

THIS MONTH: JANUARY 2007

RIDGEWAY METHODIST CHURCH



Dear Friends

Damascus Road or Emmaus Road?

In January, many Christians remember the conversion of the Apostle Paul. Although not one of the original twelve disciples, Paul is the earliest and most influential interpreter of the message and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and his writings make up a considerable part of the New Testament.

Paul was born at Tarsus. The circumstances of his birth gave him both Jewish and Roman citizenship but his Jewish heritage was most important to him. A capable student, Paul was convinced that the teaching of the emerging Christian church was wrong. He took particular exception to the Christian teaching that someone who had died on a cross (a death cursed by the Jewish Law) was both Lord and Messiah (Saviour). Paul was determined to do all he could to stamp this teaching out, even if it meant travelling to foreign cities. It was while he was on his way to Damascus that Paul had a real encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and a dramatic conversion experience (Acts 9). Thereafter, Paul became a great evangelist bringing others to saving faith in his Lord. To this day, a dramatic Christian conversion is often called 'a Damascus Road experience'.

Tucked away at the end of Luke's gospel (Luke 24) is an account of the early evening of the first Easter Day. Two disciples (one named Cleopas but the other unnamed) were on their way home to Emmaus, a walk of about seven miles from Jerusalem. On their journey they were joined by a stranger. Their conversation was about Jesus, who had been crucified some days beforehand. They had heard a rumour that his body had disappeared. The stranger talked to them about this and about the scriptures. When they arrived home, they offered the stranger to share their simple supper and as he said grace it dawned on them that the stranger was the risen Lord Jesus. It was not a dramatic conversion but it is real enough for they return hot-foot to Jerusalem with the good news that Jesus is alive.

It is a long time ago since the lively Cornish tin-miner, Billy Bray, asked the parish vicar if he was converted and such direct questioning of people about their faith is regarded as rather intrusive today but that does not mean that conversion is unimportant. In the Methodist tradition, we have made a great

deal of our founder's conversion and how the heart-warming experience that John Wesley had at Aldersgate Street, London, fired him for more than half a century's evangelistic travels in Britain and beyond.

I think that John Wesley's conversion was more 'Emmaus Road' than 'Damascus Road' and I think that my conversion, as with many youngsters brought up within the Christian community, was more 'Emmaus Road'. But whether you would describe your coming to faith in Jesus Christ as living Saviour and Lord is something you would express in quieter 'Emmaus Road' terms or dramatic 'Damascus Road' terms – make no mistake – each of us needs to be converted, to know that Jesus Christ is risen Lord and Saviour and for the whole direction of our lives to be changed.

Covenant Service: Sunday 7 January, 10.30 am

Early in the New Year, Methodists normally share in the annual Covenant Service. It is a traditional and somewhat solemn service when Christians pledge themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ in another year of faith and service. The traditional prayer has been a source of great strength to Christians as we recall that we must actively or patiently accept whatever is God's will for us. An obligation rests upon Methodist members to attend the Covenant Service and I hope that everyone will take this seriously.

Bible study and small groups

The programme of Bible studies and small groups is going well. There is an open invitation for everyone to join the Monday evening Bible study. Small groups meet on Monday and Tuesday afternoons and Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings. If you would like to be part of a small group, please let me know and I will arrange for someone from a group to contact you.

Thank you for the many seasonal greetings that you sent to us in December. These were all very much appreciated and we respond by wishing you God's richest blessing into the New Year.

John Haley

Church bank account

Lloyds-TSB have written to us to say that they will be imposing bank charges upon us.. As this would cost the church a substantial amount of money the church council has agreed to open a new account with NatWest, which will not be subject to charges. We do ask members who give by standing order for their understanding and patience. We hope that everyone who currently gives in this way will transfer their standing orders to NatWest. Our treasurer will be on hand to help with this in due course. It will be an opportunity for those who currently pay by standing order to review their giving and we also invite members who do not yet give in this way to think about regular giving by standing order.

Pastoral training

Deacon Ruth Richey is pleased to meet with Pastoral Visitors in coming weeks to discuss aspects and issues that may concern you in your visits. The meetings are on 19 January and 23 February (7.00 pm). Please see the weekly notices for a reminder of dates nearer the time.

January Diary

Tuesday 2:

10.00-12.00 Patchwork
7.45 pm Ladies Group: Bag Beetle

Wednesday 3:

10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

Saturday 6:

8.30 am Monthly Prayer Meeting
9.00 am Dartmoor Walk
10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Mission Outreach (Christine Gregory)

Sunday 7:

10.30 am Revd John Haley (Covenant Service)

7.00 pm Revd Karl Freeman

Monday 8:

7.30 pm Moore OT 1: Creation and God's Purpose

Tuesday 9:

10.00-12.00 Patchwork
7.45 pm Ladies' Group: Janet Horrell, 'The History of Theatre in Plymouth'

Wednesday 10:

10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

Thursday 11:

2.45 pm Women's Fellowship: Revd John Haley, Communion
7.30 pm Outreach Group Meeting

Saturday 13:

10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Church Outreach (Pat Stead)

Sunday 14:

10.30am Mrs Janet Bell

7.00 pm Revd John Haley

Monday 15:

7.30 pm Moore OT 2: Rebellion and Judgement

Tuesday 16:

10.00-12.00 Patchwork
2.15 pm Service at Pocklington Rise
7.30 pm Men's Fellowship
7.45 pm Ladies' Group: Revd Rod Thomas

Wednesday 17:

10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches
7.30 pm Circuit Meeting (Sherwell)

Thursday 18:

2.45 pm Women's Fellowship

Friday 19:

7.00 pm Pastoral Visitors' Evening

Saturday 20:

10.00 - 12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Youth Outreach (Miriam, Kim and Steve)

Sunday 21:

10.30 am Mr Andrew Maxwell

7.00 pm Revd John Haley

Monday 22:

7.30 pm No Moore College Bible Study this week

Tuesday 23:

10.00-12.00 Patchwork Group

7.45 pm Ladies' Group: R.N.I.B.

Wednesday 24:

10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

Thursday 25:

2.45 pm Women's Fellowship

Saturday 27:

10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Avril Baker

Sunday 28:

10.30 am Revd John Haley (BB/GB enrolment)

7.00 pm Revd John Haley

Monday 29:

10.00 am Peninsula Gospel Partnership Conference at Exeter

7.30 pm Moore OT 3: The Patriarchs

Tuesday 30:

10.00-12.00 Patchwork

7.00 pm Ladies' Group: Dinner at the New Country Inn, Smithaleigh

7.30 pm Men's Fellowship at Elburton: Nigel Overton

Wednesday 31:

10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

7.30 pm Stewards' Meeting

Church office hours:
Tuesday-Friday 9.30 am - 12.30 pm

Church telephones:
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Church Office: office@ridgewaymethodist.org.uk
Minister: The Revd John M Haley: minister@ridgewaymethodist.org.uk

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Information for February's *This Month* to the office by 23 January please.