



St

Andrew's



United Reformed Church
Penylan Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF24 3PF

30th January 2022

Weekly newsletter - issue 100

Dear friends,

Welcome to this bumper 100th edition of our weekly newsletter. I think that one thing the pandemic and its lockdowns have done for many people and Christians in particular, is to give them more time to think about our religion. We have perhaps asked ourselves questions such as '**what is faith?**'

While our modern world might distance itself from many Christian concepts, faith is not one of them. Our world, with people like Oprah Winfrey, seem to love to talk about faith, and even George Michael

often sings about faith. As far as our culture is concerned, faith is a feeling — a positive outlook on life. ***Faith is great.***

But what is that rosy view of faith based on? Often it means having faith in oneself. It is about becoming who we're really meant to be. But when we think about it that idea does not stand up to scrutiny. Faith becomes just something that we conjure up in ourselves. It is something to add to the list of things that we need to do in order to be successful. And it doesn't work with the reality of what people are like. After all, if true faith is all about looking inward and seeing how great we are, that is not such good news. We're a mess!

The biblical definition of faith is radically different. It is not about being a positive thinker. Instead, we are called to take our trust and place it in something outside ourselves.

"Faith is rock-solid trust that when God makes a promise, it is true and right. It is absolute assurance and confidence that God's word can be relied upon."

Hebrews, chapter 11 is sometimes called the ***"Hall of Faith."*** It takes us through many Old Testament saints and reminds us of what God can accomplish through his people when they trust him. But the key lesson is not ***"Go out and do great things."*** It is not about you or me and what we can achieve if we just have faith. Yes, it is a call to have faith; but it is really about the object of our faith: the person we are trusting in. The main theme of Hebrews, chapter 11 is ***'trust in God.'*** The first verse gives us a definition of faith: ***"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."***

Faith is not just a feeling. It is not just saying, "***I hope it's true.***" It means being certain about something. Notice the two key words in this first verse: "***assurance***" and "***conviction.***" Faith is rock-solid trust that when God makes a promise, it is true and right. It is absolute assurance and confidence that God's word can be relied upon.

These days, if we claim to be certain that our religious convictions are true, we are likely to be condemned as arrogant. We can see why: if we claim that a religious truth is really true, then that means that we think someone else's version of religion is not true. And that is not fashionable in our world today. The biblical definition of faith swims right against the tide of our culture.

Of course, Christians are not always certain about everything. Doubt is a very normal part of the Christian life. But Christians should respond to doubt differently than non-Christians. People in our world today sometimes embrace doubt and uncertainty as things worth striving for in themselves; Christians, by contrast, believe that there are certainties, even though we may find it difficult to hold on to them. So, when we have those struggles with doubt, we fight them. We look for reassurance from God.

So, if faith is "***assurance***" about something, what is it exactly that we have this assurance about? Verse 1 highlights the two types of things that we know by faith. "***Things hoped for***" are things in the future that have not yet happened. "***Things not seen***" are things in the past — events that we were not there to see. Or, put simply, our faith is in what God has done and in what God will do.

Belief in what God has done in the past is illustrated in verse 3. **"By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible."**

We were not there to see God make the world. Nobody was. So how do we know he did it? We have to believe it by faith.

There are many other things in the past that we take on faith because we weren't there to see them. Were we there to watch Noah build the ark? Were we there to see Moses lead the way through the Red Sea? Were we there to see Jesus die on the cross? These are all events that we embrace as true — by faith.

So, the question is, **'Is that faith groundless?'** Absolutely not. We have tremendous historical evidence that confirms what we know by faith. The stories we read about in the Bible are historical, and we can trust the books of the Bible as reliable. When we say we have faith in something we cannot see, we don't mean that there are no good reasons to believe in it. It just means that we were not there to see it with our eyes.

Yet faith is not just about what God has already done but also about what God will do in the future: **"things hoped for."** We cannot know about the future just by empirical evidence. We cannot see it. We have to trust God about what it will be like.

In the context of the book of Hebrews — particularly the later sections of chapter 11 — there is no doubt that what the author is alluding to is the second coming of Christ. We look back to creation with faith in

what we have not seen; but we also look forward with hope to a new creation, when Jesus will return to set all things right.

We have to trust God with what is coming. We have to believe that Jesus is real and that he is coming back. We also have to trust him with our lives and our own futures. There are probably many things in our lives that we are worried about, and it's easy to wish we could see the future. But that is exactly where faith kicks in. We hope for what we do not see (Romans 8:24-25). Part of faith is trusting that God will provide for us, walk before us, and keep his promises to us as we go.

Faith either looks back at what God has done or looks to the future at what God will do. Either way — and this is key — ***faith is about trusting God.*** It is not faith in ourselves. It's about trusting something outside of ourselves.

NEWS

As already mentioned, believe it or not, is the **one hundredth** edition of our Newsletter. The first edition being launched as "**Coronavirus (Covid-19) update - issue 1**" circulated on 21st March 2020. Many of us have experienced life in different ways since that date and we thought it would be good to ask some of our readers to provide contributions to this special edition. Here are some of the items that we have received.

1. First from Mrs Pam Jenkins, St Andrew's URC Cardiff who writes:

"In 2020 my challenge was to walk 2020 kilometres; this I completed on 6th January 2021. In 2021 my challenge was to walk 2021 miles,

being significantly more than the 2020 challenge. In addition to these 2021 miles; an additional 155 miles was undertaken for Christian Aid; the challenge for this was 10,000 steps [5 miles] a day during May 2021. Despite not starting until 17th February 2021, which was Ash Wednesday, the completion date was 28th December 2021; then a further 7 miles. In 2022 my walking challenge is 2555 miles, why, 2020 - 1262 miles, 2021 - 2183 miles, 2022 - 2555 miles = 6,000 miles in three years. During the year I hope to do a few marathons; 20 : 22, a marathon being 42K, very appropriate!

Sometime soon, I will release the information on how you may support my chosen charities, that is for those using the internet. For those who do not use the internet, but who would still wish to support, please see Pam directly. The Charities are Noah's Ark Children's Hospital, Ty Hafan Children's Hospice and Wales Air Ambulance Charity.

2. The following was received from Mrs Sandra Gough of Senghenydd URC Church:

"Hello Des.

Once again, thank you for last Sunday's "Thoughts and Prayers" and weekly news. It is almost inconceivable that you are approaching the one hundredth edition. On behalf of the fellowship at Senghenydd URC, and personally, I thank both you and Jill, profusely, for putting so much time, effort and love into sharing God's message with us week on week.

I would also like to pass on our congratulations on your joining the as a volunteer for the Chaplaincy at the University Health Board

Hospitals; you will be a wonderful asset to them and all who call on your counselling and prayers in your future role.

We have been unable to open our doors for Sunday Services for many weeks during this seemingly endless time of the Coronavirus Covid 19 Pandemic. We have been unable to be with loved ones as they have slipped into the next life and we have lost faithful members of our flock. We thank our Lord for taking them into His tender, loving arms and thank you, our friends at St. Andrews Church for all your wonderful work and support. May we all look forward to a brighter future in which we will see God's plan for His children, ***"Unfurl into a glorious banner of righteousness"***.

I thought this poem by Helen Steiner Rice puts into words what you have done for us and that you may wish to include it in the "One Hundredth Edition".

With love and best wishes

Sandra, Secretary, Senghenydd URC

PRICELESS TREASURES

What could I give you that would truly please,
in topsy-turvey times like these?
I can't take away or even make less
the things that annoy, disturb, and distress.
For stores don't sell a single thing
to make the heart that's troubled sing.
They sell rare gifts that are ultra-smart
but nothing to warm or comfort the heart.
The joys of life that cheer and bless
the stores don't sell, I must confess,
But friends and prayers are priceless treasures
beyond all monetary measures.
And so, I say a special prayer

that God will keep you in His care.
And if I can ever help you, dear
in any way throughout the year.
You've only to call, for as long as I live,
such as I have, I freely give.

***"Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord: the man you teach
from your law."***

Psalm 94:12.

3. Thoughts on 100 Editions of the Covid 19 Inspired Newsletter by Jill Shelton

Let me start by raising a hypothetical question. In a hundred years when people look back to this period of history how will it be classified? Will it be classed as a dismal time? Or will people say ours was a time of real impact and opportunity?

Consider our situation. Here we sit in the modern church, and we have to admit that the golden age of the church seems to be well and truly over. In the past, young people were encouraged to be ministers of Word and Sacrament. Now ministry is far from being a priority for 6th form students looking for a career. There was a time when the church had a role in directing the shape of society – now it is lumped together with a whole range of ***"special interest"*** groups. Even those who grew up in the church are losing interest.

Of course, that doesn't mean we have given up. We still have our dreams, visions, goals and direction setting. These are concepts which are often spoken about.

Furthermore, it is not as if we are sitting around doing nothing. People are encouraged to be involved and make a difference. And always we pray that the Lord will give us wisdom and direction as we

seek to minister to the culture and community in which He has placed us.

The Covid 19 Lockdown provided an unthought of opportunity to focus on keeping our church community and the wider community connected and provide Ministry in a different way.

The production of the weekly Newsletter and Des' You Tube Thoughts and Prayers has become a source of comfort and inspiration for many people who are members of this church and, perhaps more importantly, for many who are not members of St Andrew's or of any other church.

What began as a short-term means of getting us through Lockdown has become a semi-permanent feature of church life and the receipt of each weekly edition is looked forward to with eager anticipation by many people.

Huge thanks must go to Des for the production of the Newsletter and the You Tube broadcasts and also to those people who have delivered hard copies of the Newsletter to church members who do not have internet access.

During Lockdown we all developed '**Coping Strategies**' to help us through the enforced isolation and the prayers in the Newsletters were a great comfort to many. Looking through my copy of Prayers for all Occasions by Ian Black, I came across a short prayer about what many people turned to as a source of comfort in addition to the receipt of the newsletter- Chocolate!

Lord God, You delight us with taste and smell and set us upon the earth with a rich bounty of plants and fruits. We give you thanks for chocolate, its sensuous textures and stimulation and for the joy of giving and receiving it. May our enjoyment not be marred by any means of its production: rather may the love it expresses and engenders embrace all to your honour and glory. **Amen.**

Please enjoy this 100th edition of the Newsletter- and perhaps some chocolate as well! **Jill.**

4. Notes from St Andrew Bible study group

On Fridays, between 10.30 and 12.00 noon there are weekly Bible study meetings at St Andrews. These offer the opportunity to read, explore and ponder over sections of the Bible, in order to gain more fulfilment of life.

The Bible can provide answers in times of stress, for instance Psalm 23: verses 3 – 4 says of God, **"He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths, as He has promised. Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid Lord, for you are with me."**

We learn from the Jewish leader Nicodemus' discourse with Jesus, the benefit of our Lord's ministry. John 3; 16 – 17 tells us, **"For God loved the world so much that He gave us His only son, so that everyone that believes in Him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send His son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour."**

The New Testament is full of advice and instructions showing us how to live. Matthew 6; 31 – 33, says, **"So do not start worrying:**

where will my food come from? Or my drink? Or my clothes? (These are the things that the pagans were always worried about). Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. Instead, be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what He requires of you, and He will provide you with all these other things."

Finally, in the Epistle to the Colossians 3; 16 – 17, Paul tells us how we should think and act, "***Christ's message in all its richness must live in your hearts. Teach and instruct each other with all wisdom. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs; sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts. Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through Him to God the Father."***

It is all there for us; we only have to find it and act upon it. For His name sake, ***Amen.***

Jan Kitto

(All quotations are from the Good News Bible)

5. News from our Beaver, Cub and Scout Leaders of the 25th St Andrew's group

The following is a rather cute photo of one of the youngest members of the Scout Group in Uganda that we have linked up with. Our scouts have been writing to members of the Ugandan group and sharing information about their lives and activities. It helps to show how worldwide the Scouting movement is and the different ways young people live and enjoy their scouting.



I would like to offer my gratitude to Jill for providing sermons and prayers for many of the editions. It has been extremely comforting to know that there is someone there who provides such backup. We have provided our weekly '**Thoughts and Prayers**' video, which, as always, can be found by holding down the Ctrl button and clicking on the YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/PAsSKZ1nO-Q>. The video is also available on St Andrew's, and my Facebook pages.

May God bless and keep you all safe.

Des

Minister - St Andrew's URC Cardiff and Penuel Nelson

SERMON

Isaiah 6:1 - 13; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11

The message of all the people in these scriptures today is: ***"I'm not very good at this. I don't think this is working."***

"Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Isaiah says.

"I am the least of the apostles," Paul says, ***"Unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."***

"Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing," Peter says.

"I'm not very good at this. I don't think this is working," our scriptures say. I wonder have we ever felt like that in life? In ministry?

There is one word that describes the feelings of all the above scripture writers: that is ***futility***. There is an overwhelming sense in these texts of seriously being about to give up. And futility is perhaps a feeling we can all identify with in year 3 of the pandemic with ever-growing cultural conflicts. Many of us have been perilously close to giving up on ourselves and those with whom we disagree. Perhaps we have been starting to believe that change is not really possible. We're starting to believe our efforts are futile.

This is the situation in our scriptures, and this is all too often the situation in our lives. Futility is a dangerous state. It robs us of hope, of possibility, of faith itself. This is where Peter is one early morning on the Lake of Gennesaret.

He and his companions have been out all-night fishing and have caught nothing. They will have nothing to eat that day and nothing to sell either. They also may be doubting their skills and capability as fishermen.

This is where the slow-rising tide of futility can land us. We don't just begin to doubt what we can do. We begin to doubt who we are. Then Jesus comes into the situation, and everything changes.

"When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink."

This story is about far more than just, ***"If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."*** One thing Jesus says here jumps off the page: ***"Put out into the deep water."*** Let that phrase pierce our hearts. ***"Put out into the deep water."*** When we are feeling swamped by futility, we need to go deeper. When we can't figure out what to do next, go deeper. When we are mad at everybody and everyone is mad at us, go deeper. When the tasks placed before us seem insurmountable, go deeper. When we feel like we have nothing but failure to show for our very best effort, go deeper. ***"Put out into the deep water and let down your nets."***

What is the difference between beating our heads against a wall, i.e., doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results, and following Jesus' advice? Two things:

Jesus asks us to return to the ground of our futility, the place of feeling stuck and stymied and sad, and go deeper there. Fish beneath the same assumptions and habits and patterns that we have used before. Ask ourselves harder questions. Give ourselves and others more time and more commitment.

Then do something radically different. Take Jesus with us. That is what changes the disciples' action from **"doing the same thing and expecting different results"** into a sudden and bountiful harvest.

When Jesus is with us — in our minds, in our hearts, in our conversations, in our discernment, in our priorities, two things happen. First, we are empowered to go out into the deep water. We are able to take risks and stretch ourselves and each other toward something new. And then, we can let down our nets and actually find fish. What was once the site of futility becomes the site of abundance, discovery, and sustenance.

Notice one more interesting detail in this gospel text. At the end of the fishing part of the story, we read this sentence: **"And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink."** They began to sink? That sounds pretty problematic. Like, actually took on water and started to get alarmingly low in the frighteningly deep water? If they go down in the deep water, they're in trouble. They're a pretty good way offshore. It might be hard, if not impossible to swim back, and the disciples may not have the **"walking on water"** skills that Jesus has.

We don't actually know how they dealt with it. Luke doesn't tell us that they started rowing furiously for the shore or had to throw some of the fish out of the boat, or who knows what. Peter, in fact, is so overcome by the miracle that he either doesn't notice or doesn't care

that the boat is about to sink. He falls to his knees before Jesus and says, **"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"**

We do find out by the end of the story that they make it back to shore, but that detail that Luke includes is important. The boat begins to sink. Notice the significance of that in the context of the end of this story. This is Peter, James, and John's call to ministry. Jesus says, **"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people,"** and **"When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."**

The boat begins to sink. This is a symbol of having to leave your old life behind. The boat was the fishermen's primary tool of the trade, the economic engine of their lives. They needed that boat, and they needed it to stay afloat, so they and their families could stay afloat.

But when Jesus showed up, the bounty and abundance his presence brought into their lives completely overwhelmed their old worldview, their old tools, their old ways of living their lives. **"Business as usual"** just couldn't stand up to following the call of Jesus. Saying yes to Jesus means we have to give up all our most cherished sources of security, to find true security and freedom in him. And remember what the call is to Peter and his friends: to become fishers of people. **This is about true evangelism.**

And that is surprising. We don't expect energy and vocation around evangelism to be sparked out of being swamped by futility. Peter and his companions begin this story sad, frustrated, afraid, and almost hopeless. They don't believe there are any fish, and they don't believe that they have what it takes to catch them. But Jesus says, **"Put out into the deep water, and let down your nets for a**

catch,” and everything changes. The shamefaced group of failed fishermen are courageous new evangelists and followers of Jesus by the end of the story. So, ask ourselves: where do we find futility in our lives?

Where do we feel like a failure? Where are we ready to give up? Where have we lost hope? And then listen to the call of Jesus: **“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch... Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”**

The road from failure to evangelist is quite short — it just requires saying **yes** to Jesus and saying yes to depth. What will we do?

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

Holy God, whenever we fail to care for our brothers and sisters throughout creation, the way is opened to destruction, and hearts are hardened. We recognise our responsibility to encourage and uphold one another and to live together in peace and love. We also recognise our needs and our human weaknesses and come to you now with our prayers and petitions

Gracious God, thank you that you call some of us to be apostles, sent out to do your work. We pray for all who respond **“Here I am Lord”** when they hear you call. We pray also for those who have a ministry in their daily lives of work, family life or community, who daily bear witness to the gospel in all that they say or do.

Creator God, we thank you for our world and the places where we live. Help us all to be mindful that we are all created equal in your sight and accept our deep regret that despite this there is still so much inequality to be found. Help us to remember that you want us

to be good stewards of your creation, living responsibly in the lands and seas of the earth. May all future growth be sustainable, and may we ensure that its abundance is fairly shared for the good of all.

Father God, Lord, help us to use our influence within our families and communities to bring peace, joy and fun into people's lives, instead of stirring up hatred and strife. Help us be reliable and honest in what we do, and friendly to all who we meet in our daily lives.

Loving God, friend of those in need, your Son Jesus can free us from our burdens and heal our bodies and spirits. We pray for those still burdened, those seeking healing, those in need within the church and the world.

Merciful Father, when death separates from us those we love and we find it hard to live without them, take from us all bitterness and resentment and help us to remember that death has no power at all over the peace you give and that the love we shared with our departed loved ones goes beyond the grave.

At this time, we are thinking of:

Ken and family of Pat Alexander.

John and the family of Eirlys Emery.

Julia and the family of Teifion Griffiths.

The family of Ralph Rees and all those who have lost loved ones.

Everlasting God, in the weeks ahead help us to conduct our lives with dignity, always giving and expecting respect, always praying before taking action and following each action with prayerful thanksgiving.

Merciful father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.