

GORING UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

WELCOME

12 APR 20

HE IS RISEN

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Musings

Weeks 3&4

from the **Manse**

BUMPER EASTER HOLIDAY EDITION

It's good to be back in business after too many days off. Jill and I are both well on the way to recovery. Thanks again to everyone for your prayers and offers of practice help. We hope you are managing in this current situation. Remember if you need help or just a word of conversation to another human being please get in touch with someone, stay in touch. In our churches we have a good pastoral network, remember we are here for each other. I also once again thank the Elders; they are still being kept busy on behalf of the church. There is a lot still going on behind the scenes. As for me I am involved with a Synod minister's video conference call next week, must remember to find somewhere with a good background. You have to be so careful what people can see on camera, could be embarrassing.

After my last

newsletter photo, I was emailed, "Andrew it looks like you have a fish tank on your desk." Yes, I do have a fish tank on my desk! I will have to do a virtual tour of my study to showcase the various creatures I share it with. Back to the fish tank, one of several. It is a Nano tank that I designed and built. Totally biologically self-sufficient, seven water parameters are constantly monitored and adjusted. I shan't get into the technology, but it is good to gaze away from the computer screen now and again to see what's happening in this compact world.

In this tiny tank there are over 25 fish (no, not overcrowded, none



grow over 1cm) and 20 Neocaridina (Cherry Shrimp, red, bright blue and yellow).

Tuesday night something else to look at in the night sky. It was a giant Pink Moon. A super moon, wow, awesome etc. Now I don't know about you, but I was just a little disappointed. Obviously, it was in a closer orbit, so it looked a bit bigger and yes it was nice and bright ... but it wasn't pink! You could call it silver, gold or yellow even but absolutely not pink. I found out "Pink moon" is just a nickname from folklore — a reference to wild ground phlox, whose pinkish flowers are among spring's earliest flowers in the eastern United States. So why do we call it a pink moon in the UK! It's strange during these surreal times what taxes your thoughts. Or perhaps it's just me ... I haven't been well lately you know.

A question that often crops up this time of year is ... why can't you have a fixed date for Easter like you do for Christmas? **Easter** is a moveable feast celebrated on the first Sunday after the vernal equinox full moon (i.e. on Sunday after the full moon of March). These dates are calculated with the old Gregorian calendar, because it specifies the vernal equinox. Over the years churches have fallen out over how we tie our celebrations in with the Passover.

It is a nightmare and I reckon that the bogus Pink moon has something to do with it.

The misnamed Pink Moon episode reminded me of another conversation I had this time last year. It was a visitor to the church he asked me "why do you call it Good Friday. To me that's weird as your God Jesus got killed that day. You should call it Bad Friday or Black Friday." He paused for thought. "Oh, Black Friday was already taken I suppose the end of November when people go to the shops and grab all the big screen TV's". I tried to explain but I sensed I was not really listened to or understood (a bit like my Sunday sermons lol). But it is a fact that we take many things for granted in our Christian practices, language and tradition.

As we know the most harrowing event of holy week is the crucifixion itself, which happened on a Friday — and is commemorated on Good Friday. But where did the day get its name? And why is it thought of as 'good' when it's the day the Messiah was put to death? The term 'Good Friday' does not actually mean that the Friday in question was good, positive or nice. Used in this context, the word 'Good' carries the same meaning as the original Old English word, in that it means holy. Thus, this day is also referred to as **Holy Friday**.

However, we Christians argue that the day of Christ's crucifixion was good in its way, because it was the start of his resurrection (which happened on Easter Sunday) and also the day he died for our sins. All of Easter should be a joyful celebration anyway because ultimately if Jesus hadn't carried the cross, worn the crown of thorns and commended his spirit into his father's hands, we'd all be still in a state of hopelessness.

The Easter season is a time to celebrate. More than just a day. Yet sometimes our everyday lives feel so heavy that celebration is not a part of them. The burdens of everyday life under the shadow of COVID 19 can make it a challenge to feel particularly joyful – even in the Easter season.

But the joy we are being invited into this season is beyond what we see in our everyday lives. It's true that Jesus says "Come to me and bring me your burdens" but we usually can't believe it. Maybe we don't want to believe it. Too good to be true. If I really allow Jesus to come into my life the way he wants to, will he ask me to change my life in ways that are too hard? How do I share the chaos of my life with Jesus? If I keep him at arm's length, my life might be difficult, but at least my problems are familiar. What would it cost me to let go and change my life?

We know our own faults and failings so well. Too well. We begin to believe that Jesus loves the way we love – with all of our human limits. How could Jesus love us and accept us the way we are right now?

If we can trust in Jesus and begin to overcome our fears and doubts, the real power of letting Jesus into our hearts is realised. Suddenly, we are not afraid, not burdened and simply ready to live our lives with Jesus.

The **good news** is that Jesus loves us - right now whoever, however we are. At this very moment in time, Jesus holds each one of our lives and loves us so freely at a depth that our human minds can't take in. Whether we comprehend this or not, Jesus loves us endlessly and waits for us with his arms open, ready to hold and support us.

As we receive his embrace and feel the peace and joy of Easter wash over us, we can look over His shoulder, and see beyond to the hope we have been promised. That's when we realize that the real joy in our lives is putting aside our own faults, challenges and difficulties for a while and entering into the life of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. We shall overcome all things for in Jesus we have the power and the victory!

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and
stronghold.

For the health and well-
being of our nation, that all
who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free
from worry:

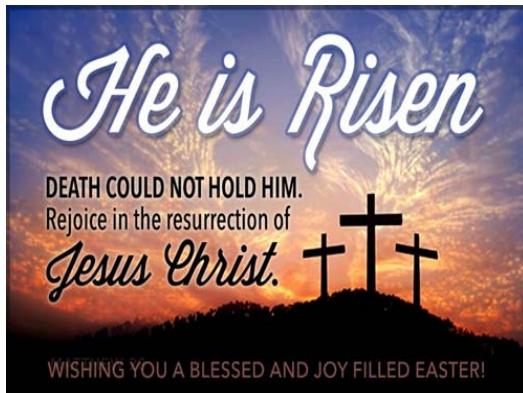
For the isolated and
housebound,
that we may be alert to their
needs,
and care for them in their
vulnerability:

For our homes and families,
our schools and young
people, and all in any kind of
need or distress:

For a blessing on our local
community,
that our neighbourhoods
may be places of trust and
friendship, where all are
known and cared for: Father
accept these prayers for the
sake of your Son, our Saviour
Jesus Christ.

Amen.

A HAPPY EASTER
from Andrew and Jill



Easter Sunday SERMON

Morning everyone. Happy Easter.

Listen, Lord, there is so much we don't understand. We celebrate on this Easter morning the glory of your victory over death. and with it the blessed assurance that through you, we now have access to the kingdom of heaven. We are joyous, but we are also confused. What does it mean in our lives this news of a resurrected Lord? How are we in the 21st century affected by it? In what ways are we changed? What will tomorrow bring? We are living in troubled and trying times. We find it difficult to raise our vision from our current situation. Just as Mary in her discovery at the empty tomb was so focused on the issues of her life that She failed to recognise you standing before her. We too struggle with seeing your presence in our lives. You are the risen Lord, and we sing loud

hosannas in celebration of this. But then we return home and focus on the issues that fill our days. Lord, we pray that you open our eyes and our hearts to your love and glory. Create in us a spirit that focuses only on you. Transform our hearts and send us off into the world to do your work. Rise again, Lord in our hearts, so we can truly become the children of God we have been created to be. It is through the glory of the empty tomb we pray. Amen.

So Easter morning. The Bible reading today tells us of Mary finding an empty tomb. By the way, it's a lectionary, **John Chapter 20, verses one to 18**. So for Mary, this is not necessarily good news, Mary must have been devastated to see the empty tomb, and she may have suspected grave robbers. We know that this kind of thing took place at this time. And there was the death penalty for those caught. The grave robbers, they would have taken grave goods. Even the shroud that was lying there but but not a body.

And there have been stories made up over the years about grave robbers to explain the missing body. But 'Body Snatchers' and such were not invented yet, there was no need. Mary then runs to tell Peter and

the disciple whom Jesus loved, commonly thought to be John. Mary goes to Peter, in part because he is the leader of the disciples. Also St. Peter and the beloved disciple remained in the vicinity rather than fleeing with the other disciples.

The presence of these two men at the tomb will be important because it establishes two legal witnesses to the empty tomb, the number required by Torah law. As a woman, Mary had no legal standing as a witness. This is an interesting detail in itself. Jesus ignores this tradition, this understanding of the role of a woman and uses Mary as the first apostle and an important witness. There are three women in Mark, women, in plural, in Luke, and two in Matthew, but let's concentrate on John's version.

Every step of the way, Jesus challenges and changes things. This account of Mary visiting the tomb is more significant than it may first appear. Make certain the involvement of a woman is not something that they early church would have invented, not only if they wanted to the resurrection to be taken seriously. When they enter the tomb, they do not see the scene of a robbery. The grave clothes have been left behind folded, not the actions of a thief. The resurrection is therefore, not like

the raising of Lazarus. Jesus did not need to be unwrapped from the clothes. He has departed the physical body, he is in an entirely different kind of bodily existence. His body is different. It can now pass through doors and grave clothes.

The disciple whom Jesus loved knew that something miraculous had taken place. This was the moment when belief in the resurrection first became a reality in the human mind. This was a momentous moment.

However, we must not lose sight of the importance of Mary. Her role in the Gospel story is crucial. Make no mistake, she is the first apostle. She is sent by Jesus as an apostle to the apostles. It was she who was the first person to meet with the risen Jesus. We don't know a great deal about Mary Magdalene from the Gospels. Popular and extremely doubtful tradition tends to associate her as being a prostitute. The woman who anoints Jesus feet, or with Mary of Bethany.

You will perhaps remember such films as *Jesus Christ Superstar*, or *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and Renaissance artists portray her as a bit of a floozy, patron saint of fallen women, the opposite of Mary, the mother of Jesus. None of these fictional portraits helps us to understand the real Mary. The early church

has handed down the notion, that Mary Magdalene had the role of a sinful, albeit repentant woman. What we do know for sure is that Mary Magdalene was healed of seven evil spirits by Jesus. And she's spoken of in the context of a woman who has supported Jesus in His mission. So once the men left, Mary returns the tomb to find two angels sitting where Jesus has lain, one of the head and the other at the feet, like the two gold cherubim, who sat at either end of the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant.

Neither Peter or the beloved disciple saw the angels, and Mary does not recognise them as angels either. They asked Mary why is she crying and she explains through her tears, that "they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him." We don't know who "they" is, and Mary, surely doesn't either. Then Mary turns and Jesus repeats the question the angels had just asked. Mary fails to recognise Jesus. Perhaps her vision is clouded by tears. Perhaps her grief so overwhelms that she cannot think clearly. Perhaps since she came looking for a dead man, her mind is incapable of seeing a live man. We often see what we expect to see and fail to recognise the unexpected, the thing that's right in front of her face. Perhaps Jesus' body has been

transformed, so that it is not immediately recognisable.

So there is an irony here; Jesus' opponents, because of their hostility, failed to see the Messiah in their midst. Now Jesus' friend, because of her love, also fails to see, and there's also a spiritual tension here. On the one hand, Jesus' resurrection body can be touched, and bears the marks of wounds inflicted on Jesus pre-death body and not only cooks fish but eats it, and on the other hand, Jesus' resurrection body apparently rose through the grave clothes, appears in a locked room and is sometimes not initially recognised at all. There is something significant about Jesus making his first resurrection appearance to Mary, a minor character in the Gospel story.

We would think that Jesus would grant this honour to one of the inner circle of disciples or his mother even, but God's ways are not our ways. We probably wouldn't have picked Mary Magdalene for this honour, but neither would we have picked many of the characters whom God chooses, like Saul to be a missionary. God calls whom God calls. Mary addresses Jesus whom she assumes to be the gardener, with the word 'kyrie' which the NRSV translates as 'sir' but which is more usually translated 'Lord'. Jesus addresses

her by her name, Mary. Hearing her name and Jesus' voice, Mary recognises him and addresses him, Rabboni. Mary, like the disciples at Emmaus does not recognise Jesus until a specific act lifts the veil from the eyes. The disciples at Emmaus recognised him when he broke bread with them. Mary recognised him when he calls her by name.

This incident reminds us of Jesus' words, he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he's bought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know His voice.

Mary's word 'Rabboni' is confusing. John tells us that it means teacher, a lesser word than Lord, which she used earlier. Mary probably threw herself at Jesus' feet and clung to him in a great joy. Jesus commands her not to cling to him because he's ascending to the Father and is therefore unable to resume life as he knew it before.

Interesting in the Gospel, his resurrection and his ascension constitute one event rather than two. He is in the process of Ascension part of the glorification which is necessary to enable the gift of the Holy Spirit. Rather than clinging to Jesus Mary is to go to his brothers, his disciples. He and his disciples are

brothers by virtue of the fact that they share a common Father, my Father, and your Father, my God, and your God. This is the first time in this gospel that Jesus has referred to the disciples in this way. Until now, Jesus alone has been the Son of God. The hour of Jesus shortly culminating in Jesus' ascension to the Father will create a new situation where the God and Father of Jesus will also be the God and Father of Jesus' brethren, and they will no longer be Jesus's disciples, but his brothers.

Mary obeys by going to the disciples and announcing, "I have seen the Lord," and by telling them all that he said to her. So what about this news, this testimony of Mary, this person the disciples was probably kept at arm's length? Is it true? Is it to be trusted? You see, this news was frightening, even threatening, before it was sad, but comforting. But now if the dead don't stay dead, what can you count on?

Death is the natural conclusion to life, a full stop. But resurrection, well, that breaks all the rules and while most of us might admit that the old rules aren't perfect, at least we knew them. We became attached to them. And, you know, particularly in the church, we don't like the challenge of change. Plus, I suspect, this news sounded to the disciples just a

little too good to be true. Think about it. After all they'd been through, there's probably not too much to entertain thoughts that Jesus might come back. I know Jesus had tried to prepare them for this, for all of it, but it just doesn't sink in. But who really is ready for death, let alone new life after death. The gospels gave us a glimpse with the raising of Lazarus earlier.

If you think about it, scripture usually prepares the grounds for amazing things, but if we recognise it and understand. Imagine the possible disappointment if this woman wasn't being honest, or if it was just plain wrong, she was mistaken. Precisely because this news is what we want more than anything else in the world it is terrifying. Already wounded by the loss of their Lord, the disciples fear getting cut out once more on the shards of their broken dreams? Truth be told, I think we're all a little like that.

Maybe that's why we've domesticated the empty tomb. While we've been almost numb to the word 'resurrection', it's just a word, a concept in our doctrine. Maybe the promise of this extra life is just a little frightening to us mere humans. But this is what Jesus promised, and on this day, it's now come to be true. Remember the conversation Jesus had with

Pilate just days ago? "You say that I'm a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth, listens to my voice." Pilate asked him "what is truth?"

Which is where you and I come in. You know, those strange people who call themselves Christians. We need to tell the world this truth. Both the truth of our human condition and of its wonder and glory, but also its shame and fragility, an even greater truth of God's tremendous love for us. A love will go to any lengths and depths, through death itself, in order to bring us life. And we need to tell of this truth not just once, not just today, at Easter, but again and again and again. So little by little this world is beckoned towards this new life, life in all its fullness, life eternal.

So we need to be confident enough to say and drop these hints at resurrection. Don't shy away from it. Don't be frightened by it. And people will say "Okay, tell us remind us of our doubt and fear. And then tell us of God's love and life. Tell us so that we might also experience the wonder and joy of your Easter which has made us so glad and able to rejoice." What you and I do matters. On this day, and every day, it matters more than ever.

There is so much fear and uncertainty in our world, but we know we have the truth. Yes, we do. There is so much darkness and terror and, you know, we can spread a little light, we can talk of peace. There's so much despair, that we can be bold enough and talk about hope, the hope we have in our hearts. Our Lord Jesus has overcome all the evil and sin of this world and death itself has been blown away. He has won a mighty victory and he empowers us to continue in that victory to claim the ground for Jesus, Lord and Saviour. So today we thank God for the blessing of Easter. For Christ is risen. He is risen, indeed. Hallelujah! Amen. Amen.

Have a joyful and peaceful day, and hopefully I'll get to speak to you very soon. God bless

DAILY PRAYERS

Sunday:

God our Father, Creator of all, today is the day of Easter joy. May the risen Lord open our minds and our eyes that we may know him in his risen life.

Monday:

Risen Christ, when we find ourselves behind closed doors, come and stand among us. When we are alone shield us from loneliness.

Tuesday

God our father bless us for we are sad that this Easter-time is not as it should be, that we have not been able to sing your praises in your church.

Wednesday:

Take our lives and let them be consecrated, Lord, to thee; take our moments and our days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Thursday:

Father God be with us at this difficult time, especially when we are alone. May we know that help is always near-from neighbours, family and friends.

Friday:

Loving God here we are. We wish to follow you. Though we cannot do as we want or go where we want, may we find you when you call.

Saturday:

Now the day is over, night is drawing nigh; shadows of the evening steal across the sky. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to thee blest Spirit while all ages run.

CHURCH FAMILY PRAYERS

During the year we remember all in our Church Family.

This week:

Tony Trevithick, Amy Varga, and Carol & Steve Webber

Daily Bible Reading: Here is your next list of daily bible readings for the coming week. If ever there was a time for re-focusing on the Word surely this is it. Please read prayerfully and meditate on what God is saying to you/us day by day.

Readings for April

Mon	13 th	Luke	6–8
Tue	14 th	Luke	9–11
Wed	15 th	Luke	12–14
Thu	16 th	Luke	15–18
Fri	17 th	Luke	19–21
Sat	18 th	Luke	22–24
Sun	19 th	John	1–4

NOTICES

SPRING HARVEST

Like many events this year Spring Harvest has had to be cancelled, but good news, they have Spring Harvest Home, this is running from 13th –17th April. Just search from **Spring Harvest Home** to all the info.

Valerie Cooper

Mint is growing rampant in my garden, if anyone would like a root, I will be only too happy to leave some on your door step, not however potted. Also I have an abundance of Bay Leaves to share. Please give me a ring, number is in the Handbook.

Valerie Cooper

Would anyone like to write some words as to how you are getting on during this time? Do they have any news or stories? If so could you please contact me by 1st May. Thank you.

Graham Redman

NEW BANNER FOR 2020

During this strange time of isolation we are living, with our Church closed and not able to be physically together as a fellowship we can be together in being creative and making a banner in celebration of getting back together again to worship the Lord.

Some of us have already started to knit or crochet flowers. Therefore would you like to join us? How they

will be displayed as a banner is still being considered but in the meantime free patterns are available, which can be printed direct from the website www.LoveCrafts.com. They can be made in any weight of yarn, you can use up all those left over bits and



pieces. You may have flower patterns yourself so please use them. We have time on our hands so let' s use some of it in service of the Lord and to Glorify his holy name in our lovely Church. Any queries please contact me. Thank you. **Caroline Hibbs**