

Ploughshare February/March 1999
(scanned version from the original)

From the Curate
Petra Owen

This is what the Lord says:

Do not dwell on the past - See, I am doing a new thing. 'Isaiah 43:18 & 19

I once heard a story about a man who was walking his dog. As they walked beside a pond, he threw a stick into the water for the dog to chase. The dog walked over the top of the water, picked up the stick and walked back! The man threw it again and the same thing happened. In his excitement, the man called a passer-by to watch. He threw the stick and once again the dog walked across the top of the water and brought it back. 'Now,' he said to the onlooker, 'did you see anything unusual?' 'Yes,' said the other. 'Your dog can't swim.'

All of us, at some time, when forced to look at things in a new way, find it difficult. We like the security and safety of the 'familiar' things always staying the same! Nobody really likes change. It makes us uncomfortable, insecure, challenged. It can feel too scary and risky. And yet all around us there's change: birth, marriage, death bring change to families and individuals. Technology and politics force change on us and our world.

With any major form of change there has to be a sense of loss in order to gain. Change in our lives, whether it is moving house, jobs or change in church can bring a tremendous sense of loss in order for us to gain.

The chosen people of God when they went into exile in Babylon, were crying out to God for assurance that he would rescue them from exile (this was one change they really wanted!). They were remembering God rescuing his people from Egypt and God tells them: 'forget what I did then, I'm going to do something even greater.' But he asked them to adjust their lives and ways to His way, to hear, believe and trust. To be actively co-operative and then witness to God and His great works. He led them into unfamiliar territory. They had to lose to gain.

God has promised us too that He's doing a new thing. Indeed, our God, whose nature is unchangeable is a God who, by His action, desires change. The new heaven, new earth, new church, new person, are the work of God's hand. This is exciting. Change, when ordained by God, is challenging, exciting, bearable, achievable and profitable. It brings Him glory. As we go into this new year, let's pray that we will all have the courage and faith to allow God to do "new things" in our lives, as individuals and as a church.

Petra Owen

Losing to Gain

The mind of God is different from the thoughts of humans. As we follow Him we discover that we:

- lose to gain
- surrender to win
- die to live
- give to receive
- serve to reign
- scatter to reap

In weakness we are made strong
In humility are lifted up
In emptiness we are made full!

I said to the Man who stood at the gate of the year, "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown".

And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!"

St Thomas' Re-ordering Gets Underway (1999)

After many years of frustrating delay, St. Thomas' Church is now to be re-ordered and re-decorated. Sunday 7 February will be the last Sunday in the old St. Thomas'. It will then be closed for seven weeks while all the work is carried out. The re-opening will, appropriately, be on Easter Day and the Bishop of Derby is coming to re-dedicate St. Thomas' at a 6.30 p.m. service.

What is to be done

- Redecoration of the walls and chancel ceiling Repair of the fine nave ceiling
- Creation of a demountable platform at the chancel step, spreading the whole width of the building.
- Placing on this platform, a new holy table, font, preaching lectern and the present eagle lectern.
- Improvement of facilities for music groups.
- Removal of the existing pulpit
- Provision of new carpet throughout, improved wiring and lighting, large storage cupboards each side of the chancel end and a new noticeboard at the west end.

Worship arrangements

St. Thomas' are going "into exile." Each congregation will be meeting together in St. John's Church at 3.30pm, starting on Sunday 14 February and continuing until Palm Sunday, 28 March. There will be facilities for children - sometimes all-age services and sometimes with children's activities in the church, the Waddington Lounge, the office and Walton Village Hall.

The theme for the seven weeks: *FOCUS ON GOD*.

The Rector sees this as a big opportunity for St. Thomas' people, He writes:

"Our time 'in exile' at St. John's will give us the chance to come together, to do things differently, to see God afresh, to repent of wrong attitudes and to find different perspectives. We must aim to have better attitudes and better structures, to make growth more likely and to seek to glorify God more. It will be a time to 'celebrate our diversity' while at the same time becoming much more deeply united."

Details of the return to St. Thomas' on Easter Day and thereafter will be published later after prayer and reflection.

Financial Arrangements

- We need about £130,000 to carry out the work.
- We have given/received £73,000 from the March 1996 Gift Day and other gifts.
- We have given away £7,000 in accordance with PCC policy.
- £33,000 has been spent on the Garden of Remembrance.
- £3,000 has been spent on preparing plans, court evidence, tender documents etc .
- £30,000 is left in the kitty.
- THEREFORE WE NEED ANOTHER £100,000.

There is to be a Gift Day on 7 February and we trust that what is needed will come in. Prayer is Vital "*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.*" Psalm 127:1

So, we must pray.

A prayer card is available to assist private prayer. There will be a Prayer Meeting in St. Thomas' between 9 am and 11 am on Saturday 6 February.

"*Glorify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together.*" Psalm 34:3

Christopher Frith

Face to Face with Keith Bates

Keith is choir master at St Thomas'; he has been a member of the church since 1974.

Keith, you were at the same University and College as the Rector. What was he like in those days?
I must pass on that one, since, believe it or not, he's ten years younger than I am!

What did you do after University?

Before University I did two years National Service in the Army Intelligence Cops. Afterwards I entered industry as a graduate Management Trainee; this proved not to my liking, and so I turned to what I said I would never do - become a teacher. My uncle was a teacher; it was thought that I would follow suit, but having resisted I decided to give it a try. Never once have I regretted it.

What is your subject?

Latin, Greek, Classical Civilisation - Classics in short. Sadly it is much less popular than it used to be. The subject has much to offer, a vast storehouse of wisdom, experience and achievement gathered over 1,500 years. It still has a remarkable influence even on our modern life.

You've been sportsman all your life, haven't you?

Name the sport, and I've probably played it. I don't think I've played polo, and golf is banned because of a back problem, an old sports injury from 1972. But I have really enjoyed Rugby, Football, Cricket, Hockey I still play tennis and badminton regularly, and in February I shall be entering my thirty first skiing season.

Any other interests?

Music, of course, which has always been important. I have sung in a variety of choirs, including St Thomas' choir which has been a real pleasure over the years. I have completed almost nine years as a temporary fill-in as choirmaster! Sometimes it is hard going and frustrating, but the delight is much greater. Looking to the future, the recruitment of two or three good singers would help us enormously.

It must have been terrible time when your first wife, Joy, had cancer.

Indeed it was. She became ill in 1974, after fourteen years of marriage. We had a young daughter and son. After a long struggle, Joy died in June 1978. I have to say that St Thomas' members were a God-send. A team organised by the late Gill Watts-Jones (the previous Rector's wife) gave tremendous help to us all in many practical ways. Some of that team are still church members. And I mustn't forget my late mother and her outstanding support. I couldn't thank them all enough. However, life goes on, and I resolved that we should go on with it, and some time later I had the good fortune to persuade Maureen (a member of the RC church) to marry me and take on my children. None of us have ever looked back and regretted it.

How long have you been part of St Thomas'?

We had attended intermittently over the years but we became regular attenders in response to the publicity of the Watts-Jones' when they arrived. It wasn't long before I was roped into the choir, where I've been ever since. My son, Jeffrey, served his time also in the choir, and Joy, when fit, was for a short while secretary to the PCC.

What does your faith mean to you?

I was brought up with it, so it's been an ever-present, a constant sustaining and supporting force. It gives a great sense of belonging, of knowing that you don't stand alone. It presents a great challenge in trying to adhere to and strive towards the principles it entails.

What are your hopes for St Thomas'?

First I hope that our forthcoming exile is not detrimental in any way, but a real opportunity to display a unity of purpose and action. Change is not always popular because we are afraid of the uncertain, but the return to a 'new' St Thomas' will provide an opportunity for a fresh impetus. I don't like revolution but a good dose of renewed energy and a reappraisal of what we're doing and where we're going will not come amiss.

Do Not Dwell in the Past

In the same chapter as He tells us not to dwell on the past, the Lord says "*Review the past for Me*" Isaiah 43:26.

Memory is a wonderful thing. Have you noticed the tricks it can play on us and how we can use it to fit any explanation we want? The Israelites had a selective memory when the going became tough during their Exodus through the desert wilderness out of Egypt into the Promised Land. "They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea to go round Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way. They spoke against God and against Moses and said "*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food*" - Numbers 43:26

When, then, is it right to look back?

It is not so much when as why. I suffer from depression that is featured by panics that overwhelm with fear. The present is so unbearable that it blots out the past as if it never happened and the future is unthinkable because the present is so terrifying.

On my exodus from depression, the Lord helped me to review the past. He showed me that on 2 occasions I had been ill with life threatening illnesses but for the inventions of wonder drugs (that I had nothing to do with). I realised I had survived accidents and my survival had depended on other people's, not my, actions. In His time, when I was capable of registering, the Lord showed me that my life, from before conception, had never been in my control, but His. He planted firmly in my heart and mind - "*There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun! A time to be born and a time to die*" Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

My past became the evidence to support present faith and future hope because He had provided and in doing so had given every hope that He would go on doing so.

*Listen in your hearts
Remember this, Fix it in mind
Take it to heart, you rebels.
Remember the former things, those of long ago.
I am God and there is no other.
I am God and there is none like Me.
I make know the end from the beginning,
From ancient times, what is still to come.
I say: My purpose will stand and
I will do all that I please.
From the east I summon a bird of prey
From a far off land, a man to fulfil my purpose.
What I have said, that will I bring about.
What I have planned, that will I do.
Listen to me.*

Isaiah 46:8-12

These words and words like them offer sense and reason to our lives. God, not us, makes the key decisions in our life. We had nothing to do with our conception, birth, nor on the evidence of the past, our survival. But God did.

Let us each pray that God will speak to us about our past and make Himself known as the Lord of that past, the present and the future.

Edison Muhindo Kalengyo

Edison Muhindo Kalengyo is on an EFAC Bursary linked to St Thomas'

Last August I stayed with Edison and Dorothy at their home on the Uganda Christian University site at Mukono, formerly known as the Bishop Tucker Theological College. It was great to share with them and their younger two children for meals and evening prayers. They have an avocado tree in their front garden and it was in fruit so I enjoyed large, juicy avocados every day. Dorothy and I cooked as I showed her how to make pastry and she made small cakes to sell and fresh pineapple jam. Their elder boy was away at boarding school which is very common for secondary education in Uganda.

It was during the university holiday time so I did not meet many students but I saw Edison's office and he was busy preparing for the new term and organising a MA course in theology. He is head of the theological department and works very hard. On Sunday, we worshipped at the local church which is now the cathedral for the diocese of Mukono. At the 8 am English service there is a lively group of teenagers who lead the music. The congregation slowly arrives during the first half hour of worship music but then at the end we leave quickly to allow the 10 am local language service to start. In September Dorothy and Edison were going to join a team who visit a local prison once a month to lead services and share the good news of Jesus with the prisoners.

Before my week resting with Edison and Dorothy I had spent two weeks with five other Britons and a Ugandan guide and two Ugandan chaplains on a pilot CMS Spiritual Safari. This was very interesting as we prayed and shared together and visited many different places around Kampala and in the west of Uganda. While in the west, on the borders of the Congo, (formerly Zaire) we realised a little of the difficulties of daily life with unrest in the region as rebels attacked Kasese. This is Edison's home town and he was actually there visiting his mother for two nights when the attack happened. We also met Revd Saul who had managed to escape with his wife and three young children but had lost his home and some relatives after rebels attacked their village, high up in the mountains. However for the people just over the border in Congo the situation is much worse. In August CMS had to withdraw all their mission partners in Congo and it may be some time before any of them can return. Meanwhile, the local people have to adjust and cope with uncertainty and insecurity.

Back at Mukono where Edison lives and works there is an unfinished guesthouse. The building has a roof, doors and windows but no plastering, plumbing or electrics. Over the front door is the date 1990 and it would be great if the building could be in use before ten years pass from that date. The cost of completing is about £7,000 and we thought that as a group and as a thank you to CMS and the Ugandans who helped us we would try to raise that amount. The finished guesthouse could then earn money for the new Christian University and provide accommodation for visiting lecturers. Perhaps St. Thomas' could consider supporting this as a special project in Lent. I am sure Edison and the other staff at Mukono would be very grateful.

The World Mission Committee will consider Sheila's suggestion.

Sheila Pite

Introducing Dina Tintean

New Years greetings to everyone in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and a very heartfelt thank you for your continued support and commitment towards our mission work in Romania. It certainly has proved to be a very busy and challenging year, but an exciting one too.

God has made a way possible for us to begin to support and encourage young people, especially those who feel called to mission work. Our journey in February to Emmanuel Mission in Bucharest proved to be a very valuable link for Dina Tintean who had been praying for God to confirm her calling to India as a missionary. Rosanne Yoo and myself eventually linked up with Dina at the Romanian Bible Institute, where she was studying for her final exams in July after four years training to become a Religious Education missionary teacher. During our meeting we felt a strong desire to support her through prayer.

This eventually led us to take a step in faith and invite Dina over to England to give her an opportunity to improve her English and hopefully make the right contact in India. Did the Lord answer these prayers? Dina tells you her story...

Dina Tintean

Hi everyone! I am Dina Tintean, the youngest daughter of Pastor Dumitru Tintean, a family with eight children (7 girls and 1 boy). I was so blessed to meet Pamela Gratton and Rosanne Yoo in February 1998 and to receive their support in prayer which eventually led to my visit to England. When you are born in a country like Romania your chance to go to another country is nil but when you belong to the family of Christ your chances become bigger.

I came to England on 31 August 1998 trusting in the Lord. And you know the motto of your church in the last year was very true for me. "God, who has called you ... is faithful". He provided all my needs and blessed me abundantly.

I really enjoyed being in St Thomas' church. A special thank you to Christopher and Pam Frith for their kindness towards me and my sister Nuta. I will miss you.

I had a wonderful time also at Quest Club. It was nice to have the opportunity to speak, play and pray with the children. I would like to say a big thank you to all of those who work at Quest Club for being very nice with me and accepted me as I am. All my life I will remember you.

I have also been very actively involved in the mission work of 'Hope for Eastern Europe' by supporting Pamela's meetings, sorting and packing supplies for my own area of Basarabi. Our region is very poor. Many families are without basic provisions like food, toiletries, shoes, heating, beds and bedding, decorating materials etc.

We really ask sincerely for your ongoing support to give them hope in their situations, so we can show love in action. Thank you very very much for your support, for your sacrificial love which you demonstrated until now. Thank you for Les, Pamela and Matthew for their great love and dedication, for their great commitment towards this challenging mission work in Eastern Europe. Thank you for their kindness to accept me as their own daughter and sister. Thank you, thank you very much.

A few years ago God called me to mission, but, for a Romanian this is almost impossible. Everything that is impossible for man is possible with God. So this is how I came to England and God who is faithful helped me again. He opened a door for me to go through Oasis Trust to India. I will go in July 1999 for six weeks. I am so pleased that God answered my prayers. Thank you for your willingness to support me in this mission trip to India. Please continue to pray for me and I promise to keep you updated.

By the time you read this letter I will have returned to my own country with a thankful heart that I had such a wonderful time in England. I learned many things from you and I will go back with many fresh ideas which will benefit my people. Thank you to everyone for what you have done for me - I will miss you.

Love Dina