

Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES
No 633 March 2014

Pulpit Diary

Feb 28 (Friday)

7.30pm Pre-Communion Service

Mar 2

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion (Crèche, Spectrum and Springboard meet as usual)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

Mar 7 (Friday)

9.15 am Pram Praise

10.30am Area World Day of Prayer Service

Mar 9 First Sunday in Lent

10.30am Morning Worship

Mar 16 Second Sunday in Lent

10.30am Morning Worship with Annual Meeting followed by QII and Springboard lunch

Mar 22 (Saturday)

4.00pm Messy Church

Mar 23 Third Sunday in Lent

10.30am Morning Worship

Mar 30 Fourth Sunday in Lent

10.30am Morning Worship (End of Second Term for Springboard and Spectrum)

Apr 6 Fifth Sunday in Lent

9.30am First Sunday Service led by World Mission

10.30am Morning Worship (Special Activity for Children)

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

Website: www.greenbankchurch.org

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

Recently the film "Twelve years a slave" won a Golden Globe for best motion picture in the drama category of the Academy Awards. Starring Chiwetel Ejiofor, alongside other perhaps better-known names such as Benedict Cumberbatch, Michael Fassbender and Brad Pitt, the film is based



on the true story of a free black man, Solomon Northup from Saratoga. In 1841 Northup was kidnapped and taken south to work on the cotton plantations. It was to be 12 long and brutal years before he would be a free man again.

The film makes very uncomfortable viewing with its powerful and unflinching portrayal of slavery. Conditions in which the slaves are forced to live and work are shocking and degrading. The film does an excellent job in portraying the dehumanising nature of slavery not only for the slaves themselves but for those who would own them and manage them. Those who dish out the cruel treatment are almost as much prisoners of racism and slavery as those on the receiving end. There is perhaps only one character who engages our sympathies and with whom we might want to identify. And that is a courageous Canadian who is not a part of the system.

Disturbingly too, in the film we see how a flawed view of Christianity was used to support this infernal institution. Yet we read in the Bible of Jesus' promise that he has come to fulfil the words originally spoken by the prophet Isaiah to those who were slaves in Babylon.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

And recovery of sight to the blind

*To let the oppressed go free
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

Today slavery is no longer legal anywhere in the world. And to be fair many of those who were instrumental in the abolition of the institution were themselves

Christians. Yet human trafficking remains an international problem. According to the anti-slavery society 29.8 million people are estimated to be living in illegal slavery today. Their personal freedom is denied and they are forced to engage in certain kinds of work, against their will and unlawfully. For many people what forces them into slavery is poverty.

As Lent approaches, the Christian calendar invites us into a period of self-examination. There is always a danger that this could degenerate into mere introspection. While it is important to recognise the things that are wrong in our lives and in society, and to seek forgiveness from God and from those whom we have hurt, it is just as important to go one step further and with God's help do something positive to address those things that could and should be different.

Greenbank's Adult Christian Education Committee have taken the courageous decision this year to look at some challenging material which has been produced by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. This material focusses on Jesus' parables and encourages us to reflect on some of the big issues of wealth and poverty facing our world today. I hope you will be interested in coming along and engaging with these issues.

With warmest wishes,

Alison I Swindells
Minister

Morningside in the Great War

Morningside Heritage Association (MHA) is running a community project exploring the impact of the Great War on everyday life in Morningside. The intention of the project is to build up a picture of what life was like for families, both during the Great War and as they readjusted in its aftermath. We are also interested in current perceptions of the impact of the Great War. The first phase of the project, collection of data from a range of sources, is complete and we are currently regrouping these data into street-by-street cohorts.

MHA is keen to encourage the Morningside community to participate in this project, by providing information about changes in family and community life from handed-down family stories, letters, photographs and other memorabilia relating to domestic, social and commercial life, and by volunteering to help develop the project.

If you have material or handed-down memories relating to the Great War that you are willing to share with us, or would like to help us in other ways, please contact Jill Powlett-Brown (email jillpowlettbrown@hotmail.com).

Recordings

You can listen to a recording of the 10.30am service. (Most services are recorded.) This is appreciated by those who find it difficult to get to church. Monthly CDs can be delivered. Recordings can also be emailed on request.



Listen to the *Leaflet* by requesting the “audio version”, available on CD or by email. Request these through your elder, or speak to David Ferguson.

An Audience with our own Edinburgh Makar

Ron Butlin

There are still a few tickets left for this event, in aid of Scottish Love in Action.

*At Butterflies Cafe, Marchmont St Giles Church, 1a Kilgraston Rd, Edinburgh
7.30pm–9.30pm, Thursday 27th March 2014*

With an international reputation as a prize-winning novelist, Ron Butlin is also the Edinburgh Makar (poet laureate). In 2009 he was made the first ever Honorary Writing fellow (together with Ian Rankin) at Edinburgh University.

Much of his poetry, as well as many of his novels and short stories, have been broadcast and translated into over ten languages. In addition to his plays for BBC radio and theatre (most recently *Sweet Dreams* for Oran Mor in Glasgow), he has written five operas, two of them for Scottish Opera.

Tickets £10 (incl. refreshments), available from Hazel Macaulay; Raffle

Life and Work

We are sorry that there has been a misunderstanding over *Life and Work* orders. If you have ordered a *Life and Work* and not received one, or if you are a District Visitor who has someone in District who you think should have received a *Life and Work* and has not, please contact either the Church Office or Robert Young, our Treasurer as soon as possible so that we can resolve the matter. Many thanks.

Best wishes,

Alison Swindells

The Guild

I cannot believe we have reached the last month of our Guild session. It seems no time at all since our first meeting, yet in between we have heard an excellent selection of speakers, each one firing our interest and giving us something to think about.

Our first meeting in March is on the 4th when Mrs Macartney comes to tell us about multiple sclerosis, and then on Friday 7th at 10.30am we host this year's World Day of Prayer. The service will be held in the Braid Room and we offer a very warm invitation to all the congregation.

Our final meeting of the session is the ABM on Tuesday 18th when after the business Hongsuk Um is going to tell us about his church at home in Korea. Currently Hongsuk is studying at New College.

The Guild outing will take place as usual in May to a place and on a day to be decided.

Ann Pirie

Easter Bookstall

There will be a Bookstall on *Sunday 23rd March* in the Main Hall. You will find new books from the Cornerstone Bookshop, titles recently reviewed in the *Leaflet* and a selection of books about Easter. Please come and browse. If there are any books you would like to see please contact us.

John and Joan Ritchie

Lent / Easter Appeal 2014

At the January Congregational Board meeting it was agreed that the recipient of the monies raised in this year's Lent / Easter appeal should be *Myeloma UK*.

This charity, which is based in Edinburgh, is the only organisation in the UK dealing exclusively with myeloma, a blood cancer arising from plasma cells in the bone marrow. It provides support and information to those affected by the cancer, funds research and campaigns to raise awareness.

More information can be obtained from www.myeloma.org.uk.

Commonwealth Games 2014

Homestay Programmes

Do you want to get involved in supporting the Glasgow Commonwealth games but not sure how? How about opening your home and offering the arm of hospitality to official Commonwealth Games volunteers or athletes' family members?

The Athlete Family Homestay Programme (AFHP) and the Volunteer Homestay Programme is being coordinated by *More Than Gold 2014* whose mission is to encourage churches of all denominations to reach out and bear witness to our Christian faith within our local communities through the theme of Sport. With 20 years experience of coordinating Christians hosting thousands of athletes' family members through the Athlete Family Homestay Programme (AFHP), they anticipate that many more will want to do the same in Scotland.

During past games, affordable accommodation has been tough to find. As a result, many visiting volunteers and the support family for many athletes have struggled to find accommodation. At the same time, many of these international visitors have struggled to make the most of the experience without the practical help and care of a local hospitable host.

Although the majority of events are being held in Glasgow, Edinburgh is proud to have the Diving events, to be held at the Royal Commonwealth Pool, and so families and athletes will without doubt value our support and hospitality this Summer.

If you wish to find out more, visit <http://morethangold2014.org.uk/homestay> or contact David Willson (david.willson@morethangold2014.org.uk) or the undersigned.

Catherine Fergus-Allen
(Mission and Service)

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

Greenbank Scout Group

*Do come along on Saturday 12th April
to our Annual Jumble Sale*

9.30am – 12 noon

Tea/coffee and home baking

Admission £2

During the week Monday 7th – Friday 11th April (evenings only: 6.30pm–8.30pm), our Scouts will be calling on houses in the Greenbank area to collect items to sell such as:

books and toys; clothing; crockery; working electrical goods; small items of furniture; glassware; hardware; pictures and mirrors; records, DVDs and CDs; soft furnishings; and any other saleable items.

Unsold items will be offered to charities before disposal.

Pants



Not the sort of image one normally sees in the Greenbank Leaflet, is it?

At the last Night Shelter, in conversation with one of the Bethany staff, it became clear that although they had plenty of donations of socks and hats to hand out at the shelters, there is a demand for men's underpants. Obviously, such donations would need to be new, if possible, so if you feel you would like to contribute to this, please do so before 3rd April. Just put them in a bag and leave them with any hats, gloves and socks, at the entrance to the church in the Food Box for the Homeless.

Many thanks in anticipation...

Greenbank Help the Homeless Group

March Issue of Life and Work



Breaking Down Barriers

Marking International Women's Day on March 8, we discuss the changing role of women in the Church. Includes interviews with the Moderator of the General Assembly, the Rt Rev Lorna Hood; Pauline Weibye, Secretary to the Council of Assembly; and Ruth Rankin, the young minister's wife who featured in a recent BBC series.

Encounter at The Well

Jackie Macadam celebrates the multi-cultural advice centre in Glasgow, established by the Church of Scotland 20 years ago.

The 'Invisible Church'

Steve Aisthorpe offers further insight into research on Christians who don't go to church.

A Gift of the Spirit

The Rev Gordon Jamieson believes good management is God-given.

'A Wonderful Message of Hope'

The Moderator highlights the importance of chaplaincy in the Church.

'God Alone is Great'

Donald Macleod offers a reminder of the purpose of worship.

A Taste of Intimacy

The Rev Dr Martin Fair emphasises the importance of experience and encounter in sharing faith.

A Neverending Task

An interview with Clapperton Mayuni, General Secretary of the Bible Society of Malawi.

Plus news, letters, reviews and crosswords, all for just £2.

Online: Visit www.lifeandwork.org for the latest news and exclusive features.

Parables and Possessions

A Study Course for Lent

In 2012 the Church of Scotland's General Assembly received a major report called *A Right Relationship with Money*. This was the final report of the Kirk's Special Commission on the Purposes of Economic Activity, which had been meeting and taking evidence for around two years. The impetus for establishing the Commission was driven by a strongly-held feeling in the Church of Scotland that, following the credit crunch, financial crash and the impact of the recession which ensued, things must not return to 'business as usual'.

Along with a number of his colleagues, Professor Charles Munn, who chaired the Commission, has produced this Lent course to develop and explore some of the insights contained in the Commission's report.

The course will be held in the Braid Room, on five successive Monday evenings, starting on 10th March. The programme is:

- 10th March** **Temptation:** The Parable of the Sower
- 17th March** **Forgiveness:** The Parable of the Prodigal Son and his Brother
- 24th March** **Ridicule:** The Parable of the Rich Fool
- 31st March** **Sacrifice:** The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin
- 7th April** **Transformation:** The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Course materials are available for download now from the website of *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland*, www.ctbi.org.uk/649, but for those without internet access, a few copies of the materials will be available each evening. Sessions formally begin at 7.30pm, with tea and coffee available from 7.00pm.

SU Holidays

SU Scotland have been organising holiday events for nearly 70 years, with the aim of giving young people a superb holiday experience and producing a simple introduction to the Christian faith.

From P5 to S6, from Easter to October, from Arran to Aviemore, from £99 to £320, from under canvas to *en suite*, from studying to surfing, from raft building to role play, and high ropes to high notes, filled with faith, fun and friendship – there is an SU Holiday for every taste!

Booking is now available online at www.suholidays.org.uk

If you would like an SU Holidays brochure or more information, please contact the SU Edinburgh office (Tel 445 4125) or Alison Ambler.



Kirk o'Field and the Churches of Edinburgh's South Side

In September 2013 Kirk o'Field held its final service as a parish church of the Church of Scotland before uniting with Greyfriars. The previous year Roy Pinkerton, a member of the congregation, published a book tracing the history of this last Church of Scotland congregation in the South Side back through the many congregations which were, through unions (the last in 1984), constituents of Kirk o'Field. The historic name was revived at the time of a triple union in 1969. The book provides fascinating insights into church history, and also the urban and social history of this area of Edinburgh.

The story starts in the early 18th century when the South Side – the area to the east and south of the Flodden Wall – was open country with elegant mansions and parkland (or Pleasance) and the villages to the south and east of the city were part of the parish of St Cuthbert's. "Chapels of Ease" were built so that residents did not have to make the long journey to the parent church. If you are, like me, ignorant of church history, the opening chapter provides an indication of the capacity of the reformed church for dissent and disunity. If you want to know what separated the "Burghers" and "anti-Burghers" and their division into sub-groups known as "Auld Licht" and "New Licht", or what the "Relief Church" was (it was founded "for the relief of Christians oppressed in their Christian privileges"), or how "Praying Societies" related to the "Associate Presbytery", this book gives answers!

In the early 19th century there was a growth in the number of South Side congregations because, as Roy Pinkerton records, of "this multiplication of denominations representing various shades of belief in matters which now seem of far less moment". One major cause of dissent was patronage, and this came to a head with the Disruption of 1843 and a division in the national church which led to the splitting of many congregations. At the same time there were major changes in the urban environment, with the parkland being replaced by tenement dwellings, and one area, the Dumbiedykes, "acquired the dubious reputation of being one of the most densely populated, not to say overcrowded, areas in the whole of Europe". The situation was reversed in the 20th century, as congregations grew smaller and the South Side population decreased dramatically with the migration of people (and transplanting of congregations like North Richmond Street, now Richmond Craigmillar) to areas of new housing. In the South Side this was reinforced by the development plans both of the city and the University of Edinburgh; many of the numerous church premises became redundant and were bought by the University.

Buccleuch (which began its life in 1756 as the original St Cuthbert's Chapel of Ease and was part of the 1969 union which gave birth to Kirk o'Field) became a furniture store.

This is the context of the author's survey of the 19th and early 20th century congregations that are concentrated into Kirk o'Field in the unions of 1969 and 1984. It is a story filled with fascinating and in some cases tantalising detail, recording rises and falls in membership, usually associated with the skills and personality of the ministers (including financial acumen!). It relates admirable outreach and mission work, both abroad and among the urban poor in the community, which is echoed in some of the outreach of churches today. Nicolson Street Church (the building is now the South Side Community Centre) was responsible for the Potterrow Mission, which as well as providing Sunday services, and Sunday and Day schools, created two Friendly Societies (one for domestic servants) and a savings bank. The book also recounts squabbles and disputes – between Sessions and Ministers, between different factions within congregations, and in one case "friction within the Woman's Guild" (the Session minutes don't give details, alas). There are accounts of the development of music in churches, and of the decision of one Session that ladies could be allowed to join the choir – but that they must be chaperoned by an elder at choir practice. In 1829 Roxburgh Place – surprisingly for a "Relief" congregation – was the first Presbyterian church to install an organ, and defied the outraged Synod's instruction that the offending instrument should be removed forthwith. In 1833 the congregation successfully petitioned to be received into the Church of Scotland, knowing that the organ would have to go. Ten years later, Roxburgh broke away and became Roxburgh Free Church.

The Kirk o'Field building itself opened in 1912 as the Charteris Memorial Church, commemorating the Rev Archibald Charteris who promoted the role of women in the church and the creation of Deaconess House as a training centre for Deaconesses. Deaconess House opened in 1891 and, having served as the halls of the later church building, is now part of the "Kirk o'Field Centre" operated by Greyfriars, and used for a variety of community activities as well as being the location of the Scottish Love in Action office. It was partly as an expression of gratitude for the warm welcome and support given by the congregation to SLA that I had the privilege of attending that final service in September 2013.

A final note – the Kirk o'Field sanctuary is again in use for worship on Sundays and two weekdays by an independent congregation, the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

Brian Barron

Thanks to Greenbank

Annette Street Primary School, Glasgow G42 8YB

Dear Rev Swindells

and the congregation of Greenbank Parish Church,

We are the Pupil Council of Annette Street Primary School. We want to thank you for all your help. You have been a great help as your donation helped us raise over £500 at our Christmas Fair.

We had a great time at our Christmas Fair, there was so much to do! We had a bouncy castle, face painting and lots to sell.

Thank you very much, we are really happy.

Marisa Covaci, Hamza ki Hafeez (Annette Street Pupil Council)



Greenbank contributed to a collection of toys last year for this Glasgow Primary School.



The next collection dates are **30th March** and **11th May**, at the Sunday service (table set up in Main Hall).

Thanks to everyone who has responded to my request for donations to this worthwhile cause. The need for good quality donations to the starter pack scheme is as great as ever.

A full list of the items wanted appeared in last month's *Leaflet*.

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

A Cautionary Tale

(from Facebook)

Pastor Jeremiah Steeppek transformed himself into a homeless person and went to the 10,000 member church where he was to be introduced as the head pastor that morning.

He walked around his soon to be church for 30 minutes while it was filling with people for service. Only 3 people out of the 7-10,000 people said hello to him.

He asked people for change to buy food – no one in the church gave him change.

He went into the sanctuary to sit down in the front of the church and was asked by the ushers if he would please sit in the back.

He greeted people to be greeted back with stares and dirty looks, with people looking down on him and judging him.

As he sat in the back of the church, he listened to the church announcements and such.

When all that was done, the elders went up and were excited to introduce the new pastor of the church to the congregation.

“We would like to introduce to you Pastor Jeremiah Steeppek.” The congregation looked around clapping with joy and anticipation.

The homeless man sitting in the back stood up and started walking down the aisle. The clapping stopped with all eyes on him.

He walked up to the altar and took the microphone from the elders (who were in on this) and paused for a moment then he recited,

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

After he recited this, he looked towards the congregation and told them all that he had experienced that morning. Many began to cry and many heads were bowed in shame.

He then said, “Today I see a gathering of people, not a church of Jesus Christ. The world has enough people, but not enough disciples. When will YOU decide to become disciples?”

He then dismissed service until next week.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ should be more than just talk. It ought to be a lifestyle that others around you can love about you and share in.



Scouts @ Greenbank

Be prepared for “*probably the best...*”

JUMBLE sale
...in Edinburgh”

SATURDAY 12TH APRIL 2014 : 9.30am – 12 noon
GREENBANK CHURCH, BRAIDBURN TERRACE, EH10 6ES

4th Morningside Scout Group is registered as a Charity, number CR43781.

Admission £2

Congregational Register

Omitted from the on-line version of the Leaflet

Welcome Teams

March

- 2 **John Ritchie**, Eric Brown, Stewart Coghill, Ralph Davidson, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman, Ian Thomson, David Easton, Susan Jackman
- 9 **Roger Bland**, Eileen Campbell, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Robin Nimmo, Keith Winton
- 16 **Ian Thom**, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Elizabeth Htet-Khin, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Charles Black, Greig Scott
- 23 **Stuart Sanders**, Moira Davidson, John Murison, Rachel Cadell, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Carrie Reid, Moira Land
- 30 **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones

April

- 6 **John George**, Rhian Ferguson, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead, Tony Foster

Coffee Rota

March

- 2 Communion – *no coffee*
- 9 Spectrum 3
- 16 QII and Springboard Lunch
- 23 John Mowat & Louise Coghill (D67 & D68)
- 30 Charles & Susan Black

April

- 6 Scouts



Crèche Rota

March

- 2 Hazel McLachlan
- 9 Shona Murray
- 16 Isobel Thom
- 23 Janet Ferguson
- 30 Eileen McKinnon

April

- 6 Sharon Hamilton



Flower Rota

March

- | | <i>Provided by</i> | <i>Delivered by</i> |
|----|------------------------------|---------------------|
| 2 | Isobel Aitchison | Ruth Ray |
| 9 | Isobel Brown/
Anne Morham | Fiona Connal |
| 16 | Doreen Milliken | Jean Roynon-Jones |
| 23 | Sheila McDonald | Pauline Walker |
| 30 | Catherine Hardie | Isobel Brown |

April

- | | | |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| 6 | Rona Sommerville | Joan Cameron |
|---|------------------|--------------|



Friendship Club

Reminiscing is something at which our members excel and so on 12th March, our Victorian Magic Lantern Show *Phantasmagoria* given by Winnie Stevenson (on a welcome return to the Club) will be a joy. Kathleen, in hope, has entitled her music afternoon on 19th March, *Spring*.

Our final meeting of the session on 26th March is about the *Work of the RSPB in Scotland* which nowadays covers much more than looking after our birdlife.

Information about our May outing will be in the April *Leaflet* when details have been finalised.

You do not have to be a member of the club to join us if any subject interests you.

Val Smart

World Day of Prayer

Friday 7th March 2014

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name... there I will be also.” **Will you join us?**

Every year on the first Friday in March, Christians around the world of all ages gather in small groups and large congregations to use the same basic form of worship, written by women of a different country each year on a theme chosen by the World Day of Prayer International Committee. This year the service is on **Friday 7th March** and a service will be held in **Greenbank Parish Church at 10.30am**. This service has been prepared by the women of Egypt and has the title *Streams in the Desert*. In the service we think about water, which is essential for all life.

Everyone is very welcome to come to the service, on Friday 7th March 2014 at 10.30am in the Braid Room.

Margaret Barrowman

Material for the April *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by Sunday 16th March, or sent by e-mail by 9am on Tuesday 18th March to greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

Some Prayers of the Old Testament

Our National Anthem, *God Save the Queen*, is a prayer for the well-being of our sovereign. Its words first appeared in print in 1744 and became very popular at the time of the attempt by Bonnie Prince Charlie to regain the British throne for the exiled House of Stuart. However, its sentiments can be found two hundred years earlier in the play *Ralph Roister Doister*, in which one character prays, *The Lord strengthen her most excellent Majesty long to reign over us in all prosperitie...*

Prayers for the monarch are nothing new. In the Bible, the book of Psalms contains a number of prayers for Israel's king, "royal psalms" as they are called. They were written for use at the enthronement of a king, at his marriage, at the beginning of a military campaign and on his triumphant return from war. One psalm (Psalm 72) opens with a plea that the king may govern the people rightly and in particular defend the cause of the poor and help the needy. God's anointed king has to ensure that the whole nation is given the opportunity to lead life to the full, in freedom from poverty and oppression.

This psalm has the heading "for Solomon". It is generally accepted that the headings of the Psalms were added long after they were first composed, so it is highly unlikely that this particular psalm had any direct connection with King Solomon. Despite this, it remains significant that this particular psalm bears his name rather than that of his father David, for its contents remind us of a prayer offered by Solomon.

It was about 970 BC that Solomon succeeded David as the third and last King of Judah and Israel. His name means *Prince of peace*, but his reign began with intrigue and a bloodbath. He disposed of Adonijah, his elder brother and rival for the throne; Joab, the most distinguished soldier ancient Israel ever had; and Shimei, another potential rival. Having eliminated all likely sources of opposition he settled down to a reign of peace and prosperity.

At this point in the narrative we are introduced to another side of Solomon's character. The tough, assertive and ruthless eastern despot visits an ancient shrine at Gibeon to worship God. There he sleeps in the sanctuary, and as he sleeps God speaks to him in a dream. God's offer seems too good to be true. It sounds like the three wishes granted by elves in fairy tales or by the genie of Aladdin's lamp. *Ask what I should give you.* But this is not a fairy tale or a pantomime: it is a test, set for Solomon by God.

With reverence and affection Solomon first speaks of the man who has gone before him. *You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today.* The world did not begin with Solomon: his throne is the throne of his father. Solomon shows that he has learned more from his father than how to survive palace intrigues or to deal firmly with his enemies. He has learned that even in the face of human failure and frequent wickedness God's *great and steadfast love* is at

work. This *steadfast love* is undeserved, unearned and unrepayable and it is shown to those who would be lost without such help.

Solomon acknowledges his need of divine assistance if he is to rule effectively. *And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.* Thus Solomon recognises the inevitable limitations of human insight and knowledge. We might expect Solomon to have made extravagant requests of this generous God, to pray for power or wealth or fame, for an expansion of his kingdom or an extension of his life. Instead he has the courage to admit his own frailty and insufficiency in face of the greatness of the task ahead of him, his lack of competence to do the things kings are expected to do. He asks only for what he really needs to be a good king: *Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?*

To be a king is not a matter of using unbridled power and authority. To govern and to judge require practical wisdom, not mere book-learning, but a shrewdness that penetrates to the hidden motives and desires that lie behind the words and actions of men and women. To be a good king Solomon has to be attentive to the needs and demands of the people for whom he is responsible. He needs what the original Hebrew describes as a *listening heart*. At the same time as listening to his people he must heed the ancient command to listen to what God has to say, *Hear, O Israel...* so that he himself may be ruled by God.

Solomon went on to become a successful king. He brought to his nation political stability and a period of peace, making the united kingdom of Israel and Judah the strongest in the region and fabulously wealthy. Later generations gave him credit for his major achievement in constructing a beautiful Temple at Jerusalem, a building which was to become the focal point of the nation's faith and worship. However, it seems that he did not continue to listen, either to God or to his people. He became notorious for his love of luxury and ostentation, his enormous harem of foreign women whose religions he encouraged, his oppression of his subjects and his autocratic spirit. Sadly, it is impossible to imagine the older Solomon displaying any of the vulnerability, humility and receptivity of the young man in the sanctuary at Gibeon.

We are all of us subject to inner conflicts and turmoil. These make it difficult for us to establish our priorities and the setting of high and worthy ideals. Take time to imagine God saying to you, *Ask what I should give you.* What would we seek to choose from God? If prayer is no more than the presentation to God of a list of things we would like to receive or to have done for us, it makes nonsense of all prayer. With Solomon we have to seek the wisdom that will enable us to live more nearly as we pray.

For further reading

The story of Solomon's reign is in *1 Kings, chapters 1-11*. The "royal psalms" include *Psalms 2, 18, 20, 45, 72 & 110*.