

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS!

THE BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF
CLARE BAPTIST CHURCH

To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known



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Cheers!

Rev Paul Graham

Picture the scene, if you will: a family of four gathered around a dining table for their evening meal. In front of each of them is a plated puddle of some vaguely identifiable stew, the greyish-brown waters crowded by the flotsam of multi-coloured veg bumping gently into the jetsam of meat that has been advertised as chicken. The cutlery shines brightly in the light of the oil-lamps, and the smell of the food mingles gently with the heady aromas of kerosene and insect repellent that has been sprayed liberally around the room to allow for a few moments respite from the equally ravenous hordes that are amassing just the other side of the mosquito-screened back door.

The four seated figures at the table are aliens in a foreign land, invited intruders sharing life's experiences with the locals to whom the almost daily power-cuts are the norm, and the concept of "meat stew" is all-too-familiar, without troubling to identify the primary ingredient, though they draw the line at the rodent end of the animal kingdom.

It's a Graham family meal, harking from our time in Nigeria, and a familiar scene to the many waifs and strays who graced our house as welcome guests during our tenure as the family of the "Diocesan Bod" who had vague instructions to be of some use to the local clergy as both missionary and mission partner (ably supported by Mrs Diocesan Bod who did much more besides making the most of the ingredients supplied by the local market and friendly neighbours).

As part of the ritual of the evening meal, once the family have gathered at the table, there is the singing of grace and the strains of the chorus to the old Harvest staple, "We Plough The Fields And Scatter" float into the evening air:

*"All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above;
so thank the Lord, O thank the Lord, for all his love."*

And for those around the table, this was true. We were generally

and genuinely thankful to be at the end of another day in paradise. If, by paradise, you mean living in country where the imbalance between rich and poor was heartbreakingly apparent as soon as you stepped outside the front gate of our little compound and breathed deeply of the open sewers and Mercedes exhaust fumes. A paradise that was ruled at the time by a military dictatorship, where we were all kept under close scrutiny and the now ever-present threat of extremism was at least under the same level of control as the rest of us. A paradise which meant that the level of choice faced in the supermarket was whether to buy the one breakfast cereal option or not. A paradise that brought torrential, yet warm, rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous, or blew Saharan dust onto beggars and rich alike.

But paradise nonetheless, because amidst the poverty and hardships was great joy. Joy at the everyday delight of waking up in a country where the sun invariably shone and fruits not then commonly available in UK supermarkets were just dropping from vines and trees into our hands. There is nothing quite like the delight of picking the stringy bits of mango flesh from between your teeth when you've been the one to pick it straight from the tree. Nor the joy to be had in discovering fried plantain, or fried yam, or (even better) fried Kosai (spicy beancakes). And don't get me started on roast goat and jollof rice...



Image by Wokandapix from Pixabay

And gratitude came in different shapes and sizes, though food featured highly. It was easy to be thankful when the shops were full (or at least there were more shelves with supplies than empty ones), or the memories of the latest coup (or attempted coup) faded far enough to remember what freedom looked like. It was in the simple pleasures of life in another country, where people were hospitable and friendly, where singing and laughter mingled with the incessant sound of car horns, and where the standard potato was the sweet variety and the occasional treat of an “Irish” potato (no political message intended, I’m sure) was a joy.

But what of life in these last few months? It seems that there has been so little to be thankful for, particularly as we lurched from lockdown to lockdown, from U-turn to U-turn, with the light at the end of the tunnel seeming to be travelling away from us faster than we were moving. How can we be thankful with daily death rates, crowded Intensive Care Units and frazzled nurses and teachers?

Our attitude of gratitude may well have taken a few knocks recently. It’s hardly surprising, as we lurch from crises of pandemic to petrol, from grief to delayed joy and back again. But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t take a moment to realise what we have to be thankful for. And to give thanks to the one who has been with us every step of the way. It was no coincidence that our harvest festival service in the middle of last month was entitled “Thankful” because we do well to take stock of what we have, not just all we have lost. We’ve suffered much, but we can be thankful for much as well, as was proved in that service.



We had a car in Nigeria that was emblazoned with the Diocese of Jos's crest on the front doors. It proudly told the world that it (and by association, its occupants) were undeniably Christian, and certainly my parents' cautious attitude to the roads did nothing to contradict this message. Other road users couldn't fail to spot this and, though it didn't seem to afford us any special treatment or make us a particular target, it was clear that when that car was on the road, there were Christians about.

If we also want to declare something of our Christian faith to the world, we ought to display it in ways other than getting "Clare Baptist Church" hoodies or tattoos (though that might help). If we practise the godly art of gratitude, to live life in a way that demonstrates that the goodness of God is appreciated in all its many ways and means, that will show the world that we stand out from the crowd. The song "I love you, Lord" asks of God to "take joy, my King, in what you hear". If we're asking God to do that with our voices in worship, can't we also take joy in all that he gives to us for life? And be thankful.



Coming to a Baptist Church near you soon (or maybe not)

Photo by Lucas Lenzi on Unsplash

Ride The Breath Of God Above The Storms

Jenny Catton

(Excerpt from “Where Eagles Soar” by Jamie Buckingham)



“Watch the eagle,” our Israeli guide said, pointing to the silent figure soaring close to the mountains. “He locks his wings, picks the thermals and rides the breath of God above the storm.”

For seven days our small group of men had been trekking the desert sand, making our way through the awesome wadis and climbing the rugged stone mountains in the footsteps of Moses. Now we had reached Jebel Musa, the Mountain of Moses. Struggling in the darkness, we had climbed the backside of Mount Sinai to reach the summit by dawn. Now we were on the descent. It was then I spotted the eagle.

But it was the eagle that drew the attention of the guide. We were near the summit of the 7,600 foot mountain and the eagle was al-

ready 10.000 feet above us and climbing.

“How high will he go?” I asked.

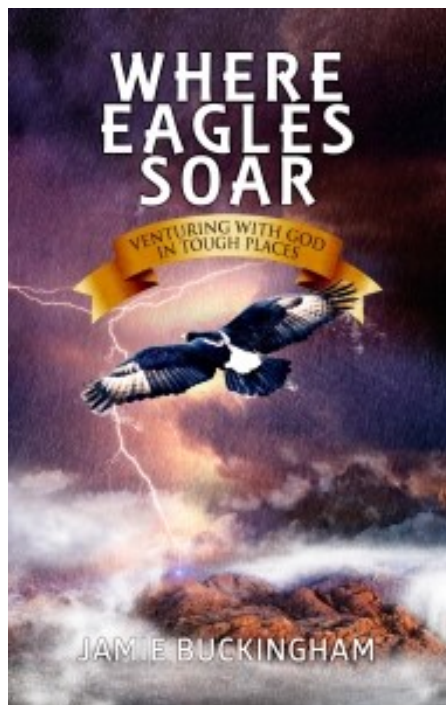
“Over the storm. Twenty-five, thirty thousand feet. He is now beyond his own control. He locks his wings here,” he said-pointing at his shoulders – “and rides the wind of God. I watched fascinated as the eagle circles and ascended until he was but a tiny dot against the onrushing storm. Then he disappeared altogether.

“He fears nothing,” the guide said “Even though we no longer see him, he can see us. He can see for 50 miles. He will go high, he will be covered with ice-his head, his wings, everything. Then he descends on the backside of the storm. Who knows, if it were not for the ice, he might just keep going up, touch God and never come down again.”

I keep thinking of that eagle - and the breath of God upon which he rides. I think of him when the storm clouds approach. I think of him when it seems I'm being swept away beyond control, to some dizzy encounter. I think of his determination, in the face of impossible odds, to lock his wings so that nothing can deter him from the upward climb.

“Those that hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:31)

If you are struggling today and feeling absolutely overwhelmed by situations and problems, then be an eagle. Lock your wings and let the breath of God carry you over the impossible situations. He will bring you down the other side where there is peace.



The Kitchen Project

Steve Radford

No one knew what challenges this project would bring when it was decided that the members of the congregation would take on the task of doing as much of the work as possible to save on labour costs. John Baillie and I decided to run the project jointly, as we both have very busy working lives running our own businesses.

We had a number of volunteers from within the church to help with the work. Which at the start included emptying all the cupboards, drawers and worktops, then removing them from the kitchen into the main hall. Some of the worktops were collected and taken away to be reworked for the new layout, as the layout had to be reconfigured, due to current Health & Safety legislation and becoming Covid compliant.



The next job was to remove the existing tiles from the walls; the last few tiles were removed by John Sargeant who put them up twenty years earlier. The walls and ceiling were washed down, filled and painted.

One of the main issues was trying to plan work around schedules of the contractors, as they were all very busy playing catch up after lockdown. The decision was made to start the tiling and grouting, while we waited for the flooring contractor. Once the floor

had been laid the cupboards were put in their new locations. The island was placed with an equal space around it, to aid ease of flow around the kitchen.

There were a couple of problems with the worktops, but these were eventually resolved and were installed. This then allowed the remaining plumbing and electrical wiring to be completed. The main cooker has been replaced by two electric hobs and a sepa-

rate double oven in its own high-level unit away from the hobs. This was done to reduce the risk of people bumping into each other and getting hurt. A back splash and new extractor hood were then installed. This was followed by the completion of the tiling and grouting along with the all the sealant between the worktops and tiles. When everything had been cleaned and wiped down, the cupboards and drawers were replenished with new and old items.



One of the highlights for me throughout this whole project has been the banter that has gone on, even though it has mostly been at my expense. Little did I know that being vertically challenged would bring such hilarity to my co-workers. From the strategic placing of a child's chair and a hop up when I was doing the top row of tiles, I did not waiver as little did they know that I have been a fully paid up member of the rhino club for the past thirty years.

I'm going to miss "just popping down to the kitchen" and returning home several hours later (I live in an upside down house so it's not a referral to home). As well as conversations starting in the morning via WhatsApp and continuing on and off during the day. However, I don't think Ellie will miss it. I've a few more projects that need to be completed before the clock goes back an hour and I'm guessing that a few more have been added since I last checked.

I would like to thank all the volunteers who worked on the project including those who kept the workforce fed and watered throughout the project, which enabled us to keep up the momentum.

*Many thanks to the Kitchen Project Team
Our Fellowship knows how much skill, time and effort
was given so willingly by men and women who were
already very busy.*

*May we honour their work by using the facilities to
nurture spiritually your congregation and the commu-
nity while we nurture ourselves bodies*

*All in the Lord's name—we are His people with a com-
mission.*



House Groups

John Baillie

Following considerable disruption over the last 18 months, House groups are a focus again!

Some groups have been able to adapt and continue meeting, some stopped but continued to meet the fellowship and pastoral support element of house groups and some have unfortunately stopped altogether.

As we move forward, please rest assured you are welcome at a house group where you will enjoy fellowship, teaching and support from a group of people which are loving and committed to following Jesus teaching.

There are a number of groups meeting on various days and at a variety of times in the day, so please ask so you can find a group for you.

In addition to house groups, we are currently (as a church) having a variety of small group meeting to discuss and review the book “How to Pray”. This could be really interesting to you so why don’t you consider joining with one of the groups?

Moving forward, our desire is to Follow & Worship Jesus, and house groups are an important way of doing this.



Photo by Tim Wildsmith on Unsplash

Jonathan Bugg's Spiritual Journey

I probably always thought there was a God, but growing up in a nominally Christian family I never understood the possibility of a personal relationship with God. I understood God was eternal, infinite and out of reach. Certainly not personal, intimate and accessible. Neither had I ever been challenged about why I believed what I believed, or if I actually understood what it all meant. Sure, I had gone to Sunday school as a kid, but I had learned about God-sent plagues, slain giants and the miraculous parting of seas. I hadn't learned about God's healing power in today's world, God's uncontainable love for everyone (the little man or even the aggressive giant), nor the Christ who travels by our side through the troubled waters of life, parted or not.

That was all to begin to change when a girlfriend insisted that I accompany her to a series of youth services on Sunday evenings at Clare Baptist Church. Once a month for six months I heard Irene Lipson preach about Jesus. Each time she ended by asking a question. A question that demanded an answer from me - I simply had to know the answer! Of course God can be particularly clever and so it was I always needed to attend the next youth service in order to know the answer.

Over this time I learned not only how much I needed a personal relationship with God, but I also encountered people for whom that relationship was more than a Sunday practice. In fact I began to realise that it was an all of life journey. I learned the fundamentals of a Christian life at CBC. I learned the importance of a daily time spent with Jesus both in prayer and in reading his word. I learned the benefit of sharing with one another in fellowship and growing together through shared bible study.

And as I grew my gifts became apparent to others who encouraged me to preach (although I had a lot to learn about encouraging and including love and grace in what I said). I served on the diaconate (although I'm not sure I was a huge benefit to the church). I went to technical college, got married and allowed life in all its good and bad to distract me from focussing on Jesus as I should have. But God had not given upon me yet. When my marriage failed, I was still part of the CBC family and so I was loved and supported

and ultimately this led to my meeting Catherine who I was later to marry. It was as we were sent from CBC on our last Sunday that a visitor to the church told us that although they didn't know where in Wales we were moving to, if was anywhere near Penarth we should go a church Tabs. No one knew at the time that our flat for the first few months was to be in Penarth. Was this visitor an angel?

As life unfolded before us we felt God's hand guiding all the way. We discerned together God's call to leave my job in Air Traffic Engineering and train at Baptist college. We discerned together when God was calling us to pastor at a church and when to leave it for pastures new. We have both grown in our faith, in our relationship with Jesus and in how to do this thing together. I was asked to write about how CBC played a role in my becoming a Baptist minister and when I started to write I wasn't sure how much there was to say.



Manor Baptist Chapel Nuneaton

However as I began it became very evident that from my coming to faith, through my baptism and formative years, to the provision of the woman behind (and now as we share the role of pastors, very much beside) the man, I have had to recognise that I owe CBC a debt of gratitude I could never begin to repay. CBC gave me a

foundation on which the most amazing and rewarding spiritual journey has been built.

My prayer for all at CBC now is that you experience that wonderful loving relationship as you journey everyday with the one CBC first introduced me to as master, saviour and friend almost 40 years ago.

Rev Jonathan Bugg

LADIES FELLOWSHIP FULL STEAM AHEAD

Vivien Sargeant

***I wonder what springs to mind when you hear those words
... Ladies Fellowship?***

I looked back at previous AGM reports, prior to 2019 and the continual theme throughout the years seems to have been Change. The membership changed, as we said our “goodbyes” to faithful friends who, although no longer here, memories of them still remain with us. The speakers changed, no longer just giving a message from the Bible but inspiring us to think about school meals for children in Africa, the life of a working police dog or how a village Museum was created. It goes without saying that these last 18 months have also brought about change.

As soon as we could we started back, then we were closed again, and finally restarted in Sept.

So we have adjusted, but some things remain constant - like the time, 2.15 pm every fortnight on a Thursday - the chatting, laughing, sharing, drinking tea, eating biscuits or cake, (sometimes both) listening, thinking and giving thanks to our Lord and Saviour for His love, grace and mercy. We are always pleased to see new people wherever you are from.

7th October 2021 2.15pm
Come and share your craft work
Tell us why you do them
We would love to see you



21st October 2021 2.15pm
Rev Sue Johnston will be updating us on the re-
furbishment of Great Samford Baptist Chapel



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