

Penge Congregational Church



Let the heavens Rejoice



February 2021

From the Minister

Well, so far 2021 hasn't been great, has it? More Covid infections than ever, sadly more deaths than ever and another lockdown. Although this time the rules do allow us to continue with communal worship, the Deacons, mindful of the Stay at Home message and of the determination of our members to be there if there is a service, have taken the difficult decision to suspend worship services until we can all be safe.



Please remember however that church isn't the building: church is every one of us and the closure of the building just means that there is a bit of church in every one of our homes.

Perhaps this is a good moment for us to reflect on the Congregational principles we all believe in. The Congregational way of being church can be traced back to early church teaching. Please do read Acts 2: 43-45, which begins by telling us that all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony. Today the three most important Congregational principles are: a church where Christ is the head with no external hierarchy; a church based on a covenant relationship with God and with one another, where seeking the mind of Christ is the basis of all that is done; *a church where all members are considered equal before God, and all skills and gifting are valued and recognised.*

I have put that last one in italics, because it is so important that we remember we are all disciples of Jesus Christ, we have all received the call to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ, we are all expected to testify to Jesus whenever we get the chance, we are all witnesses to the Gospel.

That might seem a tall order when you are stuck at home on your own but have a look at the weekly readings later on in the newsletter; have a look particularly at the one for 7th February. Here we see that Andrew was a disciple first of John the Baptist but felt called to follow Jesus. He told his brother, Simon, about Jesus; Simon went to meet Jesus for himself, and Jesus, after looking at him intently, named him Cephas (Peter in Greek), “the rock”. And Peter’s is the name we remember rather than that of Andrew. But Peter met Jesus through Andrew, who had followed Jesus and believed. The first thing Andrew did as a follower of Jesus was to testify, and his testimony had an impact that would shake the world. Peter is the famous one but Andrew’s quiet faithfulness played a vital part in the spread of the Gospel. God can use every one of us powerfully where we are, even when no-one seems to be looking!

God bless us as we endure faithfully at home! *Pam*

*We have the sad news to share that **Jack Young** passed away. He has enjoyed being part of our church family for a long time and there will be a tribute to him next month. Please pray for his friends and for his family in China.*

Church Update

It's now a year since we were able to have a Church Meeting. In that time, Deacons have met each month, usually on Zoom, and seen to essential issues. At the beginning of this new year, we felt the Church should have an update.

Worship life

Up until the beginning of this month, we have opened for Sunday morning worship whenever allowed to do so by the Government. It was only on January 4th, when the PM asked everyone to stay at home, that Deacons took the decision to suspend services until it is safe again. Since the first lockdown, we have held a twice weekly Zoom Bible discussion, which everyone is welcome to join. We have also put a devotional podcast on the church website each week, made by a member of the Worship Team and edited by Callum McShane. A Scripture reading for each Sunday has been included in the Newsletter which has been published every month since the first lockdown began and circulated either in hard copy or via email. The Minister and Deacons have done their best to keep in regular touch with church members by phone.

Building

At the beginning of the first lockdown, we were in the process of repairing the floor at the front of the church and of adapting our surplus pews to pass on

to the church in Eltham. Both these projects were completed by the autumn, although it hasn't yet been possible to get the carpet put down permanently. We now have the seating as agreed with the Borough Conservation Officer: 10 pews at the back and the chairs in front of them. When it is possible to do so, the Conservation Officer will come to approve this. Thanks to Chris Parker and Chris Doran for the DIY, and to the McShane family for organising the completion of the carpentry work on the pews.

The autumn rain after a dry spring and summer found a dozen leaks in various parts of the building. Stevensons, a local building firm, gave us a quote of £13,000 to deal with them all. After claiming two years' Gift Aid, Deacons felt we should accept the quote and the work will be done when the weather allows.

Although a couple of groups had begun to meet again during the relaxation of Covid measures in the summer and early autumn, all activity, apart from the Pre-School and the AA, had ceased by November and the resulting lack of heating in the Kenilworth Hall brought on a renewal of our old problem with the floor lifting. We have been fortunate that our Scout Leader, Colin Denny, has voluntarily identified the problem (the floor should be able to expand in damp weather and the boards at the edges had been nailed down) and begun to fix it.

Finance

You will appreciate that we have lost our income from hall hire, and that our offerings have been reduced, although many people have been very generous about sending in their offerings to Lynn. In March, the decision was taken by Deacons that everyone on our payroll would continue to be paid (Minister, Admin. Manager, Cleaner and Gardener). This decision has been amply rewarded by the commitment of all employees who have continued to work hard for the church as much as they have been able.

The generous giving of members, rental income from the Manse and Flat, and a recovery of 2 years' Gift Aid gave us balances as follows on 6th January 2021:
Gold Account- £10,828; Current Account- £19,222, of which

£13,000 is earmarked for roof repairs, and £900 for charitable giving (Deacons agreed to tithe the Gift Aid for community charities' aid for local people in difficulty). These ring fenced amounts give us an actual current account balance of £5,100.



Lynn has done a budget forecast for January which can be summarised as follows:

Income (rents, collection/giving, rental from Pre-School and AA) £3,239.

Expenditure (salaries, utilities, regular charitable giving, insurance, admin costs) £4,539.

As you can see, that's a deficit of £1,300. Lynn calculates that, if we try and keep the Gold Account as a reserve, we can manage until the end of May.

Deacons whole heartedly believe in the goodness of Almighty God and we remember that the Jews in the desert were given manna just enough for each day. We would ask our members and friends to remember us in your prayers, along of course with the many people around us who are considerably worse off than we are.

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Spinnaker

For the last few months, Spinnaker has been producing multi-media packs for schools and even managed to do a few 'live' assemblies last term. Our video skills have definitely improved over this time and we now have a recording studio set up and ready to use where we managed to film this term's assemblies before going back into lockdown. Our video assemblies for this term are 'Amazing Colours Bringing Hope' and we had great fun pulling them together and trying to make them as fun as possible for children to watch in school, in bubbles or at home. You can have a look at

our resources on our website – www.spinnaker.org.uk/resources and there is an overview of our current assemblies at the bottom of this article if you do not have internet access – we hope you find it encouraging.

It has not been an easy time, we are so disappointed that we cannot go into schools and see the children in person, but we are grateful that we still have the opportunity to talk to children in a different way and help them engage with the Christian faith. Please pray for our team as we work remotely on our resources and that they will get through to the right children at the right time. Particularly pray for children and families during this difficult time and for teachers as they try and work remotely with their classes.

This term's Worship Pack aims to inspire, encourage and engage children in discovering how God gives people HOPE. By focusing on amazing colours that are familiar to everyone, we will consider some of the thoughts, feelings and emotions colours can evoke in us. Each colour is also linked to a Bible story with themes, values and key words that help support the spiritual, physical and mental well-being of children (and teachers!) - bringing HOPE to everyone as we begin a new year!

Colours are amazing!

Each worship this term will encourage children to ...

DISCOVER: scientific, artistic and fun facts about colours and how they make us feel.

ENGAGE: with child friendly Bible stories, games and activities that link to different colours and which help them understand key themes and values about God and his love.

EXPLORE: the different thoughts and emotions they feel at different times and be given time to reflect on these.

BE INSPIRED: to have hope for the future and to help bring hope to others.

God loves colour. You can tell that by the way he has filled the whole world with so many amazing colours. Our first worship focuses on the RAINBOW – a colourful symbol of hope. Hope is vital for our happiness and well-being. As we retell the story of creation using splashes of colour, the children will be encouraged to appreciate all the colours of the rainbow in creation. The beautiful earth, filled with colour, filled with life for us to enjoy. Sometimes, it's only when things are hard that we see the real beauty of hope. We only see rainbows when it's raining. God sent the rainbow as a sign that everything is going to be alright and Christians believe that no matter what we are going through, God is still saying to everyone, "It's ok. I've got this", and that brings hope.

The final assembly concludes with an Easter Worship on the colour GREEN. It encourages children to consider green as a positive colour, representing NEW LIFE and growth. Many plant seeds often look dried up, dull, and brown and yet under the right conditions, they

spring into life, some with colourful blossoms, some producing fruit, some growing into huge trees. As each child hears the amazing story of Easter and of God's love, we pray that they will be filled with hope for their future, and as each child grows that they might also bring hope to others.

Thank you for your support
From the team at Spinnaker

*And now for more **colour** from the pen of Ronald*



The Sky at Sunrise

I think we are all familiar with the old television programme “The Sky at Night”, presented by the rather eccentric Sir Patrick Moore. For those of you interested in Astronomy it was perhaps compulsive viewing - much as “Strictly Come Dancing” seems to be today.

What follows is my attempt to share with you the pleasure I have derived from viewing “The Sky at Sunrise” in ‘Historic’ and ‘Picturesque’ Penge.

I have the good fortune to live in Penge and the panoramic view at sunrise from my bedroom window at the back of the house can at times be a joy to behold. This does not occur every day but fairly frequently during summer and often enough at other times of the year. The window overlooks my own and my neighbour's back gardens and, beyond these, a large allotment, giving a view of cinemascope proportions. The sky on these occasions brings to mind the artist J.M.W. Turner, as reddish oranges, varying shades of blue and bright yellows combine to produce what I can only describe as an awesome spectacle. If only I had the artistic skill to transfer it onto canvas as Turner might have done!!! In fact, one of his many great paintings was "The Sun rising through Vapour".

Personally viewing this gives me a great sense of wellbeing and I realise what a wonderful world we have been given to live in.

For the best part of two years (1951-1953) as a member of The Royal Airforce, I was stationed at a place called El Adem in Libya and there I could watch the sun coming up over the horizon at the break of day. This, for me, was a fantastic sight but it pales into insignificance when compared with the view from my window which I have just described.

This had turned out to be a somewhat brief article but it has given me the opportunity to share with you the pleasure I have derived from the sheer beauty and, more importantly the spirituality of the sunrise as viewed from my window in picturesque Penge.

And so to Laughter Corner:

Let's think about Knowledge and Wisdom.

Some of you will have knowledge but be not wise.

Some of you will have both knowledge and wisdom and be considered wise.

So to illustrate the matter, we can say “knowing that a tomato is a fruit is *knowledge*; *wisdom* is not putting it in a fruit salad.

Ronald Kirby



February Scripture readings

Our January 24th reading was about the Woman at the Well. She was a woman (Jewish men didn't speak to women when alone), a sinner and a Gentile. Yet she “got” Jesus, and Jesus revealed himself to her: ‘ The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus told her, “I am the Messiah!” ‘ And the woman went off and told her neighbours about him. She testified. She acted like a disciple. The February readings flesh out Jesus' template for discipleship.

Sunday 7th February: John 1: 35-42

35 The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. 36 As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, “Look! There is the Lamb of God!” 37 When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. 38 Jesus looked around and saw them following. “What do you want?” he asked them. They replied, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” 39 “Come and see,” he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day. 40 Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. 41 Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”^[a]).

42 Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, “Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

Note how the disciples came to see Jesus and, when they encountered him, they remained with him. Note also that Andrew, about whom we hear little later, was the one who brought his brother Peter to Jesus. Peter became the rock upon which Jesus founded his church, but he came to Jesus through someone who played a much smaller role. Every disciple has a role to play in following the Lord.

Sunday 14th February John 3: 1-17

3 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. 2 After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” 3 Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” 4 “What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” 5 Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7 So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

9 “How are these things possible?” Nicodemus asked. 10 Jesus replied, “You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don’t understand these things? 11 I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won’t believe our testimony. 12 But if you don’t believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who

believes in him will have eternal life. 16 “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

Note the contrast between Nicodemus and the Woman at the Well. Nicodemus was a man, a Jew, a person with status in society. Yet he came to Jesus secretly in the darkness; he was full of religious learning but he didn't understand about spiritual rebirth. He was a secret follower; the Woman at the Well ran and told everyone about Jesus.

Sunday 21st February Matthew 10: 5-18

5 Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: “Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, 6 but only to the people of Israel—God's lost sheep. 7 Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received! 9 “Don't take any money in your money belts—no gold, silver, or even copper coins. 10 Don't carry a traveller's bag with a change of clothes and sandals or even a walking stick. Don't hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve to be fed.

11 “Whenever you enter a city or village, search for a worthy person and stay in his home until you leave town. 12 When you enter the home, give it your blessing. 13 If it turns out to be a worthy home, let your blessing stand; if it is not, take back the blessing. 14 If

any household or town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, shake its dust from your feet as you leave. 15 I tell you the truth, the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will be better off than such a town on the judgment day. 16 “Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. 17 But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and will be flogged with whips in the synagogues. 18 You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell the rulers and other unbelievers about me. “

Jesus gave his disciples authority as his ambassadors to go among the Jews and teach about him. Note from verse 7 that they were to demonstrate Jesus’ status as the Messiah. They were to act in an upright and ethical way. Part of the work of proclaiming the Gospel was to reject those who opposed God’s purpose.

Sunday 28th February Matthew 20: 20-28

20 Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. 21 “What is your request?” he asked. She replied, “In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honour next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.”

22 But Jesus answered by saying to them, “You don’t know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?” “Oh yes,” they replied, “we are able!” 23 Jesus told them, “You

will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.”

24 When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. 25 But Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. 26 But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. 28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Here we see James and John being selfish: they had already been promised a place in God’s Kingdom, yet they wanted to be the most prominent people there. Jesus responded by teaching all the disciples that the Kingdom of God doesn’t follow the values of the world. There those upon whom society places the least value are the most important! Even Jesus himself came to serve others and to sacrifice himself for their good. We too are called to serve others as he did.

XX

Black Velvet Sky

“Faizal, oh Faizal, this is really serious.”

These were the rather alarming words addressed to me by my master, Melchior, as he absently played with the reins.



We were returning to the palace after a long session at the observatory, during which my master had repeatedly ascended the stairs of the observation tower, bringing charts down and checking rows and rows of mysterious figures and looking increasingly anxious about the results.

He leaned over from the saddle he was perched on to scratch my ear. This mark of affection was difficult and dangerous to execute, as I am a camel, and our ears are not so conveniently placed for scratching as those of horses. I also don't particularly like people scratching my ears, but I had grown used to my master's moods and it was clear he was in need of comfort and consolation.

“There's a hole out there,” said my master – and there was real terror in his voice, “a great yawning chasm of nothing, and it's hungry. It's going to devour the universe as we know it. We can't stop it!” I looked up at the night sky, trying to see what master was referring to. And indeed, there seemed to be an unusual dark patch in the Western sky, a menacing spectacle. But I

am a camel and not given to imaginings as my human masters are. It is often a most valuable trait in camels. Human imagination is apt to cause needless anxiety and stress.



Master spent the next night observing the vast universe with his closest friends, Caspar and Balthazar. My Master, Melchior, climbed the long staircase to the observatory, sighing loudly, "Friends, I am sorry to have to break such awful news, but what I have seen means the end for all of us. And we cannot stop it!" A loud wail broke from my master. The three friends stopped on the stair. The silence was palpable.

"Melchior, my good and wise friend," said Balthazar, "tell me what you saw and let us go over your calculations together, so that we can be sure of the interpretation. "

I heard this from below. This was not the wisest word from Balthazar. My master was very sensitive about his calculations, since he spent hours over them, checking and cross checking.

"Balthazar, there is no time to check the calculations again! The entire universe is in jeopardy and you want to fuss with numbers!" I did think this statement ironic, since my master puts all his faith in numbers.

Balthazar, who knew his friend well, looked with great concern at his friend and said, "When you put it like that, I think we need to go up and see this grim sign together. Please lead the way."

I watched the three men I admire and respect the most climb the endless staircase up to the observatory. Melchior chattered constantly in a most anxious manner, while Balthazar muttered calming words to his friend. I for one was glad that Balthazar was there, because I was becoming concerned about the way my normally rational master seemed to be – well ranting would be a disrespectful word to say, but Melchior was not his normal self at all! As they reached the top, Melchior was still keeping up a continuous flow of words.

Then, silence.

Balthazar: My God...

More silence.

Melchior: It's not a hole!

The silence went on. Then

Caspar: It's a star...

That set off such a chatter among the three stargazers that a stranger would have thought there was a market somewhere nearby. Caspar insisted that he knew about the star. The others were indignant. They had never heard of it. Melchior kept singing out, "It's not a hole, it's a star!" Caspar could be heard saying repeatedly, "If you would just let me explain." Eventually everyone seemed to run out of breath (or words).

Balthazar broke the silence, "Alright, Caspar, tell us about this star."

Caspar paused dramatically before intoning, “This is the king’s star. I said THE king, not just a king, or even a king of great importance, but the king who will rule all the world and bring peace to all the nations. There has not been a king like him and there never will be another.”

After another dramatic pause, I heard Melchior say, “Did you get this from the Hebrew scriptures?”

“Well actually, yes I did!” Caspar shot back rather defensively. Melchior was known for his dislike of the Hebrew scriptures.

“But the Hebrew scriptures are so partisan, exclusive. All the messages are for their nation alone. What has that got to do with us?”

“Well don’t believe me then. Only look at the star. Have you ever seen such a star? It dominates the heavens and casts a graceful light around the whole universe; it rests in the sector of Judah; yet it can be seen from kingdoms far away from the Hebrew kingdom. It calls us!”

Balthazar almost shouted, “You’re right, Caspar. It’s calling us. There in Judah is something we have never known of: a king is there and we have seen his sign. We have to go there and find him.”

“Well I can’t disagree,” muttered my master, Melchior, “The signs are very compelling. I suppose we’d better go then.”

That is how I, Faizal, the most respected member of the Royal Caravanserai, was fated to travel a very long and arduous journey to a place I had never had the remotest urge to visit, to find a king which (as far as I could surmise) was not much more than a figment of my masters' imagination. But such is the life of a camel. I had grown fond of my master and I was very solicitous of his wellbeing. It was a hazardous time for him, and he was often discouraged, but he, the doubter, never lost sight of that star, and in spite of being a dour and unimaginative camel, there was a hope growing inside of me, which I could not understand until the end of our journey.

Which was also a beginning.

But that is another story...



*In case you are wondering, Faizal has a scribe called
Chris McShane*

Website:

www.pccweb.co.uk



To arrange a marriage service, funeral, baptism or similar event, please contact the Minister: **Pam Owen** on:

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