

SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH
PARISH RECORD: FEBRUARY 2009

MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

The National Health Service often speaks about “wholistic health care” and the world of education also likes to think it provides “wholistic education” but in practice they both often fail to live up to the ideals. We are not just a sore leg or a heart case, we are a whole human being; and we are not just a pupil in the history class or whatever. Similarly in Church life, we believe in wholistic discipleship – there is no sacred-secular divide, no “no-go areas”, our faith affects every part of our life. We are a unity of body, mind and soul and they are not to be compartmentalised and fragmented. Matters of the body affect the mind and soul; matters of the soul affect mind and body and so on. So I want to share with you the following information about food. No I am not a dietician but I am concerned with every part of our lives and good or bad food affects our bodies, minds and souls. Eat well and we feel better; healthier bodies help us to have sharper minds and these in turn help us think, pray, meditate, be active in God's service etc. It took me hours of research to find out all this and then condense it down to this list, so I hope it saves you time and leads to a much healthier life for you. I do practise what I am preaching here and I feel all the healthier and happier for it.

GOOD FOOD

- 1 **WHOLEGRAIN** eg muesli or granola; porridge; shredded & malted wheat, Shreddies, Cheerios, Grapenuts, Weetabix & wheat biscuits.
Benefits: lower insulin resistance, help control weight by helping fill you up and stopping you feeling hungry because they are rich in fibre, contain lots of protein, vitamins and minerals. They are low in fat and good for our blood sugar levels.
- 2 **WHOLEWHEAT PASTA**
Benefits: same as wholegrain, plus – three times more fibre than normal pasta, has lots of vitamins and minerals, and is a good antioxidant (i.e. helps prevent cancer and heart disease)
- 3 **SWEET POTATOES**
Benefits: they are as good and flexible as ordinary potatoes (and take less time to cook too). They are very much better for our blood sugar levels; have a large amount of vitamins and iron; and are great for reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease.
- 4 **BEANS** eg butter beans; soya beans, red kidney beans, haricot beans (as in baked beans)
Benefits: beans are versatile, tasty, good for blood sugar levels, nutritious, high in fibre, full of protein and great for reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease. They help lower cholesterol levels and count as one portion of vegetables out of our five portions of fruit or veg per day. Beans fill us up for a long time reducing snacking and have very low fat content. Drawbacks:
 - they can produce wind (but only till you get used to beans in your diet)!
 - red kidney beans must be soaked then boiled (or else you get a stomach ache)!To save hassle you can buy most beans in tins, but they have slightly less food value. Some beans can be eaten fresh e.g. broad beans and soya beans.
- 5 **LENTILS**
Benefits: they are rich in protein, carbohydrates, calcium, iron and vitamins; and low in fat. They constitute one of our five portions of fruit and veg. in a day. They are full of fibre and therefore help lower cholesterol and are good for our blood sugar levels.
Tip: Lentils do not require soaking but if you soak them for a few hours it halves the cooking time.

6 **NUTS and SEEDS**

Benefits: they are a good source of omega-3s which help alleviate depression, protect against heart disease and reduce the risk of cancer, lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of diabetes and lower fat levels in the blood. They have plenty fibre; are good for our blood sugar levels and they have protein, vitamins and minerals. They can help us to control our weight. We only need about 30 grams of them per day.

Tip: you can add nuts and seeds to breakfast cereals or to salads or use them as snacks or incorporate them into breads or any kind of baking.

Nuts e.g. – Cashew/Pistachio/Almond/Peanut/Pecan/Walnut/Brazil/Pine nuts
(store the walnuts in the fridge or freezer)

Seeds e.g. – Sunflower/Pumpkin/Sesame and Linseed (which is best ground up unless you prefer it as a laxative)!

7 **BERRIES**

Benefits: Berries can be added to breakfast cereals or to baking (e.g. muffins). They make a healthy, easy snack or dessert; they are part of our five daily portions of fruit and veg; they help prevent cancer and heart disease. Blueberries and cranberries help treat painful bladder infections. Blueberries and raspberries help our vision. They have plenty vitamins and minerals, and are good for our blood sugar levels. Berries are also very low in calories.

Tip: keep a stock of frozen mixed berries in the freezer so you can eat them all year round.

8 **YOGHURT**

Benefits: Yoghurt is very versatile – it can be used in sweet and savoury dishes and in smoothies. Yoghurt adds a creamy texture to sauces, goes well with fruit, especially berries and makes a healthy snack. It is low in calories; it is good for our blood sugar levels; it contains many nutrients including calcium and riboflavin. Bio or live yoghurt contains probiotic bacteria which help us digest our food, offset thrush and boost our immune system

9 **GREEN VEGETABLES** eg cabbage, broccoli, kale, Brussel sprouts, cauliflower,

Benefits: They reduce heart disease and cancers. They have anti-cancer agents. They are rich in vitamins and minerals. (If you cook them too long you lose some of the nutrients). Broccoli seems to be the dieticians' favourite even though it has a short shelf life and while on the shelf it loses some of its goodness.

10 **OILY FISH** eg sardines, pilchards, trout, herrings including kippers, salmon, fresh tuna,

Benefits: They contain vitamins and iron and omega-3 oils which help alleviate depression, prevent blood clots and heart disease, lower blood pressure, prevent type 2 diabetes. They also boost our immune system and have anti-inflammatory properties. Fish is much cheaper than meat and fish eating populations are generally healthier in terms of the heart. NB. Oily fish have a slight drawback in that they also contain some toxins which can be harmful if we eat too much of them. Dieticians recommend that pregnant women should eat only two oily-fish meals per week while others can have four portions a week quite safely.

Bon appetite!

Alex B Noble

Saltcoats North Parish Church Record – MARCH 2009
MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Well we are now in the Christian season of Lent, and soon it will be Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter. How time flies! It seems like yesterday since it was Christmas, New Year and Epiphany. The dead of winter one moment, then the resurrection of spring the next. Isn't that like daily life for us? One moment we are down, the next we are up...up down...up down on the rollercoaster of life! It is not a long way from triumph to tragedy, laughter to tears or from despair to joy, failure to success...and back again!

So what has our daily ups and downs, crucifixions and resurrections got to do with Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection and what has Jesus' Life, Death and Resurrection got to do with our daily living and dying?

The first thing to say is that they are connected. Jesus came all the way to meet us where we are at. He crossed the dance floor to chat us up. The Good Shepherd sought out and found His lost sheep. He came down to Earth when we could not reach up to Heaven. He chose to enter fully into our ordinary daily living – as a baby in Bethlehem, as a carpenter in Nazareth and as a victim of injustice in Jerusalem. He embraced human life fully, enduring suffering, persecution, temptation, homelessness, being an asylum seeker, being loved and hated at the same time, being betrayed and let down by friends etc. He took on our fallen humanity, our weaknesses, our limitations, our vulnerabilities, sweating blood in Gethsemane, weeping at Lazarus's grave, letting rip as He cleansed the Temple. He "walked in our moccasins" as they say, He stood "shoulder to shoulder" with us and lived a fully human life.

Why did God come down to our level, and live among us, as one of us, sharing our daily ups and downs? Because He loved us and wanted a courtship with us. Young men and young women are often found going round to the boyfriend or girlfriend's place and sharing their lives – getting a feel for the other, sharing their interests, getting a better understanding of them, developing a loving relationship. This is what love does. The logical progression leads on to mutual love and mutual commitment, to a wedding together of two life stories into one joint life story. They marry and grow in maturing love thereafter. God knows all there is to know from the outside but God came as Jesus to know human life from the inside. Wow! God knows our joys and sorrows not only because He knows everything anyway but also because He has been here, done it and got the tee-shirt! He knows because He continues to be fully God and fully human as He is in Heaven right now. He knows because He has walked every step of life's journey with every life that has ever journeyed through this world. God knows you (and me) because He has shared every moment of OUR experience throughout our lives. God is infinite in many ways including paying infinite attention to every minute detail of our lives. The Bible says He knows the number of hairs on our heads and watches over every sparrow.

Why does God bother? Why does He put up with the likes of us? Why did He come knowing it would lead to His Crucifixion? Why are our trivial details and our petty lives of interest to Him? Because He loves us. Why does anyone love anyone? Sure God could have "done better for Himself", maybe "there are other fish in the ocean" of space, yes He is aware of our faults and failings – but none of that changes the bottom line that He loves us. It is US whom He loves. And nothing, absolutely nothing will separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus as St. Paul put it. The "Hound of Heaven" is onto our scent and like all good lovers will woo us for as long as it takes and no rebuttals will ever stop Him loving us. True love is willing to die for the one it loves – a million times over – and will always bounce back again with the love that will never let us go. So Happy Easter! Isn't this Good News? Well come worship Him and spread the word to others over this Easter season. See over for details of special Easter services!

Alex B Noble

Saltcoats North Parish Church Record – April 2009

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

I have been thinking a lot lately about “the real deal”. It is a fascinating expression and there is a lot of truth in it. We all like to think we have got “the real deal” or we know “the real deal” or we are “the real deal”. What exactly is the real deal? It means lots of things in different areas of our lives, but consider this. We live so much of our lives without the penny dropping – and we are greatly impoverished by that fact. We would be far better off and happier if some of the following real deals were truly accepted by us.

- They really do love me!
- Jesus is risen...alive...here...now...with me...for me!
- Evil is for real...”principalities and powers”...watching me on cctv...out to get me!
- Hell is for real!
- Heaven is for real!
- “My sins are all forgiven, I’m on my way to Heaven...joy, joy, joy!”
- I am forgiven! Clean! Guilt free! My slate is wiped clean! I have a fresh start!
- In Christ, we have the victory over everything in life and over death!
- There are real people right now living on less than a pound per day!
- A billion people right now have no education, no health services, no gas, no electricity, no clean water, no chairs to sit on!
- There are people with no job, no home, no family!
- There are people wrongly convicted in prison!
- We are all mortal creatures, finite beings who die!
- Money, possessions, treasures on Earth are always a let down and have to be let go of!
- Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth, the only Life!
- There is no real living outwith a close personal relationship with Jesus!
- JESUS IS THE REAL DEAL!

We only have one short life here on planet Earth and thereafter one long eternity...so it is a matter of life and death importance to grasp the real deal – not just for our own soul’s sake but also for the sake of everyone else around us. When the penny finally drops, we simply have to let other people know these things too – otherwise there will be Hell to pay and, put more positively, we and they will miss out on Heavenly life now and ever after.

In the light of Easter, we celebrate the real deal that the Risen Christ is and offers to us.

Happy Easter

Rev Alex B Noble

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

We often meet people who say that we don't have to go to Church to be a Christian. They are mistaken. Sadly their mistake means that they miss out on so much right now and will miss out on so much in the future. More than that, their families lose out and their friends too. They do not seem to understand how much it would mean to worshippers to have the whole family worshipping together. Their children do not get the good example they need nor can they realise how essential it is to go to Church. The wider community today is suffering hugely because people have not grown up in Sunday School and Church worship. As a nation and a world we suffer because of leaders who are not steeped in the Christian faith and worship. The Church itself is hugely handicapped by all the missing parts of its body. It is like a bird trying to fly with only one wing!

Most of all they do not seem to grasp that it is not a private matter nor a selfish matter but a matter which concerns others and above all God! God created us for mutual love and worship, for corporate life – that is why He put us in families, communities, groups, teams, social circles, clubs, school classes, staff rooms etc. God Himself constituted us as His family, flock, salvation army, Church. To not be the part which He has appointed to us is to break His heart, defy His will, disobey His command. It is like the goalkeeper not turning up for training, the musician in the orchestra ignoring the conductor, the soldier not reporting for duty, the mother not coming home one night.

When Archbishop William Temple was confronted by a man who insisted that he did not have to go to Church to be a Christian, he leant forward and took a coal off the fire and said:

“You see this coal. You are like that. Out of the fire it loses its glow....

....but if I put it back in the fire it will burn brightly again.”

In more modern terms we could say a Christian who does not go to Church is like a golfer who never plays with anyone....or a computer user who never e-mails or googles or twitters or face-books or you-tubes or communicates with anyone in any way with it....or like a family member who never spends any quality time with their spouse or children or parents, who eats alone, is a ship that passes in the night and someone absorbed in themselves.

So, briefly if you are such a person, or if you know such a person, try running by the following 10 replies to the silly and dangerous notion that “you don't have to go to Church to be a Christian”:

- 1 Make your Church-going family members by going with them.
- 2 Obey God's command: “Do this in remembrance of me”.
- 3 Make yourself happy – save yourself the guilt trip – and you will also find that Church is not the same as you remember it as.
- 4 You need spiritual nourishment.
- 5 Work is not more important than worship.
- 6 Don't aim too low, at minimum standards, asking “how little do I have to do to still be classed as a Christian?”
- 7 Ask yourself why it is not a natural impulse to join with your brothers and sisters and Heavenly Father to pray together saying “Our Father....”
- 8 How is it suddenly essential to go to Church for a baptism, wedding or funeral?
- 9 Families – our own or God's - are not very close knit if they only meet on special occasions and not in the ordinary days of family life.
- 10 Other people need you and you need other people. That is the way God wants it and made it. 99 out of 100 is not enough – just one missing lost sheep makes for a grieving community and causes the Good Shepherd to do a lot of overtime!

Saltcoats North Parish Church PARISH RECORD – JUNE 2009

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

Here's hoping we get a lovely summer and plenty of opportunity to sit in the sun and contemplate on the meaning of life! Here are a few thoughts for you to chew over at your leisure. These are some of the amazing facts of modern life which I have been quoting in our Sunday prayers. On Sundays they can trip off the tongue so quickly that we don't get enough time to savour them, but when you see them in print and take time to consider them, they could potentially change our lives!

- The world has 60 million blind people. 30 million of them (ie half) could see after a simple 20 minute operation. When the Mercy Ships (the Doulos and the Logos) arrive to perform these operations, one mile long queues of 3-5,000 blind people immediately start to form.
- Every day, 6,500 Africans die of preventable illnesses.
- The world has 6,000 languages but the Bible is only translated into half of them.
- 16,000 species of animals are in danger of extinction.
- Millions of animals and birds are being killed by plastic carrier bags
- The world produces 1.2 trillion carrier bags per year (ie 1 million per minute) and they each take 1,000 years to degenerate. Supermarkets are therefore trying to wean us off them.
- The world population grows by 200,000 per day (ie 1 million every five days).
- In our ill-divided world, there are 1,000 million obese people and 1,000 million starving.
- Kenyans use an average of 4 litres of water per day; Britons 100 litres; Americans 380 litres.
- 1 in every 8 people in the world has no clean, safe drinking water
- 1 in every 10 people in the world is malnourished
- 1 in every 3 people in the world lives on less than £1 a day (ie 2,000,000,000 people)
- There are 146 million children going to bed hungry tonight.
- A child dies of hunger every 5 seconds.
- The average age of the world is just 25 (ie half of the people in the world are under 25).

- 515 people immigrate into Britain every day.
- Britain spent £1,700 million on food last Christmas and £12,000 million on Christmas shopping, £1,800 of it on-line (which is £700,000 per minute).
- 27,000 people in the U.K. are waiting for an organ transplant and 1 per day dies waiting.
- In the U.K. 1 in 4 women experience violence from their partners; every month 6 are killed.
- There are 4,000 still births per year in the U.K. and 2,500 babies p.a. die within 4 weeks.
- There are 600 abortions per day in the U.K.
- Britain has the worst drug problem in Europe...it is a £5.3 Billion industry but only £380 is spent tackling the problem.
- Nearly a million people in Britain have dementia.
- 6 million people in Britain have depression illnesses but only a quarter get treatment.

- In the one month, January 2007, there were 6,000 abortions in Scotland.
- 1,500 Scots die each year due to Alcohol (ie 1 every 6 hours), double the rate in England. Alcohol is the number one reason for hospital admissions in Scotland (42,000 admissions per year are alcohol related). Alcohol costs Scotland £2 billion p.a.
- Scotland has the most murders of any developed country.
- Every week in Scotland someone is stabbed by a knife.
- Most of the babies born in Scotland in 2008 were born to single parents (51%).
- In Scotland, every 6 minutes, someone has a heart attack.
- In Scotland, every 5 minutes, someone has a stroke.
- Abortions in Scotland: 1968 = 1,500 2008 = 13,700
- One in seven Scots has hearing problems

(Most of these facts came from the BBC News).

Have a good summer.....*Alex B Noble*

SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH RECORD – AUGUST 2009
MINISTER’S LETTER

Dear Friends,

I hope that you have had a lovely summer holiday whether you have travelled far away to exotic destinations or just leisurely sunbathed in sunny Saltcoats by the sea. Some of you may still be waiting to go on holiday, but soon the cycle of the seasons and the turn of our attention will draw us into another period of busy Church activity. We enjoy periodic rest and recuperation, but sooner or later we get “itchy” for the kick off to the new season. This year we will be basking in the glow of a newly refurbished Church hall complex. It is looking pristine snow white on the outside and positively glistening like gold on the inside! In a time of recession, we are rejoicing in our face lift and with it the lift it gives to our spirits.

So what can we look forward to in the 2009-2010 season in Church life? I hope that you are all catching something of the vision of what discipleship of Jesus Christ can mean for each one of us and for all of us corporately together. We are in process of being built up personally in body, mind and spirit and in being built up in love as the Body of Christ, the Church. All that we do is geared to being all that we possibly can be and helping each other to be the best that they can be too. By that we mean growing ever more Christlike. All our activities are meant to lead people closer to Jesus so that they may enjoy the fullest life possible in a close relationship with Him.

So come and throw yourself enthusiastically into the life of Saltcoats North Parish Church. Come and bring others with you. Come and worship God together in public. Worship Him privately at home or up a hill, worship him in family worship, in small group or organisation, worship Him in the weekly Prayer Group meetings on Thursdays at 10.30am., but also worship Him in large crowds in the sanctuary on the Lord’s Day. He appointed the Day, Sundays; He chose the dedicated building, churches, He commanded us to “do this in remembrance of Me” and “remember the gathering of yourselves together”. Our Heavenly Father, in love, wanting the best for us, summons His family to sit down together for family quality time and so that He can speak to us and hear our prayers and commune with us.

Come and be part of the worshipping community which is also a learning, growing, supportive community. Come and learn more about God, life, ourselves, others; come and grow in faith. Come and learn from one another and come to teach others too. The Reformers fought and died for the freedom and opportunity for “the priesthood of all believers” and so that every person could study the Bible in their own language. We are never too old to learn and it is a joy to share together in groups and learn through each other’s experiences. Manse Groups are designed to be a relaxed, comfortable way of learning together.

Saltcoats North Parish Church also strives to be a friendly, welcoming congregation always embracing visitors and new people at church. We also want to reach out into “the highways and byways” to draw people in. We are not a closed clique; we are part of the ever-growing family of God. We are missionary because God is missionary; to be Christian is to be missionary. Jesus came out of the comfort zone of Heaven and embraced human life even to a Cross to draw all men and women to Himself. His mission is what we live for. So, come and bring friends with you. Go out in Jesus name and by word and by action be little candles or more accurately little mirrors reflecting the Light of the world, Jesus. The free CDs which we give away are just one way in which we reach out to people beyond the Church with something of the Good News of Jesus.

We also try to express the love of Jesus in practical Christian service – individually and together as a congregation. We support Christian Aid and charities, we pastorally visit parishioners, we support our Missionary Partner’s work in Malawi and the Church of Scotland’s work locally. God does bless us as we participate in all this privileged share in His life and ministry.

Alex B Noble

SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH
PARISH RECORD – SEPTEMBER 2009

MINISTER’S LETTER

Dear Friends,

This is September. Schools are back. Students are starting colleges. It is back to work after the summer holidays. All sorts of organisations and groups are restarting. The Church season has also kicked off again. There is a flurry of activity all over the place! Are you ready for it all? Are you excited at the prospect? Sometimes we lose the plot and forget why we are doing half the things we are signed up for! It is important therefore that we catch the vision of why we are doing all the things we are trying to do. In Church life that means remembering that we are following Jesus. The whole point of all Church activities is to be disciples following the Master.

You hear a lot about Jesus. So have you ever stopped and said to yourself: “Who is this Guy?”; “Why am I following Him?” and “Why should I?”

There are all kinds of seemingly contradictory claims made about Him. He is certainly full of paradoxes. Christians claim that He is the One and only almighty God.....and that He the “Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise” became a man

--a baby at Christmas to be precise....an ordinary human being like us.

Think about it....it means that:

The all powerful God	-	was a baby wetting His nappies
The mighty God	-	was physically unable to carry His cross
The holy, perfect God	-	was spat upon
The Judge of all the Earth	-	was put on trial...and found guilty!
The Creator of the universe	-	had nowhere to lay his head
He the Truth	-	was accused of lies, deceit and blasphemy
He the Giver of Life	-	was crucified, dead and buried

That is the bad news....but consider the Good News.....it too is paradoxical:

Jesus who was hungry.....is the Bread of Life
Jesus who was weary.....gives us rest
Jesus who wept.....dries our tears
Jesus who was thirsty.....is the Water of Life
Jesus who was sold for 30 pieces of silver..redeems sinners like us
Jesus who was led like a lamb to the slaughter.....is the Good Shepherd
Jesus who was called a Devil.....casts out demons
Jesus who died.....is the Resurrection and the Life

Wow! God is not distant and remote and aloof. He is called Jesus. And He knows how we feel because He is human too! And though He has the human touch and humanity to feel for us in our predicaments.....He is also almighty God and able to give us strength beyond our own human strength. Isn’t that the best Good News you have heard...ever!? That is who we are following and that is why we are doing everything that we are doing in the Church life and in every aspect of our daily lives.

Alex B Noble

SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH RECORD
NOVEMBER 2009 - Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

This month is very much a month about standing up and being counted. It begins with "All Saints Sunday" which is all about remembering and giving thanks for all the Christians before us who have stood up and been counted for their faith. Hebrews chapter 11 gives an overview of history celebrating the lives of remarkable people of faith. However for most of the Bible, "saints" don't mean extraordinary individuals, but ordinary folk like ourselves. Indeed when Paul addresses the Corinthians you can clearly read between the lines that they were quite a bunch! All down the centuries, ordinary Christian folk have lived out their faith through good times and bad, and often suffered persecution and sometimes been martyred. Today millions of Christians are persecuted for professing faith in Jesus. We have a relatively easy time of it. Please stand up and be counted for your faith this month and always. Speak up when you know you should. Practice what you preach. Live the faith in action. Think twice about celebrating Halloween with all its un-Christian connotations while ignoring what it is, namely the "hallowed evening" precursor of All Saints Day. Why get excited about the secular celebration of the shadow when we could be praising God for our rich heritage of Christian role models? I am pleased to say that we have two new people in Church willing to stand up and profess faith and become the latest additions to the ageless procession of saints. We welcome Barry Fisher and Susan Watson as new members. We also welcome Kathleen Guiney back again.

November the fifth is also a day about standing up and being counted, for we have a choice of activities that evening. We can go outside and play with matches and explosives in the company of children and distressed dogs, all in aid of the bad cause of celebrating Guy Fawkes' attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament, the home of world democracy....or....we can come inside and have fun with the Sunday School children and enjoy a Fashion Show all in aid of the worthy cause of sponsoring a needy child in the poorer part of the world! Go on, stand up and be counted, have the courage of your convictions, do the right thing not the wrong thing!

The second Sunday of November is of course Remembrance Sunday and three days later it is Remembrance Day on the 11th. We remember the courageous sacrifices of many ordinary folk as they stood up and were counted in their time and place. We also remember our current armed services personnel in action around the world in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We also have soldiers wearing the blue berets of the United Nations serving in other conflict situations. Remembrance is ever new because there are always situations of conflict and ordinary people, both military and civilian, have to keep rising to the challenges in extraordinary ways. We never get long without being required to stand up and be counted. The best way to honour our predecessors is to be worthy successors, to accept the baton and run with it until it is our turn to let go and pass it on to our children. Today we also have wars against crime, disease, ignorance, abuse, drugs, greed, etc. In each of these daily battles we need "all hands on deck", everyone playing their part, each of us standing up and being counted.

Above all we need every Christian to stand up and be counted in order to let people know about Jesus and experience His love and salvation. Your King and His Kingdom need you to pray together (Thurs 10.30am), read the Bible together (Fri 7pm), worship (Sun 11am), witness (eg give away free CDs), serve (eg visit new neighbours with welcome packs).

Alex. B. Noble

Saltcoats North Parish Church Record – December 2009

MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Patricia and I would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas time and all God's fullest blessings in the New Year, 2010. This four week period of Advent leading up to Christmas is a time to prepare our hearts and minds as well as our decorations and shopping. So here, in print, is a prayer which is full of things to chew over and causes for us to rejoice.

"Lord Jesus, when you looked up from your manger bed, you saw....

- an exhausted mother struggling to cope
- a worried father bewildered and buffeted by recent events and anxious about what was going to happen next
- a young couple far from home, homeless and helpless
- a harassed innkeeper rushed off his feet
- humble shepherds worshipping you and thinking they were the luckiest people in the whole world
- wise men acting foolishly and bowing down to worship you a poor baby
- a tired donkey licking his sore feet
- local people scurrying by, preoccupied with their own business
- a star shining as if it was shining just for you.

Lord Jesus, when you look down today from Heaven.....

- you still see mothers struggling to cope
- fathers worried about the future of their children
- young couples homeless and helpless
- harassed business people dying in the attempt to make a living
- ordinary people who feel privileged beyond their wildest expectations
- wise people bowing down and worshipping you
- tired and weary travellers on the journey of life licking their wounds
- people passing you by preoccupied with their own trivial pursuits
- stars shining for you who flung them into space calling them all by their names.

Lord Jesus, help us to understand more the great mystery of Christmas...the Incarnation...and help us to understand the wonderful exchange at the heart of it:

- You came down to Earth in order to raise us up to Heaven
- You who were rich became poor so that through your poverty you might make us rich
- You " powerful " weak " " " weakness " " " strong
- You " divine " human " " " humanity " "unite us to you
- You the all-powerful God were a tiny baby
- You the infinitely wise God were gurgling in a manger
- You the holy, perfect God were helpless and dependent
- You the Judge of all the Earth God were chased by Herod
- You the Great Creator God were a little, new born creature, a human baby
- You the Giver of Life God were breathing your first breaths
- You the Truth were unable to say a single word
- You the Supreme God were wetting your nappies
- You the Saviour of the World were helpless in the hands of a mixed bunch of people

Lord Jesus, you left the glory of Heaven, came down to Earth, were born of Mary; you emptied and humbled yourself; you stood in our shoes till your feet hurt; you stood shoulder to shoulder with us. You took our sinful humanity and all our sin and became sin personified. You took our punishment and died our death, wiping the slate clean and giving us a fresh start, reconciled to yourself. You opened up Heaven for us and gave us new birth right now on Earth. You give us new life, fullest life, eternal life. No wonder, like humble shepherds and wise men, we fall at your feet and worship you – Baby of Bethlehem, Carpenter of Nazareth, Crucified of Calvary, Resurrected Redeemer, King of Kings! Amen!"

Alex B Noble

SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH
PARISH RECORD – MARCH 2010

MINISTER’S LETTER

Dear Friends,

You might have heard that Saltcoats North Parish Church and its Minister were given the great honour of addressing our leaders in the Scottish Parliament. Every Wednesday at 2.30 pm there is a “Time for Reflection” before the Parliamentary business gets under way. Each MSP gets to nominate someone to conduct this thought for the week. Kenneth Gibson our MSP asked me as the SNPC Minister to do it on Wednesday 24th February.

These brief reflections are from different faiths and none. Quite often they are given to a half empty chamber. However, as God would have it, (not luck), I found the Parliament absolutely packed to capacity both downstairs with MSPs and upstairs in the gallery. There was also a heightened state of excitement – because the first item of business after the Time for Reflection was Nicola Sturgeon, the Health Minister and Deputy First Minister’s, statement to Parliament about why she wrote a letter in support of a convicted benefits’ fraudster. The TV cameras circled her like vultures, the other parties scented a possible resignation and blood! In that charged atmosphere I tried to give a prophetic word from the Lord to our national leaders. I thought you might like to read what I said, so this is my verbatim script:

Thank you Mr Fergusson for inviting me to speak today. It is a great honour and privilege. Thanks also to my MSP Kenneth Gibson for nominating me...and for the lovely lunch!

If I were to speak like this...with my head down in my notes...you would rightly feel:

“How boring! For goodness sake, look at us when you are speaking to us!”

It comes across so much better when the person talking looks up from themselves and outwards to the listeners. We engage...have dialogue...get feedback...connect!

Now this whole parliament seeks to address the whole nation...starting with the nation’s representatives in the gallery...engaging the public, dialoguing, connecting, rather than looking introspectively navel gazing. So let’s look up from ourselves...and look outwards to others.

Lord Northcliffe, a famous politician in his time, feared he was going blind. However the optician reassured him:

“You are not going blind. You have been reading too much small print for too long. All you need to do is go outside and look up at the moon and stars...stretch your vision!”

So let’s look outwards and upwards.

In the Bible, the huge Syrian army, overnight, surrounded the city of Dothan to capture Israel’s prophet Elisha. Next morning Elisha looked out and saw the Syrians...and panicked! Elisha was perfectly calm, pronouncing:

“Those who are on our side are more than those on theirs.”

Elisha was wearing the bi-focal spectacles of faith: he could see his big problem in the foreground, but he could also see God’s greater Heavenly army in the background.

In the New Testament, Peter could walk on water so long as he looked to Jesus rather than focussing on himself and the surrounding storm.

We all need to get our bearings in life – individually, as a parliament and as a nation.

When we are all at sea, we get a point of reference on the horizon and a point up in the sky – i.e. horizontal and vertical dimensions.

So let’s always look outwards to others and upwards to God.

Thank you...and may God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, give you vision and wisdom and moral courage in all your endeavours.

Alex B Noble

SALTCOATS NORTH PARISH CHURCH RECORD – OCTOBER 2010

MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

How many eyes have you? That's not such a daft question as it may sound!

We have all got more than two eyes! We have extra eyes.

We each have different extra eyes of course. For instance, some people have....

- the artist's eye.....they can see far more than the rest of us.
- the comedian's eye.....they can always see the funny side of everything.
- the carer's eye.....they have the ability to detect how we really are feeling, even after we have given the standard reply "fine".
- the philosopher's eye.....they seem to be able to see through problems which confuse the rest of us.
- the preacher's eye.....they can see a sermon illustration in everything and work out deeper spiritual interpretations.
- the journalist's eye.....they can spot a story a mile off.
- the poet's eye.....they can perceive a poem and a profundity in unlikely things.
- the lover's eye.....they can see right into their loved one's soul (but not always the on-coming lamp-post.
- the Christian's eye.....seeing things with Jesus' eyes, as He would see them.

Of course there are negative eyes also. We can see the world through selfish eyes, greedy eyes, envious eyes, jealous eyes, bitter eyes, drugged eyes, grieving eyes, depressed eyes.

If our eyes are going bad, we usually get them checked out and often have to get spectacles.

It is very important to get the right pair of spectacles for if we wear pink specs the world will look pink and if we get blue specs the world will look blue. With positive specs things look positive and with negative specs things look negative.

What we really need are the bi-focal spectacles of faith by which we can see our presenting problems in the foreground and at the same time be able to see God's over-arching providence in the background. Best of all is to see the world through Jesus' eyes.

God bless,

Rev. Alex B Noble

Saltcoats North Parish Church

PARISH RECORD – NOVEMBER 2010

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,

This month we are all very conscious of Remembrance Sunday and Thursday 11th November. We think of World War I and World War II plus all the other wars and continuing warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq and many other places today. It helps us to get an understanding and be better able to remember when we can see things in a personal way, so the following poem and prayer may be of such a help. It was found on the body of an American soldier killed in Italy during the Second World War.

“Look God, I have never spoken to You –
But now – I want to say, “How do You do?”
You see God, they told me You didn't exist –
And like a fool – I believed all of this.

Last night from a shell hole I saw Your sky,
I figured right then they had told me a lie.
Had I taken the time to see things You made,
I'd have known they weren't calling a spade a spade.

I wonder God if You'd shake my hand
Somehow – I feel that you will understand.
Funny – I had to come to this hellish place
Before I had time to see Your Face.

Well I guess there isn't much more to say
But I'm sure glad, God, I met you today.
I guess the zero hour will soon be here,
But I'm not afraid since I know You're near.

The signal! Well God I'll have to go.
I like You lots – This I want You to know.
Look, now – this will be a horrible fight. –
Who knows – I may come to Your House tonight –

Though I wasn't friendly with You before
I wonder, God – if You'd wait at Your door. –
Look, I'm crying, me – shedding tears.
I wish I had known You these many years. –
Well, I will have to go now, God, goodbye.

Strange – since I met You – I'm not afraid to die.”

God Bless,

Alex B Noble

MINISTER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Orchestras are funny things – the main person, the conductor, never makes a sound! He or she, just stands there wagging an arm with a wee stick, and yet from those silent gestures comes all kinds of loud or soft, happy or sad, inspiring and moving music. It is so strange that the key person, the one in the central role, the one who is really orchestrating everything, is the silent, stationary one.

Have you noticed that it is the same thing with Christmas? The star of the show on centre-stage, the central figure, the one organising the whole event from before time began, is the baby lying gurgling in the manger, passively doing nothing while all around is frantic activity. Caesar Augustus with his census is making tens of thousands of people scurry criss-cross all over the country to get back to their home towns. Mary and Joseph are making a mad dash for Bethlehem hoping to make it before she goes into labour. The citizens of Bethlehem are too preoccupied with their own hustle and bustle to notice a couple of migrants. The overworked Innkeeper is running around like a headless chicken, scratching his head trying to think of something and find room when he has no room. Angels are sweeping across the skies to announce the Good News of the answer to the world's problems. Shepherds are hurrying up to Bethlehem during their night shift to catch a glimpse of the Saviour of the world – and hoping to get back before the gaffer notices they have skipped off with the dubious excuse that angels told them to go and see the Heavenly One in a feeding trough in a stable. Wise men are frantically seeking the solution to their long standing mystery quest. They have travelled far and wide, up hill and down vale, over desert and across wilderness, night and day fighting off physical fatigue and psychological doubts as to whether it was all in vain. King Herod is greatly agitated at the news of a potential rival to his authority and rule. He is rousing researchers to get to the bottom of what is going on and despatching squads of soldiers to put an immediate stop to it. Meanwhile "Away in a manger...the little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head...no crying He makes".

Interestingly it is the same at Calvary Hill when Jesus is at the centre of all that is going on, but He Himself is very passive. He just hangs there limply. Like a lamb before its shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth. All the time He is on the cross, He hardly says a thing. He doesn't seem to be doing anything, while all around is frantic activity. The crowd shout and swear and taunt Him; some spit on Him, some throw things at Him. The Roman soldiers are busy hammering nails into His hands and feet and raising up three wooden crosses, and when not doing that, they are busy gambling for the perks of the job, the criminals' clothes. The Pharisees are jumping for self-righteous, smug joy. The women are highly agitated, turning to and from the gruesome scene of cruelty, attracted and repelled like moths to a fatal light. The disciples are sneaking closer and running away as their courage ebbs and flows. In all this mayhem, in the midst of the swirling winds of hate and violence, buffeted by endless waves of animosity, hangs Jesus, the light of this dark world and the Rock of Ages. The waves will beat against the Rock and dash themselves to pieces.

The truth is that when Jesus lay in the manger, and when Jesus hung on the Cross, He was not so passive as it first appears. He is the eternal Lord of Glory who planned His venture into time and space from all eternity. He was God on a mission. He was entering into the human predicament, taking on our humanity, embracing our life – actively and willingly. He freely chose to become the lightning rod conductor receiving all our worship and all our hate... whatever life threw at Him. He received our love and affection and devotion; and He accepted all our sin and guilt and bitterness. However He is also a lightning rod conductor of the human orchestra in reverse – He today is silent and invisible, but when He wags His baton, He brings His powerful love and loving power mightily into play making harmonious music in our lives and in the life of the whole world. We celebrate this every Christmas, and indeed every day. Merry Christmas!

Alex B Noble

