

Weekly Newsletter (60)

by and for the Christ Church and Pagham URC families

25th April 2021

Musings from the Manse

Dear Friends,

This week I'd like to share another of Sheila Walker's *'Contemporary Reflections'*, entitled *'No other name'*. It is based on two of the lectionary readings for the fourth Sunday of Easter... **Acts 4: 5-12** and **John 10: 11-18**...



'Christianity would be a lot more popular, palatable, cool, if it were not for this preposterous claim that salvation is found in no one else: there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved! If only we were content to stick to the golden rule – *do as you would be done by* (which every faith agrees) - could we not all then live in peace? Why must we be so unreasonable, and exclusive?

Ask, rather, why we, in the West, appear to have gone soft in the head and, in general, prefer comfort at almost any price - the price being, to create a god who is tolerant, nice and who hesitates to rock the boat; how very English ...

But God is *'I AM WHO I AM'*, and not what we'd like him to be ... and Jesus – is *one with God*; 'Before Abraham was, I AM ...' And the only question is not if we like what they say, but *'Is it true?'* It is one thing to read scripture in context but explaining away all that we find uncomfortable simply will not do.

Jesus, who said, *'I am the good shepherd'* (that's nice) told us too *'There will be one flock and one shepherd.'*

He who said, *'I am the bread of life'* (that's nice), *'I am the resurrection and the life'* (that's nice), told us, too, *'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except by me.'*

No other name? We do so like to think that all religions are much the same, really – aren't they? In the end, don't they all lead to God?

Er, **which God?**

For Buddhists, there is no personal creator or God; for Hindus, God is a philosophical absolute – whatever that may mean. New Age religion says that all is one, all is God, we are God! Islam believes in a God of judgment rather than love - creator but distant, now, from his creation.

I think I'd rather be led to the Christian God: infinite, holy, loving Father; mystery revealed in Jesus, full of grace and truth.

No other name by which we must be saved? We understand the need to be saved from terrorism, poverty or Aids, but from ourselves? From sin, and therefore death and separation from our God? Jesus' claim to bring us that salvation is unique – and, indeed, to many, quite irrelevant.

For Buddhists, Hindus, New Age man has little individual worth; ignorance, not sin, the problem; therefore, no need for saving - only for knowing some kind of enlightenment, nirvana, union with a universal principle. Muslims share with us a holy God; but one who works through law: salvation, then through works – a desperate, uneven, fearful thing: even the final sacrifice of life itself for ever falling short ...

Only Jesus speaks of the depths of our natural sin and the height and the length and the breadth and the depth of the love and the grace of God.

So, no, actually, all religions don't appear to speak or lead to the same, the one true God.

The name of Jesus - believe in him or not - is unique; Peter may not have heard of Islam or New Age but what he said stands for all time; no one else can hold a candle to him; no one else claimed to be one with God; no one else claimed to forgive sin; no one else has been raised from the dead to live for ever. There is no other name that could sustain such claims for five minutes, without being laughed out of court - let alone for two thousand years.

And who are we to say that this is a strange way of doing things? How do we know if it could ever have been different? If I want to travel in space, then, when somebody hands me a space suit, I'd better not say, 'Oh no, I'll go as I am, thanks; jeans are more comfortable ...' Such is the nature of space, I'd better accept with good grace ...

Just so, if I want to dwell with God, then, when Jesus hands me his robe of righteousness, I'd better not say, 'Oh no, I'll go as I am, thanks; I'm no worse than most ...' Such is the nature of God, I'd better accept that, without grace, I would be consumed ...

There is no other name: it is an exclusive, a hard-won, incomparable name, but whoever calls on the name of God incarnate will be saved.'

The other two readings, which make up the lectionary for this week, are **Psalm 23** and **1 John 3: 16-24**, and I pray that, when you read them too, you will be able to picture all the images they provide and reflect on the questions they pose. But that, through them all, God will meet you where you are and, perhaps, provide some of the answers you need.

Yours in Christ, Helen <><

Word for today John 10: 11-18

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10: 11-15)

Meditation of a shepherd

To what lengths would I go in looking after my sheep? That's a good question.

I'd watch over them day and night if I had to, for it's dangerous country out there and there are wild animals aplenty that would make a meal of them, given half a chance.

I'd search for them too, should they be lost, and, yes, defend them if necessary - provided I was suitably armed.

But knowingly surrender my life for them? No, I'd draw the line at that. After all, it's sheep we're talking about, nothing more, a way of earning a living – keeping a roof over one's head and money in one's pocket.

There's no room for sentimental attachment.

Would any go further? Certainly, none I know of. A hired hand wouldn't, that's for sure; they'd run a mile at the first whiff of danger and even the most dedicated among us would save their own skin first, if push came to shove.

No, I've heard of some fine shepherds in my time, but to lay down your life for your sheep would be something else.

Could any flock be worth it?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
words cannot thank you enough for your goodness to us
for your patience, concern and devotion.

Repeatedly we go astray,
yet you seek us out,
never resting until we are found.

We ignore your guidance,
yet you continue to call
gently leading us back.

Though we are foolish and fickle,
naively following the crowd,
you stay true to us,
refusing to let us go.

For your awesome love
that gave everything to bring us life,
receive our grateful praise
and heartfelt worship.
Amen.

Word for today, Meditation and Prayer from 'A most amazing Man' by Nick Fawcett

Gathered for Prayer....

Gathered for Prayer continues to meet at **9 am and 7 pm** each Wednesday. **All are welcome!**

Here's the link....

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5742722693?pwd=R3BEQ3pPV0ZJNndRWVKeWdvand6QT09>

Meeting ID: 574 272 2693 Passcode: xsX5UM

From Pagham URC (St. Ninian's)....

Each week, Penny, (Pagham URC Church Secretary), sends out an email with Pastoral News to the congregation there and, usually, there are a few 'funnies' attached as well – I mean, who doesn't like a good laugh!! Sometimes snippets are shared which you may not have seen before, (funny or not), and one such came to me last week - courtesy of Bernard Taylor, (Church Treasurer). It was passed to him from a friend and some may already have come across it – but I hadn't! So here it is:

'An Obituary printed in the London Times...Absolutely Dead Brilliant!!'

'Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years. No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape. He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as: - *Knowing when to come out of the rain*; - *Why the early bird gets the worm*; - *Life isn't always fair*; - and - *Maybe it was my fault*.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies - (*don't spend more than you can earn*) and reliable strategies - (*adults, not children, are in charge*).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place: Reports of a 6 yr-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate, teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student only worsened his condition.

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining their unruly children.

It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an aspirin to a student but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses and criminals received better treatment than their victims.

Common Sense took a beating when you couldn't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home and the burglar could sue you for assault.

Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realise that a steaming cup of coffee was hot. She spilled a little in her lap and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death, - by his parents, *Truth and Trust*, - by his wife, *Discretion*, - by his daughter, *Responsibility*, - and by his son, *Reason*.

He is survived by his 5 stepchildren; - *I Know My Rights*, - *I Want It Now*, - *Someone Else Is To Blame*, - *I'm a Victim*, - *Pay me for Doing Nothing*.

Not many attended his funeral because so few realised he was gone.

If you still remember him, pass this on. If not, join the majority and do nothing.

Here is the Spring update from HEART (*see attached pdf file*). If you are not familiar with HEART www.heartchichester.church it is a local charity set up by the churches to care for our Homeless community in the city. As you can imagine, there has been a large increase in demand through the pandemic with the wonderful team of volunteers from the city churches keeping the food and welcome flowing daily.

Dan Slatter Team Leader- Core Leadership Team

'Thy Kingdom Come' - Global Prayer Movement - 13th - 23rd May 2021

You may remember me mentioning this a couple of Newsletters ago! The Prayer Novena has been acquired and is a resource which will be coming to each household via your Pastoral Visitor before the start of 'Thy Kingdom Come'. Please use this during the days between Ascension Day and Pentecost.

Pastoral Visitors please note, your bundle will contain one for yourself but will not contain any who are pastoral visitors in your group - they will have their own in their bundle.

We have also been supplied with 50 copies of the 'Prayer Journal and Book Mark' resource on a first come first serve basis; if you would like one of these please let me know as soon as possible so that it can be brought to you. 50 copies of the 'Digital Family Prayer Adventure Map' were also supplied - some of these will be distributed to our young people, but any left over will be available from Tina Twaites should you wish to pass them on to grandchildren etc. *Helen <><*