

GATHERED & ONLINE SERVICE

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20 December 2020

Welcome and Notices

Carol

Once in royal David's city

Prayer of Invocation

Young at Heart

Christine Bradbeer

Bible Reading: John 1: 1-18

Will Findlay

Advent #4 Sermon

Why Jesus came according to John

that you might have life

Prayers of Intercession

and

The Lord's Prayer

Carol

Hark the herald angels sing

Benediction



NOTICES

20 December 2020

Wednesday 23 December No Prayer Meeting until February
Friday 25 December 9.30 am Christmas Day Service
Sunday 27 December 11 am Divine Worship.

For your prayers this week:

Congregational member: Rodney BLACKWOOD



and



Motor Isaac and Julia YAT who minister at refugee camps in Ethiopia.

Members who wish to continue their freewill offerings during the COVID 19 restrictions may post to our Treasurer. Vic Ansell, 59 Queen St Kangaroo Flat, Vic 3555 or use the electronic banking details below.



Electronic Banking Details: ANZ Forest Hill,
Account name: Blackburn Presbyterian Church
BSB: 013-328. Account number: 2970 40694

BLACKBURN

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Treasurer: Mr Vic Ansell 5447 7118



Joseph, with Mary and the Child
from the film
The Nativity Story, 2006.



For your
Prayers

260,000,000

Christians live in areas of high persecution

Last week's news reported the abduction of hundreds of boys from a school in northern Nigeria. Now mercifully safe. You may recall six years earlier the chilling abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls, of whom over 100 are still missing. Each week this little column encourages prayer for Christians living in countries where persecution is a regular part of the Christian experience. Each week I draw on a number of sources to provide background. My usual sources are:

Amnesty International - In 1961 Peter Benenson, a British lawyer, formed Amnesty International, dedicated to secure freedom for 'prisoners of conscience', which was how he described people imprisoned, not for what they had done, but for what they believed. Also Human Rights Watch, a New York based organisation begun in 1978 <https://www.hrw.org>.

In addition I usually draw on two Christian organisations. Open Doors which is active in over 60 countries, is vigilant concerning persecuted Christians and documents a highly respected and independently audited 'World Watch List' detailing the countries where it is most difficult to be a believer. The other is Barnabas Fund, a UK based organisation which offers relief and practical support to Christians experiencing persecution. <https://barnabasfund.org>

On 24 May 2014 *The Times* newspaper published an article headlined "Spectators at the Carnage" It began 'Across the globe, in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, Christians are being bullied, arrested, jailed, expelled and executed. Christianity is by most calculations the most persecuted religion of modern times. Yet Western politicians until now have been reluctant to speak out in support of Christians in peril.'

In order to be better informed the then Foreign Minister, Jeremy Hunt asked the Bishop of Truro to provide the British and Foreign Office (BFO) with an independent (of Government) Report. The Report provides a global view of issues of religious discrimination irrespective of religious faith. It reports that 80% of religious persecution is against Christians.

In 2021 we will continue to report on persecution of Christians (and at times other minority groups) and we trust that we will seek to keep our political representatives informed. Please use this weekly column to keep yourself informed and prayerful. We do not want our political leaders to merely be 'spectators at the carnage', but we too must be engaged in the conflict!

Graham



Sermon
Notes

The Bee Gees were a hit sensation. The three Gibb brothers grew up in UK and Queensland before forming the Bee Gees. The story of the Bee Gees and their younger fourth brother Andy, is a sad tale of an accomplished family of singer/songwriters of whom only the oldest is still alive, aged 74. As one would expect from a band of attractive young men, many of their songs are of love and relationships.

I looked up the Bee Gees quintessential 80's song *Stayin' Alive*. Guess how often the 'official' YouTube clip has been viewed! *Stayin' Alive* has had a staggering 572,618,084 views. [Only three by me]. It is a song about staying alive in New York City, where presumably there are added complications. Perhaps the most telling and repeated climactic line is: "Life goin' nowhere, somebody help me/ Somebody help me, yeah". What might this suggest? And why this song?

1 Life: Grace and Truth What is the reason for Christmas according to John's Gospel? After all, he doesn't mention Jesus' birth at all. What keyword does John use to express the reason Jesus came? I suggest the word is life! (1:4) It was thinking about this that took me to the Bee Gees song *Stayin' Alive*.

John presents Jesus' arrival as a new life-creating word. He brings a new kind of life to people. It is life enriched with 'grace' and 'truth' (1:17). Of these, John says, they '*came*'.

Grace is a special kind of love. It is love undeserved and unmerited. It is loving a beloved devoid of beauty or even goodness. John talks early about truth, but at the climax of his writing Pilate asks, 'What is truth?' and his sarcastic question is unanswered. Truth is about Jesus, whose personal integrity generates meaning and purpose. The word became this human being.

2 A personal relationship Jesus talked personally with Nicodemus (3:1) and the Samaritan woman (4:7). Both were invited to experience a new kind of life (3:3, 4:14).

The Greek word used for 'life' in John is never *bios*, (life of the physical body - our *biology*). Instead it is always either *zoe* (divine life, eternal life - *zoology* comes from this Greek word) or *psyche* (life of the mind, soul, emotions - our *psychology*).

Jesus brings resurrection life (11:25).

3 A unique person Jesus initially describes himself in this life-giving role in one-on-one conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Later He shares his good news with crowds of people.

Jesus' words will bring 'life to the dead, eternal life' (5:24). Hearers are invited to take and eat the bread of heaven, for Jesus is the 'bread of life' (6:27, 54). At the festival of shelters Jesus declares himself to be the source of 'life-giving water'. (7:38). His followers will have the light of life' (8:12).

These public statements shock and awe the hearers. The reason Jesus, the 'good shepherd' has come, is to bring life, life in all its fullness. (10:10).

4 A costly relationship Time fails us to explore the passion narrative told in John (chapters 13-17). What is clear is that grace and truth come together in an unimaginably costly way. The incarnation, and more! (Philippians 2:6-11)

Jesus is the servant, washing his disciples feet - this is the way, the truth and the life (14:6). The servant way is the way of life.

His is the greatest love that a person can have; love that gives its life - "Greater love hath no man than this" (15:13).

Overhearing Jesus in prayer we learn that he is to give 'eternal life' to those the Father has given him (17:3), and this consists in a kind of 'knowing' Jesus (17:3) in such away that he 'may be in them' (17:26).

In 'leaving the world' Jesus will experience the full force of "the world's hatred" but the Helper, the Holy Spirit, will lead the disciples into the truth. (15:18, 16:7, 13)

5 Your Invitation Reflecting on his knowledge of Jesus John later explains why he has penned his Gospel. "These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

This is John's invitation to you and me and to all his readers, to believe in and begin a personal relationship with Jesus. This is the life of the age to come, fullness of life, and life-giving.