

Days, Months, Years

OUR WORLD IS but a part, a very small part of our galaxy. A galaxy has 100 billion stars - and there are billions of galaxies! In 1999 the Hubble Space Telescope estimated there were 125 billion galaxies in the universe. Our God is so big.

God could have created the world in one second flat, but He chose to do it in six days. So why did He not do it in one second? The answer is that God is **orderly** and is never in a hurry – He **plans** (carefully) all He does! His plan covers centuries and millennia! God wants His creatures, especially His Church, to be orderly and to plan ahead.

To help us to do that God, created the sun and moon which in turn would provide not just day and night but weeks and months and years. God divided **time** into parts - for **our** benefit - to **help** us to plan and keep order!! God of course does not need such 'technology' but for us it is most helpful! Time and dates also give some meaning and significance

APOLOGIES

Our apologies for stating that Jamie Gunn, who wrote an article in our last issue, was from our Toronto congregation. He belongs to our **Vancouver** congregation.

to things – it adds a dimension and shape which makes things much more interesting.

Time is most helpful to the Church to carry out the Great Commission, to go into the world with the gospel. It helps us to realise that time is passing - each day that passes is a day more to give account of, and a day less in which to fulfil all that God has planned for us.

The Bible tells us that the sun and moon are signs to us! *"let them be for signs"*[14]. Signs of what? They are signs of God's voice to us over the years. The voice of our Creator calling to us regarding our 'work' in the world! Regarding our 'purpose' in life! They are reminders and very important indicators to us regarding the **progress** we are making. The seasons are God's voice to us to help us speed on to spiritual growth, maturity and wisdom!

The world considers time to be 'the enemy'. But time is meant to be a blessing. Very few people actually do not learn some things from the passing of time!! Almost everybody has learnt some lessons from life.

Dates, and new years, etc, can bring back memories which in turn, can stir the emotions and make us nostalgic! The 'old' days at school, boyhood pranks, university days, apprenticeships, romantic evenings,

etc, all bring back memories of facts that relate to our inner values!

God meant it to do that - to help us to ask sensible and important questions. To bring us back to the values and purposes of life! The longing and sadness that is in nostalgia is meant to lead us back to God - a God who gives meaning to life and can provide wonderful hope and forgiveness.

Reminding people of the past is very Biblical. Peter said *"Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as **reminders** to stimulate you to wholesome thinking"* [2 Pet 3:1].

Paul also spoke of the benefit of looking back *"Now I would **remind** you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand"* [1 Cor 15:1]. Jude also called his readers back to former days *"But I want to **remind** you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe"* [Jude 5]. Again Hebrews *"But in those sacrifices there is a **reminder** of sins every year"* [Heb 10:3]

So, church services, Lord's Supper, funerals, baptisms, are all reminders of our need to repent, to be thankful and also of God's willingness to pardon and forgive.

Dates, and new years, etc are also a challenge to us in asking questions. Has another year's experience of life (ie, of God's love and mercy) made us stronger in our faith towards God, or more careless regarding our pro-

fession? How are you compared with this time last year? Have you 'sorted' out any 'issues' that needed to be sorted out between you and God last year? God's 'dealings' with you has either melted you or hardened you more than you were last year!

Just as it is wrong to get depressed about the past, so it is wrong to idolise the past and say 'The Good Old days!' Solomon warned *"Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?"* [Ecc 7:10] There are Christians who would love to live in the past and reject this present age! They think the Puritan age was 'Golden!' They think that the Puritans were faultless. 'All you need to know is what the Puritans wrote; you don't need to read anything more' is what I was once told!

Yes, the Puritans were marvelous and we owe them a tremendous debt, yet, they had their faults and weaknesses and there are issues today which they are unable to help us with! They lived before the Enlightenment, evolution, post-modernism. But God's Word is sufficient - we must study it for our own generation and its problems!

Days, months, new years, challenge us to face the issues of our own hi-tech age and all its problems! God is giving us another year, not only to enjoy all the blessings He has given us, but also to learn from the past. Let us study the Scriptures with new vigour and interest and discover those things Paul said were *"written for our learning"* [Rom 15:4].

May God bless us all in 2006.

The Hot Water Bottle

A True Story by Helen Roseveare, Missionary to Africa

ONE NIGHT, IN Central Africa, I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all that we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying, two-year-old daughter.

We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive. We had no incubator. We had no electricity to run an incubator, and no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts.

A student-midwife went for the box we had for such babies and for the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly, in distress, to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in tropical climates. "...and it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed.

As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk; so, in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over a burst water bottle. They do not grow on trees, and there are no stores down forest pathways. "All right," I said, "Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with

many of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby.

I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chilled. I also told them about the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died. During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt consciousness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, the baby'll be dead; so, please send it this afternoon." While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added by way of corollary, "...And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen?" I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything: The Bible says so, but there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if

anyone did send a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time that I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel! I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone; so, I sent for the orphanage children.

Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then, there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children began to look a little bored.

Next, came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - - that would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend. As I put my hand in again, I felt the...could it really be? I grasped it, and pulled it out. Yes, "A brand-new rubber, hot water bottle!" I cried. I

had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone: She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, "Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday School class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. One of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child -- five months earlier in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "That afternoon!"

"And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." [Isaiah 65:24]

[Helen Roseveare a doctor missionary from England to Zaire, Africa, told this as it had happened to her in Africa. She shared it in her testimony at Thomas Road Baptist Church]

PRAYER

"MANY PEOPLE know of William Carey, the 'father of modern missions.' But few people have heard of his sister. She was a quadriplegic and had to be carried from bed to couch. For 50 years she lay in bed and prayed for William Carey. She wrote him encouraging letters - with a pencil between her teeth. Her ministry was perhaps more important because she was a silent partner. Certainly William Carey realized God's blessing was as much a result of his sister's commitment to pray for his ministry as was his dedication to serve God."
(Dan Harrison, A Living Legacy)

Homosexuality & the Bible

By Jerrold Lewis

IN MARCH OF 2000, the Federal Government of Canada voted to approve legislation that would give same-sex couples identical status and rights as common-law heterosexual couples. The vote carried in the House 137-118.

Canada, while leading in little else on the world's stage, is receiving top marks for moral decline as the passive voice of the Canadian people is drowned out by minority activism. The aggressive lobbying of the proponents of a "new morality" has paid off, and the prophets of liberal thought are rejoicing in their success.

Over 30 years ago, Francis Shaeffer wrote regarding the future of ethics, "The thinkables of the eighties and nineties will certainly include things which most people today find unthinkable and immoral, even unimaginable and too extreme to suggest. Yet - since they do not have some overriding principle that takes them beyond relativistic thinking - when these become thinkable and acceptable in the eighties and nineties, most people will not even remember that they were unthinkable in the seventies".

Since the beginning of time, homosexuality was a heinous sin. Whether one studies the ethical writings surrounding the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Early Church, the Middle Ages, and

the Reformation, homosexuality has unanimously been condemned as sinful. And it has been so for over 6000 years for one simple reason- the Bible says it is a sin.

Now, at the dawn of the millennium, liberal theologians are telling us that homosexuality is natural, as apostate denominations lining up to welcome to their rolls, homosexual members, Sunday School teachers, elders, and even ministers! In spite of the modern onslaught of liberal thinking in the area of homosexuality and religion, the Bible remains *unchanged* on its position of condemning homosexuality as a great wickedness.

Creation

When the Lord gave us the Scriptures, he did not leave us without an interpretation of those Scriptures, but built into them a guide, or a rule, to discover His will in all matters of faith and life. Scriptures such as "*Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it*" [Deu 12:32]. And, "*You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God*" [Lev 18:4].

As followers of Christ, we are not free to draw our own conclusions or interpret the Scriptures in a private way. "*Knowing this first, that no*

prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation [2 Peter 1:20]. In other words, the Bible is not a *wax nose* that can be twisted or manipulated to suit the face of our particular circumstance, nor is it to be used as a pretext machine that justifies all our closely held sins. To be a Christian means abandoning our sinful desires at the feet of Christ, denying ourselves, and taking up our cross and following Him [Mat 16:24].

When God created male and female, He did so, in part, to reflect the intimacy and unity of the Trinity. *"Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"* [Gen 1:26]. The creation edict dictates our understanding of God's will in respect to sexual intimacy, love, and reproduction. Homosexuality is a distortion of the creation ordinance of marriage.

In Genesis 2:24 God tells us, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* From this point on, there should be no doubt as to what God intended in respect to fleshly or sexual union. John Murray states, "The prima facie sense in Genesis 2:24 is that one man is to be joined to one woman and that the two would become one flesh". The word *marriage* is used 18 times in the Holy Scriptures, and in every instance it demands a *female object*.

All sexual union therefore (as the fruit of Genesis 2:24) is between male and female. We have absolutely no Biblical instance of God ever

permitting a male/male, or female/female relationship in the sanctity of marriage, or in any other permissible circumstance pertaining to sexual union. In fact we have quite the opposite. But before we go any further let's look at the first account of homosexuality in the Word, and discover what God is telling us about it.

Sodom

In short, the men of Sodom demanded that Lot produce the two guests that they might "know" them [Gen 19:5]. The end result was the citizens of Sodom were smitten with blindness and the city was destroyed by fire and brimstone. It is true that Sodom was guilty of *far more* than sexual perversion but it can't go unnoticed that the men of Sodom wanted to "know" Lot's guests.

Those that defend homosexuality from the Bible try to prove at this point that the Hebrew word "know" (*yadha*) is not the normal word used for homosexual activity (*shakhabh*) but is rather a more generic work for "get acquainted with". The liberal interpretation of the story of Sodom goes something like this: As an alien resident in Sodom, Lot was responsible for introducing his guests to the established townsmen and letting them examine their credentials. For that reason the Sodomites asked to "know" Lot's visitors. The Sodomites wanted to get to know Lot's guests, to see where they were from, where they were going, and why they were in Sodom. Since (in the Eastern

mind) a stranger had a right to hospitality, the Sodomites actions would appear to be overbearing and inhospitable. For such a breach of love and hospitality, God destroyed the city with fire and brimstone.

The problem is that the interpretation set forth above does not work if we take the rest of the story into account. Only if we leave the story in its isolated form is this conclusion possible.

First then, in context, we must see that the men of Sodom came to Lot and asked to “know” his guests. Lot’s response was to shut the door and characterized this request to “yadda” (know) the visitors as a *great wickedness* [See Genesis 19:6,7]. It is very strange to think that Lot would believe that a simple *civic custom* like getting to know the visitors would be a “great wickedness”. In fact to us it would seem quite hospitable to want to drop in on the new visitors to get to know them. Certainly this was not a warrant for divine destruction?

Second, why would Lot offer his *virgin daughters* in place of an introduction to his guests? The Sodomites were already acquainted with them, for Lot was a prominent man in Sodom by virtue of his location (he lived at the gate of the city, the most prominent place to reside. See Genesis 19:1). If these men were just wanting to “get to know” Lot’s visitors, then why does Lot turn around and say, “*Take my daughters, they are virgins who have not been with a man, and you can do with them as you wish*”

(Genesis 19:7,8). Has Lot gone mad? Would he exchange his daughter’s virginity for a short interview with his new guests? How insulted and shocked the Sodomites must have been to be propositioned in such a way! To be given a sexual bribe in exchange for a short visit, Lot would have to be crazy. And how does this square with the belief that Sodom was destroyed because of inhospitality? Surely the only inhospitable one in this story is Lot, yet he was saved from the city’s destruction.

Only those who want to avoid the obvious and natural meaning of these texts would say that they wanted to “know” the visitors in a generic, general way. The great wickedness in this text was sexual perversion in the form of homosexuality, and God destroyed Sodom for it.

The Law of God

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination” [Lev 18:22]. *“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them”* [Lev 20:13].

It is impossible for the thinking man or woman to read the Scriptures quoted above and not see their objective. Still, some liberal theologians will argue that these laws set down in Leviticus were only for the nation of Israel, that these laws were strictly *ceremonial in nature* and are therefore terminated

with the coming of the New Testament. While we would agree that the specific laws known as ceremonial and judicial have expired with the nation of Israel, we still believe that the *general equity* of the moral law remains. The Westminster Confession says, "To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the *general equity thereof may require*."

While it is true that certain laws were *abolished* with the coming of Christ (ceremonial laws), we are left with the *moral portion* of the Law even in the New Testament.

Matthew 5:17,18 says, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*" The truth remains, that in respect to sodomy, there is a ceremonial feature (uncleanness) that was abolished with the final sacrifice of Christ. Nevertheless, sodomy remained a *moral crime* as well, falling under the *judicial heading* of the 7th commandment.

Sodomy was one of the few ceremonial laws that transcended its primary typical category and was firmly embedded in the judicial and moral laws. Furthermore, if Sodomy (as mentioned in Leviticus 18) was abolished with Israel, then so was incest [vv 6- 17], adultery [v 20], and bestiality [v 23]. The theologian who is arguing for a termination of the

sin of sodomy is, by the same reasoning, arguing for the termination of every other sin mentioned in Leviticus 18.

The New Testament

Romans chapter 1 tells us that even in the New Testament the principle of homosexuality is unchanged [Rom 1:22-28]. Vile passions can only be interpreted in light of what we *already know* to be moral or immoral. The New Testament is off its hinge if we separate it from the moral grounding of the Old Testament.

Many current liberal theologians would like to take Romans 1 and place it in the context of the Greek culture found at the time of its writing *instead* of the Old Testament. That is why when we see words like "*burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful*" in Romans 1, we have nothing to tell us what is being done here unless we look at the etymological root of male/male lusting. We can only do this through the viewfinder of the Old Testament. "Vile passions" is in direct relation to Leviticus 20:13 "*If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.*" It is very clear here what Romans 1 is speaking about.

Clever attempts have been made by the homosexual community to divest Paul of his clear condemnation of homosexuality and put a

new twist on his words. This has been called the *pederasty theory*. In a nutshell this theory maintains that Paul was only condemning the sexual and emotional exploitation of boys. The problem with this line of reasoning is we have absolutely *no mention* of boys in Romans 1, only men. As well, if the Apostle was speaking about sexual exploitation of minors in Romans 1:27, doesn't the problem of Leviticus 18 come back and haunt the exegete? If pedophilia was abolished with sodomy at the coming of Christ in the ceremonial law, why then would Paul be condemning pederasty in Romans 1?

Lastly, Jude 7 interprets the story of Sodom for us. What better interpreter of the Scriptures are there than the Scriptures? It is quite clear that Sodom was destroyed because of sexual immorality. "*Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*" What is this strange flesh? Jamison, Faussett and Brown believe it to be "departing from the course of nature, and going after that which is unnatural".

Conclusion

Just before Christmas, in what's been described as Britain's "wedding of the year," pop star Elton John was "wedded" to his longtime partner, Canadian, David Furnish. The ceremony was held in Windsor's 17th

century town hall and conducted by the same registrar as the earlier nuptials of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles. Weather you are in Canada, or Britain, it is obvious that homosexuality is not going away any time soon.

Yet our response as Christians to those who practice the sin of homosexuality needs to be Biblical, not simply loaded with emotion. All too often the homosexual is lost in a blaze of expressive rhetoric that hardly seems like reasonable, cogent, argumentation. We need to rid ourselves of the vitriolic attitudes that so often characterizes the Christian and respond with a Christlike attitude.

Chances are, most homosexuals won't care much for the arguments set forth in this little article. On the other hand there is an increasing interest in the gay community to incorporate *spirituality* into their historically pagan lifestyles. That is why in Canada and in Britain they have sought a distinctly religious term to front their sin.

It is the duty of every believer to defend the Bible in every way that they can. When the Bible is circumvented to establish sin, we must rise up. But not with weapons of violence and hate, but armaments of passionate debate and interchange, and above all, the Word of God. And we must all remember that sin is the plague and pestilence of the human race, not just gays. "*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ* [Eph 2:13].

True Faithfulness

FAITHFULNESS IS USUALLY defined in terms of what we believe and how much we hold to that belief without wavering when tested. It is also usually defined by how much we remain true to the traditional understanding and practice of the belief. To live according to the rules is to be faithful. The Pharisees are an example of those whose faithfulness was determined in that way, eg, how you kept the Sabbath must be in accordance with the traditional standard and practice of the Pharisees.

However, biblical faithfulness is not quite the same. While it does include behaviour – it is behaviour which requires faith with an element of risk in exercising that faith! This is the whole point of the parable of the talents. *“Well done, good and faithful servant”* – why? Because he had invested his talents in service which resulted in increase. Wholly trusting in the Lord, yet taking some sort of ‘risk’. The servant who did nothing with his talents is called *“wicked and lazy”*! [Mat 24:26]! It is those who are in risky and difficult situations that are called to be faithful unto death [Rev 2:10]. Abraham, the father of the faithful, took a step of real faith in leaving his home-land and going to a place he had never heard of before!

Faith must be ‘improved’. Peter is insistent that we **add** to our faith. Our faith must be ‘used’. Doing nothing with our gifts and talents is grievous to God and constitutes unfaithfulness. Paul told Timothy *“to stir up the gift that was in him”* [2 Tim 1:6] because he felt Timothy was not using his gifts as he could have done. We have to give an account of how we used the gifts and opportunities God gave us. God will never ask more of us than we can produce. But God **will** ask of us all that which we could have done with the gifts and talents He **has** given us.

Individuals and congregations need to be faithful to the great commission and step out in faith spreading the Word to those who have never heard of it before and who are in desperate need of it. Faith without works is dead.

Adoption

A teacher was discussing a picture of a family. One little boy in the picture had a different hair colour than the other members. One of her students suggested that he was adopted. A little girl said, “I know all about adoptions, I was adopted.” “What does it mean to be adopted?” asked another child. “It means,” said the girl, “that you grew in your mommy’s heart instead of her tummy!”

Congregational News

STORNOWAY

The congregation has had a very busy start to the winter. In October, another series of "Christianity Explored" commenced and we look for the Lord's blessing. Missionary meetings were frequently held with speakers from European Missionary Fellowship, TransWorld Radio, and WEC. We also had the Annual Friends Rally of the local branch of the Gideons International in the church and our November Communion which ended with a Guest Service on the Lord's Day evening.

One new development this year, which we hope will become an annual event, was the distribution of the evangelistic issue of "Evangelical Times" around the doors in several streets near the church. Fellowship meetings continue in the church after the evening service every second Lord's Day and one particular memorable evening was when a converted Hindu pastor spoke to us.

The congregation enjoyed having with them, over the festive season, the minister of the APC congregation in Toronto, Malcolm and Joan Macleod and family, who formerly belonged to the congregation.

INVERNESS

Over a number of years the

congregation have had the pleasure of a preaching visit from Revd Dick Lucas, formerly of St Helen's, London. He comes to the Inverness area to spend part of the holiday time with a friend who worships in the Inverness congregation on Sunday evenings, and we have the privilege of Dick's ministry when he is in the north. On this visit his preaching theme was the Uniqueness of Christianity, in two parts, The Incomparable God and the Incomparable Christ.

Over the holiday period a number of activities in the congregation were put on hold, but now things are up-and-running again. In the midst of all our busyness we must be careful that we do not lose sight of the Master. Being busy about the things of the church is not the same as being holy and serving Christ. In the congregation we have started a 'Prayer Time' before the evening service, and it has proved a refreshing and profitable time.

EDINBURGH

It can't be the deadline for sending a brief article to the editor again, but it is. Surely not 'mid' January already, but it is. Where did the past year go? Time flies-faster and even faster yet. It is only used well when we do God's will. Thankfully God's will includes rest and recreation, but

pray that we and Christians everywhere would make the most of the time that God graciously gives. Who doesn't know the bitterness of time wasted, and the satisfaction of time spent well.

Why do I use precious time and effort on writing this article? Because we greatly value the prayers and the good will of God's people and most certainly believe they are fundamental to Christian work and strategy. More than ever we say: 'pray for the work and the workers here.' By using your precious time and effort to read this, you will be better equipped to pray for the situation here.

The services and the shop are the main outreach at the moment. The service Sunday by Sunday is humbling when we recall that less than a year ago we only had our own family and one other person on a Sunday. This other person continues to be a huge support and help. Now we can have anything from ten to twenty five. This includes children, teenagers and over sixty's - converted and unconverted. Isn't God wonderful!

All who come need God's word in a great variety of ways. Pray that we would minister it in a wholesome and attractive way; otherwise the main purpose of being here would be overshadowed with chronic failure and sadness. Pray that we would graciously and wisely meet the challenge of working with children from a great variety of backgrounds. Some children with much more than the normal

negative influences. This can only have a profound effect on their concentration, perception and most importantly moral and spiritual values. Pray for all these dear children. Pray that those favoured with better family situations would understand the needs of the less favoured.

Pray for those who come not so much for us to minister to them but so that they can help with their presence, prayer and in a variety of ways practically support the work. This is very humbling for us and most generous of them. There are at least four in this category and more than four when the ones who come less frequently are taken into account.

Pray for Jo the parish youth worker, young, talented, enthusiastic and spiritually alive. The children miss her anytime she can't make it.

The shop continues to be a wonderful contact with the community and a place where people share their joys and sorrows with breathtaking frankness and very entertaining humour at times. Pray that all of us who help in the shop respond appropriately. God's grace is sufficient; our problem is that we don't draw on it, as we should.

The range of shared experiences is phenomenal: a family member murdered; abused as a child; house trashed by a family member; falsely accused by a father; stolen from; maimed in ones own home as a result of a revenge attack; a grotesque case of bullying in school; someone anxious about a family member

serving in Iraq and much more besides.

Then thankfully the positive stories: a baby on the way; the wonder of a safe birth after years of the worst kind of heart rending disappointment; a victory over drugs; a bargain of a lifetime; temporary employment at last; someone converted rejoicing in their new found faith; someone eager to attend a follow up to their Alpha Course in another parish; someone organizing a meeting to support a Christian Mission abroad; remarkable answers to prayer; a Christian going on steadily; a Christian eager to help and people who come again and again just to see how we are doing.

We serve Christ who responded perfectly to every situation and it is only as we have His Spirit acting in us that we will respond with any measure of appropriateness. Help us please by your prayers.

Pray that we would give ourselves to prayer as never before, and to preaching and speaking and gossiping the gospel. Only God can equip us day-by-day. We are abysmal failures in our own strength, and we mean it! But God can use us. Pray that he would.

Please note the times of the shop opening: Monday to Friday from 10.30am to 3.45pm. Closed on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

JR

DUNDEE

Once again we had a very good attendance at the Special Service

over the holiday period. It is encouraging to see the locals, whom you have been contacting over the year, come to a service where the gospel is clearly proclaimed.

One Sunday morning a lady came in to the church with her daughter. She was in need of help. Her son had been murdered, and her other son had just been accused of murder and was now in remand. Her son, she said was totally innocent. She asked 'How can you believe in God when that happens?'

We invited her to wait for the service which she willingly did. Afterwards we provided her with some of her needs and ran her home. Please pray for this woman and her family.

We continue to leaflet the area with an appropriate message and an invitation to come and worship with us. We still see one or two new faces each month which encourages us to keep in contact with the community.

We look forward to our Congregational meeting in February where we hope to present some our plans for the ensuing year. Please ask God to provide more regular helpers for the various events throughout the year.

We have begun to study the Westminster Confession of Faith at our mid-week meeting, which is now held in one of the homes in the congregation. Please look at our website or telephone us if you hope to come! You will be very welcome to join us.

We ask for your earnest prayers that God would bless our work.

From the Moderator's Desk

That Reached My Heart

Mr William Byers, Fearn

"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" [Jeremiah 15:16]

DO YOU LIKE ME, remember how the old folks of a previous generation when they *enjoyed* something very tasty and nourishing used to say, "That reached my heart"? Life was much more basic and simple in those days. The fare was good and wholesome, but plain, without the variety that we take for granted in these days of supermarkets and deep freezes. Maybe at New Year time there would be something special on the menu, something more exotic and unusual, that would be especially tasty and would evoke the response, "that reached my heart". Have you spiritually come to *"Taste and see that God is good"*? [Ps34v8].

How does a preacher get a text? The direct answer is, from The Lord. Tomes could be written on this subject from the experience of God's people. Well I will bring you into my confidence regarding our text today.

After I sent off to the editor my previous insertion for the APC News. My mind began to be exercised on the next issue. I was praying that God would give me something

appropriate to say to you at this time. I awoke at about three o'clock one morning about three weeks ago and this text flashed into my mind in a very vivid way with a brief outline of how to handle it. I took it as from The Lord, and rejoiced that my mind was now settled on a subject. It was three in the morning, my wife was sound asleep beside me, I did not want to waken her, so I did not put on the light to write down notes, it was so vivid and clear I thought I would never forget it. When I woke in the morning it was gone! I racked my brains, agonised and prayed, for about ten days, but could not recall my "vision of the night."

We were at a marriage in Aberdeenshire, quietly waiting for the bride to arrive when click, there it was all before my mind in vivid reality. How I rejoiced and thanked God for its recall, concluding that he did indeed mean me to use it in this exercise. Not prepared to trust my memory this time I asked my wife if she had a pen, but no, she asked our daughter seated next to her, who provided the pen and down went the notes there and then. So I cast my bread upon the waters, humbly trusting the Lord to do with it as seemed him good.

We approach then this verse of

Holy Writ, Jeremiah 15:16, seeking the blessing of God the Holy Spirit upon it so that we may profit from it. By way of introduction to the text and it's context, we note that it was penned by Jeremiah, often called 'The weeping prophet', one of the major prophets of the Bible, who wrote this book and also The Lamentations of Jeremiah which follows it.

He lived in a very dark day in Israel's history. Sin and wickedness abounded and this was the source of his grief and sorrow. It seems as if the books were written in tears and blood and yet as we read them we find real gems of God's truth and comfort shining through the gloom and doom to lift up, console and encourage God's people in a day of rampant wickedness.

Isaiah in the preceding book of the Bible and it's opening verses [1.4] says to Israel, *"Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corruptors: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, They are gone away backward."* Here then by way of contrast the weeping prophet speaks of joy. *"Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart"*. The psalmist was in this position too [Ps 119:162] *"I at thy word rejoice, as one of spoil that finds great store"*, and again [Ps 119:103 Met Ver] *"How sweet unto my taste, O Lord, are all thy words of truth! Yea, I do find them sweeter far than honey to my mouth."* Have you been here yourself dear

believer? Have you not eaten Christ, Gods word incarnate, spiritually and found it to be the *joy* and rejoicing of your heart?

Jeremiah, you are the weeping prophet, what do you know of joy? Cleopas and his fellow were in sorrow on the Emmaus road but they knew burning of heart when Jesus walked and talked with them. It has always been this way, let God draw near by His Word and Spirit and you will know real joy. As John Newton puts it so aptly in his hymn - *"Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know"*. Oh dear soul, did you not know something of this yourself, when The Lord Jesus drew near and went with you?

How often it is in a time of trial, discouragement and difficulty, that our loving, gracious Lord draws near and goes with us; applies the balm of Gilead to our faltering steps; proves to us His Word that our weakness is made perfect in His strength. This is how the Lord gives His people *"The oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"*, How blithely then may we sing the new song.

Has the Lord so blessed His Word in your experience, that you have had to say, I now understand that text. Little wonder then that you, because it is the Lord, lean upon Him and say of His Word, 'Oh that was good. Precious to my soul, that reached my heart', because *"Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart"*.

Service at Dingwall Auction Mart

Report by Kenneth MacLean, Gairloch

THE ANNUAL SERVICE for farmers, crofters and friends in Dingwall Auction Market, took place on the afternoon of the Lord's Day, 11 December 2005. It was again wonderful to see a congregation of over five hundred gather, some coming along up to an hour before the service began, to be sure of a seat.

Following some community singing, the service commenced with the singing of Psalm 100 to the beautiful tune Zion's Temple, the praise being led by the Inverness and District Gospel Male Voice Choir. Thereafter the Choir Chairman led in prayer, several items of praise were sung and a passage of Scripture read.

Choir member **Roderick MacKenzie**, Fearn, then gave the Gospel message, the gist of which was as follows:

"Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" [John 15:13].

"I did not expect to be at this desk again this year, but having had the responsibility placed on me once again, it is necessary to try to focus my mind on what is really important for us all.

A few weeks ago I heard a noted preacher begin his sermon with this story: "There was a man who was out of work for many weeks and visited the job centre regularly to see if he could get a job. After several weeks he was delighted to be told 'We have a job for you at the Zoo – they want someone to dress up like a monkey'. He went immediately to the Zoo and they supplied him with a monkey outfit and he was told to go to the monkey enclosure and act like a monkey from 9.00am to 5.00pm every day.

He had soon mastered monkey movements, learned monkey sounds, could scratch himself appropriately, could swing from the branches of the trees, and could easily be taken for being a monkey. One morning however, he swung from the high branch of a tree so vigorously that he swung right out of the monkey enclosure and landed in the lions' enclosure alongside. Immediately a lion advanced towards him roaring, and he ran to the fence, with the lion growling at his tail all the while. He feared for his life and was on the point of shouting out for help when the lion whispered to him "Don't worry – don't shout or I'll lose my job too".

Both were men who were dressed up for their respective jobs!

Why did he tell that story? Because he wanted to illustrate the fact that things don't always look the way they really are. We can all look happy and secure today, but what is really important is how we are on the inside, and in particular what our relationship to God and to His Son Jesus Christ is like.

With that in mind, and hoping that you will come to know what your relationship to God and to His Son Jesus Christ really is, let's remind ourselves of the following verses:-

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" [John 3:16]; "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" [John 15:13]; "These things I command you, that you love one another" [John 15:17]; "Love not in word only but in deed and in truth" [1 John 3:18].

First, let's remind ourselves of God's love [John 3:16].

"God so loved - that he gave", (He could not have done more to prove His love) - that whosoever – that means you and I are included in this verse, because we are in the world, but in order to have everlasting life we - must believe, so the question is, "Do you believe?"

Second, let's remind ourselves of the love of God's Son – Jesus Christ [John 15:13]

So there is no greater love than this. But wait - it is for His enemies

he died *"while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* [Rom 5:8]. Are you moved by this love, by this person? Has he captivated your heart? Note the words of the piece the choir has just sung "He left the splendour of heaven, knowing His destiny: the lonely hill of Golgotha, where He lay down his life for me. If that isn't love, the ocean is dry; there are no stars in the sky, and the sparrow can't fly; if that isn't love, then heaven's a myth; there's no feeling like this: if that isn't love."

How can we remain unmoved by this love for sinners like you and me? Surely there will be a positive response to the final verse of that piece: "Come to the Saviour who loves you, casting on Him your care; there's a pardon for all who will trust Him, and His Glory in Heaven you'll share".

Third, we are told "Love one another" [John 15:17]. Robert Murray McCheyne died in 1843 at the age of 29 and is still known as one of the most blessed of preachers in Scottish History. A young minister had always wanted to hear him preach but had been unable to do so before Robert Murray McCheyne's death. However, some months after McCheyne died, he went to see the church in Dundee in which he preached and asked the church officer if he could give him the secret of McCheyne's success. He took the visiting minister to the vestry and said, "Put your arms on the table and your head in your hands and let the tears flow", and then he lead him up into the pulpit

and told him to do the same again, explaining that Robert Murray McCheyne rarely preached without a tear in his eye, and in this he was following the example of Jesus who wept over Jerusalem and said "*How often would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings but you would not*". The choir sang "Weep through Me". Love causes tears of sorrow and of joy, and love costs - and you all know that that is the truth.

Well then - there is the (solemn) thought that even although today you have heard the message of the love and mercy of God and His invitation, you still refused. Frankly, that brings tears to our eyes and to our hearts. What have you against Jesus who has shown such love? Please do not refuse him any longer, but confess your sin to Him and believe that Jesus died for you, and do that now. We believe the Holy Spirit can bring that to pass in all our lives.

Finally, we are to love in deed and in truth [1 John 3:18].

The deed and the truth is that we are here today. We look at you face to face – sinner looking at sinner, and we just pray and hope and long for you to taste and see Christ's love for yourself. Then when the roll is called up yonder you will be amongst those who believe in Him and not amongst those who do not. Please remember that at death His people are carried into heaven with Christ which is far better; but those who have rejected Him and have

continued to do so are cast off into outer darkness.

I hope and pray that when we sing at the end of this service "When the Roll is called up yonder", we will be there together amongst those who have a real understanding of these wonderful words: "*Greater love hath no man than this – that a man lay down his life for his friends*".

Thank you all so much for coming here today and for listening so attentively.

May God bless us all."

A Change of Role

A BOY WAS swimming when he developed cramps, and cried out for help. A man heard his cry and saved him from drowning.

Years later that same boy and some friends robbed a store and were arrested. When the young man appeared in court, he recognized the judge as the man who had saved him from drowning several years earlier.

The young man said, "Your honor, I remember you. You kept me from drowning." The judge replied, "Yes, I remember. Then I was your savior, but today I am your judge".

Today Christ is a Savior. But one day He will be the judge of all the earth. He wants to save you from sin, judgment, and hell now, and invites you to come and trust Him before He changes His role from a Saviour to a Judge.

Memories or Dreams?

By Malcolm MacInnes

TRUE HISTORY records the fulfilling of God's purpose in the world. He reigns, and his will is best for us all. This affords great comfort for all who trust and obey him.

Both the Bible and Christian biographies are replete with accounts of God's wisdom and goodness. These records have inspired many people to pray to God that He would work mightily in their own lives.

A wall-plague in a small church in England there bears the name of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. A man, seen gazing at the wall-plague, was overheard saying to God, "Do it again, Lord; Do it again". He was remembering the past and dreaming about the future.

To benefit from our memories we must move from the past to 'hope and dream' about the future. In Psalm 115, verse 12, the writer recalls what God has done, but quickly moves to confidently say, "He will bless us". Even a cursory reading of Bible passages shows a pattern of recalling what God has done, followed by a confident challenge to face the future with God. Read Joshua, chapter 24, for example.

The church needs men who 'dream dreams' because they have

seen from God's book what he has done in the past, and can do again.

Greg Morris, in an issue of Leadership Dynamics, makes this observation: when 'we lose our effectiveness when our memories are greater than our dreams'. Dreams for God are not self-generated ambitions, but goals which become the focus in your life as you serve him. They rise from your discovery of the wonder of God's stepping into human history.

What moved Abraham to move out from his pagan background to become an example of the life of faith? It was God's special intrusion in his life. Following God's instruction, absurd as they may appear to many people, led to the collapse of the walls of Jericho.

King Ahab disguised himself to escape the fulfillment of the adverse prediction of his death in battle, but he was fatally wounded. A man drew his bow at random and struck the king through a chink in his armour [1 Kings 22:34]. The timing was impeccable, and who made it so? Our God. Isn't that breathtaking?

E.M. Bounds, in one of his little books on prayer, makes this challenging comment, 'The church is looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men'. Older Christians, who have been a long

time in Gospel ministry, will have tried many methods and schemes, and are possibly now feeling frustrated, disappointed, and perhaps even disillusioned. Young Christians will possibly feel that if they change the way things are done and have a fresh approach, great blessing will follow.

There is ample room for changes in methods, presentations, and preaching, but none of these will effect changes in lives which are gripped by something stronger than the novelty of our approach.

God alone will set the prisoners free. It is God's prerogative to build his church. We must be prepared to be, not the architects, but the labourers who, at our best, only carry the bricks. What God has done before, he is capable of doing again.

Possibly the fault for any delay in experiencing the blessing lies pretty close to myself and to yourself. We organise, we plan, we discuss, we scheme. Preaching follows preaching, and we see little fruit. Another year has dawned, and will it be for your church fellowship what so many previous years have been?

Perhaps we have settled for a shameful predictability, because we do not really expect the extraordinary to happen. Read Isaiah, chapter 40.

The Creator God is covenanted to strengthen his people so they will fly. Otherwise, although we profess to be Christians, we get no higher than the Ducks in Kierkegaard's story. It reads like this: There once was a village inhabited by ducks. On

Sundays, the ducks would waddle out their doors to the church down the street. They waddled into the sanctuary and squatted in their favourite pews. The duck pastor would waddle up to the pulpit and open the Bible.

Then he would read, "Ducks! God has given you wings! With wings you can fly! With wings you can mount up and soar like eagles. No walls can confine you! No fence can hold you! You have wings. God has given you wings, and you can fly like birds". Excitedly, all the ducks shouted "Amen" – then they all waddled home!

Is your outlook for the church's future that it carry on as it has ever done as far back as you can remember, with no expectation of people being born-again or of professing Christians being gripped with a passion for holy living in the power of the Spirit of God? Have your vision for the future grounded and sustained in God's truth.

Abandon yourself to his promise and providence. That is where memories inspire dreams. Work as if it all depended on you, but pray knowing that it all depends on God.

Joseph, the Dreamer in Genesis, had hard experiences in life before his dream became a reality, but it did come. Get your dream from God's word, look to him for its fulfillment, and he will not disappoint you. "Delight yourself in God; he will give you the desire of your heart" [Psa 37].

Rise, Let Us Be Going

IN THE GARDEN of Gethsemane on the night Jesus was arrested, the disciples fell asleep when Jesus had asked them to stay awake; they turned their heads away in weariness when he had asked them to pray and keep watch.

They felt the heaviness of their eyes instead of the heaviness of the moment, though Jesus repeatedly tried to stir them to be alert. It was a day of failings. After Jesus's arrest, everyone deserted him and fled.

Peter, who had emphatically declared he would never deny Christ, heard the rooster crow and knew exactly what he had done. In the aftermath of three denials, Peter wept bitterly. One wonders how the other scattered disciples received the morning.

What do you do with despair? What do you do when you know that you have messed up, when you know that you have missed an opportunity, when it seems that all of your shortcomings are written in large print across your life and there is no going back with an eraser?

Most of us walk away from a ruined moment thoroughly defeated. But where do you go? And how long do you remain in your defeat? Do you throw up your hands and stop trying? Do you mentally beat yourself up? Do you carry your guilt as if paying penitence? Do you, in the words of George MacDonald,

house a conscience that does its duty so well it makes the whole house uncomfortable?

Christian author Joni Eareckson Tada knows intimately what the face of despair looks like. Injured in a diving accident that left her paralyzed, she was once convinced she had missed God's best for her. Her misstep loomed before her, and because of it, she believed that God was somehow forced to go with his divine Plan B.

Do we, in our assailings or failings, hold a similar perspective? In the regret of a missed opportunity, the guilt of a failed moment, the despair of an irreversible situation, it is understandable that we sometimes sink into the hopeless thought that it is all over. It is easy to beat ourselves up, to despairingly ponder what it means to have missed God's best, and to believe that somehow, with disappointment, God must now come in and adjust his plan for our lives.

How significant, then, are Christ's words to his despairing disciples, and to those of us who have ever felt the sting of regret. To those who had fallen asleep, Jesus returned and said, "*Rise, let us be going*" [Matthew 26:46]. To Peter who had denied him three times, Jesus took him aside and said, "*Feed my lambs*" [John 21:17]. To his once

scattered disciples, Jesus offered two commands, neither asking them to sit in a corner and think about what they'd done, nor asking them to carry their sense of guilt for a time before thoroughly moving on. He simply said, "Go" and asked for their obedience.

For the disciples, it was a day of failings. For God, it was the fullness of time, the moment in history when the floodgates of heaven were opened, and failed days, missed moments, and broken lives were forever offered a hope that does not let us down.

There are days that we can never

get back, words we can't erase, and times when we have certainly failed. Yet in Christ, all is never lost. But all is gained. In him alone we are accepted, redeemed through his blood, forgiven of our sins. In him alone we are adopted, received as children of God, and loved as heirs of the promise. Do not despair. Go and follow.

Jill Carattini
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The Church Today

IT IS ONE OF THE REMARKABLE features of contemporary church life that so many are attempting to heal the church by tinkering with its structures, its services, its public face. This is clear evidence that modernity has successfully palmed off one of its great deceits on us, convincing us that God himself is secondary to organisation and image, that the church's health lies in its flow charts, its convenience, and its offerings, rather than in its inner life, its spiritual authenticity, the toughness of its moral intentions, its understanding of what it means to have God's Word in this world. Those who do not see this are out of touch with the deep realities of life, mistaking changes on the surface for changes in the deep waters that flow beneath. An inspired group of marketers might find a way of reviving a flagging business by modifying its image and offerings, but the matters of the heart, the matters of God are not susceptible to such cosmetic alteration. The world's business and God's business are two different things.

The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organisation, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stop the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgments is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common.

David F Wells

MANY CHURCHES have not learned the lessons that most parents stumble on sooner or later. Churches imagine that the less they ask or expect of believers, the more popular they will become and the more contented the worshippers will be. The reverse is true. Those who ask little find that the little they ask is resented or resisted; those that ask much find that they are given much and strengthened by the giving. For it is only as lives begin to intersect in sacrificial ways that the church starts to develop its own internal culture, and it is only in this context that the reality of God will both weigh heavily on the church and be preserved in its life.

David F Wells

OUR GREAT CREATOR

The sun is the closest star to earth, and it takes about eight minutes for its light to reach us. Yet the light from the stars that are farthest from earth but still visible to us takes over 4,000 years to reach us!

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