

# The Liberal Christian Herald



*The Unitarian Christian Association seeks to strengthen and revitalise the liberal Christian tradition.*

**Articles by**

**Rory Castle Jones, Jo James, Lesley Harris,  
Stephen Lingwood, Kevin Mason, Roger Tarbuck,  
Jacky Woodman**

**Plus: News, Events, Worship Resources, You Must Read...**

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# The Liberal Christian Herald



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## Unitarian Christian Association

The Unitarian Christian Association (UCA) was formed in 1991 to strengthen and revitalise the liberal Christian tradition within the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in Britain. We aim to be that place where this tradition can be explored, while at the same time providing a resource for the denomination as a whole.

From the object of the General Assembly:

‘To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.’

**Registered Charity No 101 777 1**

Front Cover Picture: “Sea of Galilee” by Rory Castle Jones

## Editorial

These are exciting times for the UCA. We continue to attract new members who bring with them fresh and fascinating perspectives, as you’ll see in this summer’s Herald. Longstanding members are getting involved in newer ventures, such as weekly online worship and fellowship, and there is plenty of life in our affiliated churches at local level. So there’s a lot going on!

There’s so much good stuff in this edition. There’s Rory Castle Jones’s wonderful account of his recent trip to the Holy Land, Jo James shares an innovative worship resource, Kevin Mason relates his journey from Evangelicalism to Unitarianism, Lesley Harris gives an intriguing interpretation of Easter and Jacky Woodman has written an incisive and illuminating examination of prayer, particularly the Lord’s prayer.

We’ve also got more book recommendations, with another round of You Must Read...and there’s news from our affiliates as well. I’d love to know what you think of what you read so please do get in touch with your responses, as well as news and articles.

Francis Elliot-Wright



## Prayer: a Unitarian pentecostalist perspective

*Jacqueline Woodman provides us with an incisive and illuminating examination of prayer*



Greta Vosper in her book 'Amen: what prayer can mean in a world beyond belief' describes three groups on the basis of their attitude to prayer.

The first, consider prayer an active part of their life and at regular times during the day they make use of it. Its presence in their lives provides comfort, focus and perspective on what is important. It provides a link to the sagas of generations, both in good times and bad. In generations past, when the world spun out of control, their forebears took every step accompanied by the power of their confidence in prayer. When the world settled into a rhythm of beauty and harmony, prayer remained part of the picture of joy and gratitude. In the cycle of birth, life and death, everyone knew it to be close at hand and knew its value.

For a second group, prayer has been a source of frustration and despair. They have followed the teachings on prayer, and ...nothing has happened. They cannot understand the attitude of the first group towards prayer and feel confused, and sometimes angry.

For a third group prayer serves purely as a ceremonial function. They recognise that it means something within their tradition, and that it was valued by their forebears, but for them it remains absent in their daily lives.

At some point in my spiritual journey, I have identified with all three groups as I challenged and was challenged in my prayer life.

Prayer was foundational to my evangelical Christian upbringing; so much so, that when I started searching for a deeper, more meaningful spiritual path in the secular world, there was a sense of loss as the rational, scientific world that I inhabited often saw prayer as a regressive, almost superstitious practice. In my initial introduction to Unitarianism, prayer was sometimes viewed with suspicion and alternative words such as meditation and contemplation were used to make the practice of prayer more acceptable to an 'educated' and sophisticated audience.

This was particularly apparent with the Lord's Prayer. I have personally come across comments that termed it 'backward' and 'antiquated'. At first, this perspective was hurtful and alienating especially as I come from a mixed-race background from a specific ethnic group that traces its ancestral African links to the indigenous Khoisan tribes that populated Southern Africa for millennia. Their rock art bears testimony to their deep spiritual connection with what they perceive as the Divine.

The Khoisan were the first native peoples that the Dutch settlers encountered at the Cape colony enroute to their spice-rich possessions in southeast Asia. This interaction between the European interlopers and the Khoisan pastoralists was particularly disastrous for the latter. Despite war, pestilence, starvation and genocide, a hybrid community of Khoisan/Dutch descendants emerged that adopted the faith of their overlords but infused it with their own unique identity. The cultural and religious diversity of this population that absorbed later foreign influxes is evident in the many indigenous African churches that developed in Cape Town.

Today, these houses of prayer reflect a Pentecostal-style Christian worship facilitating a distinct spiritual expressiveness seldom found in more liturgical-orientated veneration. Prayer is therefore felt, and is expressed through song, music and dance. Since Biblical teaching allows it (Acts 2:4; 1 Cor 14:23 amongst others), speaking in tongues (glossolalia) is commonplace in the land of my birth. Such a noticeable outpouring in traditional prayer was part of my identity and infused my early adulthood as lived through my faith.

As a new Unitarian 12 years ago, I tried to fit in with what was expected of a 'rational' worshipper in the UK, my adopted country. Strangely enough, in attempting assimilation, acceptance did not necessarily follow. Later, when starting to lead formal services, I was advised that it was best to ask a congregation whether it would be appropriate to recite the Lord's Prayer. This seemed to me quite bizarre since at their inception these beautiful chapels and churches would have reverberated with Christianity's seminal supplication.

For me the turning point came in 2015 when with my Khoisan-descended grandmother and my Muslim husband, I took a trip out of Oxford and visited a Unitarian congregation. That service highlighted the rationality of Unitarianism and clearly outlined the inherent errors that Trinitarian Christians (like my grandmother) were guilty of. My grandmother smiled sagely throughout the service and took no offence. But from that religious engagement, I decided to reclaim my own identity as a Unitarian Christian and decide for myself what relevance and purpose my faith holds for me at present.

So, I decided to look at my practice of prayer anew. I came to know the 'Our Father', as many Unitarians in the UK do, within its specific Western context and with its rigid English word structure. I am trilingual and know the Our Father in three languages, but it's gendered language and references to temptation and transgressions remains largely the same.

Naturally, I struggled with this pivotal prayer that had become so fixed within my own spirituality. It is only after many years of travelling all over the world and hearing the same prayer recited or sung in Aramaic and Arabic, Syriac and Georgian, Russian and Swahili, that the oneness of humanity which Unitarians are so fond of quoting, really struck me.

As I explored the origins of this influential prayer it became less of a symbol of one culture and a specific language; instead, it transformed itself into what it was really meant to be from the very beginning – a connection with the Divine.

Upon hearing the Our Father in original Aramaic, which is how it would have sounded from Jesus's lips 2,000 years ago, filled me with an unquantifiable blessing. (To hear this for yourself, set to music, go to this online address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FznM-UKMSY>)

Many English translations exist, and various scholars offers a litany of interpretations, but what I had come to accept as the sole acceptable translation was, in fact, not strictly gendered in the pristine message. The opening words that a western English audience immediately recognise as a male-orientated prayer is not strictly true, as the Aramaic opens with 'Abwoon' – a blending of 'abba' which means father and 'woon' referring to the womb. The immediate recognition of a masculine and feminine source of creation resonated with me

and prompted further investigation and reflection of Christianity's premier invocation.

Neil Douglas-Klotz in *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus* postulates that sacred teachings must be examined from at least three points of view: the intellectual, the metaphorical, and the universal (or mystical).

His phrase-by-phrase dissection and commentary on the Our Father provides rich pickings for thought. While his is not the only approach, it inspired me (and others) to undertake fresh scrutiny of this age-old prayer. Douglas-Klotz offers various translations for each line from The Lord's Prayer from the Bible's King James version. The one selection dealing with the idea of being 'led into temptation' can as easily be translated as not being 'deceived by the outer nor the inner' and instead of 'freeing us to walk your path with joy'. In the same vein, the New Zealand version of the Our Father first published in 1989 in *The New Zealand Prayer Book* resonates in a similar more universal way (<https://livinghour.org/lords-prayer/new-zealand-maori>).

For me, in exploring the mystical side of prayer, my background from a Pentecostal tradition, provided an interesting perspective to my Unitarian journey. Prayer, within an indigenous African context, has never been a quiet affair. It is also not always reverential and easily crosses into the secular world. One illustration of how something considered divine is absorbed into everyday life is the use of the Lord's Prayer for mainly secular purposes as shown by Christopher Tin. He used The Lord's Prayer for a video game called 'Civilisation'.

Living your faith for many Pentecostals means living in the Spirit all the time. So, having overlapping spheres of faith with layers of secularism and humanism does not seem mystifying to me at all. It's one of the reasons why African animism has an easy way of creeping into most Pentecostal churches in Africa. I may not approve of every practice, and some of it, I find curious, but who am I to judge?

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*Enjoy Christopher Tin and his very upbeat and worldly version of the Our Father - in Swahili: It is called Baba Yethu (Our Father). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=or4IKVG2zAA>*

My journey has not ended and there is little doubt that in exploring prayer further, I will find depths to this devotional practice that I cannot completely fathom.

*1. Neil Douglas-Klotz. Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus (Harper & Row, 1990)  
2. Gretta Vosper. AMEN: what prayer can mean in a world beyond*

## UCA Worship & Fellowship

Have you joined us yet for our weekly online service? We gather every Sunday from 5.45pm for a 6pm start. Services are about 45 minutes and are always followed by a time of fellowship. Some folk come occasionally, and that's fine, but we have quite a few regulars now, and are becoming a proper fellowship. There is a Facebook group attached to the Worship and Fellowship, and all UCA members are invited to search for UCA Worship and ask to join (you'll definitely be accepted!)

One of the many highlights from our diverse service leaders was a recent service by Jo James, based around the five stones that David selected with which to confront Goliath. Many of us would like to replicate this form of worship, and so we've asked Jo to provide us with a prayer resource, which is offered below.

### Five stones – a resource for communal prayer by Jo James

It can be helpful to invite participants to contribute actual stones, sea pebbles & touchstones are ideal, to hold. At Mill Hill we invite people to drop stones into the water of the baptismal font.

The notes on James Luther Adams' 'Five smooth stones of liberal religion' (with acknowledgments to a responsive reading found here: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop1/handout-1>) are included for interest and may or may not be helpful in practice of worship.



#### Worship Leader:

In our individualist and atomised culture it can seem that the forces that oppose change are overwhelming. But we remember David in the First Book of Samuel (ch.17: 40): *"Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine [Goliath]."* The boy David placed his faith in his hand when he went to face his giant opponent.

James Luther Adams (in his essay *"Guiding Principles for a Free Faith"* in *On Becoming Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society*, Max Stackhouse, ed. Beacon Press, 1976, pp. 12-20.) said that the liberal church also had five smooth stones:

*"Religious liberalism depends on the principle that 'revelation' is continuous."* liberal religious tradition is a living tradition because we are always learning more about reality and discovering new aspects of the truth. God's ongoing self revelation didn't end with the Bible, but is a continuous process that we can choose to participate in.

*"All relations between persons ought to rest on mutual, free consent and not on coercion."* The history of religious radicalism is a struggle for freedom inspired by God. The God of Exodus is the God of liberation, and "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom", so in freedom we enter into relationship with one another, and we aspire to relationships free from the shadow of domination.

*"Religious liberalism affirms the moral obligation toward the establishment of a just and loving community. It is this which makes the role of the prophet central and indispensable in liberalism."* We aspire to fairness and equality. The role of prophetic witness is to disturb and disrupt the superficial narratives of competitive culture. By instinct and tradition we cherish freedom of conscience, reason in religion and freedom of expression.

*"We deny the immaculate conception of virtue and affirm the necessity of social incarnation."* Social justice isn't a spiritual virtue in itself, but neither will it happen by itself. *'The incarnation is true, not of Jesus exclusively but people universally and God everlastingly* (after Martineau). God works through good (and sometimes not-so-good) people to bring the kingdom closer.

*"Liberalism holds that the resources (Divine and human) available for the achievement of meaningful change justify an attitude of ultimate optimism."* Despite all our difficulties and all the challenges that confront us, we may share in a hope which transcends hopelessness. Beyond hope there lies an

opportunity to discover new meaning and new life.

We recognise that prayer is itself a counter cultural act and so we raise up prayers like stones against the faceless and mindless powers and principalities of hyper-materialism.

It is important to note that online, as in chapel, silence need not be difficult or awkward but it can instead be a resource; silence is the stream from which we lift our stones.

Our first stone is a prayer of gratitude

what small things (or maybe big things) are you grateful for...

Our second stone may require you to commit more deeply it is a prayer of sorrow or grief.

You may chose to hold this sorrow in your heart but if you wish to share it, please know that your grief is held and respected and your tears are welcome

Even more courage may be required to lift up our next stone which is a prayer of self acceptance and may be written or voiced or maybe understood only in your own heart

State with clarity in your own heart any failure you'd like to overcome – or state an aspiration to do better. Again you may choose quietness in which to bring your own knowledge of the things you struggle with to consciousness, but it is important to bring to awareness all that you know in your heart. You may wish to share the goal you are setting for yourself.

Our fourth stone is a prayer for our own congregation or family & friends –

who are the *individuals* close to us we should raise up, in celebration or in concern?

Our fifth stone is a prayer for the wider community:

what *places or communities* in the world should we raise up in celebration or concern?

Developed by Jo James at Mill Hill Chapel in lockdown 2020. Our grateful thanks to Jo for sharing this valuable resource.

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## **Focus on our Affiliates - July 2022**

### *Stalybridge Unitarian Church*

The congregation continues to grow slowly but surely. Currently, congregations are between 40 and 50 every Sunday. The Sunday School is continuing to thrive with 20 children on the register.

The weather on Whit Sunday was terrible so we were unable to hold an outdoor service. We held the service in church and over 70 of us were led in a wonderful traditional Pentecost service by Len Elias, music was provided by Denton Brass Band.

Following the service we all stayed for a Platinum Jubilee Celebration Tea. The church was beautifully decorated for this special occasion.

Luckily, the weather for our Summer Fair was much kinder and a lot of people came to support this fund-raising effort. We raised just over £1000 which is a great result.

A special Father's Day service was held, conducted by Sue Elias. Some of the Sunday School children gave the readings and prayers.

We are now preparing for our 160th Anniversary Service on 10th July. During this service all the Sunday School children will be presented with a book, of their own choice, as a thank you for their many contributions to the life of the church.

Ken Howard, Warden

*It's great to hear what's happening in our affiliated churches. Please send news of what's happened in your chapel or church to [franciselliottwright@gmail.com](mailto:franciselliottwright@gmail.com)*

## From Deconstruction to Reconstruction; the positivity of doubt

*Kevin Mason joined the UCA recently. Here he tells us about his journey from evangelicalism to Unitarianism.*

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The doubts began with questioning the doctrine of hell. Lockdown gave me plenty of time to study and it didn't take me long to realise that I no longer believed in such a place. Following that I questioned and concluded that I didn't believe in a literal being known as the Devil either. Hand in hand with that, of course, I threw out of the proverbial window the doctrine of cosmic conflict, where God and Satan fought for the souls of men and women.

As an elder in an evangelical church, I shared my conclusions with the Minister and fellow elder. I found it only right to offer my resignation, which they accepted, telling the church that 'Kevin has rejected the clear teaching of scripture'. I wondered why, if the scriptures were so clear, that there were thousands of different denominations. It became apparent very quickly that in evangelical circles to doubt the traditional Church teachings was to invite warnings, ridicule and anger from fellow Christians. My wife and I also resigned from church membership.

I had often wondered what the dark night of the soul was all about. Now I know. What followed in the months after was akin to a helter skelter ride of spiritual doubt, fear and confusion. If you have never done so before, I recommend that you ask yourself why you believe the things that you do about your faith. Do you believe what you believe because you have studied it, questioned it and come to those conclusions, or do you believe what you believe because someone told you it was so?

My faith (of 28 years) began to fall apart like domino bricks. I questioned everything from the Trinity to opposition to same sex marriage. Coming to conclusions is the easy part, letting go is the hard part; beliefs are sticky. You find yourself afraid to get it wrong. Where hell is concerned for instance, there's a lot on the line.

At one point I briefly considered myself to be an atheist. However, spiritual experiences of the past nagged at me and so I claimed to be an agnostic...briefly.

A book I re-read called 'The Inner Reality' by Paul Brunton, confirmed in me the Unitarian beliefs I was forming. It is actually the first spiritual book that I ever read, 30 plus years ago. Having found and read it again I felt I had come full circle. Now whilst I don't agree with everything the author states, as a Unitarian Christian I do agree with a lot of it and feel at peace with where I now find myself spiritually. Whilst I have been wrong in the past and can therefore be wrong now, I have reached a beautiful place, a place where I believe there is nothing to fear but plenty to hope for.

How did I get to this beautiful place? Through the Valley of Doubt.

Doubt, especially in mainstream Christianity, can often be viewed by people as a negative thing. Take doubting Thomas for instance. He doubted the resurrection of Jesus and has ever since then been labelled as a bad example of a Christian. This is unfair and even shines a bad light on a character to be admired; let's not forget that when the disciples tried to dissuade Jesus from going back to Judea (John 11:7) it was Thomas who said in verse 16 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' (NRSV).

The way I read Jesus' words later to Thomas in chapter 20, verses 26 to 29, I see no rebuke or ridicule from Jesus, just a point about those being blessed who believe without seeing. Yet Thomas, poor chap, is not remembered for his bravery but his doubting.

Why has doubting become so viewed as a negative thing and not a reasonable way to reach conclusions? I think the 'herd instinct' and the desire to fit in and not be seen as an outsider must play a massive part. Yet doubt is a reasonable and valid path to confident conclusions. Doubt doesn't mean that we won't come to agree with the offered understanding or said occurrence; Thomas did. Doubt helps us search for

reasons to either deny or accept, by first asking ourselves why we doubt and whether our reasons are valid. Ultimately, of course, it is our reasoning and understanding that helps us reach the place of confident and comfortable conclusions, yet we may have not even questioned our stance if it were not for doubt. I remember how when I was a child, I would believe anything that I wanted to believe, simply because I wanted to. I believed things that as a man I now believe to be untrue. I don't believe in Father Christmas (just my opinion I'm not pushing it) or the Tooth Fairy. Why? Because I came to the point of doubting and then having reasoned it through, I formed a belief about them that I'm confident and comfortable with.

Without questioning our beliefs how can we be secure in them? Where is this heading? Simply to say this: if you are having doubts about certain aspects of your faith, see it as a positive thing not a negative thing. You may well have to go through a time of confusion but by questioning and reasoning, your beliefs, whichever way they go, will be firmer and you will be more confident in them.

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## You Must Read:

### More book recommendations from UCA folk...

'The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity' by Philip Jenkins,  
*How Christianity is increasingly a religion of the global South.*

**Alex Bradley**

*I would recommend the book 'The Parables' by Paula Gooder. A useful guide to exploring a little below the surface of the parables without exhaustive detail as in 'Stories with Intent' by Klyne R. Snodgrass. (no I did not believe the name either but its on my desk!).* **Peter Brown**

'Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind' by Yuval Noah Hariri.

*If you haven't read this bestselling history of humanity yet, I highly recommend it to you! Hariri manages to present the history of our species from an entirely different angle to most histories, challenging how we see ourselves, our history and our world and presenting stark home-truths as we confront the challenges of the 21st century. It has truly changed the way I look at many issues and the ideas presented have been swirling around in my head since reading it last month.* **Rory Castle Jones**

The Kingdom Within: The Inner meaning of Jesus' Sayings - by John A. Sanford - 1987 - revised edition, Harper and Row Publishers.

*Sanford as an Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst, skillfully uncovers the psychological depths, hidden meanings, and richness of the Gospel narratives - considering their relevance for spiritual growth and wholeness, and drawing on case histories and dream material. Whilst some of the references to gender and sexuality may now be dated, I would still recommend Sanford's books, which have played a pivotal role in my own journey of uncovering the depth and breadth of Jesus's teachings, and reclaiming the treasures of the bible.* **Sheena Gabriel**

The Growing of the Seed . The story of Unitarianism in Stalybridge 1862 - 1962. Published by The Sunday School and Church to celebrate the centenary. Available from Stalybridge Unitarian Church.

*This booklet chronicles the events leading up to the formation of a Unitarian Sunday School and Church in Stalybridge, and continues with a potted history of the first 100 years; it is a story of success against all the odds; this should inspire anyone who is involved with the many trials and tribulations surrounding modern day church life, it proves that faith can really move mountains.* **Ken Howard**

The Secrets of Divine Love by A. Helwa (and the accompanying journal).

*I loved reading this beautiful book about Islam. The author takes an intrareligious route through her joyous and loving exploration of Islam. I found reading it deeply moving and inspiring. Whether you're unfamiliar with Islam or you have already done some exploring it will lift your heart to God.* **Tristan Jovanović**



# My Interpretation of Easter

## *Lesley Harris gives us her take on the meaning of Easter*

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I would like to begin this article with extracts from a reading which I have taken from the Easter Service from the book "Marking The Days"

The word "Easter" comes from the name of the Teutonic god, Oстера. The ancient Saxons celebrated her festival in April, accompanied by "egg rolling" – rolling eggs down hill sides or grassy slopes (the winner of the competition was the one whose egg rolled furthest). Easter is the festival of new life, of renewal which was adopted by Christians to celebrate the new life in Jesus, whose spirit, they believed, still lived on in their hearts and minds, and whose life and teaching still inspired them and instructed them in ways of love and peace, breaking the hard shells of human fear and selfishness and setting them free.

We still celebrate Easter with eggs after all these centuries and sometimes we give some thought to the deeper meaning they represent - to the love at the heart of our lives, to the renewal of life in the seasons year by year and also to the renewal that will enrich our own lives, and those around us as we reach out in love to our world, just as God or The Spirit reaches out in love to us.

So far, so good. Easter – Natural and personal renewal and rebirth, coming out of the Dark into the Light, Nature, Spring, Blossom, Bunnies, Sunshine, Gardens, Chocolate, thinking about Jesus Christ, and his message of Love. That's how some of us may like to have Easter. That's how our secular society has Easter. None of the gory Crucifixion Atonement. No hymns like "There is a Green Hill Far Away" or "When I Survey The Wondrous Cross". Some of us really are uneasy about the literal Atonement aspect of the Christian Easter story which in a nutshell comes over as this, as described by Ernest Baker:

Good Friday – Why "Good". Good because it sees the commencement of the first act of the culmination of the Christian story. God created the world, humankind disobeyed and was cast out of paradise, the Son of God came, was cruelly done to death and by his sacrifice made the relationship between God and humans right again, and He will come again at the end of time to separate the sheep and the goats into a new age  
Many of us became Unitarians to get away from the

Atonement aspect of this story which appears to be taken literally by at least some of mainstream Christianity. We feel uneasy about sacrificing to appease a God. And certainly not by means of someone being nailed to a cross and left there to die. We don't want to believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins over 2000 years after His Crucifixion.

But, if you think about it, the Atonement Perspective of Christian Easter story could be considered as an analogy for how the world works or rather doesn't work. If for the word God we substitute the words "political and social circumstances", we could have a secular version of the Easter story which might run like this.

"Political and social circumstances created nations but they couldn't get on together, work together or even just mind their own business and let each other get on with life. So they were cast out of the security they could have had. War threatened but they weren't prepared for it, as happened for example in the Second World War. Prevailing political and social circumstances turned nasty, just as the old style vengeful God did. And so in order to get political and social circumstances to be nice to us again, combatants and civilians, such as those who fought in the Battle of Britain, or who perished in the Holocaust, were cruelly done to death in various ways and sacrificed their lives or had their lives sacrificed, because of the evils of the perpetrators of war, but also because of the sins of the previously unprepared politicians and the previously apathetic populaces.

You can also think about those who lose their lives in terrorist attacks, or random street and school stabbing events. The victims who die by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, in a way, save those of us, who are in the vicinity at the time but who are lucky enough not to happen to be in the path of the bullet or on the receiving end of the knife. If it hadn't been them, then it could have been us.

All the time we are directly or indirectly living off the voluntary and involuntary sacrifices of others to a greater or lesser extent. Sometimes these sacrifices are necessary and are not life threatening and are done with love and joy, e.g. all of us are happy to sacrifice our time and effort for our

children, for our friends and for causes we believe in, and without these types of sacrifices, the world would not be able to keep going. Sometimes these sacrifices are life taking and are not done voluntarily but are necessary to save us from great forces of evil, for example having to fight a war to protect your country. Sacrifice is a part of life, it's all part of the eternal battle between Good and Evil, but the question is: to what extent should sacrifice be necessary?

I ask this because at other times, there are life-taking sacrifices which "should not have had to happen", and which might not have happened if our society was in a better state. I still remember the case of Philip Lawrence who was stabbed to death protecting a pupil, the case of Keith Blakelock who was hacked and pounded to death on police duty and more recently the case of PC Andrew Harper who died horribly trying to get someone's stolen goods back. These sacrifices were just as grisly in their way as the Crucifixion, and they happened because of the state of our society.

We are saved by all the people and examples I have mentioned as much as mainstream Christianity would say that we are saved by Jesus Christ, and we should perhaps therefore acknowledge the whole Crucifixion drama as an enactment of the truth that, yes, the way humanity is, we are saved by blood shed for the remission of sins. We don't like the idea that the Crucifixion was part of a Great Pre-Ordained Plan, but we should remember Aldous Huxley's line "Providence takes its cue from Man" and remember that some of the sacrifices that people have made to get "Political and Social Circumstances Back On Track" are just as awful as the sacrifice made by Christ to appease an angry God.

I once went to see a multi themed Pakistani film Janaan. The hero of the story, as well as having a romantic interest, was also trying to expose a local and well respected dignitary who was a child abuser. Nobody listened to the hero, nobody believed him, but when the hero's servant was murdered by a band of thugs sent out by the child abuser, suddenly the town came round to the hero who then uttered the words "Oh why does a man have to die for a town to see sense?". It reminded me of the centurion's comment after the Crucifixion: "Truly this man was the Son of God". I always wonder why the centurion did not understand this before the Crucifixion.

Could we not do better than this? Could we not bear in mind that nobility and heroism should not have to be the way that is so often needed to put things right? Nobility and heroism are wonderful qualities but they are also symptoms of "Something is Badly Wrong".

So yes, we need to think of Easter as a time of spring, renewal and hope and coming into the light literally and figuratively after dark times. And far more importantly we should also think of Easter as a time to remember all those who have saved us and who save us every day. But I would suggest that we also need to think of Easter, and what happened to Jesus Christ, as a reminder of the need to work towards a society in which some of the terrible sacrifices that some have to make don't have to happen.

## **FUTURE EVENTS**

The Unitarian Christian Association

[www.unitarianchristian.org.uk](http://www.unitarianchristian.org.uk)

In collaboration with

The World Community of Christian  
Meditation

[www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

will host a Quiet Day

at Dean Row Chapel, Chapel Road,  
Wilmslow SK9 2BX

[www.deanrowchapel.org.uk](http://www.deanrowchapel.org.uk)

Saturday 20 August 2022, 10am until 4pm

Come for a day of peace, silence, gentle fellowship, guided meditation and Taizé worship, all offered in the beautiful surroundings of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Dissenting chapel, garden and well-appointed hall. There will be no charge for participating in the day's event but it would be helpful to have some idea of numbers. Contact: Jeff Gould (tel 01625 402952 / email [jeffreylanegould1959@talktalk.net](mailto:jeffreylanegould1959@talktalk.net)) to register interest or seek further information.

# “By the shores of Galilee...”

by Rory Castle Jones



One blissful day in early June this year, I stood with my feet in the cool waters of the Sea of Galilee, refreshed after touring the archaeological site of the village of Magdala, home of

Mary Magdalene, in (for us Welsh travellers, at least) extremely hot weather. Standing there for the first time, after many years of wishing to visit, I thought of many things. I thought of Mary Magdalene, of Jesus and his disciples, but also of my late grandmother who always wanted to visit Israel but was never able to.

I thought too of my congregation at Gellionnen Chapel back in Wales, and I hummed the words of one of our favourite hymns – ‘When I See The Purple Heather’ (#205 in the purple hymn book), written by one of our former ministers, Rev. Elwyn Davies, and sung to the beloved Welsh hymn tune *Calon Lân*. In particular, I thought of these lines: *“I’m reminded of the healing, on the shores of Galilee, and the ‘Lord’ who is ‘my shepherd’, who will lead and comfort me.”* I was, finally, in the place where it all happened, where Jesus lived and worked and ministered for most of his life.

This was my third trip to Israel, but my first time at the Sea of Galilee. Previous visits had taken me all over Israel and the West Bank – to Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Ramallah, Haifa, Caesarea, and more. Travelling with my husband, our trips are a mixture of relaxation in cosmopolitan Tel Aviv (the “gay capital” of the Middle East, although as our tour guide pointed out, there’s not much competition for that title!), meeting up with friends and relatives (including a family Bar-Mitzvah), and then intense all-day coach trips spanning the country. The latter include visiting ancient archaeological sites, contested holy places,

meeting fascinating people, and diving headfirst into a land which can be both uplifting and wonderful, whilst at the same time bewildering and challenging.

For me as a Christian, visiting the Holy Land is of course a powerfully spiritual experience, helping me to connect with my faith and understand more about its origins. Modern-day Israel and the Palestinian Territories are home to primarily to Jews and Muslims, but also to Christians, Bahais, Druze, and other faiths. Within the space of a few hours on a trip to Jerusalem (a truly amazing, crazy, stifling, beautiful, unique city) I found myself praying alongside Jews at the Western Wall, standing outside the Dome of the Rock on the al-Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount, one of Islam’s holiest sites, and visiting the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the traditional site of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is shared between several historic denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, Syriac and Ethiopian churches. The church is strictly divided into sections, each controlled by a different denomination. Today things are fairly amicable, but in the past interdenominational conflict was so rife that in 1192 the Muslim ruler Saladin had to give the key to the church to a Muslim family, as the Christians couldn’t agree on who should have control. The same family hold the key today. As recently as 2002, a Coptic monk moved his chair into the shade, overstepping the boundary of his church’s area. The Ethiopians responded to this hostile act and eleven people ended up in hospital.

In 2004, the Orthodox accidentally left open the door to the Catholic area, resulting in a fist fight and several arrests. Perhaps it is unsurprising that, just as Christians have sadly never been able to get along with each other in the wider world, things are much the same in their holiest of churches.

The day before our visit, there had been some trouble in Jerusalem and so there were fewer tourists than usual, meaning the queue to visit Jesus' tomb (itself within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre), which is usually several hours long, was non-existent. Crouching to enter through a low and narrow stone door, welcomed in by a solitary monk, I made my way in alongside three other pilgrims (there is only room for four people to enter) and hurriedly said my prayers. I had just a couple of minutes inside and leaving aside questions about the 'authenticity' of the location I truly felt the power of the prayers of thousands upon thousands of people who have entered that tiny space. It was real. It meant something to me.

It's hard to talk about a trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories without talking about politics. Even visiting the country can be seen by some as a political act. Through the eyes of a tourist, of course, it's impossible to really grasp what is going on in another land, just as we can't fully understand the situation easily just from what we see and hear on the news. It's a complicated place. Everywhere you go you meet people whose lives have been shaped by conflict. Conflict between peoples, between faiths, between ideologies. There are many problems and there is much conflict. But there are also many people working for peace, for reconciliation, for hope. And in the midst of all of this, of course, normal people are just living their lives. As one of our guides put it: "every day in Jerusalem and elsewhere Jews, Muslims and Christians are coexisting. Some days there are conflicts – and this makes the headlines around the world – but most days there is peace and coexistence. It is possible for us all to live together... and most days we manage it."

There is so much I could say about my trip – about standing on the Golan Heights looking down over war-torn Syria, or the tranquillity of the Garden of Gethsemane, about watching young people enjoying life on the beach in Tel Aviv, or the rigorous security checks and strict Islamic dress code required to enter the al-Haram al-Sharif, about

the people of many different faiths and identities who spoke with concern and with hope about the present and future about this Holy Land.

But what I want to finish with is a return to the shores of Galilee. Hot, dusty, beautiful Galilee, with those refreshing waters. To those shores where Jesus lived, where he healed, where he launched a movement for peace, hope, faith and love which has carried down the millennia to us today. A simple message of love for God and for our neighbour. I'll leave you now with some more words from Elwyn Davies' hymn: "*When I see the pathway winding on and on so far ahead; when I see the river widening as it flows along its bed: I can hear a voice proclaiming, 'I'm the way, so do not grieve; peace I give like flowing waters; do not fear – my peace I leave'.*"

### **More You Must Read:**

"An Interrupted Life" the Holocaust diary of Etty Hillesum. *This is a remarkable book from a remarkable woman living her life, exploring spirituality and meaning as the Holocaust slowly casts a shadow upon her life. She was truly one of the great mystics of the twentieth century who choose love and choose God in the face of the most extreme evil.* **Stephen Lingwood**

The Authentic Letters of Paul, by Arthur J Dewey and others. *Clear your minds of negative judgements on St. Paul with this fresh translation and arrangement of his seven genuine letters, combined with a simple introduction to Bible scholars' identifying that the other six Bible letters with his name on were written by others after his death. Also briefly showing that Acts is not a reliable report on Paul's life; and how even the genuine letters were edited and added to in the 2nd century AD. The illiberal passages purported to be his are not his.* **Wade Miller-Knight**

The Gospel According To Jesus by Stephen Mitchell. *I highly recommend him. He gives concise and well considered derivations of the gospels, using comparisons to ancient texts and sources, this book has helped me in many ways over the years.* **Lynne Readett**

Laird, Martin (2006) Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation. Darton, Longman and Todd. *Laird gives a profound, yet readable introduction to the practice of meditation or 'silent prayer', outlining the 'how's' and 'why's' within a context of spiritual growth in the Christian tradition.* **Jim Wilson**

## A letter sent to Newcastle Unitarians in October, 2021

*by their former minister, Roger Tarbuck*

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Dear Friends,

I have a favourite walk along a little lane round the ancient Anglican Church nearby. The graveyard is full of gloomy old tombstones, but burials now take place in the Parish Burial Ground across the lane, which I often visit. "Weird!" some might say. Well, no: this burial ground hasn't any tall gravestones: all memorials are laid flat, with an occasional foot-high wooden cross. The rest of the view is flowers and their containers, because most of the families of those who have died keep their plots bright with fresh seasonal blooms all year round, none of them more than a foot or so high, or maybe a bit more in the spring, when the cheerful daffodils move in. At the entrance to the ground stands a beautiful grove of trees – Lombardy poplar, weeping willow, cypress, beech, oak, and more, while smaller trees stand watch over the flowers in the wider area. Nothing gloomy or threatening there. But not all cemeteries are like that.

Once, when I was on my way to visit friends in Bolton, I called at an old cemetery to tidy up my grandma's grave. I parked my car near the grave and walked around a bit, admiring some of the magnificent stonework and statuary on some of the older graves, with angels and sweet marble cherubs beckoning to me here and there. Then I set about my business. Time passed and it was getting a little dark, so I finished the job, got into my car and drove towards the gate – which was closed! I got out of the car to see whether the gate was locked: it was. There was a low wall by the gate, which I could easily have stepped over, but my little Mini didn't "do" walls of any height. There were no mobile phones in those days, so I couldn't call my friends for help, but I had to do something.

It was getting darker and I suddenly seemed to be in a different world. Gone was the air of beauty: now, the memorials were towering, threatening things. Even the cherubs no longer looked sweet but nasty little creatures, as they joined the other statues in staring at me horribly, and I began to feel very uncomfortable. So, I got into my car and headed down the narrow road deep into the cemetery. It was the only way to go, and I was lucky, because that must be the only cemetery that blends with a jolly garden centre and a gate open to the main road. Phew!

The cemetery must have been exactly the same night or day. Only my perception was different. I'd never have dreamt that I could have been so disturbed. The sudden sense of isolation left me wide-open to the remarkable change in the appearance of the graves, and something deep within me stirred. It reminded me of how easy it is to forget the shadows - our unconscious - behind the brightness of our day. Some analysts say that the inner world of humankind - our **collective** unconscious - is like the personal unconscious of a single human being, and that the collective unconscious may have moods and neuroses, some terribly violent, as it struggles within itself, as well as periods of peace and love, just like an individual, and that it is our life's work, as individuals, to control our own darkness and integrate its power into our good side, and so make us more likely to improve the collective unconscious of humankind, as it staggers tragically from crisis to crisis.

When good and evil fight for supremacy in a person, it can lead to disease, neurosis, breakdown, anti-social behaviour - even, in some cases, violence. Putting it into old language, the angels are at war with the devil in us. This is what happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to our collective unconscious. Ruthless, homicidal dictators had to be stopped by the forces for good, which, time and again, made a gigantic effort to achieve balance and peace. And in our present century, haven't people learned? Have they forgotten that in the two major wars alone, in the past century, over a hundred million people died world-

wide, and countless more suffered in unimaginable ways, plus many killed in “smaller” wars? Is no figure striking enough to affect the dictators and other cruel people with power in their hands? Will fanatics never learn? From World War Two: Auschwitz, Belsen, Buchenwald, Treblinka et al: millions murdered, including 6 million Jews: words like these do their terrible dance through the brain, revealing the colossal, festering disease in humanity, which had to be healed by the brave ones who fought for us, like phagocytic healing cells working in a diseased body.

And so, we remember, still shocked as we are by the dreadful wars of the last century: we remember the courage, the dedication, the sacrifice, even unto death, of those who served, and the suffering millions who perished on all sides. May their sacrifice not be in vain. Dear God, preserve us and give us wisdom, patience and hope in the present turbulent time.

Yours sincerely,

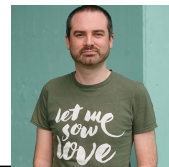
Roger Tarbuck

***Editor's note: The above letter  
was written before the war in  
Ukraine***

Donate to Christian Aid's Ukraine Appeal here: [www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/ukraine-cris-appeal](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/emergencies/ukraine-cris-appeal)

## **A tale of two protests**

by Stephen Lingwood, pioneer minister at Cardiff Unitarians



I was at two different protests recently. Both were in the middle of Cardiff, and both at points were on exactly the same routes. One was a protests, organised by the Cardiff People's Assembly, protesting the cost of living crisis. The other was a procession between two Anglican churches in Cardiff as an act of witness to pray for peace in Ukraine.

Now of course those issues are very different, but at the same time it really struck me that I seemed to be the only person who was at both of these different events. Both in the middle of Cardiff, both virtually in the same place, just a few days apart. I was the only person at both the left wing cost of living protest, and the Christian pray for peace in Ukraine event.

It really got me pondering - why do I often feel like I'm the only person who goes to these different things? Why is there so little crossover?

Now these are two separate things. But I also find it hard to believe that people who care about the cost of living don't also care about peace in Ukraine, and that people who care about peace in Ukraine don't also care about the cost of living crisis. So I'm left puzzling about why I was the only person (as far as I could see) at both of these events.

I think part of the answer is that these things happen in silos. There's the left wing activist community silo and the (mainstream) Christian community silo. And never the twain shall meet.

But it's not just that. The reality is that people will often go to events organised by their own organisation, but won't go to events organised by other organisations. So if Anglican Christians create an event led by Anglican Christians praying and protesting for peace in Ukraine, then Anglican Christians, people in those networks will turn up to it. And yet if you organised an event not lead by those people, probably people wouldn't turn up.

In fact they probably won't even know about it. Extinction Rebellion people turn up at Extinction Rebellion events. Friends of the Earth people turn up at Friends of the Earth events. Muslims turn up at Muslim events. Christians turn up at Christian events. Socialists turn up at socialist events. Trade unionists turn up at trade union events. Everyone wants everyone else to turn up to their events, but they are less likely to turn up to other organisations' events.

Why? Well sure, there are only so many hours in the day, and you have to discern what to give your energy to. And you also have to work out if you feel like you will be comfortably welcome in some spaces. Black people and people of colour have to decide if they have the energy to turn up in mainly white spaces. And we all have to make those kinds of decisions.

But I also think there's something of organisational ego, or sectarianism going on here. I want my organisation's event to be successful, because then I/we will feel successful. I'm not saying people don't have good intentions as well. I'm noticing these thought patterns in myself as well. We're all a mix of different motivations, aren't we? I am accountable for what I do, professionally, and the fact is, if I produce a report that says "I organised an event and X people turned up" that sounds much better than "I attended/supported someone else's event and X people turned up." I feel better. My organisation feels better. I feel like I'm achieving something.

But are we achieving much, each operating in our different silos? Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "There's no limit to what can be accomplished if it doesn't matter who gets the credit." The opposite of that is that maybe we're not accomplishing what we need to because we are pre-occupied with who gets the credit.

Can we step back and ask - what are we aiming for, and how can we collectively get there? How could we build peace and justice in our city and in the world in a collaborative way? Maybe this sounds like a recipe for more meetings.

That would be a depressing conclusion. There's no easy answers but perhaps part of the solution is not to exist in social silos. Maybe if we just were friends with each other, we would know what's going on in each other's communities and feel more like supporting each other. Maybe if the Christians were friends with the socialists it would make a difference (and you can of course, be both - I am!, but perhaps we often operate in primarily tribal ways in the circles we move in). Maybe if the environmentalists were friends with the trade unionists. Maybe if the anti-nuclear activists were friends with the anti-poverty activists.

Perhaps that is naive. But I just hope for a time when I don't feel like I'm the only one who goes to different types of protests/events, where it all feels more networked, more connected.

*Originally published on Stephen's blog, Reignite. Check out these other brilliant blogs by UCA members*

**A Space of Possibility** (Jo James)

*Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, Minister's Blog.*

<https://spaceofpossibility.wordpress.com/>

**Reignite** (Stephen Lingwood)

*Seeking paradise in Cardiff*

<http://reigniteuk.blogspot.com/>

**Caute** (Andrew Brown)

*Making Footprints Not Blueprints*

<http://andrewjbrown.blogspot.com/>

**Rev. Robin Hanford**

*Personal website of Robin Hanford, Unitarian Minister*

<https://hanford.me.uk/>

**Didymus** (Lucy Harris - Editor)

*Unitarians in Ringwood*

<https://ringwoodunitarians.blogspot.com/>

**Unitarian Christian Ark** (Francis Elliot-Wright)

*UCA Officer & Ministry Student*

<http://unitarianchristianark.blogspot.com/>

**I Dream of the Ocean** (Danny Crosby)

*There is something in the corner of my life, that I cannot quite see...and my reflections upon it*

<http://danny-crosby.blogspot.com/>

**Unitarian Musings from North Wales** (Ant Howe)

*A Unitarian Minister reflecting on life, spirituality and simpler living*

<https://walesunitarianmusing.wordpress.com/>

**Unitarian Thoughts** (Kevin Mason)

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Rory Castle Jones at Magdala, Galilee photo Rory Castle Jones

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