

NEWS LETTER

Heath Street
Baptist Church
Hampstead



Minister: Ewan King

Minister's letter: thoughts funeral!

Many of our regular readers will be sorry to learn of the death of Margaret Smith, whose funeral took place on Thursday 8th February. Margaret passed away in January, at the age of 90. Although Margaret was unable to attend worship during my years as minister, she is very well remembered, having served both as a Sunday school teacher of long standing, and as a deacon of the church. Lucy (Moore), Mary (Hughes) and Margaret made up a fondly recalled trio of Heath Street friends. It was good to gather to mourn Margaret's death, celebrate her memory, and entrust her body and soul to the keeping of Almighty God. I've been asked to write up for the newsletter the thoughts I shared on this occasion, something that seems appropriate for this lenten season!

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I think it must be a common feeling at funerals. The nagging awareness of a slight disconnect between the rather flamboyant grandeur of the religious language coming from the front, and the relatively modest scale on which the average human life is lived. This feeling probably has very little to do with *disbelief* as such. The problem is not that we don't *believe* in these big religious themes, just that it's somehow difficult to get them into emotional focus.

Like most who plan and lead funerals, I always end up wanting to keep the grand perspectives in. Without the eschatology, the general resurrection, the consummation of all things in God in Christ, the wiping away of every tear from every eye and so on, I would feel something had been left unsaid, and the most important thing at that! But even at its most exciting, our everyday existence rarely seems to match up to the cosmic perspective of the Bible verses that frame most funeral services, while our last days very often see the kind of narrowing of scope Jacques Brel documents in his heart-breaking song *Les vieux*: “*Du lit à la fenêtre, /*

puis du lit au fauteuil, / et puis du lit au lit...”.

The text I had chosen for Margaret's funeral was Jesus' raising of Lazarus. One conversation there might, on a first reading, suggest that the Lord has very little patience for this sort of reaction:

Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’
Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life...’.

I suppose it all depends how the exchange is read. For a start, what does Martha mean by “I know”?

Just conceivably she might be launching into an impromptu miniature credo - (*Martha*) (*looking to the heavens with Hollywood certainty, eyes glowing with other-worldly fervour...*) “*I KNOW!*”.

However, when my reply starts with “I know”, what I'm actually suggesting is often something rather less exalted - namely that what you just said didn't need saying!

I hear Martha fending off what seems to her the excessive religiosity of Jesus' reply. “*Yes, Lord, I'm very well aware of that, I've not forgotten my catechism (Death of Brother... see under Last Day). But the last day is - well the last day... Whereas today...*” Is Martha being a bad girl (again)? Should faith in an eventual resurrection, however distant, have smoothed her furrowed brow? Dried her tears before they were even shed? Or ought she to have known what was coming next, and when Lazarus eventually did ‘come forth’, should Martha have been the only one who wasn't surprised?

Perhaps - were it not for the fact that when he arrived at the tomb, Jesus too wept.

Jesus' tears indicate no lack of faith in God's big plans for the cosmos. But they do suggest that all that can wait. For God too, incarnate in Jesus,

the reality of death crowds out - for however brief a moment - sublime pictures of future triumph. Jesus meets Martha in his tears - even Martha in the troubled state of mind that fends off premature consolation. In the shared moment of grief, tears have their rightful place. When, on the last day, the Father finally wipes the tears from every cheek, the upturned faces will include his Son's.

It's often said that the fact Jesus cries give permission for us too to be overpowered by grief. Perhaps especially the grief we feel for a life cut short like Lazarus'. And that's true. But it also gives permission for us to be honest if, even in the face of death, we just can't quite connect our lives in their smallness with the grand cosmic sweep of the Christian story. If the grand panorama of resurrection can momentarily be displaced by tears, even in Jesus' eyes, it's hardly surprising that we find it hard to see how our small story fits into this big picture.

Margaret's faith was real and strong, and of course we prayed together in faith. But I'd be lying if I said our conversations were distinguished by their religious intensity! And as for the Last Things, the general Resurrection, or the coming day when God will be All in All, I'm not sure we ever quite got around to discussing them. Does this exclude us from those promises? Surely not! The basis of our faith is not what we talk about with one another, anymore than salvation rests on what we manage to feel or imagine when we attend one another's funerals! Faith and salvation rests on, and in, the God who makes and keeps promises. Jesus the maker and keeper of the promises of God is in the midst of his people, not only in the extremes of their grief but in the smallest of their sadnesses. He is the Lord in Whose keeping are the most exalted of cosmic outcomes, and the most outwardly undramatic of human dramas, the most private of private lives.

So as again today we hear in faith those astonishing promises, we can hear with a confidence that is based not on what we might or might not manage to feel, but in the same Lord who wept by Lazarus' grave, the

Resurrection and the Life, the Lord Jesus, Whose sure and certain intention it is to keep His word of promise to Lazarus, to Margaret and to us all.

Newsletter: Secretary's report

Dear Friends,

I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year. We certainly had a lively time here at Heath Street with various services, events and social gatherings, including a well-attended Church Christmas lunch on 10th December.

I need to inform you that I am stepping down as Deacon and Church Secretary on 31st March this year. It is not yet known who will take over from me but I will make sure you are informed and hope to keep in touch with many of you by e mail (t.thom@hotmail.co.uk) or by letter to me at 15 Ingham Road, London NW6 1DG.

News from the church is good. Since I last wrote, we have had another baptism (Laura Somers) and admitted another church member (Konrad Biadun).

The Contact Club (for the homeless, lonely and vulnerable) is very busy nowadays: over 70 guests attended the Christmas dinner on 3rd December. Ewan and I continue to assist with that, now very ecumenical, project (volunteers from St Mary's Catholic Church having been joined by others from the Jewish and general community).

We remain committed to helping refugees. Our Childrens' Worker Wilf has made trips to Calais and Greece and is on the steering committee for the Hampstead Parish Church's bid to welcome a refugee family to this country and provide ongoing support. Our church has also committed financial support to a bid by Churches Together in Hampstead to host a family. If anyone wants to make a further financial contribution I urge

them to contact our Treasurer Gaynor Humphreys gaynor@eandghumphreys.plus.com.

If anyone thinks they may be able to offer practical help with settlement of refugees then

I urge them to contact Wilf (stanleywilfridmerttens@gmail.com).

The Church year moves on and we are nearly into Lent. The theme of Ewan's sermons will be 'Temptation'. There will also be Lent Study Groups locally studying Rowan Williams's

Being disciples (new and second hand copies available for purchase on online).

On a lighter note, Ewan is planning pancakes on Shrove Tuesday for the kids attending his Old Time Nursery sessions as well as others attending our free Tuesday lunchtime concerts organised by John Baker, Our Music Outreach Co-ordinator.

Much love,
Theresa

The Mountain According To Wilf

It was a difficult night.

Our tent leaked;

it was bitterly cold.

Everyone was camped close

together on the side of a mountain

on whatever levelness could be found.

I was angry we hadn't arrived earlier

and gotten a better space.

We sat up late drinking whiskey

though you weren't meant to

and discussing whether or not it was a cult.

About 4am we started upwards

The darkness and cold

were blotting out my will to climb

but Anne kept the faith, singing

a breathy song and making us laugh.

The top of the mountain was wearing a robe

of cloud, and there was this sound

that sounded like a UFO in an old movie

or a giant comb being played

but as we approached

the summit

it was clear

it was many

voices together.

They were singing

toward the east,

where the light began

beginning

like wine being poured.

A droplet come zygote of light

on a distant ridge
our gazes yoked.

The song was a song like a marching song
a river might sing among itself.
The sun was coming up the steps of the song
like an adorable groom.

The devotees were mainly middle-aged,
everyone was wrapped up in blankets,
their faces full of dusky tributaries.
Prayers were read. People were quietly
Orange, a cloud was poking up over the ridge
like a dog hoping to join in.

Everyone went to a little stone cave
the back of their hats blazing as they chatted.
We entered too, saying thanks.

They were preparing tea and breakfast.

I was hungry
but Anne said we shouldn't have any because
we weren't members
and she didn't want us to impose.

We quarrelled about it
but then they offered us some.

They had burnt tea and bread that looked like stone.

There were fat dates and there were bowls of golden
honey. The bread was divided into hunks.

There were no plates so they filled our hands.
We cradled it in our hands. Two hunks of bread to each,
a dozen dates, a cup of milky tea and honey
that poured down in shafts
from each knuckle.

People sat on boulders
or dangled their legs over the precipice.

Their smiles said, *Take, eat,*
we made it for everybody.

Their rosy cheeks spoke too, saying, *All the world*
are devoted to this,
so all the world are members.

It seemed a voice from sticky fingers called out to us
saying, *Everything*
is for everybody, breakfast is for everybody
forever and ever and ever.

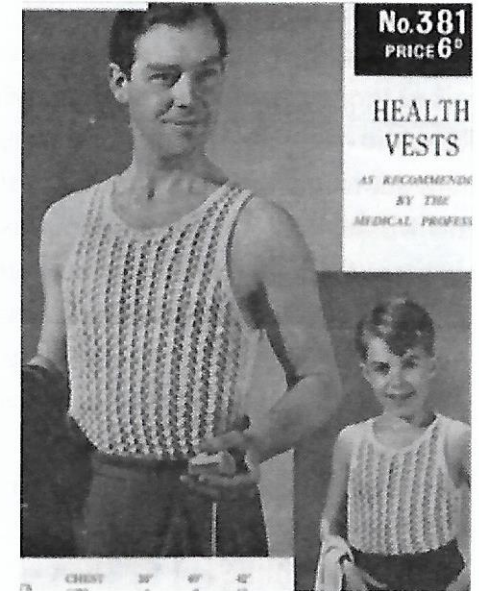
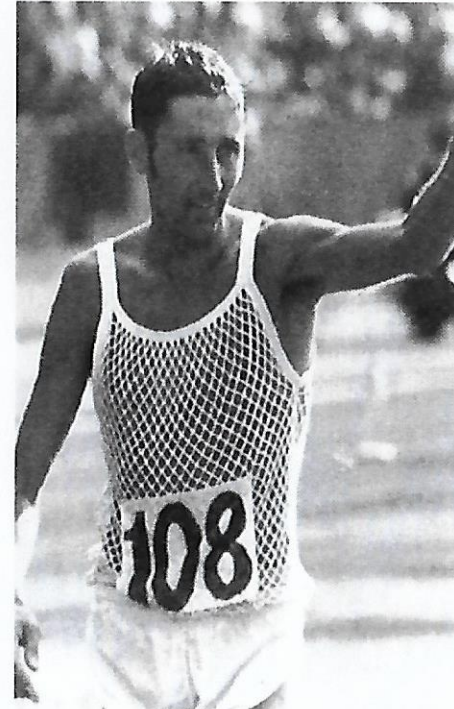
Treasurer's note

Thanks to all the Church members who rallied round at a special meeting in January which agreed that we should proceed with changing the legal status of the Church so that we can apply to register as a charity and take advantage of a governance structure which limits the liability of Deacons and members should anything go wrong in the management of the building or in the life of the church. As well as all the members present agreeing to this change we had the informal approval of other members, both those temporarily away and others who live at too great a distance to get to services.

The resolutions passed at the meeting gave the Deacons the responsibility of making the change happen. We have an agreed new constitution, which should not mean any significant change in the policies and practice used at Heath Street. For the next few months it will seem that nothing much is happening, but the Deacons will be working on applying to the Charity Commission for registration and then dealing with an awful lot of paperwork as, purely technically, we have "close" Heath Street Baptist Church and "reopen" Heath Street Baptist Church and you can be sure that our bank and investment managers and any other bodies we have a formal relationship with will make a meal of that!

*Help
us
INVEST
in our
vestibule*

We have great plans to make the vestibule of Heath Street Baptist Church a bright and welcoming space – new paint, new lights, new flooring – the works. To do all this, plus the bits we cannot see, like improving the electrics, will cost almost £20,000 (including VAT, which we cannot avoid). Can you make a contribution to this investment in upgrading the building? Ewan and the Deacons are setting a challenge to ask Church members and building users to help raise half of the cost – with the congregation finding the other half from Church funds.



If we could find 10 people able to give £500, that's £5,000, and 30 contributing £50 comes to £1,500 ... then we will only need another 700 people to give us £5 each! Perhaps you could get together with friends and raise £50 or even £500 jointly?

If you are a UK taxpayer we can also claim an extra 25% on your donation. That makes £500 up to £625 and £50 becomes £62.50.

Your earthly reward? Huge thanks and a warm glow every time you walk in to the church!

Talk to Gaynor about this!
(gaynor@eandghumphreys.plus.com)

Money matters

Waking from Sleep, our special event of Christmas words and music raised money for Panzi Hospital which is based in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. It functions as a general hospital for the local population, but is mostly known for its support for survivors of sexual violence and women suffering from complex gynaecological conditions such as obstetric fistula. We sent a contribution to the Panzi Foundation in early 2017 and we have about £450 to contribute from this recent fundraising. We have another fundraising campaign going on at the moment – to improve our dingy and rather messy vestibule and make a bright and welcoming entrance to the Church. We hope that all our members and friends, regular and occasional worshippers, and people who enjoy our many weekday activities will want to make a contribution towards the cost, which will be not far short of £20,000 overall including rewiring, new lights, painting, better carpet and all the rest, seen and unseen, to upgrade the space. We have £500 plus Gift Aid from our first donor, and every size of contribution will be welcome, however small (or large!).

Please either put your donation in the Sunday plate or the wooden vestibule contributions box (mark it for the Vestibule and if you are a UK taxpayer please put your name and address with it and your agreement for us to claim Gift Aid which adds 25% at no cost to you). If you prefer to do this by bank transfer, ask me for bank details when you see me or via gaynor@eandghumphreys.plus.com. The more we can raise towards this project the nearer we get to affording to put in the new lift!

With love and good wishes, Gaynor

Lent studies

I'll end with a little plug! For everyone who has been complaining that eleven am isn't an early enough Sunday morning kick-off, we will be opening the church doors at nine for lent 2018, with a meditative series, in which I will lead intrepid Heath Streetites on a whistlestop tour Lenten Patristics and Matristics, starring (in order of appearance, rather than chronologically) Diognetus, Macrina, Ignatius, Perpetua, Chrysostom and last but not least my own Maximus! "Lent with the father and mothers of the church, 9 am, Sundays though lent".

Ewan

Wednesday 14th - 17th February

Isaiah 43.18-25

- 14th *“Man does not live by bread alone.”* Joel 2.1-2,12-17
15th Anselm King
16th Robin Thorne
17th *“Worship the Lord your God,*

February 18th –24th

Genesis 9.8-17

- 18th *and serve only him.” ’*
19th HM
20th Beauty Kunene
21st Gaynor Humphreys
22nd Frida King
23rd Neil McLeod
24th *“He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you”,*

February 25th – March 3rd

Genesis 17.1-7,15,16

- 25th *“On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’*
26th Margaret Biadun
27th Wilf Merttens
28th Tom Somers

(March)

- 1st Michael Bloxham
2nd Nomsa Ndebele
3rd *“Do not test the Lord your God” ’*

March 4th – 11th

Exodus 20.1-17

- 4th *“Man does not live by bread alone.” ’*
5th Nesa Thorne
6th Beryl Dowsett
7th Josh Somers
8th Ewan King
9th Annie Fang
10th *“It is written: “Worship the Lord your God,*

March 11th - 17th**Numbers 21.4-9**

- 11th *and serve only him.” ’*
 12th Susan Le Quesne
 13th Lydia Baker
 14th Joachim King
 15th Nathan Biadun
 16th Hildegard Williams
 17th *“It is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”*,

March 18th – 24th**Exodus 2.1-10**

- 18th *“On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’*
 19th Christina Cairns
 20th Theresa Thom
 21st Bezawit Geberebiaher
 22nd Thaddeus King
 23rd Andrea MacEachan
 24th *“Do not test the Lord your God” ’*

March 25th – 31st**Mark 11.1-11**

- 25th Evelyn Baker
 26th Hildegard Williams
 27th Heini King
 28th Edward Humphreys
 29th Birgit Leuppert
 30th Susan Le Quesne
 31st Judith Peak

EVENTS (see website for details)**February**

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|----------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| Tuesday 13 th | | Shrove Tuesday |
| Wednesday 14 th | | Ash Wednesday |
| Wednesday 21 st | Evening | Live in Concert: Finnish folk fiddle |
| (Folk on Monday) | | |
| Friday 23 rd | Evening | Live in concert: Flyte |
| Sunday 25 th | Afternoon | Rachel Ward - Handstands |
| | | Yoga event |

March

Saturday 17 th	Evening	Balfolk (folk dancing event)
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Friday 30 th		Good Friday
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April

Sunday 1 st		Easter Day
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2 nd Tuesdays	7-9pm	Sacred Harp hymn singing
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Wednesdays	4.30 pm	Storymakers Club
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Thursdays	10.30am	Oldtime Nursery
	7.30-9pm	Heath Street Choir

Saturday		Coffee Morning (alternate Saturdays see website for details)
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WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

Sundays	9am	
	11am-12 noon Divine Worship (including Sunday Club for children)	
	7.30-9.30pm	Contact Club
Mondays	7pm	Swing Patrol (Swing dancing)
Tuesdays	10-11am	Oldtime Nursery
	1-2pm	Lunchtime recital

Church Officers: Gaynor Humphreys (Treasurer)
 Theresa Thom (Church Secretary)
 Annie Fang (Deacon)

To contact Ewan King
please email: ewan_king@mac.com

Copy for the next newsletter should reach Ewan King
(ewan_king@mac.com)
Not later than Wednesday 14th March

*For requests regarding church membership,
Baptism, or opportunities for Christian ministry in the church
please contact the minister.
For questions regarding space use and room hire
please contact the minister.*

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