

Stockton Road Church News December 2024



Mark 12: 30-31

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your mind, and with all your strength, and you shall
love your neighbour as yourself”.*

We are a union of Presbyterian and Congregational churches at the heart of Sunderland city life, growing from a past rich in mission and hospitality. We embrace this heritage utilising the Five Marks of Mission to guide and enable us to take forward current opportunities for mission and service.



DECEMBER REFLECTION

LUKE 1: 46b – 55 (Magnificat)

This is Mary's song of praise when she arrives at the house of her relative Elizabeth, after travelling south from her home in Galilee to the hills around Jerusalem. Mary's Magnificat resembles Hannah's song (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10), though it is more personal, full of joy and hope because of the salvation she carries in her body. Notice how it pictures the movement of God's grace. It starts by recalling God's favour towards her lowliness (v.48; cf Luke 1:30). As it moves outwards, its message becomes more radical. God will transform the injustices enjoyed by those who are rich and well-fed into blessings for the humble and hungry. So, Mary looks forward to a salvation that can be seen, tasted and embodied in the lives of ordinary people.

The Magnificat doesn't specifically mention peace; this has to wait until the angels' Gloria when Mary's son is born (Luke 2:14). Yet the hallmarks of peace are evident in God's readiness to bless the lowly (v.48); the mercy that flows from one generation to another (v.50); and the way divine strength re-orders the world to benefit the humble poor (vv.51-53). In all this God is said to 'look', 'remember' and 'help' – language that suggests the humanity and intimacy of God's dealings with his people. Mary expects salvation to feature in the day-to-day life of ordinary people. But its radical peace doesn't come cost-free, as Mary will discover when she takes her child to the Temple (Luke 2:33-35). Her song of joy will one day turn to lamentation, like Jesus' tears for Jerusalem, which cannot be true to its name as 'city of peace' because it misses the moment of God's visitation (Luke 19:41ff).

Mary and Elizabeth meet at a time full of personal turmoil. Mary is young, probably feeling outcast and unsure. Elizabeth may be conscious of being an older mother and her husband is currently mute. They might both be wondering what the neighbours are saying about their unexpected pregnancies. Yet there is real joy in their time together, and they seem to find peace and acceptance of God's will. There must have been a real sense of mutual support and encouragement. A hymn by Fred Kaan expresses it like this: 'Put peace into each other's hands, and like a treasure hold it' (Stainer and Bell, 1989). Can we do this for each other?

A Prayer

God of wisdom and wonder,
we praise you for your gift of peace:
for its depth when we are most troubled;
for its comfort when we are most afraid;
for its simplicity when we are most pressured;

for its truth when we are most disconcerted;
and for its stillness when we are most swamped by the
noise and busyness of Christmas.
We praise you, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Lectionary Readings

1 -7 December - Hopeful beginnings

Advent 1: Jeremiah 33.14-16; Psalm 25.1-10; 1
Thessalonians 3.9-13; Luke 21.25-36

8 - 14 December - A loving plan

Advent 2: Malachi 3.1-4; Luke 1.68-79 (Benedictus);
Philippians 1.3-11; Luke 3.1-6

15 - 21 December - Joyful news?

Advent 3: Zephaniah 3.14-20; Isaiah 12.2-6 (Canticle);
Philippians 4.4-7; Luke 3.7-18

22 - 28 December - Peace, actually

Advent 4: Micah 5.2-5a; Luke 1.46b-55 (Magnificat);
Hebrews 10.5-10; Luke 1.39-45(46-55)

25 December - A place for Jesus

Christmas Day: Isaiah 9.2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2.11-14; Luke
2.1-14(15-20)

29 December – 4 January - Learning and growing

Christmas 1: 1 Samuel 2.18-20,26; Psalm 148; Colossians
3.12-17; Luke 2.41-52



Church Services December

Services at 10.45am in the Sanctuary unless indicated otherwise

- Dec 1st Barbara Mitchell and Christine Hutchinson. Coffee & Croissants in the lower hall
- Dec 8th Elisabeth Meikle.
- Dec 15th Revd Jane Rowell. Communion service.
- Dec 17th Community Carol service. 1.45pm.Refreshments afterwards.
- Dec 22nd Revd Dr David Whiting. Carol Service.
- Dec 24th Revd Jane Rowell. Christingle 6pm.
- Dec 25th Christmas Day **10.30 am at St Margaret's South Shields.**
- Dec 29th Revd Jane Rowell. Joint Pastorate service **St Margaret's South Shields 10.30 am.**

Weekly Church Activities (all welcome)

- Bible Study Group Tuesdays at 10.30am
(**Note:** Tues 17 Dec will be the last of 2024 and will resume Tues 7 Jan 2025)
- Food Cycle Lunch Tuesdays at 12.30pm
(**Note:** Tues 17 Dec Christmas lunch will be the last of 2024 and will resume Tues 7 Jan 2025)

Christmas Worship Events Across the Partnership

Community Carol Service at **Stockton Road** after Food Cycle Lunch Tues Dec 17th at 1.45pm.

Carols by Candlelight at **Roker**. Dec 19th 6/6.30 pm (tbc).

Scratch Nativity at **Grindon**. Dec 22nd 4pm.

Christingle at **St Margaret's**. Dec 22nd 3pm.

Christingle at **Stockton Road** Dec 24th 6pm.

Watchnight service at **St Margaret's** Dec 24th 11.15pm

Christmas Day service at **St Margaret's**. 10.30 am

GOD'S GHOSTWRITERS

BY CANDIDA MOSS

WILLIAM COLLINS ISBN 9780008612177

Candida Moss is the Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham. Her book is subtitled 'Enslaved Christians and the Making of the Bible'. This subtitle sums up what the book is about; she is considering how enslaved people have influenced the contents of the bible as we have it.

The book is divided into three sections, each of three chapters. The first part entitled 'Invisible hands' in Chapter 1 on 'Essential Workers' begins with a story involving an ancient piece of graffiti found on the Palatine Hill in Rome. The graffiti shows a tunic clad youth looking up at a crucified figure with the head of a donkey. The inscription: 'Alexamenos worships his god'. For pagans at the time depictions of Jesus as a donkey were common, for them Christianity was both absurd and servile. Crucifixion was a penalty handed out to slaves. Alexamenos and his school mates were not freeborn children but were slaves of the imperial family. In the school they learned the various skills to become a bookkeeper or secretary. Moss goes on to tell of various slaves who served prominent Romans as assistants and secretaries.

Chapter 2, 'Paul and his Secretaries' refers to the attendants who were with Paul at his conversion. Could it be that slaves are the first witnesses to Paul's conversion? At the end of Paul's letter to Rome there is reference to Tertius the writer of the letter, he seems to be like many enslaved people acting as a secretary. At least four of Paul's letters were composed from a prison cell. It does not seem likely that he would have been able to do this without help. Perhaps Paul's followers hired scribes to take notes, maybe squatting

next to the window of Paul's prison cell. In this chapter Moss also refers to Mark's Gospel. It is said that Mark translated Peter's words, it could be that Mark was an enslaved or formerly enslaved worker.

In chapter 3 the story of Jesus is re-read picking up themes that relate to slavery. If Mark's Gospel was recorded by a slave, then according to Christian tradition Matthew was written in Hebrew before being translated to Greek. Of course, the names of translators are not recorded, but it suggests the work of an enslaved scholar. Also, according to tradition John wrote his Gospel when he was of an age when he would need assistance in writing, perhaps another work of someone enslaved or formerly enslaved. At the end of the chapter Moss writes 'The written gospel only spread and survived because there were people to carry it, copy it, and read it aloud in performance for others.'

The second part of the book is entitled 'Messengers and Craftsmen'. Chapter 4, 'Messengers of God' begins with reference to 'Acts of Thomas' and Thomas travelling to India. The disciples were not only students, they were also apostles (or messengers). Luke's Gospel is referred to where first of all a small group of messengers are sent out by Jesus followed by a larger group. They travelled lightly and were dependent upon others for sustenance and housing. This Gospel account is linked with other early Christian accounts of messengers who were slaves or former slaves.

Chapter 5, entitled 'Curators of the Word' touches upon the copyists the early Christian writings. A copyist is unnamed, enslaved in a wealthy household they may have copied the text for their enslaver, or maybe they worked for a freed bookseller.

In chapter 6, 'the Faces of the Gospel' were often the faces of the enslaved who had the job of performing the Gospel or

reading it to assembled guests. The result would be that often the language of enslavement became embedded in these early texts as the Christian follower was described.

The final part of the book concerns legacies in the chapter on the faithful Christian. The language of enslavement and enslaver is picked up in Pauline writings in the relationship between Christian and Christ. Similarly, the 'possessing Spirit' takes up residence in Christian believer, binding the parts of the body together.

We learn in chapter 8 that the language of the punishment of the enslaved finds its way into the language of some of Jesus' parables. We also find the language of forgiveness and as Moss points out 'Ordinary human enslavers were not in the habit of providing people with second chances.' She goes on to warn that although the language of enslavement in describing the Christian believer is found in the earliest Christian text, such texts are not fixed and that over the years that followed those who read or interpreted the words unconsciously or deliberately reshaped them.

I found the book fascinating, well worth reading by those who are interested in New Testament origins.

David Whiting

REFORM MAGAZINE



I write encouraging you to subscribe and read the Reform Magazine. The Reform Magazine has been the magazine of the United Reformed Church since the Church's formation in 1972. In my view it is as good as it has ever been. The Tuesday bible study group at Stockton Road URC often makes use of the magazine, particularly regular articles on 'Chapter and Verse' and 'A Good Question', but there are many other articles that are worth reading.

The Magazine for December 2024 and January 2025 contains a number of articles following on from the elections in the USA, an article about a new book 'Daybreak in Gaza'. There are a number of articles relating to Advent and Christmas. One article I found particularly interesting was one concerning Bernard Thorogood, a former General

Secretary of the URC, on his work with the Council for World Mission (CWM).

To subscribe to Reform call 020 7520 2721 or visit www.reformsubs.co.uk. A digital subscription costs £18, £29.50 for a printed subscription, or £35.50 for a combined edition.

We should read it or we may lose it.

David Whiting

Love, Amelia receives The King's Award for Voluntary Service

On 14th November 2024, His Majesty the King's birthday, it was announced that Love, Amelia has been awarded [The King's Award for Voluntary Service](#) for 2024. This is the highest award a local voluntary group can receive in the UK and is equivalent to an MBE. To read more about the award go to the Love, Amelia website www.loveamelia.org.uk and click on their News page.

Don't forget to check out their Wishlist too and if there is anything you can give from the list it can be brought to the church where we have a collection/drop-off box.

November Wishlist

Toys in excellent condition

Women's toiletries/gift sets

Bottles (new only)

Cold water & Microwave sterilisers

Moses baskets & cribs

Cots, Cotbeds & Toddler beds

Prams & Strollers



Please only bring items from our wish list
No clothes till January please



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Amelia

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