

# **NEWSLINK**

FEBRUARY - MARCH, 2023

## **CANTON UNITING CHURCH**



## **Canton Uniting Church Deacons**

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Dear Friends,

February 2023

Are you aware that 1 January 2023 was a significant anniversary date? Perhaps, in the rush of Christmas, it passed you by that the hymn, 'Amazing Grace', was first shared on 1 January 1773, in a sermon at Onley Parish Church in Buckinghamshire.

While John Newton, the author, is a controversial figure due to his participation in the slave trade, his hymn has had a huge impact on the world. It is known worldwide. It touches many of us deeply—

'Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
was blind but now I see.'

These words may describe Newton's experience of God. They clearly resonate with many other people and describe an experience of the encounter with God's inclusive love.

The anniversary, and the participation of our friends, gave us pause to wonder how God's grace touches our lives. We found this quote from Kathleen Norris an interesting challenge to Newton's amazing grace:

'If grace is so wonderful, why do we have such difficulty recognising and accepting it? Maybe it's because grace is not gentle or made-to-order. It often comes disguised as loss, or failure, or unwelcome change.'

Norris challenges us to reflect on the ways we experience God's presence and grace. One of our friends once reminded us, and a group of elders, that change is the only constant in life. Nature shows us this through the turn of the year and different seasons. Yet we so often struggle with changes.

Like change, acknowledging the grace of God may challenge us to reflect on God's presence in life circumstances which we find uncomfortable. Is it in that discomfort that we open our hearts to God's presence, that we find the way through trusting ourselves to God? Is this part of what Norris means by describing grace as loss or failure or unwelcome change? Or does she mean that with hindsight we find God revealed to us in those situations?

'Amazing Grace' doesn't mean life is easy. 'Amazing Grace' does mean that God finds us, loves us, and works with us and within us however we are and where ever we are in our life experience.

In response to the anniversary of the hymn, 'Amazing Grace,' perhaps we can take a moment and give thanks to God for being at work in our lives and challenging us to reflect that grace in the life of the world. Or perhaps we simply remember that despite tough times, God's grace is working away with us and for us. And maybe we are instruments of God's grace to others who are struggling. 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!'

Yours in Christ,  
Martha and David

## Junior Church Christmas Party



The Junior Church Christmas party was held on the 21st of January. The children and young people enjoyed games in the back hall, before sitting down to a spread of all sorts of foods. Some went for the healthy options ... some didn't! Many thanks to all those who made it such a lovely afternoon.



**Begin  
1 March**



Enjoy the benefits of gathering in person with the in person group on Wednesday evening or joy of a link with the Zoom group. Please let Martha know if you would like the Zoom link for Tuesday. If you would like to join Wednesday but prefer Zoom, please ask about this facility.

## **LENT GROUPS:**

**Online and IN PERSON!!**

**Wednesdays, 7.30 - 9 p.m.**

**Beulah and City URC's**

1 MARCH AT BEULAH

8 MARCH AT CITY

15 MARCH AT BEULAH

22 MARCH AT CITY

29 MARCH AT BEULAH

**Tuesday 2 - 3 p.m. on Zoom**

## WHAT HAPPENED TO EASTER?

Why is the general public so ignorant about Easter? We see Easter, as we see Christmas, as a seasonal shopping event, with giant and very expensive chocolate “easter” eggs and “good friday” hot crossed buns on sale as soon as the “christmas” dreams of sugar plums are forgotten..Our holiday language becomes the flat, commercial language of things rather than the more reverberating language of “I am the resurrection: that draws us into wonder.

The easy thinking of the commercial holiday is everywhere.

Marieke says that in the small, rural, tropical Indonesian village where she grew up they now have an annual Christmas parade with snowmen and sleighs decked with fake ice-cycles. The accompanying photo shows an Asian shop somewhere that has Father Christmas confused with our crucified Saviour. Who can blame them?.



When we moved here in '88 the giant, completely secular chocolate eggs were a big surprise, especially in a country with so few churchgoers. While back home churches were overcrowded on Easter, here, we saw, Easter was a public bank holiday that emptied the churches as families chose to frolic in the springtime sun.

Our Congregationalist and Baptist forebears would not have been surprised at this problem. They associated such calendar events as Christmas, Lent and Easter with high church festivals marking the solar

year, and marginally pagan at best. Scrooge remember, was a Congregationalist, and Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* never mentions Jesus, not do *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street* or *It's a Wonderful Life Christmas*, Lent and Easter are all about titillating our emotions so that we spend money. Lots of money. For our forbears Lent and Easter did not coincide with the vernal equinox but came unexpectedly in the sudden, Holy Spirit-led experience of repentance and conversion.

Resurrection is very much about conversion. Why does Scripture say only those who followed him could see the risen Christ? Mark, the earliest Gospel, depicts the only witness to the resurrection as a young man dressed in white—one who has just been baptised, one who, in Paul's words, has just died and been raised again with Christ in baptism. Paul himself "saw" the risen Christ in his conversion.

This experience of the resurrection of Christ in our own re-birth is, according to Mark, still the case today. In Mark, the women who come to the tomb are so frightened by what the young man tells them that they tell no one (as women their testimony would not be received in court anyway). So the only witness to the resurrection are those, as Paul says, who have experienced it—the baptised.

In this ecumenical age, I really don't think celebrating Lent is something we can avoid. But we should not allow the marketplace's fractured understanding to provide our primary theological education. Maybe the slow pace of the weeks leading up to Easter is just enough time to think carefully and courageously and imaginatively what our baptism has to do with resurrection. What is the new life like that has given itself wholly to Christ?

Tom Arthur

Dieric Bouts,  
"Resurrection of Christ,"  
c.1455, distemper on linen



## Prayer Call

<b>February</b>			
1st	Eva Elliott	5th	Lent 2: Those whose faith is being tested
2nd	Calum Ellis	6th	Barbara Smith
3rd	Alan Farnham	7th	David and Malou Smith
4th	Ceri and Phil George	8th	Audrey Takle
5th	Trade unions	9th	David and Joy Thompson
6th	Linda Gibbs	10th	Alison Walker
7th	Rachel, Kate, Evan and Emily Gill	11th	Liz Williams and family
8th	Bronwyn Gregory	12th	Lent 3: The Covenanted Churches
9th	Rob, Fiona, Isobel and Alistair Harding	13th	Kenneth Woods
10th	Jean Hawkins	14th	Rita, Francis, Gloria, Gabriel and Michael
11th	Barbara Jones	15th	Tom and Marieke Arthur
12th	Industrial mission	16th	Chris and Megan Atherton
13th	Sian, Joshua and Harri Jones	17th	Geraint Atherton
14th	Elinor Kapp	18th	Gwyn Atherton
15th	Olaide, Taiwo, Ore, Korede and Nifemi Kassim	19th	Lent 4: Families (Mothering Sunday)
16th	Jenny Keenor	20th	Lowri and Amelia Baldwin
17th	Beverley, Christopher, Ioan and Evelyn Kibble	21st	Keith Bick
18th	Cindy Lim, Arwyn McCabe, Nye Buckle and Cian	22nd	Doreen Cassam
19th	Fair Trade	23rd	Debbie Cheshire, Paige and Lola
20th	Ann and Tom Lloyd	24th	David Cooke
21st	Angie Luther	25th	Clive Curtis and Constantino Dumangane
22nd	Millie McQuade	26th	Lent 5: The Persecuted Church
23rd	Audrey Morgan	27th	Fred and Rowena Davies
24th	Barbara, Hugh and Bence Morgans	28th	David Dean, Martha McInnes and family
25th	Michael and Katie Munnick, Isla, Leo and Tate	29th	Ann Dobbins
26th	Lent 1: The work of charities	30th	Marc and Alison Dummer
27th	Danielle Phillips, Laura, Will, Cian and Ruby	31st	Gareth Dyer
28th	Mandy and Steve Phillips		<b>April</b>
	<b>March</b>	1st	
1st	Abigail, Matt, Brooke and Toby Powell	2nd	Lent 6: The Leaders of the Nations (Palm Sunday)
2nd	Julie Richards	3rd	Hiroko, Richard and Emily Edge
3rd	Janice Richens	4th	Toni Edwards
4th	Lucy Robinson and Andrew Wilson-Dickson	5th	Eva Elliott
		6th	Calum Ellis



## The Pastoral News

In order to comply with the GDPR Act principles of protecting people's personal information, we will need to seek people's permission in sharing information about their personal situations. We will include those who agree to give their permission in future editions of the Newslink.

In the meantime, we remember all those who have been poorly for a while, or who are recently bereaved. You are in our thoughts and prayers.

We also celebrate the sporting achievements of Emily Edge. She is representing the City of Cardiff Swimming Club at the South East Wales Regional Championships. In addition, she has been selected to represent Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan at the National School Cross Country Championships in the near future. Well done Emily! We are proud of you!

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## Sunday Lectionary Readings for February - March, 2023

**5th February, 2022:** Restore the streets

Isaiah 58.1-9a,(9b-12); Psalm 112.1-9; 1 Corinthians 2.1-12,(13-16); Matthew 5.13-20

Using metaphors of salt and light, Jesus teaches that true disciples witness to the gospel in what they say and do, not by merely believing it; and true discipleship cannot be hidden from those around us. He says that he did not come to abolish the Jewish Law, rather to fulfil and transcend it. If we are to challenge the issues that cast a shadow over our world, we must be sure that we practise what we preach. Rather than turning to God and closing our eyes, how can we make a difference and help him with the work of restoration and revitalisation?

This week we explore the call to revitalise our communities.

**12th February, 2022:** No buts

Deuteronomy 30.15-20; Psalm 119.1-8; 1 Corinthians 3.1-9; Matthew 5.21-37

Jesus addresses his followers' behaviour, and the thoughts and feelings that give rise to it. Disciples of Jesus must be faithful, trustworthy and reliable. Right thinking – what is in the heart – is as important as right action. There are no half measures with God, so we shouldn't need to think about what is right or wrong. When we have chosen life with God, his standard of integrity should always guide our actions and reactions.

This week we explore choosing a life of integrity.

### **19th February, 2023: I Witness**

Exodus 24.12-18; Psalm 2; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1.16-21; Matthew 17.1-9

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain where they see a vision of Jesus' heavenly glory in the presence of Moses and Elijah, and they hear a voice that confirms Jesus' identity as God's Son.

When we hear about the transfiguration of Jesus we may regret missing such an encounter. If only it would happen today! This week, we explore experiencing how close God does often come to us by being open to knowing he is near. And that this is something worth sharing!

This week we explore moments that make you feel close to God.

### **26th February, 2023: Take Temptation Seriously**

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-19; Matthew 4.1-11

As he prepares to begin his ministry, during a time alone in the wilderness, Jesus is tested. Where will he put his faith? What will he trust? Where do his deepest loyalties lie? Jesus showed that, faced with temptation, he could be trusted to do the right thing; we explore how we respond when we are tested, and whom we can trust when facing life's challenges.

This week we explore discovering who you are and who you trust in testing times.

### **5th March, 2022: A step into the unknown**

Genesis 12.1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4.1-5,13-17; John 3.1-17

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, goes to see Jesus, acknowledging him as a man of God. Jesus says that to see the kingdom of God you must be 'born from above'. Nicodemus doesn't understand, although Jesus says that, being a teacher, he should. Jesus also says that those who believe in God's only Son will have eternal life.

Jesus' late-night conversation with Nicodemus challenges him, and others like him in the synagogue, to be courageous enough to bring their curiosity about Jesus into the open. They will find this challenging – as will we – but the disturbance it causes will be like being born over again.

This week we explore what it takes to try something new.

### **12th March, 2023 Come and See**

Exodus 17.1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5.1-11; John 4.5-42

Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman about 'living water'. He reveals himself to be the long-awaited Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Many Samaritans come to believe in Jesus because of the woman's testimony. People take a variety of meanings from this Gospel passage. Everyone agrees that Jesus was breaking convention, speaking with a Samaritan woman. What does it mean to us today, to accept and be accepted and to drink from the well of living water?

This week we explore astonishing acceptance.

### **19th March, 2023** Gradual Insights

1 Samuel 16.1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5.8-14; John 9.1-41

Jesus gives sight to a man born blind, who comes to 'see' Jesus for who he truly is. But Jesus' critics refuse to see as the healed man sees: even his parents are wary. But their attitude reveals a more sinister kind of blindness. How often do we find ourselves saying 'I see' when we really mean 'I understand'? In today's Gospel reading the contrast between them is clear: we read about overcoming physical blindness and also growing in understanding. But not everyone experiences or is open to both. Are we? This week we explore the power of an eye-opening story.

### **26th March, 2023** Jesus Wept

Ezekiel 37.1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8.6-11; John 11.1-45

Jesus' dear friend Lazarus dies. Four days later, Jesus raises Lazarus to life and restores the faith of Lazarus' sisters Martha and Mary that he is the Messiah. But in Bethany, only two miles from Jerusalem, Jesus' own life is increasingly at risk from the authorities there. This week we hear about the most amazing miracle: Lazarus is brought back from the dead – contentious then, and still so today. We explore how different people in the story responded to grief and loss, and what that can tell us about these familiar experiences and emotions.

This week we explore grief, a common human experience.

### **2nd April, 2023** Sing Hosanna!

Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 118.1-2,19-29; Philippians 2.5-11; Matthew 21.1-11

Jesus enters Jerusalem as a Passover pilgrim for the last time, demonstrating how he brings in God's kingdom and setting the stage for the showdown with those he sees as God's real enemies.

Today, as we focus on Jesus entering Jerusalem, less than a week before his journey to the cross, we explore the reaction of a crowd who seem to be carried away in acts of praise. As a church community, do we have a reputation for celebration?

This week we explore celebrating as a gathered community.

### **9th April Easter Sunday.** Filled with Great Joy

Acts 10.34-43; Psalm 118.1-2,14-24; Colossians 3.1-4; Matthew 28.1-10

Two women, disciples of Jesus, visit his tomb once the sabbath is over. They find the tomb empty, and experience both fear and joy. They are sent by an angel to tell the rest of the disciples that Jesus is raised. As they run, they fleetingly meet Jesus himself, who repeats the angel's message.

Most, if not all, of us know the feeling of being at rock bottom; this is the experience of the two women in today's Gospel story. Jesus had died a cruel death and they go to prepare his body for burial. What they are not prepared for is the sudden change from despair and fear to great joy

This week we explore the dynamic of our response to the resurrection.

**CANTON UNITING CHURCH** was established in 1995 when New Trinity United Reformed Church joined with Llandaff Road Baptist Church and in 2013 joined with Grand Avenue United Reformed Church Ely which in 2005 had united with Saintwell URC. We are committed to ecumenism through our links with Cytûn, the Covenanted Churches and Churches Together in Canton. Our previous minister was the Chair of the Committee of the Covenanted Baptists which, with the Church in Wales, the Presbyterian, Methodist and United Reformed Churches seeks to bring about the goal of uniting together.

## **CONTACTS**

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## **USUAL WEEKLY DIARY & MONTHLY EVENTS -**

The Wednesday evening prayers on Zoom have finished.

CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

**AND FINALLY ...** Please hand in material for the next Newslink to Hugh Morgans by the end of the Morning service on **Sunday, the 19th of March, 2023.**