

Group News



*** 2023 * June * 2023 ***

The monthly magazine for:

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Our churches are members of the Cleveland Pastorate

Part of the URC Northern Synod – www.urch-northernsynod.org.uk

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Pastoral Letter

'If I speak in the tongues of people or angels, but do not have love, I become nothing more than a blasting trumpet or a clashing cymbal. If I dispense all my goods and surrender my body to be burned, yet do not have love, it profits me nothing'

1 Corinthians 13

I have never really enjoyed cooking, and probably because of that I've never been very good at it! I remember one meal that I cooked for a couple of friends having invited them to a small dinner party. It looked good, and it smelled good, and as I set it on the table I was confident that it would taste good too. But it didn't! Instead of setting the taste buds tingling, as I'd thought it would, it was bland, lifeless and unappetising; a culinary flop rather than a cordon bleu delight! Why? Because instead of adding chilli powder, I'd mistakenly put in paprika..the vital ingredient was missing.

I'm sure you can see where I'm going with this; the analogy may be different, but the Apostle Paul was talking along much the same lines in his celebrated words on love to the Corinthians. He sets out what looks to be the perfect recipe for Christian discipleship, - faith to move mountains, spiritual gifts, generosity and commitment to the point of self-sacrifice, - what more could you possibly want? Yet, says Paul, without that one vital ingredient of love, it counts for nothing. We may have heard that message innumerable times, but maybe we still need to hear it again, for it's impossible to overestimate its importance.

We can so easily turn faith into a matter of outward observance, of thinking or believing this, of doing, or supporting that, - the deed more important than the motive behind it.

Let us keep praying to make sure that we never confuse the incidentals of Christian discipleship with the one ingredient that really matters.

May the Lord bless you all and keep you..

Shalom

Jan

Synod Prayers

June

- 4th Stamfordham; the Revd Jona Sewell
11th Ministerial students Roberta Ritson and Louise Sanders
18th Bellingham; Falstone with Kielder; Wark; Deacon Anne Taylor
25th Refugee Week; North East Churches Acting Together

A Sermon for Trinity Sunday

Scripture readings: Isaiah 6: 1-8 God's call to Isaiah to be a prophet and John 3: 1-17: Jesus and Nicodemus.

The Art of the Possible

What is that attracts to another person? Is it their appearance – their looks - or is their voice. Of course, they may be just good company – can talk on any subject in an interesting or entertaining way. There is always the possibility that they have similar views to ourselves – which can be comforting – or simply reinforce our own prejudices. Or perhaps it is look up to someone who has a natural air of authority, showing wise words and common sense, a person of integrity – and they always appear to know what they are talking about. And then there those who are kind considerate and have empathy with us and all that we care about. So do you know any one just like that?

I can think of several when I recall the events of the recent council elections - held nation-wide. Various political leaders vying for our attention in the run up to polling day. They were certainly trying to be attractive to us by the carefully honed image of themselves, as people and for the policies which they presented. All people of integrity who can be trusted, or can they? Politicians, as we all know, don't have a good reputation, something a little below traffic wardens seems to be the general consensus of opinion, but they do an essential job and make decisions that we may find difficult or prefer to avoid altogether. In its purest form politics is the 'Art of the Possible.' 'The Art of the Possible.' Not just hopes and dreams for the future - but seeing them through to be delivered.

Nicodemus was attracted to a politician – Jesus. He was a man that seemed to get things done; the sick were healed, miracles were performed, he had a new view of

religious observance and he could get himself out of trouble when asked a difficult question. Think on when he was asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar, he picked up a coin saying which head is on this? The answer was of course Caesar. So the reply was: pay that the Caesar and to God that which is God's. No answer to that.

Like our politicians the Jewish Pharisees get a bad press. So when we read about Nicodemus visiting Jesus we naturally think in terms of a clash between two diametrically opposed viewpoints on issues about the Jewish Law and detailed rules and Jesus's rather more empathetic and flexible approach.

But Nicodemus was a good man as were other Pharisees and he recognised in Jesus something of great value – and nor was he alone amongst his fellow Pharisees in seeing this. They carried out their faith in God as they saw it. In some respects, we as faithful followers of Christ, need to ask ourselves whether or not in the routine of worship we haven't taken on some of the attitudes of the Pharisees putting form of worship before true spirituality in our Christian living.

So put ourselves in Nicodemus place as he goes to visit Jesus at night. This action of Nicodemus was a deeply political move – considering how the majority of the Jewish authorities saw Jesus as a threat. In the discussion that followed the concept of being born again was raised. Born Again has a bit of an image problem these days – a cliché. To describe yourself as a Born Again Christian can be a way of inviting suspicion – or worse - but the idea is a powerful way to accurately describe how revolutionary Jesus can be in the life of a person.

In the first instance Nicodemus came to see Jesus by night – which may suggest caution – given the sensitive situation with the authorities. Although another explanation may be that the Jews considered night time as being the best time for undisturbed study.

He came because he was impressed by the signs and wonders performed by Jesus. He may also have seen the possibility of effecting a great change in his own life. Having a great longing to be better but not being able to do so in his own strength – so here was a great opportunity for him and worth the risk should his visit become known to those who opposed Jesus.

He was puzzled by the idea of being Born Again – questioning how it was possible to re – enter your mother's womb. Whilst clearly impossible the fact that that the point was being made may be a hint that he perhaps it was possible – in line with the miracles Jesus had performed in the past. It is the silver bullet solution to a problem – some magic and the life's problems are solved in an instant. But no that was not the way – as Jesus himself had discovered in the wilderness when he was tempted to change stones into bread. No magic here.

And so the explanation was for the idea that you may be born of human parents – but being born again is of the water and the spirit. He is born spiritually of the spirit. Describing this process as a wind which cannot be seen or known where it may come from – presents a mystery. But Jesus makes it clear that only someone who is descended from heaven – and will ascend there again has the ability and authority to speak about heavenly things.

Being born of the water and the spirit is symbolic of the cleansing strengthening power of Jesus, which wipes out the past and give victory in the future. When the Holy Spirit takes hold of us – possession of us the defeated life of human nature becomes the victorious life of God.

The Jews did know of re-birth. When a man from another faith became a Jew – and accepted into Judaism – he was regarded as new born. So for Nicodemus the new birth, proposed by Jesus, must have seemed as something special, exceptional by Nicodemus. And so this special, exceptional authority which Jesus had demonstrated – suggested that this must be surely the case.

In Matthew's Gospel this great truth is put more simply and vividly: unless you turn and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. This idea has a common thought – innocent trust in God.

And for the Kingdom of Heaven we have the best definition – found in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." So how can we act in this way? Also, how could Nicodemus do the same – if in fact he came to accept the great claims that Jesus made?

In the reading from Isaiah, we are told of how he had a vision of the Lord in all of his holiness and majesty. This vision centred upon the holiness of the Lord. It terrifies Isaiah as a sinner, how can he live after seeing God? In an act of purification, he is touched by a burning coal and so his guilt is removed and now he is free to speak of the Lord to his people. This gives him the power and the authority to be commissioned to bring the word of God to the people in the full knowledge that they may not like what is said and refuse to respond.

This experience of the prophet mirrors, in a real sense, what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus about being re-born. But it can be seen that Isaiah has received a spiritual power that gives him the strength needed to face the great difficulties ahead as he preached the word of God. Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, would be fully aware of this story – which could have been exchanged as an idea as he talked to Jesus. "Who will be my messenger?" said the Lord, and Isaiah answered, eagerly, "I will go! Send me!" Nicodemus is offered a similar choice by Jesus.

For us today this may seem like a somewhat similar situation where, in an increasingly secular society, we find it difficult to make heard, or hear the word of the

Lord as an accepted moral authority. But something we must face in our life in Christ.

Jesus reinforces his claims when he reminds Nicodemus of how Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert in recognition of the deliverance of the Jews from the plague of snakes – by God’s help. Jesus speaks of the deliverance of believers from death through the gift of eternal life, which will become possible through his death. This eternal life was to begin then, and now today through faith – which is given to us to us through the astonishing fact that Gd loves the world so much that his own son should die for it.

In the reference to the Holy Spirit we have the puzzling comment that it like the wind which blows where it wishes – and that we don’t know where it is going. How can we understand this? What does it mean?

So if we have faith it will come to us when we are ready, or when we are needed for God’s work. But how will we know and how can we respond?

The Holy Spirit moves like the wind – so it is a dynamic force – and so if we look at the record of the early church we can see this unfolding by the thing that were done. The disciples and St Paul went out and preached the Good News about Jesus and founded many churches in his name. In Acts we read of a community, who held everything in common – shared and helped each other – when the need arose. Giving generously from those with the means. This was a great example of the Kingdom of God – heaven being brought to earth. Of course there were difficulties as the Church in Corinth found – when factions arose within the fellowship and so that the unity in Christ was lost. Later to be rescued by Paul.

But in essence the Holy Spirit remained in the hearts of believers and was expressed in their actions – and the results they achieved.

Sunday, 4th, June is Trinity Sunday the last Christian Festival Day before Advent leading onto Christmas. So before us now we have almost half a year or more when the Sundays are numbered Pentecost ...2, 3, 4.. and so on. It can seem like a wide sea of ordinariness before we rejoice in the coming of Christ. It is no such thing – for it is a great opportunity to quietly reflect on our faith add the Christian life. To think back over the past year, as to where we have been in faith – and then where should we go now? Where is that unpredictable wind of the spirit going to blow us now? Or better still how can we listen for a call from the Lord to do something for him?

We can be encouraged We can be encouraged in this task by Jesus’ final words to his disciples: “...And baptise them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you to the end of the age.” Great words for us now but what of the action?

As a starting point it is, I think, important to ask ourselves the most fundamental of questions: Do we believe what we believe? Yes, that is what I have said: Do we believe what we believe? Because if the answer is yes then finding what the Holy Spirit is telling us will come naturally – because we have faith that Christ is with us.

Way back in 2012 the URC Churches in East Cleveland held a Day of Evangelism - hosted by St Andrew's of Marton. At one point we were asked to imagine that we were in a railway carriage and had 4 minutes to explain what Christ means to us to a fellow passenger who is about to leave the train at the next station. Quite a challenge – and for a number of people this was an uncomfortable experience. They found it difficult. Which raises the question how strong is my faith? Should such a role play be a problem for anyone committed to Christ?

As we look back on our achievements of the year – and to the future – how do we get guidance? How do we manage to deliver something of value in the Christian life? What is that 'Art of the Possible'?

We can start with the Bible and then in our prayers. But the Bible is a big book – where do I start? Many years ago I heard a sermon from an elderly retired minister delivered on a theme of the book of Mark. At of which he said: go home read this Gospel from beginning to end without stopping. This I did and what an experience - (It only takes an hour.) – reading the eyewitness account of St Peter. We use the Bible like a reference book – short sections read out. Read it like a book sometimes – it then will be such an encouragement, such an inspiration. In fact it was performed successfully as a one man play in a West End theatre about 30 years ago. People paid to see it.

Then there is another guide: The Five Marks of Mission. An idea drawn up years ago as a path to the Christian Life. It can be remembered as the five 'T's' and they are:

- To Tell - about Jesus.
- To Teach – about faith.
- To Tend – to be concerned about others
- To Transform - to speak out and about and against wrong, unjust, unfair practices.
- To Treasure – to value the important things in this world – the people, the creatures and the environment.

So remember the five 'T's'. Pray about them and think back on how you may have work on any and what was achieved.

We all have different gifts and talents – but out of these five tasks there may, there must be something that we, as individuals, can do, or to contribute.

During the course of the weeks' up until Advent we will attend worship, sing many hymns hear prayers and sermons. And out of all of this if we listen carefully, surely we will hear the call of God – and then the Spirit will come to us. In that moment we can and must respond. To go out and do something for the Lord – something for now!

It can be done, it must be done – it is there for us to grasp: it is: 'The Art of the Possible. 'Amen.

Ray Tunnicliffe

Guisborough

Last Sunday, with not a little trepidation, I climbed onto the organ seat and played for the service for the first time for quite a few weeks. I'm very grateful to Helen Simmons and Dorothy Brown for standing in for me, also Maureen Houston who led on the piano with the top line of the hymns. As some off you will know I have been poorly, had a long period when I ate nothing, culminating in an ambulance trip to hospital, where I was treated well, although I was in three different wards the first night, at least I wasn't on a trolley on a corridor. I ended up in a 5-bed ward where we were 'entertained' by a little Irish lady with dementia and who kept telling us we were all going to Hell.

On Easter Sunday, the priest appeared to give her Mass, of which I understood not one word except the Lord's Prayer. I was surprised that when he finished he walked quickly out, I had fully expected him to go round the ward and shake hands with everybody. My stay in hospital and later at home was considerably brightened by visits and phone calls from church members, and friends.

Since coming home, I have been

Guisborough United Reformed Church

Saturday 1st July 2023

10am – 1.00pm

Summer Coffee Morning

All welcome

well served by Social Services, have got various appliances to help in the house, and a carer who comes in the morning to help me get washed and dressed.

Of course, the main topic of conversation last weekend was the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. As a lifetime royal watcher, I watched the service in Westminster Abbey, the procession back to Buckingham Palace, and of course, the appearance on the balcony. It was a shame that the flypast was curtailed because of the weather, but at least we saw the Red Arrows.

The service in the Abbey was very moving, though unfortunately I missed one of the most moving parts: the anointing and the singing of 'Zadoc the priest', but I did see a shortened version in the evening. Coincidentally I had been reading the Bible passage about King David's death and Solomon's accession which contains the words set to Handel's music: Zadoc the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout 'Long Live King Solomon'.

The commentators made much of the fact that every coronation since 1066 had taken place in the Abbey, but these were words going back even further to the time of Solomon around 1000BC.

On Saturday evening, I had no intention of watching the concert, and was just about to switch the TV off, when the pianist Lang Lang appeared on the serene, and the entertainment wasn't too bad. Kermit and Miss Piggy followed Paddington Bear in sharing the Royal acting prowess and the Prince of Wales paid a very moving tribute to his father,

Now the BBC is full of the Eurovision Song Contest and football, neither of which interest me, although I was a fan of the former in the time of Cliff

Guisborough Calendar

Saturday 1st July 10am-1pm Strawberry Tea - details to follow.

Weekly

Thursday from 9.30am Coffee in Church Hall

 from 10.30am Church open for private prayer

 11.30am Thursday Prayers led by Maureen and Ray.
 Details on church notice board

Richard and Sandy Shaw. My children took over after that. Fortunately I am reading a very interesting book at the minute though it was very difficult to get into, and was about a Welsh princess so had many characters all with Welsh names. The heroine Princess Eleyne was raised by her fiercely Welsh nurse to support the Celtic cause against the marauding English. Though family connections and marriage she moved to London and Fotheringay Castle where May Queen of Scots was executed, but next spent some time in Chester where I was on more familiar ground. Finally the story moved north to Scotland to Dunfermline, then the capital of Scotland, Roxburgh, Falkland Palace initially under Alexander II then his young son Alexander III who, if I remember correctly fell off a cliff near Kinghorn, leaving his kingdom to be inherited by Margaret, Maid of Norway, who then died crossing to Orkney in a terrible storm. The result was the Scottish wars of independence, featuring William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, Edward I (Hammer of the Scots) and his candidate John Balliol (nicknamed Toom Tabard).

Among all this historic background was the fact that Princess Eleyne dabbled in magic and could see not only into the future, but can see people who are dead. She is convinced that her sons will become the ancestors of a line of kings, and judging by the charts and family trees at the beginning of the book, this does happen. But exactly how, I'll just have to wait and see. One of the main themes running through the book is the hunger to acquire land and property, and not just kings but noblemen too: Henry and Edward were famous for this although to be fair, it may have been the feeling of power over the Welsh and the Scots, after all, Edward was known as the Hammer of the Scots.

So I will be buried in my book this evening, unless I can find a good film somewhere.

Madge Baird

	Welcome/door	Vestry/notices	Communion server
4th June	Darren	Joyce	Jenny
11th June	Ray	Jenny	
18th June	Jenny	Ray	
25th June	Martin	Peter	
2nd July	Sandra	Martin	

St Andrew's

“Coffee & Catch-up”

Wednesday June 7th will mark the last of our 6 month trial dates for “Coffee & Catch-up” at Larchfield, so a good opportunity to make some decisions:

1. Are they serving a purpose?
2. Do St Andrews members/friends wish to continue?
3. If so, in the same venue? same frequency? same format (or, more accurately, lack of format?)

Do come along and let's hear your views. Alternatively, let Jane, Jan, or Shirley know beforehand.

Coffee Morning

An update on the Coffee Morning held on 22nd April. £198.00 was raised for the Turkey/Syria Appeal thanks to everyone.

Watch this space for details of our Soup Lunch to be held in the Autumn!!

Condolences

It is with sadness that we have to inform you of the death of our friend Sheila Morris on the 5th May.

Sheila was a longstanding member of St. Andrew's initially helping Una to run the weekly Thursday Club at our church. She also helped Isobel Hunter run the nursery taking over from her when she moved away. Sheila became an elder of St. Andrew's and then became Church Secretary for many years. Latterly she had suffered from long term illness which she bravely battled.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Rachel, Neil and family at this sad time.

Coffee for Charity

23rd April	Turkey/Syria Appeal	£31.21
30th April	Christian Aid	£26.00
7th May	Christian Aid	£23.20
14th May	Boys' Brigade	£23.70

Preachers

Marton

10.00am

4-Jun K & M Harris
Church Meeting

11-Jun Dot Thomson

18-Jun Jan Harper

25-Jun Donna Moore

2-Jul Chris Eddowes

Guisborough

10.00am

Donna Moore
Communion

Brian Stephenson

Ian Smith
Communion

Dave Elliott

tba

Redcar

10.30am

Redcar Baptist
in URC Church

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Material for the July/August Magazine to church editors by Sunday 11th
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