

Birth Pangs (May 2024)

May 30, 2024

by Rev Paul Graham

So here we are. My 48th and final (at present) article for the Fellowship Matters magazine. I'm not about to spend the time reminiscing about times past, and the ways that these articles have given me the opportunity to add my voice to the church's many conversations over the past nearly nine years. However, I am going to briefly take the time to thank everyone who has contributed to the writing and production of the magazine throughout my tenure. Thank you to everyone who has contributed something to these pages, in whatever form it has taken and about whatever subject has been written. Particular thanks are also due to Rita and Janet, who continue to compile and edit each issue, coaxing articles out of people, always encouraging and graciously flexible when it comes to deadlines. My grateful thanks for their continuing ministry in this way. Please support them by saying "yes" and putting pen to paper (finger to keyboard) in the future...

As for me, the only way that I can realistically finish my written ministry here is to provide you with a reflection for the current time. The span of this magazine takes us through the few weeks remaining before Ascension, Pentecost and the anticipation of summer, with its attendant flash flooding, flies and hosepipe bans (particularly during Wimbledon fortnight). During this time, we will have our fair share of opportunities to curse the weather for being either too hot or too cold, we will find reasons to be cheerful and disheartened at the various sporting events that pepper the late spring/summer calendar, and we will start to enjoy the first fruits of gardens and allotments that will soon be awash with salad leaves, courgettes and other tasty treats. And in the midst of all that, we will once again celebrate the birthday of the church as it was established in the upper room in Jerusalem a mere 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Let's just for a moment put ourselves into that upper room, sitting alongside the disciples and the other followers of Jesus who we understand from Luke's writing in Acts numbered around 150. Picture yourself as one of those unnamed people, present at the day of Pentecost.

Imagine your thoughts as you arrive. You will have had to travel across the city to get in, maybe wary of those in soldier's uniforms as much as your fellow Jew, remembering that it was only a few short weeks ago that the crowd cried out "Crucify him", less than a week after they clamoured for him to be declared their messiah. But you make it to the secret meeting place, away from prying eyes and amongst friends.

How long have you been a follower of Jesus? Are you one of those who heard his teaching in the Temple, when he fearlessly confronted the Pharisees and challenged the prescribed order of religiosity and rules, instead preaching of a third way, a way of peace and grace in the face of violence and restrictions? Or are you one of those who saw Lazarus emerge from his tomb, his resuscitated breath forcing its way out of the tightly woven bandages around his head? Or have you been with Jesus for longer, one of those who were there on a hillside being fed with a portion of five loaves and two fishes, and having heard stories of runaway sheep, errant sons and violent attacks on the road to Jericho?

However long your association with Jesus, and with those gathering now in the upper room, you are united in prayer and waiting. Waiting for the promised Holy Spirit, a few days after the long-promised Saviour disappeared from view. What keeps you going during this time of waiting? Is it the company of others, those who have shared in these remarkable days, their testimony of healing and restoration sustaining you during the silence from heaven?

Ten days may not sound a long time, after all they say that a week is a long time in politics, but Jesus

didn't give a time limit when he left. The Psalmist wrote that a thousand years is as a day to the Almighty, so maybe there will be a bit longer to wait than anticipated.

John and Peter, James and Andrew, now gaining in confidence since their encounters with the resurrected Jesus on the beach, leading the prayers of the faithful as you look around the faces of your fellow pilgrims. What are the prayers that are offered? Surely there will be prayers for safety, for the threat of death will not have diminished just because the cockerel crowed three times. There will also be prayers for healing, for those who are dying and for the families of those who have died. There are too many of you to make such prayers unlikely during this less than sanitary time in earth's history. So much for prayers for the present situation that you all find yourselves in.

But what of prayers for the future? Do you dare ask for the Holy Spirit to get a move on and make its presence felt sooner rather than later? Do you ask for a change in the hearts of the authorities, both religious and military, to become more accommodating to the followers of the man they could not silence? Do you pray for a better, brighter tomorrow? Or do you still fear what might happen to you when you leave later in the day?

Or do you just sit in silence, lost in the memories of the life you left behind to join with those who answered the call of "Follow me"?

Paul, your soon to be mortal enemy will later in his post-Damascene fervour encourage all believers in Jesus to pray continuously, giving thanks whatever the circumstances, so maybe it's a chance to simply say thank you for being where you are, for the people you are with, for what you have seen, heard and experienced since you made your choice.

Whatever the future may hold, you can't be robbed of your past. And just for the moment you can appreciate the time you are spending with like-minded people, many with still unanswered questions, doubts and certainly plenty of fears. But also the reassurance that you are not alone. The promise is yet to be realised, but when the Holy Spirit does finally come, in who knows what way and through who knows what method and with who knows what effect, this will yet again vindicate you in your decision to back Jesus. You may well have been one to have deserted Him on the road to the cross, but your presence in the room hints of your rekindled commitment now.

It is because of His grace that you are in that room. It will be by His grace that you and your fellow pilgrims will carry the good news into the world when the Holy Spirit finally arrives, facing whatever response you receive. God's grace that was sufficient for you previously will continue to be sufficient for you and all those to whom you bear witness of all that Jesus means to you.

And God's sufficient grace is what continues to be offered to us today as we are challenged to live lives that bear the same good news message as those who sat waiting in that upper room. It is God's grace that sustains us when we face the darkness and celebrates with us in the light. Although we cannot predict the future, we can be confident in God and His grace, at all times and in all places.

Go in peace, love and especially in grace.

Cheryl's Skydive for East Anglia Air Ambulance

May 30, 2024

Cheryl Trundle took part in a charity skydive on Saturday 11th May, raising money for the East Anglia Air Ambulance as part of the Big Leaaap Challenge.

Not only did she survive the experience, it looks like she enjoyed it, judging from the photos below.

(Photos credit: <https://shredvideo.com/> on behalf of UK Parachuting)







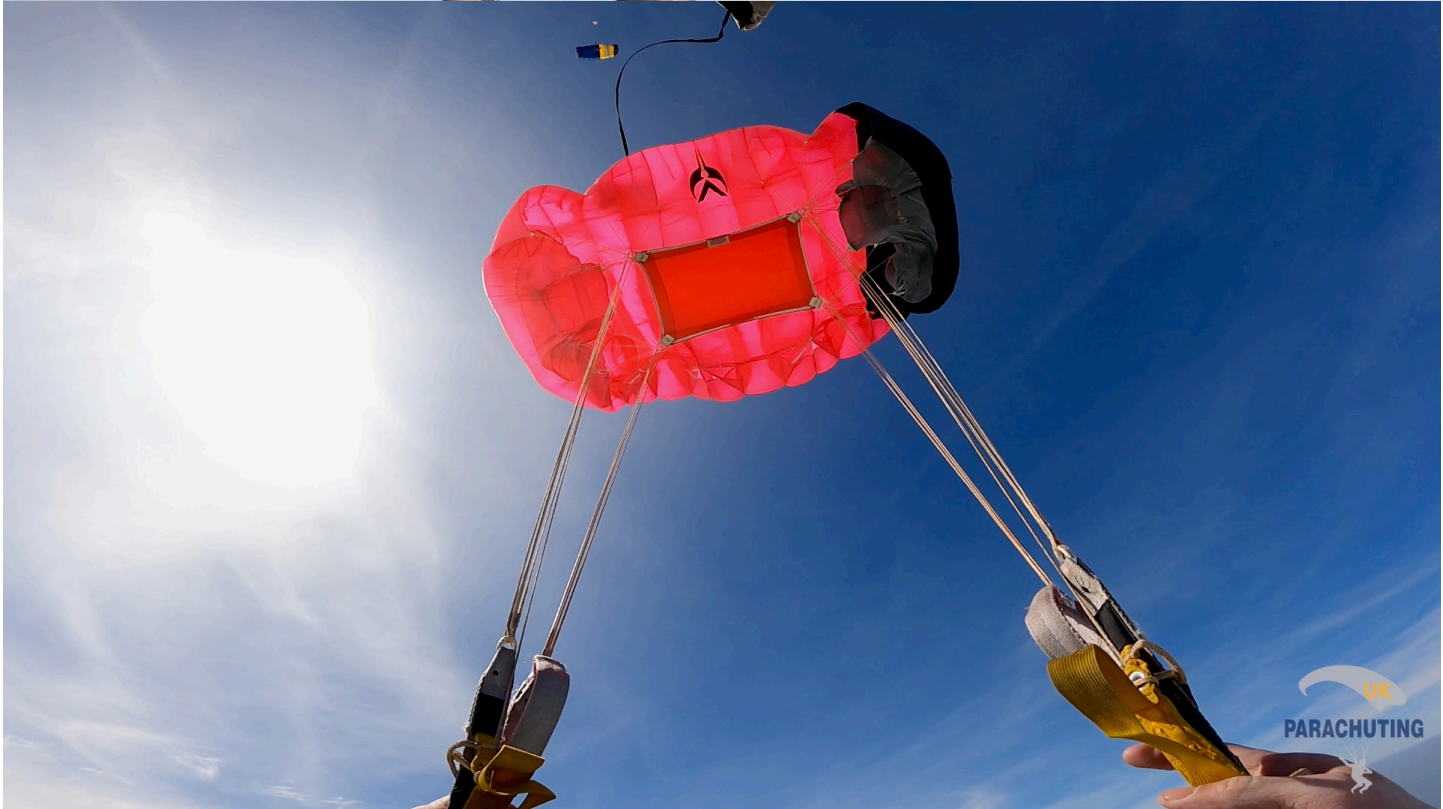
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Easter 2024 - Photos

May 30, 2024

A couple of photos from the church on Easter Sunday.

The Easter Cross was decorated with flowers during our Morning Celebration Service.

The Easter Table was decorated with symbols of Jesus' life leading from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday.



Easter Cross



Easter Table

Palm Funday Afternoon 2024

May 30, 2024

Sunday 24th March 2024, starting at 4:00pm

Easter-themed stories, songs and craft activities, followed by a light tea.
For everyone of all ages.

To book in, click [here](#)



Palm *Funday*

Afternoon

Sunday 24th March
starting at 4:00pm
at Clare Baptist Church



Easter themed Stories, Songs and Craft Activities, followed by a light tea.
For everyone of all ages!

Booking preferred.
Scan the QR code or book via
bit.ly/cbcbooking



Food, Glorious Food (February 2024)

May 30, 2024

by Rev Paul Graham

Churches traditionally spend the time between Christmas and Easter focussing their preaching on the life and ministry of Jesus. Focus is usually on themes such as his baptism and presentation at the Temple, the temptation by Satan, the calling of the disciples and various of his many miracles and teachings. All this in the attempt to show the world that significant events took place in the 30+ years between the cradle and the cross.

However, this year's calendar doesn't allow much time for this as it feels like we have only just finished the annual wrestle of returning the Christmas decorations to the loft and we're already moving into Lent. We may still have leftover cheese in the fridge, or some eaten treats lurking in the dark recesses of the freezer, but the supermarkets segued smoothly from mince pies to hot cross buns^[1], from selection boxes to mini eggs before 2023 had finally ended. In response, the Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester, called out two of the big supermarkets for such a rapid move, reminding them that Christmas at least lasts until Epiphany.

And supermarkets who realised that there is another opportunity to sell chocolates and cards found yet more room for Valentine's Day treats while people were still buying last-minute Christmas presents. However, even these heart-shaped chocolate boxes and heart-bearing bunnies will be fully overwhelmed by their Easter counterparts once February 15th dawns.

This year you can eschew the supermarkets' offerings and celebrate Valentine's Day with leftover pancakes from the previous day's Shrove Tuesday dinner. For those who usually abstain from chocolate during Lent, it may be therefore easier to relinquish that last Rolo to your nearest and dearest (unless they also join you on that fast). Even better news for chocoholics who will keenly feel its absence through the 6 long Lenten weeks is that as Easter falls on the last day of March, even those last few Christmas chocolates should still be in date when you crack open that first egg. Though if you need help removing such temptation from your life, your minister is willing to offer a self-sacrificial disposal service for you...

Food will continue to mark our journey to Easter, and not just in its ovoid chocolate conclusion. Whether you are like me and try to keep your consumption of hot cross buns to the latter stages of Lent or have to celebrate Easter Sunday lunch with roast lamb (with or without mint sauce) or have some other culinary tradition that you adhere to, there is one meal that remains central to the Easter story. I refer to Communion, the Last Supper, the Eucharist, the Breaking of Bread.

A simple meal, usually of bread and wine, that features in church services across the world wherever they can gather safely. Globally celebrated anything from annually to every time people meet for worship, our own pattern has us hold communion services twice a month, once in the morning as part of the regular service and once in the evening in a service with the meal as its sole focus. The words of invitation, the people who share the meal, even the type of bread that is broken may be different, but the event we all remember and the person who instituted it remain the same.

For those of you who joined us during the COVID pandemic, we continued sharing in communion together over Zoom, using anything from biscuits and tea to cake and port as representatives of the bread and wine. From the safety of our own homes we still met, remembered and joined in the meal at Jesus's

invitation. Back in the church building as we have been for a while now, we still meet, remember and join in.

Stepping carefully into controversial territory for a moment, it grieves me that the one meal that should unite the entire global community of the Christian church is still one that divides us. Because there are divergent understandings of what happens to the bread and wine, and there are different rules governing who can do what in the service, we cannot come together as Jesus prayed on that first occasion to “be one” (John 17:21). Not that I’m suggesting that the way that we do things in the Baptist world is the one to which all others should conform. I just wish there was a way that we could find a way to join together as Jesus hoped.

That sojourn into an appeal for ecumenical unity aside, Communion at Clare Baptist Church takes centre stage on Maundy Thursday evening as we meet in the church building, and again on Easter Sunday morning both in the Country Park at 7:00 and then later during our Easter Morning Celebration Service. Three occasions where we will remember that Jesus died once and for all. Three occasions when all are welcome to respond to the invitation of Jesus to take, eat and drink.

But, of course, those aren’t the only occasions when you will be eating and drinking over the coming weeks. Even taking into account those people we’ve already mentioned who eschew chocolate during Lent, there are still plenty of opportunities to eat and drink, usually around 3 times a day as standard. Some of these may well be with friends and family. Some of these may be with other Christians – we will be having a shared lunch during February to prove it.

We often use Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth as part of our Communion services. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 is a particular favourite passage. However, the context of this was Paul berating the believers in that young church for the way that they treated each other at mealtimes. The church, being made up of a mix of social classes, had some among their number who didn’t need to work and could afford long, lavish, idle meals. Others, the working classes, would arrive later, with their own meagre supplies, and yet others came with nothing. Rather than operate a “Bring and Share” policy, so beloved by churches nowadays, there was a definite divide between the “haves” and the “have nots”.

Paul’s point is two-fold. Firstly, no one should go without, and I’m glad to say that usually the problem at the church here in Clare is one of excess, rather than paucity. Secondly, and the point that is largely missed, is that Communion is part and parcel of every shared meal. Whether or not we take the time to explicitly go through the actions of Jesus of “Take, Eat, Drink”, we all do that naturally when we come together to eat and drink.

So maybe our ecumenical problem isn’t such a big one. If we understand Communion as also happening every time we gather together as a Christian community and “Take, Eat, Drink”, then we can also include those occasions when we do that at the invitation of others, and by inviting others to join us for any meal. Whenever and wherever that may be.

[1] Though, in reality, hot cross buns are increasingly available all year, which seems a bit of a pity.

Easter Services and Events 2024

May 30, 2024

Please join us for any or all of our Holy Week and Easter events and services this year.

Palm Sunday 24th March

10:30am Service - "Welcome to the King"

4:00pm Palm Funday Afternoon for families

Maundy Thursday 28th March

7:30pm Communion Service

Good Friday 29th March

10:30am Walk of Witness from Clare Priory

11:00am Arrival at Market Hill for songs, readings and prayers (with the other Clare churches)

Easter Sunday 31st March

7:00am Communion Service in Clare Castle Country Park (by the Old Goods' Shed)

9:00am Breakfast in the Church Hall

10:30am Easter Celebration Service



Clare Baptist Church

**"To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known"**

Easter at Clare Baptist Church

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Spring Sale March 2024

May 30, 2024

Saturday 16th March 2024 10:00am - 1:00pm

Join us for a sale of Easter gifts, books, homemade produce and all sorts of goodies - all raising money for charities at home and abroad.



Clare Baptist Church

**"To follow and worship Jesus
and make Him known"**

Spring Sale

(raising money for our supported charities at home and abroad)

Saturday 16th March 2024

10:00am - 1:00pm

Clare Baptist Church



Refreshments & bacon butties

Handmade items

Cake stall

Bric-a-brac

Books & Jigsaws

**Free
Entry**

Family Nativity Service on Sunday 17th December 10:30am

May 30, 2024

Sunday 17th December 10:30am at Clare Baptist Church - everyone is welcome to our Family Nativity Service! A chance to sing carols, hear the Christmas story (and be involved!) and enjoy refreshments during the service. Special mention to anyone who turns up dressed as the donkey...

**Clare Baptist Church
invites you to...**



**...a Family Nativity Service
full of fun, refreshments, carols
and an interactive telling of the
Christmas story.**

**Come dressed as a character from the story:
angels, shepherds, Marys, Josephs, inn-keepers,
kings, stars, donkeys, sheep and non-dressed up
people all welcome!**



Sunday 17th December 10:30am

Image by brgfx on Freepik.com

07949 454626 - 01787 277864 - www.clarebaptistchurch.org.uk - or find us on Facebook

Christmas Services across Clare and Cavendish Churches 2023

May 30, 2024

Sunday 10th December

10:30am Gift Service at Clare Baptist Church

10:30am Nativity & Gift Service at Clare United Reformed Church

Saturday 16th December

6:00pm Carols by Candlelight at Clare Parish Church

Sunday 17th December

10:30am Cafe Church Crib Service at Clare Baptist Church

10:30am Christmas Worship at Clare United Reformed Church

5:00pm Carol Service at St Mary's, Cavendish

Saturday 23rd December

5:30pm Vigil Mass at Clare Priory

Christmas Eve

8:00pm Mass at Clare Priory (no 10:00am Mass)

10:30am Carol Service at Clare Baptist Church

2:00pm Family Crib Service & Carols at Clare Parish Church

4:00pm Carols by Candlelight at Clare Baptist Church

5:00pm Family Crib Service & Carols at St Mary's, Cavendish

5:30pm Carols by Candlelight at Clare URC

6:00pm Family Mass at Clare Priory

8:00pm Midnight Mass at Clare Priory

11:30pm Midnight Mass at Clare Parish Church

Christmas Day

8:00am Mass of Christmas morning at Clare Priory

10:00am Christmas Celebration at Clare Baptist Church

10:00am Mass of Christmas Day at Clare Priory

11:00am Family Christmas Eucharist at Clare Parish Church



Christmas Services 2023 around Clare and Cavendish



Sunday 10th December

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6:00pm Carols by Candlelight at Clare Parish Church

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10:30am Carol Service at Clare Baptist Church

2:00pm Family Crib Service & Carols at Clare Parish Church

4:00pm Carols by Candlelight at Clare Baptist Church

5:00pm Family Crib Service & Carols at St Mary's, Cavendish

5:30pm Carols by Candlelight at Clare URC

6:00pm Family Mass at Clare Priory

8:00pm Midnight Mass at Clare Priory

11:30pm Midnight Mass at Clare Parish Church

Christmas Day

8:00am Mass of Christmas morning at Clare Priory

10:00am Christmas Celebration at Clare Baptist Church

10:00am Mass of Christmas Day at Clare Priory

11:00am Family Christmas Eucharist at Clare Parish Church

Produced by Churches Together in Clare and Cavendish
For more activities and information, please visit any of the churches listed above

Christmas Services 2023

May 30, 2024

Please join us for any or all of our Advent and Christmas services this year.

Sunday 10th December

10:30am Gift Service

(for Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre)

Sunday 17th December

10:30am Family Nativity Service

6:30pm Advent Communion Service

Christmas Eve

10:30am Carol Service

4:00pm Carols by Candlelight

Christmas Day

10:00am Celebration of Christmas

Clare Baptist Church

Christmas Services 2023



Everyone is invited to join us...

Sunday 10th December

10:30am Gift Service

(for Bury St Edmunds Women's Aid Centre)

Sunday 17th December

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6:30pm Advent Communion Service

Christmas Eve

10:30am Carol Service

4:00pm Carols by Candlelight

Christmas Day

10:00am Celebration of Christmas



Image from freepik.com

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