

January 2021

CIRCUIT NEWS

CIRCUIT NEWS AND VIEWS FOR BANGOR & HOLYHEAD METHODIST CIRCUIT

THE MISSION OF THE BANGOR & HOLYHEAD CIRCUIT IS TO LIVE OUT GOD'S WORD AND SHARE THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST BY LOVING AND CARING WHOLEHEARTEDLY THROUGH SERVICE AND WORSHIP WITH FUN, FELLOWSHIP AND JOY FOR ALL THE CHURCH FAMILY AND THE COMMUNITY.

GOD
IS WITH
us

As we turn the page in our diary that separates one year from the next, we often find a blank page staring at us. This may be a completely blank 'spacer' page, or it may be a page with the days and dates pre-printed onto it... but without our handwriting on it to sully the pristine nature of the new!

A new year is indeed a watershed moment in our lives – we reflect on the ups and downs of the year just past and anticipate the unknown to come in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Staring at that blank page affords the opportunity to plan: perhaps meeting-up with family members that you were unable to meet last year, that holiday you have always promised

yourself, perhaps a significant birthday or anniversary is looming or perhaps it's your newly-formed set of new year's resolutions that require attention.

In my diary I have inserted the following anonymous quote on the blank page to regularly reflect upon:

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away.

The miracle of Christmas, of God becoming human and living a human life in the form of Jesus, constantly and repeatedly takes my breath away. As the pages are turned and the months roll on, I will be engaging once again with the breath-taking story of Easter before the next celebration of Advent and Christmas unfolds. I have all this to look forward to, and so do you.

The pages of the year may not have all our scribbles upon them yet, but the significant things for me are already written in my head and my heart.

When it comes to celebrating those breath-taking moments that 2021 holds for us, let us remember that in all that we do **God is With Us:** ready to joyously celebrate alongside us.

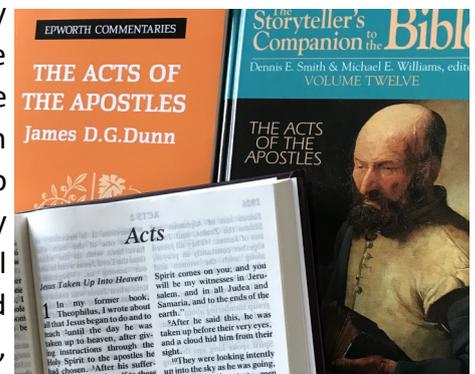
Rev. John G Hughes
Superintendent Minister



The Adventures of the Apostles in Action.

In September 1964 I was appointed to teach mainly RE, religious education, at St Margaret's, Secondary Modern School which catered mainly for children from Moss Side, Manchester. I would be responsible for the weekly 90 minute RE lesson for all four classes in each of the four age groups. My only resources were a cupboard full of small print, authorised version, Bibles, a blackboard, some chalk, plenty of wall space to display pictures and the mandatory agreed syllabus.

I have little recollection of how I coped with the other classes but I remember with affection my lessons with the second year, the thirteen year old children. In those days the mandatory agreed syllabus divided up the scriptures into sections appropriate to each age group from which the teacher was allowed to select suitable material for the children. To my delight the Acts of the Apostles was the section of the New Testament considered suitable for second year pupils. Thirteen year olds love an adventure story. I was reasonably sure I could retell the missionary adventures of Peter and Paul in such a way as to engage the children's attention: but not for 90 minutes. I didn't want to overuse the graffiti-covered Bibles or overburden them with too much written work. Instead I decided to match the Biblical story with a similar up-to-date example. This wasn't too difficult because the recent Billy Graham Manchester mission, had been well reported in the local press. Also we worshipped at a local church which, in summer held street pavement Sunday schools, open air services in the park and, the highlight of the year, a week long children's tent mission in the local park which many of the children knew about. All of which could be supplemented with overseas missionary stories.



Now in 2021, over half a century later, I am looking forward to re-reading Luke's account of how Jesus' disciples fulfilled His command **"be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** [Acts 1:8] The Acts of the Apostles is still an exciting story. The story of how Jesus' followers, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit passed on their faith to change the lives of whole communities. It also provides the background to the New Testament letters and will help in understanding the issues discussed in them. It doesn't matter whether you joined the "Read the New Testament in a Year" scheme in September or not, grab a large print, modern Bible translation and join me on Tuesday 5th January for the next phase of the project: **The Acts of the Apostles.**

Anne Jackson

Introducing the Acts of the Apostles: An Invitation.

During the autumn, St John's fortnightly study group has been following the "Read the New Testament in a Year" programme, using Zoom. On Wednesday 6th January we will be "Exploring the experience and challenge of Acts focusing on Acts chapter 2". We join at 7:05 pm so we have time to chat before the 7:15 pm start. If you would like to join us please contact Jean Ware for the joining instructions a couple of days earlier.

Anne Jackson

As part of his local preacher training Julian Bonnebaigt has a number of assignments to do. These include sermons, poems, prayers, book reviews etc. The one here has been written as a magazine article and Julian has asked to share this with you in this edition of the Circuit Newsletter. It's especially appropriate for a January issue, a time when we traditionally hold our Covenant services.

CIRCUIT NEWS

What's all this "Covenant" stuff about then??

Since the time of John Wesley, every year, we as Methodist people, are invited to publicly renew our covenant relationship with God. While I was looking at the service, I thought that there are a lot of words, and ideas about God (theological ideas), which get "banded" around amongst people who go to Church, but do we really know what they mean?

So as this issue of "Circuit News" comes out for January (which is when most of us have a Covenant Service), please join me as I try to explore the important theological idea of "Covenant", what it meant in the Old Testament, what it means in the New Testament, and what it means to us today.

Well to start with, the Cambridge English dictionary, defines "covenant" as:

"A formal agreement or promise between two or more people"

(<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/covenant>)

Seems simple enough, so, for example, when you go online shopping with say, Amazon, you enter into a covenant with them. You give them money, and they promise to give you your chosen goods. This type of covenant, is called a conditional agreement, a sort of, "I'll do this, if you will do that".

There is another type of covenant, called an unconditional agreement, still between two or more parties, but here one party offers something to the other party, without expecting something in return. I

suppose a relevant example for us might be covenanting with a charity, such as the Bible Society (biblesociety.org.uk), or Shelter Cymru (sheltercymru.org.uk), to give a regular amount of money, without expecting anything back from the agreement.

There are several of both types of covenants found within the pages of the Old and New testament, in fact did you know that the word "Testament" actually means "covenant" so within the covers of our bible we find an old covenant, and a new covenant!

There are 4 main covenants in the Old Testament, the first was an unconditional one found in Genesis 9 verses 8 to 17, where, after Noah's flood, God promises never again to destroy all living creatures on earth by flood, **God promises that this will be a permanent covenant between himself and all living creatures on earth, and as a reminder, he gives us rainbows.** I've always been stunned by the beauty of rainbows, and since moving to the North Wales coast, have seen many amazing examples, sometimes even double ones!

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What's all this "Covenant" stuff about then?? ...continued

The next covenant, starts with a promise to Abram in Genesis 12, is confirmed in Genesis 15, and ratified with conditions, in Genesis 17. Here God calls Abram to leave his homeland, with a promise that his name would be great, he would be a blessing, and that through him, all the people on earth would be blessed (Gen 12 v1-3). In chapter 17, God changes Abrams name to Abraham, and sets the condition of the covenant, that was the hard bit! Every boy child, from Abraham through all generations, had to be circumcised as a sign of this covenant.

The third covenant was a bit different, in that it was really between God and the whole nation of Israel, mediated by Moses, and we find it in Exodus 19. The people had been freed from slavery in Egypt, were on their way to the "promised land" when they stop at Mount Sinai, and God, speaking through Moses sets out a proposal:

"Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation" (Exodus 19 v 5 & 6. Christian standard bible)

When the people heard the offer, they all responded:

"We will do all that the Lord has spoken" (Exodus 19 v 8. CSB)

And so, we got the 10 commandments, and the rest of the Law! This was definitely a conditional covenant!

The final OT covenant was with David, and is found in 2 Samuel 7, and this was

that God would give David a great name, He would settle Israel and bring them peace, and most importantly (for us especially), give him an enduring kingdom forever.

At this point it's worth saying that covenants are rarely forced, we listen to what is offered, and what (if anything) is required of us, weigh up the risk / benefit ratio, then we make a choice. But once we've agreed, once "we've signed on the dotted line", we have to keep our side of the bargain!

Unfortunately, throughout the OT we see the nation of Israel and Judah straying from their covenant responsibilities, following other Gods, ignoring justice, and failing to be a blessing to all the nations.

Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel and Micah arose, telling people to return to God, but few listened. Some of their prophecies, spoke of a future time, a messianic time, when God's kingdom would be fully established by a "New Covenant".

I suppose my favourite of these prophecies, are in Jeremiah 31 v 31-34, which is one of the "set" readings in the covenant service, and Isaiah 53, if you get time, read them, as they speak of God's gracious plans for us all!

So now we arrive at the time of Jesus, the time of the New Covenant...

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What's all this "Covenant" stuff about then?? ...continued

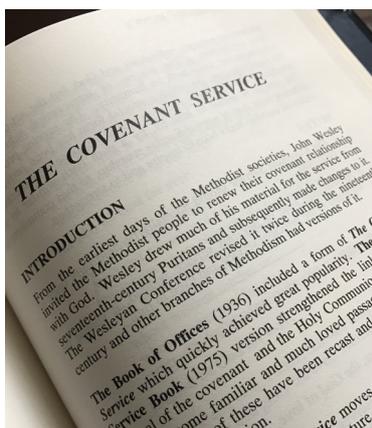
Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, forgiving and healing, fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies regarding an expected messiah. At the last supper in Luke 22 verses 19-20, he looked forward to the New covenant which was sealed by his shed blood, death on the cross, and his resurrection three days later.

As he cried out "It is finished" (John 19 verse 30), he fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5 verse 17), leaving us a simplified form, calling us to, Love God, and love your neighbour as you love yourself (Mark 12 verses 28 – 32).

This new covenant is unconditional, in that, God gifts us by his grace, with forgiveness and restored relationship (Romans 5 verses 1-8).

And yet in a sense it is conditional, in that we are called to accept and believe, that what Jesus did, was for you and me, and make a decision to follow Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

Every communion service reminds us his death and resurrection, and every covenant service gives us a chance, before our brothers and sisters, to once again renew our commitment to the new covenant, and to say, **"Yes Lord, I believe, and I will follow you"**.



CIRCUIT NEWS

Chicken with Lemon & Sage

From Keith Alexander's Recipe Book

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp flour
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 2 garlic cloves
- 4 Chicken fillets
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- Half pint chicken stock
- 2 tbsp chopped sage
- Salt & pepper
- 2 egg yolks

Method

Mix together the flour, lemon zest and garlic. Use to lightly coat the chicken pieces.

Heat the oil in a flameproof casserole. Add the chicken pieces and cook until lightly browned, turning once or twice.

Stir in any remaining flour, then stir in the stock, sage and seasoning. Bring to the boil.

Cover and bake at 170 degrees Celsius for 30 minutes or until the chicken is tender and the juices run clear when the flesh is pierced with a fine skewer.

Mix the egg yolks with 30ml (2 tbsp) lemon juice. Off the heat, stir into the pan juices, then return to the heat and warm gently until the sauce thickens, stirring frequently; do not boil.

Adjust the seasoning.

Serve garnished with lemon slices and sage. Serve with rice and/or a mixed salad.



In the next 2 articles, John Hay and Della Fazey discuss their experiences at the on-line Wales Climate Change Week Conference

**CIRCUIT
NEWS**

Wales Climate Change Week 2/11/20 to 6/11/20

This month saw an important online conference, sponsored by the Wales Government as a precursor to COP26. As you might expect there were many politicians, project workers and climate activists involved, but there were also many ordinary people like Della and myself, looking to learn and make sense of these big issues in a local context. My favourite session was this one.....

How Communities are taking action: voices from the grassroots 2/11/20 at 3pm

This meeting consisted of a series of presentations by leaders of diverse community action projects from around Wales, followed by a Question and Answer session. I found it both illuminating and challenging; there are lessons to be learned for our own church communities as we seek to expand our mission activities on how these groups are facing the changing world. The following are the key points I picked up on;

Climate and community go together. Different project workers expressed the same thing in slightly different ways. As they engage with people and connect with them about environmental issues within their own community, they also become aware of the great need many people currently have, a sense of hopelessness, isolation and powerlessness. Part of the process towards effective change lies in bringing people together and empowering them for action; giving people things to do. For example, planting trees, learning what to do with food waste, helping run Care Farms which cater for vulnerable people; these are all things which instill confidence.

Community organisations need to “dig where they stand”, to adapt and evolve at a very local level and do what people are concerned about rather than imposing a predetermined plan.

Progress on climate issues within our communities is not solely dependent on experts and educators; anyone with a passion for the environment, anyone who is able to connect with others and bring people together has a part to play.

Happiness and fun are what people want to be involved with. Showcase fun and creative ideas.

System change can happen quickly when good ideas find their moment and the right people are in place to drive it.

We can learn from this. We can learn to be passionate about God's world, to commit to working for positive change by starting with our own church life. But there is more than that. There is a parallel with Mission here too. **As we seek to broaden our mission horizons we too need to come together, to draw confidence from working alongside each other, to be willing to adapt and evolve our plans and to do so with a great dollop of happiness and fun!**

John Hay



Wales Climate Change Week (WCCW)

Upgraded from a day conference last year to a week-long conference this year you can imagine how much was presented and discussed in the four to five sessions each day. I managed to engage with many of the sessions, only being distracted by the NFU Cymru Conference which focused on the 'net zero carbon by 2050' target - a target shared across all aspects of Welsh life, including farming.

The WCCW was opened by the First Minister Mark Drakeford who, as always, was articulate and convincing in his commitment to tackling the Climate Change Emergency declared by Wales last year. **In passing the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, the issues associated with climate change have been embedded in law and planning across all sectors now has to demonstrate how the plans are in-line with the net zero carbon target.** Anyone who saw the DIYSOS Children in Need programme, highlighting a build in the Gower, will have seen a 'green' building using sustainable, locally sourced materials, solar panels, a Tesla battery and the growing roof. This was a good example of what can and will be done.

Throughout the week the Covid-19 Recovery Plan for Wales was mentioned as an opportunity to move more quickly towards the net zero target. As important as resources, plans and action the need to facilitate behaviour change was consistently emphasised. **Change has to be driven by individuals as well as through legislation** and the examples throughout the week of locally-driven initiatives indicated how these are impacting communities and developing an eco-literacy. Another thread through the week was the need for a just transition in which no-one is left behind. **Climate justice recognises that the poorest suffer the most and need to be considered first.** Support is needed for those industries (e.g. farming, car industries and fossil-fuel production) which will have to change if the net zero target is to be achieved. A just transition will require inclusivity and empowerment with strong corporate and trades union relationships. The pandemic has indicated that we CAN improve air quality, reduce travel and work in more sustainable ways and the recovery will encourage thinking about greener travel, building and support for polluting industries.

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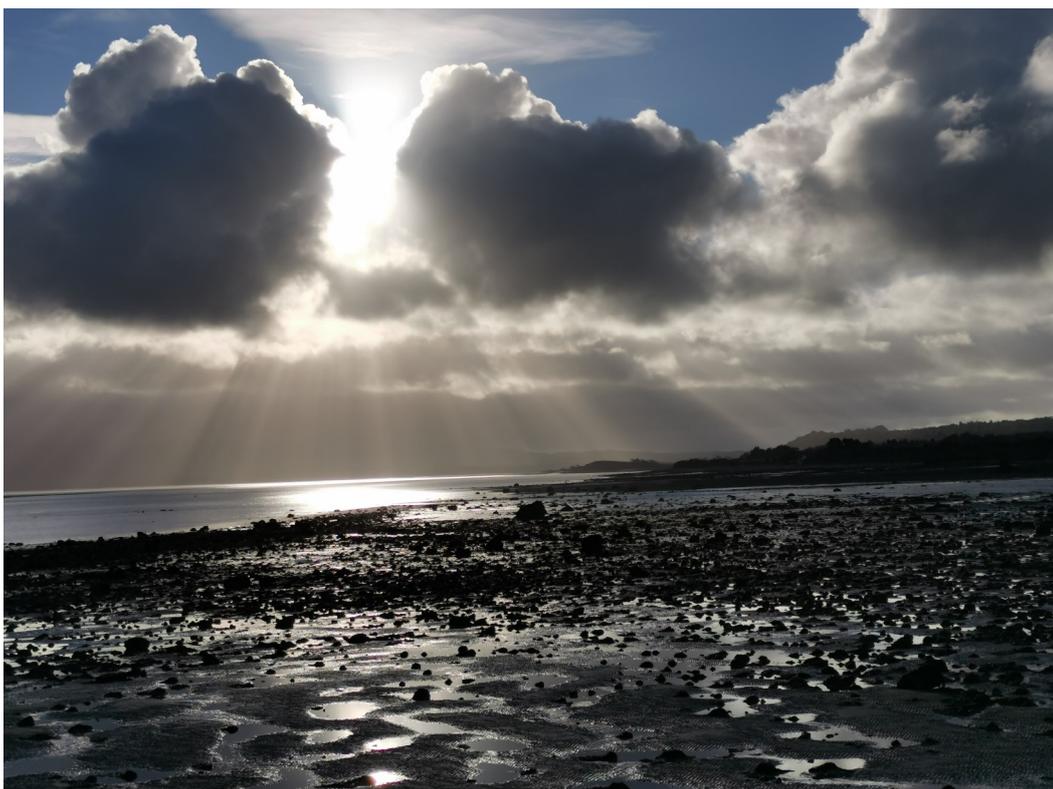


Photo:

*Light over Snowdonia
from Beaumaris.*

Heather Bonnebaigt

Wales Climate Change Week (WCCW)

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Another thread was the importance of working collaboratively – across governments, industries and communities. It was emphasised that none of us is ‘a silo’; that we are all connected and dependent on each other. As farmers, for instance, we are reliant on supply chains in order to reduce emissions. Currently the lack of quality local supplies and services for many of our operations means that we have to travel and procure supplies from distant sources rather than reduce the mileage. Changing to an electric car will only be possible for many if there is greater availability of charging points, particularly in rural areas.

Exciting energy projects, developed in Wales and now used across the world include a combined wind and wave turbine designed for shallow waters such as estuaries. The potentially damaging impact on marine wildlife is avoided as they are only tethered to the seabed. A pilot project off Holyhead has a submerged aeroplane-like structure which generates electricity across its wings underwater, adjusting its position make best use of the changing tides and currents. It is cost-effective, lightweight and the first in the world to use low flow tidal energy – amazing innovations!

There was much, much more to celebrate in this week but there were also some very challenging and sobering statistics. I finish with a prayer from Day 5 in the Methodist Prayer Book 2020/21.

Speak to me Lord, and guide me. Help me to make changes to the way I live, to be a better guardian of your earth and to love this world and everything in it, just as you love me. Amen. *(Rob Russell, Worship Leader, Bedford Methodist Church).*

Della Fazey

CIRCUIT NEWS

We need you to help us to fill future editions of Circuit News. If you have any words of wisdom, jokes, pictures, stories you would like to share please send them to us.

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What's the carol answers

1. Angels from the realms of Glory: Iris
2. Lo, he comes with clouds descending :
Helmsley
3. Away in a manger: Away in a manger
4. O Come, O come Immanuel:
Veni Emmanuel
5. Cradled in a manger, meanly: Saltash or
St. Winifred
6. O Come all ye faithful: Adeste Fideles
7. Once in Royal David's City: Irby
8. Hark the Herald :
Mendelssohn Bethlehem
9. See amid the winter snow : Humility
10. As with Gladness men of old: Dix