

By the Way

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EASTER 2016

WHAT IS LIFE?

Have you ever asked ... ?

What can I get out of life? Isn't there more to life than this? What's the point of it all? Why am I here? What happens at the end of it all?

Some of you may know the little Suffolk village of Dunwich, about 30 miles up the coast from Felixstowe. But did you know that it was once a thriving port and one of the ten most important cities in England? Sadly, all that's left above water now is a tiny village steadily falling into the sea. Like Dunwich, we – mankind, all of us – have fallen from splendour to ruin.



God's creation was good, beautiful, glorious. And in so many ways it still is!

But the ruin is painfully clear to see. Evil and suffering, people doing things that are wrong, hurt and disease, injustice and

frustration, all show us that things are not right with the world – or with us. What hope is there?

The end pages of the Bible promise *“a new heaven and a new earth”*, a *“holy city”* shining with the glory of God, where *“God will dwell with his people and be their God; He will wipe every tear from their eyes; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”* (Revelation ch 21 v 3). Nothing which could ruin it will ever enter it. (verse 27)

How will this be possible, when *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way”*? Because, at the cross (which we remember at Easter), *“The Lord has laid on Him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.”* (Isaiah 53:6). “Iniquity” means our disobedience against God. Jesus suffered in our place, so that He could promise, *“I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”* (John 6:47)

Jesus Himself is the answer to life's questions! He can give us a life worth living, new life that is whole and fulfilling, even a life that will never end. Because Jesus took on our iniquities, we can be forgiven, have a brand new start, and know the peace of trusting God, – in whose very hands are life, the world and the future. Jesus offers us new life now, and there is no better time to hear His words!

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Welcome to 'By the Way' – John Bale

Welcome to the Easter edition of Bethesda's magazine. We would love to hear from you. So, if you have a question about anything you read here, or any comments, or would like further information about the Christian faith and what we believe, please do write to us, or 'phone or email; or come and see us! Our contact details and when we meet can be found on the back page. (By the way, please tell us whether or not you would be happy for your question to be published in a future edition; we won't print anything without your permission.)

It would be good to know a little more about Giles Meehan, who is responsible for the magazine's technical and design side, as well as some of the writing. He enjoys composing and playing music, video and photography, acting and the theatre, sailing, works in a local shop, and – not least – follows and worships Jesus. Surprising then that he studied Engineering at Cambridge University and tutors Maths?!

***I lift up my eyes to the hills; Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.
... The Lord will watch over your coming and going,
Both now and for ever more. (from Psalm 121)***

I had heard the Bible stories at school, and I reckoned they were irrelevant, didn't make sense, and were probably even made up. I thought that our brains were powerful enough to make whatever we wanted to believe, seem real to each of us. So, at the age of 18, when St John's church in Woodbridge offered a few informal evenings to look at 'Who was Jesus?', I decided to join in – partly because I was searching for some peace for my worries, but more really just to let these poor, misguided Christians know that, actually, they'd got it wrong! They started telling me about Jesus, and tried to answer questions about church history and why are there other religions; but they also lent me a copy of Luke's gospel (the third book in the New Testament).

Over the course of a couple of evenings, I read it all the way through, twice. Now, instead of seeming irrelevant or full of contradictions (I've still never found one in the Bible!), these eye witness accounts actually brought me to face the real Jesus who walked this earth around 2,000 years ago. I was struck (like those who heard him then) by his authority. And I still vividly remember being certain that what I was reading was true – more true even than $2 + 2 = 4$. I didn't know very much about Jesus then, but I knew that I would have to accept his invitation, "Follow me," or I would have to lie to myself and pretend I had never seen the real, living Jesus, this extraordinary man who was the Son of God, in this book.

I became a Christian, and then had a very happy time at university, where I also enjoyed wonderful fellowship with other Christians, and very good Bible teaching. Soon after graduating, I became severely ill throughout my twenties, with M.E (a neurological and immune disease sometimes called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome). For many years, I was barely well enough to leave the house, or even to read. I am so grateful that my Mum, and a few friends, looked after me. My hope for getting better was stretched perhaps beyond all the hope I could muster for myself, but God held onto me with a rock solid faithfulness and love; and my *ultimate* hope would not lie in this world anyway. I gradually started to recover, thank the Lord, and have still had to keep learning what it really means to trust God.

Much better health now tempts me to get too busy for my own good, but while I want to experience "*life in all its fullness*" (John 10:10), I also still want to hear God saying, "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46:10) and to remember His peace. And even more than all of the different things I do, I want to be able to share what I can of knowing God's wonderful love and faithfulness, with other Christians who are suffering, and with everyone who (like me when I was 18) thinks that Jesus isn't for them.



Hope

André Beck, Pastor

Hope is a beautiful word. In the Bible, hope means more than just mere desire. It goes beyond a longing that may or may not be fulfilled.

We can hope for a better-paying job, for England to win the world cup, for Ipswich to beat Norwich, but it might not happen. We can hope for a terminally ill loved one to be healed, but maybe healing won't come.

This isn't the hope we're talking about. In Scripture, hope means "to expect with confidence". Christian hope is the eager anticipation of a guaranteed outcome. This is the hope found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Let's say you were walking down the road when suddenly a limousine pulls up next to you and somebody from inside the limo rolls down the window, hands you a cheque for £1,000,000, says "Have a nice day," and drives off again.

How would you respond? Maybe you would be overjoyed. Maybe you would be extremely sceptical. Why on earth would a complete stranger who you care nothing for, give you such a generous and costly gift? Surely this is a joke. The cheque can't be real ... can it?

When the Lord Jesus Christ walked the earth some 2,000 years ago, he made extraordinary promises.

He claimed that he was not simply another messenger, another prophet, revolutionary or teacher.

He claimed that he was the creator and sustainer of all things.

Jesus Christ claimed to be God.

Moreover, Jesus claimed that as God he could offer us forgiveness, eternal life, a right to be called God's children, and much, much more. He would offer all of this at the cost of his own life.

Maybe you respond to this as you did before. Why would someone we don't know or love offer us so much at such a great cost? Surely it can't be real ... can it?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the moment God cashed the cheque and declared all of his promises to be authentic. Now we put our hope in Jesus. God has vindicated Jesus' claims. He has raised Jesus from the dead. Our hope in his promises are guaranteed.



One life.
What's it all about?

Christianity
EXPLORED

If you are wondering, "What is it all about?" (and it's a good question to ask), we warmly invite you to come along to find out more about Jesus, what the Bible says and what Christians believe.

We offer small, friendly groups called *Christianity Explored*, where we look through Mark's gospel together. There are no exams (!), and whatever your background, and however little or much you know about Christianity, you really are welcome.

Phone André on 01394 270187 or see our website bethesdaofelixstowe.com.

If you'd prefer a chat over a cuppa, then the Friday coffee morning (at church, from 10:30 am) is a great place to start. You can also find us at the Triangle most Saturday mornings.

Jesus: “a good man”?

“Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone,” Jesus said. (Luke 18:19)

Can we leave Jesus in the history books and say he was merely a good man, a wise teacher, or even just a healer? C. S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) became a Christian in his thirties. In his excellent book *Mere Christianity*, he argued that no one should say the “really foolish thing” that they are “ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but not his claim to be God.”

“That is the one thing we must not say,” wrote Lewis. “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman, or something worse.”

For anyone to claim that they are the Son of God; to accept worship as God; to say he has the authority to grant God’s forgiveness through himself; to teach that he is the only way to God; to promise eternal life; to warn that he will judge all people at the end of time; and to tell his followers to expect

persecution, and sometimes even death, for his sake, must either be completely deluded, or deliberately misleading, or who he claimed to be? Surely he must be either “mad, bad, or God!”

Lewis concluded, “You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Jesus’ question (“*Why do you call me good?*”) was rhetorical. While all people have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Jesus was sinless and the very radiance of God’s glory. Jesus was a good man, and by the Bible’s standards, the only good man ever; but he was not just a good man.

Founders and leaders of religions have come and gone, but only One stepped out of the tomb; only One has risen from the dead; only One has conquered death; only One offers the promise of eternal life to those who trust and follow Him.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25)

Tenebrae: a service of shadows

We are holding a Tenebrae service on Maundy Thursday (24th March) from 7:30 pm. The word ‘*tenebrae*’ is Latin for ‘*shadows*’; and the service is a quiet, contemplative meeting, held by candlelight, offering the opportunity to reflect on Jesus’ inevitable journey to the cross. As each Bible reading concludes, another candle is extinguished, until the church is in complete darkness, symbolising the death of the Light of the World. Leaving in silence, we remember the overwhelming penalty of our sins which Christ bore for us, and His overwhelming love to die in our place; and look forward keenly to celebrating His resurrection and victory over death, which He promises to all who believe.



God's promise when the doctor says "cancer"

Peter Croft, an Elder at Bethesda



"Your life expectancy has somewhat shortened," so said the Consultant on telling me I had kidney cancer and incurable lung cancer.

To say I was somewhat shocked would have been an understatement. I looked so well and felt well apart from some persistent night sweating that had sent me to my GP.

Now as a Christian, I had a number of choices. I could respond to the situation by saying, "It's not fair; why me Lord?" Anger could have been the response. I could have panicked!

Yet I could not respond in those ways, because I have a firm conviction in the sovereignty of God: that God is in control of my life, and that God has never promised that life would be free from all problems; and I also had a deep sense of peace. In fact my testimony was – and still is – that I couldn't have worried even if I tried.

The next month brought scans, an operation to remove the kidney and tumour – and then an unexpected heart attack two weeks after coming out of hospital.

Yet through all these things, the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ was not that He would heal me, although I have no doubt that He could, but that He would give me something more important than that: it was the promise of His presence, to be with me in the uncertainties that ill-health always brings.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

(John 14:27).

It wasn't a verse that said, "I am going to heal you"; but it was a promise that the Lord would be with me no matter what. So, from the initial days of diagnosis, I have had this overwhelming sense of peace.

What of the future? When I put my trust in Christ as my Lord and Saviour many years ago, He not only made clear that my sin was forgiven because of what He accomplished on the cross, but also I was given the assurance – as are all true believers – that finally I would be taken into glory at death. In other words, death will not be the end, but an entrance into the presence of the One who had made His presence felt in the peace He had given.

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it The world and all who live in it (*Psalm 24 v1*)

Bethesda has always been supportive of missionary work, both in the UK and overseas. The church's first overseas missionary was Miss Rene Cordle, who went to India in 1933, where she worked with the Baptist Missionary Society for 10 years.

Over the last 30 years, six church members have been called by God to full-time service in this country and abroad. The church now supports missionary work on three continents, as far afield as Israel and South America and as near as London. A list of the missions and organisations we support can be found on our website.



Bethesda supports WEC International. Colin Bearup is a missionary with them.

"We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God." (John Stott)

What do we actually do on Sundays?



“Sshhh! Be quiet, you’re in church!” our mother would say as she took us young children to that forbidding building where we had to be as quiet as church mice! “Don’t forget, God sees everything!” (Well, that was me in trouble right from the start!) Sadly, that’s the memory a lot of people have about the ‘house of God’ (as if the building itself was a holy place and the object of worship – as I thought). So it’s not surprising that traditional church attendance has fallen, even though interest in ‘spiritual things’ is on the increase.

What can you expect from Bethesda’s ‘Sunday Morning Service’?

About a hundred of us meet together for the morning meeting (and roughly half that number in the evening); not to revere ‘God’s house’ (the building) in fearful silence, but to worship the Head of the church, Jesus Christ. Many visitors comment that the welcome is friendly and genuine, the atmosphere warm and inviting, and the service itself informal yet sincere and joyful. It’s a place where family, friends and visitors meet; a place to encourage and build each other up; a place of love

and friendship (the name ‘Bethesda’ means ‘house of mercy’). The message of the Bible, God’s Word, the ‘gospel’ (which means ‘good news’) is never out-dated. Yes, the language has changed since the early translation, but the Bible never changes. At Bethesda, that message comes in the form of a 25-minute meaningful and relevant Biblical sermon. We also sing joyfully a mixture of a few Christian hymns and modern songs accompanied by accomplished musicians. All the words are displayed on the screen, but hymn books are also available, as



are Bibles. We are led together in prayers, and we enjoy an informal cup of tea and chat at the

end (except when we share communion, on the third Sunday morning of each month).

There is a crèche for babies and toddlers, and a Sunday-school called ‘Mini-zone’ for the growing number of growing children!

Many people say, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian,” and whilst there is some truth in that, the Bible tells us:

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another ...”

(Hebrews 10:25)

So whatever your age, and whatever your circumstances, you are welcome to join us for worship. We start at 10:30 am and usually finish by 11:45. We hope you will find it an important and valuable time of blessing and encouragement as you start a new week.



Why celebrate Jesus' death at Easter?

Just as Santa Claus takes centre stage for many people at Christmas, it can be the chocolate egg (or maybe the bunny) that causes the most excitement at Easter.

But why do Christians call the day that Jesus Christ died "Good Friday", and why do they go around on Easter Sunday saying, "He is risen"?

Do you know why Jesus died on that first Good Friday? What is so special about the execution of Jesus Christ, and why are we still talking about it 2,000 years later?

His death was predicted long ago.

The Old Testament part of the Bible, written many hundreds of years before Jesus was born, contains hundreds of prophecies about the coming of God's chosen Saviour. Jesus Christ fulfilled them all, including amazing details about his birth (and even where He'd be born), His life and His death. As one example, the prophet Isaiah foretold 700 years before that the Saviour would be executed alongside criminals. *"He poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors."* We know from eye-witness accounts that two criminals, one on either side, were crucified with Jesus that afternoon.

His death was punishment for others.

One of those criminals rightly said about Jesus, *"This man has done nothing wrong."* Even the Judge at his trial had said the very same thing! The Bible tells us (and if we're honest, maybe we know it's true?) that we have all broken God's laws, and have

fallen short of His standard of perfection. Therefore we stand condemned in front of God who is holy and just. Yet because God loves us, He planned that His only Son, Jesus would be punished in our place – a willing substitute for others. The Bible says, *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8).

His death provoked two kinds of response.

One of the criminals crucified next to Jesus mocked Him by demanding that if he really were the Saviour, if He really could save other people, then He should save all three of them. But the other man's attitude was different: he said that he and his fellow-criminal were getting exactly what they deserved. Then he turned to Jesus and, showing that he believed He really was the Saviour of sinners, asked that there might be a place, even for him, in Jesus' coming Kingdom. The man received the most amazing reply from Jesus (Luke 23:43):

"Today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

His death still demands a response.

What Jesus Christ was willing to go through on the cross will either repel you, or it will draw you to Him in sorrow for your sin and with complete trust: *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."* (Acts 16:31) The power that raised Jesus from the dead three days after His crucifixion is the same power that can save your soul and guarantee you a home in heaven.

His death was not the end.

We celebrate Easter Day, to remember the day Jesus rose in triumph from the grave, claiming victory not only over sin, but over death itself.

Because He lives, so can we, through trust and faith in Him. God provided the sacrifice that we might go free:

For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Please get in touch with us and receive a free 32-page 'Story of Easter' booklet.

THE HOPE OF EASTER

Maundy Thursday, 24th March – 7:30 pm Tenebrae Service
 Good Friday, 25th March – 10:00 am Morning Service
 Easter Sunday, 27th March – 10:30 am Family Service

WHAT'S ON AT BETHESDA FELIXSTOWE

Here at Bethesda, we are a 'family' of ordinary people from all walks of life, who together try to follow the extra-ordinary Jesus of the Bible, and to love people. You are very welcome to our Sunday services, our informal Friday coffee mornings, or other activities.



Sunday – Morning Service – 10:30 am

*Crèche is available, and Mini-Zone for ages 3-8
 Communion after the 3rd Sunday of the month*

Sunday – Evening Service – 6:30 pm

Communion after the 1st Sunday of the month

Sunday – Connect for 20s & 30s – 8:00 pm

Every other week, at the Pastor's house

"Monday Madness" – Children's Groups *

Fun & Games, Crafts & Quizzes, Bible Talks & Discussions, Refreshments and more ...

1:30 pm - 3:00 pm – Jelly Tots

(Babies & Toddlers with Parents & Carers)

5:00 pm - 6:00 pm – Smarties (Reception – Year 4)

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm – All Sorts (Year 5 – 8)

7:30 pm - 9:00 pm – After 8s (Year 9 – 13)

Tuesday – Women's Groups *

10:00 am Women of the Word (WOW)

2:30 pm Bethesda Women's Fellowship

1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month

Tuesday – Prime Time for Seniors – 3:00 pm

2nd Tuesday of the month

Thursday Meetings – 7:30 pm - 9:00 pm

Prayer Meeting at the church

1st, 3rd & 5th Thursdays of the month

Home Group Bible Studies at members' homes

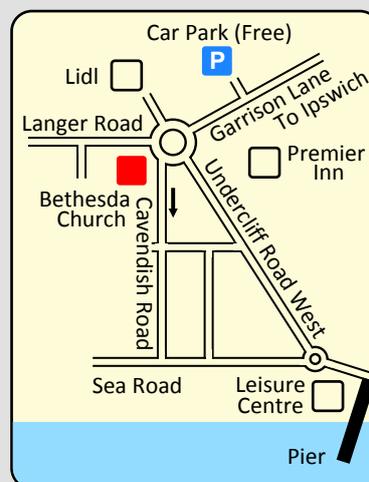
2nd & 4th Thursdays of the month

Friday – Coffee Morning – 10:30 am - 12

Everyone always very welcome!

Saturday – Meet us on the Triangle – 10 am - 12

Opposite the cinema. Come and chat!



* During school holidays and half-terms, children's and women's groups do not meet regularly. Other meetings may occasionally change; please check with us for details.

Bible verses are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

Bethesda is a member of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. There are more than 550 F.I.E.C. churches in the UK.

Reg. Charity no. 1129260

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