

Spring 2023


IN TOUCH

THE

CROSS

"Behold the Lamb of
God, who takes away
the sin of the world"

John 1:29

 St John's Lindow
www.saint-johns.org.uk

SIMON'S SCRAWL

by Simon Gales

Good Friday! How could it possibly be called *Good* Friday? The day on which your leader and hero was brutally executed? Jesus was flogged, ordered to carry the cross on which he would be crucified and then put to death. At first sight it is difficult to see what is 'good' about it.

It certainly was an agonising death. The articles on pages 3&4 explain how offensive crucifixion was in the ancient world, and how unthinkable it would have been for them to wear it as an item of jewellery!

But strangely the gospel writers do not focus on the physical suffering. Mark simply says '*With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last*'. John records '*Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit*'. I know Hollywood likes to do the blood and gore but that's not where the gospel writers put their emphasis.

It is in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before Jesus was executed, that we begin to see the true agony of the cross. We are told that he began to be deeply distressed and troubled, and then he prays to his Father '*Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will*' (Mark 14:36). Why does he refer to his death as drinking a 'cup'? He has in mind it's use in the Old Testament when God said to Jeremiah '*Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it*' (25:15). Jesus knows that his death will be the drinking of the cup of God's wrath, the judgement that each one of us deserves for the dishonourable way that we have treated God. Although he understandably recoils from it, he will take upon himself the holy hostility of God against my sin!

This explains why, on the cross, Jesus cried out '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*' (the words are even recorded in the original Aramaic, direct from the lips of Jesus). During those dreadful hours of darkness Jesus experienced the full weight of our sin, and utters that cry so that we might understand what is happening! He was forsaken, so that through him we might be welcomed forever; he was treated as the worst of sinners, so that through him we might be forgiven and made righteous forever! (see the *Theology Corner* on page 11).



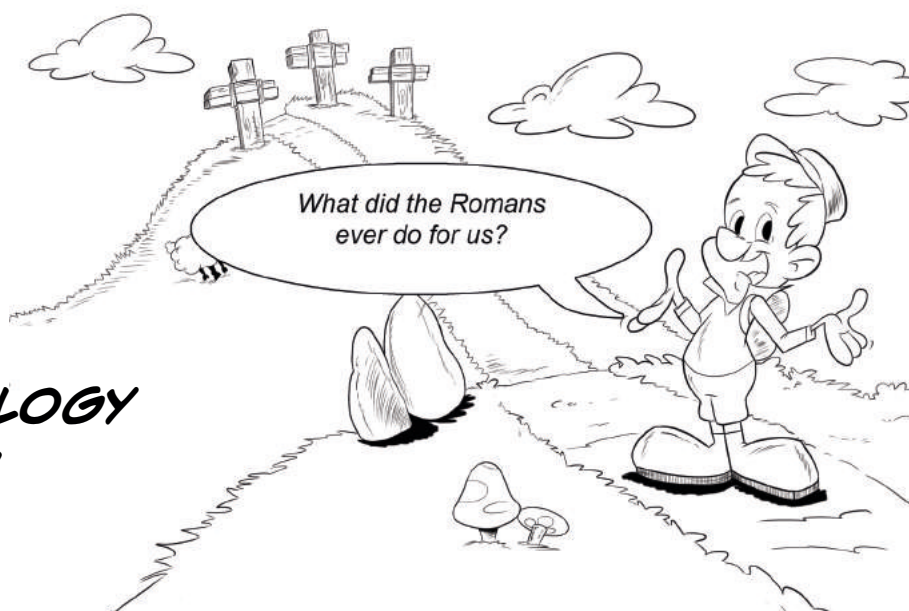
In the centre pages we asked some church members for their favourite hymn about the Cross. Here's one that rejoices in the good news of that Jesus 'swap', and why all who experience it have no doubt that it was indeed *Good* Friday!

*Behold the Man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished*

Do join us for our services at St John's this Easter, and may you know the great *goodness* of our God!

Simon

SKETCHY THEOLOGY BY BEN HOLLINSHEAD

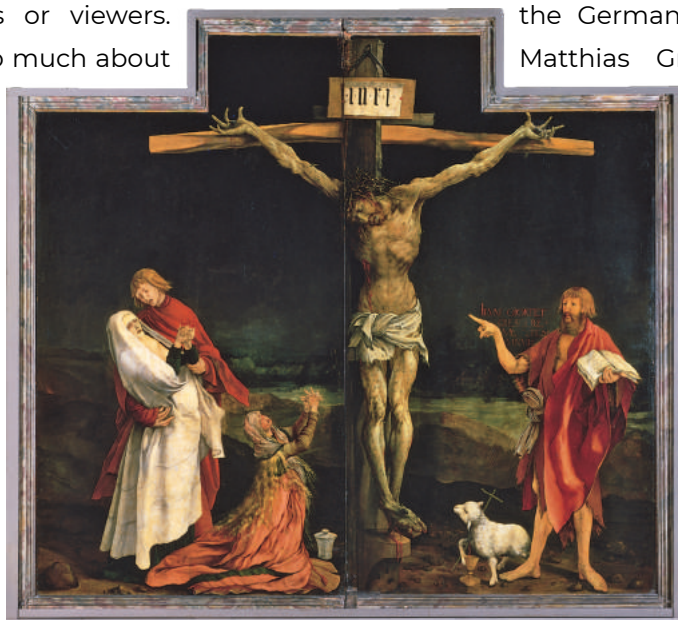


'Trigger warnings' are increasingly common in emails, articles, social media posts and TV news items to say that what follows may be

disturbing to some readers or viewers.

Perhaps the concern is not so much about

upsetting the reader as fear of a backlash and possible legal action. A frequent response to the slightest upset will be to suggest a likeness to the evils of Nazi Germany! Yet if anything might truly merit a 'trigger warning', it is the central claims of the Christian 'good news' about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Today the "cross", or crucifixion of Jesus,



Museum in the town of Colmar, Alsace, in France. One summer, I drove directly from Calais to Colmar specifically to see this work – sculpted and painted by

the Germans Nikolaus of Haguenau and Matthias Grünewald in 1512-1516. It is

Grünewald's largest work and is regarded as his masterpiece.

Matthias Grünewald painted the *Crucifixion* as a panel for the Altarpiece in the hospital chapel of St. Anthony's monastery. The monastery hospital specialized in the treatment of ergotism, a painful skin disease. The Christ figure in the painting

TRIGGER WARNING – CRUCIFIXION

has become domesticated, even within Christian Churches. It has become an acceptable form of jewellery, created from ceramics, precious stones or silver; the overtones of suffering, anguish and torture largely lost.

It was not always so. Throughout the centuries, great artists and musicians in Western Europe have depicted the agony of Jesus' death without losing the horror. There is no more moving composition in world music than the final chorus of J.S. Bach's *St Matthew's Passion*: "we sit down with tears and call to you in the grave". I listened to this one Easter, at the Protestant *Frauenkirche* in Dresden. Amidst the congregation of about 800, one could have heard a pin drop!

The churches and galleries of classical art across Europe are full of depictions of Jesus' crucifixion. Amongst the greatest is one known as the *Isenheim Altarpiece*. It is on display at the Unterlinden

is shown as suffering from these same sores - a sign to the patients that Christ shared in their afflictions. To Christ's right, Mary Magdalene kneels in humble adoration and his swooning mother Mary is supported by the apostle John, the Beloved Disciple.

To Christ's left stands John the Baptist, holding an open book and pointing to the crucified Christ. In the background in Latin are words attributed to John the Baptist in the Gospel of John: "He must increase, but I

must decrease". At John's feet is a lamb with a cross, echoing some of his other words: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

The 20th century Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, who dared to preach against the Nazi regime, kept a reproduction of Grünewald's *Crucifixion* in his study to remind himself that his role was to point to Christ and him crucified.

“
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”

BY DAVID WATTS

Crucifixion in the Ancient World

In *1 Corinthians* 1:18, Paul says that in the eyes of ‘those who are perishing’ the ‘word of the cross’ is ‘folly’. This denotes, not merely a lack of wisdom. The early Christian writer, Justin, explains that the upset, caused by the Christian message in the ancient world, is really *madness*.

“They say that our *madness* consists in the fact that we put a *crucified man* in second place after the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of the world”. (*Apology* I, 13.4).

It was particularly offensive to the imperial magistrate, Pliny the younger, that the one who was honoured in Christian worship ‘as a god’ had been nailed to a cross by the Roman authorities as a state criminal. His friend Tacitus speaks no less harshly of a ‘pernicious superstition’ and knows of the shameful fate of Jesus, who ‘suffered the extreme penalty’. The Jewish historian,

Josephus, describes crucifixion as ‘the most wretched’ of deaths. From the 3rd century BC onwards, there is evidence of the word *crux* as a vulgar taunt among the lower classes, including slaves and prostitutes. It was an obscene word; we might well print: c****f*****.

Crucifixion was a barbaric form of execution of the utmost cruelty. It was a punishment in which the brutality of the executioners was freely allowed. Because of its harshness crucifixion was almost always inflicted only on the lower classes. The upper classes could reckon with more ‘humane’ punishment. The Roman world was all agreed that crucifixion was a horrific, disgusting business. Crucifixion was widespread and frequent, but the cultured literary world wanted to have nothing to do with it and as a rule kept quiet

about it. Nevertheless, in most Roman writers, crucifixion appears as the typical punishment for slaves.

When Paul spoke about the ‘crucified Christ’ (*1 Corinthians* 1.23, 2:2; *Galatians* 3:1) every hearer in the Greek-speaking East knew that this ‘Christ’ had suffered a particularly cruel and shameful death, which as a rule was reserved for hardened criminals, rebellious slaves and rebels against the Roman state. That this crucified man, Jesus Christ, could truly be a divine being sent to earth, God’s Son, the Lord of all and the coming judge of the world, must inevitably have been thought by any educated man to be utter ‘madness’. Prior to his conversion on the road to Damascus, this was precisely the view of ‘Saul of Tarsus’ as he was known then (later Paul the apostle). As he says in *2 Corinthians* 5:16: “From now on we regard no one from a human point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer”. Paul had a complete turnaround in his thinking and attitudes – what today might be called a total paradigm shift.

In *Philippians* 2: 5-11, Paul composed – or quoted – an early Christian hymn, which says the Son of God:

“... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself

And became obedient to death – even death on a cross.”

As the final section (vv 9-11) of that hymn says, the shameful cross of *humiliation* was followed by the glorious *exaltation* of Jesus; the basis of our Easter hope, so that one day:

“At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

CHAT FROM THE CHAIRS

Marc Hollinshead talks to: May and Ken

Marc: How long have you been living in England?

M&K: We moved here a year ago after spending sixty years in Hong Kong. We used to live in Wilmslow, but two months ago we bought a house in Handforth and will be spending the rest of our lives here.

Marc: That's a big move after being in Hong Kong for so long! Are you enjoying living here?

M&K: We could only speak basic English when we moved here so that made it very difficult as we didn't know anyone. We're very happy now, though. Our daughter also lives in Wilmslow with her husband so she always comes over for dinner on Sundays.

Marc: It's great that your daughter lives so close to you. Do you manage to keep yourself busy and meet new people as well?

May: We're retired now but for five months I have been volunteering at Hope Central and a charity shop, both for one day a week. It's really helped me to understand British culture and speak to new people. In Hong Kong I worked in a bank for most of my life and was very happy working there.

Marc: That sounds like a great way to get settled into your new home. Is it through this volunteering you came to St John's?

M&K: As we didn't know how to meet new people, we actually used a social media group called UK Hong Kong. We managed to find St John's from that group and were brave enough to email Simon!

Marc: We're very glad that you decided to send that email! How are you finding St John's and church life?

M&K: We only sometimes went to church in Hong Kong so we are new to the gospel. Simon has been very kind and we want to learn more about Jesus. We



can sometimes find it hard to understand and listen to different accents, but it is a lot better now since we moved.

Marc: Have you been going to the English conversation classes to help your understanding?

M&K: We have, yes. It's been so great to see other people from Hong Kong and learn the language. We're also thankful to Alison and all of the volunteers as they have been very helpful to us.

Marc: It's such a fantastic group and the volunteers do great work! How has this helped you both since joining the classes?

M&K: We feel like we can now meet new people and not feel scared. Coming to St John's and the conversation classes has given us the courage to do this, so we are now very happy in our new home and learning about Jesus.

Marc: We're happy that you're settling in so well. Thank you, May and Ken, for being willing to share some of your story with us.

We asked some members of St John's to choose their favourite song about the Cross, and something of the reason why...

Mandy Hui

I have chosen '*My worth is not in what I own*'.

The reason I chose this song as my favourite is because of the beautiful melody, and the lyrics are so touching:

*My worth is not in what I own
Not in the strength of flesh and bone
But in the costly wounds of love
At the cross*

As the song says, my worth is not in what I own, but in the costly wounds of love at the cross. The blood of Jesus Christ that flowed at the cross means He is the only saviour and it is the greatest treasure to me and every Christian, that's why I will trust in him, no other.



Anna Norman

A hard choice, because there are so many brilliant songs about the Cross!

I've gone for the hymn *Before the Throne of God* above for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, there are the Spirit-inspired words, written by Charitie Lees. From the heart-stopping truth of verse 2 -

*Because my sinless Saviour died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God, the just, is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.*

- to the glorious truth of verse 3 speaking of the risen lamb, the 'Great, unchangeable I AM'

Secondly, it is a song of truth and hope and encouragement beautifully set to music by Vikki Cook who has a great gift for choosing just the right melody.

Ian Lawrence

I vote for '*And can it be*' by Charles Wesley.

It's wonderful to sing such rousing songs written by 'saints of old':

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own*

*Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!*

This verse reminds us that 'there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8v1) and that we will one day 'claim the crown through Christ'. We have a promise keeping God who has made the way open for us. Glory be to him!



Nigel Brooks

It's so difficult to choose a favourite but I am going to say *In Christ Alone*.

This song is written by Stuart Townend, a Christian musician who I listen to often and whose songs I love to play in church. His music often has a Celtic lilt which I find particularly up-lifting. The opening lines to this song are:

*In Christ alone my hope is found.
He is my light, my strength, my song.
This Corner-stone, this solid ground.
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm*

What words of encouragement that God's gift of grace and love for us, and hope for the future, can be found simply by trusting in Christ alone.



Chris Piltz

I have chosen *When I survey the wondrous cross*.

This has always been a favourite of mine. I find it very moving. Jesus made such a great sacrifice in dying on the cross for our sins and it was such amazing love:

*See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*



John Bowler

In church we have recently been thinking about the word "grace" during Sunday mornings. So I thought it would be relevant to maybe choose one of my favourite devotional choruses, which is also relevant for Easter:

*Only by grace can we enter
Only by grace can we stand
Not by our human endeavour
But by the blood of the Lamb*

I've chosen this not just because it's a beautiful chorus but because it has such meaningful words relating to Easter.



George Perrin

'Oh to see the Dawn'

Unbelievably I like the tune and believe I half know it. Don't laugh!

Of course if I had been there at the time I would either have stayed in bed or been amongst the mockers. But the words, particularly of the chorus, sum up in many ways my belief of both my need for forgiveness, and that it is achieved on the cross. It pretty much contains the gospel.

*This, the power of the cross:
Son of God – slain for us.
What a love! What a cost!
We stand forgiven at the cross.*



John the Baptist was doing his job of telling people all about Jesus.



Read John ch 1 v29

What animal does John say Jesus is like? Draw one here.



In Bible times, a lamb was killed and offered to God as a _____

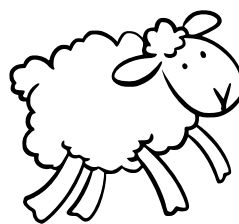
If someone had _____ against God, they would say _____ to him then offer him a gift called a _____, such as a lamb.

We have 3 words begin with the letter S. Can you fit them in the blank spaces in the box?

Sinned
Sorry
Sacrifice

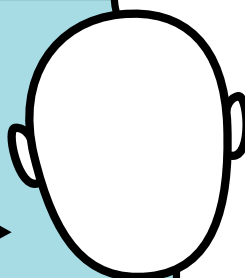
Can you think how Jesus was like a lamb?

Clue: Use the longest "S" word to help you.



Think about the wrong things you have done.

How does that make you feel?
Fill in the face. →



But if we trust in Jesus, he takes away all the sins we have ever done so that we can be forgiven and can be friends with God!

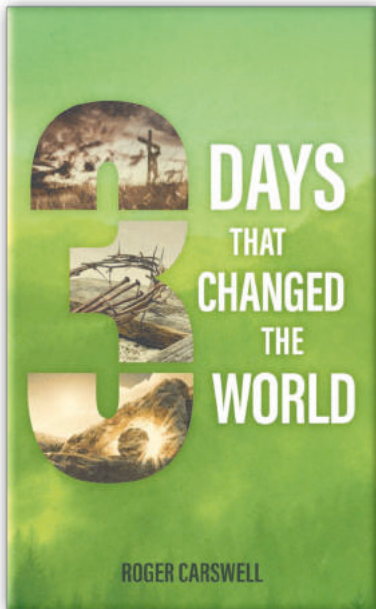
How does that make you feel?
Thank God that Jesus takes away our sin!

Can you draw the shape of the place where Jesus was killed as a sacrifice?

What did Jesus' death on the cross take away?



BOOK REVIEWS

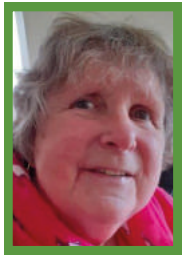


3 Days that Changed the World – Roger Carswell

Reviewed by Freddie Kennard

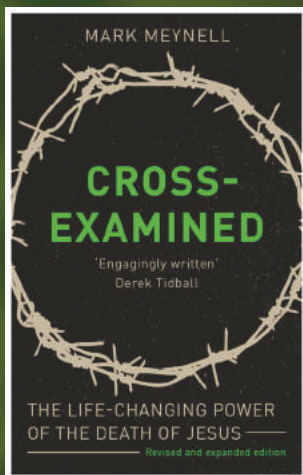
'3 Days that Changed the World' would be good for anyone to read who is unsure of the message of Christianity, or without any prior Bible knowledge, with no passages to look up.

It explains how our separation from God was put right by Jesus over 3 momentous days. That restoration had been prophesied throughout the bible and anticipated for many years. In the Garden of Eden mankind had enjoyed an intimate friendship with the Lord until Satan led them into rebelling against God, with all the brokenness that followed. But then 3 wonderful days - from the Passover meal on the Thursday evening; His death on the cross bearing our sins Friday afternoon; and His resurrection, and appearance to Mary Magdalene, on Sunday.



Now we can all have access to God through Jesus, the perfect sacrifice without the need any other mediator. And that relationship can deepen and mature as we give him access to all areas of our lives – an ongoing process. We are encouraged to read the Bible ourselves where we learn much and know his plans for us.

A concise and very readable book to pass on to family, friends, strangers!



Cross-Examined – Mark Meynell

Reviewed by Phil Edgington

What does the symbol of 'the cross' mean to you? Perhaps it's a 'logo' for Christianity. It might seem a bit mysterious or even a bit weird to have an instrument of death so central to the Christian faith. Why was Jesus' death necessary anyway and what relevance does it have to me, two thousand years later?

If these, or any other questions about the death of Jesus, have ever been on your mind you may have been reluctant to ask Simon in case you are given a big theology book. If so, this book may just be the one you've been



waiting for! Mark Meynell has a rare gift for taking excellent Biblical and theological understanding and communicating it in an engaging way. The book is quite short (only about 160 pages) with great little summaries at the end of each of the short chapters – so ideal for reading in short bursts. At the end, there is a 'study guide' that would be good to do with a friend or small group if you find that helpful.

With aid of many good illustrations, he helps us see (afresh?) why the apparent symbol of defeat is the greatest victory imaginable and why it is so amazing that a Holy God can also be a loving God. The final section ('part 4') of the book relates the impact of the cross to our everyday experience and really helps us understand the expectation of the 'normal' Christian experience.

For those of you thinking 'I already have a stack of unread books to trip over', why not borrow this one and promise to give it back by a certain date? Deadlines help I find.

(PS I borrowed mine from Leonie so ask her not me!)

hello

NEW FACES

hi!

nice to meet you!



Olena, Artem & Yaroslav

We are a family from Ukraine who arrived in England on November 6. Simon is our sponsor, we are very grateful for the shelter from the war. After arriving, we started coming to St John's every Sunday, with Nicky giving us a lift from Macclesfield. It is always a great opportunity to pray to God and meet new people. All three of us are currently attending the Christianity Explored course and studying the Bible. We are happy that God is helping us.

welcome!



Hi everyone, we are Nicole and Kenneth, and we have just moved to Wilmslow from Melbourne, Australia, but we are originally from Hong Kong. We've got one boy, Aiden, who is 10 years old, and one little toddler, Alyssa, and she's twelve months old. I'm a 'stay-at-home mum' and my partner does IT telecom work from home. I heard about St John's from my neighbour, Alex, who recommended it to us. It is our pleasure to join in!

hi

nice to meet you



...and welcoming one more new face, Holly and Alex's new arrival! Timothy was born on the 4th of January and is the younger brother of Enoch.

new baby!

hello!

Perfect Sacrifice

How The Cross fixes our righteousness problem

I have recently been doing a weekly Bible study with some of the Iranian men who've been coming to our church and living in a nearby hotel as they seek asylum. Most of these men are Christians (because of the persecution this brings, they are fleeing the regime in Iran).

I asked them if they had any questions about the Christian faith, and one man asked me to explain what the word 'righteousness' meant. It was an excellent question. I took them, in their Farsi New Testaments, to Romans 1:16-17:

'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes... For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed —a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."'

I explained that righteousness is to have a correct relationship to the will of God. To be rightly related to God who is perfect in character and nature, and how that is seen and expressed in His law. We then saw how this exposes our human problem, as Paul goes on to say in Romans 3:10-12: *"There is no one righteous, not even one... no one who seeks God. All have turned away ... there is no one who does good, not even one."*

I went on to explain that even if our actions are good, often our motives are wrong (we've been preaching through Matthew 6 and saw Jesus' exposure of the Pharisees' hypocrisy in their giving, prayers and fasting). There were lots of nods from the men in the room. Everybody understood and agreed.

So, how can we in our innate unrighteousness relate to a perfectly righteous God? We

looked again at Romans and saw Paul's joy in the gospel. In the gospel we see the power of God to make our relationship with Him possible through faith. Paul shows us in Romans 3:25 [that on the cross] *'God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood —to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness...'*

Through Jesus' death of Christ on the cross, through the shedding of his blood, God's righteousness is demonstrated, our sin is atoned for, and we can rightly relate to God. Crucially, we saw that this relationship is initiated, and continued, through faith in Jesus Christ. For my Iranian friends who grew up in a culture of Islam the fact that we can relate to God through faith and not our religious effort is beautiful. It was also beautiful to the apostle Paul and hence the reason why he was not ashamed of the gospel and the cross.

There were many smiling faces and nodding heads in our little bible study. The cross of Christ brings us joy when we combine it with faith and understand just how much it means for us too.



Steve is the vicar of St Chad's Handforth, and grew up at St John's! Many will remember his parents, Hugh and Joyce.

SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMME

Mornings 10am SUNDAYS Evenings 6.30pm			HOMEGROUPS
16 Apr	Meeting the Risen Jesus <i>Part 1</i>		Meeting in various homes, on Wednesdays, Thursdays & Fridays, afternoons and evenings, to study God's Word and encourage one another.
23 Apr	Annual Review		
30 Apr	Such Good News! 'What is the Gospel?' Romans 1:1-7	The Gospel Grows Postcard from Corinth Acts 18:1-17	
7 May	'Why preach the gospel?' Romans 1:8-18	On the road again Acts 18:18-28	Romans : Such good news! During the summer our homegroups are linked to our Sunday morning series. Meeting weekly the groups begin on 4th May and finish on 20th July. Dates given are Thursdays but some groups meet at other times (full details on weekly noticesheet). One week each half term will be a Prayer Evening (see below).
14 May	All age Parade Meeting the Risen Jesus <i>Part 2</i>	More than a name Acts 19:1-22	
21 May	'From what do we need to be saved'? Romans 1:18-32	Let's start a riot! Acts 19:23-41	
28 May	Pentecost Acts 2:1-41	The works of Jesus (continued) Acts 20:1-12	In addition a men's fellowship meets at 6.30am Fridays
4 Jun	'The problem we all face' Romans 3:9-21	To the leaders Acts 20:13-38	
11 Jun	All age Parade The power of the risen Jesus Acts 3:1-16	Gospel courage Acts 21:1-26	
18 Jun	Michael & Steph Baldwin UFM mission partners	Romance, Race & Risk Going away and coming home Ruth 1	MONTHLY PRAYER EVENTS (in church rooms) Sat 22 April Prayer Breakfast 8.30-9.45am Thur 18 May Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm Thur 15 June Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm Sat 24 June Prayer Breakfast 8.30-9.45am
25 Jun	'God's solution!' Romans 3:21-31	Under the wings of God Ruth 2	
2 Jul	'What does having faith mean?' Romans 4:1-17	Encounter on the threshing floor Ruth 3	
9 Jul	'A leap in the dark?' Romans 4:18-25	The Redeemer Ruth 4:1-12	
16 Jul	'What does the gospel give us?' Romans 5:1-11	The Royal Family Ruth 4:13-22	
23 Jul	'How will the gospel succeed?' Romans 5:12-21		

SPECIAL EVENTS

April 21 Men's Curry Night Coach and Four	7.30pm	May 7 Evergreens 'Coronation' Lunch	12.15pm	June 18 Evergreens Lunch	12.15pm
April 28 <i>Loving our neighbour</i> – a meeting of the Christian Institute, St John's Knutsford	7.45pm	May 20 Ladies' Breakfast, church rooms	9am	July 1 James Doo's ordination, St Mark's New Ferry	10.30am