

# May - Group News - 2021

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*'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship, persecution or famine, peril or sword? In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us' Romans 8 35-37*

During this last lockdown I have been privileged to access live streamed services from Augustine URC in Edinburgh, — not the same as being able to meet face-to-face in worship of course, but so much better than not being able to worship at all. On Easter Sunday, — the second Easter when we have been unable to worship in our own church building, — the sermon from Augustine was entitled 'Easter Sunday is the defiance of hopelessness'

We might imagine how hopeless the disciples must have felt on Good Friday, — nothing would ever be the same again for them...all hope had gone, died on the cross.

And yet.....and yet, - Easter Sunday came, bringing with it the resurrection of hope, - and indeed life would never be the same again for any of them, - but not in the way they had imagined only 3 days earlier.

We sometime speak of a roller-coaster of emotions, and if ever that phrase was appropriate it would surely be in the days of Holy Week; suspense, excitement, - dismay, despondency, fear and grief; followed by hope and joy and a sense of the beginning of something wonderful.

There is a lesson for us here, - life doesn't always go smoothly as we have seen over this last year. It brings its fair share of challenges, - and there may well be time when the future looks hopeless. But, come what may God is with us, - He walks alongside us in the good and the bad.

As we look forward to re-opening our church buildings on Pentecost Sunday 23rd May, - let us remember that our hope is not just 'hope so' but genuine life enhancing hope for the future. A future in which we shall again be able to worship together, - with each other, and with God.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. Shalom.

Blessings

Jan

## News from Guisborough

Pentecost, on Sunday, 23rd, May, should be the day when Guisborough Church opens again for services after being closed by the Covid 19 restrictions and concurrent sanctuary refurbishment. At the time of the last service, on the 15th, March, a heating failure had meant that all worship had been held in the hall since the 19th, January, so the return is after an absence of 14 months and 16 months, for the sanctuary, before we are able to enjoy the benefits of new chairs and so a more flexible layout than was possible with pews.

The new chairs represent a strange quirk in our history for when the present church building was opened on the 31st October 1811, the interior had a small pulpit, a harmonium, a gallery, a large stove for heating and 'chairs', later described by a visitor as very uncomfortable. The pews were installed as part of a remodelling of the church in 1905, seemingly to produce a more comfortable and attractive building.

So will this U turn, on furniture, indicate a move back to the simplicity of our ancient roots - the ministry of all believers? For a church is really no more than people coming together in faith and mutual support - as we follow our Lord, Jesus. And then we have the effects of the long wait for members and friends before being able to come together, in person, as part of a unified fellowship: could this be a case of "Absence makes the heart grow fonder?"

The re-introduction of chairs will, quite naturally, bring about a change, since the pandemic restrictions were introduced, as this had been the original idea - a greater flexibility of use of the building. In terms of worship we are now able to arrange the sanctuary in a way appropriate to the occasion. So for our 'Guisfolk' services It could be, for example, that we have chairs in a circle like 'Theatre in the Round' creating informal setting for extemporary Bible study or prayer and praise. It could provide a bigger space for the coffee mornings and, importantly, encourage external organisation to use our premises - one way to have some outreach into the community.

As for the effects of the long wait before our members could come together for fellowship - we are faced with a question that is difficult to answer. In the February edition of the National URC Magazine, Reform, four people were asked the question: How will the church look after the pandemic? The first, Nichola Furley-Smith, the URC Secretary for Ministries, entitled her answer:

“God is giving us the opportunity to do a new thing.” In her answer she says: “At the start of the pandemic ‘some churches’ swiftly adapted to other forms of worship - online platforms, telephone services, delivering printed services - which often resulted in more people attending Sunday worship. There was an explosion of choice and a ‘try and see’ approach to church.” The pandemic has reminded us that “being a church has become more important than going to church.”

This is an important point - the church being the people not the building. We all know this, but do we really believe it? Some buildings can have an extraordinary attraction for the people who worship there, so a long absence may have been a salutary reminder of this fact. We may have missed the joy of singing rather than asking deeper questions like: do I believe what I believe? Without the guidance of the preacher, have I explored my experience of faith and what it really means to me?

Nichola Furley-Smith goes on to say: “...not everyone can embrace technology or have the means. Technology serves us well but it cannot be our master and replacing active participation with passivity is not a good thing. Worship will continue to be more flexible, a mixture of online and in person with shorter services and greater creativity.”

In this quotation we have a good summary of the direction in which we should travel post pandemic. In the routine of normal church life “busyness” tends to take over in ‘getting things done.’ We need to pause and carefully reflect more often. Ask the question: why am I doing this? Is there a new and better way? Then wait for God to answer.

*Ray Tunncliffe.*

## **Mary Robson**

It is with sadness that we have learnt of the death of Mary Robson, a long time member of Guisborough Church.

Although Mary had not attended the services for around ten years, elders, Jenny Reynolds and Sandra Verrill have been in regular contact with her at home in Guisborough. She recently went into Brotton Hospital but later died in James Cook University Hospital on Sunday, 28th, March, aged 95.

Mary became a member of the church by profession of faith in May 1968, so being part of our fellowship for nearly 53 years. As member she was, for a number of years, the church caretaker and served as a teacher in the Junior Church alongside the late Joan Bulmer.

Mary was a kind, gentle 'people' person - always showing a genuine interest in others - their interests and concerns, and in conversation known to come out the with occasional surprisingly witty remarks. She was a woman of quite natural humility.

*Ray Tunnicliffe.*

## **From St Andrew's**

We are looking forward to returning for worship on Sunday 23rd May, when our Pentecost Service will be led by Jan. The building are looking good and ready to us to come back.

The Boy's Brigade has already returned to in person meetings around our premises but in line with government and Boys Brigade advice the programme has had to be outdoors based. A-class learning and other classes are planning to return from 17th May provided the government allows indoors hospitality as planned

Churches around us remain active and some returned to their buildings on Easter Sunday. Churches Together met recently and are now looking forward to the summer. They have a Prayer Walk planned for 26th June from 10am to 12 noon. Further details will follow in due course.

*Roger Wheeler*

## **Next Group News**

A shortened June Group News will be published on Sunday 30th May and I would be grateful if material could be forwarded to me on of before Sunday 23rd May.

The July/August magazine will be published on Sunday 27th July with a copy deadline of 13th June. I am hoping that this magazine will be a full print edition. Future magazines should then be able to revert to our previous pattern.

*Roger Wheeler*