to feed the human resource, so that we in turn can give of ourselves in the often demanding caring role. It is always reassuring to hear how members of other churches experience the same difficulties i.e. overload, physical and mental stress, not enough willing people and yet the needs remain the same. Refreshing also to hear that prayer, teaching and bible study are the areas that need building up.

Grateful thanks to John for conducting a stimulating Saturday workshop. Future training sessions will be open to all who are interested in the pastoral/caring aspect of church membership.

Gwen Wildman

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH - JANUARY 2005

One day ends and another begins; one week ends and another begins; one month ends and another begins; one year ends and another begins. Time rolls on relentlessly. Five years ago we were celebrating both the beginning of a new century and a new millennium. We were embarking on a new, exciting era, the twenty-first century, a new golden age! Or so it appeared, but what a mess we've made of the first four years of it.

I thought that the seemingly speedy passage of time was a sign of my years, but recently more and more younger people have been saying that time passes very quickly. No sooner have we wished each other a Happy New Year than it seems time to wish each other a Happy Christmas again.

But think about your life; it's much like time - a series of beginnings and endings. We start off at home being cared for by our parents; then comes school followed by employment. We leave home and get married. Then comes the phase of parenthood and eventual retirement and so on. Of course there are many stages in between, but all the way through our lives, one stage ends and the next begins. That is true for all of us. Make the most of each day God gives you. With each new beginning come new opportunities. May the coming year be a fruitful and fulfilling one for you however old or young you may be. May you have a year of true, inward happiness and may God's love fill your heart to overflowing.

Bill Cox

CHURCH DIARY FOR DECEMBER

Wed	1	07.45 pm	Midways (Joanna Bogle - Caroline Chisholm - a forgotten heroine)
Sun	5	10.30 am	Toy and Gift Service led by Rev John Nyota
		6.30 pm	Communion Service led by Rev Stuart Veitch
Mon	6	2.45 pm	Fellowship
Tue	7	10.00 am	Coffee and Chat
		7.30 pm	Men's Supper Club (Annual Social)
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Fri	10	12.30 pm	Lunch Club (Christmas Dinner)
Sun	12	10.30 am	Morning Service led by Brenda Cannon
Mon	13	2.45 pm	Fellowship
Tue	14	10-12 am	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Wed	15	7.45 pm	Midways (Christmas Meal)
Thu	16	2.00 pm	Seekers' Group
Sun	19	10.30 am	Carol Service led by Rev John Nyota
		8.00 pm	SIGMA Christmas presentation
Mon	20	2.45 pm	Fellowship
Tue	21	10-12 am	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Fri	24	5.00 pm	Christingle Service
		11.30 pm	Midnight Communion Service
	25	10.30 am	Christmas Day Service
Sun	26	10.30 am	Morning Service led by Rev John Nyota

CHURCH DIARY FOR JANUARY

Sun	2	10.30 am	Covenant Service
Tue	4	10.00 pm	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Thu	6	2.00 pm	Seekers' Group
Fri	7	12.30 pm	Lunch Club
Sun	9	10.30 am	Morning Service
Tue	11	10-12 pm	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Wed	12	7.45 pm	Midways (Ted Ashwood - a musical evening)
Sun	16	10.30 am	Morning Service
Tue	18	10-12 pm	Coffee and Chat
		7.30 pm	Men's Supper Club
			Geraldine Ellis - The Three Fs
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Thu	20	2.00 pm	Seekers' Group
Fri	21	12.30 pm	Lunch Club
Sun	23	10.30 am	Morning Service
Tue	25	10-12 pm	Coffee and Chat
		8.00 pm	Time for Prayer
Wed	26	7.45 pm	Midways (Members' evening - QUIZ)
Sun	30	10.30 am	Morning Service