

20 ~ J a n u a r y ~ 09

Prayer for the Month.

Almighty God,
you know that we seem surrounded by many great threats, and can feel so helpless in the face of them, so that we cannot always stand upright;

give us such strength and protection as may support us through all dangers and carry us through all trials;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Based on a historic collect in the Alternative Services Book.

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Dear Friends,

Firstly, a brief note of thanks from Sue and myself to people who sent us Christmas Cards. As you may have seen from the joint card in church, we did not send a vast number of local cards this Christmas to people whom we would be seeing, but donated to Send-a-Cow instead ~ so please don't feel left out if you did not get a card in return.

Later in this issue I have made some comments about the Congestion Charge vote. I had one or two comments that my earlier pieces on this subject were too political. Perhaps, but I make the following defence. I believe this is, or was, an issue which will significantly affect the parish, so that comment was appropriate. I also believe that it was a moral issue, given the way the rejected scheme charged the few to benefit the many, and was promoted in an "I'm all right, Jack" fashion. I believe that our relationship with God involves the way we behave ~ our morality ~ as well as the way we pray and what we believe, so moral comment is very much in order in a church magazine.

And thirdly, I would argue that politics itself is a moral activity. That is, it voices and then puts into practice moral attitudes, which may be good or not so good. It does not cease to be morality because it is done in groups by organised parties and the attitudes are shared rather than personal and private. So comment on shared moral activity is in order in these pages. I believe that we

Politics voices and puts into practice our moral attitudes, good or bad.

should all weigh up our political decisions morally. Also, in this particular case, I do not reckon what I said had any party political significance, given that the various parties were themselves split on this matter.

On a more domestic level, can I thank everyone who is involved in circulating Concord, and our advertisers for supporting us. I hope that the adverts in turn support you. Subscriptions (if you pay annually) are now due, though do not worry if your distributor waits until the lighter evenings before knocking on your door to collect them. Thanks to our distributors!

I shall be commenting later in this issue about the new year and its prospects. For the moment, may I simply wish you all a happy, successful and prosperous new year.

Yours faithfully,
Greg Forster

HAPPY NEW YEAR ! ... HAPPY NEW YEAR ? GSF

My new year's good wishes in my letter are genuine, but I cannot help wondering whether they will come true. There is so much doom and gloom in what the media, and in what the politicians, have to say. Do we believe them? Or is it a matter of sensation inflation on the one part, or point scoring on the other?

More to the point, will we learn anything from what is happening? I find myself asking how one of the Old Testament prophets would have spoken about our situation. Is it judgment, or opportunity, or just one of those things ~ part of an inevitable economic cycle?

Firstly, they would, I think, have championed the poor. As the late Bp. David Sheppard reminded us, God shows a bias to the poor, and in the way the situation is handled it would be immoral and culpable if the poor (in the rich countries, or across the world in the developing countries) were made to bear the brunt of cuts and costs and inconvenience.

They would not, I think, have seen it as inevitable. For them history was not the blind outworking of impersonal forces, but the interaction of God's purposes and human choices. Judgment is entwined with wrong choices. Wellbeing comes when people act justly and love mercy. And where, if anywhere, are the wrong choices? I suggest (an old testament prophet would probably have been more forthright!) that we have built too much

on debt ~ either as individuals or as financial institutions Far from being a “capitalist” society and system we have become a “debtist” system, using cards or insecure credit instead of real capital to try to create more credit, which may not be real wealth ~ and the bubble may be bursting.

We have become a debtist system.

The Old Testament is, as I have written before, very wary of “usury” ~ using money to make itself and as an end in itself, and trapping poorer people with commitments they cannot meet. When this business is sorted out both institutions and individuals will have to work with what they have, not what they can borrow from the thin air of their uncertain futures. If we do not do that, then the bubble will burst again, and again, and people will be hurt again and again. And somewhere in that mix is God’s judgment on a hollow system.

But is there a blessing, or perhaps another warning, within the judgment? Part of what triggered the crisis financial was a shortage of raw materials, a hike in their prices, and a consequent panic over the cost of fuel, and other commodities. The fact that the “global downturn” has led to falling prices and will by a quirk of statistics reduce inflation should not lead us to forget the original problem. Between us we are asking for too much out of a limited earth. I am torn. I like comfort, and the chance to travel, and the things I have, but maybe it is God’s blessing if I ~ we all are forced to learn to live on less.

We ask too much of a limited planet

So will it be a happy new year? Please God, yes ~ but as we work through the hard times they will only be happy if our world learns these lessons ~ and maybe that means looking more to God as well as finding a new economic miracle.

their thanks for £150. Reports of the Centre are among the leaflets and papers available at the back of St. Wilfrid's church.

The Fair too was a steady success: never so crowded that it was uncomfortable, but always busy, with Brownies in evidence in all quarters. About £980 was raised ~ thanks! There is one lonely and adorable dog, with its puppy, waiting to be claimed as raffle prize no. 258. If you still have your ticket, check it, and claim her from church.

Drop in ... 2 – 4pm. (*-ish!*)

St. Wilfrid's church is normally open each Sunday
from 2.00 – dusk,

for prayer, visiting and just looking round, enquiries about baptisms, weddings, ancestor hunting, ... &c.

But building work is going on; the church may be closed to general visitors, though if it is and you have a specific query call at the Rectory during those times.

It's All Happening ..., for your diaries ...

Sat. 3rd Jan. Remember the Farmers' Market

Wed. 14th Bible Study, Rectory, 8.00pm.

21st, 28th ditto.

Thu. 22nd P.C.C meeting, 7.30pm Church Hall

Sat. 31st Coffee Morning. 10am – Church Hall.

(NB too the Civic Society meeting
about ideas for Northenden's future)

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

FROM THE REGISTERS;

IN MEMORIAM ...

Helena Carrington (Middleton/Lee House) 87,
Rene Rowland (Bartley Rd.) 86, Jean Hartley (Banstead Ave) 84,
Fred Hodcroft (Yew Tree Ave.) 88, Joan Brewis (Howard Rd.)

Repairs and Improvements. GSF

I noted in the diary section that we are having work done on the church building, and that this may disrupt some of our opening times and activities. Having said that, the major disruption inside the building is over (I hope!) and the ceiling planks which were dangerous have been screwed securely into place, so we will normally now be open on Sunday afternoons.

You may like to know that when the slates were removed and before the waterproof roofing felt was put in place, a layer of insulation was laid over the ceiling. I may be biased, but it seemed that the building was almost instantly warmer. The scope for draughts has also been cut down by this move. But the dust that came down ~ 130 years worth ~ was unbelievable!

The building
seemed warmer

I am sorry that the scaffolding, and shuttering which is now a necessity (thanks to "Health and Safety") for a job like this, has obstructed access to a number of graves and "tower plot" monuments to those who have been cremated. I should have realised this in advance and warned those who might be affected. My apologies.

Work on the south aisle slates is finished; that on the north aisle remains to be done. Work is in hand to replace both the nave gable cross, which fell in a storm in 2007, and also the downspouts from the upper roof, which were dangerous, or had actually fallen.

While work is in progress the churchyard will be locked overnight ~ a step designed, like the metal shuttering, to prevent interference with the building while scaffolding is in place. We hope that the whole task will be completed early in February, but this will partly depend on the weather. There is also a standard two-week holiday period in the building trades over Christmas and the New Year break.

MILLENNIUM BANNER

The start of a new year is an excuse to mention again the banner we prepared (in 1999) for the beginning of the new millennium, and publicise the fact that an illustrated leaflet describing the banner and listing its artists is available in church.

Magpie ...

... has heard all the rumpus about the toilets on Mill Lane. What a palaver! First there was the campaign to get the old ones replaced and reopened, and now they are there there's another campaign to get them closed in case someone uses them wrongly. You can never satisfy humans, can you? What are all the cyclists going to do? What are all the walkers going to do? What are all the canoeists going to do? What are all the children

from that nice new adventure playground going to do? It's quite a long way to the bushes on the other side of the Mersey! (The ones on the Northenden side have been butchered, of course.)

... Canoeists? Yes. There is a scheme to set up facilities for Manchester's youth service to have mixed canoe and cycle treks between our Park and Chorlton Water Park, and the toilets on the spot are an integral part of their scheme. After all, they are a great convenience, aren't they?

... and while we are flying around the Riverside Park, how many people have had a go on the slide so far? Yes, M. knows that it is not open yet, and that the ground around it is a quagmire, but he has seen some adults (and the odd child) having a go. There are still bushes to plant, and the fencing to tidy up, and no doubt all the regulation health and safety checks. But who will open the children's area? (Will it be formally opened?) Will it be a child, or a school, or a toddler group, or if it is the Lord Mayor, will he slide down it in full robes? Will he be allowed to if he wants to? M. knows some other grown ups who want a go.

... was rather saddened to see how crowded Woolworth's was in mid December. The closing down sale drew more customers than their normal operations, which must have been galling for the staff, as they saw their jobs going with the stock.

... and had to fly sharply away as the flag flapped: yes, the St. George's flag for St. Wilfrid's church has been replaced after a long while. The previous one got torn to shreds when it stuck on the weather vane in a storm 18 months ago. Now there is a new one, smaller so that it should not catch again.

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 Lesley Thomson (491-1323)

The main hall and smaller rooms are available for hire;
~ contact Peter Todhunter (Meeting House Warden) 834-5797,

The Year of Mark

GSF

Most churches in this country work with a "lectionary" or set pattern of bible readings for their Sunday services. This year the readings from the gospels in the lectionary are largely taken from Mark's gospel (with some gaps filled from John.) So I thought it would be worth writing briefly about Mark's gospel here, at the beginning of the year.

Firstly, a comment about gospels as a whole. They are not quite what we would expect from a biography, but the ancient world expected something different from its biographers than we do. The gospels match what was expected of a biography nicely.

They did not expect wall to wall coverage, or psychological probing; notable sayings and notable incidents highlighted the character, and impact of the subject on his world. The gospels fit that bill quite nicely. Apparently there was some discussion in the ancient world about the relation between biography and history, but here again, our gospels fit neatly within the range of what a historical biography might be expected to be. As far as history goes, again, they had different expectations from us, but set a great store on the evidence of participant eye-witnesses.

We are afraid that such writers or informants will be biased, and give a distorted picture. With some wisdom the ancient

Where we fear bias, the ancient world recognised personal insight.

world argued that such people were actually better placed to know what was really going on than a detached and distant outsider. Richard Bauckham, the New Testament scholar formerly at Manchester University, has argued this point well in a recent book, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. He argues that Mark gives clear hints of the eye-witness nature of his writing using techniques that his contemporaries would recognise.

So, what then about Mark? His writing is abrupt and urgent. He wanted to get over a message that called for attention and a response. He did so in language which is not polished and grand. We are spoiled by having heard the grand cadences of the Authorised Version, or more recent "church" bibles read in the formalised setting of a church service. Mark's gospel was probably intended for use in worship, but in other settings too, and it uses quite colloquial and sometimes quite

awkward language (some people have seen behind it the blunt preaching and story-telling of Peter.) Mark earned a nick-name, Stumpy-fingers, which may say as much about the shape of his writing as the shape of his hands.

Mark's gospel is the briefest of the four. You could read it in an hour or so, if you put your mind to it, and I dare to suggest that you should. We spoil the impact of the gospels by chopping them into "manageable" chunks to read in church, or in our Quiet Times. Such reading is worth while, but in ancient times a book was published by being read, out loud and as a whole (or at least in long sections, with a break for wine part way through). That is how we should read the gospels (with or without the wine) as some of us experienced last year in Margaret Young's project. So give it a try one wet Sunday afternoon this year, and use a version you can understand easily.

Try reading Mark's gospel through one wet Sunday afternoon this year!

So what has Mark got to tell us? His opening sentence gives us the clue: the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, God's Son. What Messiah actually will mean, and what it is to be God's Son, his minor characters do not yet know, though his readers have a fair idea, and his hero is committed to. So the first eight chapters are punctuated with the question, "who is this?" who heals the sick, stills storms and challenges the religious establishment. Half way through Peter blurts out the answer; "You are the Messiah." Then for the rest of the gospel he, and the readers ~ us ~ learn what being Messiah will actually mean, for Jesus himself, and for us who reap the benefits of his Messiahship, for he came "to give his life as a ransom for many." So, read all about it! Over to you.

Read Mark Learn ...

GSF

I suggested you might read Mark's gospel. Here is a taster, though I am doing what I suggested was a mistake: chopping it into a "manageable" chunk. This is Mark's description of a typical day or so in Jesus' early ministry, from chapter 1. Also typically, it ends with an implied question: who is Jesus?

Now after the betrayal of John (the Baptist) Jesus came into Galilee with the God's message of good news. "Now's the time we've been waiting for," he said, "and God's kingdom

is near. Change your hearts, and commit yourself to the good news."

So as he was making his way beside the sea of Galilee Jesus saw Simon, and Andrew Simon's brother throwing a net into the sea. They were fish-catchers, you see. He said to them, "Join up with me, and I will turn you into man-catchers!"

Straightaway they put their nets aside and followed him. He went a bit further, and saw James bar-Zebedee and John his brother, and they were in their boat, sorting out the nets. He called them right away, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired hands and went off after him.

They went on into Capernaum. Now on the Sabbath, when he had gone to Synagogue, he immediately set about teaching, and people were stunned by what he taught them. There he was teaching them, you see, as if he had some authority, and not like the Scholars.

All at once, there, in their synagogue, was a man with an impure spirit, and he yelled out with the words, "What are you interfering with us for, Jesus from Nazareth? Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are ~ God's holy man."

Now Jesus told him off, with the words, "Hold your tongue, and come out from him!"

The impure spirit shook him to and fro, and cried out in a loud voice and came out from him. Everyone was wonder-struck, so as to quiz each other with the words, "What is this? New teaching ~ with authority too ~ and he actually gives orders to impure spirits and they do what he says.

Straightaway rumours about him went out everywhere into the whole region of Galilee.

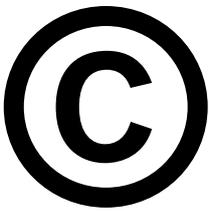
So straightaway they left the synagogue and went to Simon and Andrew's house, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a temperature, so they told him about her at once and he went in, took her by the hand and

sat her up. The fever left her and she began to look after them.

Later on, after sundown, people brought to him everyone who was poorly, and those who were demon-struck. Indeed, the whole town was there, gathered in front of the door, and he cured many people who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and expelled many demons ~ he wouldn't let the demons say anything because they knew who he was.

Mark, ch. 1 vv14 ff.

After the vote, how might we react?



Congestion ©harge

Greg Forster

I must admit to being surprised at how decisively the voting in our Congestion Charge referendum turned down the proposal. On the positive side, it was a very good "turnout" ~ if postal voting can be called a "turnout". 53% or so is not far short of a general election response, and about twice what we might expect in a local election, so good for Greater Manchester! I should like to see a break down of voting by post-code area; it might suggest what people were voting against ~ any quasi-tax, or a quasi-tax which they themselves would have to pay.

I had expected a far closer result, however, and my thoughts and comments were actually geared up to a "Yes" vote. The proposals needed a great deal of improvement, and this vote is not least a request to the transport planners to go back to the

This is an opportunity to devise a fairer scheme. drawing board and devise a scheme which extends its benefits more widely and fairly. There are also some improvements which do not need a vast injection of Government funding in order to implement them: better timetabling and information; better cycle lanes; rationalisation of the bus-jams on Wilmslow Rd.; maintenance of buses into Piccadilly, to name a few. So this should be seen as an opportunity, rather than a failure.

I just hope that the transport people, locally or in Westminster, do not act like the billionaire Barclay brothers following an electoral snub in the Channel Island of Sark on the

same day. Taking your ball home ~ shutting down your business ~ and refusing to play if you don't get your own way is childish.

And on a related matter, I received a full response to letters which I had written about the TIF bid, which was gratifying. One of the points that were made in that was a promise that the matter of renewed stations on the Altrincham to Stockport heavy rail line would be reviewed seriously in the new year. Let's hope that this is done, whatever the referendum has said, since it was one of the items that never got into the TIF funding scheme in the first place. We need to keep up the pressure over this. Northenden Station ...