

Keynote: the preaching of sin

Dear friends,

Greetings to you, far and near, on behalf of Chris Fry and myself—Elders of the church. I hope you will find this newsletter informative and encouraging.

The church was recently minded to celebrate the 35 years since I was inducted as “Assistant Pastor” and 20 years since I began working as full-time Elder. It was quite moving to see old(er) faces and hear testimony of how much God has used Calvary, or even “the Railway Mission”, over the years. A full report is planned for our next newsletter.

It made me think. What keynotes need to be sounded to keep us on track with the gospel long term? It seems to me that one keynote is the preaching of sin.

At the anniversary afternoon Anthony replayed a sample of someone reading from Luke 18, and beginning to preach on the beatitudes of Matthew 5. Apparently this was my first Sunday sermon at the Railway Mission! I am interested in the theme of that reading. Luke 18:13 says “God have mercy on me a sinner”. The point was that those who are confident of their own righteousness and look down on others do not “go home justified before God”. It is those who are conscious of their sin, and ask for mercy,

who go home right with God. So if we are not living as penitent sinners we do not live right with God.

I was also thinking of the woman in Luke 7:36–50. She wept her heart out (v.44) and was utterly devoted to Jesus (v.45), with real and costly devotion (v.46). According to Jesus “she loved much”. The reason she loved much was not that she was emotional, or well-brought up. But rather it was because “her many sins have been forgiven”. Jesus explained “He who has been forgiven much loves much and he who has been forgiven little loves little”.

So, if we are not conscious of the magnitude of our sins which Jesus has forgiven, then we are unlikely to love him very much.

All this makes us mightily glad that Jesus died on the cross to save sinners! I think that is where we were at 35 years ago, and I hope it is where we are still at today.

Yours in his service,

Philip Wells
Elder

London Road Area Local Action Team (LAT)

As many readers will know, at Calvary we have been of the view that God is calling us to specific involvement with the area where our building is situated. Local traders and others have been complaining that London Road and surrounding areas have been particularly affected by behaviour which makes it feel unpleasant and unsafe to be in the area. Street drinking and drug trading would be examples. These issues are things we have been thinking about (a little), and praying about (intermittently, but for a long time). Across the country Local Action Teams (LATs) have been set up primarily to address issues of “community safety”, which could include graffiti, burglary, vandalism, road crossings, etc. They are supported by police and local councils. No two LATs seem to be the same, as they have sprung up in different communities, with individual agendas. All the Brighton LATs appear to inhabit a world of euphemisms and acronyms : CRI (Crime reduction Initiative); BCRP (Brighton Crime Reduction Partnership); Night-time economy (pubs and clubs and probably excessive drinking); JAG (Joint Action Group); CSF; SPD etc. But it is worth noting that behind each of these letters is probably a little group of people working very hard and very sincerely to help sort out the problems that sin of one sort or another has brought to our city.

Origins of the LAT

In November 2008 Simon Bannister, council officer, and St Peter’s ward councillors, including Pete West, took the initiative to call a meeting to set up a LAT.

The meeting was held in our buildings and more than 50 people were present. The new LAT started meeting in December 2008, and has continued more or less monthly since then. The deacons and elders offered the use of the buildings free of charge for a year. After a couple of meetings led by Simon and Cllr Pete West it was announced that local leadership would be preferable and everyone present looked intently down at the floor. In the end Christina Summers and I felt that we could offer our services in order to get the ball rolling. We wrote a constitution and Christina was voted for the post of Vice-Chair, and myself as Chair, though in effect we work closely together and Christina does much more of the spade-work than I do. Notionally Christina takes an interest in the traders, and I in the residents. I believe we should see this as a natural progression from the church’s earlier work of visiting shops and offices that continued, albeit at a low level, for many years. In this new way we have a mandate for a relationship between the local traders, residents and ourselves as representatives of the church—genuine “stakeholders” (as they say) in the community. On the other hand we now have to earn the right to testify to the gospel when the main agenda is already set on something else.

The business of the LAT

The aim is, roughly, to make life better for all members of the local community. Anyone can therefore come along and pipe up with their particular concerns. If seen as serious enough the LAT can agree to make this one of the three identifiable

“policing priorities”. These are to be agreed, noted, acted upon, and reported back on. As the months have progressed the priorities that have emerged are:

- (1) street drinking, particularly as it affects the Level (local grassy area),
- (2) encouragement of the Traders to use radios and a special web-site to report and track “anti-social behaviour”,
- (3) problems associated with York Place (a main thoroughfare with a slightly unfriendly atmosphere) i.e. drink, drugs, and general chaotic behaviour.

It is also becoming clear that London Road, Viaduct Road and New England Road accommodate bases for provision for people with some very deep-seated problems in their lives. Drug users, particularly, experience real trouble in their own lives, and bring trouble to those around them. We need to remind ourselves that these people are made in the image of God and should be treated as such, no matter how many problems surround them, and indeed no matter how objectionable their behaviour. It is also worth noting that some of them have never had stability and order in their lives from their earliest years. There but for the grace of God go I!

The future of the LAT

Time: The running of the LAT takes up significant time, if it is to be done properly, so we need prayer to do the bit that God wants us to do. The activity offers a limitless set of threads that could be followed up: meetings to attend, thick documents to read.

Traffic: One thread that has been presented is that of Traffic and Transport. Those of us who have lived here and brought up our children here have been somewhat aware

of the risks to health posed by traffic pollution. New figures show that this problem has not gone away over the past 20 years, but rather is even more pressing. Traffic with its associated noise (don't we know it when it is the London to Brighton bike run?) and air pollution has made its mark on the lives of “our” people for years. At this moment there are a number of local groups saying “does it have to continue like this?”. Please pray for this issue. A working group has been set up to look at it.

Traders: Although the traders were vocal in their complaint, it is not yet clear that they perceive the LAT as a positive remedy for their problems. Please pray for good basic communication, good relationships, a sense that something can actually be done, and attendance by more traders and residents

People: For myself, I am particularly interested in the people that this work brings me into contact with. Whether the Head of XYZ department on £60K, or the newly qualified Police Support Officer (who, for all I know, is also on £60K!), each of these is a person with aspirations, fears, hopes and needs; someone for whom I can pray; someone whose trust I might win so as to share the gospel of Jesus Christ; someone whom I might invite to a meeting at church; someone who could be a friend as well as a “contact”. Please pray for these people

Philip Wells

*Proceedings of the LAT can be found on
www.safeinthecity.info.*

Secretary/Treasurer

The sand in the hourglass of 2009 is nearly through as is the first 'noughties' decade of the 21st Century. Do we call the 2010s the tens (in which case it might mean the pain relief machines) or 'tense' to reflect the pace of life?

As I write this at the beginning of November, it is 45 years since I sat to prepare the first newsletter, then called 'VIADUCT'. It was September, 50 years ago, that I first attended the church, having moved (like the original methodist congregation 83 years previously) from the High Street Chapel (Gordon Hall) to Viaduct Rd. It is a time of anniversaries as in October we celebrated Philip Wells' 35 years since appointment as Assistant Pastor, and 20 years since taking up full-time ministry. More details of this (with pictures) in the next issue—along with details of the sabbatical that members have agreed that Phil should take next year.

Since the last newsletter, the 2008 church accounts have been completed, examined and registered on-line with the Charity Commission in good time, so thank you for your prayers for this. We received the good news a while ago that Brian and Jordan Douglas in Idaho USA are expecting their second child, In June Kim Sanggeol (Ted) was baptised and, along with Collen Moss, received into membership of the church.

Ted returned to South Korea and is continuing studies at university. After seeking a good church he has found one that he reports 'is just like Calvary' where the

Word is preached and he has been made to feel at home. He plans to return to the UK for further study in about 18 months

The new chairs arrived just after my last report and are in full use. The balance of the Chris Wingate memorial fund is being used towards the refurbishment and enlargement of the Primary/Sunday Club/meeting room which is underway. Our autumn Thanksgiving offerings will be used towards this (about £2500 or so is needed); any excess will be used towards laying carpet tiles along the west corridor or to augment the General Fund. (The Thanksgiving offering will be kept open until the year end.) This will be the last area of the building to be refurbished and modernised. Then it will be a question of keeping on top of regular maintenance and decoration!

Ray Wingate

Church Camp 2009

9th to 11th August 2009

Fifteen campers converged at the site near Henfield on a sunny Friday evening. The weather was set fine right through until Sunday afternoon, when the church lunch was convened at the campsite (to help use up all the food!) The grass was lush and the ground hardly featured a bump or lump anywhere.

Other folk came over to join in both evenings for the meal/BBQ and time together when Winnie the Pooh stories, and other cautionary tales took place –

alongside Bible quizzes and memory games (without a camp fire this year, but a lot of fun nonetheless). An ice cream van made a visit which was a draw for all; the children also had a play area with a boat and life size fibreglass livestock; where Chloe made three friends from other camper families.

Regeneration in London Road

This was the theme of an events week organized by Calvary Evangelical Church in Brighton (29th June–5th July). To most of the residents and traders in the London Road area “regeneration” refers to the ongoing plans—by the Council and community groups—for economic and social renewal of this down-at-heel part of Brighton. Calvary, whilst actively involved in this long process at every level, is making a case for spiritual regeneration and, by God’s grace, this was heard, seen and debated by many people over the course of one week.

This was certainly true of our first event at which author and minister, David Robertson, quizzed Caroline Lucas MEP on various issues not so much from a political standpoint, but more so from a personal one. It was an experiment on Calvary’s part and a new experience for Caroline herself who expressed gratitude for the reminder to re-examine her “internal values”. Caroline is leader of the Green Party and we see this growing relationship as a God-given chance to debate and demonstrate the Gospel in the local political sphere.

Perhaps the most engaging event was led by David, who has written a very influential response to Richard Dawkins’ polemic ‘The God Delusion’ establishing him as a protagonist in the field of Christian apologetics and debate, particularly with self-proclaimed atheists. At the Jubilee Library, he addressed nearly 100 people on the subject of ‘Jesus, Dawkins and You’ and fielded many difficult questions in a compelling way. Better still, the debate continued in a local bar well into the night with five young atheists and several members from Calvary. This was meant to be. God gave us the opportunity to “give the reason for the hope that we have” because we were asked to. It was a time of honesty, clear thinking and a good spirit amongst both parties and we were thrilled to have some of them visit us at Calvary the following evening to probe David and ourselves further on key issues under the title of ‘Who needs Christianity anyway?’

Full advantage was taken of David’s experience by holding two apologetics training sessions open to evangelical churches across Sussex. In all around 30 people attended (including many ministers) and were given some keys on how to deal with the new wave of atheism promoted by Dawkins et al. Many conversations were had over the week, with people in London Road every day and others from around Brighton throughout the time, and some minds were changed. This lifestyle for us at Calvary continues and we pray “without ceasing” that some will return to us and be persuaded that life is meaningless without Jesus Christ. Please remember us in your prayers.

Christina Summers

Sri Lanka

April-May 2009

It seems a long time since Maria and I made this visit to Sri Lanka. We were invited by Pastor Muralee, and Principal Priya Handy of Baldaeus Theological College in summer 2008. Our visit was made possible by kind and generous personal gifts for which we are most thankful.

Our original plan was to split the visit into three: Hatton in the central “up-country” with its mild climate and beautiful scenery; Trincomalee, the north eastern sea port where the late Dr. Charles Hoole established his longed-for Baldaeus Bible college and then, thirdly, across to Mannar in the north west. Here our friends Pastor Jothy Hoole and colleagues have been serving for many years. We were also planning to (and did) spend a few days meeting the believers at Grace Church in Colombo.

The first part of the plan went well. We travelled up to Hatton by train—a long, slow, noisy journey through beautiful hills and valleys. Our “conference centre” was in fact the home of Pastor Vijayakumar, and Pastor Muralee had brought together 20 to 30 pastors, leaders, and trainees from little churches known to him. Pastor Kaythees brought a van-load from Batticaloa.

I brought material on preaching John’s gospel. This was well-received, especially as many of those attending were practitioners, and could see the issues involved (exegesis, hermeneutics, theology, application) from that point of view. Pastor

Muralee translated—adding his own “spices and condiments”, as he told me. It was a happy and fruitful time.

It was most moving to spend some relaxation time visiting the home situations of some of these men as they struggle in conditions of frugality to maintain themselves and their families, let alone their ministries. It is difficult to assess the depth of the impact: Pastor Kaythees said candidly “I didn’t think this conference would really be much help, but actually it was!”

A day’s driving brought us to Trincomalee. The heat there was intense: 35 to 38 degrees C. Our accommodation was air conditioned, but unfortunately the combination of travel, heat, various bugs and germs laid Maria low for the next three days or so. Celine the college worker, was most kind and attentive to our every need. This week was taken with teaching from 9.00 till 4.30 each day with various breaks. The aim was to teach all through John’s gospel. I had three translators, but spent most time working with Newton, with whom I felt an excellent rapport. The students were mostly younger men and women. Some of them were experiencing a word-based approach to Christian ministry for the first time, and there were several heated question-and-answer sessions conducted in Tamil. In many cases I had no inkling what had sparked them off.

During this time the military conflict was reaching its costly final stages some 50 miles or so north of Trinco. Principal Priya was deeply burdened with the desire to help the refugees coming to the

local emergency transit camps. He was understandably preoccupied with this, and would periodically share today's harrowing accounts of suffering and hardship which he and others were working non-stop to alleviate.

The plans for our third week did not materialise. Refugee camps were rapidly being set up in Vavuniya, the area we would have to travel through to reach Mannar. But the military would not allow people like us to travel through without military clearance. It was not possible to obtain this. In the end we found that we had been unexpectedly booked in to the almost-deserted Nilavelli Beach hotel for a three day holiday.

To begin with we found the idea of doing nothing by the beach under a hot sun a little difficult to adjust to. But in the end we managed to get the hang of it: evening meals overlooking the Indian Ocean with the moon rising and the waves lapping. It was a God-given respite after the two hectic weeks before.

Our eight-hour journey back south to Colombo was an adventure in itself when the van broke down, and the driver was unable to accompany us further, but space does not permit further details.

We are grateful to God for enabling us to make this journey together. We trust that he will use the input as he sees fit, and we are pleased that our church's links with Sri Lanka—its churches, believers, people, trials—have been maintained and hopefully furthered.

Philip Wells - October 2009

Not as You Were

1 John 2:15-17

I love the way God works in seasons and I am so relieved that He does. For those people that know something of my personality this won't come as a surprise. The thought of life continuing on a business-as-usual basis without change horrifies me! Yet most people, it would seem, naturally think the opposite, and do not like, nor desire, change. But what does the unchanging God (Malachi 3:6) say about this? Well, when someone is born again (out of Adam's line, into Christ's) Paul says: "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). A choice is made and change, huge and sudden, takes place. When Jesus comes to fetch his people before the Father's wrath of judgement is poured out on this sinful earth, it will happen again: "Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." (1 Corinthians 15:51).

But what about the time in-between? What about the regenerate Christian whose destiny is secured but whose journey is yet to be completed? Is change a necessary or relevant factor and should we desire it? Let me answer that last question in true Jewish fashion, with another one. Would we ever call "home" a place that is unfamiliar to us and that, upon honest reflection, we could not imagine "fitting into"? After the first change Jesus' promise to the Christian "we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23) is fulfilled

by the indwelling Holy Spirit (v.26). I really wonder how “at home” he feels inside us. This is probably hardly the case for most of us in our early regenerate life as we grieve and quench him while we struggle with our new identity constantly reverting to old habits and old mindsets. Thank God for his patience towards us as we go through this long process, and thank God this sets us an example to be patient with one another.

At Calvary we know that his sanctifying, change-inducing, work in us is supremely carried out with the Holy Spirit’s help via the proclamation, teaching, hearing and application of his written Word. My personal concern in all of this for some years has been the age old struggle with the application part. It is one thing to understand a principle being taught but it is quite another to know what it “looks like” for us individually and to what aspect(s) of our character it poses the challenge to change. Furthermore, there is a crucial need to understand and acknowledge the mindset that informs our character flaws. Once we arrive at that point we can apply God’s Word (the Sword of the Spirit) really effectively to do some uprooting of the old person and planting of the new (Jeremiah 1:10).

Now for a short testimony: it works! Until Jesus comes I will continue to say in all confidence that God’s transforming work (to which there are many references in the Bible not least in Romans, e.g. 12:2) bears the most incredible fruit. But there needs to be a real desire to be transformed away from our sinful natures and not simply a “putting up with” it as if that were ever acceptable to God. It is

not. Paul goes out of his way to say something like this in his letters: “you were once like that, but now in Christ you are like this—so be like this!” It’s an exhortation, a pleading to be willing to change in this life, now. There is no denying it is a real struggle as all battles are (Galatians 5:16-18; Romans 7:14-20) but we are not to give up because...it works!

I have the awesome privilege at Calvary of taking one-to-one Bible studies for anyone who wants to join me and experience God’s transforming work in them. The marvel of seeing God’s process of change in our Korean brother, Ted, as his mindset took on a whole different worldview—one in which God’s perspective became prominent—is something that I long to see in many others. I am not only talking about this change from darkness to light but also the one that produces fruit (the evidence of a disciple of Christ (John 15:8)) on a continual basis season by season. Whether you are a Christian of many years or simply exploring the Christian faith I would urge you please to consider whether personal change is a priority to you, or even a desire, and let me know.

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Who are We?

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www.calvary-brighton.org.uk