

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS!

THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF **CLARE BAPTIST CHURCH**

To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known



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This Time Next Year...

Anniversaries are funny old things: a bone of contention when a spouse forgets, a day of celebration or a day of sadness, a time for joy or a time for regret, all these and more packed into a moment in time when we look backwards. Because that's what anniversaries do; they make us hark back, to recall what the world looked like then, or try to empathise if the commemorated event occurred before our times.

They're also deeply personal; even national anniversaries like Remembrance Day in November resonates in every life uniquely. We might all together observe the two-minute silence, but we will have our own reasons, our own histories, our own responses to the events that are being remembered. Those of us who are post-war babies will have been shaped by those who experienced World Wars first-hand, either through active participation or because they kept the home fires burning.

And then there are the anniversaries that are personal, rooted in family or individual. The anniversary of a wedding, birth, death, or any other of the myriad ways we mark the passing of time – all of these may not resonate far beyond the family, but are all meaningful and a cause to reflect with a tear or a smile.

During this current pandemic, anniversaries are starting to come thick and fast; we've already passed the first anniversary of the first lockdown, and we're rapidly approaching the first anniversary of "Clap For Carers". Pretty soon it'll be the anniversary of the first attempt to leave lockdown, followed by "Eat Out To Help Out" and then the second lockdown, then the third one and so on until we start the second anniversaries.

But hopefully it won't be too long before some of these anniversaries fade into the distance once we work out what post-COVID-19 life defines as normal for us. Maybe all of them will disappear totally like the Spanish flu pandemic or the Black Death, becoming

answers in history exams rather than dates in the diary. Certainly, it feels like we're living in times that will form large chunks of the history syllabus in generations to come (to the pandemic, I would add Brexit and Donald Trump's presidency as events of the past five years that will become classroom topics).

Of course, Christianity, like all faiths, has its own anniversaries that have long outlived the original participants (well, the earthly ones at least). But unlike other faiths, Christianity's anniversaries resonate far beyond the confines of its walls and followers. Though Passover and Holi occur at this time of year, it is to Christianity that the chocoholics of this country will owe a debt of thanks, even if bunnies are largely absent from all gospel accounts of Holy Week.

There are other anniversaries to come; it won't be long until we reach Ascension Day and shortly afterwards, Pentecost. As the church's "birthday", the day of Pentecost serves as a reminder that God's gift of the Holy Spirit is offered to anyone and everyone.

And that's the thing about anniversaries; though they are markers in the diary, they are just another day like any other. We may remember our wedding anniversary, but that doesn't mean that we're not married on any other day. Likewise, we may remember the fallen of the World Wars, but that doesn't mean that they only matter on a certain day in November; the echoes of those long-finished conflicts still resonate around us each and every day in one form or the other. And even as we mark off the twelve months since COVID-19 affected so much of our lives, we still live in the reality of a world changed, for many, irrevocably.

But anniversaries, such as Easter (and Pentecost) remind us that God who was involved in human history then is still involved today. And that's something worth celebrating – with chocolate!

Paul Graham

Rita and I came up with the ideas of asking people to write about any way in which they have felt blessed in the last strange difficult year.

My musings on the subject:

1. There were blessings already in my life.

Many of us can identify blessing we already had in our lives which become more appreciated: a relationship with God, a caring and all-embracing church fellowship, a distant but loving family, a fit tech-savvy minister with a committed family, a community with a supportive heart as well as glorious local countryside and in my case – a husband, plenty of books and a piano.

We bought a different car in January which we are both happy to drive and I bought a new mobile phone (set up by daughter Rachel on her last visit three weeks before lockdown) which deals with the social media apps without grizzling about not having room for them. We would never have achieved these things once the pandemic struck and our family contact has been enriched by the new software - blessings in place indeed.

2. An unexpected blessing.

I have seen it as a blessing during the last months we have depended on more Sunday Zoom breakout rooms and phone calls to make contact with people. In some ways it has proved very rewarding because I spent longer time with people rather hurrying off to catch someone else at coffee time about some Church business.

3. Blessings found in the small things.

The Spring Autumn and Winter Watch programme have encouraged us to see beauty in the small things as well as magnificent landscapes. Chris Packham encourages the viewing public to take a single leaf and look at its detail and beauty. Hopefully, all of us when we find a leaf or see a sunset can examine the colour and intricacies and feel blessed.

Simon Armitage, the Poet Laureate, makes the same point about adjustment in his poem *"It ain't what you do it's what it does to*

you.” He writes in the voice of someone whose ambitions have not been realised: he has not backpacked America with a Bowie knife, he has not visited the Taj Mahal, nor has he parachuted from light aircraft but he “has skimmed a stone across Black Moss (reservoirs)” and “has held the wobbly head of a boy at the day centre and stroked his fat hand.”



These actions produced sensations inside he says **which are** *“part of that sense of something else. That feeling I mean.”* What would we call a blessing? Have we adjusted our expectations to find joy and fulfilment in different things?

4. Blessings preparing us for the future.

As I grow older, I may not be able to do as much as I did. Lockdown has helped prepare for that time. I have managed without holidays, visits to theatres and cinema and meals out; I don't expect to drive long distances; I have signed up for regular Asda deliveries and I have delighted afresh in the everyday things. All these are preparation blessings.

When lockdown times change, we are going to need vision and courage if we are going to be blessed and bless others. The lines from the USA Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman's poem at President Joe

Biden's Inauguration point us in this direction:

*"The new dawn blossoms as we free it.
When the day comes, we step out of the
Shade, aflame and unafraid.
For there is always light,
If only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it."*

(I am reminded of Rita's vision of the light filling our town.)
We pray that we may be blessed and *know* that we have been. Let
us remember that we are here to help others to find the blessings
in their lives. God works through us.

Janet Shaw



**Interactive Easter Cross
outside the Baptist Church**



**The Easter Story
through the window
of the Priory Church**

THE CENTRE OF THE BIBLE

Q: What is the **shortest** chapter in the Bible?

A: Psalms 117

Q: What is the **longest** chapter in the Bible?

A: Psalms 119

Q: Which chapter is the **centre** of the Bible?

A: Psalms 118

Fact: There are 594 chapters **before** Psalms 118

Fact: There are 594 chapters **after** Psalms 118

Q: What is the **centre verse** in the Bible?

A: Psalms 118:8

Q: Does this verse say something significant about God's perfect will for our lives?

The next time someone says they would like to find God's perfect will for their lives and that they want to be in the centre of his will, just send them to the centre of His Word,

Psalms 118:8

***"It is better to trust in the Lord
than to put confidence in man."***

Now isn't that odd how this worked out
(or was God in the centre of it)?

When things get tough, always remember.....
Faith doesn't get you around trouble, it gets you through it!!!!

***Author Unknown
Submitted by Rita Bateman***

NOAH'S ARK

An Inspirational Christian Story



Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark.

Don't miss the boat.

Remember we are all in the same boat.

Plan ahead.

It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

Stay fit. When you're 60 years old,
someone may ask you to do something really big.

Don't listen to critics;
just get on with the job that needs to be done.

Build your future on high ground.

For safety sake, travel in pairs.

Speed isn't always an advantage.
The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

When you're stressed, float awhile.

Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs;
the Titanic by professionals.

No matter the storm, when you are with God,
there's always a rainbow waiting.

Author Unknown
Submitted by Rita Bateman



“Have you had any surprise blessings during lockdown?”

Well now. What a strange but surprisingly telling question! When taking a first look at the lockdowns, “blessings” is not a word that quickly comes to mind! Restricted mobility, restricted contact with others, restrictions on shopping, restrictions on sport & leisure, restrictions on the variety of surroundings (“Stay at home”)! Doesn’t seem very fertile soil for “blessings”. However, there have been some.

One blessing has been boredom. Yes, boredom! It has stimulated me to take more notice of what is around me. Faced with the same surroundings, the same times, the same places I’ve been made to look at them more closely.

There’s food for a start. Often meals have just been punctuation marks for the day with sometimes little time to enjoy them. Now they have become opportunities to savour what I am eating; to take time to notice subtleties of flavour and texture. To realise, sometimes, how much work has gone into a meal and perhaps be a bit more thankful.

Then there’s the daily exercise, the “Boris walk”. Especially as the seasons have been passing, there’s quite a lot to see and even marvel at. The astonishing variety of shapes in trees in full-leaf provokes some admiration. To see those same trees later stripped of leaves and become amazing architectural shapes (especially against a brilliant blue sky) has sometimes been breath-taking. Then there’s the changing colours of flowers bursting out of hedge-rows; a succession of plants and colours – yellow, blue, red, purple – as the weeks go by. And it’s prompted the question, “How has all this come about?” Yes, I know people have been planting and caring over the years, but why such a variety and beauty? It’s all been a blessing.

Then there’s people. These are not always seen as a blessing! The heaving crowds in cities, the crowded shops, the surly teenagers slouching home from school. But now, when I am out, people

avoid me! Now before any smart-aleck comments come to your mind, this is avoidance as a sign of care! And it's almost universally done with a smile and a "Good morning", "Hello" or "Nice day". Even from the youngsters who have managed to get out of the house for bit.

Suddenly I am blessed by seeing more kindness and consideration in people. I know that is not the whole story, but it's my local surprised blessing we are talking about! It's a blessing to see kindness, thoughtfulness and, particularly when looking at the NHS, sheer, determined compassion and expertise. That is a blessing!

And one final blessing – silent space. Space that can get filled with unexpected thoughts and feelings. This has been particularly so on walks, but also in the quiet of home. And it's been about the questions – why such a variety of tastes in food-why the beautiful variety of the natural world-why the sudden discovery of more than expected goodness in people! For me the answer has become clearer and sharper. The space is filled with God. He's always there, of course, but I haven't always noticed that. The world of nature fashioned by an amazing creator with a taste for variety in flavour, shape and colour.

Human beings made "in the image of God", and showing some of his deeper attributes of compassion and love. It's become clearer and, sometimes, when I've given the time and the openness, God's love has filled my being unexpectedly and with a sharp breathtaking clarity. Not a lot of the time, mind, but enough. And that's a blessing.

"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace." — Frederick Buechner in *Now and Then*

Paul Hills, March 2021

COVID BLESSINGS

At the beginning of the year, I made a resolution that I was not going to use the words COVID-19, PANDEMIC, ISOLATE, SHIELDING, etc, etc. So when Rita asked me if I could write something for the magazine about how I'd coped with the virus, I didn't think I could – however, I have!

I have not coped particularly well at times. I've been grumpy, but I appreciate that I'm lucky to have Colin to be grumpy with. I've been tearful and felt very negative and fed up at times and I don't think I'm alone there.

I have resented that I couldn't welcome family and friends over the doorstep and couldn't hug anyone, especially my young grandchildren. It annoyed me that I could visit my dentist three times, the optician once and the chiropodist two or three times, yet I couldn't actually see my doctor face to face. (I did eventually, because you can't actually sound someone's chest over the phone!)

We didn't have a holiday last year and I can't see us going away this year either, as I can't relax not knowing what we can and cannot do. We didn't have Colin's large "Christmas in the Summer" family event, or our old Methodist youth club reunion which we've had for the past thirty years, and so it goes on. I so, so miss going to choir and I can't wait to get back to helping with meals for the old folk at the Community Centre.

To me, last year and so far this year have been rather wasted, and I feel I'm wishing my life away, waiting for normality. People laugh, but the highlight of my day is going to the Co-op, and you won't believe how many letters I've written or how many apple crumbles I've made.

What did we do that was different? Jigsaws? Playing cribbage? Neither of us really enjoy doing jigsaws. We mainly did ones with 250 or 500 larger pieces so that we could get them done without getting too frustrated. I have bought fifteen over the past year, so I think we'll be having a Jigsaw Sale. We've enjoyed a few games of cribbage, but I never win, so I think I might need a few lessons

to see where I go wrong or if there's a knack.

I must finish on a positive note – We're just about to have our second shot of vaccine; the children are back at school – we have our two young grandchildren once a week after school and – Hallelujah! – we are opening the church up again on Easter Sunday. I am not a happy zoomer, although I know it has been a lifeline for many people; I can't wait to worship together again in church! For now we can't sing, but I'm sure I can hum behind my mask.

Anne Barrable



*This year we were unable to have a March of Witness starting
in the Priory Grounds.
Here is a reminder that we are witnessing every day.*



**The Easter Story in the window
of Clare Baptist Church**
Thanks to Elsa and Les for their creativity and hard work

The Easter Story at the gate of the United Reformed Church



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