

CONCORD ~ April 2012

Prayer for the Month ...

Almighty God, who through your one and only Son have overcome death, and opened for us the gate of everlasting life,
we pray that you will both put into our minds the longing to do what is right and good, through your generous love, and also give us your ongoing help to achieve that,
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, together one eternal God. Amen.

Northenden Rectory, Ford Lane.
0161 998 2615

Dear Friends,

Firstly, and most importantly, happy and blessed Easter! You will find details of what is going on in our churches in the diary sections below. We look forward to welcoming you to any or all of those times of worship, thoughtfulness and thankfulness.

Two items have hit the news in March which invite comment. One is the announcement of the resignation of Rowan Williams from the Archbishopric of Canterbury. His past ten years have not been easy, but he has, rightly I believe, seen the unity of the church as a moral imperative just as strong as the moral and theological claims of people on all sides of the several disputes which have raged around him ~ to do with women's place in the church, or the claims of gay or lesbian Christians, or other issues. We should thank God for his ministry, and wish him well for his future, as we pray for his successor, whoever he may be.

Related to that has been the recent promotion by the Government of the idea of Gay Marriage, and the launch of their consultation on the matter. The Catholic bishops went public in a big way against this, and Anglican bishops too have voiced their concern. I touched on it briefly in the St.Valentine's edition of Concord in February. There are many points that might be made. The first is that I would not want Gay people to be used as political footballs, so that one party or another can prove its credentials as trendier than thou, or more equal than others. From surveys it would seem that opinion is about equally split as to whether this is a good idea, but the overwhelming majority don't think it is urgent enough to devote the Government's time to it just yet. Or maybe it

is even more Machiavellian, and they think that if they can wrong-foot the Church over this (or simply create a furore), then there will be less notice taken of Church or others' criticism about welfare reform or the like? Or am I being too subtle?

As for the substance of the debate, I am glad that the institution of Civil Partnership exists, since it regulates the financial and inheritance affairs of gay or lesbian couples, and as such makes for social justice for them. It also allows them to express their commitment to each other, and to be fair, in popular speech it is already often described as "getting married", though the law avoids that language explicitly. But the Christian understanding of Marriage is that it is the union of one man and one woman, not just for mutual support, or for sexual relationship, but with the pro-creation of children as part of the potential (even if in many cases this does not work out for one reason or another). It is a God given blessing, not just a human invention. Parliament should not meddle

But now read on! *Greg Forster (Rector)*

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

South Manchester Meeting

There is a meeting for worship

**at the Friends' Meeting House, Wythenshawe Rd.,
at 10.30am every Sunday.**

Children welcome. *Details from Roger Hensman, 980-5158.

The main hall and smaller rooms are available for hire;

~ contact Peter Todhunter (Meeting House Warden) 834-5797

Easter

GSF

For many people I suppose Christmas is the big Christian festival, and it is big, but not the biggest. Our faith revolves around what happened in Jerusalem, in the early days of April 30AD, not what took place thirty-odd years earlier in Bethlehem, important though that was. Jesus' death was a demonstration of God's love, because it effectively drew the poison out of our sin, and was an act of reconciliation between God and humanity. It was also an act of solidarity, as he shared the worst that happens to us ~ death itself. But that was not the end; his return to a more dynamic, liberated life offers hope to us all, if we trust him, in the troubles of this life

and our uncertainties beyond it. But perhaps I am wrong to use the word uncertainties. We speak in the burial service of a "sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life". Because of the Easter triumph of Jesus we can have confidence for the future.

Northenden Methodist Church

Minister: The Revd. David Bown,
5 Kenworthy Lane, Northenden, M 22
0161 - 998-2158

Sunday Services.

1st Sunday every month

Family worship ~ Sunday breakfast club ~ MESSY CHURCH

All start off with breakfast** together at 9.00am, then do activities with your child(ren) followed by a story, songs, and prayer based on the activities ~ finishes about 10.30am.

**Currently £1 per person.

For details contact Amy Carline, 07816 888 704

April 1 st	9.00am	Messy Church
	11.00am	Mr. John Ream
	6.30pm	United Service at St. Wilfrid's
Apr. 6 th	10.30am	Good Friday Meditation
8 th	Easter Day	11.00am The Rev. David Bown Holy Communion
15 th	11.00am	Mrs. Carol Jack
22 nd	11.00am	Mr. Nic Harding, Mr. Duncan Rutter
29 th	11.00am	Northenden Team
May 6 th	9.00am	Messy Church
	11.00am	The Rev. Geoffrey Barnard (Communion)
	6.30pm	United Service ~ The Rev. David Bown
13 th	11.00am	Miss Joyce Burgess.

Community Lunch

Wed. 11th April, 12 noon - 1.30pm ~ normal arrangements
Next lunch ~ Wed. 9th May.

Fun Bingo

Usually last Sat. of the Month (Apr. 28th), 12.00 noon - 2.00pm.

(to be confirmed in weekly notices)

St. Wilfrid's Church, Northenden.

Ford Lane, M22 4WE

Rector ~ the Revd. Greg Forster,
Northenden Rectory, Ford La., M 22 4NQ
Tel. 0161 998 – 2615

Email; gsf @ stwilfridsnorthenden . org . uk

Services:

On Sundays there will be a communion service at 8.00am;

On Thursdays at 10am there will also be a communion service.

We run "Scramblers" ~ which I mustn't call a Sunday School ~
for children from 3½ to 7 ~ in the Church Hall, ...

... and "Sunday Club" ~ for children from 7 upwards ~ in the
Rectory, both between 10.30 and 11.30am Sundays ...

... except when there is a Family Service in church ~

i.e. April 8th (Easter day), May 6th &c.

April 1st 10.30am Holy Communion ("Standard" service)
 3.00pm Nigerian Congregation.
 6.30pm United Evening Worship @ St.Wilfrid's

Thurs. 5th Apr. Maundy Thursday
7.30pm Holy Communion ~ the Lord's Supper
(at St.Wilfrid's)

Fri. 6th Good Friday ~ 10.30am Hymns & Readings

Sun. 8th EASTER DAY
 10.30am **Family Communion**
 6.30pm Evening Worship

*Please contact the Rector if you (or a friend or neighbour) can't get
to church and would like communion at home around Easter time.*

Sun. 15th; 10.30am Holy Communion
 6.30pm Evening worship
22nd 10.30am Holy Communion (Shortened) ~ AGM
 6.30pm Evening Worship
29th 10.30am Morning Prayer
 6.30pm Holy Communion
May 6th 10.30am Family Communion
 3.00pm Nigerian Congregation
 6.30pm United Service at Methodist Church

13th Communion at 10.30am, Evening Worship at 6.30pm

Drop in on St. Wilfrid's ...

On Sundays from 2.00 till 5.00pm the church is open, for private prayer, for enquiries, or just to look around.

On 1st April the church will be open from 2 till about 2.45pm in this way, and then will be in use for a service.

In addition, the church will be open on the last Saturday of each month, from 10am till noon (in parallel with the **Coffee Mornings). This is a new arrangement to compensate for the "lost" open hours on "first Sundays". If you want to visit specifically on a "first" week-end, please contact the Rector.**

The next open week-end is June 16th & 17th ~ displays & tower.

Dates for your Diary ~ it's all happening!



April

Mon. 2nd Women's Group. Rectory, 7.45 for 8.00pm

Wed. 4th Bible Study, Rectory, 8.00pm

(but not on Wed. 11th, or 25th)

Thu. 5th School Easter Service at about 9.15am.

NB the special services over the Easter period.

Sat. 7th Coffee Morning for St. Anne's Hospice, Hall, 10 - 11.30am.

Wed. 18th Bible Study, Rectory, 8.00pm

The Church's annual meeting will be on Sun. 22nd April, after the 10.30am service (i.e. approx. 11.30am) ##

Thurs 26th PCC meeting, 7.30pm

Sat. 28th Coffee Morning, Hall, 10.00 - 11.30am & Church open

Weds. 2nd, 9th May; Bible Studies, Rectory, 8.00pm

May 13th - 19th **Christian Aid Week**

Thurs. 17th Ascension Day service at Christ Church, Didsbury, 7.30

And advance notice of a Concert by Lyra, the Russian Group, on Thurs. 24th May at 7.30pm in church. Details next month.

Please note that the church's membership list (electoral roll) is being reviewed prior to this. If you are not on this, and would like to be, forms can be obtained from Mrs. E. Towler or the Rector.

Sidesmen.

Please note that you are to be visited by the Archdeacon at St. Matthew's Stretford at 7.30pm on Wed. 23rd May.

The Parish Registers –

In Memoriam ...



Jack Cheetham (Parkwood Rd.) 80

Jack died a few months ago, just as I sent the next month's Concord to the printers. I therefore thought I had included notice of his death then ~ but hadn't. My apologies to Joyce, and Michael and Rebecca and the rest of his family, for the error. As an architect he was involved in designing, among other things, the old Royle Green Infants' School which many readers will remember fondly, and (as a church member, in retirement) a scheme for a ramp for the disabled at the church which never came to anything when the grants we had hoped to tap into were discontinued.

Ashley Shaw (Newall Green) 24, Kathleen Tyrer (Shawdene Rd.) 82,
Andy Taylor (Royle Green Rd.) 52,

Also in March there were two sad deaths in the village which should be recorded. Adam Gough, who lived on the caravan park on Ford Lane, appears to have drowned in the Mersey after celebrating his 44th birthday. A shock to all his friends.

Also a shock to friends and the many people in Northenden whom he has helped in one way or another, was the sudden death of Dan Moynihan. He had been ill, with what he thought was just a severe cough, and neighbours were keeping an eye on him, but to no avail. He lived much of his life in Northenden, and became a tireless campaigner, through the Civic Society, for the good of the community. He would not just speak about some poor planning decision, or whatever, but would produce chapter and verse from an Act of Parliament to show why it was wrong. But beneath the energetic public figure was a very private individual, with his own faith and ways of doing things. He served as secretary for the Civic Society for about ten years, but stood down a year or so ago. Another of his campaigns was to see the Oscar-winning local actor, Robert Donat, honoured with a blue plaque on his childhood home. After some years Dan was proud to be able to attend the unveiling of the plaque, and meet Donat's son, last year. *O si sic omnes!*

Women's Group. The next meeting will be on Monday 2nd April, in the Rectory as usual from 7.45ish for an 8.00pm start. Our visitors are Eileen and Chris Howe, from Altrincham Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, to speak on the work of the association. They will probably be accompanied by a guide dog user, and a dog. After that the next meeting will be on *May 14th* to avoid the bank holiday; ~ timing as usual, speaker; Joan Mycock describing a visit to Egypt.

Understanding Syria

That is perhaps an ambitious title; you could almost wonder how many Syrians understand Syria. (And it is not a small country, far away; we have links in the parish with people over there.) But here goes!

I suggest the key is to recognise that Syria is a country with no ethnic or religious majority. Even Sunni Muslim Arabs, who represent the largest group, I believe, are barely 50% of a very mixed population (but I am ready to be corrected on the precise figures.) Perhaps one Syrian in eight is a Christian ~ but from a mixture of different historic churches; Orthodox, Armenian, Catholic, and others which are less well known. There are people who are ethnic Kurds, ethnic Arabs whether from town or desert, and other small ethnic groups; Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, and also a number of other groups which we might in ignorance think of as Muslim ~ Druze, and Alawi. These two are probably from what once were distinct ethnic groups, who resented the take over of their country by the ethnic Arabs who led the Islamic invasion of the 7th cent. CE. They preserved their identity in the mountains by creating the impression of following Islam, while holding quite idiosyncratic beliefs on the quiet. (I simplify!)

It would seem (and my source admitted that detailed information is hard to come by) that the Alawis hold some kind of Trinitarian belief, in which the one God has appeared on earth in triads ~ one of which is comprised of 'Ali (Mohammed's grandson), Mohammed himself, and a Persian follower of his. Now if that is true (and even if it is not, but sufficient outsiders think it is) you can see how explosive that is ~ worse than simply burning a Qur'an ~ in the eyes of an orthodox Sunni Muslim. Shi'a, especially from Iran, might find the focus on 'Ali, and the Persian connection, a mitigating factor. Over the centuries this heresy ~ blasphemy ~ has provoked Sunnis to feel justified in persecuting, sometimes violently, their

Alawi neighbours. There are generations of bad blood between the communities. This is part of the current picture, I believe.

And the key is that the present régime is led by Alawis. Reporters often say this, without spelling out the implications. Over the past sixty years or so, since France gave over its mandate to administer the country, Alawis have, allegedly, infiltrated their way into senior positions in the military and in the ruling Ba'ath party. They are therefore in a position to pursue their own agenda, and protect their own interests, in a way which their group has never been able to do before. The veneration paid to a Persian and to the Shi'a hero 'Ali perhaps explains their ease with an alliance with Iran; their history of pogroms perhaps sheds extra light on the way the lives of some of their own fellow-citizens are treated so cheaply ~ there is little fellow feeling to work with or appeal to; and their past experience would lead them to expect little fellow feeling for their group if they lose power. We are wrong to assume that being in the same country means being of the same mind.

I am sure it is even more complex than that, mark you: into the equation add the Crusades, during which Syria made up three separate Frankish kingdoms, and subjection to Turkish and then French imperial rule. Add the nearness of Israel and its links with the USA, and no doubt more besides to muddy the waters.

I was initially surprised to hear of Syrian Christians supporting the Assad régime. I don't know how the Christian community there feels now, but I can see how a régime from a minority could seem a safety net for them, and how they might fear a government made up of the majority Sunnis, buoyed up with the thought of purifying their nation from blasphemy. Minorities stick together. Our prayers for our Christian brothers and sisters in Syria ~ and we should pray for *them* as well as praying for a general restraint of evil ~ should be mindful of the fears and dilemmas they face, while we just look on from a distance and perhaps take a simplistically moral view.

It also seemed, initially, to be a good thing that various Arab nations were taking a lead in trying to restrain the Syrian régime. I still think that that is the best hope of a resolution, but I can now see that the Saudis are not dis-interested brokers, but see themselves as guardians not only of the Muslim holy places, but of Islamic orthodoxy in its Sunni form. There are wheels within wheels, as they say.

But what should be done? The implication of that question, thrown by the media into the ether, and aimed at governments, or the UN, or whoever, is some kind of military action, as in Libya, or, in the end, in Bosnia. The horror of what has been shown on TV is very emotive, and our revulsion is justified. But any decision about intervention should be made rationally, not emotionally, despite our memories ~ perhaps guilty memories ~ of places in Rwanda, or the Balkans. Within the Christian moral tradition people have spoken about "Just War", and that is a helpful framework to use. It helped shape the international agreements and law which underlies the religiously neutral work of the UN. The first point is perhaps that war should be the last option, not the first so that diplomacy and other pressure (which our and other governments are already applying) is not a cop out, but an essential part of the response; what can we do? We are doing it!

Two more questions come next. Is the "cause" just? and, Is it likely to succeed? If our revulsion says the cause is just, perhaps an awareness of the history will warn us that we are not dealing with one isolated revolting incident, but a long drawn out field of incidents lasting generations. Justice may want to recognise past wrongs against Alawis, even if it also must insist that one past injustice does not justify another. But would intervention succeed? What would success be? Could a just solution be imposed on such a complex community as Syria? Would we find ourselves faced, in a year or so's time, with calls to "do something" to protect Alawite, or Christian, minority communities against massacres by a vengeful near-majority community, or desert-Arab invaders? And in particular, would not intervention by European powers very soon be cast as a new Crusade among Muslim communities in the Near East, apparently proving the Assad régime's claim that they are victims of an age-old animosity. And finally, what intervention would actually succeed in restraining and reducing blood-shed? Recent experience might warn us against thinking that!

So, despite the emotion and revulsion at the horrors we have been made aware of, I still reckon that diplomatic and economic pressure is the only just course of action, coupled with humanitarian aid, and legal threats ~ at least on the part of the European powers. And as Christians? To pray the situation into God's hands and God's justice.

Magpie...

... devotees of Springwatch, Autumnwatch, &c on the BBC will know that the presenter Chris Packham knows everything ~ well, almost. Someone asked him back in the autumn series about blackbirds with black beaks, and he was stumped. Black blackbirds, it was ~ the males. "They're probably youngsters," he ventured. Of course the next week the real answers flooded in by email. "They're Scandinavian birds, taking a winter holiday in Britain." Well, one of them has been holidaying in the Rectory Garden, having the occasional tiff with his Saxon counterparts (he is a Viking, after all!) and may even be thinking of settling down with a local lass, by the look of his behaviour ~ unless of course, she came over with him.

... The Spread Eagle

... it was such a lovely day. Just right for a round of golf, thought the vicar, as he looked out of the window. What a shame it was Sunday! His conscience tussled with his love of sport, and he picked up the phone, to call his curate and ring in sick. Off he drove, before anyone would be near the church, to a course miles away where no-one would know him. "Did you see that," the angel asked the Almighty. "You're not going to let him pull a sickie are you? Punish him!" The Almighty smiled. The vicar tee'ed up at the first. It was a perfect drive, and was it the wind that caught it, and wafted it a full 350 yards to the green, where it bounced twice and went into the hole? Even Nicklaus, or Tiger Woods in his heyday, could not have done better! "What a shot, but I thought you were going to punish him," complained the angel. "Of course," said the Almighty, still smiling. "Who can he tell about it?"

The Old Rectory lawn has seen some famous visitors, and Magpie heard of another just the other day. One of the church garden parties or fairs in the 60s or 70s was apparently opened by John Humphreys, doyen of the Today Programme on BBC, when he was a relatively young reporter in Manchester. His predecessor, the late great Brian Redhead, apparently lived in Northenden for a while too, but then, you knew that, didn't you?

Magpie noted some months ago that Northenden is a unique place-name. So, it seems, is Baguley, but only just. There are lots of Bagleys, but we have acquired a wandering U somehow. The -ley bit means *wood* which surprises the experts, because it does not usually go with habitation. The first bit may be someone's name (Bacga?), or an animal ~ but what? Candidates are a ram, a small pig, a fox or a badger.

The Organist at St. Wilfrid's, Josh Stephens, can make quite an impression when he wants to, as we heard at his Recital here in January. He has made an impression with his peers and tutors too: On Tues. 28th of Feb. a couple of days after a debilitating tummy bug, he competed in the RNCM Organ Recital Prize competition. It was between a fourth year undergraduate, a first year postgraduate, and himself, adjudicated by John Scott-Whitely... and he won! As a result he will get the opportunity to perform recitals in Cathedrals in the North of England, including (he thinks) Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, and York Minster.

Magpie takes a dim view of hacking into people's emails ~ but does that mean it is wrong to be interested in the emails of the Syrian dictator, as revealed by the Guardian, which also takes a dim view of phone and email hacking? Or does the fact that his opponents in a Civil War did it, and not a hack private eye or journalist, make it all right? Incidentally, Magpie would like to hear from anyone who has hacked into his mobile phone messages, because he cannot get into them himself.

A Magpie Special ... Solving the Nation's Finances!

Readers will remember that at the beginning of March the news broke that a couple of police forces were going out to tender for private security companies to carry out various "police" duties, such as investigating crimes, or even patrolling some districts. This raised howls of protest, since the ersatz police would be answerable to shareholders, rather than the crown and the public. It turned out that some of the story was rather exaggerated, but not entirely. We were assured that this was intended to save money, some forensic work was already contracted out and the world had not disintegrated, and still only police officers would arrest us.

Phew! We can all breathe again ~ but the idea does throw up some interesting possibilities. What about the tax system? What if collection of taxes were put out to tender? Imagine that the Government estimate that our Banks ought to pay £20 Billion in tax next year. (It's probably more, but this will show the system, and everyone knows the Banks are fair game, don't we?) So Company X signs up to pay the Government this £20 Bn up front, and then they collect what is due with State authority, with a little bit extra as their fee for their *service* to the banks of collecting their dues. (Let's reckon the Banks owe them the £20 Bn from 6th April, but don't have an overdraft facility, so have to pay overdraft fees for

every day they fail to pay up.) And if Company Y bids £21 Bn for the privilege of collecting the £20 Bn plus their “fees”, so much the better for the Government. There’s plenty of precedent, you know! That’s probably how Matthew and Zacchaeus worked in the Bible, after all, before they saw the light.

Once upon a time the Navy worked that way. Francis Drake went round the world as a private agent of the Government, with letters of marque to pursue the war with Spain, and his profit, split with shareholders who included the Queen, came from intercepting a Spanish Treasure fleet in the Pacific.

So how could this idea be developed further? How about privatising Parliament? Repeal the 1832 Reform Act, throw Peterloo and its Northenden connections to the winds, and reintroduce Rotten Boroughs ~ with the profits to the State! (Keep 650 MPs too, or even increase the number to maximise the take.) How much would you ask for a seat in Parliament? Given a few elections (we could shorten the term of Parliaments too, from five to three years, or even the Americans’ two) we could wipe out the National Debt. Just think of the advantages. Almost like selling peerages! Instead of Prime Ministers cosying up to Rupert Murdoch he could buy a seat for himself, and then they could make him Minister of Information, or Minister of Culture, or even Minister of Truth.

So what about it? A penny for your thoughts!

Magpie

1 / 4 / '12.