

The Messenger

and Mayflower Hall News

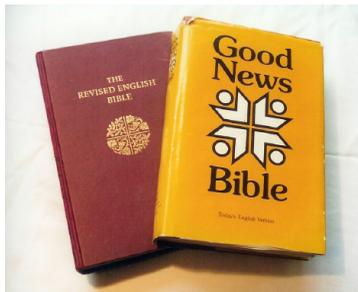
Billericay United Reformed Church

Joint Pastorate with Brentwood and Ingatestone URCs

MEMBER OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BILLERICAY

Extracts

February 2008



Readings used in worship during Lent 2008

Our Minister guides us through our Sunday service readings and themes during the Lenten period.

Easter comes early in 2008. In fact it could only come one day earlier in a year. So it seems that Christmas is hardly over and

then Lent arrives. During Lent this year we are inviting our worship leaders to use the gospel readings taken from the Revised Common Lectionary.

First Sunday (10/02/08)	Matthew 4: 1-11	Temptation
Second Sunday (17/02/08)	John 3: 1-17	Born again
Third Sunday (24/02/08)	John 4: 4-42	Slaking thirst
Fourth Sunday (02/03/08)	John 9: 1-41	Able to see
(Mothering Sunday)		
Fifth Sunday (09/03/08)	John 11: 1-46	A friend's death
Sixth Sunday (16/03/08)	Matthew 21: 1-11	Welcomed and rejected
(Palm / Passion)	Matthew 27: 11-54	

There are no short readings and there are a number of readings that are longer than average for a church service. Sometimes the worship leader may choose to take only part of the reading or divide up the passage to be read at different points in the service. At other times, however, to do this would “lose the plot” of the story.

We begin, as is traditional during Lent, with the temptation of Jesus. Then on the following four Sundays we get the opportunity to hear some readings from John's Gospel. All four readings are found only in John and include questions about what it means to be born again; the nature of true worship; the link between sin and illness; and whether death is the end.

On Palm Sunday we joyfully enter Jerusalem with Jesus. Many people, however, will not be at church again until Easter Day. Unwilling to leap directly from the triumphal entry to the triumph of the resurrection without experiencing the pain of the crucifixion, we also hear of the events leading to the cross and Jesus' death.

What does the Bible say about climate change?

Nothing – and everything.

Trevor Jamison introduces our Lenten study series on the Bible and our environment

Climate change is a contemporary problem, undreamt of in scale by the biblical writers. Yet familiar passages can be studied to discern and apply biblical insights and principles to this contemporary issue.

“*What does the Bible say about climate change*” is the theme of study material from the Methodist Relief and Development Fund, which we will use at four meetings on Wednesday evenings during February and March, which I shall lead.

Everyone is welcome to come and participate in the meetings which take place on February 13th, 20th, 27th and March 12th, 8.00 p.m. – 9.30 p.m. Topics covered include examining our habits of consumption, caring for creation, travel priorities and talking with our leaders and representatives about climate change.

The study material relating to the theme is downloadable from the MRDF website at:

http://www.mrdf.org.uk/pages/bible_study_pack.php

If you are interested in meeting to talk about these topics but are unable to come on Wednesday evenings please contact me to discuss possible alternatives.

Trevor

Fairtrade Fortnight

This runs from 25 February – 9 March. On Saturday 8 March the local Fairtrade Group will be giving Coffee and Tea tasters in St Mary’s in the High Street. Please call in and taste Fairtrade!

The above Group have again submitted a bid for Billericay to have Fairtrade Status. We wish them well and if they get that by 8 March it will be quite a party!! *Ann Mynott*

PS: Many thanks to all who supported Traidcraft with their buying at Christmas!

PPS: Stop Press! Billericay has now become a Fairtrade Town. Alleluia!

Two months in Indianapolis *Trevor Jamison describes his experiences on Sabbatical*



It's a long way to Indianapolis, it's a long way to go, at least it seems so when your transatlantic flight and your rescheduled connecting flight both run hours late. Still, "in the wee small hours of the morning" Joshua, Sue and I finally landed at Indianapolis airport to be met by Bob, Kathy and Carol from Allisonville Christian Church. My sabbatical was underway, or was nearly underway. First came holiday, travelling and camping in Kentucky, a beautiful state, but with August temperatures frequently exceeding 100° F.

Soon we were back in Indianapolis, however, for Joshua to join the local elementary school as a third grader; for Sue to explore the cultural and artistic life of the city; and for me to begin working on my preaching accompanied by a deep exploration of St Paul's *Letter to the Romans*. Allisonville Christian Church is not a large congregation by American standards boasting only five hundred members. Up to fifty of these arrived for the 8.30 a.m. service on seven Sundays in September and October to hear me preach from *Romans*. Then approximately two hundred people (including a robed choir sometimes more than thirty strong) would come to the 10.45 service to receive the same sermon. Allisonville is an unusual congregation, having more than thirty ordained ministers as members, some retired, others a mixture of office holders at the denomination's national and regional offices, and the rest teachers from Christian Theological Seminary. I only found this out **after** I had agreed to preach there! The congregation was very supportive, both in their comments after the sermons and in their enjoyment of the times I highlighted, sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, the ways in which we really are "two nations divided by a single language".

Delivering the sermon, however, was much less than half the job. On Monday mornings, quietly chanting "they drive on the right, they drive on the right" under my breath, I would motor over to Christian

Theological Seminary for a session with Ron Allen, Professor of Preaching and New Testament Studies there (handily, he is one of the 30+ minister-members at Allisonville). We would review the sermon preached the day before, explore the scripture passage for the next Sunday's sermon and discuss a whole host of related preaching, theological and church issues. On one occasion, when he was absent from church on a Sunday, Professor Allen had my sermon videotaped. This led to the unreal experience of being one of an audience of two in the Seminary Media Center, watching myself on a big screen preaching about Christian faith and obedience to governments. (Comment from Ron Allen, hitting the 'pause' button: "Trevor, you've just said, 'We'll begin by ...'. You are actually 13 minutes and 53 seconds into the sermon – the congregation may lose hope at this point.") Following our meeting I was free to explore and exploit the seminary library and all its considerable resources had to tell me about the passage to be preached upon, before I got down to writing next week's sermon.

As well as preaching and studying I got a number of chances to get acquainted with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination (an American expression of the same movement as the Churches of Christ tradition that came into the United Reformed Church in 1981). I was invited to give talks at the Disciples Center in downtown Indianapolis (their much bigger equivalent of the URC's Church House in London) and to meet the staff of the Indiana Conference (their much bigger equivalent of our Eastern Synod staff team). On both occasions the topic was challenges facing the churches in the UK today. On both occasions the American responses were the same: "What you describe in terms of numbers in churches greatly reduced is not our experience but we can see ourselves going there over the next couple of generations."

So very soon, it seemed, our time in the USA was up, returning home on time, though temporarily missing one piece of luggage. A couple of days later I was off to Westminster College in Cambridge for a month's intensive reading and study on Romans but without the weekly challenge of preaching. Others went back to work and to school and by the first day of December so did I as well. What do I bring back from the American experience? Well, I think I bring a wider view of the Church; a better appreciation of the complexities of a nation that deeply

influences our culture and our politics; a deepened commitment to the task of preaching supported by a deeper knowledge of St Paul and *Romans* - material for a lot of sermons and perhaps even a few Bible studies too.

If you want to read for yourself what Trevor preached about whilst in the USA then you can find the text of the sermons on the websites of Brentwood and Billericay URCS

<http://www.billericayurc.org.uk/>

<http://www.brentwood-urc.org.uk/>

**Thank you for the tax cut, Chancellor,
but it also cuts the Gift Aid we can claim back!**

Hats were thrown in the air when the Chancellor announced a year ago that from April 2008 (the new tax year) the standard rate of income tax would be reduced from 22% - 20%. This will help many taxpayers, but charities, such as churches, will find that whereas up to now they could claim back from the revenue an extra 28 pence in each pound donated under Gift Aid, now this is cut to 25 pence in each pound. Not much difference, you say, but multiply by the number of pounds given to the church in a year, and it could mean a loss of income of hundreds of pounds.

Every £100 you give to the church in a year, under Gift Aid, to support the work



and ministry of the church, will be worth £3 less to the church compared with the previous year.

The solution of course is clear. If you find the taxman has been good to you for once, please will you share your good fortune with the church? Many of you give regularly through the envelope scheme, and just a small amount extra, perhaps once a month, can make up the shortfall. You can of course increase your giving by anything you feel you wish to, and if you haven't thought about this for a while, please remember that the church like everybody else suffers from the effects of inflation: have a look at the church budget sheet, which has been presented to Church Meeting, and you will see that we barely keep up with the basic needs for maintaining the church's life.

You don't need to notify anybody of your intention to change your giving, as anything you put into your envelope is automatically covered by the declaration you have previously made.

And if you already give, but haven't yet signed up for Gift Aid, please speak to me – it only needs your signature on a form, and the rest will follow. *Thank you, everybody!* *Robin Derbyshire*



Christmas Worship in Boston, USA

Visiting other churches can be just as interesting as visiting other people's homes! At Christmas in Boston, we shared worship at the Old South Church, in the centre of the city. Its history goes back to 1669, the early days of the dissenting reformers and merchant adventurers. Its large striking building dates from 1875, and is in the 'medieval Venetian style', and the congregation

filled it, many in family groups.

Last October this church had taken a controversial stand in inviting Archbishop Desmond Tutu to speak there, as he had done once before, on his concerns about the 'apartheid' nature of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Some in the Jewish community in Boston protested vigorously, but groups from the Jewish Voice for Peace mounted a counter-demonstration in support of Archbishop Tutu and the conference went ahead. On its website (www.oldsouth.org) the Church spoke about the need in an open society to speak about difficult issues.

This issue is just one aspect of Old South's understanding of the Christian message. As a member of the United Church of Christ it supports its '*God is still speaking*' initiative. In the American mix of religion and politics, the UCC has been described as a church which is 'very liberal and has a particular religious vision that includes inclusiveness...' We found a strong emphasis on reaching out to help the disadvantaged in their own communities, where the benefits of our own welfare state are not available.

We joined the 'Gathering' and were made very welcome, with the greeting 'Merry Christmas' from everyone. Old South has both a Senior and an associate minister. It has dark wooden pews and a splendid organ, whose console is positioned dominantly at the front of the church. The church is very proud of it and the congregation sat and listened to a mini-recital for 10 minutes at the end of the service. Robed choir members also sang from the front, but there was no large cross to focus on. The printed Order of Service drew the congregation in to responses

at many points, and was divided into three sections: the Gathering, the Gift of the Word, and Offering Ourselves and Our Gifts. As always, when you go to a different church, we found that the hymns or carols we knew so well had been changed or adapted! They also do Jazz Services...

The Christmas decorations inside and outside the church were mainly the traditional yew or fir wreaths with a splash of red ribbon and poinsettias, all donated by members of the church.

On this, the last Sunday before Christmas, two young children from the same family had been brought for baptism. As well as affirming that Lollia and Lenz were children of God and made in the image of God, the church members undertook to teach them the Christian faith, spelling out the Biblical names that led to “the Savior, Jesus; and about the history of the church as the people of God.” In turn, the church had expectations from the children: “We look forward to sitting with them at the Lord's Table, sharing with them the costs and joys of discipleship. Learning and growing with them in the Christian pilgrimage, and declaring with one voice our faith in God and God's son, Jesus.”

After the service, one woman brushed past us apologetically, saying “I am helping with the coffee today. Do come and join us.” We were sorry that as we were meeting up with our family we could not respond to the Minister's invitation to share in the fellowship, and to see what was offered with coffee 'and food'.... Certainly not mince pies, which some Americans seem suspicious of, if they have even heard of them. The final impression of the church is something on the back page of the 'booklet'. It is a 'Note on the inclusive dimensions of God's Grace', which invites “everyone to join in the common life and mission of our reconciling community through participation and leadership in this congregation... As we all move forward with the work of this church, we commit ourselves to making justice and inclusivity a reality in this congregation and in the world. On the threshold of Christ's open door, we rely upon the healing nature of God's love and grace to be our help and guide.”

Margaret and Robin Derbyshire

A Father is anxious for his injured Son in Gaza

News of the violence and deprivation in Gaza continues to be of great concern to people who long for a resolution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. You may remember Ahmed Sourani who in 1998, visited United Reformed churches, including Brentwood, where some of us heard him speak. He is Director of Projects & Cooperation Dept. Agricultural Development Association (PARC)-Gaza in the Gaza Strip. He sent us this message about his son.

“My Dear Friends,

Greetings from Gaza and hope this finds you all in peace. I and my family received, with many thanks, your kind solidarity/support messages, contacts and phone calls concerning my eldest child Kamal (15) who was seriously injured during one of the Israeli occupational air force's raids against Palestinian wanted/targeted car in Gaza city on the evening of the 17th of December 2007.

The accident happened while Kamal was standing accidentally with three of his friends at the one of the street corners about 50 metres away from the house we live. Kamal was taken, with other innocent children, to a local ICU with shrapnel in all parts of his body. He stayed there for 2 days. Doctors did three major operations on him. Seriousness of his case caused doctors to transfer him to an Israeli hospital where he stayed there till the 31st of December 2007, we are now at home in Gaza. Thanks God, Kamal case now is not bad and hope that he and all injured children will be better during days and weeks to come. Finally, I would like to confirm that the case of my son Kamal is not the only case that happens with innocent and victim children in our area, still many of the children in our area are being traumatized and suffer from the absence of justice, real peace and socio-economic development.”

Through *Commitment for Life* we support the work of those in Gaza who seek to protect the children from the consequences of the violence. As Ahmed writes: “Let us pray and work together to end this suffering and injuries. Let us all work together to bring protection, smile, love and real peace to the minds and hearts of those weak children who live in this conflicted area.”