

Blackbraes and Shieldhill
Parish Church
linked with
Muiravonside Parish Church
Spring 2021



www.bsandm-church.org.uk

Interim Moderator: Rev Scott Burton
Locum Minister: Rev Sandra Mathers OLM

Registered Charity
Blackbraes and Shieldhill SC 002512
Muiravonside SC 007571



Message from the Interim Moderator

Rev Scott Burton

Dear friends,

This edition of the parish magazine comes to you at a time when the Church of Scotland will soon be meeting in General Assembly, with representative ministers and elders gathering together virtually from across the nation and wider world to debate and agree plans for our denomination. For several years we have been told that we need to be “more radical” since the situation looks grim for the Church of Scotland. As I’ve said in a few sermons now, we have seen a 50% reduction in 20 years!

Well, from what I’ve heard at the time of writing this article, it would appear that this year’s General Assembly could bring some radical changes. Certainly not all the changes we need, but some at least, and likely to be focused on the number of ministers and buildings across the land, as well as the systems and plans which underpin this.

This is not new news of course – I’ve been telling you about this for some time and what it means for the Braes Churches. But I am waiting with bated breath to see what comes about at this year’s GA and I’ll give you further info once we know more.

But let us continue to be clear – change is still coming and likely will increase in pace and range even more than we’ve already outlined in previous articles and updates.

However, other changes are maybe more welcome – the easing of restrictions for example, and hopefully when you receive this letter we are still heading in a positive direction! With what has been outlined to us so far from the Scottish Government and Church of Scotland central offices, it does look like some activity might return over the summer, but what and how is still uncertain, so do keep in the loop through other members or

speaking with your elder or locum, Rev. Sandra Mathers.

Nevertheless, if we are to be the people of God in this place – if we are to see God's purposes furthered in our time – then we can't rely on central changes, nor on the slow return to "normal". Because, there is in fact so much we can still do even now and the kingdom of God has always been primarily furthered when God's people – at the local level – took ownership of their faith and responded to God's calling upon them to fulfil that Great Commission from Jesus: '...go and make disciples of all nations.' (Matthew 28:20)

Friends, the times are still changing and uncertain, but the Lord is as near as ever and His call still stands. Will you respond and play your part? Will you give of yourself to His purposes, caring for His people and sharing your faith (in word or deed) with friend and neighbour? I hope and pray that we will, brothers and sisters, and that this summer will bring about much testimony to the glory of God.

With love to one and all,

Scott

Interim Moderator



Message from our Locum Minister

Rev Sandra Mathers

Hello everyone, today is one of those days we see and drool about in brochures: the sky is blue, the sun is shining, the new leaves are clothing the trees in green, the daffodils are trumpeting the beauty of it all – and to crown it all – it's fairly warm. I'm reminded of a chorus that used to be sung when I was a very small member of the Sunday School:

The birds upon the treetops sing their song
The angels join their chorus all day long
The flowers in the garden blend their hue
So why should I not praise Him too.

I also remember with amusement that all of us singing so lustily lived in the middle of the city and not one of us had a garden. Nevertheless we were very aware of God's handiwork and His goodness to us in the beauty of our world.

The Psalmist in Psalm 47 reminds us that "God is the King of all the earth" and encourages us to "sing praises to Him." Given a day like today its easy to lift our hearts in praise to God for all His goodness to us – and yes, also the fact that we can look forward – corona virus allowing – to more freedom of movement than we've enjoyed for quite a while. It seems too good to be true that we'll be able to travel beyond our own area and even be able to go shopping.

Yet not everyone's heart is overflowing with praise today: many families have hearts heavy with the pain of loss. For

some the problem is the likelihood of unemployment as government aid is withdrawn, and we're all aware of how many firms in our area have already closed.

Agnostic writer HG Wells said, "God is an ever-absentee help in times of trouble." He was - and is - wrong, as many of us have proved in our own lives. In Psalm 46 we are assured that "God is our refuge and strength; an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear - ***though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the sea***"

It is precisely when our world collapses about our ears, when the beauty of the world around us seems an anachronism and an irrelevance, that we need to cast ourselves on God's mercy and loving kindness. He is the God who is with us whatever befalls us, and He is the God who knows and cares, whether our shock, bewilderment and pain are caused by circumstances pertinent to our personal lives, the world around us or indeed the problems of the church where we have worshipped and enjoyed fellowship for generations.

Words from the Bible which have brought me comfort and reassurance in the best and the worst of times are these - "I am with you always; I will never leave you, never forsake you" and they have brought comfort, encouragement and hope to countless others in many different circumstances.

I pray that all of us, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, may remember with thanksgiving their

unchanging truth and indeed prove them day by day in our lives. Let us be faithful in praying for all who find themselves, for whatever reason, going through a time of crisis, pain and uncertainty, that they may know the presence of our loving and unchanging God surrounding them, and be assured that He – and we – care for them.

Sandra Mathers

Locum Minister

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NHS

I have been fortunate over the years in not having contact with NHS except making a few visits to the GP! Times have changed and in recent years both Robert and I have been indebted to NHS. Having had stays in three hospitals recently I have been treated with tender care, sensitivity and dignity by all staff. At present the services are with the pandemic and other conditions highlighted in the media. For me in recent years “they have been there at the point of need.” Well done!

Lorna Coulter



At the bottom of my garden, in my favourite place,
I sit down on the bench and feel the sunlight in my face.

Breathing in the early spring is always good for you,
So I take time to relax, there's nothing I need to do.

But the birds up above me don't have time to rest,
As they try to find a mate then start to build a nest.
They sing as they fly back and forth, working busily,
And from below I watch them as they flit from tree to tree.

Butterflies that flutter by, blue, red and yellow too
There's one, and another one there are quite a few,
Newly emerged from their cocoons, it looks like lots of fun,
Dancing with each other in the bright warm sun,

I feel the nice warm breeze, smell the new grass that's
growing,

And suddenly I have a thought, I really must get going.

I need to put the laundry off, then cook, pop into town .

But I wouldn't want to miss this, so I stay sitting down.

Rita Braes

Funerals

'The Lord will protect you as you come and go, both now and forevermore'.



Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Mrs Helen Wight

Mrs Janet (Nettie) Thomson

Funerals

'The Lord will protect you as you come and go, both now and forevermore'.



Muiravonside Parish

Mr Gordon Taylor

Mr William Lockhart

Reflections at the Quay

Many people in our congregations look forward to worship on Sunday mornings from the Quay in Glasgow, where two people from different religions present a short service.

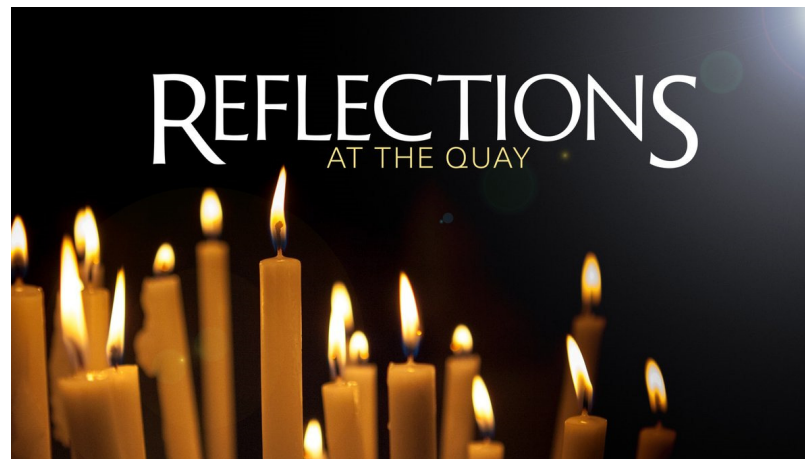
Many people have commented on the hymn singing recordings around Scottish churches, how uplifting this has been during the cold winter days throughout the virus.

Wouldn't it be special when eased restrictions allow us to have a joint Songs of Praise service in celebration!

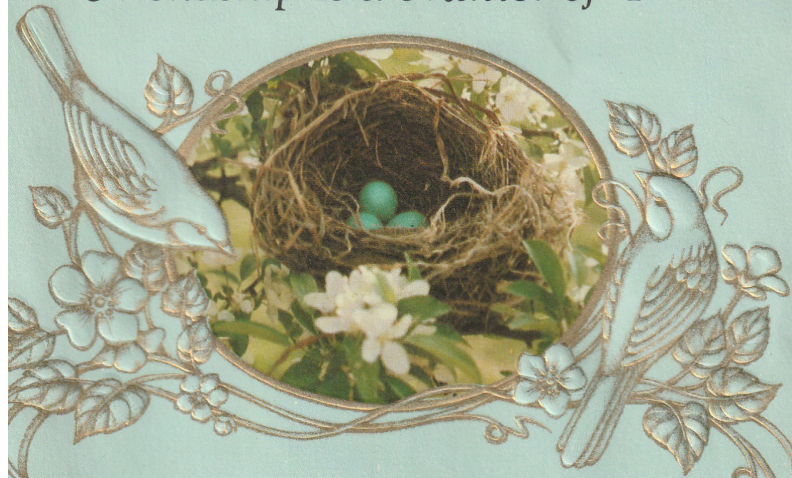
No doubt, Government and Church of Scotland Guidelines will determine what progress can allow such happenings.

Watching smiling faces sing their hearts out speaks volumes for our faith, recharging weekly hope and prayers during this difficult period.

John Robertson



Friendship Is a Matter of Time



Friendship is really a matter of time...
the time that it takes to be kind,
the time that it takes just to listen and talk,
to help someone find peace of mind.

Friendship is really a matter of time...
the time that it takes you to do
a thoughtful and generous favour
that wasn't expected of you,
the time that it takes just to answer a call,
to let someone know that you're there.

Friendship is really a matter of time...
the time that you take when you care.

Amanda Bradley

Submitted by John Robertson



Guilds Together Report



We are coming to the end of the present three year strategy and the most recent note of the amount of money raised is :

Crossreach; Join the dots:	£100,996.67
Malawi Fruits:	£85,550.82
Boys Brigade:	£93,014.56
Faith Impact; Empowering young mothers in Zambia :	£82,232.06
The Free to live trust; Seema's project in Pune, India:	£96,461.92
Sailors Society;	
A Chaplin in our ports.	£81,413.79

The grand total that has been collected over the three years is: £539,675.62

The new projects which the title “ Looking Forward in faith” with the title for this year’s activities being “Lights and Bushels” are:

“ Star Child”. This charity works in Ugandan villages where they are supporting families of handicapped children, changing attitudes to these children. The belief is that handicap in a child is the fault of the mother and the father usually leaves the family home. The child is then hidden, not ever to be seen.

They introduce families who have a handicapped child to

each other and the children are integrated into school.

“UNIDA” is a university campus in Pretoria, Brazil. They provide opportunity for young women to train for the ministry. They award bursaries so that the youngsters from poorer families can go on to further education.

“The Vine Trust”: A village of Hope. A village of with houses, schools etc. on the side of Lake Victoria.

“Home for good” encouraging and helping foster carers and encouraging people to become foster carers.

“Blether with BEAT” Working with and supporting victims and families living with eating disorders.

“Pioneers -Chocolate Heaven.” A family are living within a community on an island in South East Asia. The have helped the population cocoa bean growers to turn their beans into chocolate. They have organised a fare trade deal for the farmers and they will be exporting their chocolate once they get that side of things sorted out. Pioneers go into areas where people have never heard of Jesus, the Messiah.



Rena Moore



Janet Hunter would like to thank everyone for the lovely cards and flowers she received on her Birthday.



A Stroll with St Cuthbert

On Holiday From The Garden.

In the middle of the 1990s in the days when we visited dog shows with our two Basset Hounds, we stopped one evening at Harestanes Country Park, near Jedburgh, to stretch our legs. We had been to a dog show down south and were on our way home to Shieldhill. In the visitor centre we found a leaflet that was advertising a new long-distance walk, The St Cuthbert's Way. This walk, that is 60miles/100k long, takes in existing Border paths, bits of the Southern Uplands Way and a little bit of the Pennine Way.

When the children were young, we did quite a bit of hill walking and so were used to walking although we had never taken part in anything that required walking a long distance on successive days. However, my daughter and I decided that this distance would not take more than a week to complete and would be good experience for when we got around to walking one of the longer path networks.

Why should St Cuthbert have a path that traverses the Cheviot Hills, beginning in Melrose and ending on The Holy Isle in Lindisfarne? Who was this man? Not much is known about Cuthbert's birth but he was fostered to a widow by the name of Kenswith. She lived in a place called Hruringham, this was possibly near the area known as Old Melrose. When he was a boy, he tended sheep on the hills around Melrose. In those days talk of religion was part of daily conversation and Cuthbert would have been party to this. Cuthbert traveled around a bit at this time too, living on meagre rations and living with a band of warriors, crossing moorland, sheltering wherever they could. By the time that he reached Tyneside, he was a Christian. He joined the monastery in Melrose and, it was when he was

here, he heard of the Death of Aiden, the Abbot of Lindisfarne. He vowed to continue Aiden's work in bringing Christianity to Northumbria. After Aiden's death, Cuthbert became Abbot of Holy Isle in 661.

Cuthbert had a reputation of being a healer and able to perform miracles and so people flocked to see him. He preferred a quiet life and to be left in solitude. He left Lindisfarne and lived as a hermit on a rocky isle near to the coast. This rock is known as St Cuthbert's Rock. He was not left in solitude and he returned to Lindisfarne for a time and became its bishop. He ended his days on Inner Farne and died round about 687AD. He was buried on The Holy Isle. The Vikings raids of Holy Isle began in 793AD. The monks feared for the safety of St Cuthbert's remains and so they fled The Holy Isle, taking St Cuthbert's bones with them. They travelled around the North East of England finally stopping in Durham. Today you can visit St Cuthbert's tomb in Durham Cathedral.

We began our walk in Melrose. The St Cuthbert's Way begins with a steep set of steps that take you to the foot of the Eildon Hills. The three hills that make up this group can be seen from all over the area. If you look in this direction, after you cross the border into Southern Scotland you can see The Eildons. There was a Roman signalling point on the top of the highest one. I learned on that particular morning, steps are harder to climb up that plain hillside and do not indulge in a full Scottish breakfast before tackling such a hard climb. This was the first leg of our journey that took us from Melrose to Ancrum.

We were accompanied on our stretch along the River Tweed

by the NATO's aeroplanes diving low over the river. In those days there was a lady who had a bed breakfast facility on the edge of the A68. There was a path from Dere Street into her garden that was there for the use of guests and this was welcomed by footsore walkers. Her rooms were full that night with walkers all walking bits of the St Cuthbert's way. She put us out to catch a bus that took us into Ancrum. We had dinner in the pub-main course only because we had to catch the bus back to our digs. We had to get a bus the next morning that took us to a bus stop that I suppose is there for visitors to Harestanes country Park but also our path continued behind the bus shelter. There was a foot bridge that we should have crossed but it had been washed away in a storm and the detour was rather long.

We had sunny, warm weather and we removed stuff from our day bags into our suitcases until, by the end of our walk, we just had water and a food in our bag. We enlisted the help of, I think a very nice young man; we never met him. His company was called Carry Light and he collected our suitcases and always had them waiting for us at our next day's bed and breakfast. He also left messages of encouragement on our luggage labels.

Day two took us from Ancrum to Kirk Yetholm. This was one of our hottest days. The tomato in our cheese and tomato sandwiches had just disintegrated. This was also the hardest stretch because we had quite a long 'on road' stretch into Morebattle. The regional council was still trying to get agreements with one landowner to allow them to take a path through his land. We also had our hardest hill climb over the hill to Kirk Yetholm. Lesley got sunburnt that day; although she had plastered on sun screen. I got blisters on the soles of my feet.

On hind sight I should have worn trainers for the road section. That was also the longest section, 19 miles. Our land lady for the night sent her Pembrokehire Corgi to the end of her drive to look for us. This wonderful lady gave Lesley soothing cream for her sunburn and gave us tea and Turkish delight, from Turkey. We then had the most delicious casserole for dinner. She was ever so upset that we declined tomato in our sandwiches next morning.

From Kirk Yetholm we crossed the border and crossed over more hills to end up in Wooler. In the hills above Wooler, there is the iron age hill fort of Yeavinger Bell. The residents of this fort would have had a clear view of anyone coming from miles around. The boundary is clear to see with the lumps and bumps of the buildings.

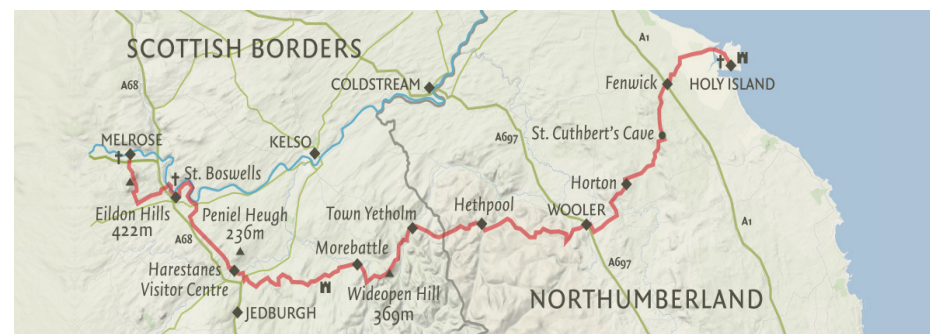
We passed the bus station as we walked to our bed and breakfast accommodation. A fleeting desire almost made us turn in and collect a timetable. After our meal that night we worked out our timetable for the next day because our next stop was Lindisfarne. We needed to cross the causeway before high tide.

The last day was exceptionally warm. We passed by and rested in St Cuthbert's cave. It was cool, shady and a pleasant place to eat our lunch. It is thought that the monks rested here with his body. Then it was on to what could be the most dangerous bit of our walk. We had to cross the A1. We did that in two halves, there being a grassy bit in the middle. That is followed by the East Coast railway line. We did this crossing carefully, quickly, listening all the time. I believe today there is a telephone, one that is connected somewhere useful. They tell you when it is safe to cross, There is a telephone on the other side of the line, I suppose this is to let them know that you have made it.

We arrived at the end of the causeway with plenty of time left to cross. I have never been so pleased to see a scruffy, red caravan that was selling ice creams and lollies. We got a lolly each and relaxed. I think that it took us almost as long to cross the causeway as it did to do the rest of that last stretch of path. The ice lollies ran up our arms. The sand blew and stuck to our chins and arms. We staggered into the Lindisfarne Hotel and the receptionist just said, "Would you like me to hold dinner until 7.30?"

I would like to do this walk again, but taking more time. We had to dig deep when we were in Wooler. We were footsore and tired. The St Cuthbert's way passes through interesting countryside and it would be nice to spend more time in some of the little towns. The St Cuthbert's Way has a web site and there is a company that organises your trip. I think that there are two bag carrying companies today. There still is no foot crossing over neither the A1 nor the East coast railway line. Lesley and I have never got around to doing any of the longer footpaths.

Rena



Happy Memories

Victorian and Edwardian tenement buildings still stand stately and enhance our cities and towns. In the 19th century as Britain moves from being a rural economy to more an industrial economy, people moved from the countryside into more crowded towns. These tenements three storeys high were built to house the working classes which came to work in the factories, most people rented their homes.

Basic flats were two roomed but more luxurious flats had two rooms with a kitchen and bath. There was a shared entry door to the street and a back door that led to the gardens, shared stairs to the upper flats and an outside toilet if required. Three flats shared a toilet and a law was passed saying that no more than twenty people should share one toilet. Shared areas were well maintained and cleaning duties were equally divided to each flat. Each tenant had access to clothes washing facilities which were never used on a Sunday. As time passed repairs were neglected and tenements became slum areas and possible places for fostering disease.

Last year just before lockdown I had the pleasure of visiting the tenant house, a National Trust property at 145 Buccleuch Street Glasgow. I took an enchanting step back in time to my childhood as I stepped over the door step into a home frozen in time. I felt a warm and cosy feeling as I remembered closing the door and shutting out the rest of the world.

The first floor luxury flat had two rooms a bathroom and a kitchen. The property had been had been gifted to the National Trust in 1965. Its highly polished furnishings had been well preserved with love and care. There was a horse hair couch with two reclining chairs, a boxed in bed. A pantry with 1lb tin of

spam dated 1929 which caused some discussion. There was a medicine cupboard a working doorbell and gas lighting. Although dark the entrance hall was big enough to house a five chest of drawers , a grandfather clock still in working order. The kitchen had a coal fire range a well scrubbed wooden table and a pulley for drying clothes, even the plates and utensils were on show.

The occupant Miss Agnes Townshend had shared with her mother in 1911. Her mother owned two dressmaking shops and sewed under gas light. Agnes, an Independent lady of her time never married and worked as a short hand typist. They were regular church goers and shopped at the CO-OP. She died at 73 and had no relatives and her lawyer seeing the historical value of the house gifted it to the National Trust.

I spent my happy early years living in a basic two roomed tenement flat with an outside toilet. My grandmother lived in similar accommodation and I visited her regularly. My children loved to visit her on our many visits. She had a tin with 3p silver pieces and sweets always at the ready. Her plush room where she entertained was dark with a window that looked out onto the main road. A sideboard with many precious ornaments and photos collected over the years. A fire brightened her kitchen, a padded fender graced the front where you could warm yourself on a cold day. No health and safety measures then. Fires were always lit as they were used for cooking and food was always available usually soup on the hob and a boiling kettle on the other. The kitchen sink had a fold down tap and a cover over the sink.

Grandmas neighbour did her shopping and they all shared the cleaning duties. My children were fascinated by her toilet which was under a communal stair in the lobby. They were scary places in the dark if the bulbs went out. The toilet bowl was enclosed in a shiny wooden bench. Toilet paper was rough and

enclosed in a shiny wooden bench. Toilet paper was rough and no washing hand facilities available. The pull chain was too high and children had to stand on the bench to flush.

They also loved the outdoor area where there were many nooks and crannies to explore. An old Anderson Air raid shelter had a small library where neighbours could share and borrow books

Although there were disadvantages living in tenement flats there were many advantages. Social interaction, sharing experiences and worries were important, helping neighbours were always on hand, playmates were always available. There was a built in support network with a sense of belonging in a community. Tenements of their time have never been replaced. The excellent community as said has gone and other benefits of modern living has replaced them. I loved my tenement living. My children share my many happy memories and I still have contact with my tenement friends of my early years

Lorna Coulter



Dissatisfaction

Who'd be a couch potato?
The chance would-be just fine!
To sit back like a lady.
Be served with food and wine.

To have no cares or worries,
To read my favourite book,
To view some day-time telly,
Watch other people cook.

Forget about the housework,
Forget the Supermarket,
No need to think of driving car,
Or even how to park it!

Well, now its really happened,
I'm here immobilized!
I've got my leg in plaster,
And feeling ostracized.

I'm fed up doing crosswords,
I'm fervently frustrated!
This lazy dull existence
is somewhat over-rated.

The telly 's really rubbish
Don't offer me more tea!
Oh. Why was I so careless?
It had to happen to me!

Oh Blast this stupid cookie!
Can't stand these plumped- up cushions
I'm a very impatient patient
I'm nothing but a nuisance.

Can't wait until I hear you say
' Whose turn to throw a party' ?
You'll never hear me moan again,
when I'm hale and hearty.

By Jean Currie

Submitted by Etta Napier.

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**Weather Related from the "Holy Wit" book
by James A Simpson**

"A little boy told by his mother that he could go on a picnic previously forbidden sighed "It's too late mum. I've already prayed for rain."!

"After a severe snowstorm closed the schools in the area, a teacher asked an eight year old boy if he had used the time constructively. "Yes miss" he replied, " I prayed for more snow."

Submitted by Lorna Coulter

Slips that Pass in the Night

Norma was clearing out old papers and found the following article from a past copy of the "Life and Work" magazine. The article is about information and bulletins which have been written quite innocently in church magazines and turned out to be unintentionally funny. Let's enjoy the fun and think "There, but by the grace of God go I." These appeared in various Scottish Church bulletins:-

This afternoon there will be a meeting in the south and north ends of the Church. Children will be baptised at both ends.

Wednesday the Ladies Liturgy Society will meet. Mrs. Johnson will sing "Put Me In My Little Bed" accompanied by the minister.

Thursday at 5pm. there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All those wishing to become little mothers please meet the minister in his Study.

This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Johnson to come forward and lay an egg on the Altar.

The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind and they may be seen in the Church basement on Friday afternoon.

A bean supper will be held on Saturday evening in the Church basement. Music will follow.

The rosebud on the Altar this morning is to announce the birth of David Alan Belzer, the son of Mrs. Julius Belzer.

Tonight's sermon: What is Hell? Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Submitted by Norma Jack

Take time...
Time to touch a rose bud,
Time to watch a bird,
Time to answer kindness
With a warm and friendly word...
Time to smile, to dream awhile
And time to be aware
And be thankful
for the loveliness
Around us everywhere.



Submitted by John Robertson



Please Drive Through — The Gate is Open

Have you ever driven to the exit of a multi - storey car park and when you pop your ticket into the slot of the little machine, have you found that the gate won't open and a queue of cars are behind you impatiently tooting their horns?

I have that phobia too!

In actual fact, it hasn't happened to me so far, but on one occasion, towards the end of last year I was convinced that this little adventure was finally going to take place! It was back in early December, just before the major lockdowns happened again and at that time, we were still in level 3 of the tier system. I had some Christmas shopping to do and as I drove through the entrance of the multi-storey car park at the main shopping mall in Falkirk, there was something different about it that I couldn't put my finger on.

Then it dawned when the machine at the barrier very swiftly and slickly dished out its little ticket. They had completely refurbished their parking system and had installed brand new machines! Once parked I stashed the little ticket in a safe pocket which kept it completely flat so that it wouldn't crumple. I then forgot all about it and took the lift up to the shops.

I had a nice hour in the shopping mall and knowing we would very soon be in lockdown again, got everything that I needed and was kind of glad to be heading away again with all the restrictions that have been imposed. I remembered my little ticket for the parking which was still pristine and absolutely flat. Carefully extracting it out my pocket, I inserted it into the brand new machine at the pay station. Normally the machine grabs your ticket very rapidly out your fingers as you put it in the slot as if an invisible hand has seen you coming and once you've paid,

it ejects the ticket back out again just as quickly.

However, this time it was a bit different!

The minute I inserted the ticket, it just shot it back out again!

I tried again – no luck!

I had a quick look at the ticket. It was absolutely flat. I know that if they are crumpled sometimes they don't work. I know too that sometimes if they get a bit warm with being in your pocket that can stop them from working too. This one was nice and cool. I tried a third time. In it went - then out it shot! This time it was with even more force as if the machine was saying with relish, "Take that! Have it back! I don't want it!" I almost expected it to blow a raspberry and surprise all the shoppers who were walking past towards the toilets!

Luckily, no one was waiting behind me and I decided to do a little experiment. I saw out of the corner of my eye, a lady hurrying in my direction with a similar little ticket clasped in her hand and I moved away a little from the machine, pretended I was looking at what was in the two vending machines nearby and watched to see what would happen. And of course... you've already guessed it! The machine accepted her little ticket as smooth as silk and kept it as she put her coins in the slot. Then it very delicately gave her the ticket back! All paid and ready to go! Another shopper came along and the same performance was re-enacted without a hitch!

Right, let's try this again!

I wondered if it was "in the wrist action," as the makers of a children's game in the seventies called "Battling Tops" used to say. Just like the lady had, I gently inserted the ticket. No luck though. It just threw it back at me again.

"Time to get some help," I thought!

Away at the other end of the centre, there is a little help desk which deals with enquiries about anything to do with the shopping mall. A very nice lady there had a good look at my

ticket, scrutinised it from all angles and was just as mystified as I as to why it wouldn't work.

"It looks absolutely fine," she said with a puzzled look on her face. "Don't worry though, I know just the person who'll be able to fix this. She produced a little walkie – talkie radio, had a conversation with a person at the other end who sounded a bit muffled, then with a smile said, "He's on his way!"

After a few moments it was actually two men who turned up and after I told them what had happened, they didn't look surprised. The first man explained, "The machines have only been in operation for two days and there are sometimes odd teething troubles with them." The second man added "Don't worry about it at all though." He glanced at the ticket, probably to check what time I came in, noted something down in a little notebook, and gave me ticket back. He added, "If you just pay the lady here the £1.50 parking charge, we'll open the gate from our control room once you approach it."

"That's fine!" I replied and thanked them.

With a spring in my step, I went back toward the lifts at the other side and it was only as I was walking along, something suddenly occurred to me that stopped me in my tracks! I had forgotten to give these men my registration number. I didn't even tell them what type of car I had. How would they know when to open the gate?

I looked back along the mall but they had already gone - probably back to their control room. Then I thought, "Drew, why don't you have a bit of faith? These men know what they're doing. They would have asked you for your registration number if they needed it. At this very moment they are probably following your every step on all the CCTV cameras that are dotted all around the place."

I know that sometimes these cameras can be a bit of a nuisance and many people don't like them watching their every move, but sometimes they can be very helpful and reassuring as in my

case. I imagined the two men glued to a certain screen in their room full of monitors and saying “He’s approaching the lifts now!”

So on I went with a bit more confidence and sure enough I passed several of these cameras as I walked through the multi storey car park below the mall to my car. I was a little bit apprehensive as I drove down the winding spirals that seem to have the biggest blind spots in the world when you’re trying to negotiate them to the level the gate is on. Again though the voice said to me with infinite patience and very soothingly (Definitely God!) “Remember – for once in your life, have faith in other people. These men won’t let you down.”

The gate came closer – on the final approach now. I had the window wound down and the ticket sitting on the small tray on top of the dashboard ready to pop into the machine. However, just as I came up alongside it a remarkable thing happened. Just as I was raising my arm outside the window with ticket in my hand, as if by magic, the barrier lifted before I could even put my ticket in the machine!

A little message popped up on the little display screen that the ticket machine has. It simply said:

“Please drive through- the gate is open.”

I did just that with a sense of relief but also a sense of wonder at the technology we possess nowadays.

There is however, another gate that is absolutely spectacular.

It started to open just over two thousand years ago beside a cross. It opened fully beside an empty tomb and has never closed since. I paid just £1.50 for my gate to open, but this other man paid an immeasurable price. He gave his life for all our sins so that we could be rescued.

That man was of course, Jesus.

Jesus said in John Chapter 10, verse 7, “I am telling the truth: I am the gate for the sheep.” And later in John Chapter 10, verse 9, he adds “I am the gate. Those who come by me will be saved; they will come in, go out and find pasture.”

Jesus is the gate between humankind and God. It is such a comfort knowing that this gate will never close. The price for opening it has been paid forever all those years ago on a cross.

Going back to a much more humble gate, as I drove home that day from the car park, I tried to puzzle out how the men knew when to open the gate and had just put it down to them tracking me through the mall, courtesy of the closed circuit cameras that are there. It was once I got home though that the mystery was finally solved.

When you get one of these tickets from these parking machines, most people I would imagine hardly ever glance at them and just put them away in their pocket or purse until it is time to leave and to pay for their parking time. I am exactly the same and it was only when I got home and was sitting with a cup of coffee that I looked at the ticket which I still had, very closely – only because it had caused such a problem.

It was then I found the solution. With the new parking machines now in place, amongst all the print towards the bottom of the ticket there was one little enhancement that had been added that has never appeared on the ticket before throughout all the years that the car park has been in existence.

My registration number was written in very small print!

Above the gates, part of the new equipment installed must have been cameras that have number plate recognition installed in them. No wonder the two gentlemen from the control room were so confident! When one of them was looking at my ticket he must have simply just written the registration number. They wouldn't even have had to sit and chart my progress through the mall to the car park. They would have just waited until they saw

a car with my registration number at the gate and lifted it. There was probably even a way they could program the gate in advance to open when the cameras read my number!

I have gone back to the car park again once or twice now that the restrictions are easing. This time, the ticket machine seems to always accept my ticket no problem. I still marvel though how the gate “magically” opens as I approach it and the little message appears on the machine saying, “Please drive through—the gate is open!”

I think too about that other gate I will one day approach just like we all will. Our Lord and saviour will be at the other side and he will beckon us through with words that are not dissimilar to the cheery little message I received as I exited a car park on that cold but sunny December morning.

He will say “Please **come** through – the gate is open.”

Drew Robertson



South Africa Link

The following message was received from Graham and Sandra

December 2020, Dear Friends,

Well, it has been quite a year, but the good news is that most of us have survived and the resilience of the human spirit has been affirmed as essentially 'very good' as Godself proclaimed at the completion of the creation project! We have learned how to survive and even thrive, in the face of the worst global pandemic for six hundred years. Social distancing has been one workable response despite it forcing us to reassess how intimately we relate to one another. This is difficult in an African context; yet we persevere for the sake of one another. We reject the callousness of those who refuse to adopt social distancing measures in the name of affirming their human rights while infringing the human rights of others and avoiding responsible action. We rejoice in the discovery of a vaccine. We thank God for the commitment of those who endanger their own lives in order to help those in greatest need. We pray for patience as we work towards the restoration of a 'new' normality.

It is good to hear how many congregations here and in Scotland are managing to be innovative in the ways they continue to worship and maintain contact with members. We moved to Zoom services at St Andrew's but are now having open services with social distancing in addition to Zoom. Having a large church makes social distancing easier. However, people have been slow to return the church while they have returned to their work situations which have much poorer social distancing provision. Our financial situation has been seriously and negatively affected and we are preparing to contact our members to discuss stewardship issues with them. Today, 13 December, we have just had our service of nine lessons and carols led by our organist, Neil and a group of musical friends.

Our situation here in South Africa is not good, with rising numbers of infections, particularly in the Eastern Cape but, thankfully, our recovery rate is 93%. Deaths at the time of writing are just over 23,000. The Minister of Health has declared that we are now in the second wave of the pandemic. We have not been affected too badly by restrictions ourselves as we are used to working from home. In some ways, we have established a 'new' normal by restricting our social contacts to one couple at a time and avoiding events where large numbers are congregating. Sandra has been quite busy with language editing. We think this is due to the lockdown where students have had more time to get on with research.

She has been busy with our elder, Violet Mashao at Mamelodi. Thankfully, due to ongoing support from Scottish partners, particularly Cumbernauld Old and Brightons, we have been able to increase our involvement with the orphans' project at Mamelodi East congregation. These kids are a special risk at this time. The support given helps them understand that when all else around them is collapsing, the church is still there helping in times of great need, and that church means far more than the local congregation which nourishes them (see attached photos). One of our ministers in the St Andrew's team, Dr Fundiswa Kobo, a lecturer at the University of South Africa, has just been appointed minister at Mamelodi.





Graham has been busy at the Baptist Theological College, teaching and helping them rewrite their policies which need to comply with national educational standards. That involves a weekly trip to Johannesburg but the social distancing arrangements are excellent. His work continues at St Augustine's College with online teaching.

Along with his colleague from St Augustine's, prof Jakub Urbaniak, Graham contributed an article to a volume in memory of our late colleague, Rev Prof Vuyani Vellem who sadly died a year ago. Graham was deeply touched by the acknowledgement Jakub appended to his article:

The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Prof Graham Duncan – his mentor, colleague and dear friend – who introduced him to Prof Vellem, his work and Black Theology at large. One cannot doubt that God's grace is at work when a Scotsman inspires a Pole to study a Xhosa theologian and the mind-and-heart of the 'one in the middle' gets transformed in the process.

One of the unifying factors in the nation is the eJerusalema Challenge in which many schools, colleges, businesses churches and others including our own Church office and the Baptist College have participated (see text below and:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/w5snl7thcp17re9/WhatsApp%20Video%202020-12-12%20at%2009.50.56.mp4?dl=0>

You will look in vain for Graham. He attended the rehearsal but was not at the College in the day of the recording.

It is based on Psalm 122:3-4:

Jerusalem, a city built

compactly and solidly.
There the tribes went up, the tribes
of the Lord,
to give thanks to the name of the
Lord,
the duty laid on Israel.

and Revelation 21:1- 4:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: 'Now God has his dwelling with humankind! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and pain, for the old order has passed away!'

It offers a message from Africa of hope in a new order, where iLondoloze (the Protector of all living things) will save the people of his creation. This is interesting because it is normally the rest of the world that is giving Africa hope.

Other than that we are doing fine and wish you all a very Merry Christmas!

Graham & Sandra

Overleaf is a copy of the lyrics in the African language with a translation to English.

Jerusalema

x2

Jerusalema ikhaya lami Ngilondoloze Uhambe nami
Zungangishiyi lana

x2

Ndawo yami ayikho lana Mbuso wami awukho lana
Ngilondoloze
Zuhambe nami

Ngilondoloze ngilondoloze ngilondoloze Zungangishiyi lana
Ngilondoloze ngilondoloze ngilondoloze Zungangishiyi lana

Ndawo yami ayikho lana Mbuso wami awukho lana
Ngilondoloze Zuhambe nami

Ngilondoloze ngilondoloze ngilondoloze
Zungangishiyi lana Ngilondoloze ngilondoloze ngilondoloze
Zungangishiyi lana

Jerusalem

x 2

Jerusalem, my home. Rescue me, Join me,
Don't leave me here!

x 2

My place is not here, My kingdom is not here,
Rescue me!
Come with me!

Save me, save me, save me, Don't leave me here,
Save me, save me, save me, Don't leave me here!

My place is not here, My kingdom is not here,
Rescue me! Come with me!

Save me, save me, save me, Don't leave me here,
Save me, save me, save me, Don't leave me here!
Save me, save me.

Gizza Jab!

Over the last few months, the roll out of the vaccines have understandably taken up all the news coverage with great excitement among everyone about when they would get theirs.

When I was watching all these news programmes, the phrase "Gizza Jab!" suddenly came into my mind.

I was trying to think how that phrase came into my head and then it came to me! It all relates back to the 1980s when you will probably recall there was a tv drama series called "Boys from the Blackstuff" by Alan Bleasdale. One of the characters "Yosser Hughes" at the height of all the mass employment then used to go about saying "Gizza Job!"

This catchphrase went on to become an iconic phrase in the 80s and I imagine that in 2021, most people who are watching the progress of the vaccine on their tvs, including Yosser Hughes if he was still around and waiting for his vaccine would suddenly shout out at the television:

"Gizza Jab!"

I think this would definitely become a catchphrase for 2021.

Drew Robertson



Thank God, for little things

Thank you, God, for little things
that often come our way,
The things we take for granted
but don't mention when we pray,
The unexpected courtesy,
the thoughtful, kindly deed,
A hand reached out to touch us
in the time of sudden need-
Oh make us more aware, dear God,
of little daily graces
That come to us with "sweet surprise"
from never dreamed of places.

Blessed be the Lord,
who daily loadeth us with benefits.

Psalm 68:19

Submitted by Rita Braes

Christian Aid

Kiltwalk Challenge 23-25 April - Marion, Rena and Andy were delighted to take part in this year's Kiltwalk Challenge to support Christian Aid and they would like to thank everyone who sponsored them for the walk. All sponsor money will be topped up by 50% thanks to Sir Tom Hunter and The Hunter Foundation and the final total will be announced in due course.

Christian Aid Week 10 – 16 May - If anyone would like to give a donation to Christian Aid there will be a collection box available at the next Church Service at Shieldhill on Sunday, 16 May.

FUNDRAISING

Quiz - Liz MacGowan has kindly produced another quiz for us, this time on the subject of 'Famous Landmarks'. If you want a challenge, please ask Liz or one of the elders for a quiz sheet, priced £1. Completed sheets should be returned to Liz by 30 June and there are prizes for a few lucky winning entries.

Sponsored Walk - Also for Church funds, there's been a suggestion that we hold a sponsored walk. It is hoped to arrange this for the beginning of September. Details will be announced later.

Marion Zacks

