

CONNECT

Magazine of the Evangelical Connexion

December 2010



September 2010 Convocation at the Hayes Conference Centre

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Connect!

Greetings! I trust that you will find this edition of the magazine of the Evangelical Connexion helpful and stimulating. Having been asked to take over as Editor, I have changed the title to *Connect*, as an encouragement to all in the Connexion to engage in connecting - connecting with one another, individuals and congregations, indeed maintaining communion and “quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people”, as in our declared principles. 2010 has in many respects been a most encouraging time for the Connexion, with new ministers being established in Workington and Fleetwood, and real development from a dramatic decline at Tue Brook. Nevertheless, we could help each other significantly, and it would be good for our congregations to have contacts with ministers and members of the Evangelical Connexion, including events and visits.

The following list shows contact details of ministers, including websites and e-mails for each of our seven congregations:

St Paul's, Fleetwood (1907)

Website: www.stpaulsfleetwood.org.uk

Minister: The Revd Virgil Tountas

E-mail: virgil@stpaulsfleetwood.org.uk

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Christ Church, Leeds (1949)

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Christ Church, Leigh-on-Sea (1889)

Minister: The Revd J Lee Potter

E-mail: elizavictoria@gmail.com

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Christ Church, Tue Brook, Liverpool

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St Stephen's, Middlesbrough (1908)

under the oversight of Bishop Dominic

Christ Church, Teddington (1864)

Website: www.christ-church.org.uk

Minister: The Revd Dominic Stockford

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Emmanuel, Workington (1939)

Website: www.emmanuel.fce-ec.org.uk

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Do maintain contact with all the seven churches in the Connexion.

With regard to the magazine, please let me have any articles you would like to submit, as well as any correspondence or comments and any advertisements. Please see the page 15 for details for contact about *Connect* as well as the dates for the events of this coming year for the Connexion.

Michael John Smithson

Ministering to the Afflicted

In August 2009, the Patients Association published a report on 16 elderly patients. In the Foreword Claire Rayner says, 'the Patients Association has been receiving calls on our Helpline from people wanting to talk about *the dreadful, neglectful, demeaning, painful and sometimes downright cruel treatment* their elderly relatives had experienced at the hands of NHS nurses.'

Since compassion is of God, we should be shocked but not too surprised at the contents of the report. We are thankful to God for the good work done by the medical profession, but we need to be realistic about human nature. Our country has largely abandoned the Christian faith and its work-ethic. No longer do people do all things **heartily, as to the Lord** and not to man; no longer to they do things in the fear of God as those who must give an account to God on the Day of Judgment; no longer do people operate with **the royal law**, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," James 2⁸.

Without the Christian faith, there is little to sustain human kindness even in the medical profession, especially when it requires hard work and inconvenience, getting the hands dirty or considerable expenditure.

GOOD INTENTIONS

When Job was afflicted, his friends **loved him** to the extent that they got alongside him and sat with him for a week in silence and then wrestled with him over the issues raised by his sufferings. Job's friends were full of good intentions; for the sake of their friend, they gave themselves to Job for an extended period of time. They are a rebuke to those who stand aloof from the afflicted.

DANGER: COMFORTERS AT WORK

Yet Job's friends stand as a **warning** to all who offer counsel to the sick and the dying. By their mistaken approach, they increased Job's sufferings and added to his anguish of soul. Despite their good intentions; despite their fear of God; despite their grasp of Scripture, they did more harm than good. How often do we who seek to comfort the afflicted, actually increase their anguish by wrong counsel, despite the best of motives?

“YOU HAVE NOT SPOKEN OF ME WHAT IS RIGHT”

Where did Job's friends go wrong?

God explained, Job 42⁷, “My wrath is aroused against you,... **for you have not spoken of Me *what is right***, as My servant Job *has*.” It was their knowledge of God that was deficient. They applied to Job the Deuteronomic principle of **blessing for obedience** and **cursing for disobedience**, without considering other possibilities.

God said of Job that “there is none like him on the earth, a **blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil**.” God told Satan that Job was afflicted “without cause”, Job 2³; yet his friends insisted that his suffering must be due to wickedness. Once again, God's judgment is more merciful than man's.

For 35 chapters, Job 3-37, Job and his friends wrestle with the problem of suffering. His friends had much to say about God, some of which was sound; but they were **theorizing**. Job also said much about God but he wanted more; he constantly appealed directly to God; he wanted **a face to face with God**. In the end, his desire was granted to him: “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind,” Job 38¹.

If we are to minister to the afflicted, we need to **learn of God** so that we are able to speak of the mind and will of God aright, lest

we do them more harm than good. After the failure of his friends to comfort Job, the Lord spoke to him. Let us learn from the example of divine comfort.

GOD AT WORK - COUNSELLING

How then did God counsel Job?

God said: Job 38³⁻⁴, “Now prepare yourself /gird your waist **like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me**. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?”

1st, The Lord exalted Himself and put Job in his place.

Stand like a man; be a man; stop playing at being god. Each question God asked, exalted Himself put Job in his place. 38⁴, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” Humble yourself to answer God and let God be God.

Our society has put itself in the place of God. God says, “You shall not kill.” Yet millions of unborn babes are murdered each year; society discreetly practices euthanasia; infanticide is increasing – doctors are allowed by law not to feed sick babies when rejected by parents! Increasingly, those thought to ‘burden society’ are encouraged to end their own lives. But only God has authority to give life and to take life.

In God's message to Job, ch.38-39, Job 38³⁶ is pivotal. “**Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart?**” Before this verse, 38⁴⁻³⁴, God asks Job questions about the created universe - the sea & the sun, the weather and the stars. After this verse, 38^{39-39³⁰}, God asks questions about animals. The distinguishing characteristic of man is the capacity **to think**; the potential for wisdom and understanding. God made man in His image and holds us to be **morally accountable to Him**; to think and act responsibly before Him, with intelligence and integrity, dignity and sobriety. Stop blaming

others; stop blaming circumstances. Answer to the God Who put wisdom in the mind.

2nd: The Lord spoke to the man's conscience.

For 37 chapters, Job has wrestled with **the problem of suffering**; then God ministered to him in 38-41 and resolved the issue. Yet God said **nothing** about his sufferings! **God spoke about entirely about Himself. The answer to suffering is in the knowledge and love of God Himself.**

God is under no obligation to enter text n to explain to us **why** we suffer. He knows the reason why. It is sufficient for us to know that God Most Merciful is the ultimate cause behind all that comes to pass.

For Job, as for us, the issue is '**Why?**' - 'Why is this happening to me?' In speaking to Job, God changed the question to '**Who?**' - 'Who is putting me through this?' When people suffer, they do not need to know the reason why they suffer, but they must know WHO is ultimately behind their troubles – God Most Merciful.

God tells Job repeatedly that He is **God the Creator and Sustainer** of all things, thus putting Job in his place. This is God's world which He sustains and over which He reigns, doing His will, achieving His purposes, for His glory. And God reiterates His message to Job again and again until it penetrates Job's conscience. Here **God speaks to the man's conscience**, until he cries out, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth," Job 40⁴.

GOD WITH US

Suffering poses many issues as much for the carer as for the afflicted. Our afflictions are a trial of faith. Our afflictions have the capacity to destroy our faith. Yet when we suffer, what we need above all is God Himself; we need His felt-presence.

Job's friends talked endlessly about God; they **theorized** about God. Job talked **directly to God**; crying out for **a face to face** with God. That is what we need when suffer! Psalm 23⁴, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; **for You are with me.**" In the day of trouble, that is all that matters – the reality of the presence of God.

The experience of the felt presence of God in suffering left Job stunned and overwhelmed; his objections were silenced; his complaints dried up; his sin was exposed; his voice was silenced; his heart was humbled at last to let God be God. As Job put it, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but **now my eye sees You.**"

The point is not that eye-gate is better than ear-gate. Job is contrasting theorizing about God with the experience of His felt presence. "Thus says the LORD Who created you: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine. When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you. ... I am the Lord your God; I have loved you; I am with you,**" Isaiah 43.

That is what we need in life and in death - the presence and the peace of God. God Himself counsels the dying. Through suffering God humbles us and draws us near to Himself. As Ezekiel put it, "**Then you shall know that I am the LORD.**" That is what our people need to experience in the day of affliction.

As the Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And Paul responded: "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, **that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, **for Christ's sake.** For when I am weak, then I am strong," Corinthians 12⁹⁻¹⁰.

Arthur Bentley-Taylor



John Reader

Funeral Message given by Virgil Tountas at St Paul's Fleetwood:

These are always such times of mixed emotion when we lose someone as precious as John. This is a wonderful testimony to his life to see such a congregation at the funeral. All who knew him could do

nothing but love him because of the character of the man and the calmness of his personality.

Four passages of Scripture came to mind to show the spiritual history of our departed John:

Ephesians 2¹² There we read, “remember that at the time you were separate from Christ... without hope and without God in the world.” That expression *without Christ* tells us what was true of every one of us in our unconverted days. It was true of John Reader. As a young man, a fisher man, a good friend to many here, he was nevertheless - without Christ. As he looked back on those early years, he realised in a very deep sense how ungodly his life had been.

But John in this was like **John Bunyan**, who, when the arrows of conviction entered his soul and he saw himself as a poor sinner in the presence of a holy God, felt as though he could not exaggerate the corruption of his heart and the wickedness of his life. For a man who is brought into the light of God realises the evil of his own heart in such a way that he cries out in agony to be delivered, and never ceases then to amplify the grace of God that could take up such a sinner as he. This explains John's sense of his own deep, deep need in those days when he was without Christ.

The second passage speaks of the great change that came to him when he heard the gospel through loving friends and those at St Paul's, and received the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour. In **2 Corinthians 5¹⁷** we are told: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” This is what the Bible calls *conversion* or *regeneration*. **This great change came to John**, as it comes to every truly saved soul, as a great miracle. One moment he was without Christ. The next, to his joy and amazement, he was in Christ. He would not have fully understood the meaning of this at the time, but his life all through the years - what I have heard and seen - has proved the reality of it.

Now the man who is in Christ is the man who has been born again, who has become partaker of the divine things of God, and has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. John was that man, who is in Christ, has been justified before God, freed from condemnation. Having learned that he has no righteousness of his own, he found a perfect righteousness in the risen Son of God. That was John. He knew he was lost but he also knew that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”; that “the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.” (Luke 19¹⁰) And he rested on the words, “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.”

When he knew that **he was secure in Christ**, he was not yet satisfied. His heart went out to others who did not know Christ, and he in his heart was determined to win his family and friends to the knowledge of the Saviour who meant so much to him. This brings me to **2 Corinthians 5²⁰**, “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.” John - the young convert of so many years ago - realised that the One who had redeemed him had claims upon his life. Jesus was not only his Saviour, but also his Lord. If He is not

Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all. **John spoke boldly of what he believed** and was a great ambassador for his Lord and Saviour.

Now he has finished his course, kept his faith and he is at home. In **Philippians 1²³**, the Apostle tells us, “having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”

This then is **what death means to the Christian**. This is what death has meant for John. It is to be with Christ. *Absent from the body, present with the Lord*. We may be sure of this, that as gathered to pay respect to the memory of our dear departed brother, and as we commit his body to the ashes until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to Him, that we are not burying the real John Reader.

He himself is with Christ in that city that has foundations eternally to be with him for ever. We are simply laying away the body, the tabernacle in which he lived for a season his spirit, his soul, his personality that we knew as John. His spirit that is truly John is now with Christ. “Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” John 11²⁶. Why? “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” Ecclesiastes 12⁷.

What a history this is! Once without Christ; then through grace in Christ; to become for many years an ambassador for Christ. And now, his labour ended, the victory won, he is at home with Christ, awaiting the glad hour when all the redeemed shall meet in the Father’s house. All those who believe shall meet in the Father’s house.

Virgil Tountas

God is kind to the rebellious

As we rapidly approach Christmas and all the celebrations that go with it, we would do well to pause and remember the reason for the season - the amazing kindness of God to mankind in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He extends to a rebellious people an invitation to be part of His Heavenly family. Wow, how amazing is that!

Please would you allow me to help you reflect on our Lord’s kindness to the rebellious by looking at a verse in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 1:18 the Lord calls to a rebellious Judah and Jerusalem and invites them to : “*Come now, and let us reason together,*” says the Lord, “*Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.* (NKJV).

After spending many years as a youth pastor in South Africa, I have seen the extreme heartache of families with rebellious children. On the one hand the rebellious child thinks they know better than their parents, they want their freedom and this is often demonstrated in the rejection of the parents in various hurtful ways. The parents on the other hand want to protect their children from harm and error, often from wisdom received from their own hurtful experiences themselves. These parents almost always bravely hold to a constant hope of reconciliation and despite their deep hurts, out of love, invite their wayward children to return home. I am sure you can identify with this either from your own personal experience or events you have witnessed with others.

This is exactly how Isaiah is to understand God’s relationship with His people. He, the Lord, has nourished and brought up

children, and they have rebelled against Him (Isaiah 1²) and have provoked the Lords anger (1⁴). They are described as sick spiritually and in desperate need of spiritual care (1⁵⁻¹⁶). The New Testament equivalent would probably be the prodigal son. It is in this sad state of affairs and seemingly hopeless situation that the Lord extends to this rebellious and undeserving people a generous invitation.

As we reflect on this invitation, we are reminded that this same offer is still open to our world in Jesus. The invitation is:

- (1) firstly **Commanding**. The Sovereign Lord knows everything about their rebellion, yet as King, He extends to them a commanding invitation to come to him for reconciliation.
- (2) Secondly, this invitation is **Urgent**. They are commanded to come now not later, to leave what they are doing and come immediately. I believe the call is just as urgent today.
- (3) Thirdly, the invitation is **Legal**. He uses court room language and exhorts them to reason together. As someone has said, *“He is not inviting them to a debate. He is not opening the matter up to negotiations. He is inviting them to come to His way of thinking.”* If they will repent of their sins and change their ways then God would receive them and restore them. How amazing is this. This invitation is still open to our modern world where people do not like this sort of teaching and choose rather the so called right to be free and who express this in a lifestyle opposed to God’s Word.
- (4) Fourthly, this invitation is **Gracious**. The Lord offers to a people deserving nothing more than Eternal punishment in Hell, an incredible supernatural gift. It must be added that people cannot save themselves or choose God unless the Lord invites them personally by His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2^{1-3, 8-9}). The words *“scarlet”* and *“crimson”* refer to dye that was extracted from both shellfish and a certain type of insect. When white garments were dyed with these colors,

they could never be made white again. Once they were dyed no human means could ever return them to their pure state. They are described as a garment stained scarlet or crimson; they were dirty and nothing they could do would take the stain away. Yet, if they would acknowledge Him to be right about their sinful condition and repent of their sins, He had the power to make them “whiter than snow”, and as pure as “wool”. As someone has said, “From the wrath of God, to His Pardoning Grace.”

- (5) **In Christ**. This same invitation is offered to mankind in the person of Jesus Christ. He the Sinless came to rescue the sinner; He the Creator came to redeem the created; As Rescuer He invites people personally to put their trust in Him and His finished work on the cross, as their substitute. He calls us personally through His Word and by His Holy Spirit, to come now and receive this free Gift of Eternal life. Have you received this free gift?

***May we always celebrate:
the kindness of God to a rebellious people
through Jesus Christ.***

On behalf of my family and Emmanuel Church Workington, we wish you a blessed Christmas and new year.

God Bless.

Tony Pietersen



DATES FOR 2011

MINISTRY CONFERENCE 2-3 February
[at Hothorpe Hall, Leicestershire]

CONVOCATION 1-3 June
[at Christ Church, Leeds]

FAMILY CONFERENCE 28-30 September
[at The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire]

GENERAL COUNCIL MEETINGS: 2 February [Hothorpe Hall]
1 June [Christ Church Leeds]
5 July [Church Lane
Evangelical Church, Stafford]
28 September [The Hayes]

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