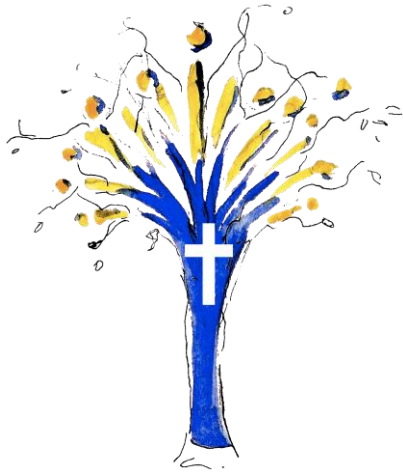


Off the Record



From **MAGOR
BAPTIST CHURCH**

*Growing and sharing
in God's love*



AUTUMN 2024

Gates - obstacles or opportunities?



I love gates. Iron, wooden, old, kissing.

My first 21 years were spent in a house with a front gate, although most of our modern houses are not blessed with this fascinating piece of outdoor furniture. There, I came to understand that gates are for opening but especially for closing. *'Close the gate behind you'* was as common a cry to be heard in the Thomas household as *'shut the door behind you'*.

Ask any farmer - they'll tell you what gates are for : for letting animals out and letting animals in. A gate is both a safety mechanism and a convenient point of access for tractors and, once upon a time, for working horses.

Gates are visible and tangible metaphors, but are they obstacles or opportunities? Are they there to keep us out, or to invite us to open up the next stage of the path, and walk on? To open a gate, and close it behind us, is one of those actions that is both intentional and purposeful. I doubt if opening and closing a gate is ever thoughtless or careless.

In my own growth and development into the person I now am I've walked through a number of significant gates. There are those life experiences when you know that you have gone through a definite point of transition, the landscape has changed and so have you. The time I came to realise who Jesus is, gave my allegiance to him via baptism, and committed my life to the loving service of "*the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*", a gate was opened into a new future, and that same gate closed on a life to which I would never go back.

The words of an old Billy Graham anthem, "*I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back*" are a life-changing testimony, accompanied by the clicking shut of a gate on what was, and a move into a new future and a different path.

The moment of exploring a vocation is also a gate, a hinge point that swings open to the next field of the life we are to live. For me that call to be a minister, and to spend my time, my energy, my strength (and my weakness) as servant of a community of Christ's people was another gate opened and closed behind me. And since then there have been other gates, each requiring a decision of whether to open, go through, and close behind me.

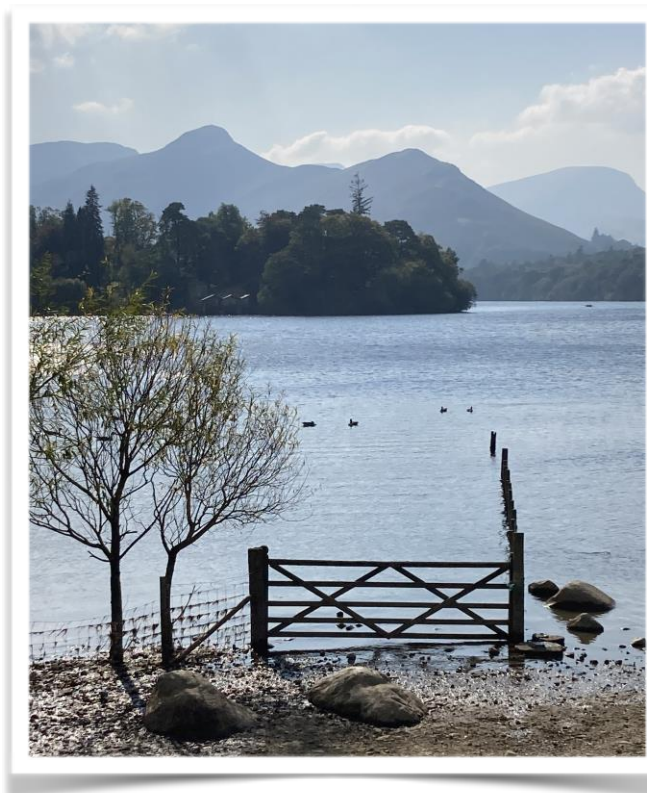
I've been wondering about how and why we make the decisions we do, why we go through some gates and not others. Discerning what is good for us,

and trying to fit that with where we believe God is calling us is one of the more scary and risk-laden tensions in our lives.

To discern his voice amongst the voices

Is that hard task to which we each are born.

Those anonymous words ring true for me, yet they can now cause despair or paralysis. Rather, they spur me on to seek God's leading via a mind and heart open to Scripture, guidance from trusted friends, prayer to tell the ego to pipe down, and attempts to read and understand our own life story - these are what significantly shape our decisions when we encounter another gate.



All of this perhaps explains why a recent photo of a gate, courtesy of my wife's eye for an intriguing image, lead me to ponder : are gates an obstacle or opportunity, there to halt me or give me access? But, more importantly, are they a challenge to see if I'm ready to walk another path through another field and into a wider landscape?

Canals are places for wide vistas across open fields, or narrow winding bends, or enclosed entrapments (aka locks). The locks have gates and on the flight of three locks at Hillmorton on the Oxford canal are the words "*This*

door makes depth" inscribed on the bar of one of the middle lock gates. This is truer than just a reference to the water that fills and empties the chamber and makes one "*captive for a while*", which is another inscription on one of the Hillmorton lock gates.

This door makes depth

Although, at times, somewhere within us lies a gate beyond which we feel we dare not go, and would rather remain captive for a while, it is sometimes just past that threshold that our real being, real healing, real wholeness, takes place.

The door that makes depth - gives meaning, offers purpose, grants understanding - is the One who once said "***I am the gate***" – Jesus.

MT

Fellowship News from Val Jones

We thank God for his Harvest and we thank all those who took part in decorating the church and all who gave to the collection for Raven House. We have been so blessed and it is right that we share what we have with others.

If you have been on holiday, are on holiday or looking forward to a break in the next few weeks we trust that you will come back refreshed for the winter.

We continue to thank God for our families and friends. I am sure that many of you, like me, have had or will have your Covid and Flu jabs over the last few days, and we pray that they will work and keep us safe during the long winter months.

The garden at the rear of the chapel is looking lovely with Michaelmas Daisies out in full bloom and we thank Chris Seabridge for all the hard work carried out in the garden. We also thank Liz Upton for overseeing on behalf of the Property Trustees the refurbishment of the disabled toilet and the resurfacing of the seating area at the rear of the chapel, together with the back door entrance. We also thank Owen Jones for painting the doors at the front of the chapel and Adrian Davies for putting up the new blinds in the meeting room. We thank God for all the gifts he has given to members and friends of the Fellowship.

On August 27th the church was full as we gave thanks for the life of Bernard (Berni) Hill – the service led by Mark. Tributes were given by family members and a full funeral tea was enjoyed by many. We extend our love and sympathy to Jonathan and Helen, and to the rest of the family.

We thank God for the life of Shirley Brown and pray for her family and friends. The service of celebration for her life will take place here on Friday 11th October at 1pm. Shirley and her late husband Eric were members for many years, coming to Munchies together. Shirley was president of the Womens Hour and led a house group at The Lawns as well as being a member of Knit and Natter, Coffee Morning and Ladies Friendship. Shirley also made the three kings which are part of the Nativity display in the windows at Christmas. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

We also thank God for the life of Jean McKee whose service of thanksgiving took place on Friday 4th October at St Mary's Church in Wales of which she was a member for many years, attending communion every Wednesday as well as other activities in the church. Jean also attended Munchies (with her late husband Bob), came to chapel every Sunday Morning and attended

Ladies Friendship, Coffee Morning and Knit and Natter. She knitted the shepherds for the Nativity window display. We pray for her family and friends as they come to terms with their loss.

Last Friday a number of folk enjoyed a well-organised entertainment evening which included items from the Welsh Folk Music group. Thanks to Christine Miles and others for putting that programme together. Don't forget the annual Tearfund Big Quiz night will take place on Saturday 16th November at 7.30pm.

We pray for all those who have been unwell over the last few months and ask for God's healing touch.

Lastly we pray for the whole Fellowship that we may be the people God wants us to be as we seek to serve him in this place.



The Big Quiz Night

Saturday 16 November

**Hundreds of churches.
Thousands of people.
One big quiz.**

Get together with your friends, family and community for an epic evening of poverty-beating fun.

Up and down the UK, people will be gathering for the ultimate quiz extravaganza – all in the name of ending poverty for good. And you can be part of it!

7.30pm at Magor Baptist Church

For more information contact
John Loebel on 01633 880318

Every pound raised at the *Big Quiz Night* will help transform the lives of people living in poverty.
Visit justgiving.com/tearfund to donate to Tearfund.
Visit tearfund.org/quiz to find out more.

tearfund.org/quiz
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Don't Miss It!

Seek first the Kingdom – BMS Harvest Appeal

Sowing abundant hope across Bangladesh this harvest.

You can help bring abundant life and share the Word of God across Bangladesh this harvest season. **Bina and James** have been working among impoverished communities in Bangladesh for over ten years. They help children get into school, they bring emergency food and relief when disasters strike, and they share the hope that comes in knowing Jesus Christ.

But they know that so many more people across Bangladesh are still in need.

Could you help train up more people to reach them?

The Harvest display in Church



Tearfund - A small church with a big voice

Pastor Sumon and his 33 congregation members are **a small church with a big voice** in Bangladesh. Following some Tearfund-developed Bible studies, the church refused to accept their challenging situation and began speaking up. As a result of their advocacy, they've made tremendous progress around clean water, housing, education and other issues directly affecting their community.

And the best part? Pastor Sumon and his church aren't done yet: *'Our future plans include further efforts to prevent child marriage and to increase networking at government and non-government levels.'*



Pastor Sumon stands in front of the water reserve that is helping the whole community. Credit: Amit Rudro/Tearfund

Join the chorus

Pastor Sumon's story is a great example of the work Tearfund does to envision, empower and equip churches. This work helps them to play their part in transforming their communities. Sometimes transformation is possible by installing a water pump using local skills and resources. At other times it requires churches to use their voice to advocate for change, such as working with the government to secure 24 new houses.

For more information see www.tearfund.org

Ed: Our September communion offering of £530 was sent to Tearfund.



A message from Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow on Ethiopia

Hear from our Founder about our expansion in Tigray province

September 2024

In different circumstances we might, as a Mary's Meals family, feel quite proud of some recent achievements. For example, as you know, earlier this year we ran an appeal for children suffering in Tigray, Ethiopia. Witnessing a truly appalling humanitarian catastrophe – one that is already taking lives by starvation and robbing children of their futures by preventing school attendance – we wanted to expand our school feeding programme as quickly as possible.

Your response was yet again overwhelming and beautiful. Each gift made toward that appeal is already making a tangible difference in children's lives, having enabled us to grow our programme very rapidly. Instead of providing 24,000 children in Tigray with daily meals – as we were previously – we are now reaching more than 110,000!



This remarkable growth has been achieved under hugely challenging circumstances, following a war that took an estimated 600,000 lives, has left nearly a million people displaced, and shattered all sorts of infrastructure. In the aftermath, an ongoing drought means that farming cannot resume at scale. And yet despite all this, through your amazing support and the dedication of our teams (especially our partner in Tigray), Mary's Meals has found a way to go forward.

Schools on the verge of closure have new life. Hope is being reborn in the form of smiling children filling school classrooms. Lives are being saved. Dreams of a better day are once again alive.

Mary's Meals works! Even in the most challenging situations, your donations become simple school meals that transform everything.

So yes, there are reasons to be proud. But can we really feel proud when we still see neighbouring schools with empty classrooms crying out for Mary's Meals to reach them, whilst outside emaciated children beg to survive? Of course not.

But we can take satisfaction from a job well done and be greatly reassured that every action in support of Mary's Meals really does have a life-changing impact on children living in poverty. And we can use this as fuel to go forward to reach the next child waiting.

As we do, on behalf of every child who is receiving our meals and has new hope for the future, I thank you with all my heart.

**It costs just £19.15 to feed a child for
a whole school year.**

**We 're now feeding over 2.4M
children every school day.**

For more information see

www.marysmeals.org.uk

**Mary's Meals will be our communion offering in
November**

Who are we?

By Hazel Lucas

When Ernest and I lived in the USA, many years ago, it was possible to send off for your family coat of arms (on payment of a suitable fee). Ernest did this, and ended up with 2 completely different coats of arms, neither of which we believed for one moment to be correct! Ernest did quite a lot of family history research and many of his ancestors were farm labourers or foot soldiers in the army, i.e. very ordinary. We would like to think that we are descended from royalty or someone famous, heroic or beautiful, and it seems that those whose forbears had emigrated to the States were even more keen to identify their origins. Some of us, on the other hand, are proud of the fact that our forefathers worked their way to 'the top' from nothing, started their own highly successful businesses, or achieved academic distinction. This last was certainly the focus in my family! I was expected to do well at school and attend a good university. Fortunately, I was very happy with those ambitions. But family expectations can be a great burden if we can't fulfil them, as happened with some pupils I taught.

In the last few days, I found myself thinking about the burden placed on the shoulders of the Lord Jesus by his unusual birth and all those prophecies. I was reading John chapter 7 and thinking about the questions raised there. How would it feel to be told by your parents that you are the unique son of God, born due to an extraordinary miracle, and destined to save the world



from their sins? Presumably Mary and Joseph must have explained to him about the Virgin Birth! The mind boggles! So when he said '*I know where I came from and where I am going*', was he thinking about those things, or other criteria that we use to identify ourselves? The Jews asked how he could be the Messiah if he came from Galilee, when he was supposed to come from Bethlehem, and how could he be the Messiah if he wasn't of the line of King David? Presumably the apostle John who wrote the gospel, and the early readers, knew perfectly well that Jesus did meet all those criteria, but Jesus never defended himself on any of those issues. He expected to be believed on the basis of his teaching and his miracles, which all clearly showed his divine nature. The officers

who were supposed to arrest him said '*No man spoke like this man*', (John 7:46) and couldn't fulfil their charge until Jesus himself decided it was time for them to do so.

So who are we, and how do we decide what really matters? If we want to know where WE came from, the time and place where we truly accepted the

Lord Jesus is more important than anything else. He is our Brother, offers us His wonderful Spirit to transform our ordinary lives, and gives meaning to our existence because we can now be God's children, on our way to heaven which we will share with Him. So we too, can know where we came from and where we are going, and show our share of the divine nature by the way we live. What we do and what we say, just as He did. Praise the Lord for His mercy.

Snippets from the magazines, 50 years ago by Chris Leighton

October 1974

The magazine began with an apology from the editor that pressure of school work in August and early September meant it had not been possible to produce the September issue of the magazine. Furthermore, the Art Editor (Berni Hill) was so busy completing the building of his bungalow at Undy that no photographs had been available since the July issue.

It clearly hadn't been a good summer that year; the church secretary wrote: *'August, the holiday month, once again did not fulfil our expectations as far as the weather. Gone are the days of my childhood when it was light until 11 o'clock at night and the days were very hot and sunny'*. However, he went on to say, *'Never mind, we usually have a much warmer and brighter time between now and the end of December than we did in my young days'*. Let's hope that is true this year! The weather was clearly an issue as there is a page extracted from the *Underwood Record*, where Bryan Close, the minister said, *'How changeable these days are, no two alike. One day is mild, the next day cold. One day is calm but on the next the wind blows almost to gale force. One day the sun shines in bright clear sky and the next day the rain just empties down upon us'*. He went on to say that human nature being what it is, no day suits us all. God in His wisdom made us all different but, whatever our needs and problems, God is capable of providing for us.

Again the church was suffering from insufficient accommodation. Over 70 members of the Primary Department were unable to join the Harvest Festival Family Service and had to have their own in the School Room. The evening service was also well attended with more than half the congregation under 21. Harvest celebrations concluded with a ploughman's supper – bread, cheese and a pickled onion, with most of the 20p paid for each ticket going to 'Operation Agri' (OA). OA, with its aim of 'showing the love of

Jesus in action', was adopted by the Baptist Men's Movement (BMM) in 1961. The initial challenge was to provide tools, livestock and equipment for BMS agricultural mission workers. OA is still operating, making grants to support projects in developing countries, designed to enable the poorest of the poor to generate their own income and support.

The Sunday School outing to Bourton on the Water was a great success with 249 parents and children. Perhaps you were one of those children?

The church had collected and sent 215 pairs of used spectacles to the Lions Club in Blantyre, Malawi. In a letter of thanks the Club said that, having distributed over 8,000 free glasses, they had decided to build a Lions Spectacle Bank. Adjoining the hospital in Blantyre, it would comprise an examination room, a workshop and a store. They added, *'It is a great source of satisfaction to us that devoted friends in far away countries are willing to help and serve a noble humanitarian cause. ... One has to see it to realise how happy the recipients are as this brings them relief and pure joy.'* Blantyre Lions Club still exists today.

Rising costs had led to increased expenditure and a deficit on the first five months of over £400, wiping out the balance carried forward from the previous year. The September members' meeting was the best attended for many years and they *'expressed a determination to strive towards a more realistic contribution bearing in mind the continued decrease in the purchase power of £1'*. It then asked,

What is your level?

- 1. the 'tip' level – my small change to God*
- 2. the 'entertainment' level – I pay when I go*
- 3. the 'emotional' level – I give what I feel like*
- 4. the 'good intention' level – I'll give more when I've got more to spare, and providing it won't interfere with anything else*
- 5. the 'Christian' level – I'll give as I've been given, systematically and sacrificially, gladly and ungrudgingly'*

What is your level? Something for us all to consider.

November 1974

Notes from the church secretary about events in October: *'Surely the highlight of the whole month was the baptism of three young people'*. One of those was Gareth Thomas who, at the evening communion in November was welcomed into church membership.

Persecuted Christians

The secretary also noted that, at the Autumn Rally of local Baptist churches held at Underwood, there was a most inspiring film, *To Russia with Love*, which showed the difficulties experienced by Russian Christians. The previous month, readers had been encouraged to consider what it would be like to live in Russia and what difference that would make to their witness.

Such difficulties were further expounded when, on 4 November, eight members attended Duckpool Road Baptist Church to hear Richard Wurmbrand (1909-2001). Born a Jew in Romania, he and his wife, Sabina, converted to Christianity in 1938 and Richard was later ordained. In February 1948, Richard was arrested for his faith by the Communist authorities. He spent the first three years in solitary confinement in an underground cell with no light, and where total silence was observed. Torture continued for the next five years; drugged and beaten, he couldn't even remember the words of the Lord's prayer so said, "Our Father, I have forgotten the prayer, but you surely know it by heart".

In 1950 his wife Sabina was also arrested and spent three years in penal labour. When released, she was told (by secret police, posing as former prisoners, who claimed to have attended Richard's funeral in prison) that her husband was dead. A false name had been used in prison records so people could not trace him but, after eight and a half years, he was discovered by a Christian doctor pretending to be a Communist Party member. He was finally released in a general amnesty in 1956. Strictly warned not to preach, he immediately returned to his work in the underground church before being arrested again in 1959.

In 1964, after increased political pressure from Western countries, he was again granted amnesty and released. Fearing that he would continue getting himself arrested, the Norwegian Mission to the Jews negotiated with the Communist authorities, who had begun 'selling' political prisoners. The going rate for political prisoners was \$1,900, but the government demanded \$10,000 for Pastor Wurmbrand. At first he refused to leave his home country, but was convinced by fellow leaders of the underground church to become a voice in the West for the persecuted church. Thus he, Sabina and their son Michael (born in 1941) left in December 1965. Despite death threats from the secret police if he spoke out against the authorities, he devoted the rest of his life to being that voice.

In April 1967, Richard and Sabina formed an interdenominational organization to support the persecuted church in communist countries. Initially called 'Jesus to the Communist World', it expanded to include persecuted Christians in other parts of the world, including Muslim countries, and was renamed 'The Voice of the Martyrs'. The organization provided

relief to families of Christians imprisoned because of their faith. The message, 'Hate the evil systems, but love your persecutors. Love their souls, and try to win them for Christ'.

In 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Wurmbands finally returned to Romania. Pastor Wurmband wrote numerous books, which have been translated into more than 70 languages, and has been called 'the voice of the underground church'. Perhaps his most famous book is *Tortured for Christ*, first published in 1967. It is still well worth reading and quite a challenge to our somewhat cosy existence. Did I see a copy in the church library?

Chris Leighton



Mary Artemisia Lathbury (1841-1913) - the writer of

"Break thou the Bread of Life"

A hymn that was written as a study hymn.

Mary Lathbury was born on August 10, 1841, in Manchester, New York. Her father and her two brothers were Methodist ministers. As a child, she enjoyed reading, writing, and illustrating poems that she wrote herself. She taught art in Vermont and New York schools. She then moved to become the general editor of materials for the

Methodist Sunday Schools, and used her literary activity at the Lake Chautauqua, New York, summer assemblies.

The Chautauqua Lake Sunday School Assembly, now the Chautauqua Institution, was founded in 1874 by two Methodists as an educational experiment in out-of-school vacation learning. The Assembly's ecumenical spirit and programming was successful and broadened almost immediately beyond courses for Sunday school teachers to include academic subjects, music, art, and physical education. The 2024 programme of courses in religion, art, drama and music was very stimulating and it is a delight that what started as an experiment is still busy with education and courses.

For the Bible studies in the Sunday School education class Mary wrote these words, "*Break thou the bread of life.*"

1 Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
as Thou did'st break the loaves beside the sea.
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;
my spirit pants for Thee, O living Word.

2 Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me
as Thou did'st bless the bread by Galilee.
Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall;
and I shall find my peace, my all in all.

The first stanza of the text speaks of Jesus feeding the five thousand by the sea of Galilee especially as it is told in John, with the application in 6:22–59, where Jesus described a "*food that endures to eternal life,*" and he himself was the "*bread of life.*" Lathbury connected this episode with Jesus' status as the living, incarnate Word (Jn. 1:1,14). The second stanza describes a release from bondage. In John 8:31–32, Jesus said, "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (ESV).

These two short verses were considered too short to be a hymn and when The Methodist Hymn-Book (1904) was published, 2 verses written by Alexander Groves, the organist for the Henley Wesleyan Chapel, were included. In different hymnbooks the verses have been rearranged, and added to, wording has been updated and modernised, the tunes have changed. This seems to have been one of the most altered hymns. Yet the thought behind the hymn that Jesus was able to physically feed the many, and to spiritually to feed each one of us, is still the same.

Mary Lathbury said that she became involved with Christian service full-time because God said to her, "*Remember, my child, that you have a gift of weaving fancies into verse and a gift with the pencil of producing visions that come to your heart; consecrate these to Me as thoroughly as you do your inmost spirit*".

Christine Miles

A church noticeboard said: '*Why pray when you can worry?*' – a truth to take notice of!

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