

# Avoch Linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland

Quarterly Newsletter Issue 6 December 2020

## What is *your* Hallelujah?

Hallelujah is not so much a word as a call to *Praise the Lord!* It's an expression of thankfulness or great joy, exclaimed spontaneously when we realise that the Good Lord has done something which makes us ecstatic. The last five psalms 146 to 150 all begin and end with the words "Praise the Lord" - so, to learn the Who? Why? When? and Where? of praise, all we have to do is read these Psalms.

In the English Standard Version translation, Psalm 150 is subtitled "Let everything Praise the Lord" and contains no argument, no real teaching, no real explanation but is an eloquent, passionate cry to all creation to give Yahweh the praise due to Him. God is to be praised at all times, in all circumstances. In our present time of trial, God is to be thanked and praised for giving us the infinite variety present in his creation to contemplate and admire giving us release from our everyday concerns. Likewise, the healing power of music can be a wonderful tonic, lifting our spirits and inducing a sense of wellbeing.

On occasion, I have been known to spontaneously try to dance in the kitchen when the music moves me, not necessarily a pretty sight but the spectacle of King David dancing when the tabernacle returned to Jerusalem was not appreciated by all either. For myself, I am thankful that we are the adopted children of God and as a good parent our Heavenly Father provides us with instruction and correction when necessary through His Word and the Holy Spirit.

Take a moment to pause and reflect on:

- *For what do you thank the Lord?*
- *What would induce you to exclaim, "Hallelujah?"*

Finally, if you have internet access, check **Riverview performs Halle Halle Halle** on YouTube. When I was in primary school and sang in the choir we were always told to look as if we were enjoying ourselves and this choir look as if they are doing exactly that! I also love the word 'spontaneous'. Perhaps we could set our inhibitions aside, raise our hands in the air and join the choir to sing:

Halle, halle, hallelujah.  
Halle, halle, hallelujah.  
Halle, halle, hallelujah.  
Hallelujah, hallelujah.

Praise God in this holy place,  
every nation, every race.

Come, make joyful music to the Lord.  
Sound the trumpet, sound it clear.  
Sound it for the world to hear.

Come, make joyful music to the Lord.

*Refrain*

Everything that breathes now praise;  
sing your songs, let voices raise.

Come, make joyful music to the Lord.  
Play the cymbals, play the lute;  
play the timbrel, play the flute.

Come, make joyful music to the Lord.

*Refrain*

By Hal H Hopson Words © 1998 Hope Publishing Company, 380 S Main Pl, Carol Stream, IL 60188

**Bob Moore**

*In happy moments, PRAISE God. In difficult moments, SEEK God.  
In quiet moments, WORSHIP God. In painful moments, TRUST God.  
In every moment, THANK God*

**Rick Warren**

Leaves are still falling. Days are shortening. Temperatures are dipping. Autumn is sliding in to winter and with it ever-changing COVID-19 related regulations reminding us that we are well into the next phase of the pandemic. Initial coping, discipline, forbearance, willing sacrifice and Thursday evening hand clapping seem to have slipped into weariness, disgruntlement, frustration, fear, general questioning and uncertainty. These are all natural reactions to prolonged stress but how do we react as Christians?



One Biblical antidote is thanksgiving. Now for certain dispositions, this is quite easy. Our hearts soar when we spot a pine marten crossing a road in the Fairy Glen, or we duck inside the car when an owl swoops in front of us at twilight, or we manage to brake in time as three young deer bound across the road at dawn. We smile when we see the highly committed early morning swimmers, shrugging off their long thick warm coats as they head towards the cold waters of Rosemarkie Bay with the sun coming over the horizon. We recognise the privilege of living in long established communities, where many are kent faces, histories known, identities established, and relationships forged.

We are grateful for spectacular scenery, open spaces in which to exercise, local shops and vans which have operated throughout, carers who have visited, pharmacies which have delivered, neighbours who have helped, volunteers and community groups which have mobilised, free health care, reliable electricity, running water and even modern technology mitigating to some extent the pain of not being able to see loved ones face to face. We can also be thankful for the opportunity to reassess priorities, to appreciate more deeply what perhaps we have taken for granted - life's simple pleasures, being with friends and family, sharing meals together in our homes, freedom to travel and much more.

However, sometimes it is hard to be thankful. How can I be thankful in the midst of a pandemic which causes so much suffering? When I am in constant pain from my bad hip and the waiting list for replacement stretches even farther into the future? How can I be thankful when suffering depression? Having faced a bereavement? When plagued by loneliness and the prospect of a long winter? When facing serious ill-health? When separated from family confronted by tragedy? When watching helplessly as job losses soar, the economy plummets, the marginalised suffer, children go hungry, injustices are carried out and governments along with their advisers struggle how best to respond?

Along with thanksgiving, the Bible encourages lament, a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Habbakuk did not face a pandemic but he is a good example of someone who gives full vent to his angst as he surveys the utter mess of the situation around him. He laments the terrible state of affairs. He cries out to God, 'Are you not listening? Why don't you do something?' And as he hears God's response, in the midst of lament, he is able to give thanks. He gets back to basics - God is his strength and salvation. God is on the throne and He will have the last word.

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Rev. 21.3,4.

**Stroma Beattie**



*Faith is like the blackbird that feels the light and sings while the dawn is still dark ..... and then keeps on singing as the light grows.*

Adapted from Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore quote



# A Prayer of Thankfulness

Father, of late, I've been like Peter and taken my eyes off You, changed my focus, and let the waves of the pandemic steal my peace. What I thought to be temporary was difficult but now this second wave seems more permanent, harder to predict.

Sometimes, in the ache of grief, loneliness or despair, it can feel like drowning, yet when I call out and look up, Your hand is out stretched to lift me and remind me that I am always in Your care. You are far greater than the pandemic that is in the world. So with fresh hope in my heart I'm jolted into a reality that makes me suddenly more aware and appreciative of the simple pleasures, the so often 'taken for granted' daily blessings.

Blessings like running water, central heating, the first cup of coffee of the day, the ribbons of light across the morning sky. Your rich pallet of late autumn, early winter colours, the unexpected rays of sunshine that stream through the window. Honking geese, the rainbow after the rain shower. The love of family and friends, the laughter of a child. My favourite meal, a soak in the bath. Gestures of thought and kindness in the unexpected text, phone call or letter. The cheery wave, the casual pleasantries now more valued than ever, and at the end of the day closing the curtains feeling cosy and secure.

Thank You for all the 'winks' of Your care that are peppered throughout my day. Help me to keep looking for the signs of Your constant love and faithfulness.

And when the waves of doubt splash against the shores of my life remind me again of Your unshakable promise of hope that no matter how dark, difficult, uncertain life can be You are always beside me to hold, support and strengthen.

Now that calls for a 'high five' Hallelujah!

Amen

**Sandra Bell**

# From the Minister's Study



**Rev. Dr. John Ross –an important Scottish contributor to Korean Christianity**

A report in the Press and Journal (7th Oct 2020) informs us that a community project based around a restored church in Easter Ross is getting money from a South Korean church! Before our eyes gleam at this news and we need to be reminded of the tenth commandment, we might wonder what kind of connection exists between the Balintore area and the Korean peninsula. The answer is found in the name of the new building – “The John Ross Memorial Centre.”

Many Scottish people do not know who John Ross is but he is an important figure in the development of Christianity in Korea. In the conclusion of A History of Christianity in Korea since 1945 the expert team of Korean church historians write as follows:

*Today's Korean Christianity is the result of the past and the beginning of the future. The seeds for Korean Christianity were sown when Scottish Protestant missionaries and merchants from Euiju in Pyeongbuk Province of North Korea met at Goryeo-Mun (the Korea gate) in Manchuria.*

This reference to Scottish missionaries includes John Ross who was a missionary with the United Presbyterian Church's Foreign Mission Committee working in Manchuria in China. Ross had grown up as a Gaelic speaker and seems to have had formidable linguistic skills. Not only was he bilingual but was redirected from a ministry vocation to Gaelic speakers by a friend who (with clear gifts as a mission mobiliser) suggested that it was “better to be a spark in China than a flame in the Highlands ...”

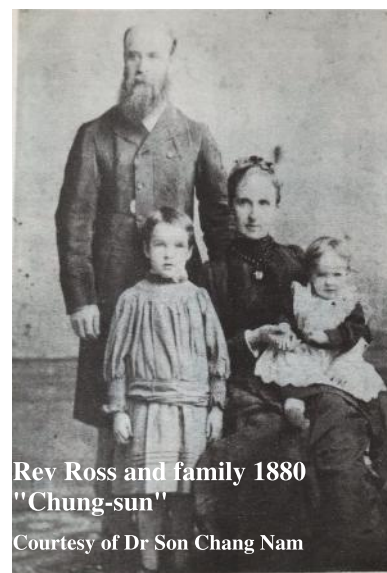
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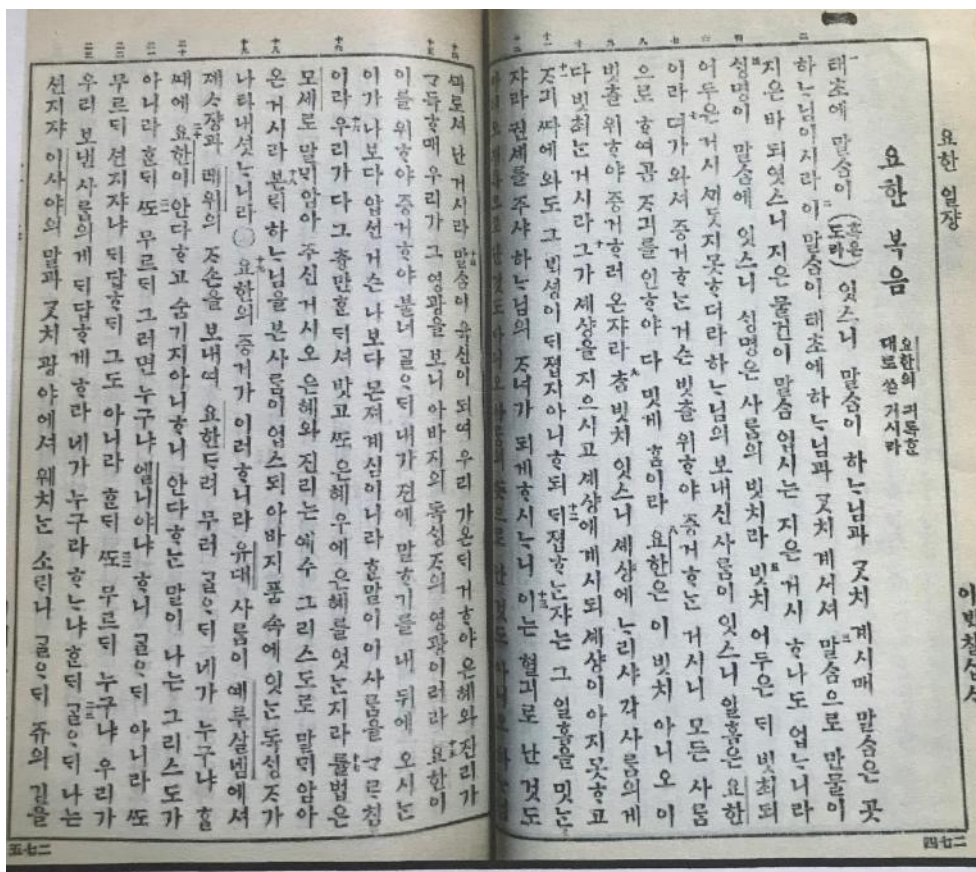
Ross went on to learn Mandarin and minister in China for more than thirty years. Meeting the afore-mentioned Korean merchants, he decided to learn Korean and produced and published a Korean primer and Korean grammar by the early 1880s. He went on to manage a team of people who produced the first version of the New Testament using the Korean alphabet.

It is not easy to explain the significance of this in a few words but here are some pointers. The following characters 한국 (韓國) both describe the sounds “han-kuk” the Korean word for the country’s name “Korea”: the first two characters 한국 are written in han-geul - the Korean alphabet; the next two characters in brackets 韓國 are the two Chinese characters for han-kuk - these give a precise meaning of which han and which kuk is meant. If you write han as 한 it takes six strokes; han as 韓 needs seventeen strokes ... I have been able to write 한 since a few days after arriving in Korea – I could write it blind-folded; by contrast, if I had to write 韓國 for a Quiz Night, I’d need to practice ... By writing the New Testament in the Korean alphabet, Ross and his team produced a New Testament for ordinary people in everyday writing.

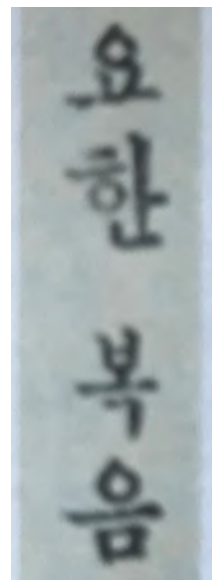
This was an extraordinary achievement and one that has had a lasting impact not just on Korean Christianity, but also on the role of han-geul in the wider Korean culture. Even more remarkable, Korea was still at that time a “hermit kingdom” (Ross would not have been able to enter in person) and later, when the first Protestant missionaries arrived on the Korean peninsula in 1885, they found a few Christian groups already meeting with their own New Testament. It is little wonder that the ministry of John Ross is so highly regarded in Korea.



Rev Ross and family 1880  
"Chung-sun"  
Courtesy of Dr Son Chang Nam



This (left) is the Korean alphabet (as it was in the 1880s); similar to today but now modified further. You read the columns from the top right hand corner downwards (and left to right).



This (right) reads: John's Gospel in Korean.

Even today, the legacy of John Ross lives on and not just in the Balintore area. A generation of Koreans who studied in Scotland have created “The John Ross Scholarship Fund” to help Koreans who want to study at the University of Edinburgh. Mayfield Church of Scotland (which represents, after historical unions, the church which John Ross attended in retirement) welcomes Koreans to visit their church (in Korean) on its website. Those encouragements notwithstanding, the role of John Ross on Korean and East Asian Christianity is less well grasped in the Highlands. As the webpage about scholarship fund written by the University of Edinburgh notes: *Widely regarded as the father of Protestant Christianity in Manchuria and Korea, John Ross remains a revered figure today, although one who deserves to be better known in his native country.*

For further information, see the church website.

# Memories of Mary

We were neighbours and friends with James (Jumbo) and Mary for years, even after we moved on to another house. Their daughter, Ann-Marie, used to come to ours every afternoon when school was finished and at the weekend. One day Jumbo and Mary came to the door to ask if they should pay us rent for having her so much. Two lovely people.

But back to the start. Mary was born in Cromarty on 26th January 1935, one of four: the late Peggy and Peter, and her younger brother George who lives in Lincoln.

She was said to be a very quiet and shy girl through her school years in Cromarty, leaving school at 15 to work at Balnabeen House as a housekeeper, taking over from her older sister Peggy. Mary then went on to be housekeeper at Navity Farm, Cromarty.

Like so many other couples, Mary met James at a dance in Strathpeffer Pavilion. Romance blossomed leading to marriage on the 26th June 1965. They enjoyed many social events with close friends and neighbours throughout their happy years together.



Mary MacIntosh 1935 - 2020

They went on to have three daughters, Rose, Ann-Marie and Fiona, followed by six grandchildren, Andrew, Richard, Paul, Lauren, Samantha and James. She was also a great-granny to Tommy, Drew and Lilly. Mary loved to spend as much time as possible with all her grandchildren who all now share their own special memories.

Mary was a keen gardener who was often seen pottering away happily in her Anderson Drive garden. She also loved to read books and was a regular at the library even attending a beginners' computer course which she thoroughly enjoyed. It helped with her Crosswords which were a passion.

You would never find Mary without a packet of Polos in her pocket whatever she was doing. She also had so many gadgets about the house it made the family laugh. To be honest what she didn't have was not worth having!

Sadly, James passed away on the 9th July 2000. Mary then spent more and more time with her grandchildren enjoying many family events and many afternoons across the road with her good friend, Agnes. Mary went on to join the local lunch and friendship clubs where she met so many good friends and always enjoyed her time there. Mary was a regular attender at Fortrose Church and, along with Agnes, popular members of the Contact the Elderly Sunday afternoon teas where their sense of fun and tales from the past were enjoyed by all, not least their hosts.

Mary passed away peacefully on the 19th of July. Two lovely people together again.

Anne Fiddes

## Cultivating a Church Garden

Mary loved her garden. Any Church seeking growth needs to plant the right seeds if it is to produce a harvest. They might start with with:

**One short row of Squash:** squash gossip, negativity and indifference.

**Two rows of Turnips:** turn up regularly and turn up with an open heart.

**Three rows of Peppers:** pepper the lives of others with generosity, thoughtfulness and kind words.

**Four rows of Lettuce:** let us be unselfish, let us be understanding, let us be forgiving, let us love one another.

**Five rows of Peas:** be prayerful, patient, peaceful, practical and fully present.



# Avoch Memories with Dannie Reid

Around late September, shoals of small delicious herring called “Kessacks” would arrive in the Firth opposite Avoch, later moving up to Inverness and the Beaully area. This would be followed by a rush to get the boats ready to go to sea. In a regular week, the boats would leave harbour on Monday, with fishing for four consecutive nights, catches being landed each morning at Inverness.

After discharging the shot on Friday, the boats would return home one by one, depending on their discharge order and the rest of the week would be taken up by drying and mending the nets. The herring would sometimes be succeeded by shoals of sprats (called Garracks) and there would be another hectic rush to change to the smaller meshed fleet of nets. Regarding the latter, one of my happiest memories is our family sitting around the table without any cutlery to be seen. There would be two ashets in the middle, one with Kerr’s Pinks or Golden Wonders boiled in their skins and a big pile of the delicious Garracks on the other.

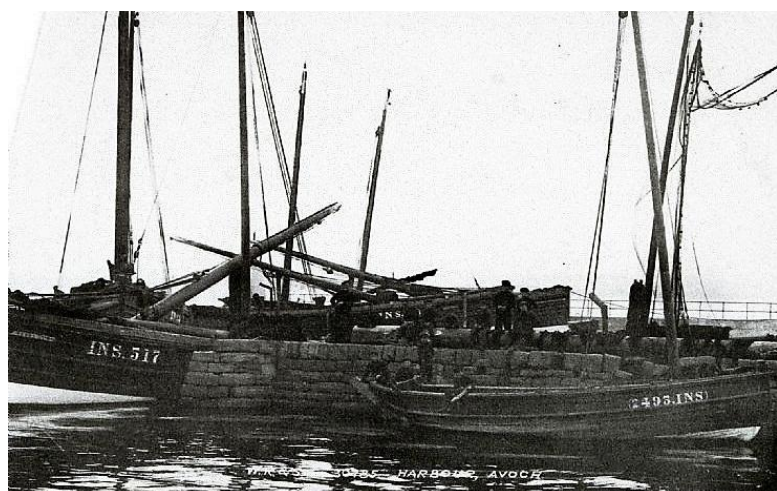
When heading for the harbour, each man would have a fairly large rectangular box slung over the shoulder, with a strong rope. This was called “a kyustack” and it would contain some provisions for the week ahead, which would eventually be supplemented by shopping in Inverness. Many of the kyustacks would contain some cold boiled rabbit which was really the staple food of the village in those days. Rabbits were plentiful in the pre-myxomatosis days and hardly a night would pass without a knock at the door followed by the familiar question “buy a rabbit?”

The rabbits would generally be strung in pairs across the cycle bar. Before purchasing, my mother would always examine the “innards” as the fat content would enable her to select young juicy animals rather than tough veterans. The cost as far as I can remember was one shilling a pair, with tuppence subsequently recouped after selling the skins.

Herring fishermen, as is well known, are exceptionally superstitious and the word “rabbit” is one of the most familiar. The word must never under any circumstances be mentioned aboard a fishing vessel. My father, Sandy, began his fishing career on his grandfather’s boat, “Begonia”. One night, after shooting the nets and going to the “Den” for a snack, he took a leg of rabbit out of his kyustack and later without thinking said “I’m fairly enjoying this rabbit.” There was a deathly silence and eventually his grandfather said, “Sandy, you must never utter that word again on this or any other boat.” Later on, they hauled one of the best catches for some time and my father perked up and said, “Look at that, Bouba, it didn’t matter.” The response was, “But how many more would we have caught if you hadn’t mentioned them.” I would add that if it is ever necessary refer to the animal, it has to be called “the four footed chap”.

There was always a binding relationship between the Avoch fishermen and the Chapel (Congregational Church). For example, when they “squared up” after the Minch summer fishing, the chapel received the same share as the crew. However, the church also features in the list of superstitions. This relates to the belief that, if you should meet the minister en route to the harbour on Monday, you might as well return home for all that you are going to catch that week. Mr Kerr, who was the Chapel Minister for about 50 years, would, of course, have been well aware of that and wouldn’t have dared to venture out until the last boat had sailed.

Presumably the superstition also embraced Mr Brechin of the Church of Scotland. I remember him really well, especially the day he and the banker, Mr Forsyth, each received brand new Hillman cars from Mrs Fletcher, Rosehaugh House. Mrs Fletcher used to appear now and then in the village in her chauffeur driven Rolls Royce.



This was one of the first ever cars in the county as it had the registration JS, followed by a single number (possibly 6).

There was a memorable day in the village at that time when Mrs Fletcher’s niece, Miss Elford, was married in the Church of Scotland. There was a red carpet from the gate to the church door and every child received the gift of a mug!

**Begonia INS 517 at Avoch pier**  
**Thanks to Alister Jack for photo**

As regards the chapel, my first cousin Marie was the organist for many years. The organ had to be pumped and this was carried out by a young lad from the Dock, Andrew "Fiddler". One evening service when Marie tried to play the introduction for the final hymn, there wasn't a "smeech" out of the organ. Mr Kerr must have had a very "dry" sermon as, when Marie looked round the back, Andrew was in the "Land of Nod".

My mother was born next door to Andrew and my grandfather eventually lived there on his own. Kitty, Sandy and I took turns to take his lunch down, generally soup and a main course. One day Kitty took home chocolate pudding from her Cookery Class. Sandy, David and I were all set to "pounce" but our mother said she wanted to give it to my Bouba as it would be a nice treat. The next day was my turn and when I set the pudding before him, he said in the dialect "ut's that Dannie." "It's chocolate pudding, Bouba - Keetie med it at the school." "Tak that oota my sucht! It's no wonder there's so muckle fowk dyan in the world."

Mr Kerr retired in the 1930's and was succeeded by Mr Lees from Dundee. He was very knowledgeable on bird life and other aspects of nature and wrote a weekly column in the Ross-shire Journal. I remember it was mentioned that during visits to the caves between Rosemarkie and Cromarty he became the first person ever to discover that pigeons bred all year round. I thought that this would have merited a mention on Google but when I checked it appeared that no-one had informed them!

Taking a general view of the 1930's there is no doubt that it was an exceptionally difficult period for fishing villages such as Avoch. This is well illustrated by the following entry from historical records-

*"In the 1930's, the herring prices were even more depressed. In 1932, the Garyvard, Lewis crew of the "Try Again" SY 108 sold a fairly good catch in Stornoway for 2/6d per cran, consisting of four quarter baskets, each containing about 250 [equating to 12.5p in today's currency for 1,000 herring]. To add insult to injury, the curer, as was the custom, demanded a few cran extra free, by way of discount."*

There was of course no Child benefit or National Health Service and regarding the latter the arrival of doctor's bills was a frequent cause for concern.

Despite these problems my Father and two younger brothers had the confidence to commission a new boat from Danny Ralph's boatyard in Henrietta Street, in fact the final boat to be built there. It was called Blossom INS 241 and it was launched in 1930.

My mother always describe the time as "the poor days". I was born in 1924 and am, of course, able to recall the period at first hand. There is no doubt that virtually every household frequently suffered great hardship but, somehow or other, they survived.

One of the best features of life in Avoch is the pleasure derived from recalling amusing anecdotes and I feel sure this was particularly beneficial at that time. In general, I feel that Avoch was an optimistic village with a really good sense of humour and always ready to believe that something better was lying just around the corner.

Finally, a dear friend who was born near Turiff in Aberdeen-shire passed away nearly 25 years ago and her Family gave Kay and I her Christian Perpetual Calendar as a keepsake. It is a ring-binder type, with a new message on each page. When the message on 14 August is revealed it always reminds me of my upbringing in Avoch. It expresses the view of the Roman Emperor and Philosopher, Marcus Aurelius:

**"Remember this. That very little is needed for a happy life."**



Blossom INS 241 - thanks to Alister Jack for photo



# News from the Pews.....



Scenes from the first day back at Rosemarkie Church on Sunday 6 September



Anne Fiddes delivering the latest batch of Trauma Teddies to the safe custody of the Police at Burnett Road, Inverness. Many thanks to all the knitters. These little teddies have such an important role to play.

Sincere thanks to all in the Avoch Parish for their generous Harvest donations to the Blythwood Foodbank and much needed contributions to the Blythwood Shoebox Appeal. Gratefully received.

Sincere thanks, too, go to Bridget Houston, Anne Fiddes and fellow volunteers who created Harvest gifts and cards (below) to distribute around older members and adherents of Fortrose and Rosemarkie congregation.



More local knitting amongst a multitude of items in this truck arriving last month in Ekwendeni, Malawi, courtesy of The Banana Box Trust. Again, sincere thanks to all our industrious knitters.



**How many books of the Bible can you find in this little story? (from the September Newsletter)**

Well done to Ethel Urquhart, Jack Kernahan and Violet Stewart who were first back to Douglas Simpson with the correct answer of 24.

**Life is Fragile. Handle with Prayer.**





# Traidcraft - Contributing to a better, fairer world



If you believe in fair trade, then why not support your local Traidcraft store? Established and run for over 20 years by Jane Bryant it's now organised by Linda Simpson and she'd love to hear from you!

Traidcraft not only ensures that producers and suppliers in some of the poorest parts of the world get a fair price for their goods but also supports critical social outreach programmes to combat practice such as sex trafficking and child labour.

Every time you buy a Traidcraft product you'll be contributing to a better, fairer world!

Linda (left) currently stocks the products listed below but a wide range of other items (including toilet rolls!) are advertised in the Traidcraft catalogue and can be ordered via Linda.

**To make an order or obtain a catalogue phone Linda on 620433 or 07810 434 876**

**Thank you!**

## In Stock

**Food Stuffs:** raisins, sultanas, almonds, dates, cocoa, drinking chocolate, instant coffee, ground coffee, coffee beans, tea, honey, chocolate bars, small snack packs of biscuits (ginger nuts / fruit and lemon crunches)

**Kitchen:** rubber gloves, soap, egg cups

**Cards:** Greeting cards and Christmas cards



## FINANCE - FORTROSE AND ROSEMARKIE

The Kirk Session wishes to thank all members and adherents for their continuing financial support for the congregation in this difficult year. Income has continued to flow in, and all expenses have been met. In the ten months to 31 October receipts were £27,481 and payments £23,063, giving a surplus of £4,418 which is being used to restore resources eroded by deficits in previous years. However, included in the payments have been donations of £500 to Highland Hospice, £500 to Crossreach and £490 to Tearfund to be used directly for the purpose of providing a water tank for Kigezi village in Uganda.

Many of you will remember the film shown of the two girls carrying water uphill in such difficult conditions. Hopefully this will soon be over for them, and they and future generations will be able to attend full time education. The reason for the amount being £490 is that a further £510 was donated by the congregation as a direct result of the appeal made at our harvest thanksgiving service, so the total donation made was £1,000.

Many thanks for this wonderful response and for keeping up the regular givings to the Church.

**Jack Kernahan, Congregational Treasurer**



## Blythswood Cares



*Many in our linked congregations support the Blythswood Foodbank initiative so we thought you'd be interested in finding out a bit about what happens to the items you provide. Thanks to Danny Muschate, Head of Fundraising and Marketing for this information.*

The main foodbank centre is in Inverness with others dotted around the Highlands. It's at the central store in Inverness that food is sorted and stored for distribution. For those areas without a foodbank, food packages are made up for local distribution by partner agencies. The items will be similar to those received by people presenting at a foodbank.

Since starting in 2005 Blythswood has fed over 62,000 people in their time of crisis. In 2017 a total of 6,454 people were fed, rising to 7,225 in 2018 and 7,752 in 2019.

This year is presenting even more of a challenge, for example in April 2019, 694 people were fed but with the start of the pandemic, this number doubled in April 2020.

During lockdown foodbanks were very busy, especially when offices in Dingwall and Nairn had to close since they were staffed by vulnerable senior people. For these areas, deliveries had to be made to homes, as was also the case in places such as Drumnadrochit, Kinlochbervie and Ullapool.

Lockdown restrictions have prevented much of the personal contact which Blythswood staff consider a vital part of their work but food packages are currently pre-prepared to avoid people who arrive for assistance having to wait outside for too long.

One couple who needed their help had received an unexpected and extortionate telephone bill the payment of which meant going without food for two weeks. Another recipient with two teenage children lost his job and required help while awaiting the Universal Credit to which he was entitled.

There have been countless such stories during the past few months and Blythswood are indebted to businesses, individuals and churches like our own who have been particularly generous, ensuring they are currently well stocked to meet the increase in demand that's expected over the next couple of months. For the rest of this year, Danny indicated that the need is for personal toiletries and washing powder rather than foodstuffs. **Douglas Simpson**

## Ethel Urquhart - Shoebox Filler Extraordinaire!

*Another Blythswood initiative strongly supported locally is the Shoe Box Appeal. Ethel Urquhart was in touch to ask us to be sure to thank everyone who, once again supported this year's appeal. But a huge thank you must go to Ethel herself as **Maggie Wynton** explains.*

Over the past fifteen years Ethel, who is over 70, has skilfully decorated shoeboxes for the Blythswood Appeal filling them with basic necessities such as soap, shampoo, toothbrushes and toothpaste as well as cosy hand knitted hats, scarves and gloves.

In the beginning, Ethel did three or four boxes and enjoyed it so much that over the next fifteen years the total number rapidly increased. This year she has just sent off the amazing total of **355 boxes!** Plus £120 in donations for fuel. Friends and members of the local community happily donate items to Ethel's boxes.

This modest lady's enthusiasm for her 'hobby', as she calls it, is boundless. Ethel feels happy and assured knowing that the aid reaches all of the people for whom it is intended. She unquestionably encompasses Blythswood's spirit of practical Christianity founded over fifty years ago by four young men training for the ministry. They took the ministry to the public on the streets of Glasgow where they visited homeless hostels with food and clothing, thus practising Jesus's example of love with practical action, by reaching out to those in need - now delivering aid to those crippled by poverty in Eastern Europe. Faith in action.



**Shoe boxes - so much appreciated**

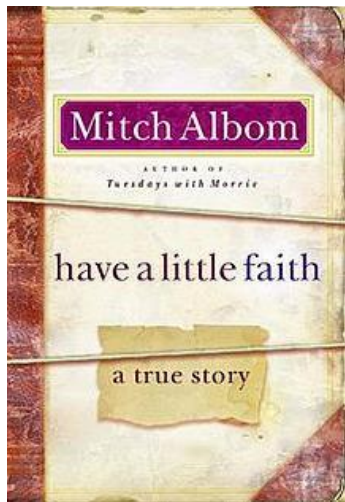


# From the Bookshelves.....

I was raised in a Christian family and have always thought of myself as such, although I didn't become a church member until my husband Ron and I moved to Glenurquhart, and our three children were born.

I relied heavily on my faith after Eilidh our youngest, was born very prematurely, and I'm convinced that God answered my many prayers. Although she is severely disabled, due to a bleed in her brain, she is a lovely, cheerful lass who, like her older sister and brother, has a good social conscience.

In November 2009, Ron and I were over in Ireland visiting our son Andrew, his wife Mary and our new granddaughter Iona. Knowing that I enjoyed Mitch Albom's books, Mary bought me a copy of his latest book, *Have a Little Faith*. I read it from beginning to end over the course of the car and ferry journey home – in fact at one point, Ron offered to stop the car to let me finish it.



There was no need. This book tells the true story of an 82 year old rabbi from Mitch's old hometown who asks him to deliver his eulogy. Mitch insists on getting to know the man better. This catapults him into a world of faith he'd abandoned years ago. Meanwhile Mitch becomes involved with a Detroit pastor - a reformed drug dealer and convict who preaches to the poor and homeless in a decaying church with a hole in the roof.

As the world struggles with its hard times and folk turn more to their beliefs, Mitch, the rabbi and pastor examine the issues that puzzle people: how to manage when difficulties arise, what heaven is, forgiveness, doubting God and the importance of faith in trying times. As the rabbi nears death and a harsh winter threatens the pastor's wobbly church, Mitch regretfully carries out the request and writes the eulogy. Then he finally understands what both men had been teaching all along – the profound comfort of believing in something bigger than yourself. *Have a Little Faith* is a book about a life's purpose, about losing belief and finding it again, about the divine spark inside us all. It's one man's journey but it's everyone's story.

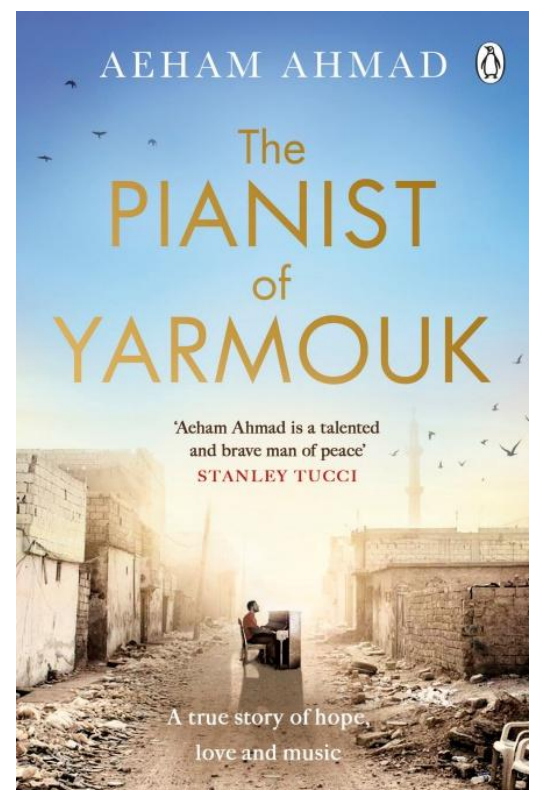
Last Christmas, Linsey my older daughter, sent me some books. One was *The Badly Behaved Bible* by Nick Page. It's a challenging read though very worthwhile.

The other was *The Pianist of Yarmouk* - the true story of Aeham Ahmad who at the time, lives in the war torn city of Damascus. The city is in ruins, people are starving and a blanket of hopelessness covers all.

In despair, Aeham turns to the comfort and joy of music and pushes his beloved piano out over the rubble and into the street, where he plays for love and hope, for his family and fellow Syrians. He continues to do this even though he knows he may be killed for doing so. As Aeham's act of defiance spreads throughout the world, he becomes a symbol of hope and resistance. The more he plays, the greater danger he puts his family in. He then faces the choice of staying, waiting to die or escaping and leaving his family.

This wonderful story tells of the triumph of love and hope, of the incredible bonds of family as well as the healing power of music even in the darkest places.

*'I looked up to see three birds perched on a balcony right across from me. It seemed a miracle, for normally birds vanish as soon as the shooting begins. When I begin to play the piano, the birds started singing again.'*



Maggie Wynton

# In Praise of Harmony

*Back in 1972, Philanthropist Sir John Templeton, established the Templeton Prize to honour people who have made an outstanding contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension. He ensured the monetary value, currently £1,100,000, would always exceed that of the Nobel Prizes, Sir John's way of affirming his belief that advances in the spiritual domain are no less important than those in other areas of human endeavour.*

*This year's winner is Francis Collins, (right) a physician – geneticist who, from 1993 – 2008, led the Human Genome project, mapping and sequencing the three billion DNA letters that make up the human genetic instruction book – one of the great breakthroughs in human history. Francis Collins is also a man of deep faith. What follows is an edited version of his Templeton Prize acceptance speech*



I first learned about Harmony as it applies to music and the profound way in which the combination of musical tones chosen by a composer and rendered by gifted musicians can touch our very soul. But harmony applies in other realms as well. It is to be contrasted with dissonance. In many areas of our shared experience, harmony seems to have lost out to dissonance and polarisation. We need to resolve that.

Let me start by saying something about the perceived disharmony between science and faith. Many people say science and religion frequently conflict. That was certainly my view as I was growing up. Faith seemed to me to be the antithesis of a rational scientific approach that I wanted to pursue and so I migrated, without much thought about it, into agnosticism and ultimately atheism.

But then I moved from quantum mechanics to medical school and the questions of the meaning of life and the reality of mortality were impossible to ignore. Science didn't help me much here. I was surrounded by patients, and some of my professors, for whom faith provided a way to wrestle with those profound questions. That was puzzling. Challenged by one of my patients to describe what I believed about God, I realised my atheism was dangerously thin. I began a journey to try to understand why intellectually sophisticated people could actually believe in God – and to my dismay, found that atheism turned out to be the least rational of all the choices.

Over a two year period, with much help from wise mentors and the writings of C.S. Lewis, I slowly and rather reluctantly came to the conclusion that belief in God, while not possible to prove, was the most rational choice available. Furthermore, I saw in the very science that I so loved something that I had missed — the evidence that seemed to cry out for a Creator: there is something instead of nothing; the universe had a beginning; it follows elegant mathematical laws; and those laws include a half dozen constants that have to have the exact value they do or there would be no possibility of anything interesting or complex in nature. God must be an amazing physicist and mathematician!

But would God actually care about me? The major world religions seemed to say yes – but why should I trust that? And then I met the person who not only claimed to know those answers, and to know God, but to be God. Jesus Christ. I had thought he was a myth but the historical evidence for his life, death, and – yes, even this – his resurrection was utterly compelling. And as the truth of the New Testament sank in, I realised I was called to make a decision. In my 27th year, I could simply not resist any longer. With some trepidation, I knelt in the dewy grass on an October morning somewhere in the Cascades and became a Christian.

Friends in whom I confided my new found faith predicted this would be short-lived. After all, I was by then a physician who was interested in studying genetics. Genetics means DNA. DNA means evolution. And by then I was convinced that evolution was not only just a theory, it was supported by evidence that made it about as compelling as gravity. Surely, they said, my head would explode when the conflicts emerged. But that never happened.





Seeing the great distress the perceived conflict between science and faith was causing, I decided to write about it in *The Language of God* 14 years ago.

*“The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome.....God’s creation is majestic, awesome, intricate, and beautiful – and it cannot be at war with itself. Only we imperfect humans can start such battles. And only we can end them.”* To my surprise, the book seemed to have appeal to many who were searching.

The science / faith debate is one example of the opportunity for harmony instead on conflict. But it’s not the only one. Let’s also consider the greatest long term threat to our planet – climate change. While there is no serious disagreement among scientists that the data demonstrates a growing threat of planetary warming, and that human activity is largely responsible, our world still seems to be polarised about whether climate change is real, and what we should do about it. As time passes with no co-ordinated plan of action, we grow closer and closer to a potentially devastating outcome. Surely all of us who care about our planet should be invested in creation care? Yet again, we are polarised.

How might we recover from this? How might we heal our world? Let me suggest three commitments that might help with this healing. First, we need a renewed commitment to truth and reason. Of all the developments that cause me concern over the past few years, none is greater than the growing disregard of maintaining a high standard of objective truth, an adherence to fact over fiction, to accurate narrative over conspiracy theory. All thinking persons should raise the alarm about this.

Second, we need to address the growing spiritual void that leaves many of us adrift, unmoored, feeling precarious. We need to be re-anchored in those ancient spiritual truths that provide a rock upon which we can build our future. Go back to the Beatitudes to see what blessings apply to the kind of life that God had planned for us: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.....Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.....”* Once you have read these, you can’t unread them. But it’s still possible to put them in the inactive file. Bring them back out!

And then third, and most importantly, we need to return to our calling to love one another. Not just those who agree with us, but also our enemies. Love is stronger than hate. You cannot pray regularly for someone and continue to despise them. One of my favourite verses about love comes from Colossians 3:12: *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* Can you imagine what would happen to our fractured society if we all tried to live out this exhortation?

But it’s not too late for that. Not for me. Not for any of us. Let me exhort you, and myself also, to make a renewed effort to reach out beyond our own tribes. Let’s apply that to the science / faith debates, to the disagreements over the right response to COVID-19, to climate change, to the need to address lingering racism, to international tensions. Reach out to listen, not to insult or denigrate. Seek the common ground of fairness and compassion. As Dr Martin Luther King famously said, *“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend”*.

**Blessed are the depolarisers - *they* know harmony is the better way.**

### **Francis Collins on Covid-19**

My every waking moment is consumed by the effort to find treatments and a vaccine for COVID-19. The elegant complexity of human biology constantly creates in me a sense of awe. Yet, I grieve at the suffering and death I see all around, and at times I confess I am assailed by doubts about how a loving God would permit such tragedies. But then I remember that the God who hung on the cross is intimately familiar with suffering. I learn and re-learn that God never promised freedom from suffering – but rather to be “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46). That’s what sustains me.



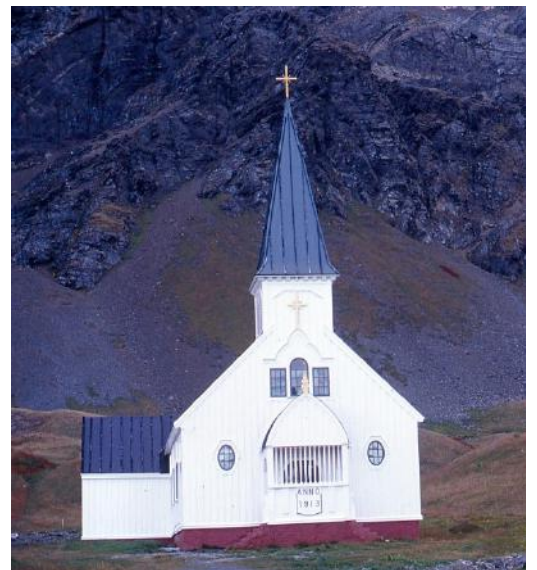
THE LANGUAGE OF  
**GOD**  
A Scientist Provides  
Evidence for Belief  
FRANCIS COLLINS

# The Back of the Stone

All of us at some time have probably walked round a graveyard looking at the stones, sometimes purposefully seeking a departed loved one or friend, possibly an ancestor who died long before we were born and occasionally, casually, out of interest. The stones all have different inscriptions, many are no longer legible, and there is very occasionally some humour, like the stone in a churchyard in the peaceful valley of Mallerstang in the former Westmorland which reads 'Here lies John Smith, dentist, filling his final cavity'.

But we probably never look at the back of a gravestone, as we would never expect to find anything written there. Indeed, I know of only one. It is a magnificent piece of Scottish granite but it is possibly one of the furthest travelled gravestones in the world as it lies in the Whalers' Cemetery in the remote Antarctic island of South Georgia, marking the final resting place of the famous explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton (right). On the back of the stone is an excerpt from the work of one of Shackleton's favourite poets, Robert Browning: *'I hold that a man should strive to the uttermost for his life's set prize'*.

South Georgia lay beautiful but desolate and uninhabited until 1904 when a whaling station was established by Norwegians at Grytviken, soon to be followed by a few more such stations to the north. The island lies 1,250 miles east of Cape Horn and 1,000 miles from the Falkland Islands. After the whaling station was established, bringing a permanent but small population to Grytviken, a Church was built in 1913, although the Lutheran minister had to admit that Christian life 'unfortunately did not wax strong among the whalers'. Originally in use in Strommen near Oslo in Norway, it was dismantled and reassembled in Grytviken, being consecrated on Christmas Day 1913. It had, intermittently, four ministers, who each tended to stay for around two years, the last leaving in 1931. Whaling ceased in the mid 1960s, since when the infrastructure of the stations has disintegrated and in many places become dangerous, particularly due to asbestos. But the Church has been restored and is now a beautiful haven amongst the twisted and rusting tanks and equipment outside. Among the many items of interest is an inscription on the east wall in Norwegian of Matthew 11:28 and several commemorative plaques, one simply quoting Job 38:29 *'Out of whose womb came the ice?'* Despite being in Antarctica, the Church is not the most southerly in the world, as its latitude is 118 miles north of Cape Horn.



Church at Grytviken, South Georgia

The story of Shackleton's ill fated expedition in 1914-17 is probably well known, and dealt with in detail in several books, two by those who were part of it. Briefly, having sailed from London on 1 August 1914, 28 men set off from Grytviken on 5 December that year with the intention of crossing Antarctica. Within a few days pack ice was encountered and the ship, the Endurance, was forced to spend the winter in the ice. With the coming of summer, however, matters did not improve, and the ship sank on 21 November 1916. Hauling the lifeboats, a camp was established on the ice and eventually a navigable channel opened up, allowing them to take to the boats and after a week land was reached, but it was an inhospitable spit on the uninhabited Elephant Island which lies 550 miles south east of Cape Horn. There was no possibility of being found by a passing ship. Camp was made using the upturned lifeboats and after a few days it was decided that six men should set off in one of the lifeboats, the 23ft 6in James Caird, to seek help from South Georgia. The voyage took sixteen days, covered 780 miles and was at times in hurricane force winds and a tempestuous sea, including what Shackleton described as the most gigantic wave he had encountered in his 26 years at sea. Through one of the greatest feats of small boat navigation known, using only basic instruments and rarely seeing the sun, they found South Georgia. While in good weather the island is spectacularly beautiful, the mountains rising to 9,629ft looking like the Alps in the middle of the ocean, it could be extremely easy to miss it in poor visibility. The men landed on the other side of South Georgia from the whaling





Approaching South Georgia



James Caird lifeboat



Endurance trapped in the ice

stations, so it was necessary for three of them to walk over the unmapped interior to reach some form of civilisation, leaving the other three. This incredible trek took thirty six hours and eventually they reached the whaling station at Stromness, from which they were able to rescue the three who had been left at the landing place in King Haakon Bay. The rescue of those still on Elephant Island was not a simple matter. On 23 May 1917 Shackleton set out from Stromness in a whaler to collect them, but it took attempts in four different ships, by now in the Antarctic winter, until final rescue was achieved on 30 August some 130 days since they first landed there, all men being safe, not a life lost. The James Caird, named after a Dundee jute manufacturer who helped finance the expedition but who died in 1916 and was therefore unaware of the voyage undertaken in the little boat bearing his name, is preserved at Shackleton's old school, Dulwich College.

Shortly after Shackleton and his two companions arrived at Stromness after their 36 hour hike a southeast gale blew up, and the Norwegians at the whaling station later told that there was never another day after that during the winter that they could have survived in the mountains. They had set off in the illumination of a full moon, and it would appear that this gap in the weather provided the best possible conditions for their journey. Some weeks later, when discussing the trek, all three men found that each had a strange feeling that there had been a fourth in the party! This caught the public imagination. The Church Times provided an illustration, with the words: *'Three were they – who hath made them four? And sure a term divine He were, Even like the Son of God'* and the comment: *'This has been the experience in all ages of the men who trusted God, for in all their affliction he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them in his love and in his pity he redeemed them'*.

Sadly, several of those who returned from the voyage to Antarctica lost their lives shortly afterwards in the Great War. Shackleton himself returned to South Georgia on another expedition in January 1922, but at the age of 47 he died there from a heart attack. Although his remains were taken back to Montevideo in Uruguay, his widow asked that they be returned for burial in Grytviken, where they will lie forever in the Whalers' Cemetery. All the graves of the whalers face east, but Shackleton's faces south. He did indeed 'strive to the uttermost for his life's set prize'.

**Jack Kernahan**

## Speaking Ruth to Power

January 17th 2021 will mark the 70th anniversary of a key moment in WW2 when words from the Book of Ruth were used to convey a key message to PM Winston Churchill. The scene, a private dinner in Room 21 of the North British Hotel (now The Millennium Hotel) in George Square, Glasgow involving, amongst others, PM Churchill, Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's special envoy, and Tom Johnston, Secretary of State for Scotland.

In January 1941, Churchill was desperate to have some assurance that the USA would - at the very least - offer military hardware, if not forces, for the war effort. Harry Hopkins had already spent six days with Churchill, travelling by train to the far north of Scotland and across to Scapa Flow to inspect the British fleet. before they arrived in Glasgow. But, as they might have said in Glasgow, 'he didn't crack a light'. However, Tom Johnstone had researched Hopkins's Scottish ancestry and referred to it in his Toast to the President of the USA. It brought Harry Hopkins to his feet declaring that he hadn't intended to speak, 'But now that I am on my feet I might say in the language of the old book to which my grandmother paid so much attention, *'Wheresoever thou goest we go, and where thou lodgest, we lodge, thy people shall be our people, thy God, our God, even unto the end.'* It was said that Churchill had to wipe away a tear. Message understood.





## In Uganda with **tearfund**

We are so used to accessing water at the turn of a tap that it's easy to forget that around 800 million people across the world lack any access to clean water.

At our Harvest Service, Warren took us to Uganda to meet Doreen (13) and Jouvlet (11), second and third oldest of nine children. The girls' parents are subsistence farmers in Rwanyana, a remote hilltop village in Kigezi, Uganda, a mountainous area often referred to as the Switzerland of Africa.

Everybody in the family has a role and the girls' responsibility is to fetch 20 litres of water each - twice a day - from a lake 4km down the mountain. 20 litres weighs 20kg, the weight of a 4 year old child or a suitcase you might put in the hold of a plane. They began fulfilling this daily task when only 5 years old, carrying 5 litres, doubling to 10 litres aged 7 and 20 litres from aged 10. Just pause a moment and think about that commitment!



**Left:** To stabilise the load the girls fill the containers to the brim and seal it with a potato.

**Right:** Lifting the 20kg is a struggle but, once up, the girls' necks are strong enough to carry the weight



A 4km walk down to the lake is one thing. But climbing back up on uneven paths, at times made treacherous by rain, at times difficult to navigate in mist, at times made dangerous by the risk of attack by cattle herders some of whom will rob the girls of their water and, more significantly, their precious containers. Physical or sexual attack is not unknown either.

There are days when the trips are just not possible. Around four times a month the family go without an evening meal, not because they lack food but because there is no water to prepare it.

The Tearfund Project is straightforward: train local people to construct large water storage tanks to capture water as it falls from the sky, and runs from roofs and gutters, and remove the need for daily double treks down to the lake. The £1000 sent after after our Harvest Service will make such a difference. There is a further bonus for Doreen and Jouvlet in that they will no longer arrive tired at school after their morning trip to and from the lake. Nor will they have to leave school early to complete the afternoon journey. They now have a much better opportunity of achieving their ambition to be head teachers.

Their case was publicised by brothers Richard and Peter Chambers, double Olympian rowers (silver medalists in 2012), who train hard 5 hours a day but found the water carrying to be a real challenge. It was not the only thing that impressed them. **"We've been struck by how little these families have, but they're so thankful to God for the little things they do have. It's incredible."** It is indeed!

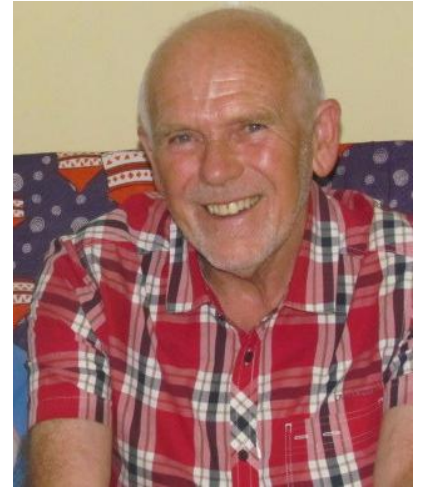


**Above:** A contrast in carrying techniques.



# Nature Notes - Douglas Willis

Many years ago, before our children were born, Kathleen and I took ourselves off with our small tent one summer to the east of England, spending one of the nights on a campsite just outside Cambridge. We were both keen to visit the famous chapel of King's College and hear choral evensong there. As it happened, we were both very familiar with another ancient university chapel, that of King's College in Old Aberdeen, when we were geography students together and attended services there. Perhaps that's partly why we were drawn to go and see the Cambridge version that day. Its interior was truly magnificent with its soaring roof and the stunning, huge painting of the *Adoration of the Magi* behind the altar. But it was the beauty of the singing of the choir as it lifted upwards that made the most lasting impression, so much so that I never miss the service of nine lessons and carols from King's on TV every Christmas Eve.



Young choristers, King's College, Cambridge

I think perhaps my favourite sung carol from the King's choir is 'In the bleak midwinter...' I love it for the purity of the voices but wince at the words, with its picture of earth standing hard as iron and water like a stone. The intensity of the frost described there makes you want to shiver. It paints a picture of a cold and forbidding, dead time of year. But Nature doesn't just shut up shop according to any human calendar; in this part of the world, midwinter isn't all gloom and doom, despite what the elements may throw at us. On a clear frosty late afternoon, the colours of a winter sky as the sun sets to the west of the Black Isle can be truly stunning as reds, oranges and blues merge to create a superb natural canvas. Add a skein of wild geese in flight, etching a long dark V shape on to the sky and you have something that's quite magical and uplifting.

I have several places I like to go to at the turn of the year to seek out even the slightest suggestions of the spring days to come: the first sign of the earliest snowdrops piercing the dark, damp ground; a few flowers of the tiny pink cranesbill appreciating the shelter at the mouth of a cave; the new buds on tree branches, just waiting to swell. There's much to see at midwinter but there's the unseen, too, as the spring bulbs in our gardens put out roots to tap into the nourishment that will support the new growth.

This year, with the unwelcome presence of Covid, perhaps more than ever it'll be good to go out in the first days of a new year and seek out what's on offer to us by way of uplift and assurance of better days to come. For ourselves, doom and gloom may well seem to be all around us, but there's an antidote to it in the celebration of the Nativity, an event so wonderfully recalled in that *Adoration of the Magi* picture. And, on our very Black Isle doorstep there's what God's great Creation can offer, if we take the time in the countryside or even in our own gardens, to stand and just look. For myself, I've always thought the words in a familiar hymn sum it all up nicely:



*Adoration of the Magi* by Peter Paul Rubens  
King's College, Cambridge

**'Ponder anew what the Almighty can do.....'**



# Bethlehem 2020

‘They come here to run where Jesus once walked.’ The words of Rev Dr Mitri Raheb, author and former senior pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem. He is referring to the estimated 2 million pilgrims and tourists who come to Bethlehem annually. He is smiling as he says it.

But he has a point. There is so much to see and experience in the Holy Land, it is understandable many tour schedules are geared to visiting as wide a variety of sites as possible in the time available. Mitri Raheb acknowledges the attraction of these ‘ancient stones’ but argues that there should always be time for pilgrims to meet ‘the living stones’ of the Palestinian Christian community.



Street artist's Banksy's thought-provoking 'Scar of Bethlehem' Nativity scene.

It's Christian community in sharp decline. Back in the 1950s, the Christian population in Bethlehem and surrounding villages was 86%. Today it is around 10%. Across the whole of the Palestinian West Bank it has dropped from 20% to less than 2%. These are worrying statistics.

Bethlehem is under Occupation. Mitri Raheb concedes that has been a norm for nearly 3000 years. In much of that time Palestine has been a buffer zone, a borderland between greater forces. But it is the current Occupation that is leading so many Christians to leave their homeland.

For Christians, Bethlehem and Jerusalem are sister cities, as close as Avonmouth is to Torquay, closer than Rosemarkle is to Cromarty. But travel between the two for Palestinians ranges from difficult to impossible.

Many residents of Bethlehem now describe their home as ‘an open air prison’. They point to the ring of illegally built Israeli-only settlements surrounding the city, the new Israeli-only roads and the fact that their water supply is now Israeli controlled with 80% to Israel and 20% to Palestinians, resulting in frequent shortages. They point out that 87% of Bethlehem is Israeli controlled, meaning that 92% of the population live on 13% of the land.



New Israeli-only settlements, illegally built on Palestinian land, surround Bethlehem



Israeli-only roads cut through Palestinian land

But most of all, they point to the 9 metre high Separation Wall that snakes around the city and, indeed, for 450 miles in total across the West Bank. Access to and from Bethlehem is tightly controlled via three checkpoints and, while tour buses are generally waved through, Palestinian workers, much needed in Israel and fortunate enough to have permits, queue in person, some as early as 4am, to ensure they catch a bus and get to work on time. To join them in that queue, and to understand that it is a daily routine, is a distressing experience.





The Wall has been routed to take away all green space, all open space, all possible building land and all but limited access to locally owned olive groves.



Palestinians wonder why there is not more of an international outcry about this situation. In his book, *Faith in the Face of Empire*, Mitri Raheb (left) comments wryly that ‘Palestine might be ‘holy’ but it is certainly not ‘oily’ and he adds, ‘Ending the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1991 took only one UN Resolution and several months of negotiation, while ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is still pending.

But there are many groups working towards a peaceful ending of the Occupation. For a start, there are individuals and groups all over the world, praying, speaking out, arguing that we should not conflate biblical Israel with the modern state of Israel.

That last point is frequently stated by Zoughbi al Zoughbi who runs **Wi’am** (meaning ‘cordial relationships’) Conflict Transformation Centre, based right next to the Wall. ‘As Christians we do not hate Israelis. We are all the dysfunctional family of Abraham. But we hate the system we live under. It is evil.....We believe in resurrection theologically and practically. So we live in hope and faith, hope and faith being two sides of the same coin.’

That theme of ‘hope and faith’ is picked up by Rabbi Nava Hefetz from **Rabbis for Human Rights**, pictured right talking to a Church of Scotland group at the Separation Wall. ‘What is going on is against Rabbinic teaching. We’ve built more than a wall – we’ve split families and communities, we’ve divided people. But it is not sustainable. There will need to be compromise on both sides. There is no other choice.’



These are sentiments echoed by another human rights group, **B’Tselem** meaning, literally, ‘in the image of (God)’, an allusion to Genesis 1:27: ‘And God created humankind in His image. In the image of God did He create them.’

The name expresses the Jewish and universal moral edict to respect and uphold the human rights of all people. Their goals are to document human rights violations in the Israeli-occupied territories, combat denial of the existence of such violations, and help to create a human rights culture in Israel.

In all that is said and done in the name of ending the Occupation, this well known prayer catches the essence:

*We pray not for Arab or Jew,  
for Palestinian or Israeli.  
But pray rather for ourselves  
that we might not divide them in our prayers  
but keep them together in our hearts.*

As we head towards Christmas, we share a final word from Bishara Awad, President of Bethlehem Bible College:

*At Christmas I would like to convey hope to the churches and to wish them a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.*

*I want you to sing these beautiful carols and lift yourselves and your souls up to the Lord, but at the same time I wish that you would remember us, the ‘living stones’ who are here.*

*We are in Bethlehem and are your brothers and sisters. We would love to celebrate together this Christmas and to know that you really care about us and that you care about the Church here in this land.*

*And, most of all, you care enough that the Church will continue to exist in the land where it all started.*

(from *Bethlehem Speaks* by Garth Hewitt)

Amen to that.

# Avoch Christmas 1930

*Back in 1930, Margaret Tanner was already 6 years old. Here she recalls Christmas Day that year in vivid detail.*

There was great excitement on Christmas morning when, along with my only brother and three sisters, we opened the stockings we had left for Santa to fill. Breakfast forgotten, we played games and wore our new (hand-knitted!) socks. We had a lovely, noisy time until lunch – Christmas lunch was always special and greatly enjoyed.

After that, we went out to play. The shops were open. The main celebration was on New Year's Day. The snow was deep and we played (and fought) in groups. I was part of a group of six girls. On a sloping piece of land piece of land we made a slide and that was great fun. We also made snowmen and snowballs which we threw at each other until we were soaked. Going home wet and dirty was a different story – there were no washing machines back then!

Christmas Sunday was special. Avoch Church of Scotland was well attended – every family had their own pew. A Christmas Tree was placed near the pulpit with candles which were lit and twinkled. I liked that! Sunday School in the Church Hall followed in the afternoon. The teachers and other ladies of the Church made a lovely tea and gave each one of us a small present.

**Now that I am old, I look back and think how happy we were – not that we had very much but we were content with what we had.**

## Margaret Tanner



Margaret celebrating her 90th birthday six years ago, flanked by her sister Jessie Smith, her late sister-in-law Annabel Duncan and surrounded by family and friends

# Favourite Carol

## In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter  
Frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen,  
Snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter,  
Long ago.

Our God, heaven cannot hold him,  
Nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away  
When he comes to reign;  
In the bleak midwinter  
A stable place sufficed  
The Lord God incarnate,  
Jesus Christ.

Angels and archangels  
May have gathered there,  
Cherubim and seraphim  
Thronged the air;  
But his mother only,  
In her maiden bliss,  
Worshipped the Beloved  
With a kiss.

What can I give him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb,  
If I were a wise man  
I would do my part,  
Yet what I can I give Him —  
Give my heart.

## Christine Rossetti 1830 - 94

I love the tune! That's what makes it my favourite carol.

But the reference to the bleak midwinter might have a new meaning this year too!

## Nancy Kennedy



# Bible Sketchbook

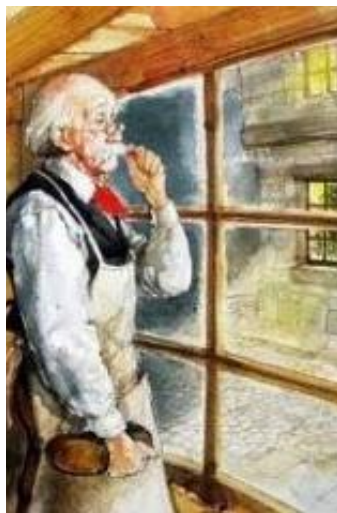
## Miracle start to an amazing life!

There were miracles before and after Jesus was born... his mother Mary was a virgin... angels told shepherds to go and see him... meeting him changed their lives. Their response? Praising God and telling others! Now it's our turn! Read more in Luke 2: 1-10



# For the Young.....and the Young at Heart

## Papa Panov's Christmas



Old Papa Panov, the village shoemaker, did not often read a book. But one Christmas Eve, he pulled down the old family Bible and, slowly tracing the lines with his forefinger, he read again how Mary and Joseph, tired by their journey to Bethlehem, found no room for them at the inn, so that Mary's little baby was born in the cowshed. He read on about the wise men who had come to see the baby Jesus, bringing him splendid gifts. Papa Panov's face fell. "I'd have had no gift that I could give him," he said sadly.

Then his face brightened. He stretched his long arms to the shelf high up in his little room and took down a small, dusty box and opened it. Inside was a perfect pair of leather shoes. Yes, they were as good as he had remembered - the best shoes he had ever made. "I would give him those," he decided, as he gently put them away.

He was feeling tired and the print began to dance before his eyes. In no time at all Papa Panov was fast asleep. And as he slept he dreamed that someone was in his room and he knew at once, as one does in dreams, who the person was. It was Jesus. "You have been wishing that you could see me, Papa Panov," he said kindly. "Then look for me tomorrow. It will be Christmas Day and I will visit you."

When at last Papa Panov awoke, the bells were ringing out and a thin light was filtering through the shutters. "Bless my soul!" he said. "It's Christmas Day!" Papa Panov put on a special pot of coffee for his Christmas breakfast, took down the shutters and looked out of the window. No one was stirring yet. No one except the road sweeper. He looked as miserable and dirty as ever. Whoever wanted to work on Christmas Day - and in the raw cold and bitter freezing mist of such a morning? Papa Panov opened the shop door, letting in a thin stream of cold air. "Come in!" he shouted across the street cheerily. "Come in and have some hot coffee to keep out the cold!" The sweeper looked up, scarcely able to believe his ears. He was only too glad to put down his broom and come into the warm room. His old clothes steamed gently in the heat of the stove and he clasped both red hands round the comforting warm mug as he drank.

When he had gone, Papa Panov put on cabbage soup for his dinner, then went to the door again, scanning the street. He saw no one. But he was mistaken. Someone was coming. A girl walking so slowly and quietly, hugging the walls of shops and houses, that it was a while before he noticed her. She looked very tired and she was carrying a baby, wrapped in a thin shawl. There was such sadness in her face and in the pinched little face of the baby. Papa Panov's heart went out to them. "Won't you come in," he called, stepping outside to meet them. "You both need a warm by the fire and a rest." The young mother let him shepherd her indoors and to the comfort of the armchair. He took the milk from the stove and carefully fed the baby from a spoon, warming her tiny feet by the stove at the same time. "She needs shoes," the cobbler said.

But the girl replied sadly, "I can't afford shoes."

Papa Panov remembered the little shoes he had looked at last night. He had been keeping those for Jesus but he looked again at the cold little feet and made up his mind. "Try these on her," he said, handing the baby and the shoes to the mother. The beautiful little shoes were a perfect fit. The girl smiled happily as the baby gurgled.



"You have been so kind to us," the girl said, when she got up with her baby to go. "May all your Christmas wishes come true!"

But Papa Panov only had one wish. He looked anxiously up and down the street. There were plenty of people about but they were all faces that he recognized. There were neighbours going to call on their families. They nodded and smiled and wished him Happy Christmas! There were beggars too and Papa Panov hurried indoors to fetch them hot soup and a generous hunk of bread, hurrying out again in case he missed the Important Stranger.

As winter dusk fell, Papa Panov next went to the door and strained his eyes. He could no longer make out the



passers-by. Most were home and indoors by now anyway. He walked slowly back into his room at last, put up the shutters, and sat down wearily in his armchair. So it had been just a dream after all. Jesus had not come.

Then all at once he knew that he was no longer alone in the room. This was not dream for he was wide awake. At first he seemed to see before his eyes the long stream of people who had come to him that day. He saw again the old road sweeper, the young mother and her baby and the beggars he had fed. As they passed, each whispered, "Didn't you see me, Papa Panov?"

"Who are you?" he called out, bewildered.

Then another voice answered him. It was the voice from his dream - the voice of Jesus. "I was hungry and you fed me," he said. "I was naked and you clothed me. I was cold and you warmed me. I came to you today in everyone of those you helped and welcomed." Then all was quiet and still. Only the sound of the big clock ticking. A great happiness filled the room, overflowing Papa Panov's heart until he wanted to burst out singing and laughing and dancing with joy. "So he did come after all!" he said quietly to himself as a peace settled over him.

**Leo Tolstoy, based on a French tale (edited)**



## **For the Christmas Tree**

There's a theme of thankfulness running through this edition of the newsletter. So here's an idea. Find yourself a few spare gift tags.

Now think back over 2020. For what are you thankful? What brought you joy? What did you most appreciate during Lockdown and in the months that have followed? What made you laugh this past year?

Write them on the gift tags and hang them on the Christmas tree or somewhere easily seen if you don't have a tree this year. Keep as a reminder when the Christmas season is over.

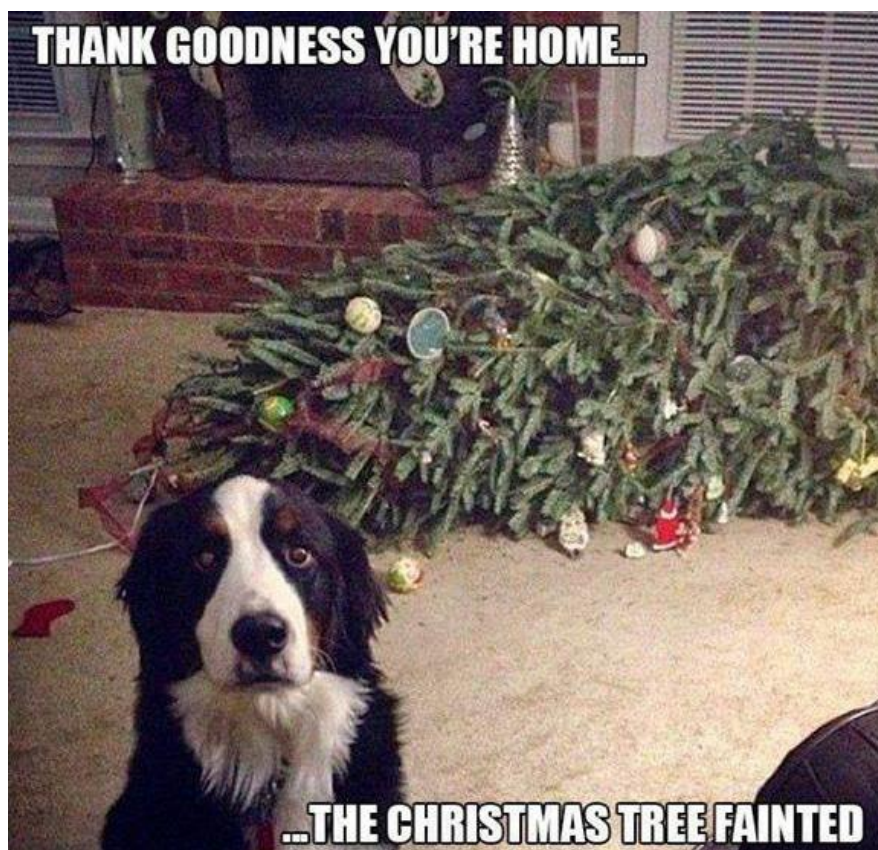
## **Zoom Church**

A question for those who are able to attend Zoom Church. Do you sit in the same 'pew' every week?!

## **Christmas Weight Gain**

Extensive research has revealed that much of our Christmas weight gain is caused by shame.

It is a direct result of saying, 'It's a shame to waste the rest of this.....It's a shame to waste the rest of that.'





In the depths of winter, summer can feel far, far away. But here's a reminder - and a key message - from William Mather.



This was done from sketches on the spot and then developed into a large oil painting. It is semi-abstract and deliberately impressionistic and expressionistic! It is not to 'correct' scale. I wanted to express something of the joys of the beach with people in the water and of course the church tower behind, symbolic of the greatest joy of all - life in Jesus! The rather large sun is also saying similar things about light, life and colour as we attempt to follow the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! If you want to see the original, it's on the wall in Crofters. WM

## **The Seaforth Mortification - Offering Grants for Those in Need Locally**

This, to us in the twenty first century, a strangely named Trust, was founded in 1680 by the Countess of Seaforth with a purpose to distribute the income arising to be used for the "poor and indigent persons of the Towne and Burghe of the Chanonrie of Ross and Burghe of Rosemarkie".

Nowadays, this is effectively our area of Avoch, Fortrose and Rosemarkie. The trustees are the minister of the linked charge of Avoch with Fortrose and Rosemarkie and the session clerks of both congregations. Some distributions have been made since the Covid 19 outbreak, notably to Black Isle Cares, but it may be that there are individual deserving cases in our communities of which the trustees are unaware. If anyone knows of people, not limited to members and adherents of the churches, who are suffering distress at this difficult time and who could benefit from a grant from the Seaforth Mortification, please let the minister or either of the session clerks know. All individual applications are, of course, handled in complete confidence.

### **Key Contacts**

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**A huge thank you to everyone who contributed so willingly to this newsletter. You make the editor's job very easy! **Deadline for the March 2021 contributions: Friday 5th February.****

**But it is always good to get them well in advance of that date. Thank you!**

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