

MAY-AUGUST 2023



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



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New Daylight

Edited by **Gordon Giles**

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Gordon Giles writes...



This time last year Rochester Cathedral hosted *The Leaves of the Trees*, an artistic installation by Peter Walker. It comprised 5,000 metal leaves, spread on the ground, flowing down from – or ascending to – the high altar. At the altar the leaves were shiny stainless steel, whereas at the other end they were rusted and brown. Intended as a memorial to the thousands who died in the Covid-19 pandemic, each leaf had the word ‘hope’ engraved upon it. Many visitors came, some of whom took selfies in front of them, while others wept quietly in the presence of the representation of loss and hope.

The quietly rusting leaves were intended to remind us of the heavenly city, where ‘the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations’ (Revelation 22:2, NIV), and for many they spoke of healing in a post-pandemic world. Whoever we are, whatever we have done, whoever we have lost, there is hope engraved on the heart of our being, and this will bear us forward through thick and thin, rust and decay, love and loss. As Christina Rossetti put it, in her poem ‘A Better Resurrection’ (1862), ‘My life is in the falling leaf: O Jesus, quicken me.’

It was then, as now, Eastertide. Rusting leaves remind us of autumn and the dying of the light, but at this time of year they are greening for spring and summer. Leaves green and then brown, reaching for light and then falling as the light fails. So we live in the moment of the here and now, with its memories, joys, sorrows and expectations. But we also mark the cycle of seasons and remember loved ones who have fallen, yet who are to be made shiny and new in the eternal, heavenly city.

Five years after Rossetti wrote her Easter poem, the hymn writer Walter Smith (1824–1908) gave us these lines:

*To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish but naught changeth thee.*

Amid all the changes of the last year or so, in our monarchy, government and internationally, we know that in our changeless, loving, creator God we find resurrection hope revealed in Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

REVD CANON DR GORDON GILES

Ephesians 1—2



Have you ever been in prison? I have. I wasn't locked up behind bars; I had been invited to help a friend of mine, who was a chaplain at a maximum-security prison near to where I live, conduct a church service one Sunday. Getting from the entrance to the chapel was quite a process: numerous checks and searches were conducted, then we were escorted through a winding system of corridors that had barred doors that needed to be unlocked and locked again every few metres. It was highly unpleasant, even though it was a modern and humane facility.

Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Ephesus while he was imprisoned in Rome. I have no idea what prison was like for him. It is suggested that he was under house arrest, so conditions were perhaps a little more bearable than being shackled to a wall in a dark dungeon, but still fairly dismal. In a situation like this, unsure if the words he wrote would be his last, I assume he would want to make every word count.

Early manuscripts of this letter omit the phrase 'in Ephesus' (1:1), which gives rise to the suggestion that Paul was writing more generally to Christians everywhere rather than to a specific group or church. This is further reinforced by the fact that this letter does not address anyone by name nor deal with issues specific to a particular church, as other letters do. So, as we read this letter, let us remember that although these words were originally intended for a first-century audience, they can still be applied to our lives as believers in Jesus today.

Over the next week, I invite you to join me as we look at the first part of this remarkable letter. We will see how, as Christians, we are to view ourselves in our new-found position of being 'in Christ'; how we are to behave as children of God; and how we have been equipped and empowered by God to live the life he has called us to: a life that is only possible by the empowering of his Holy Spirit within us.

MATT MCCHLERY

We are family

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

If you approach the community centre where our church gathers on Sundays, you will see a large banner on the railings near the main entrance that says, 'We are family.' It is a bold statement. When we decided to create it, we wanted to say something that was welcoming and reflective of the nature of our church.

The phrase above is more than a catchy slogan on a banner; it reflects the heart of what Paul is speaking about in today's reading. God chose us long before we even thought about choosing him. He chose to love us despite our brokenness and dysfunction. He also chose to make us part of his family, the closest and most loving relationship possible. Relationship is extremely important to God. We are born into families because this is how God intended us to live, in loving relationship with one another.

So when we gather as a church, we are also gathering as the family of God. It is not simply a nice idea to be friendly or to make every effort to get along with those we are in relationship with; if they are fellow Christians, they are brothers and sisters – we are family, and God calls us to live in unity with each other. Perhaps we know of someone in God's family whom we don't get along with. Maybe we too need to follow God's example and choose to love, just as he chose to love us despite our weakness and failures. We are adopted into the same family. Let us love our brothers and sisters and, in so doing, glorify God.

Is there someone you need to ask God to help you to love better?

MATT MCCHLERY

Sealed

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

For my 21st birthday, my parents had a special signet ring made for me. It had our family crest engraved on it. In the past, these rings were used to seal letters by pressing them into molten sealing wax, displaying the family mark as a sign to show who wrote the letter. It also helped to prove that the letter was genuine. The document then carried the weight of the family's reputation and associated power.

In Paul's day, a seal represented not only ownership, but also protection. Here, we are encouraged with the fact that from the moment we first believed in Jesus, we were marked with a seal that identifies us as one of God's children. That seal is the Holy Spirit, who not only marks us out as a Christian, but also gives us a taste of what life will be like in the future when we enter eternity – where sin will be no more, and we have new, recreated bodies as we live in God's presence forever. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is a guarantee of our eternal inheritance in Christ.

Whatever you are facing in your life right now, know that, as a believer in Jesus, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit. You belong to Jesus, and he will be with you. He will protect you. Know that his promises will be fulfilled and one day, when all things are made new again, you will be with him forever.

Jesus, please remind me that I am yours. Remind me that my whole life belongs to you. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to help and to protect me. Amen

MATT MCCHLERY

Mighty power

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

When electricity was first beginning to be understood hundreds of years ago, I do not think those early scientific pioneers could have imagined the profound global impact it would have on everyday life. Electricity can be incredibly powerful and, if harnessed correctly, can be used in a wide variety of applications, from powering the watch on my wrist to cooking food, lighting up dark streets and powering cars.

Paul's prayer is for those in the Ephesian church to begin to understand that they have received access to God's incomparable power. This is not just any power. It is the same mighty and miraculous power that raised Christ from the dead. This power is God's, and it wages war in the spiritual realms. It is the most powerful thing in existence.

God has delegated the access to and use of his power to those who believe. He is at work in us and through us. We need to administer the use of his power through the Holy Spirit wisely. We may think we are nothing special, but Jesus disagrees. He has given us the most powerful thing in the universe to help transform us to become more and more like him.

Like those early scientists, let us work at trying to better understand the power we have been given so that we can live lives that are pleasing to God.

Jesus, fill me with your power today. Amen

MATT MCCHLERY

Grace

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved.

Have you heard the phrase ‘random acts of kindness’ before? It is when someone does something kind for someone else for no reason or reward, like paying for the person behind them at a drive-through restaurant or giving a bunch of flowers to a stranger.

Grace is similar to this, in that it is completely unwarranted and undeserved yet offered freely. Where the similarity diverges is that grace is not random. In fact, the grace God offers us is so intricately woven into his plan for our salvation; it is premeditated. It is because of God’s immense love for us that he freely offers us his grace – an opportunity where we can choose his salvation. To be made alive despite the fact we were once spiritually dead in our sin.

Those of us who have been Christians for a long time can fall into the trap of thinking that some people are too far gone in their sin to be saved. Or perhaps we may have begun to see those who are not believers as being less worthy of God’s love than us? Here we are reminded that we too were once just as sinful as everyone else – if God’s grace was enough for us, surely it is enough for them also?

Let’s not forget the beautiful gift of grace God freely offers. No matter how broken or undeserving we may feel, let us once again embrace the deliberate love shown to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus, I need your love and grace every day. Amen

MATT MCCHLERY

Called to do good

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Yesterday, Paul reminded us of our sinful beginnings, but he used that to highlight the amazing gift of saving grace offered to us through Jesus. In today's reading, Paul reinforces the fact that we are saved by grace alone, which comes from God and not by any act or good deed we do. We cannot buy or bribe our way into salvation. It is a free gift that we either choose to accept by believing in Jesus, or not.

Salvation is a beautiful act of re-creation by our creator God. Our spirit is completely transformed and reborn. Yes, thought patterns and habits may take a while to catch up, but we now have the God-empowered ability to change them. As we are changed to become more and more like Jesus, our behaviour follows suit and good works should begin to flow out from us to touch and affect the world around us. Salvation is not just for the benefit of the one who is saved, but also for the benefit of everyone whom that person meets.

We cannot be saved by doing good works, but Paul explains here that once we are saved, we are then called to do good works as a result of our salvation.

This talk of doing good works may make you feel that it is all going to be a lot of hard work and perhaps you feel that you are not up for it. Don't get too worried about whether or not you are able to do it. If you are in Christ, you have Jesus' spiritual power at work within you, equipping you with everything you need to live in a way that pleases him. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and he will show you what to do as well as when and how to do it.

Ask Jesus how you can do good for someone today.

MATT MCCHLERY

Citizens

[Jesus] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

I was born in Zimbabwe, a landlocked nation south of the equator in Africa. I emigrated to the UK in 2003 and then spent seven years going through the naturalisation process to become a British citizen. At my citizenship ceremony, I swore allegiance to the Queen and signed a document which meant I was officially a citizen of Great Britain. This meant I was now entitled to all the rights and privileges that any citizen of the country had. It also came with a sense of belonging.

Just before today's verses in Ephesians, Paul explains how Jews and Gentiles are reunited in Christ. There is no longer any separation. Indeed, anyone who believes in Jesus is now a citizen of the kingdom of God and part of God's family.

Paul also uses the image of a building to illustrate how all believers are part of the whole family of God, each a living stone joined together and dependent upon each other. It is a building that is filled with the Holy Spirit and is where God dwells.

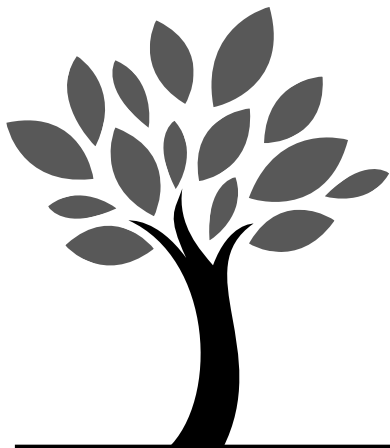
If you are a believer, you need to be connected to God's family, the church. Elsewhere in the Bible, we are encouraged not to neglect the habit of meeting together, because doing so helps us grow. Maybe you need to return to God's family today, or perhaps you are being called to extend the arm of friendship to welcome those on the edges of church into the family, as a full citizen of the kingdom of God.

Jesus, help me to function as a citizen of your kingdom. Amen

MATT MCCHLERY



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New Daylight provides four months of daily Bible readings and comment, with a regular team of contributors drawn from a range of church backgrounds. It is ideal for anybody wanting an accessible yet stimulating aid to spending time with God each day, deepening their faith and their knowledge of scripture.

Readers' comments on **New Daylight**:

'Thank you for all you do to make every issue so readable and enlightening, giving us the opportunity to get closer to God.'

'Thank you to all the wonderful writers who bring scriptures to life and make them relevant for us in the here and now.'

'I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the notes for helping to keep me going with reading the Bible and shedding light on demanding passages.'



New Daylight is edited by Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral.

Contributors in this issue

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