

Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES

No 621 November 2012

Pulpit Diary

Nov 4

9.30am First Sunday Service led by Guild

10.30am Morning Worship

7.00pm Evening Worship at
Morningside Parish Church
Speaker Nora Carmi, Sabeel
Reception from 6.30pm

Nov 11 Remembrance Sunday

10.50am Morning Worship (Springboard
and Spectrum 2&3 remain in
Church for the Act of Remem-
brance. Spectrum 1 commences
in Upper Hall at 10.45am)

Nov 18

10.30am Morning Worship

Nov 25

10.30am Morning Worship

Nov 30

7.30pm Pre-communion service

Dec 2 First Sunday in Advent

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion (Springboard and
Spectrum meet as usual)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

For information about church organisations,
please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri,
9.00am–12.00 noon, 1.30pm–3.30pm):

Mrs Virginia Johnston

tel and fax: 0131 447 9969

e-mail: greenbankchurch@btconnect.com

The pastoral team can be contacted through
the Church Office:

Rev Alison Swindells

tel and fax: 0131 447 4032

email: alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk

Rev W. Peter Graham

tel: 0131 445 5763

Youth Minister: Rev Bill Stone

tel: 07883 815 598

email: billstoneiii@gmail.com

To make contact with any of the organisations
described in this *Leaflet*, please use the tele-
phone number given, if there is one. Otherwise
contact the Church Office.

Website: www.greenbankchurch.org

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

Although 2014 may seem a long way off plans are already under way to commemorate the centenary of the beginning of the Great War, "the war to end all wars". As I understand it the intention of these commemoration events is not to glorify war but, whilst recognising genuine heroism,



it is to draw attention to the causes and grim realities of war, and to help current generations learn the lessons of the past.

Of course this is what we seek to do in our worship every Remembrance Sunday. In that service we give thanks for those who have in the past laid down their lives for others in the cause of justice and freedom and peace. We also recognise that within our human nature there is much that is good, for example that same desire for justice and freedom and peace for all people. But we also remember that within our human nature there are the flaws that lead to evil, cruelty, waste and want, as well as the hunger for power that leads us into wars. One of the cruellest features of war is that it tends to be the weakest and most vulnerable members of society who suffer the most.

Worship on Remembrance Sunday gives us an opportunity to come together for two minutes silence as a community before God, the Giver of Life, who offers forgiveness and healing and hope. In observing the silence we pay tribute to those who have given their lives for others and we stand in solidarity with all who today still suffer the pain of war, as well as with all who work to see justice prevail and to bring peace in places of conflict and strife.

Recently I was speaking to a man who spent 5 years of WWII as a pilot in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. Despite the grueling flying schedule, the risks and the heavy losses suffered, this man said that he counted himself as fortunate, because he knew

that when he returned from an operation there would always be food and shelter. Most of his school friends had joined the army and had had to endure terrible conditions. 75% of them never returned but were buried where they fell in France. This man is now totally opposed to war. He de-

scribes it as a waste of money, a waste of resource, and most importantly a waste of life. And he wishes that others could see that too. One of the things that I have been very aware of since coming to Greenbank is that our children have not been present in Church for the Act of Remembrance. While very young children might not be capable of understanding the full implications of the two-minute silence most children of school age can grasp from the adults around them the solemnity of the occasion. And silence in our noisy world can make a deep and lasting impression.

This year the Kirk Session have agreed that we should try to make the Act of Remembrance more accessible to our children by starting our service at the slightly later time of 10.50am. While Crèche and Spectrum 1 will start at 10.45am, children of school age are encouraged to remain in Church with their parents for the ceremonial wreath-laying, the silence and national anthem before leaving for Spectrum 2 and 3 and Springboard. Hopefully in this way we may play our part in encouraging future generations to grow up with an understanding of the full implications of war.

I look forward to welcoming you all to our Service of Remembrance on Sunday, 11th November 2012.

With warmest wishes,

Alison I Swindells
Minister

Greenbank Library

The new Adult Library and Resource Centre is now situated in the Pentland Room and open for business.

Some of you may have noticed that the old bookcases housing the Adult Library have disappeared from the Hall. Thanks to Alison's encouragement, the generosity of various Greenbank committees, the fine work of my trusty library helpers, and the skill of Ginny in the office, we have an attractive and more comfortable space for the books for grown ups. Please go and have a look around. Feel free to borrow them – and bring them back. There are new books to help people to find ideas for short services and there are some magazines about children's books which I am sure you will find useful.

The children's library will operate as usual after the morning service and all children are welcome. There are some great new books available.

However we have lost a lot of books during the past year. Please check at home to see if you have any wayward Greenbank copies hiding there and return them to us – that's how libraries work!

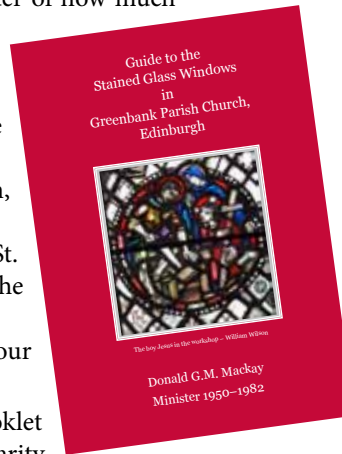
Moira Small

Have you noticed?

The recent republication of the booklet *Guide to the Stained Glass Windows in Greenbank Parish Church, Edinburgh* by the Rev Donald Mackay, including beautiful colour photographs by Tony Gorzkowski, is a reminder of how much there is to see in these windows. For example:

- Where is a martyr playing an organ?
- There is a boy in modern costume at the top right of the Parables Window in the North Transept. Is he wearing a George Watson's blazer?
- Where is a connection made between John Bunyan, the Palace Beautiful and the Pentland Hills?
- Why is there a drawing of the Crown Steeple of St. Giles Cathedral at the bottom right hand corner of the Nativity window?
- Where can the traditional symbols of the four evangelists be found? And the figure of St. Andrew?

To find the answers to these questions, buy the booklet (priced at only £5 and available at the Greenbank Charity Card Sale or after Sunday morning services), or study the windows, or – preferably – do both!



Calling All Organisations

We've just added a Monitor in the corridor outside the Main Hall. This is part of our effort to communicate with everyone who waits for children coming out of our organisations – and there are a great number, some of whom come to church and many of whom don't. However, we see the monitor as a gentle mission opportunity, as a chance to show a lively and welcoming congregation in word and photograph/video. We've got the first presentation underway and it will be shown from 6pm–9pm each evening from Monday to Friday and also on Sunday. This is an opportunity for you to invite people to join your organisation or to attend special events. Please use it. It would be really helpful if you could supply text and photographs or video material (video of no more than about a minute) to me – david.999@blueyonder.co.uk. Please try to give a little warning of any event to give time to add additional material to the presentation. Many thanks.

David Allan

The “Good Book” Group

Do you find reading the Bible a struggle? Would you like to find out more about the contents of the “Good Book” but have always been afraid to ask? Would you like to meet with others who also have lots of questions? Then this Book Group is for you.

We meet for an hour or so (usually in the Manse, 112 Greenbank Crescent), once a fortnight on a Wednesday evening at 8.00pm over coffee and cake.

For further details contact Alison Swindells or Helen Barnes

The Guild

The beginning of November is a busy time for the Guild. On Saturday 3rd we have our Baking and Produce Sale which runs alongside the Charity Christmas Card Sale.



We rely on members of the congregation to help us out and bring along baking and preserves so that we can send a nice big cheque to SLA, so please do what you can.

On Sunday 4th the Guild will be taking the early morning service, and on Tuesday 6th Bill Stone is going to introduce us to our new Theme – “A Faith to Proclaim”. Our meeting on 20th November is entitled “Fair Trade Fashion” with Sarah Burns. If you see a topic that interests you do come and join us.

Ann Pirie

Friendship Club

Neither the clocks going back nor the nights ‘drawing in’ will affect the members of the Friendship Club on the Wednesday afternoons when we will look forward to another two interesting speakers this month.

The first is Graeme Cruikshank, who will be giving us the history of the Portobello Pottery on 14th November. The second on 28th November is Maggie Frew with her talk entitled “Palestinian Threads”. She will be linking it with craft work (on sale) from **Hadeel**, a shop based within St George's West Church, selling hand made Palestinian woodwork and embroidery items. So – come prepared as this is an ideal opportunity for some early Christmas shopping.

In between these two talks, on the 21st, we will have from Kathleen Patrick, her musical selection of “Anniversaries” – maybe a hard choice given the huge range to choose from!

Val Smart



SUPPORTING OUR HEROES

Remembrance Sunday falls neatly on the 11th November this year. Come rain or shine I will be outside Church rattling the Poppy Scotland tins on Sunday 4th November for both services and for the Remembrance Service on the 11th.

Greenbank Church congregation continues to show its generosity towards our ex-service men and women. Last year we raised £520.

I have often been asked if Gift Aid can be applied to donations. For those who would care to use gift aid, I will place an envelope in the Church pigeon hole in the letter A section for you to collect and complete. Your donation can still be popped in the collection tin and I will take the completed Gift Aid Declaration from you then. I will also have some forms with me while outside church so you could also take one to complete and return to me either in person or pop it in the pigeon hole.

Poppy Scotland continues to be very well supported. The 2011 appeal raised £2,688,084, an increase of over 14%. The Poppy Scotland website (www.poppy-scotland.org.uk) is very well produced and worth a look to see in detail exactly where your money goes. May I recommend you look under the news section at the new Poppy Scotland jewellery range made by Ortak. A fine gift gentlemen, or a treat for yourself ladies?

I look forward to seeing you outside Church in November.

John Adair

Bookstall

The next Bookstall date is 9th December when we will have a selection of books from the Cornerstone for you to browse through after the service. If there are any titles you would like to see, please contact us.

John and Joan Ritchie

Meet Nora Carmi

at Morningside Parish Church

Joint Evening Service 4th November 2012 at 7pm

(refreshments served from 6.30pm)

Nora Carmi, who was a senior member of Sabeel, the Palestinian Theological College in Jerusalem, is visiting Edinburgh on 4th November and will speak at the Joint Evening Service in Morningside Parish Church on that date. Nora had a pivotal position in many of the programmes of Sabeel and its links to the wider Christian community.

Nora Carmi is a Palestinian Christian, living in Jerusalem. For many years she was one of the leaders of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, working closely with the Rev Naim Ateek, and she is a respected lay leader in the Christian community in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. One of the aspects of her work has been to work with people to help them build up their communities. Currently, she is the part-time Project Co-ordinator with Kairos Palestine.

World Mission Committee

We continue to look at various topics in the development field. One of the lesser known refugee problems arises in Malta, a well-known destination for tourists. Little is known, however, about the boat loads of refugees arriving there from Africa today (much like St Paul, shipwrecked there in the first century AD (Acts 28)). Many die in the attempt to reach the shore but those who succeed are being shown great kindness by the islanders, much as St Paul and the soldiers experienced. The refugees are being 'housed' in tents or converted shipping containers on concrete bases which are stifling hot in the summer and very cold and depressing in the winter.

"The St Andrew's Scots Church in Malta is co-ordinating a growing project called 'Out of Africa... into Malta' which seeks to meet acute and longer-term needs of the individuals and families through a series of initiatives – from coolboxes in the summer to keep food fresh and safe from rats, to children's snowsuits and blankets in winter. These small things make life more bearable. Also the project has established 'Malta Microfinance', and imaginative ways are being sought over the next three years to stabilise families and community groups, and provide the means by which they can leave the tents and cabins permanently, building a future. The same opportunity can be offered to Malta's poorest families; a sharing of opportunity and a real chance of achieving better integration among people from widely different backgrounds and experience, but whose problems are shared." – this extract can be found on the Church of Scotland World Mission website.

Pam Jack

Congregational Board Notes

At its meeting on 18th September the Board was briefed about work which had been undertaken over the summer and on the latest position regarding finance. Work undertaken had included repairs to the Manse, the upgrading of the main fuse box in the Church and a range of minor repairs. The Church library had been moved to the Pentland Room and a small annual budget allocated for the purchase of new books. New bibles had been bought for the use of Spectrum 3 and Springboard. A project had been put in hand to upgrade the main kitchen in the Church in order to encourage greater use to be made of it. A system had been put in place to regulate the lending out of Church equipment. As at 31st August costs had been greater than budget largely due to higher than anticipated repairs and maintenance costs although this increase had been partially offset by lower than budgeted costs in other areas. New contracts had been entered into regarding the supply of electricity and gas which would mitigate the impact of expected price rises in the year ahead.

Alan Ramage
Clerk to the Congregational Board



Wanted – more good quality household goods for Fresh Start

Dates for your diary: The next dates for Fresh Start are *25th November 2012* and *13th January 2013*, at the Sunday service (table in Main Hall).

Donated goods for the Fresh Start Starter Packs have not been as plentiful in recent months, and this is a concern. Here is a full list of the items needed:

Dishes and Crockery

Dinner plates, side plates, bowls, cutlery, mugs, glass tumblers, tea-towels.

Pots and Pans etc.

Pots with lids, milk pans, frying pans, plastic boxes, cooking utensils, can openers, potato peelers, wooden spoons.

Cleaning Things

Washing up basins, washing-up liquid, toilet cleaner, toilet rolls, hand soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dust pans and brushes, pedal bin liners, rubbish bags, all purpose cleaner, laundry tablets.

Bed Linen and Towels

Single flat sheets, double flat sheets, single duvet covers, double duvet covers, pillow cases, blankets, duvets, bed covers, towels,

face cloths, bath mats, curtains, rugs.

Also wanted are **small household electrical items** (not TVs).



Fresh Start uses volunteers in a number of ways. One is the *Befriending Service* to people who have been homeless and are moving into their own tenancies.

Befriending volunteers provide one to one social support to clients. Volunteers and clients mutually agree when to meet and what to do, for example going for a coffee and a chat, or taking part in an activity.

Meetings are normally weekly and the 'match' can last up to one year. All volunteers attend comprehensive training to raise their awareness of issues that affect people who have been homeless and to prepare them for providing Befriending support.

Pick up a leaflet on a Fresh Start Sunday, see www.freshstartweb.org.uk or telephone 476 7741, to find out more about Fresh Start.

Alison Ambler

Christmas Event

for primary school children

1.30pm to 4.30pm

Saturday 1st December

Have fun, enjoy messy Christmas crafts,
play games and lots more.

(let the grown-ups do the boring shopping)

Cost £5

To reserve a place contact the
Church Office (Tel 447 9969), Alison Reid (Tel 477 6537) or
the website www.greenbankchurch.org

This is a very popular event so get your place booked soon!

A Fitting Tribute

What a wonderful time was had by all at our *Sing in the City* fundraising event held on 22nd September in Greenbank Parish Church. The event raised £1,500, so well done everyone involved.

The Open Door celebrates its 30th birthday this year, and what could have been a more fitting tribute than to hold a community sing-along in the church from which our founding members came?

Peggy Hunter, the late Tom Walker and John George worked tirelessly to make their vision of church and community working together in support of vulnerable people a reality. I think I speak for all when we say a huge "Thank You".

After such an enjoyable high I am sorry to have to tell you that our coffee shop, a place of friendship and welcome to so many, has had to close temporarily due to the partial collapse of its ceiling. It is taking some time to settle things like insurances but we hope to start the repair work soon. We have many things to be grateful for; no one was hurt, Barr Construction will help in the redecoration and we were still able to provide our day support services for the elderly.

If anyone would like to make a donation towards the repairs and redecorations, no matter how small, it would be gratefully received.



The last thing I wish to tell you about is our *Christmas Fayre*. Yes, it's that time again – already!

The Fayre will be held in the new church hall of Morningside Parish Church on Saturday 24th November between 10am–12 noon.

There will be stalls, raffles and tombolas, homemade cakes and jams and of course tea and biscuits. As always, we look to you for support in our fundraising and again any donations of bottles, toiletries or home baking would be very welcome; just hand in to the Open Door.

With thanks,

Sandra Dixon, Manager

World Vision Girls' Night Out

Thursday 4th October

Over 300 'girls' enjoyed this fantastic evening of entertainment, inspiration and treats. Carrie Grant sang beautifully and spoke inspirationally about her work with World Vision. Jo Enright had us laughing out loud with her wonderful sense of humour and also inspired us with stories of her work with World Vision. Every lady also took home a 'goody' bag full of treats. I'm sure everyone who was there would agree it was a hugely successful evening. Thank you to everyone who supported this event.



Life and Work

November issue

Christianity and the Law

Jackie Macadam speaks to Scottish Christians who work in the criminal justice system.

Remembrance

The Rev Bill Shackleton reminds us that long-ago conflicts might be closer than we think.

Remembrance prayer by the Principal Clerk.

Biblical Botanicals: Muriel Armstrong looks at the poppy, a humble flower of the field which has become one of our most powerful symbols.

The Very Rev Dr James Simpson considers the power of memory.

An Olympic Summer

The Rev Neil Urquhart reflects on a month as a volunteer chaplain at the Olympics and Paralympics.

From Arizona to Kinlochleven – and Back

An American youth worker has discovered surprising connections between his home state and his Highland patch.

'A Very Precious Commodity'

An Iraqi worker for the Bible Society describes the challenges facing Christians in his homeland.

Of Incorruptible Faith

The story of 'The Outing of the Ministers', which took place 350 years ago this month.

View from the Pew

John Hodge reflects on division, both in the Holy Land and closer to home.

Plus all the regular columnists, letters, reviews and crosswords – all for just £1.80

Life and Work needs you

Please send submissions for *Parish News*, *View from the Pew* and *The Big Picture* to: Life and Work, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN or email magazine@lifeandwork.org

A Visit to the Holy Land

Gillian Sweetman, Joan and I were amongst a group visiting Israel/Palestine in February making a Christian Pilgrimage and viewing the work which was supported by the Guild Project. The visit was led by the Rev Clarence Musgrave who was for six years minister in St Andrews Jerusalem. The Rev George Shand, our mission partner in Jerusalem, joined the group on some of our visits, so it was possible to get to know him, hear from him what he does and see with him some of the issues for members of the Christian church in this divided land.

I have now visited Israel/Palestine four times and this was without a doubt the most shocking but it was also the most inspiring. Clarence Musgrave has a remarkable knowledge of the country and the people. He was able to open our eyes to situations and to the gospels in a most remarkable way. As we travelled the Bible readings were from the Glasgow Bible, read (mostly) by the West of Scotland members of our group. The Glasgow Bible has a magic of its own. We stood under a sycamore tree in Jericho and heard the words 'Jesus looked up into the sycamore tree and said to Zaccheus "cum doon wee man"'



The reading on Communion Sunday in February was about Jesus asking his disciples "who do men say that I am?". He asked them at Caesarea Philippi. Two weeks previously we were there. Clarence asked the group "Why did Jesus bring the disciples traipsing all the way up to the Golan Heights when he could have asked them the same question down by the Sea of Galilee?" The answer given by Clarence was that at our feet were the springs of the Jordan, with the river pouring out of the cliff face (the source of life in a dry land) and around us, along the cliff face, there were the ruins of gaudy Roman pagan temples. Jesus was setting the scene for the question. There is a lot in the gospels that we have difficulty understanding because we cannot appreciate what would have been very clear to those living in Palestine under Roman occupation in the first century AD. What was so shocking to us was the treatment of the Palestinians. In order to prevent Palestinian attacks on Israelis a separation barrier has been built across the country on Palestinian land in the occupied territory. The wall is peppered by checkpoints guarded by the army, a military road and razor wire. On the hill-tops Jewish settlers occupy Palestinian land. The Israeli government provides power and water for the settlers. Many settlers are from Eastern Europe, often from Russia, and are given generous financial arrangements by the State of Israel. Road signs are in Hebrew, Arabic, English and now Russian. The settlers have their own roads. The settlers are aggressive and dump rocks on the

roads to the Palestinian villages. The army closes off roads and sets up random checkpoints. The Palestinians cannot approach the settlements or use the settler's roads without a permit or they will be arrested by the police or shot by the armed settlers. The settlers have taken the water, the power and the land. We were



told that settlements receive 80% of the water and the Palestinians 20%. The settlements are illegal in terms of international law. What was so inspiring were the people that we met and their stories of how they handle adversity.

We visited a farm south of Bethlehem called the Tent of Nations. The owner had his access road rendered unusable by rubble dumped by settlers, his water and power had been cut off. He has fought many court battles to keep the land that has been in his family for generations but the State of Israel continues to try to evict him. At his gate was a sign that said "I will not allow you to become my enemy".

The Palestinians and the Bedouin we met thanked us for coming to see them and for listening to their story, and they asked us to tell it to others, which was humbling. We did not meet many Israelis on this visit – they would have told us a different story. In the Rabbis' eyes Israel is their land, and was promised to them. We visited Hebron, a busy noisy Palestinian city, with George. We were guided through the checkpoints into the quiet settler section by members of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, EAPPI. They escort Palestinians, including school children who are attacked by the settlers, through checkpoints. EAPPI have been supported by the Guild Project.





On our way north we stopped at the Palestinian village of Jayyous to meet staff at the crèche and see the barrier at close quarters. Over 60% of the Jayyous villagers' farmland is separated from them by the barrier, which is a fence in this part of the country. The village men are not allowed to cross to farm their olive trees. If land is not cared for, then under Israeli law it is appropriated by the State, so the women have to farm the land. The crèche, funded by the Guild Project, was started to allow the younger children to be looked after while the women farm. The women run a community shop and the profits help fund the crèche.

Rabbi Nava Hefetz, who spoke in Greenbank in November, accompanied us for a day on a whistle-stop tour of the Negev where we stopped to meet villagers at Al Arakib – a Bedouin village that had been repeatedly demolished as it is on land where the Israelis wish to plant a forest. The land has been sprayed with weed killer from the air so the grass doesn't grow and the Bedouin can no longer graze their sheep. The Bedouin are permitted to occupy the land inside the cemetery perimeter.

Later Nava took us to meet with a group of young female students from Sapir College, Sderot, which is close to Gaza. These students are participating in a programme called 'Sisters for Peace' which is run by the College and Rabbis for Human Rights and part-funded by the Church of Scotland Guild. We met six of the students, three Bedouin and three Jews, who have been learning about each others' cultures through working together on projects in their own communities. Jews, Bedouin and Palestinians rarely meet.

We met the local police on Temple Mount – they had weapons on their backs and possibly either tear gas or plastic bullets on their ammunition bands. They gave us a very cheery greeting. The next day a man was killed after rioting on Temple Mount.

We visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum and memorial. There we saw Jews distressed by what they were seeing and reading. We attended evening worship in a Synagogue and chanted the Service with the Rabbi in Hebrew. It was a joyous service for peace.

George led worship at St Andrews Jerusalem on our last day. He asked for help from visiting elders and ministers, so members of our group greeted the congregation, took up the offering and read the lessons. His closing prayer included prayer for those whom we love, and for those whom we ought to love.

John Ritchie

Welcome Teams

November

- 4 **John George**, Kenneth Aitken, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead, Tony Foster
- 11 **Ian Thom**, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Elizabeth Htet-Khin, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Charles Black, Greig Scott
- 18 **Roger Bland**, Eileen Campbell, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Robert Nimmo, Keith Winton
- 25 **Rosemary McCulloch**, Rona Ferguson, Fiona Grant, Frank Hutson, Christina Morrow, Alison Murison, Malcolm Reid, Joan Ritchie, Toby Tucker

December

- 2 **Stuart Sanders**, Moira Davidson, Stuart Macmillan, John Murison, Rachel Cadell, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Carrie Reid

Coffee Rota



November

- 4 WAGs
- 11 Kenneth Aitken and Kenny Htet-Khin (D72)
- 18 The Flower Group
- 25 The Guild

Creche Rota

November

- 4 Lucy Teall
- 11 Isobel Thom
- 18 Rosemary Collier
- 25 Liz Foster



December

- 2 Carrie Reid

Flower Rota

Provided by

Delivered by

November

- | | | |
|----|------------------|----------------|
| 4 | Margo Fraser | |
| 11 | Eileen Crawford | Isabel Graham |
| 18 | Louise Coghill | Gail Beveridge |
| 25 | Marjory Fletcher | Miriam Jackson |

December

- | | | |
|---|--------------|----------------|
| 2 | Paddy Bowman | Aileen Thomson |
|---|--------------|----------------|



Material for the December/January *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by Sunday 11 November or sent by e-mail by 9am on Tuesday 13 November to greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

Some difficult sayings of Jesus

Not peace but a sword...

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. These words of Jesus from Matthew's Gospel immediately raise questions in our minds. What was that "glorious song of old" the angels sang when Jesus was born? *Glory to God in high heaven and peace on earth...* Was not Jesus the long-expected Prince of Peace? Did he not tell his followers, *Peace is my parting gift to you?* As he arrived in Jerusalem for what was to be his last visit, did not Jesus pray for the peace of the city and weep over it because it was headed for destruction? What was the first thing the risen Jesus said to his bewildered followers but, *Peace be with you?* His followers rightly summed up his message as "the gospel of peace" or "the word of reconciliation". They did so because of their own experience. Individuals and groups otherwise divided from one another were brought together through their common commitment to Christ. And at an early stage in Jesus' ministry a remarkable reconciliation must have taken place to bring together two such extreme characters as Matthew who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman forces of occupation and Simon who belonged to the Palestinian freedom-fighters. Why then should Jesus be remembered as bringing peace if he had said and meant, *I did not come to bring peace but a sword?*

What did Jesus mean? These words are sometimes summoned up in an attempt to depict a Jesus who endorses war. Julia Ward Howe's Battle Hymn of the Republic depicts a Christ whose coming "hath loosed the fatal lightning of his terrible swift sword". But this is to use them out of context. In context, they refer unmistakably to the sword of division that cuts family ties. *Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.* Interestingly, the division is generational — son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law — thus destroying the family's essential unity.

Does this, and other sayings by Jesus, mean that he completely rejected the importance of the family? When Jesus spoke of tension and conflict within a family, he probably spoke from his own experience. Some members of his own family had no sympathy with what he was doing. And when people said that he was out of his mind, it was some of his family who went out to restrain him. However, because Jesus spoke about the importance of loving our neighbour and even loving our enemies, it is impossible to imagine that his final word about the family was wholly negative. Jesus did not devalue the family, but he did make it second to the Kingdom of God. Jesus clearly affirmed that embeddedness in the family and its conventions can hold back his would-be followers and may prevent them from making a whole-hearted response to God.

Why then did Jesus use the violent word picture of a sword dividing families? The Jesus of this statement seems out of character with our usual understanding of Jesus. One thing is certain: Jesus did not advocate conflict or condone violence. He emphatically distanced himself in word and deed from any use of the sword. He taught his followers to offer no resistance or retaliation when they were attacked or ill-treated. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* Children take after their parents. God is the God of peace, so those who seek peace and pursue it reflect God's character.

When Jesus spoke of tension and conflict, he may have been referring not to the purpose of his coming but to its effect. He was not outlining what he intended to happen, but describing what might result from people taking his teaching seriously. From the moment he started announcing his gospel of peace, people were shocked and appalled. Instead of accepting his message, people rejected his word of peace, and rejected him as well. The religious authorities, the imperial rulers and those who benefitted from injustice denounced him and opposed him. Instead of unity, Jesus' message brought division. No one could be neutral about Jesus or his message. Either they accepted him or rejected him.

Jesus turned down the role of predictable, innocuous do-gooder. The demands of the prince of true peace may very well feel like a sword cutting through lesser loyalties and making quick work of our flabby, common sense morality. If Jesus were the "nice guy", should he not have been able to stay out of trouble? What incited people to call him names? Not Prince of Peace but prince of demons! Why should following him split families? How did he end up on a cross? The gospel shakes up values, rearranges priorities and reorients goals.

Jesus came to bring peace, a real peace, not a bogus peace. His peace must be fought for. As followers of Jesus we are committed to fight against the evil in ourselves and in our society in the light of our understanding of his teaching and example. We are engaged in a battle against greed and selfishness, against cruelty and oppression, against injustice and indifference, wherever they may be found. The gospel is a gospel of peace, but not of apathy or evasion of responsibility. Peace in the home, peace in the workplace, peace in society at large is not achieved by everyone agreeing with everyone else, but by each standing up for what he or she believes to be true and right. This may lead to disagreement, discord and opposition, but the peace which Christ came to bring can only become a reality by striving to reconcile our differences in charity and with honesty. Or, as St Paul put it, by speaking the truth in love.

For further reading:

St Matthew 10, 34-39; St Luke 12, 49-53; Ephesians 2, 14-22