



## Obedience and Perseverance

John 14: 15 – 21 gave up on Max.

I think we can all admit that obedience is difficult. It's

difficult to learn, difficult to teach, and it's a difficult process to see play out in the lives of others around us. It's not something we're good at, or are hard-wired for, or quite frankly it's not something we enjoy!

There was a young couple named John and Sarah who decided to adopt a cute little puppy called Max. They were overjoyed to have a new furry addition to their family, and they were determined to raise him to be a perfect companion. However, training Max turned out to be more difficult than they anticipated - he was full of energy and always seemed to be getting into trouble; he would chew on furniture, jump on guests, and bark incessantly. Despite their best efforts, John and Sarah struggled to get him to behave. They researched different training techniques and tried everything from positive reinforcement to obedience classes. But no matter what they did, Max just wouldn't listen - he would often ignore commands or do the opposite of what he was told. John and Sarah became frustrated and overwhelmed. They started to wonder if they had made a mistake in adopting a puppy at all. But deep down, they knew they loved Max and were determined to keep trying. They decided to hire a professional dog trainer, hoping that someone with more experience would be able to get through to Max. The trainer worked with Max for weeks, and while there were some improvements, he still struggled with obedience. Finally, after months of hard work, Max began to show signs of improvement. He stopped chewing on furniture and would sit and stay on command. John and Sarah were overjoyed with his progress. Training a puppy to be obedient was much harder than they ever imagined, but they never

We resonate with this story on some level because we can identify with the people in the story. We resonate with the difficulty of training. We know how it feels to come to the end of our own resources and to reach out for help. We also know how rewarding it is when our hard work and dedication pays off. And as we see in this passage from John, there are several parallel lessons to be learned as we follow Christ and learn more about the unfailing love of the Father for his children. Love is a funny thing, isn't it? It's a complex and multifaceted concept that can mean different things to different people, and it can be challenging to define it in a single sentence or statement. However, at its core, love is an intense feeling of affection, attachment, and care towards someone or something. John and Sarah loved their puppy, they wanted to give him the best life possible, which included rules to follow. In a similar way, we know that God loves his children and wants the best for all of us. He's given us commands to follow and principles to live by. He even loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, and through him, eternal life.

*Loving Jesus means obeying his commands (15).*

This passage begins with one of the more difficult verses in the New Testament. In this verse, Jesus reiterates that loving him equates to listening to him. IF you love me, THEN you'll listen and obey. You'll do what I've asked, you'll follow the path, and you'll follow the path even when it gets difficult, or you feel lost. But if we're honest there are times when we don't WANT to obey. We don't WANT to stay on the path of Christ. We want to entertain other desires and interests. But Jesus reminds us today that IF we love him, really love him, then we will listen to him. But what about the difficulty? What about the fact that my fleshly desires and inclinations don't line up with the self-giving love of Christ? The amazing

part about this is that Jesus has an answer for our difficulty as well, which is that:

*The Holy Spirit helps us love and obey Jesus (16 & 17).*

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with his disciples, to help and guide them. He calls him "The Spirit of Truth." The Holy Spirit empowers us to love and obey Jesus, giving us the strength and wisdom that we need to follow his teachings. The Spirit helps us to discern between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. And, through the Holy Spirit, we can experience a deeper intimacy with Jesus and a greater ability to live out his commands. The Spirit is an amazing gift to us. It's something we often forget about as we hurry through our lives from one problem to another. But think about this, the Spirit is with us, AND IN US. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers, and that through the him believers are connected to God and empowered to live a life that honours him. These verses also remind us that we are not alone and that through the Spirit we can share the self-giving, sacrificial love shared by the Father and the Son. And finally, we know that:

*The Father loves those who love and obey his Son (18 – 21).*

Jesus promised that he would not leave his disciples as orphans but will come to them. They were and we are part of a larger family when they are part of Christ, loved by Christ and through Christ. What an amazing thing to think about. We are not alone. God will never leave nor forsake us. He is with us always. This truth is a foundational and fundamental reality that we live in as Christians. Jesus' love for us is the foundation of our love for him (1 John 4:19) - we can love him because he first loved us. It is because of this love that we can experience the redemptive and eternal love of the Father as well.



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And as we experience and receive Jesus' love, we are empowered to love him in return and to share his love with others. This is our ultimate commission - this is the call on our lives - to love others as we have been loved and to invite everyone we can into this amazing gospel.

To sum this all up - those who keep the commands of Jesus, love Jesus and are therefore loved by the Father as well. The Father loves those who love and obey his Son. Loving Jesus

is not just an abstract concept - it is demonstrated through our obedience to his commandments and our perseverance in his service, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and rooted in his love for us. Remember this - we have been given an advocate and helper to assist us when things get difficult. Just like John and Sarah had to hire a professional dog trainer to help them with Max, it's okay for us to admit that we need help too. We need the Holy Spirit, we need each other, we need encouragement, we

need gratitude and praise. These things don't make us weak or deficient, they make us human. And God knew we'd need help. He knew we'd need one another. He knew we'd need Jesus.

May we all seek to love Jesus more deeply and to live out his teachings in our daily lives. As we do, we will experience the joy and peace that come from being in a loving relationship with him.

## IT'S ALL GOING ON IN THATTO HEATH!

### Fun Nite

On Thursday 20 July around 20 members of the Fellowship and their Friends and members of our community attended 'Fun Nite' in the Church



Centre. They played games, quizzes and competitions. A great evening, with lots of fellowship, friendship and fun.

### Flower Arranging with Sue

Following on from the successful Cake Decorating Evening it was back to 'Night School' again, this time for Flow-

er Arranging. On Tuesday 15 June around 30 members of the Fellowship and their Friends and members of our



community attended the demonstration in the Church Centre. Sue (retired Florist) who helps at our Weekly Luncheon Club led a Demonstration on how to create some beautiful arrangements with flowers. Then it was over to everyone else to make small arrangements of artificial flowers. Once again, another successful evening with lots of fellowship, friendship and fun.

### Annual Field Fay—Thatto Heath

On Saturday 1 July we held our Annual Field Day. The day did not start well with the sky overcast, the wind blowing and the odd spots of rain being felt but

by the time Parr Brass Band had struck up its first note the BBQ had been lit and the stalls all set out the Lord blessed us with his beautiful sunshine. It was a most enjoyable day, meeting up with the local churches, neighbours, local community and friends old and new.

An extremely tiring but very rewarding day!



## Further Thoughts on Windrush



In 2018, I was invited to a service commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Empire Windrush* arriving in London with people from the Caribbean who had been invited by the British Govern-

ment to help with postwar reconstruction. I subsequently shared some thoughts in the December 2018 issue of the *Connexion* magazine ('Two visits to London').

It is now 75 years since the *Empire Windrush's* arrival, and I was invited to a National Service of Thanksgiving at Southwark Cathedral in June. I very nearly didn't get there: having turned up at Manchester Piccadilly station in time to catch my train to London, I found that it had been cancelled because 'there were too many trains

needing maintenance'. Although there may have been spare trains around, the only train that could replace a Pendolino - was another Pendolino. Anything slower would have held up the traffic on the West Coast Main Line for the rest of the day ... but I digress. Anyway, I just managed to get to the church (sorry, Cathedral) on time, having to sneak past assembled Bishops and other dignitaries waiting to enter in solemn procession.

In my previous article, I suggested that the then Government's invitation to

Commonwealth citizens hadn't been sold to the public at large, resulting in widespread prejudice against the newcomers. Sadly, as I found out from some of the literature I received, the church was not immune from this. Time and again, black people were turned away from churches or told not to come back. Richard Reddie, the Director for Justice and Inclusion for CTBI, shared in the June edition of *Christianity* that his mother, who had been a card-carrying Baptist in Jamaica, chose to worship at a Methodist church in England but had been marginalised so that she was unable to use her God-given giftings in the UK. Born-again Christians, willing and able to work in their local churches, were prevented from doing so. Faced with such reactions, many in the black community started their own churches, first meeting in people's houses and in time building or purchasing their own premises. Had the church in general been more welcoming, the need for what we now call Black-majority churches might not have arisen, and the decline that the established denominations have seen over many decades might have been arrested.

Growing up in Gloucester, I was aware of the immigrant community although those who had settled in the city lived closer to the centre, whereas my parents had moved to a large council es-

tate on the outskirts. Consequently, I didn't see any black people at the local Baptist church, where I was sent to Sunday School, nor were there any at Northgate Methodist Church in the city centre where we travelled for evening worship. Whether any had tried – and failed – to gain acceptance, I can't say. Northgate Methodist, on a Sunday evening, was pretty empty, and presumably little better on a Sunday morning because the building would close in 1972, with the site being sold for a Tesco supermarket and the remaining congregation moving to a church-share with the local Anglicans. At least Barton Street Methodist Church, in an area where both Black and Asian immigrants settled, still exists, although I have no knowledge of its ethnic make-up, either in the late 1960s or today. That fellowship, like many others, would have needed to decide how to react to the newcomers.

Did the Independent Methodist churches do any better than the 'mainstream' denominations? John Dolan's history of the IM Connexion barely mentions the issue, except to comment that some of the town centre churches that closed in the 60s and 70s were in areas 'populated almost entirely by ethnic groups of other faiths'. That may have only partly been true: those of the Windrush Generation were predominantly Christian, and cities like Bristol

and Manchester had significant communities from the Caribbean. Some churches were definitely unwelcoming. One of my colleagues at Astley, who used to preach at churches in Greater Manchester, has told of one church – I'd better not reveal which one - which he felt was 'dying of respectability'. He related an incident where a man who 'felt he had to come to church' was rejected because he wouldn't leave a beer bottle outside. If it had opened its arms to newcomers – whether immigrants (assuming that there were some in the area) or UK unchurched - would it still be here today?

Immigration has been a sensitive issue in recent years, but it is likely that the UK will see an influx from both Hong Kong (due to the suppression of democracy there) and the Ukraine. The Government seems more welcoming to people from those places than those in other conflict zones. How will the church react? Will it make the same mistakes as it made 75 years ago, or will it welcome them as God would have us do? In Exodus 23:9, God told the Israelites, *'Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt'*. Do we need a similar reminder?

**Brian Rowney**

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## Healing Outreach at Kirkhall lane

I must say at the outset, the idea of holding such an event as this was not born from a church business meeting. Indeed, it is certainly not a list of good ideas that we are short of. No more than an awareness of resources, whether we possess them or not. The decision for this event was due to an inspired word of faith.

A brother from our Wigan house group friends had been witnessing to a man on Tesco's car park in Leigh. The man confided in him that he had cancer and then accepted the offer of prayer. After they had prayed, our friend declared that there was going to be a healing service at Kirkhall Lane in a few week's time. To which, the poor man was invited for further prayer. Later that day he phoned me and said, "Roger, I think I may have dropped you in it".

The folks from Wigan know us very well and have been at Kirkhall Lane to worship and testify with us many

times. Notwithstanding, they came over to help us remove some trees on the hottest day of this year. Even so, the invitation had just rolled off his lips, so to speak. For my response, two Scriptures came immediately to mind (2 Kings.5:7-8; Acts.16:9-10). I knew we should do this and phoned around the church members who all gave a resounding 'yes'.

The event took place on Saturday evening the 8<sup>th</sup> July and the worship area was fairly full with capacity for more. We had delivered just under 7,000 leaflets in the Leigh area along with some street witnessing before the event and my concern was of possible overcrowding.

God is in control and knows who He wants at any time and there were more than a few folks I had never seen before. Moreover, when the call to prayer was made, a steady stream of people came forward. By the end of the evening, there was hardly a soul

among them all who had not received prayer with the laying on of hands.

One of the reasons why we believe we were met with such blessing is that we did not import the services of a band, nor a specialist and neither did we succumb to the use of theatre or manipulation techniques. The whole thing was not typical of post modern expectations but was met, purely with the faith present in the Church. We also believe that to be absolutely honest, both with the Biblical Gospel and a presentation of ourselves as we are from week to week this led to a surprisingly blessed evening.

Afterwards folks enjoyed our hospitality and fellowship until late. Whilst some ministry is continuing, who knows what will come about as a result of those leaflets which have yet to find a bed of good soil?

**Roger Stone**

# Annual Meeting 2023

The 217th Annual Meeting of the Independent Methodist Connexion of Churches was held on Saturday July 29<sup>th</sup> hosted by New Silksworth.



On the Friday evening, New Silksworth invited us to join them for a time of fellowship led by professional singing duo Chris and Karen, followed by refreshments in the church hall. It was a joyous evening to follow musical worship and then renew acquaintances over a cup of tea and a piece of cake.



On Saturday morning we had a warm welcome as we arrived. Over 60 people attended the Annual Meeting, either in person or via zoom. Phil Oliver (New Silksworth) extended a sincere and warm welcome to all. After welcomes from Dorothy Kendrick

(Connexional President) and a time for worship, business began under the chairmanship of Len Ogilvie (Boldon). Notices of motion re Annual Fees and the venue for the 2024 Annual Meeting (Mercure Hotel, Haydock) were taken and approved at this point and Roger Stone (Kirkhall Lane, Leigh) was proposed as president-elect and approved.



A short presentation on the future of Independent Methodism was given by John Claydon and Lisa Green in the light of the recent Bible studies. The meeting then broke into small discussion groups to review questions prepared by John Claydon. Leading to healthy discussion on the issue we face today in church, this was a positive and interesting point of the day. Discussion on the proposed amendments to the Constitution took place and a vote was taken. The amendments were approved, these will be ratified at the 2024 Annual Meeting.

As we broke for lunch, to a wonderful buffet served by the members of New Silksworth, we took the opportunity for further fellowship, meeting old and new friends.



We started our afternoon session with a moving 'In Memoriam' led by Bill Hampson (Ecumenical Officer). Bill Hampson and Len Ogilvie performed a wonderful song, and we remembered all those we had lost over the last 12 months.

The afternoon seemed to pass quickly as we accepted reports and elected officer and representatives.

Light refreshments were served again once business had closed, and we could continue our fellowship once more over more tea and cake! A busy day but most enjoyable and worthwhile. Time to say our goodbyes and head for home.

A big thank you to New Silksworth for hosting and making us feel so welcome. Thank you for your friendship and to all those who made it to the 2023 Annual Meeting.

Please note: All I.M. Churches will receive copies of the minutes and accounts of the business via email once prepared. A full report of the meeting will be available in the next edition of the magazine.

**Norman Prescott**

## The Carib-Asian Food Shack

On a very hot Saturday evening In June Tony Argent invited people from outside of the church to a Carib-Asian cooking demonstration in the church hall by Sherrie Eugene-Hart and her husband Patrick Hart. Everyone enjoyed the aromas and the mouth watering food that they produced.

Patrick is a music producer and broadcaster and Sherri has enjoyed over 30 years in television. She started as a sign language interpreter for HTV and became news anchor later in her career. They now have a cookery show made in Bristol, which has been very successful.

Although Sherrie attends another church she has, from time to time, brought her children to join us at our morning services.

It was a lovely friendly evening and everyone enjoyed themselves and went home happy.

We thank God for this evening.

**Hazel Chapple**



## An Alternative Narrative

off your own conversation with God.

It has been a privilege to hang out with some of you online this past week at our conference, 'The Manna of Leadership'. One of the topics that formed part of our conversations was Sabbath. How in Exodus 16, Sabbath is a challenge to the scarcity mindset of Egypt; it was a sign that even in the wilderness, there is enough bread through the miraculous provision of God. Unlike the bread of ancient Egypt, this 'bread' couldn't be monopolised, controlled, or accumulated; it was a generous gift from a generous God.

Our conversations flowed on the topic of what Sabbath might mean for us today, with various views from 'fasting from tech' to 'taking a mini sabbath each day' and wrestling with how Sabbath might fit into a pattern of ministry for those leading churches, especially in a multi-parish context.

Discussions about busyness has become something of a national pastime. Busyness means importance; therefore, the busier we are, the more critical and essential we must be. (As an aside, I think this is more of a male problem as women tend to have a much more balanced and healthy ego.) Busyness means we are necessary – but this is part of the problem – we live by possession, accumulation, and achievement rather than gift and blessing.

From my perspective, I sense this is an area where the Holy Spirit has been looking to speak. Let me be honest; I am not the best example on this one! So, I have been undertaking some 'lite' research to stretch my thinking, and I offer some reflections on this in the hope that it might resonate and spark

Sabbath comes from the word *Shabbath* which essentially means 'to stop or to rest.' The other main Hebrew word for rest used in the Hebrew Scriptures is *Nuakh*, which means 'dwell' or 'settle.' In effect, we *Shabbat* in order to *Nuakh*. When we stop working, we can truly rest in God's presence. For me, this is helpful; practising a purposeful pause enables us to make room for God to take up residence in our individual lives and communities once again.

A quick exploration of the first few books of the Old Testament shows us that the Egyptians, through Pharaoh, had a closed view of the world. In this closed world there was only so much to go around; therefore, the need to accumulate, hoard, and control became the dominating values in case stuff ran out. The Western world is not so different today from the ancient world of Pharaoh; we accumulate, store, control, hoard, and monopolise for fear of running out. Who can forget the great toilet roll shortage of a few years ago? We live with a scarcity mindset. Pausing and resting might mean we don't acquire as much, and if we view the world as closed, the risk becomes one of running out.

There are some profound implications if we follow the call to 'cease striving' rather than living as though the world cannot continue without us seven days a week. The Sabbath is a call to faith, to trust God's provision and work while we are 'not working.' Is there a prophetic call on us today to reclaim Sabbath, not as a legalistic requirement, but as a witness to demonstrate to our world that there is a different way of living?

I fear that for many, our lives bear a greater resemblance to the Greek mythological figure of Sisyphus, as we endlessly push our boulders up the mountain for them only to roll down again. Might the call of the Spirit on us at this time be to trust God again, in a similar way that the children of Israel were in Exodus 16? What if the world is not a closed system but an open one? What if we stood in the truth that making something out of nothing is one of God's specialities?

Sabbath rest doesn't necessarily imply a cessation of all activity but rather an opportunity to rest in God's presence. A chance to re-member a world dis-membered by sin. It is a reminder that recognition and satisfaction don't come from the commodities acquired through rough and ready daily economics but through a relationship with God through Christ Jesus. It is time to live an alternative, counter-cultural narrative; it is time for us to re-embrace Sabbath and recognise God as our provider?

Let me finish with some wise words from theologian and Biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann, to which I add my own question:

*The deeper implications [of the Sabbath] calls us to "cease striving" and living as though the world cannot continue without us. The Sabbath is a call to faith, to trust God's provision and work while we are "not working." It was the first test in the wilderness with regard to the manna (Ex. 16:4-5). Might it be a test for us today in this time of transition in the life of the church?*

**Simon Mattholie CEO Rural Ministries**



**Liz Greenhalgh** has been very busy during the last

couple of months. Several summer camps were held, for children both from the church and the wider Campina community, some of whom were from very deprived backgrounds. The theme was "Going deeper with God" and the aim was to teach the importance of living daily with Christ. The children really engaged with all that took place. In July a team of 27 went on a youth camp in a place called Oona Mures. The camp was well organised, with about 200 attending in total. The theme there was "What would Jesus do?" One teenage boy from Campina gave His life to the Lord there. An end-of-year celebration was

held for the children from the After-School group to recognize their achievements. Many mothers attended this year, which was an answer to prayer. It was noted by one of the teachers from the school that the children attending the programme had made more progress than those who had not. Liz is praying for more helpers to join the team for this September.

**L. and P.** have been on the move over the summer months. They were able to make a brief visit to the UK in July to visit family over the time that would have included L's dad's birthday. They had various opportunities for sharing and witness, both with the family and others they met. In August and September they were visiting France. Sadly, P's father passed away recently.

He had been in a care home for some time. The first weeks they were back in France were spent with P's mother, then they were heading to the north of France to visit some of their supporting churches there. Before they left North Africa it was very hot. However, P. and their friend Alan managed to attend a wedding some 30 miles away, on the edge of the desert, though it was too hot for L. to accompany them.

**Gail and Daniel Castro** are now settling into their new ministry in the northwest. They set out the details of their proposed work in their article in our last edition, and at present we have no further information to add.

**Anne Fambely**

# The Nazareth Challenge 2022



October 2022 saw me take part in my 6th Jesus Trail Sponsored Walk for the Nazareth Hospital. This was almost 9 years since the first walk and the first since the pandemic.



Through the generosity and kindness from friends, family and churches both inside and outside of the Connexion I am thrilled to report that I raised over £7,500 for this wonderful ministry and the Pastoral care team in particular. The delay in a formal report has been due to the continual receipt of funds and the last of the funds was only received in late March. A total of almost £100k was raised through the Nazareth Challenge which combined the Jesus Trail Walk and also the Three Seas Cycle Ride.

My time in Nazareth began with catching up with those who I had not seen since the last time I was there 5 years



ago, this was most encouraging to hear of the progress in both the development of the buildings and services but also the Christian Witness that is undertaken through the Pastoral Care Team across the Hospital, the School of Nursing and also the Nazareth Village.

My 2nd day saw me attend the Service of Thanksgiving for 160 years of service by the Hospital. The service was attended by many of the current members of staff as well as former ex-pat missionaries who served as doctors, nurses, teachers and other roles as well as current and former trustees. The communion service was presided over by the Rt Revd and Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, Bishop of London. I was also privileged to be called upon to participate in that service as well.

The advancement with modern technology allowed me to attend the hybrid Connexional Committee meeting from Nazareth via Zoom before having a final planning meeting with the Hospital staff who would be engaging in the walk during the week.

Sunday was spent in attendance at the Local Baptist Church which provides an audio translation service as well as projecting the lyrics for the hymns and songs in Arabic, an anglicised form of Arab and English. As ever I was made most welcome and being remembered, by name, after more than 5 years was a great encouragement,



Sunday afternoon was spent with the final planning meetings before the Jesus Trail participants gathered together for the first time as we shared a meal before a time of worship in the Hospital Chapel and the various briefings that were needed ready for the following day as well as the distribution of the Trail t-shirts and the requisite energy bars; nuts and other snacks to help us maintain our energy and hydration levels whilst on the walk.

The walk itself began by us gathering in the chapel for a commissioning and dedication service before setting off

from the Hospital campus and climbing up out of Nazareth which set us on the way through Zippori, then Mashad (Gather Hephher of 2 Kings 14:25) before arriving in Cana for the night and thereafter we more or less followed the



traditional route that Jesus would have walked from his hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee via Kibbutz Lavi, the Horns of Hattin, alongside visits to Mount Arbel and Magdala on the way.

That first day was a shock as we walked some 33,000 steps in 30 degrees heat which was longer and hotter than we expected. Due to post-COVID requirements many small detours had to be taken each day which saw the walk being longer every day, with the remaining days seeing us walk between 25,000 and 30,000 steps a day.

There were 14 of us on the walk with walkers present from Scotland (5), Northern Ireland (2), USA (3), the Netherlands (2), England (2). The members of our group were varied in professions from Professor of Nursing to retired Church of Scotland Minister to Local Government Officers to former ex-pats who had served in the hospital as doctors, nurses and midwives as well as a current trustee of the Nazareth Trust.

The Nazareth Trust as an independent organisation running a Hospital and School of Nursing often struggles to facilitate the patient care or student





June 2023 will see two new floors added on to the School of Nursing campus (left) and an appeal is underway to extend the Accident & Emergency Department of the Hospital and all this is achieved through fundraising. Likewise, there are no funds within the day to day budgets for the Pastoral Care Team which has developed from the chaplaincy team pre-pandemic.

The Pastoral Care Team led by the Rev. Suheil Bathish provides much-needed emotional and spiritual support for staff, patients, students and visitors. During the pandemic they also supported COVID-19 patients by visit-

ing them in the wards. Their service includes patient and staff visits, home visits, events, prayers for the organisation, prayers over new services and departments and training on various issues in order to promote spiritual wellbeing.

So thank you once more for your support, your sponsorship and your prayers but please do continue to pray for the work of the Nazareth Trust, which includes Israel's oldest hospital and the 2nd oldest and only Christian School of Nursing in Israel. Thank you.

**Shaun Newton**

tuition through the funding they receive this then means that any additional services or development has to be achieved through external fundraising.

## Pramtime at 30

Our toddler group at Roman Road IM Church recently celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. We started in March 1993 with no children at the first session but now have 2 thriving groups on Thursday mornings and Thursday afternoons.

To celebrate we held an open afternoon on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> July with opportunity to view photographs, share memories and eat cake. We had a quiz to test knowledge of the past 30 years plus activities for the children. It was lovely to catch up with old friends and see how the children had grown.

Our first children who came – James, Elizabeth's son and Abigail, Helen's daughter are now parents themselves so Elizabeth and Helen who came as mums are now running the group as grandmas! We have a few children coming now whose mums came to Pramtime as toddlers.

Our ethos at Pramtime has always been to serve and this was highlighted by a couple of mums who came to the

open afternoon and said how good it was to come as a new mum with a toddler and

a baby to be able to sit at a table and be served a cup of tea or coffee and be brought a plate of toast or biscuits.

One comment from our Facebook page read – "A big thank you for the efforts to provide Pramtime for 30 years and still popular sharing God's message and building friendships"

We have always started our sessions with a Bible story, songs and a short prayer and are grateful that we are still able to do this after 30 years.

One mum recreated a photo of her daughter and a friend who are now due to start secondary school in September. Both girls are still friends despite attending different primary schools but are now going to same secondary school and are going to be in the same class.

We are thankful for God's provision over the past 30 years and were grateful we could open again after closing for 12 months during Covid.

**Elizabeth Barron**



The last day for articles to be submitted for the November / December issue of the Connexion magazine is 2nd October. The theme for this issue will be 'Joy'.

Please could all articles be sent either directly to the Resource Centre via post, or by email to [magazine@imchurches.org.uk](mailto:magazine@imchurches.org.uk) (please note the new email address).

Just a quick reminder that all photographs need to be digital. Do ensure that safeguarding principles are followed by asking permission for the publication of any photographs and for the articles where people are named and/or can be identified.

**Thank you for all the articles – please keep them coming!**

**Connexion**  
The magazine of the family of Independent Methodist Churches



# In the Joy of the Lord

## **Bessie Heaton, 28th September 1940 - 8th June 2023 Spring View Church, Wigan**

We thank God for Bessie, for her caring love and life of faith and for all that she meant to her family and friends. We thank God too for all the wonderful memories of her.

From being a young girl she attended Argyle Street Church, Hindley. She and her late husband Ken were always involved in the life of the church. As well as Sunday worship, Bessie was a member of the Women's Auxiliary and always active, helping in whatever way she could.

A few years ago when Ken and Bessie came to worship at Hope Street Spring View they played an important part in the church fellowship. They both used their gifts and talents - Sunday by Sunday, day in - day out, at the Tuesday Fellowship and in Christian Endeavour meetings.

Bessie often led morning worship, sharing God's word and message of His saving love. She loved to share her faith. She also organised coffee & cake mornings in aid of the Macmillan Cancer Support charity appeal.

Bessie like so many others found faith, hope and love in an often difficult, loveless world because of God's unending grace. That was her faith. She walked with God in life. Now she is at peace in God's presence reunited with her beloved Ken.

To her loving daughter Sarah and to all her friends and family we give you our love and sympathy. She will never be forgotten.

Bessie's funeral service took place on Tuesday 27th June at Hindley Independent Methodist Church.

## **Colin James, Mill Lane (Warmley)**

Colin passed away in hospital on Monday June 6<sup>th</sup> with his family around him, he was 89 years old.

Colin came to Mill Lane as one of our regular preachers and then he and his wife Frances started to join us for morning worship. In his working life he was a math's teacher and when he retired he enjoyed his garden. Colin always carried a sermon in his car, ready to step in if the speaker didn't turn up, which actually happened while he was on honeymoon with Frances. He lived and worked for the Lord, but in a quiet gentle way, which made you want to listen to his message.

He is greatly missed at Mill Lane and the members pray that the Lord will be with his wife Frances and their family.

## **Pete Love, Mill Lane (Warmley)**

Pete passed away on 4<sup>th</sup> May aged 78, he had been ill for some time.

He had spent many years caring for his wife in her illness and he didn't seem to be able to enjoy life after she passed away. He, with his family were caretakers of another church near Mill Lane. He was always very willing to help when and where he was able at coffee mornings and other activities. Pete was a regular at Thursday Bible study each week.

He was a plain speaking Christian man and we miss him and pray that the Lord will be with his family.

## **Brenda Hampson, Spring View**



We celebrated Brenda's life on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023 with a service led by Rev. Joseph Cockburn Elsden (JP) at Hope Street Church, Spring View, Wigan.

Brenda attended Sunday school in Aspull and in her late teens she became a Sunday school teacher.

When she married Thomas, they moved to Wigan but could not wait to get back living in Aspull, so after 18 months they

moved back to Aspull and by this time Julie was born and then Sharon was born not long after the move back. The next 13 years was spent at Saint David's Church Haigh because both girls went to Church of England schools.

Then in the late seventies we started attending Westwood IM Church, Lower Ince, Wigan. Brenda settled in and helped the ladies at church on the social committee. She was involved in organising days out and lunches. Then in 2013 as the number of church attendees dwindled down Brenda then took over these duties. She also learned to program and play the music centre for hymns right up to the church closing in December 2019. From there we started attending Hope Street Church, Spring View, Wigan where we were welcomed by all and felt settled and so became members. Brenda attended the church right up to the Sunday before she went to be with her Lord.

## **Elsie G Armstrong, South Hetton**



Elsie passed away on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022, peacefully in hospital surrounded by her loving family. A service of celebration and thanksgiving was held on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023, conducted by Eric Southwick.

Elsie, a former head teacher from Peterlee, became a colleague and friend of Eva Richardson. Upon the premature death of Elsie's husband Peter Eva's family took her under their wing encouraging Elsie to come along to South Hetton. For over 50 years she has embraced her faith and church life taking on many roles, a true disciple of Christ. Through her love of children, she became a Sunday school teacher and Sunday school secretary then Vice President of the Church. With her great



organising skills brought the outings: the theatre trips, pantomimes, fellowship camps, car rally's, day trips, then later came the holidays to Scotland (her favourite) and many other destinations over the years. Elsie enjoyed taking part in these social activities and always took part in organising the entertainment to ensure everyone had a great time. Elsie loved to bake and always cooked up some tasty treats for special occasions as well as bringing along her delicious trifle!

Having played a big part in the Church for so many years

she was a big miss when ill health prevented her from attending weekly worship and having to resign from her post of Vice President in November 2020.

Elsie will be greatly missed but she is now in resting in the loving arms of our Heavenly Father. We will remember her with love and thanks for the many years of friendship we have shared.

Our prayers continue for her family and dear friend Eva.

## Christian Resources Exhibition returns to Manchester in 2024!

Early in May I was invited to preach at our Cliviger Church. During the lunch which followed the service I began chatting with Dave Hall who I discovered, together with his wife, work as volunteers for the Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE).

Later I was privileged to receive an invitation to the CRE Networking Lunch on 15<sup>th</sup> June which I attended. It was an informative time and opportunity to meet some exhibitors and leaders of local churches.

The CRE is a great event to discover new initiatives, books, church furnishings, children's materials, art work, work of charities and much, much more. If you are within travelling distance of Manchester I thoroughly recommend you make time to go and have a look at what is on show – put the date in your diary now! 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

A report of the meeting, prepared by David, is below.

### Dozens of organisations bowled over by plans for CRE North 2024

Less than a month before England faced Australia at Old Trafford, news of CRE's next innings in Manchester was outlined to more than 50 guests at the atmospheric venue.

Representing businesses, missions and churches from across the north

west and beyond, attendees heard from Bishop Tony Porter, formerly vicar of Holy Trinity, Platt and Mark Mitchell, founder of the Mitchell Group car dealership at Cheshire Oaks, who praised the vision of owner Steve Goddard for bringing [CRE North](#) to the BEC Arena (15/16 May 2024).

'The exhibition is a vital opportunity for Christians of all denominations to find something to assist them in their ministry and witness,' said Mark, a former High Sheriff of Chester. In a wide-ranging interview he admitted to beginning his commercial life at eight years of age, selling hamsters in the school playground.

Having set up the company in 1990 with £100 share capital and a £10,000 bank overdraft, the Mitchell Group, based at Cheshire Oaks, now employs 100 people, with a turnover of £50 million – in spite of the dealership not opening on a Sunday.

'We have a sign which says: "At home with the family". In an industry where standards are not high, we can stand out,' he said. 'Not all our staff are Christians. They are employed on the basis of skills and experience but we are the closest many of them will get to understanding Christianity. We have to be Christ to them. I follow the Bible verse – "Those who honour me I will honour."'

He recalled the time when a major car manufacturer wanted to change the franchise to ensure dealers were open on a Sunday. Despite the huge impact it would have on his company, Mark refused to continue with the manufac-



turer, telling them: 'I am more accountable to my maker than any auto manufacturer.'

His company now deals with three major brands – Lexus, Mazda and Skoda.

The interview followed entertainment from Wirral-based Christian magician Steve Price, a Gold Star member of The Magic Circle and one-time winner of the Circler's Originality Prize. Steve regularly entertains groups of all ages, taking his show to churches as well as cruise liners. Brett Pitchfork, CRE event director, explained how CRE North 2024, at the BEC Arena (15/16 May 2024) will be the first one in Manchester for five years.

'It was the preferred venue of the majority of our 160+ exhibitors,' said Brett. 'Within the first two weeks of stand sales more than 25 per cent of the floor space had already been taken.'

**Dorothy Kendrick**



# Be Wise 3 – God's Peacemakers



**God's Peacemakers** Inspired by the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity Course, 'Be Wise', thoughts on Whole life Christian Discipleship. A series of articles of what it means

to be a disciple of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 24/7.

This month the Connexion magazine has for its theme 'Obedience and Perseverance'. It is therefore timely that the third in the 'Inspired by Be Wise' series should focus on being God's Peacemakers, a role that requires both obedience and perseverance.

## David and Nabal

Recently, my church undertook the LICC course, 'Growing on the Frontline'. During the first session we explored situations of conflict and whether we as Christians should attempt to resolve the conflict or simply stay silent. The passage from the Bible that we explored concerned David, at the time he was a young, exiled leader desperate to avoid the wrath of King Saul who only sought to eliminate David as he had been anointed by Samuel as God's choice to succeed Saul as king. Saul as you can imagine was not very happy by these events.

David, along with his followers were camped on land owned by a man named Nabal and in return for being allowed to stay they were providing protection to the landowner's estate (1 Samuel 25). Whilst there, David and his men acted correctly in everything that they did. They respected both Nabal's servants and property. They did not take anything that did not belong to them whilst at the same time protecting Nabal's possessions. You would have thought that Nabal would have been thankful to David, but he was exactly the opposite, he was nasty and antagonistic and hurled insults at his protectors.

How would you react if someone whom you had helped reacted in the same way as Nabal? I suspect that as we are human at the least, we would likely to be annoyed. David was not

just annoyed; he was furious and set out to teach Nabal and his men a lesson which would have probably ended up in bloodshed.

## Abigail intervenes.

Nabal's wife Abigail heard about what had happened and realises that she must somehow prevent bloodshed and act as peacemaker. She instructed the household servants to load on Nabal's donkeys a variety of food supplies to be offered as gifts to David and his men and went off in search of David. As she travelled through a ravine, she was suddenly confronted by David and his men who were hastily seeking revenge for the insults and offenses that had been made against them.

Abigail climbs down from her donkey and with her head to the ground appeals to David to stop the senseless blood loss and revenge that he had planned. David's anger is calmed by Abigail's appeal, and he realises that God had sent her to act as a peacemaker for which he then praises God. "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgement and from keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands (1 Sam 25: 32-33)."

How often do we need an Abigail to stop us reacting badly when somebody has riled or offended us? You may have an Abigail, I certainly do! However, there will certainly be times when we won't have an Abigail, it is then down to ourselves to be peacemakers when a confrontational situation arises.

Today, we live in a world where there is too much confrontation, even within the church. When such situations arise, we should seek to act as a peacemaker whether we are directly involved or not. If we are involved the important thing to remember is to address the problem immediately and not let it fester. To be prepared to apologise and back down, and if all else fails to simply walk away from a situation and move on. Christ calls us to be peacemakers and to achieve this we may need to sacrifice something of ourselves.

## Personal Desires

A subject that was discussed later in 'Growing on the Frontline', was that of our personal desires. Desires that

effect everything that we do and how those desires become evident through our emotions and actions.

**Desires energise us towards meeting our basic needs, we all seek a level of approval, security, and control in our lives.** If we allow those desires to go unchecked, they will become all-consuming and self-serving that will lead us away from God's presence and purpose.

**Unchecked desires affect our emotions and can lead to actions that are far from what you would expect from those of a Christian.** So, what type of unchecked desires are we talking about? One general example would be, when we think that our 'way' is the right 'way' and when we don't get our 'way', we become frustrated. This can lead to anger and ultimately conflict. How often do we see this chain of events in life and how often do we see it in the life of a church or religious organisation?

If we are to be genuine Peacekeepers for God, then our priority must be to challenge and to keep in check our selfish desires.

## Peacemaker on the frontline

**It is Francis of Assisi who takes us right to the heart of the matter as far as peace is concerned.** Francis prayed, 'Make me an instrument of thy peace.' This is a reminder that Christianity is not just about finding personal peace with God, but it is also about becoming peacemakers. If we have truly discovered the fruit of the Spirit, that Paul calls 'peace' then we should not expect to find ourselves up some quiet cul-de-sac cut off from the realities of everyday life, we should expect to be there on the frontline seeking to be peacemakers.

Being a peacemaker can be a very frustrating when you are attempting to be a mediator to achieve peace between two people or sides.

We have recently seen the virtual destruction of the country of Sudan by the actions of two confronting warlords driven by their unchecked desires of achieving total supremacy. They appear to think nothing of the damage they are doing and cannot even maintain a short ceasefire. The same can be said about the ongoing Ukraine / Russian conflict. Whatever the wrongs of the original invasion, we

now have two sides so entrenched with only one objective in mind, total victory.

I was recently asked to act as peacemaker between two people who have been in a degree of conflict for several years. Despite my best efforts, there was no resolution to the conflict. The reason for this failure was that one of them seemed neither of them were prepared to take a step back and give something of themselves to achieve peace. The same can be said of both the situation in Sudan and Ukraine where nobody is prepared to take a step back and give something of themselves.

It can be ever so frustrating when others are not seeking to strive for peace. When they are not prepared to check their wrong desires, to take down their barriers to resolution, take a

step backwards and give something of themselves.

**To return to the intervention by Abigail, she was fortunate that one of the parties involved in the confrontation was prepared to check those wrong desires.** David was offended by Nabal's accusations, it is clear that his pride had been hurt. He and his men had done the right thing and behaved in the correct way. His damaged pride had generated anger which without Abigail's intervention would have led to violence. David managed to suppress his damaged pride, his wrong desire. Can you imagine what would have happened if David's pride had gone unchecked?

**So, what can we do as individuals when others are so reluctant to seek peace? We must return to the**

**thoughts of St. Francis.** If we seek to have peace with those with whom we interact, it is down to ourselves to be a channel for peace. We need to check those wrong desires that can lead to damaging emotions which can result in actions that we will later regret.

Peter in his first letter emphasises how we must behave if we are to become true peacekeepers in a troubled world.

"Finally, all of you, be like minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

Next Time – Be Wise, Friendship.  
Rob Brooks

## The "Bible Comes Alive" at Silksworth IM's



Jesus when he was asked to use his boat as a pulpit pushed away from the shore to avoid the crowds, then how Jesus called for Peter to follow Him. Finally, Peter explained about the storm on the lake and how Jesus calmed the wind and the waves. Each character had two key facts they had to include in the narrative that would form part of the quiz at the end.

Next was the bride at the wedding in Cana (Liz Clark) and she told of the first miracle when Jesus turned the water into wine. The first time the children had to participate was next when they were asked to wake up Nicodemus (Arthur Oliver/Peter Lusby), who was asleep after talking to Jesus all night. It was good to hear them shout 'WAKE UP' so he could explain his conversation with Jesus and how Jesus told him he must be 'Born Again'. Just as Moses placed the serpent on a pole in the desert, Jesus would be lifted on a cross.

The narrator then explained the geography of the area and how Jesus had to go through Samaria, where he met

For three days in June the 'Bible came alive' for 301 schoolchildren from three local schools. The children from Silksworth Academy, St. Leonard's Catholic School and Mill Hill Primary School attended six sessions. All the children from St Leonard's attended as it is a small school and nearby whilst the pupils from Mill Hill School walked the mile or so to and back from the Church with their teachers, (great commitment), for their two sessions. The Academy is only a few hundred yards from the Church, so it was easier for the largest groups from selected years to make their way here.

At each of the sessions, a narrator, (Martin Bolt & Jean Merton shared the duties), arranged for the children to sit on the floor facing the display boards covered with pictures of scenes from the New Testament. They explained the book the 'Bible' and how it contained the truth, about the stories and how they related God's plan for salvation. This then led to the time to introduce each of the Bible characters who revealed their own story. First Peter, (Peter Machin) told how he first met



the Woman at the Well. This part was taken in turn by Autumn, Rachel, and Millie, three young ladies from Texas who were working with "Wearside Youth for Christ" in our area that week. Their American accents proved to be a talking point for the kids. Each explained about Jesus asking for a drink and the telling of the "Living Water" He would give. After pointing out the woman's circumstances, how she dashed back to get all the people to come and listen to what Jesus had to say. Next to be introduced was Martha (Joy



Elkins) who told about the death of her brother Lazarus. Again, the kids were involved when they were encouraged to shout loud 'LAZARUS COME OUT'. What a miracle someone was raised from the dead!

Next came the villain of the session, Caiaphas (Andy Osenton, Wearside Youth for Christ) who was loudly booed by the children as he told how he arranged for Jesus to be betrayed by Judas, then lied about it at his trial by Pilate before Jesus was taken out to be crucified. It was encouraging to

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hear the kids saying how wrong this was.

The final character was Lucius Maximus the Roman Centurion (Phil Oliver, who invented his name). He began by drilling the kids to stand up to attention, give a Roman salute, then sit down quietly. His very real trusty sword was drawn amid gasps from the crowd as he explained how his men were frightened of nothing until the unexplainable & terrifying darkness and earthquakes when Jesus died. All he could say was "This truly was the Son of God". The narrator rounded off each session by explaining about the resurrection and the children read out loud the final text under the picture on the display boards which was John 3 V 16.

A quiz relating to all of the stories followed. The children were given clipboards and pencils to complete multiple choice questions to test their recollection of key facts from each character. After mark-

ing, a certificate for each child was produced & personalised with their own name. We then had a brilliant action song, 'Gonna Jump Up and Down, Spin Right Round', which was enthusiastically received by all present - including the teachers. After juice and biscuits, the children left excited & happy about their time finding out how the 'Bible was still alive' in 2023.

Grateful thanks is due to the organisation behind BCA which provide such professional costumes and display boards used each year and to Joy who makes the ap-

pointments with schools and keeps the characters in check, then marks the quizzes, produces the certificates and goes into the schools to present them as a follow-up. We were also so well looked after by the ladies of the Church who provided us with a beautifully cooked lunch each day.

We continue to pray that the children will think about their time learning about the Scriptures and the challenge given about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

**Phil Oliver**



## A Special Time at Northwood

Our patience was rewarded on the weekend of 15th-16th July when we were able to hold a Celebration Event followed by a service of baptism. Folks who have recently come to trust in Christ for salvation gave their testimonies in front of their natural family and their church family at the same time. Including a young man who came to the Lord that very evening and gave his testimony at the close.

Thunderstorms on the Saturday prohibited the intention to camp overnight for some folks but the evening was taken up with praise, games and a bonding time of fellowship. Sunday evening worship began with a lovely buffet tea after which, we shared the Word, praise and singing around the baptismal pool. The message was given by the use of puppets and a reading from Jonah. Further to this an appeal was made to those to whom Christ as Saviour is not yet known and some tracts and Gospels were taken.

One of the testimonies of particular interest to me was of a young man who, seemed to us all to have a certain presence of the Lord

with him. I have encouraged him since and hope he will come to Kirkhall Lane for a speaking engagement, as soon as he is ready.

The whole event was a good solid witness to family members who came and not only heard the Gospel but saw it in action. As things stand, our meetings take place on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month and folks from our churches are welcome to come. In order for us to go forward in mission and establish the site at High Legh as a hub of Christian ministry, our vision if possible, is to have more use of the premises.

Meanwhile we continue to enjoy fellowship on Friday evenings in Wigan, frequent testimonies and praise at Kirkhall Lane and have a Telegram group which keeps us all up to speed the rest of the time. Along with our witness at Northwood this gives us, what we believe, is an inspired triangle. Thanks for your prayers.

**Roger Stone**

