

Soundings

Portobello & Joppa Parish

Church Magazine

April 2021



From the editor



As Stewart says in his letter, we're now a year on from the first lockdown. And sadly it doesn't yet feel all that different from then, though many of us have now been vaccinated, which does give a feeling of hope. One of my lockdown activities has been to sort out my parents' archives. Both were young - late teens and early twenties - during the Second World War. My mother was working in London during the Blitz while my father defused bombs in Egypt and later bridged the Rhine under heavy gunfire.

Here's my father, on the right, aged 19, with defused German bombs. When I feel sorry for myself in the current situation, I think of them – and some members of our congregation who also lived through the war – and what they had to put up with. As Stewart says, there's a lot to reflect about.



In this edition, Catherine shows us how much our Family Ministry is valued. George tells us what we must never, never, never do with our daffodils and Sandy gives us an insight into local politics, while Karen says that she's about to take to the sea – watch out for her soon!

Thanks to all contributors and Happy Easter.

Pam

Me [to grandson]: What kind of Easter egg do you want?

Him: Oh, I don't mind. Cadbury's. And big.



From the minister

Dear Friends and Neighbours,

I write this on the morning of 23 March 2021.

On the morning of 23 March 2020 we began our first lockdown.

All of us have had to adjust in some manner. Sometimes we have risen to the challenges and other times we have felt swamped, inundated or exhausted. A rollercoaster.

Some of us have managed fine and have coped with the quiet, solitude, isolation and loneliness. Some of us have not managed so well. And those of us who have lost loved ones and/or seen loved ones suffer have had to respond within constraints and parameters that have limited contact with others precisely when we need others the most.

Now, it appears, we are beginning to move out of the year-long series of restrictions and lockdowns. Rates of infection are falling and vaccinations continue apace. Let's hope the momentum continues.

Today has been marked a day of reflection on the UK. A chance to remember those who have passed away, those who have suffered, those who have cared and served. Silence at noon and lights at 8pm.

What were your reflections? What came to your mind most powerfully or vividly?

I ask that question of you when I myself find it so difficult to describe all that has occurred, all that I have felt, all that I regret, all that I have done, all that I have not done, all those conversations with people, all that work. It might take a year to describe all that happened this past year.

I recently listened to a podcast and the woman speaking was asked for her reflection on the past year. She suggested that it would take couple of years to understand more fully and in more depth the events of the year. Time is required to see what is below the surface.

A commentator once remarked that it took the Christian church about 300 years to figure out the Trinity... insofar as it can be comprehended. Each year we re-visit stories from our faith and we linger, of course, on those that are most important: Christmas, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost.

And when we re-visit them, we re-engage with the wonder of our faith, the depth of our faith, the richness of our faith and, oftentimes, the mystery and utter incomprehensibility of our faith. Love can do so much, and most especially when it is divine, sacred, eternal and God-given.

We in the church are accustomed to the patterns and rhythms of reflection. We in the church are also accustomed (or should be) to the sense of humility before events that truly stretch our understanding.

As we re-visit the Season of Easter and the day of Pentecost again, and as we live in a world enchanted (again) by the incomprehensible and miraculous assertion that love overcomes death and light overcomes darkness, may we continue to stop, pause, pray, reflect.

Our faith has given to us not just love 'divine, all loves excelling' but a pattern and a rhythm to reflect consistently and regularly. In that rhythm we discover insights, we learn of ourselves, we draw collective strength and we touch, and are touched by, the peace and healing of God. It's not a one-off event. It's woven into the essence of our world and our lives and can sustain us in ways unimaginable and inexpressible.

Perhaps, just perhaps, we should mark 2021 as a Year of Reflection. We would all benefit.

Stewart

Family Ministry

Many of you will have received an email from PJPC around the 8th of March entitled “Our Ambition for 2021”. When I read the letter through I was shocked and upset to realise what it meant. The current financial situation means that we may not be able to continue to employ a Family Worker at PJPC. The call for donations towards family ministry is not simply to support Michelle’s valuable work but to provide a fund from which to pay her salary.

The role of Family Worker can too often be seen as simply running the Sunday School whilst the adults get on with the important business of worship. However, through the dedicated work of this role, families and young people in our church family and in the local area have been warmly encouraged and firmly included in the community, faith and worship of our congregation. The energy, care and time Michelle herself has given us over the years has resulted in so much:

Messy Church, a thriving Sunday Stars and Breakfast Club, Breakfast Club 2.0, Godly Play, Holiday Club, intergenerational worship and events, youth retreats, a Coffee Break group for new parents... not to mention the prayer, pastoral care and support - behind the scenes but no less tangible.

From a personal perspective, due to the pandemic I have spent this past year engaging with PJPC primarily through Michelle’s ministry. Through virtual Godly Play, Messy Church and Sunday Stars I have worshipped WITH my children. I have wondered and explored ideas WITH my children. I have connected with Bible stories in a way I have never done before. I have learned so much and I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to participate in church this way.

The role of Family Worker at PJPC helps to create opportunities for us all, our church family, to engage with worship and faith with a new perspective. For generations to learn from each other. With the Growing Young programme at the forefront of our minds, right now is the time to recognise the importance and value of this work. To help to ensure this work can continue, please consider

donating to the Family Ministry fund:

<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/PJPC>

Below are some personal accounts from congregation members and people in our community about Family Ministry at PJPC. We plan to celebrate our wonderful Family Ministry on our Social Media over the coming months too – if you have any words or pictures you'd be willing to share please email catherinerennie@virginmedia.com (quotes can be anonymised if you prefer, just let me know.) You can also help by looking out for our posts on the PJPC Facebook page – every time you “like”, comment or share it helps them reach significantly more people. A simple click can help hugely!

Catherine

Family Ministry in the Pandemic

Here are some words from a parent in our congregation:

“Everybody knows about Sunday Stars, Messy Church, Breakfast Club etc but like so many things in life, it's what people don't see that can mean the most. That's exactly how we feel about the family ministry. During a time when our children didn't want to engage with zoom and we couldn't attend church, we have been so thankful for the emails checking in to see how we're doing, the messy church bags sent to the house but most of all the genuine love and care shown to us. It is thanks to them that we have continued to feel part of the church community throughout this past year.”

Supporting and nurturing parents and carers

Coffee Break welcomes parents and carers from the local area with babies under 18 months old when we are able to meet. Adults get a warm welcome, a hot cuppa and some home baking and importantly the opportunity to connect with other adults. Here is what one parent had to say about their experience:

"After having my second child I moved area away from friends and felt extremely isolated at times. I started going to the Coffee Morning on a Tuesday morning run by Michelle at PJPC and instantly felt welcome and supported. Michelle introduced lots of new parents and ensured that we all had a place to talk openly without judgement or pretence. I have made friends for life there and honestly

feel like I could have been in a dark place without the support of Michelle, coffee club and the other parents in the community."

Encouraging and including young people in our church

Our Breakfast Club is a group for young people in S1-S6 and as well as weekly meetings, they gather for a vigil every Easter, participate in retreats, contribute towards planning for our all age worship and other church events throughout the year. These words are from a former Breakfast Club member:

"The dedication and hard work from the Breakfast Club volunteers in providing a safe space for young people immersed me in the sense of community and togetherness that a church setting can provide."

"[Michelle] has been almost ever-present in my involvement with PJPC and when volunteering or engaging with the church as a young person. She has also grown and developed the youth involvement of the church tenfold - events such as messy church and holiday club have grown and brought many more young people to be involved in PJPC." *a Breakfast Club Member*

"No one makes the church such a family friendly and welcome space quite like Michelle. Growing up in the church has honestly been a pleasure thanks to all the events, clubs and prayer spaces set up and coordinated by Michelle." *a Breakfast Club Member*

Outreach and connecting with local families

Holiday Club is a week-long programme of activities for children in the Portobello area over the summer break. It is run by a collaboration of six local churches and a vital team of volunteers. This involves a huge amount of planning and coordinating and Michelle is instrumental in this work. These words are from a local parent:

"The holiday club has provided my family with a gentle introduction to religion but most importantly, has provided a unique club environment, that all my three children can all enjoy and thrive - it covers such a variety of activities for

mindfulness (through gardening, arts and crafts) and fitness (with games and dancing). The nurturing environment promotes friendships, encouraging others, being charitable and taking on responsibilities.”

Messy Church, when we are able to gather in person, meets once a month and welcomes many families from our congregation and beyond. Open to all ages, we share a story, a prayer and a song. We respond in lots of messy ways – crafts, gardening and play and we share a meal and fellowship.

These words are from one parent in the Messy Church congregation:

“Messy Church is an important part of my children’s spiritual upbringing. It has helped to show them that church is a community where we support each other and that we can show and live Jesus’ teachings in our everyday lives by talking and being together. It has also shown them the beginnings of a life of service in Jesus’ name by working together.”

Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more
Till he became
Most poor:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin,
That I became
Most thin.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory:
For, if I imp^l my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

This poem by George Herbert (1593-1633) is one of my favourites. I first read it at university when I was 18. The poet, who died at the age of 40, then seemed to me to have reached a reasonable age. Now, I marvel at his youth and the 500-year-old originality of the shape of the words on the page, like wings helping us to soar to heaven.

Pam

Gardening with George – More plant lore from George, horticulturist and star of the small screen.



By the time this horticultural ramble goes to print, winter will be long forgotten and a spring filled with the promise of new beginnings will be on its way. The sticky buds on the chestnut trees in the church grounds and elsewhere across Scotland will be bursting with the energy of new life. And many of the gardens of the parish will be decked out with their annual displays of daffodils and tulips and will be heady with the heavy scent of hyacinths.



Daffodils are native to the Western Mediterranean region and are to be found from low levels right up to the high mountain pastures where they are frequently covered in snow over winter. They are very hardy plants. In their native habitat the bulbs of *Narcissus* (the botanical name for our common daffodil) start into growth at the onset of the autumn rains and eventually burst into flower the following spring. As summer approaches, the flowers fade and the foliage dies back, leaving only the dry bulb below the soil surface. Forming underground bulbs allows the plant to survive the heat and drought of high summer. Our gardens rarely experience the extremes of heat and drought that are common to the Mediterranean zone and so, to keep the bulbs healthy and energised, it is important to make sure that they are well fed and watered.

The bulbs respond well to a dilute liquid feed of tomato fertiliser, which is high in potash, one of the elements necessary for the promotion and encouragement of flowers. I grow many of my exhibition daffodils in pots and feed them regularly with tomato fertiliser when they are in growth. Feeding in this way increases the vigour of the foliage which, when it dies down, then increases the size of the bulbs. I leave the pots out in a semi-shaded area over the summer period and let the foliage die back slowly and naturally.

The daffodils I grow in the open garden are also fed once the flowers have faded and I never, never, never cut off their foliage before it has died off completely, nor do I twist it together in a 'ponytail' and secure it with an elastic band!! Cutting off the foliage too early reduces the plant's ability to photosynthesise, and the strength of the bulbs and the size and vigour of their flowers the following year is in consequence greatly reduced. Leave the foliage alone and let it wither and die back naturally.

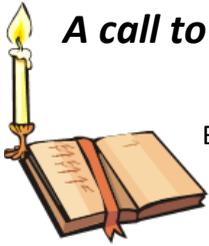
Over time, clumps of daffodils in the garden can lose their vigour and ability to flower. When this happens the bulbs should be carefully lifted just as the foliage is starting to die back. The dense mass of bulbs should then be carefully teased apart until each bulb is separated from its neighbour. The smallest bulbs can be discarded - sent off to the 'brown bin in the sky' - while the largest are retained and replanted. It is best to plant the bulbs in a new site where they can enjoy the benefits of fresh soil, free drainage in summer and sunshine in the spring.

I enjoy the displays of golden yellow that the various varieties of daffodils bring to our gardens each year. They are a real 'cheer me up' - from the highly fragrant Paperwhite Narcissus that bloom around Christmas to the golden yellow trumpets of 'Rapture', 'Golden Harvest' and 'King Alfred'. It is no wonder that Wordsworth waxed lyrical as they fluttered and danced in the breeze.

Stay safe, keep smiling and Happy Gardening

George





A call to prayer

Business transactions in Biblical times were relatively uncomplicated. Once the seller laid down a price and the buyer picked it up, the deal was done.

On Good Friday, Jesus laid down the price. On Easter Sunday, God picked it up and our salvation was paid for.

The greatest proof of the resurrection is found in the transformed lives of people all over the world. The songwriter put it like this: “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.”

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus says, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore... Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” Today Christ stands knocking at the door of your heart, saying, “If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in.”

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Brain-teaser



Some fun facts (according to the internet) about Easter that you might not know. (Complete accuracy is not guaranteed.)



“Easter” possibly comes from Eostre, who may (or on the other hand may not) have been an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and rebirth. Another version of her name is “Ostara”. The Greek for “verve” or “inspiration” is “oistros” – and in general, there’s an egg connection there somewhere – oestrogen and all that.



In the 13th century, Edward 1 of England is said to have ordered 450 eggs to be covered in gold leaf and given as Easter presents. History doesn’t record whether these were hard-boiled first; or whether the recipients were pleased.



Fry and Co. produced the first chocolate eggs in 1873 – an improvement, surely, on Edward’s idea.



76% of people, if given a chocolate bunny, eat the ears first.



Perhaps relevant to the previous fact, an anagram of “Easter Sunday” is “ears unsteady”.

Meanwhile, I’ve set myself the task of seeing how many words I could make out of the phrase “Easter Sunday”. I got 27. How many can you get?

Alison

My words are: seat, east, tease, teaser, duster, read, dear, dearest, steer, near, turn, star, stare, nest, dust, stay, deer, yeast, need, tree, rest, date, year, yearn, tune, tuner, rate



Getting to know you – Karen

Hello, I have been connected with St Philip's and PJPC all of my life (with the exception of a few years away studying and working in Aberdeen and Ayr) - from Baptism through Sunday School, Bible Class and becoming a member of the church. Even though I now live in the centre of Edinburgh, I don't think I could improve on the ministry and family feel of PJPC. Previously I have taught in the Sunday School and served on the Congregational Board and, currently (when not in lockdown), I help with the Sunday Coffees and, when I can, the Care Van.

Q. What is a favourite hymn, and why?

A. It is difficult to choose one hymn that covers all I love about singing in church. Two favourites are the uplifting "Lord of the Dance" or the moving "A Touching Place".

Q. What is an early church memory?

A. Going on the Sunday School picnic. I remember the excitement of the streamers and singing on the bus, the potted sports and the sausage roll, amongst other goodies, in a bag!

Q. In an alternative life, what job would you have chosen?

A. I've always thought landscape gardening would have been nice – quite creative and outdoorsy.

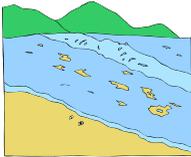


Q. What are you reading at the moment?

A. I recently picked up a birthday present for a Labrador owner – “Olive, Mabel and Me: Life and Adventures with Two Very Good Dogs” and found it a lovely, gentle read before bed – enough to make a ‘non-dog person’ like me think I’m missing out not having a dog.

Q. How did you find lockdown?

A. It’s been hard not to see and hug family and friends but as someone who is normally ‘on the go’ it’s also been helpful, at times, to slow down and take stock. However, I’ve not slowed down that much as I’ve been going out to work and been grateful to have an ‘extended family’ to visit.



Q. What extra tasks have you done/ are you planning to do before lockdown is completely over?

A. I’ve just purchased a paddle board to join all the people in the sea at Porty! We’re so lucky to have the beach on our doorstep.

Q. What are you longing to do once lockdown is completely over?

A. Travel somewhere off the beaten track.

Q. Tell us something that not many people know about you.

A. I have been to Timbuctoo (in Mali, West Africa). It’s on the edge of the Sahara Desert and I remember the bread had sand in it as the sand would blow into the flour as the bread was baking. It’s a fascinating place but, sadly, now troubled by violence and unrest.

Q. What luxury would you take to a desert island?

A. *I played Desert Island Discs on Zoom with a couple of friends during the first lockdown and I took green tea and cake (I hoped afternoon tea could count as a single luxury).*

Q. What do you do to relax?

A. *Various outdoor activities – walking, cycling, playing tennis, gardening.*



Q. What is a favourite quotation?

A. *I work in mental health and have always liked a quotation from Krishnamurti - "It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society."*

Q. What makes your heart sing?

A. *Being out in nature, especially watching the sun being reflected on water or standing on top of a mountain. Even better if it's shared with a loved one.*

Kirkin' the Council

Thinking of the church Zoom services, and the other Zoom meetings I attend on council business, reminded me of the occasions after a council election - not sure what happens in other local authorities - when in the Borders we still have the ceremony of "Kirkin' the council!!"

Once the new council is elected, the Convener of the council invites those elected to a church for a special Sunday morning service where we all sit together, irrespective of party or allegiance, and join together with the congregation to accept the blessing of the minister. The Convener chooses the church, usually within his own constituency. When Alistair, he of the "Voice of the Tattoo", was Convener, it was in Kelso; when Graham it was in Peebles, etc etc.

On my first election I had never met the great majority of the councillors. I knew many by reputation in the local press, and also knew their political views, with many of which, of course, I had no affinity at all. However, in the spirit of the occasion we mixed up and processed into the church, feeling daggers from the congregation who had been displaced from their seats to accommodate us, but also from those who had fixed views about many councillors with whom they had had dealings in the past. I know of no councillor who is universally popular!

I have often wondered if the purpose of the “Kirkin” was to allow us to pray for forgiveness for all the promises we made during the pre-election canvassing or even, perhaps, early forgiveness for the decisions we would be about to make, and some of the heated words we would say about each other in debate in the council chamber!

Anyway, on this first occasion I sat beside a councillor from Selkirk whom I had never spoken to other than pleasantries. He was completely the opposite of me in our political views, and it was not the person I would have chosen to sit with, given the choice.

Obviously with a military man like Alistair deciding on the choice of hymns, they were old traditional hymns and rousing and wonderfully musical. Therefore imagine my surprise when the first hymn was announced. I seem to remember it was “Blaw Wearie”, in Scots, but of course “Blaenwern” in Welsh! Followed by “Cwm Rhondda”. I have played in a pipe band for 30 years in many places abroad and in the UK in front of crowds of two people or thousands. I know how that sound stirs, excites and evokes romantic images of place and war. However, the sound of a Welsh choir belting it out has another dimension of faith and community created from hardship and need. Their hymns are impossible to sing without emotion.

The wonderful organ struck up. I later got to know the organist, and she could lift that instrument to wonderful musical heights. Then my companion started to sing and I was at first astounded. He had a wonderful gruff speaking voice, but his singing voice was loud and tuneful and simply dragged me along with him,

encouraging others to sing as well. The effect was spine-tingling, emotional and uplifting, creating a memorable service for me and many others. Perhaps it was the excitement I felt as a new councillor, but it was also the uplifting voice of a man with whom, outside the church, I would disagree profoundly, and frequently crossed verbal swords with on the floor of the chamber in the years to follow. After the service, various people came up and said how wonderful the singing was and we both agreed that we had enjoyed the chance of sitting with each other rather than people we might have chosen. That was the value of “the Kirkin’ of the Council”.

We remained friends, however, and I found out quite early he was a great fundraiser for heart charities. I even did a toast to the Lassies for him at one of his Burns’ Suppers. We remained friends because at the next election he was not returned and the singing the next time was the poorer.

Anyway, I send my best wishes to the congregation and hope you are all well and smiling through adversity - and, if you are feeling a bit down, get “Calon Lan” on You Tube and you will be instantly revived.

Sandy

Some members of the congregation may well have seen the local council meeting in Cheshire which was held recently on Zoom. It was more than a little unruly; and someone put a recording of it on Facebook which then went viral. Jackie Weaver (good surname), who is Chief Officer of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, battled stoically - and on the whole successfully - to keep the meeting in order and thus became temporarily an internet sensation. I couldn’t help thinking of Sandy when I watched this meeting!

The following week, at my Zoom choir practice, one of the sopranos had “Jackie Weaver” as her name on her Zoom picture. A few minutes later, an alto changed her own name to “The Real Jackie Weaver”.

I’m happy to say that Session meetings are nothing like that council one!

Pam

LIFE AND WORK APRIL 2021



EASTER SPECIAL

Easter Around the World: Church of Scotland ministers and partners from across the globe reflect on how they celebrate Easter

Surprised by Jesus: Reflection from the Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair

Easter Prayer

'Every Action Really Does Count' Interview with Helen Hughes, retired Church of Scotland Deacon and passionate Christian Aid supporter

Dreaming Big In this month's youth column, Rachel Macrae describes the influence of the Church in shaping her life and dreams

A Season of Awakening The Very Rev Albert Bogle asks whether the Covid-19 pandemic has created an opportunity to reset mission

All in the Timing The Very Rev Dr John Chalmers reflects on death, loss and the importance of signs in the story of Lazarus

God's 'Ministry of Recognition' In the last in her series of studies, Ruth Harvey looks at Paul's letters as she reflects on the importance of reconciliation in the months to come

Online

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Remembering

11 March Margaret Donald of Duddingston
18 March Betty Norris of Craigentenny
19 March Alan Greig of Portobello



MAGAZINE/DIARY DEADLINES

May 2021

June 2021

July 2021

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Portobello & Joppa



Parish Church

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