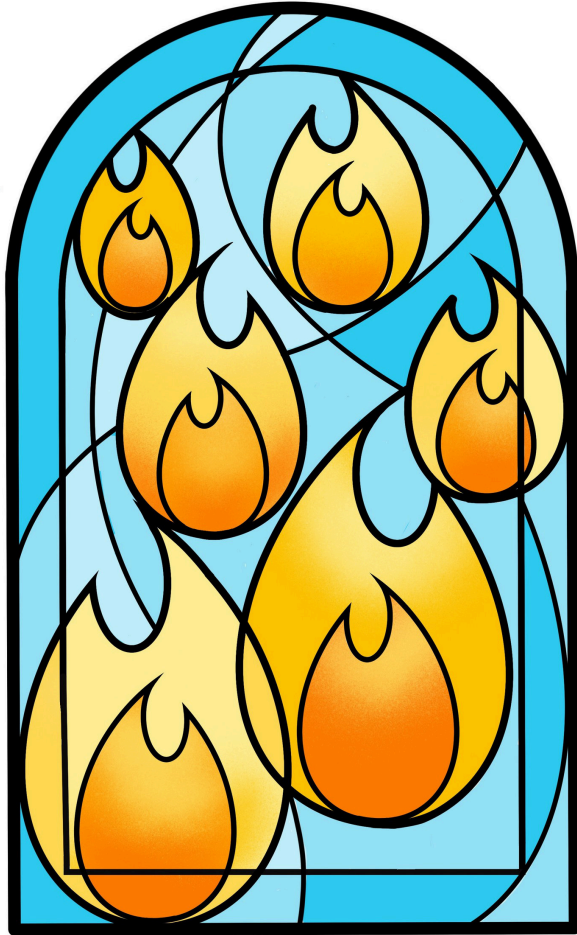




Highway



Number 393

May 2024

Free

<https://www.merthytydfilmministryarea.co.uk>

Dear Friends

Hope?

I think that nature is very brave. Despite the weather most of the trees have put leaves out, the blossom on my pear and apple tree has finally made an appearance and the grass is definitely growing. There is Hope. The poor (pun intended) weather person keeps promising us that warmer weather is on the horizon and whilst it is a distant memory we do remember what it was like to experience warm sun beating down upon us and the promise give us hope.

I was saddened to read in the paper this week of a young man who had been imprisoned for public protection who had had to serve a minimum of 23 months but there was no maximum time he should serve. He gave up hope of ever being released and took his own life. The absence of hope was personally destructive. Paul writes a lot about hope – in his epistles he mentions the word 45 times.

My favourite passage is in Romans 8: “for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope.” (v.20) which he then expands a few verses later:

“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (v.24-25)

The most important thing about hope is that we help one another to keep it alive. In these times of great change, both local and international, it is easy to just give up. To allow the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness to overwhelm. If we stop and think about it for a minute, the world, as we see it, is not very different from the view of Israel at Jesus’ time. A conquered people, helplessly subjected to Roman rule, wanting things to go back to the way they were. Jesus demonstrated that earthly kingdoms were not His concern. He was concerned about people. One at a time.

I was speaking to Bishop Mary this morning and I said to her that I would not want her job at the moment at any cost. Her reply was heart-warming. She said for every difficulty she faces there is always someone who pops up and says, 'How can I help?' She told me that this keeps her hope alive at this time.

I think in the Ministry Area we are getting there. We have just been through all the annual meetings and we know that together we face changes and will have to make difficult decisions which cannot be put off. I am finding, and I 'hope' it continues, that people are popping up and saying, 'How can I help?' Thank you to everyone who has and may that willingness to help one another nurture a real sense of hope in our hearts.
Mark

International Nurses Day 12th May

The work of nurses is celebrated around the world on 12th May. That day was chosen to be International Nurses Day because it is the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth.

Here are some current stats on nurses in the UK:

There are currently 731,058 nurses on the permanent NMC register. With midwives and nursing associates added, this figure rises to be 788,638. There are more female nurses than male nurses. 89% of registered nurses identify as female, and 11% identify as male.

We need more nurses! Currently there are about 46,800 vacancies.

Could this be a job for you?



Ministry Area Leader Report covering 23rd April 2023 – 28th April 2024

The MAC met on 3 occasions in 2023, 12th June, 17th September, 26th November and 11th February this year. The major themes have been registering the Ministry Area as a Charity, our charity number is 1203686, and then getting the charity registered with HMRC so that Gift Aid Claims can be made. Safeguarding has also been a major piece of work and I am grateful to Roger Morgan for his diligence in this matter and to Lynda Price who did so much of the administration. We have had multiple training events for safeguarding all of which have been arranged by Roger and we have initiated numerous DAB checks all of which have been successful. We have still to fully understand the Church in Wales 'My Church People' software but we are a lot closer than we were.

GDPR has also been an issue across the Church in Wales and we are thankful that Jayne Caudle has been dealing with the data audit that is required and we shall soon be registering as GDPR compliant. I would remind those appointed to the MAC, in particular, that things like emails which have a private address on them must be blind when writing to multiple recipients. Following registration, I do not want to spend what life I have left recording data breaches. Unfortunately, this is not something that can be ignored as the Data Protection unit are getting quite aggressive with fining companies and charities that are found to be in breach of GDPR regs. You will, occasionally, see their larger fines appearing in the paper but there are plenty of smaller ones that don't!

The MAC also spent some time discussing Parish Share during the last 12 months and even though this is now changing to 'Common Fund' I suggest that it will use up time in this coming year. My thanks go to our treasurers who are coping with considerable change, especially with regards to the Charity Commissioners, and here I'd like to particularly thank Nick Heuvel who has been seeking support and asking questions and finding an accountant to help us out this year. During the year we have had the Twmpath and Church Upside Down, those walls of Jericho and the Garden of Eden are now indelibly printed on my mind as was my demonstration of having two completely uncoordinated left feet. We also enjoyed an Agape meal together in commemoration on Maundy Thursday. Thanks go to my colleagues and those involved in bringing these events into being.

I have reported to the MAC from the Diocesan Conference and also from the Archdeacon's Visitation and last Monday we had our first Deanery Conference where we heard about the new Attendance App that we are going to need to use in the near future. One person from each church will have to be responsible for collection and input of the data. I suspect many of you are looking blankly at me at this moment and I am going to make the same plea here that I have done ever since the Ministry Area came into existence. We have 5 lay appointments to the Diocesan Conference and 6 to the Deanery Conference. The Diocese is using

these vehicles to communicate with the Ministry Areas and the churches. Our current Lay representation at these Conferences is 0. It would be really useful, going forward, to have Lay people listening and asking questions at these.

The MAC adopted 2 papers during the year. One dealt with administration and building our online presence and the other looked to the next steps for developing our ministry area. Some of you have already attended one of the discernment sessions. Just to clarify, there are two blocks of three. The idea is that you only attend one meeting in each block. We will then be establishing a discernment group that will bring its thoughts and ideas to the MAC. The MAC will then make the decision on the implementation of those ideas.

I am retiring on the 31st December 2024 and my understanding is that I will not be replaced. There need to be some serious discussions about what services can be maintained and how the remaining clergy should be deployed. I am aware that the next block of discernment meetings will help to focus our minds on this.
Mark Prevett 28/4/24

The Revd Dr Jo White considers the stones and mortar...

Reflecting Faith: the church as a building

Today's church buildings are rich and varied in their designs, sizes, materials, plans and groupings; from large cruciform churches to simple single room designs; from red brick to stone, and so on.

I wanted to look up some information about the fact that today's church buildings, although they may be 'modern', are usually built upon or very close to a previous church building. In other words, they stand quite literally in a long succession of church buildings.

However, on entering 'church building footprint' into the computer search engine, it responded in a related but unexpected, to me, way: 'The Energy Footprint Tool is a great way of monitoring your church building's carbon usage and energy efficiency.' A very real issue for today's world! - and one we are very conscious about when we enter the building on a Sunday morning to find, even with the heating turned on for a number of hours, that it is considerably cooler than our own centrally heated homes.

Whilst it is theologically wonderful to have high ceilings, we can see how future remodelling might well lower the ceilings, bring in the walls, and shrink the glassed areas. And so it has been through the ages – church buildings have constantly been amended. When you look carefully at a church that is more than a few hundred years old, in any part of the world, you can trace the development of its use by its architecture. Perhaps you'll see a door or window bricked up or a new one opened. The widening of the nave by the addition of arches and one or more aisles. Change in stone or building materials as later technology was available or even a change in design as new techniques came into safe use.

Have a look at a couple of local churches and spot the changes in their buildings over the years. Why do you think they took place? What changes would you make and why?

St David's Baby Bank

St David's Baby Bank were very fortunate to receive a grant of £9,246 from the National Lottery Community Fund. We were thrilled to receive this award which will ensure we can carry on helping those families who are in need.

Gerald Jones MP called to see us to offer his congratulations.



CHURCHES UNLOCKED

St David's Church is taking part in Churches Unlocked from Saturday 1 June to Sunday 9 June 2024. The church will be open from 10am to 4pm every day.



Some of the events we have arranged so far are:-

Tuesday 4 June History Talk

Thursday 6 June is the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings.

We hope to have displays from the Royal British Legion and Cyfarthfa Castle Museum.

Register of Births and Marriages will be on display.

Choirs for Good will be performing and dates and time to be confirmed.

There will be an exhibition relating to St David's Baby Bank.

Our usual church services will also take place on Wednesdays and Sundays.

It is hoped to see as many people as possible supporting these events.

ST TYDFILS NEWS

It was great to receive Melanie as a fully paid up member of St Tydfil's church on 28th April 2024 following her baptism in the church. A lovely service with some very moving hymns, followed by a buffet lunch provided by members of the congregation. We look forward to Melanie becoming an active member of our church.



St Tydfil's Social
& Fundraising
Group meets
Tuesday 7th
May 7pm in the
church.

"VOICES FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS"
A service of songs, prayers, readings
and meditations for Pentecost



Pentecost Sunday 19 May
St Tydfil's Church 11.00am



Disaster in Eden – Genesis 3.1-6 – the FALL

The man and the woman whom God had placed in Eden had everything for their well-being and enjoyment. It is tempting to try to locate the site of Eden because Genesis does give details of the site. (Calvin does a thorough but unsuccessful job in this regard in his famous commentary.) We are told that a river flowed out of the garden and then in some way divided into four rivers, two of which, the Tigris and Euphrates, we can locate but the other two do not readily yield to identification. Perhaps this is as well or we might be running tours to the site only to discover what we already know—that Eden, after the events of one tragic day, is no longer a place of delight!

The Conflict in Eden

The first two chapters of Genesis show that God granted man and woman a unique status and a unique responsibility. Rocks were made to roll and rivers to flow but they were slaves to gravity. Flowers would bloom and trees would grow because of inbuilt genetic codes. Lions would roam and seagulls would fly in accordance with divinely implanted instincts, but man and woman while subject to gravity and genetics and instincts were given the uniquely enriching and challenging capability of choice.

Man and woman had the whole of Eden to enjoy; they were to eat freely, in every sense, of the tree of life, but they were to leave the other tree severely alone on pain of death. This restriction was not restrictive. It was a gracious reminder that humans were created to live in an environment of dependent obedience in the same way that albatrosses were created for air and whales for water.

Without preamble strange character enters this idyllic environment—“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made” (Gen. 3:1). There are many things Genesis does not tell us about this creature, but there are two things we do know—one, that it was created by God and two, that it was subject to humans. However, Scripture fills in some of the gaps in other places. For example, the aged apostle in exile wrote: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). We are led to believe, therefore, that the serpent was indeed a “cunning” (the Hebrew word can also mean “prudent”—see Proverbs where the word is used eight times, always in a positive sense) creature, but at the same time Satan was using the serpent’s own natural brilliance for his own nefarious ends. We must note, however, that the Genesis narrative gives no indication of any tempter other than the serpent, does not mention Satan, and therefore gives no explanation of his existence or origin. Calvin suggests that Moses’ “homely and uncultivated style, accommodates what he delivers to the capacity of the people; and for the best reason; for not only had he to instruct an untaught race, but the existing age of the Church was so puerile, that it was unable to receive any higher instruction.”

The serpent and the woman. The serpent approached the woman and said, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” to which she replied, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not

eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' ” (Gen. 3:1–3). The Hebrew word used to introduce the serpent’s statement is difficult to translate. Luther said, “I cannot translate the Hebrew either in German or in Latin; the serpent uses the expression *aphkî* as though to turn up his nose and jeer and scoff.” Some commentators see this approach as a questioning of God’s Word—“Has God said?” Others point more to a questioning of God’s goodness— “You don’t mean to tell me that God has deprived you, do you?” Either way there is a definite albeit subtle and disarming attack on the woman’s love for and loyalty to the God who made her. She responds in a commendable manner pointing out that far from being deprived by a spoilsport God, she and her man have been wonderfully provided for, and she gives no indication of any feeling of restriction or deprivation. It should be pointed out that there may be a little colouring in her response in that she does add some things that we have not heard God actually say! On the other hand this may indicate a less than adequate grasp of what God had told her man. The serpent’s response, “You will not die” (v. 4), flatly contradicts the word of the Lord. Some translators suggest the Hebrew allows for “You shall not die utterly” or “You shall not die immediately,” pointing out that while there is contradiction it was presented in a subtle and ambiguous manner. Evidently by this stage in the sad proceedings the woman was so well and truly hooked that the serpent threw subtlety and shrewdness to the wind and stated, “for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (v. 5). Opinions differ as to whether the word *elohîm* should be translated “God” or “Gods” but the possibility of “knowing good and evil” independently of God was the draw. The woman who by this time was captivated by the possibilities being presented to her turned to consider the tree in question. She “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.” (v. 6). “Good, pleasant, and desirable” are the operative words used to describe what she saw. Physical food, aesthetic satisfaction, and moral and intellectual advancement were the things she saw hanging on the delicate branches. Eden being the place of delight had no quarrel with anything that the woman saw, no argument with what the tree offered, no problem with what she desired to have. For all these things had been created by God and given to humankind yet were to be had and enjoyed only in the context of obedience and dependence. The serpent was offering freedom and fulfilment, delight and discovery, advancement and autonomy. God offered these too, except the autonomy. To offer humans autonomy would have been to make them other than they were created to be. You can’t offer a bird free-floating flight without air, nor can you let a fish swim and swirl without surf. They, like humans, have their God-appointed environments outside of which all are less than they were divinely appointed to be.

So, the scene is set.

Come back next month to see how this all unravels for us humans!!

Update on - where we are going?

from Rev'd Marc-Ashton Walford



It has been a pleasure going around each of the churches sharing with you where we are going as a ministry area. Although I would have preferred to have been speaking to you about a different more encouraging subject, it was never-the-less wonderful to finally see you all, so thank you for the welcome I received.

I also want to say a huge thank you to all those who came along to one of the listening days from our first round. At the first two there was a great turn out and engagement, and the third, is due to start in about an hour as I sit here writing this (but the deadline for the highway is at hand!).

During this first round we focused on where we feel called to serve. We thought about our mission, whether there were any particular areas of need, possible projects we could run to serve those groups, ways to develop our daily witness, and opportunities to share our Christian faith. I have tons of notes, which myself and others will need to sit and pore through, but at a glance the main groups that seemed to be on your hearts were; those experiencing loneliness or isolation, and families (especially mothers). We also reflected on things that are going really well, which included shared meals, our fellowship times together, and the Baby Bank, all of which could be built upon to serve those previously mentioned groups.

At the end of May we will begin the next round of listening days. Each session will be a repeat, held at different times, on different days, in different locations to make it as easy as we can for everyone to attend. These will be held on;

Saturday 25th May 9:30-12:30 (bacon baps) – St Tydfil's

Wednesday 29th May 18:00-21:00 (cakes) – St Mary's Merthyr Vale

Monday 3rd June 11:00-14:00 (soup lunch) – All Saints Dowlais



St TYDFIL'S CHURCH, Merthyr Tydfil

SUNDAY	11.00am	Holy Eucharist
	6.00pm	Healing Service (1 st Sunday in the month only)

St DAVID'S CHURCH, Merthyr Tydfil

SUNDAY	9.30am	Holy Eucharist
WEDNESDAY	10.30am	Holy Eucharist

CHRIST CHURCH, Georgetown, Merthyr Tydfil

SUNDAY	11.00am	Holy Eucharist
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ALL SAINTS CHURCH, Dowlais

SUNDAY	11.00am	Holy Eucharist
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CHRISTCHURCH, Pant

SUNDAY	10.00am	Holy Eucharist
WEDNESDAY	10.30am	Holy Eucharist

ONLINE

SUNDAY	11.00am	Dowlais & Pant Facebook and YouTube Service
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St JOHN'S Troedryhiw

SUNDAY	11.00am	Holy Communion
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St MARY'S, Merthyr Vale

SUNDAY	9.30am	Holy Communion
WEDNESDAY	10.15am	Holy Communion

All services may be changed or added to especially on Saints' Days.

Please see the Ministry Area website for details

<https://www.merthyrtydfilministryarea.co.uk>

Update on - where we are going? (continued)

Please do make the effort to come. Don't feel you need to come to the one held at your end of the parish, these actually work best when there is a mixture of people at each. But regardless of which you come to, please do come to one of these sessions. During this next round we will turn our attention to our pattern of worship and our buildings. Are we being served by our buildings and current pattern of worship, or are we serving them?

Please do come along, and I look forward to seeing you then!

MINISTRY AREA OFFICE

01685 388805

(10.00–13.00, Mon, Tue & Thur)

The office e mail address is:- TBA

The readings for next Sunday and church news sheets can be seen and downloaded from the St David's and St Tydfil's pages of the Ministry Area website at

<https://www.merthyrtydfilministryarea.co.uk/st-dauids-church>

<https://www.merthyrtydfilministryarea.co.uk/st-tydfils-church>



QR Code for the
Ministry Area Website

Next issue

Please let me have anything for June 2024
by Sunday 26 May 2024. Preferably earlier.

Next issue is due out 2 June 2024

Please e-mail your articles to

kenlewis.merthyrtydfil.church@gmail.com

All named articles are the work of that person. Publication does not imply agreement with the opinions expressed. Ken Lewis, Editor.