

# IN TOUCH

Spring 2024

## THE GOSPEL IN YOUR WORLD

“...with your blood you purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” Revelation 5:9



[www.saint-johns.org.uk](http://www.saint-johns.org.uk)

# SIMON'S SCRAWL

by Simon Gales

The topic of this magazine is how the good news of Jesus Christ engages with different cultures. In the past Christian missionaries, attempting to share the gospel, sometimes mistakenly imposed Western culture upon a local population. But the gospel can and should adapt to different cultures, and that's been shown by the way in which Christianity has grown around the world.

The early church was dominated by Jews and centered in Jerusalem. Later it was dominated by Greeks and centered around the Mediterranean. Later the Christian faith was received by the barbarians of northern Europe and Christianity came to be dominated by Western Europeans and then North Americans. Today most Christians in the world live in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Christianity will soon be centered in the southern and the eastern hemispheres.

The contrast with other religions is stark. The centre of Islam is still in the place of its origin - the Middle East. Likewise, the original lands that have been the centre of Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism remain the same.

Why has Christianity been so adaptable? There are the unchanging core truths of the gospel but there is a great deal of freedom in how those truths are expressed and take shape within a particular culture. For example, the Bible encourages Christians to unite in acts of musical praise but it doesn't dictate the rhythm, instrumentation, or emotional expressiveness - all of that is left to be cultural expressed, in a variety of ways. Such cultural diversity was built into the Christian faith from the very beginning. Jesus scandalized his fellow Jews by tearing through racial and cultural boundaries. For instance, his famous parable of the Good Samaritan was shocking to its first hearers

because it cast a despised Samaritan as the hero! In John Chapter 4 we read about Jesus' life-changing conversation with a Samaritan woman - also shocking because a Jewish Rabbi would never engage with a morally-compromised Samaritan woman, but Jesus didn't care! Or rather, he cared deeply about this marginalized female foreigner.



This diversity of Christianity, kindled by Jesus, caught fire after his resurrection. Before leaving his disciples, Jesus commanded them to 'go and make disciples of all nations.' In the Book of Acts, God's Spirit enabled them to proclaim Jesus in many different languages! Moreover the hyper-Jewish apostle Paul ripped up the social barriers of his day - he wrote to the Galatians 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

Contrary to popular opinion then, Christianity is not a Western religion that destroys local cultures. Rather Christianity is more culturally diverse than any other faith. Wonderfully, the last book of the Bible paints a picture of the end of time when 'a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language' will worship Jesus. That has always been the multicultural vision of Christianity. So if you care about diversity don't dismiss Christianity! It is the most diverse, multi-ethnic and multicultural movement in all of history.

Yours,  
Simon

## Sketchy theology

By Ben Hollinshead

**Culture = How we do we things around here**



# THE GOSPEL IN OUR FOOD



BY GRACE ROBINSON

*Grace and her husband Paul are our OMF mission partners, where Paul heads up the Media & Mobilisation team. Grace is the intercultural worker at Holy Trinity Platt, and contributed to our recent weekend at home.*

Happy Easter everyone! Thank you for the invitation to share your 'Church Weekend at Home'. It was great to be able to spend the Saturday with you all. I hope that the weekend whetted your appetite for thinking about what intercultural church means for your context at St John's.

I wonder when you think of the Easter story, what do you include? For me, the Last Supper feels integral to the Easter narrative. Jesus wanted to 'recline at table' with his disciples: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.' He valued sharing this special meal together and the meal told a story – it pointed back to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb whose blood on the doorposts protected the lives of the firstborn Israelites; and it pointed forward to the sacrificial death that Jesus himself was preparing for.

Food plays a big part in intercultural church. The book I'm reading at the moment by Egyptian author Safwat Marzouk devotes an entire chapter to it (and there are only six chapters in the book)! Marzouk encourages us to 'create space for members of the church who come from different cultural backgrounds to express their identity by sharing their ethnic meals with others.' He writes, 'Far more than spoken language, food can serve as a mediator between different cultures, opening methods of cooking to all manner of invention.'

Food is definitely something we have been experimenting with at Platt as we seek to create spaces where people can connect. In the past, we have had church family picnics where everyone brings their own 'packed lunch' and we all then eat it together. This works well and is easy to organise but as our congregation demographics have changed, we began to realise that lots of our members would never dream of eating a packed lunch! For them, lunch means a carefully curated curry accompanied by noodles or steamed rice! So, we have not abandoned our church picnics completely but we have added in 'bring and share meals' where everyone brings something to the table and



we all enjoy a wonderful array of food. This is helpful because it not only creates easy conversation points but it also blurs the boundaries between visitor and host. When people spend time cooking a favourite dish and see it being enjoyed by others, it adds to their sense of belonging. Everyone gets the opportunity to both give and receive.

At Platt, I think this 'bring and share' approach has been most successful in our women's breakfasts. We really do enjoy a feast – trestle tables bursting with all sorts of tasty treats: cardamon and earl grey cinnamon buns; sharp cheese scones; spicy samosas; Mexican beans and tortillas; sumptuous spring rolls... you get the picture! There is an openness and a warmth created when enjoying food together. Appreciating the maker leads to an openness in sharing stories. At our recent breakfast, we shared about our experiences of prayer in small groups – the times when we have had wonderful answers to prayer and the times when God has not answered our prayers as we would have hoped. Several women chose to share their stories with the whole group: some with tears, some with laughter.

Marzouk finishes his chapter on food with a series of questions which I'll leave with you: 'Can you imagine what a meal and a time of storytelling might look like at St John's? What kinds of meals would be cooked and served? What are the practices you would include in order to expand the table and deepen fellowship?'

# THE GOSPEL IN OUR WORLD

BY RICHARD REEVE

*“God has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”  
(2 Peter 1:4)*

*“Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”  
(1 Corinthians 1:20)*

*“...but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles”  
(1 Corinthians 1:23).*

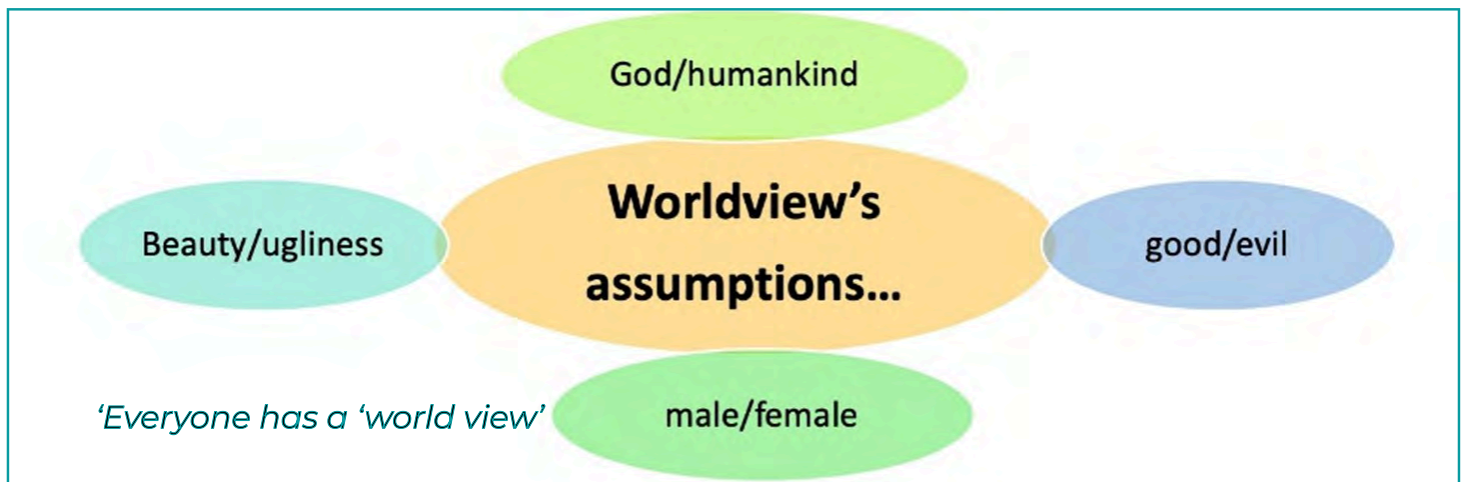
The regular way that people do things together, or human “culture”, gives each of us something of our identity. Whenever people get together – as families, in schools, universities, community groups and church groups, each gathering will have its own cultural patterns. In those places we are then provided with (often unwritten) rules for manners, traditions, and relationships.

Another way of thinking about ‘culture’ is that it’s human behaviour that can be seen. At a deeper and invisible level, everyone has a “worldview”. That is the basic presuppositions groups of people hold about such things as God; about being male and female; about what makes for beauty and what makes for ugliness; about what is good and what is evil. “Culture” is then the visible expression of values deriving from those invisible worldviews. Those cultural values may

then determine what we’ll eat and what we won’t eat; who we will and won’t eat with; which holidays are celebrated and how. For Christians, culture linked to place, ethnicity, and the branch of the church we belong to, may determine whether we dance and raise our hands in worship, or kneel quietly!

There are a variety of ways in which the Bible and Christianity are accepting or affirming of human cultures. The Old Testament, for example, does not condemn even “the [other] nations” for family life, for kinship, or a desire for land. In the New Testament we learn from John 1:14 that, “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*”. When God revealed Himself to us, He didn’t choose a heavenly culture that no one had ever seen before. In fact, at times, people wondered if ‘God with us’, the Messiah, our Saviour, was really anything special at all. In some ways Jesus seemed indistinguishable from the people he was with. When he showed he had the wisdom and authority of God they were shocked, saying, Mark 6:3 – “*Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?*” Jesus took on a very earthy culture – that of a first century, Palestinian, Jewish male. He was so culturally relevant that, when they crucified Him, they put a notice over the cross saying “King of the Jews”.

However, biblical Christianity is also discriminating about culture. Typically, there are

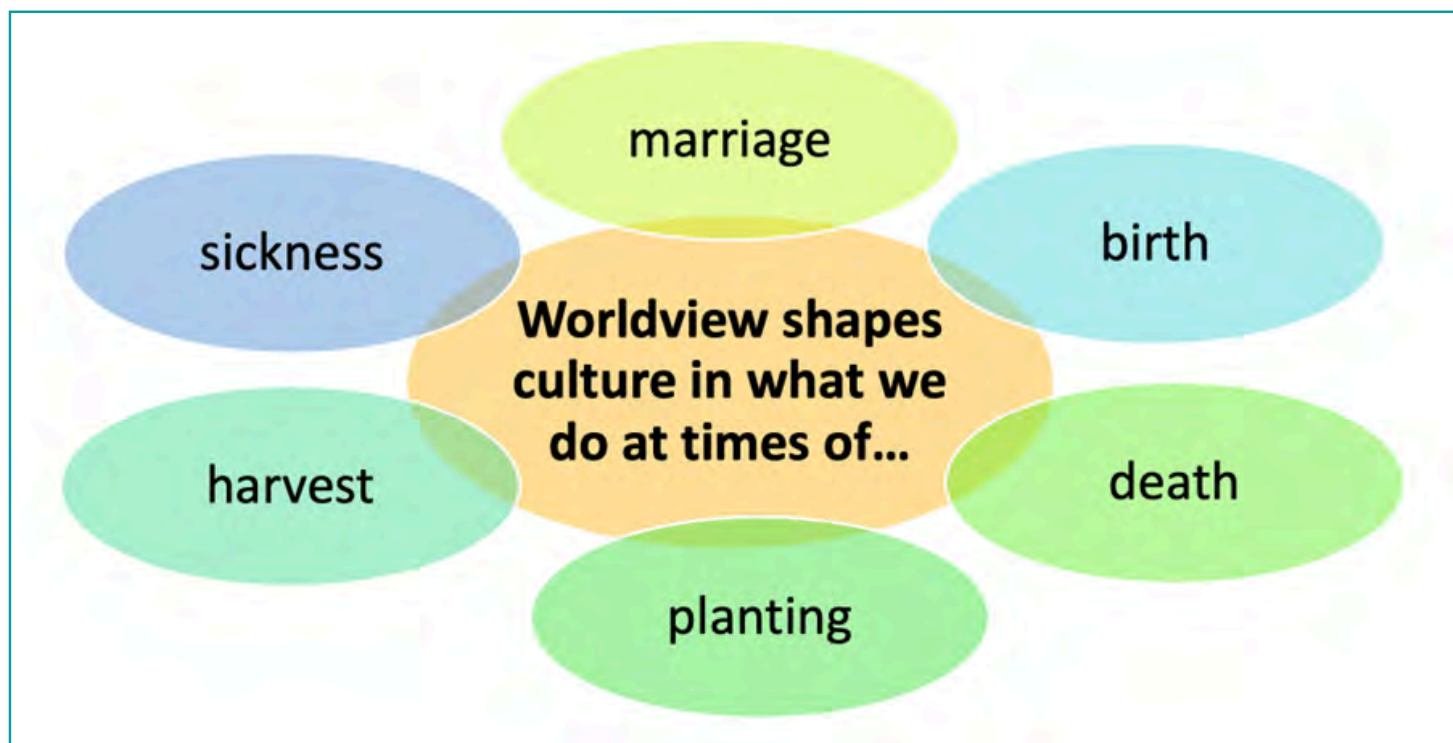


significant strands of what the Bible calls “the world” running through what humans do together. God gave the world He made as a place for humans to live and flourish, and declared it good, but it is now a place bearing the marks of our rebellion against Him, our sin. The term “world” is therefore also used in the Bible for what is corrupted and less than God’s best for human beings. As the Bible texts at the beginning of the article suggest, there is much about human culture that is morally corrupt and alienated from God. Much of human wisdom is, in fact, folly and derives from hearts that run after the wrong things, and is spoken for ears wanting to hear something other than the truth (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

It is therefore not surprising that missionaries, who prioritised the personal salvation of individuals, still found themselves challenging the human cultures to which they were sent. Writing about William Carey of the Baptist Missionary Society, Indian Christian philosopher, Vishal Mangalwadi observes: “When William Carey wrote the manifesto of modern Protestant missions in 1792, he had neither

political connections, nor ambitions. He did not even know he might be asked to go to India as a missionary. He was merely stating what seemed to him an integral part of the biblical worldview: that a Christian is responsible to teach people the laws of God...”. Christian missionaries in India, says Mangalwadi, were characterised by “a moral dynamism...a new grammar of public engagement appeared with the coming of the gospel, at the heart of which was the concern for the poor, the weak and the oppressed.”

The role of foreign missionaries in India that Mangalwadi highlights alerts us to the value of cross-cultural Bible study wherever we are. All of us need Christians from other cultures to help us evaluate our own culture. Precisely because we are so immersed in it, often we can’t see our own compromises and how the Bible speaks into them. A true partnership in the Gospel then, as Paul talks about in Philippians 4:1-5, is one where Christians from different backgrounds help each other see their blind spots to better live in the light of God’s will and purposes.



*Culture is the visible expression of values derived from invisible world views*



Richard is curate at St Chad’s, Handforth, and was the speaker at our recent church weekend at home on this topic.

# ***Fruitfulness on the Frontline***



***Lindsey***

The course got me thinking about how we might be fruitful for God on our different 'frontlines' – all the interactions we have with an unbelieving world. I realised it's not about whether how we live is 'enough' but recognising that every Christian has different 'frontline' gifts and opportunities from God.

As a 'frontliner', it's been encouraging and challenging that however we bring the gospel into our everyday lives can be used by God. I also needed to remember that, whilst God wants us to be fruitful for him, salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and that we journey on with God by our side.

***Martin***



Some struggled to determine what our frontlines were. If in full-time employment it is easily recognisable. But not for those who no longer have that daily interaction. This was important to recognise and to re-orientate ourselves to find new frontlines. Wider family are important interactions and some meet non-Christians through church activities or voluntary work. The English classes have been a great way to meet and chat and answer questions they may have about our culture and Christian faith.



***Linda***

God is amazing! Doing the 'Fruitfulness on the Frontline' course has confirmed to me that God has put me here and was an answer to prayer. Prior to me moving to my new home, I prayed in the car park of this place with one of my sisters in Christ and realised God had plans for me, this being one of my frontlines! Although I find it very challenging at times, I know God is with me when I step out of my comfort zone to help the many neighbours who come and go.

***Jan***

I have found the course makes you reflect on how you interact with others and what sort of response, positive or negative you get from them. Whether you've brought some happiness to someone or made them think about what is important in life.

***George***



'Fruitfulness on the frontline' has been helpful in reinforcing the points that: Wherever we are God has put us there and we can glorify him in both words and actions; God is glorified as we follow him in the small everyday things and interactions we have; Kingdom values and ethics are the best! In our group it led to discussions on grace, on good works and about God's sovereignty!

**Ann**

The course was practical and relevant. It created lots of discussion within our homegroup, in particular where our 'frontline' actually is, as we are all retired. We decided our families, our clubs like gym and swimming and sports group and even tending our front garden where we met neighbours were our frontline. I also volunteer at Hope, a local Christian charity, and it has helped me focus more clearly on how I can share my faith in different ways with some of the clients, not all of whom are Christians. It is also encouraging to work on a 'frontline' with other Christian brothers and sisters.



**Evon**

Very often it is hard to come up with things I can do to live out my faith, also I wonder how would God use little 'me'? Yet, as we have gone through 'Fruitfulness in the Frontline', the examples and practical suggestions in it made me realise it is the attitude and perspective that matters. I have been challenged to make a difference to the sphere of influence God has put me in, to serve Him and practice my faith even in my mundane day to day tasks or through interacting with other people in an ordinary day.



**Marc**

Studying particular parts of Scripture can sometimes prove difficult when I look to apply it to my day-to-day life. However, this course has really helped me to see how I can put my faith into action in both big and small situations in my work and home life. As each week focuses on different areas of how we live, I've been able to get more of a grasp of my own spiritual health, as well as how I act around non-Christians.



**Anna**

It's made me think about where my new 'frontlines' are and how best to tap into them.

**Andrew**

I've been challenged to consider how to try and aim for reconciliation rather than confrontation when trying to deal with sticky situations at work.



**Leonie**

I think the course has shown each of us that we do have 'frontlines' and that the opportunities to make a difference are there for the taking. We've found it encouraging to talk each week about how we have got on with our "homework" - this has given us a real sense of being in it together.

# Living as a Christian in an Alien World?

Daniel, a young man and one of God's people, knows exactly how you feel. He used to live in

J \_\_\_\_\_

but was taken to live in the foreign land of

B \_\_\_\_\_ by King

N \_\_\_\_\_

Read Daniel ch1 to help you fill in the blanks

You might have lived in the same country all your life or moved a long way from home. But every Christian's real home is not on earth but in

H \_\_\_\_\_ with

J \_\_\_\_\_

f \_\_\_\_\_!

Read ch 6v1-16 King Darius found that Daniel was so hard-working that he planned to make him in charge of (circle the correct word) the whole office / kingdom / playground. The other officials tried to get Daniel into the swimming pool / a chariot race / trouble but they couldn't because Daniel hadn't done anything wrong / right / at all. Daniel's enemies decided to set a trap for Daniel: they got King Darius to make a new bed / film / law. This law said that no one was allowed to pray to anyone except King Darius / God / lions for 40/30/20 days. Anyone who broke the law would be thrown into the sea / a bath of jelly / a den of lions. When Daniel heard about the new law he prayed to God / ran away / hid under his bed. Daniel's enemies went and told the king / the newspaper / the head teacher. Who will save Daniel? King Darius / God?

It's 60 years later some things have changed: there is a new King in Babylon, King Darius and Daniel is no longer a young man he's now 80 years old! But one thing hadn't changed read ch 6v10 and draw a picture of Daniel doing what he always did.

Read Daniel ch 6v9-23 to find out how the story ends God rescues Daniel!  
Did you notice 2 interesting things?  
1. Daniel had done nothing wrong in God's sight in fact it was doing the right thing, praying to God that got him into trouble! V22  
2. Daniel kept trusting God even when he ended up in the lions' den. V23

Peter, Jesus' friend, wrote to some Christians who felt like strangers in the world and just like Daniel, they were suffering even though they had done nothing wrong.

Read 1 Peter 2v20-23

Who is the great example we can learn from who suffered although he was innocent and kept trusting God to bring justice?

Why not talk to him now and ask him to help you live  
For him even when it is hard.

The same will sometimes be true for us: we will get into trouble just for being Christians and doing what God asks us to do. Has this happened to you? How did it make you feel? Draw an emoji here!



# CHAT FROM THE CHAIRS

*Marc Hollinshead talks to: Evon Kwok*

**Marc: How did you and your family come to be in Wilmslow?**

Evon: We lived in Trafford and Urmston for four years, but then we moved to Wilmslow during Covid in 2021.

**Marc: How has life been in Wilmslow since then?**

Evon: We're really enjoying it! There's lots of great walking nearby and places to go, but it took quite a long time to find a good house when we were searching. I also home-educate my daughters and there's a lot of good communities and resources here for that.

**Marc: Do your daughters enjoy being home-educated?**

Evon: Originally my husband and I looked for a school for our youngest, Charisse, when she was two. However, both Charisse and Charlotte, our eldest, are very happy and they don't feel like they're missing out. They're ten and twelve now and they feel very settled.

**Marc: I think a lot of people underestimate home educating! How does it feel for you as a parent?**

Evon: It's actually very convenient! The resources are great, and Charlotte and Charisse still manage to make good friends as there's a big home-educating community. We still have lots of school trips and play sports, and Charlotte and Charisse are enjoying being part of several orchestras as they both play musical instruments. We focused more on socialising before Covid, but now we have an all-rounded curriculum. I can see how God has provided a lot of opportunities for us

**Marc: It sounds like a fantastic way to develop and also great to hear how you see God at work. Did you grow up a Christian?**

Evon: I grew up in a catholic school, but I didn't become a Christian until university. I went to an Australian university and was invited to a campus church there, so I grasped the opportunity. Everywhere I go now, I always look for a church!



**Marc: How has becoming a Christian changed you?**

Evon: I used to not be a confident person but God is always helping me to change. I also went on a mission trip to an Indonesian village four years after university and I found it very eye opening. God definitely was using that opportunity to grow my faith and help me, so I can see how loving he is.

**Marc: That must have been an amazing experience! What eventually led you to St. John's?**

Evon: We were previously at a church in Tytherington, but after the summer holiday club of 2023, Simon reached out to us. We couldn't make time for a lot of activities in our other church, and I always enjoy being involved in things, so it seemed right for us.

**Marc: How have you found St. John's over the last six or seven months?**

Evon: Everyone is very warm and welcoming! I like that it's Bible-centred and Charlotte and Charisse are very happy as well. There's always a warm family feeling at St Johns. I believe that the Christian life is not to be lived quietly and we should always serve, so I feel perfectly settled here.

**Marc: Thank you for that encouragement Evon and for sharing some of your life with us.**

# PHOTO PAGE



First aid training



Nativity from Scratch

Church weekend at home



**Our glorious Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, intrinsically 'embodies' qualities of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).** Our God is no solitary, lonely individual – as worshipped in many Eastern religions and in Islam. Not surprisingly, such a God has fashioned a world of dazzling diversity, as the Psalmist exclaims: “How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all. The earth is full of your creatures”. (Ps. 104: 24). For human beings, the Bible sets out God’s plans and purposes for human life, individually and collectively. Part of this plan is for the development of legitimate cultural diversity, within the unity of humankind, as people have expanded numerically and geographically across the earth. But the Bible recounts how rebellion against God has become embedded in human culture, again as the Psalmist questions: “Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up ... against the LORD and against his anointed [Jesus, the true king]”. (Ps. 2: 1-2). Accordingly, human cultures have developed a dark underside as the consequences of human sin are worked out in history.

Situated in the ‘western world’, our nation and culture have received immeasurable blessings from Christianity, underpinning our legal system, the institution of marriage, care for the weak and many other aspects we have taken for granted. We have become a ‘prodigal’ culture rejecting God in defiant atheism, suppressing the truth, embracing paganism and following selfish idols of money, power, celebrity and fashion.

Within our society, ‘culture wars’ rage and abject folly is embraced, as Douglas Murray details in *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*. Gender confusion – the ‘trans’ issue – is a prime example of explicit rebellion against created biological reality. This is the real ‘conversion therapy’, bringing profound harm to immature and vulnerable young people.

What is the Christian’s responsibility? Negatively, our response cannot be weary acceptance of retrograde tendencies. We must be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16) in the manner we fight; but fight we must. We need



those who will analyse and understand philosophical and cultural trends. Wherever possible, our response must be strategic, thought-through and collective. There are numerous opportunities for signing online petitions, writing to the press and cautiously using social media, as suggested by organisations like *The Christian Institute*. Such action might sometimes receive a hostile reaction but the Bible warns us to expect that (1 Peter 4:4). In such times our church leaders will need our encouragement to maintain a clear stance, something that is sadly lacking at the top levels of the Anglican church in the UK at the moment.



In many spheres of public life, Christian leadership is lacking. It seems a minority of evangelical churches actively encourage – in preaching - their members to step forward when leadership opportunities become available in the workplace or community. Consider *The Parable of the Talents* (Matthew 25:14-30). We should be actively training, mentoring and praying for suitable sisters and brothers. The *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity* (LICC), founded by the late John Stott, is excellent at facilitating these goals. In every workplace, respect for the Christian voice must be earned – through integrity, kindness, consistency, honesty and all-round excellence. This takes time and effort. But once it is gained and maintained the outcomes are immeasurable.

“...part of [God’s] plan is for the development of legitimate cultural diversity, within the unity of humankind...”

# SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAMME

Mornings 10am <b>SUNDAYS</b> Evenings 6.30pm			<b>HOMEGROUPS</b>
7 Apr	<b>Resurrection Importance</b> 1 Corinthians 15:12-34		Meeting in various homes around the parish during the week (evenings and afternoons) to study God's Word and encourage and support one another.
14 Apr	<b>Resurrection Result</b> 1 Corinthians 15:35-58	<b>The Glory of God: Ezekiel</b> 1. The glory of the Lord Ezekiel 1	
21 Apr	<b>Annual Review</b>		
28 Apr	<b>Standing Firm: 1 Thessalonians</b> 1. A faith that works 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10	<b>2. A warning to the people!</b> Ezekiel 2, 3	<p><b>1 Thessalonians: Standing Firm</b></p> <p>During the summer, our homegroups are linked to our Sunday morning services. Meeting weekly, the groups begin on 25<sup>th</sup> Apr and finish on 4<sup>th</sup> July. Dates given are Thursday but some groups meet at other times (full details are given in the weekly noticesheet).</p> <p>There will be a whole Church prayer evening on Thurs 20<sup>th</sup> June.</p> <p>In addition, a men's fellowship meets at 6.30am Fridays and a Simpler English bible study (for Cantonese speakers) on Fridays at 7pm in the vicarage.</p> <p><b>PRAYER EVENTS</b></p> <p><b>Sat 6 Apr (church rooms)</b> Prayer Breakfast 8.30-9.30am</p> <p><b>Sat 18 May (church rooms)</b> Prayer Breakfast 8.30-9.30am</p> <p><b>Thur 20th Jun (church)</b> All church Prayer Evening 8-9.30pm</p>
5 May	<b>2. A love of labours</b> 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12	<b>3. A threat to the nation</b> Ezekiel 4-7	
12 May	<b>All Age Parade service</b> <b>3. A word that works</b> 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16	<b>4. The glory of the Lord offended</b> Ezekiel 8	
19 May	<b>Pentecost</b> <b>4. A love that suffers</b> 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5	<b>5. The glory of the Lord relocated</b> Ezekiel 11	
26 May	<b>5. A passion that prays</b> 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13	<b>6. A challenge to the comfortable</b> Ezekiel 12-14	
2 Jun	<b>6. A life that pleases</b> 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12	<b>7. A faithless people</b> Ezekiel 16	
9 Jun	<b>All Age Parade service</b> <b>7. A future that is real</b> 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	<b>8. God's Sword</b> Ezekiel 21	
16 Jun	<b>Family Life: God's plan</b>	<b>9. Against the nations!</b> Ezekiel 28	
23 Jun	<b>Family Life: God's pattern</b>	<b>10. The watchman</b> Ezekiel 33	
30 Jun	<b>Visit of Paul &amp; Grace Robinson</b> <b>OMF mission partners</b>	<b>11. Shepherds - false and true</b> Ezekiel 34	
7 Jul	<b>Family Life: God's purpose</b>	<b>12. The reason for hope</b> Ezekiel 36	
14 Jul	<b>8. A hope that endures</b> 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11	<b>13. The vision of hope</b> Ezekiel 37	
21 Jul	<b>9. A God who will do it!</b> 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28	<b>14. The substance of hope</b> Ezekiel 40-48	

## SPECIAL EVENTS

**Apr 20      8.15 am**  
Men's breakfast, Church rooms

**Apr 24 Christianity Explored starts**  
8pm Vicarage

**Apr 26 Christianity Explored starts**  
1.45 pm Vicarage

**May 12      12.15pm**  
Evergreens Lunch

**May 28-31**  
The Buzz, 8-11s

**July 7      12.15pm**  
Evergreens Lunch