

THIS MONTH: JULY 2007

RIDGEWAY METHODIST CHURCH



Dear Friends

The Plymouth and Devonport Methodist Circuit Meeting was concerned that I might be spending a lot of time travelling between my various responsibilities. I reassured them by saying that I could almost consider the travelling recreational time as I would be able to listen to music during the journey, Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto perhaps. Members of the circuit meeting looked suitably impressed – they obviously knew they had a cultured minister among them! However, during the recent spell of sunny weather I abandoned classical music for my CD of the Beach Boys – regular journeys on the Torpoint Ferry to the Rame Peninsula ... just like being on holiday!

In 1966, popular American pop band, the Beach Boys broke new ground with their LP record (that's 'long player' for those who don't know such ancient terms) 'Pet Sounds'. Recently, TV music network VH1 rated it as the third best album ever. American music paper, *Rolling Stone*, placed it second, while the British music magazine, *Mojo*, called it 'The Greatest Album Ever Made'. There is little doubt that the record was acclaimed for the vocal harmonies, sound effects and unconventional instruments but I was drawn to the words and I mention two of the more well-known songs.

'God only knows'

Although unashamedly romantic, the words of this song seem unexceptional today:

I may not always love you/But as long as there are stars above you
You never need to doubt it/I'll make you so sure about it
God only knows what I'd be without you

If you should ever leave me/Though life would still go on believe me
The world could show nothing to me/So what good would living do me?
God only knows what I'd be without you

This song, possibly the most popular of the many hits Beach Boys' hits, was controversial in its day because the writers feared that the use of the word 'God' in the title might cause it not to be played on the radio. Although I, personally, do not take offence at the song, the remarkable thing is how much standards have changed that what we take as commonplace today might have been thought blasphemous just 40 years ago.

Wouldn't it be Nice?

Beach Boys singer-songwriter, Brian Wilson, used the title of this song for his autobiography. It's an upbeat song for summer and expresses the dreams of a young couple in the 1960s.

Wouldn't it be nice if we were older/Then we wouldn't have to wait so long?
And wouldn't it be nice to live together/In the kind of world where we belong?

You know it's gonna make it that much better
When we can say 'goodnight' and stay together.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could wake up/In the morning when the day is new?
And after having spent the day together/Hold each other close the whole night through?
Happy times together we've been spending/I wish that every kiss was never-ending
Wouldn't it be nice?

Maybe if we think and wish and hope and pray it might come true
Baby then there wouldn't be a single thing we couldn't do
We could be married/And then we'd be happy/Wouldn't it be nice?

You know it seems the more we talk about it/It only makes it worse to live without it
But let's talk about it/Wouldn't it be nice?

I think this is one of the best Beach Boys songs, not least because of the catchy introduction, which I have always thought sounded like a jingle for ice cream. I have always enjoyed listening to the song but I felt a great sense of sadness that the aspirations and dreams of the 1960s are not shared by many of today's young people because, over the last half-century, we have witnessed the devaluation of marriage and the collapse of the nuclear family.

Issues facing Christians Today

I was interested to read that Revd Dr John R. W. Stott, prolific writer, excellent preacher and Rector Emeritus of All Souls, Langham Place, London has reached the age of 85 years and has decided to retire from public ministry. John Stott has been one of the greatest recent leaders of evangelical Christians within his own denomination, the Church of England, and in other denominations. His influential book, *Issues facing Christians Today*, published in 1984, shaped the thinking of a lot of evangelical ministers of my generation.

Defining an evangelical Christian has been somewhat problematic. In a new book, *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, edited by Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), an evangelical is defined as an orthodox Protestant, who stands in the tradition of the global Christian networks arising from the eighteenth-century revival movements associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield, who has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life as the divinely inspired, final authority in matters of faith and practice; who stresses reconciliation with God through the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross; and who stresses the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to bring about conversion and an ongoing life of fellowship with God and service to God and others, including the duty of all believers to participate in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all people.

Three of the major issues facing Christians today are the significance of the atonement, our views of same-sex partnerships and our relationship with other faiths. The three relatively short paragraphs that follow are not meant to be the last word on these immense subjects but they do put a marker in the sand both for me personally, as an evangelical Christian, and in my ministry within the Methodist Church, which by its heritage has been an evangelical denomination. Our denominational response to these issues also shapes our own self awareness as a church.

The Christian doctrine of the atonement is especially important to evangelical Christians, who see Christ's work upon the cross as the very core of Christian theology. Evangelical Christians believe not only that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself but also that Christ bore the burden and punishment for our sins in his own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24, Isaiah 53:4-5). As Wesley rendered it, 'See all your sins on Jesus laid/The Lamb of God was slain' (HP 744 v. 7).

While the media is not much interested in theological issues (e.g. the atonement) it is very interested in ethical issues, of which one of the most pressing is our view of same-sex partnerships and their appropriateness in the church as well as in the wider community. It is fair to say that the general weight of the Bible is against same-sex partnerships. Therefore, evangelical Christians do not believe that such relationships are what God intended for us. This is no excuse to vilify or persecute others but neither is it right to label anyone who firmly rejects any notion that same-sex partnerships can ever be morally equivalent to Christian marriage as homophobic.

For Christians to be living in a cosmopolitan and multi-cultural society is nothing new. Corinth (one of the earliest churches, to which two New Testament letters were written) was cosmopolitan and multi-cultural. As modern Britain becomes more aware of its cultural and religious diversity, it is important for Christians to be gracious and charitable to people of all faiths and none but again this is different from saying that all religious views are equally valid. The central figure in the Christian gospel is Jesus Christ, whom Christians believe to be God incarnate, who lived and died and rose again, after which he ascended into heaven with the promise to come again in glory. While Christians share a lot of ethical beliefs in common with other believers, the identity of Jesus distinguishes from other faiths and limits the amount of common ground on which we can stand, particularly with regard to any thought of shared worship, which for the evangelical Christian would be impossible with other faiths.

The sum total of this letter is that the world has changed dramatically over the last 40 years and will continue to do so. It is important that Christians respond thoughtfully, sensitively and graciously to those who no longer share our views, especially when we are used to British society paying lip service to orthodox Christian beliefs and moral values. How we respond as individuals and as a denomination will shape the kind of Christians and denomination that we are becoming. It is important for evangelical Christians to feel that they are worshipping and serving in a church that upholds the historic faith, even if it allows some diversity. That is one of the major challenges that face us today.

God bless

John Haley

July Diary

Sunday 1:

10.30am **Revd John Haley (Pastoral Visitors' Service and Communion)**
7.00 pm **Mrs Val Marriott**

Monday 2:

7.30 pm Minister's Bible Study (New Testament 9)

Tuesday 3:

7.45 pm Ladies' Group:Dinner at the Moorland Hotel, Wotter

Wednesday 4:

10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches

Thursday 5:

2.45 pm Women's Fellowship

Saturday 7:

10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Church Outreach (Christine Gregory)

Sunday 8:

10.30 am **Revd John Haley**
7.00 pm **Revd John Haley**

- Monday 9:
7.30 pm Minister's Bible Study (New Testament 10)
- Tuesday 10:
10.00-12.00 Patchwork Group
7.45 pm Ladies' Group: Revd Dr Applebee
- Wednesday 11:
10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches
10.00am-4.00 pm PGP day for preachers with Christopher Ash
- Thursday 12:
2.45 pm Women's Fellowship: Judith Goodridge
- Friday 13:
7.45 pm Men's Fellowship Barbeque
- Saturday 14:
10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Youth Outreach (Miriam, Steve and Kim)
2.00 pm Dartmoor Walk (Outreach Event—see separate sheet)
- Sunday 15:**
10.30 am Mr George Weddle
7.00 pm Revd John Haley
- Tuesday 17:
10.00-12.30 Patchwork Group
2.15 pm Service at Pocklington Rise (all welcome)
7.45 pm Ladies' Group: AGM followed by refreshments
- Wednesday 18:
10.00-12.30 Coffee followed by lunches
- Thursday 19:
2.45 pm Women's Fellowship: AGM
- Saturday 21:
10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar
- Sunday 22:**
10.30 am Revd John Haley
7.00 pm Revd John Haley (Communion)
- Saturday 28:
10.00-12.00 Oasis Coffee Bar: Youth Outreach (Miriam, Steve and Kim)
- Sunday 29:**
10.30 am Miss Pam Griffiths
7.00 pm Mrs Jean Walsh

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

Church telephones:
348178 (office only)
331186 (pre-school and hall)

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

Information for August's *This Month* to the office by 24 July please.