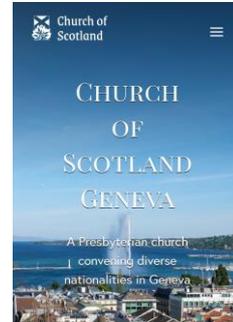




# Newsletter

## March 2024



### LETTER FROM THE MINISTER

As always, warmest and fondest greetings!

The recent interview on WRS – which you may or may not have had the urge to listen to...did give me pause for thought and reflection!

<https://www.worldradio.ch/listen-again/job-ales/>

(February 7th)

To be gently quizzed as to how and why you became a minister -and your thoughts on how it has all worked out after 40 plus years, made for some honest assessment - and many, many reasons for thanksgiving.

I reached the conclusion with Laura, the perceptive interview queen, that for me, being a minister has been the best “job” in the world - reluctant though I had been, as a young man, to respond to the compelling conviction that this was indeed the “job” to which I should dedicate my time, talents, aspirations and dreams.

How different my life would have been - or would have been my life - if I had taken that job in 1972 with Proctor and Gamble, instead of heading off to New College, Edinburgh to study theology, and train for ministry!?

No regrets – only gratitude and wonder at opportunities, immense privileges, wonderful people, astonishing encounters - and the sheer joy of sharing in worship,

preaching the Good News and sharing the lives of countless hundreds of people in their best moments, and in their worst.

So thank you, WRS – for a chance to sharpen the focus, look back, look around...and look forward. This race is not yet run!

I’m sure you will enjoy the latest Newsletter, and catch a sense of the drive and direction that will be shaping the future life of our congregation.

You will know from the Future Focus Reports that the Church of Scotland, Geneva has no desire to drift, wallow or put its feet up. We see opportunities: we see challenges: we see needs – and we know that, with the help, blessing and Spirit of God, there is work to be done...together!

Love as  
ever,  
Laurence



**HOLY WEEK AND EASTER 2024**



**Palm Sunday 24th March – 11-00 a.m. in the Auditoire**

**Monday – Zoom Holy Week Lunchtime Service 12.30 p.m.**

**Tuesday – Zoom Holy Week Lunchtime Service 12.30 p.m.**

**Wednesday- Zoom Holy Week Lunchtime Service 12.30 p.m**

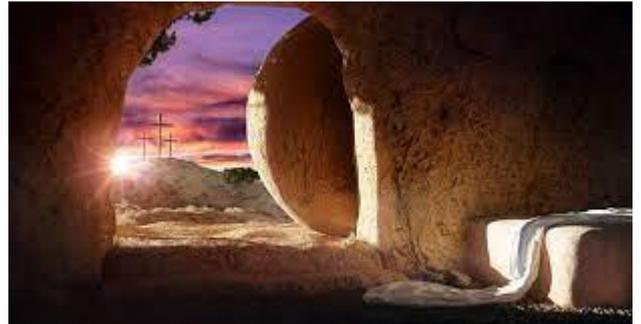
**Thursday – Zoom Holy Week Lunchtime Service 12.30 p.m.**



**Good Friday – 11.00 a.m. Morning Service in the Auditoire.**

**Easter Sunday – Morning Service at 11.00 a.m.**

**Brunch served in the Salle before the service**



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**EASTER BRUNCH**

Join us for our traditional Easter brunch before the service on Sunday 31 March 2024. All welcome from 8.45-10.45 in the Salle. Please sign up to help with catering:

[buhlerchristine@hotmail.com](mailto:buhlerchristine@hotmail.com)



## Future Focus 3: Flying solo!

We have recently been updating our congregational roll, to distinguish more sharply those who are currently members of the congregation from those who simply want to receive this church newsletter. At the last count, and on the most generous definition of “current member”, we have 94 members. (This number may increase.)

Of these, 43 showed up on January 21 for the first of our Future Focus sessions, and 36 on February 11 for the second, under the genial guidance of mission development worker Rob Rawson, who lives in Callander in Scotland but hails originally from Manchester.

In his experience, said Rob, this was an unusually large turnout. The atmosphere in the Salle Théodore de Bèze was electric as, gathered around five tables, we talked energetically about the past, present and future of our congregation.

Our five groups dreamt of a future congregation that would be:

- a dynamic, nurturing community, with growing numbers and a rich church life
- a family-friendly congregation, with people of all ages and actively integrating young people and would offer
- fellowship in spiritual and social activities
- more social gatherings inside and outside the church, and
- active participation in worship (music, prayer, readings and children)

What happens now? In his experience, Rob said, one of two things may happen.

On the one hand, a congregation may fail to follow through on the creative work it did in the two Future Focus sessions, the energy is dissipated, the electricity runs into the ground. Six months or a year later, the congregation is no better off than it was before. It focused on its future, got all excited, and then slumped back into inertia.

On the other hand, a congregation may start to make some at least of its dreams come true, by taking some of the “first steps” it envisaged at the end of Future Focus 2.

We are determined to be this second kind of congregation!

So on Monday March 4, the kirk session decided to hold a *third* Future Focus session.

Like the first two, this will be congregation-led and congregation-driven. But this time we won't have Rob to guide us. We shall have to do our own guiding. We shall have to “fly solo” – and that too will be good for us!

Future Focus 3 will take place on Sunday April 21 in the Salle, as before, after the morning service and a quick, light lunch. (Thank you in advance to the able and willing caterers!)

The kirk session also mandated a small group to think through the structure of the afternoon, so we don't all turn up and then mill around in confusion. As before, we shall work in groups around tables. A few slides may help to remind us where we have got to and where we want to go. There will be a *process*, because we want to go away at the end of the afternoon confident that we have now set wheels in motion that, in different ways, will make a tangible difference to our life together.

We hope to see you there!

*Páraic Réamonn*



## Finance and Action Plan Update - February 2023

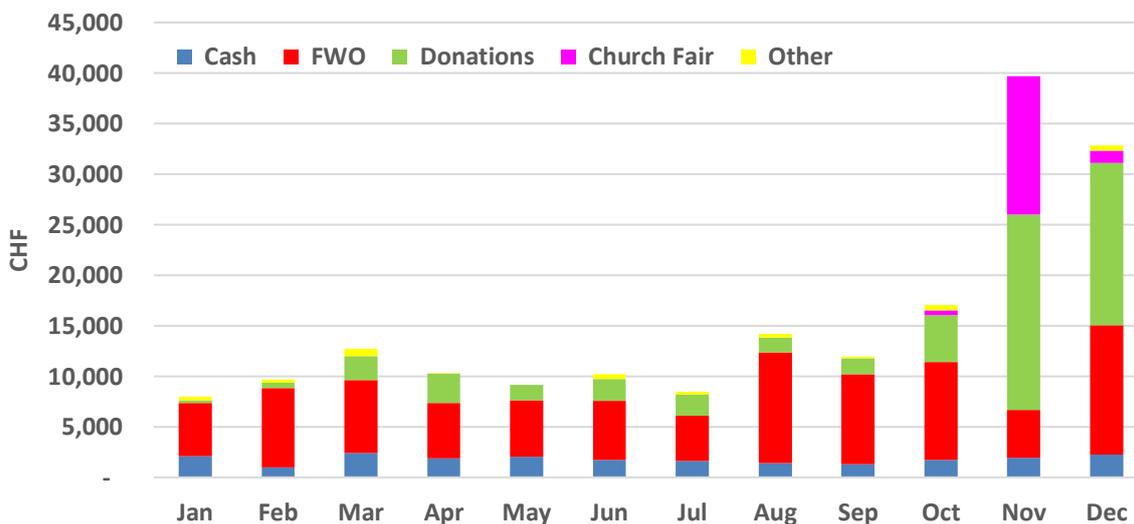
As promised in the same update at the end of November, please read on for an overview of the Church's finances at the end of 2023 and into the first couple of months of 2024. These figures are based on those submitted for the independent examination of the Church's finances in 2023 and should not be considered as definitive until that examination's conclusions have been approved by the Annual Congregational Meeting later this year. Nonetheless, unless something particularly dramatic and unforeseen occurs, they can be considered to give a reasonably accurate impression.

The performance at the end of 2023 itself certainly could be described as dramatic and is something of which the Congregation, as a community, can be justifiably proud.

At the end of August 2023, the Church's situation did not look good and, as many will recall, an alarm was raised. Income levels were falling while expenditure was rising and a deficit was projected in the realm of between CHF 20,000 and CHF 25,000, even allowing for a successful Church Fair (which fortunately did take place). This would have been the sixth deficit over the past decade and quite possibly the largest of that period, overtaking the previous low only a year before in 2022. In short, this represented a serious threat of financial bankruptcy for the Church by around 2030.

Following the alarm in August, an extraordinary meeting of the Congregation in October and an appeal at the same time, a response started to take place. This began modestly in October but then accelerated much more quickly across November and December.

**Church of Scotland Geneva 2023 Income to 31 Dec 23  
(Monthly)**



The chart shows the income level from one month to the next over the course of the year and the "hockey stick" effect during the last two months. This was when a relatively flat line up to that point suddenly accelerated upwards. To meet its budget target, the Church needed an average monthly income of CHF 13,500, which it only ever achieved, by a small amount, in August and October. That trend was reversed by almost CHF 40,000 in November (including CHF 15,000 from the Church Fair) and CHF 32,000 in December. The net worth of the Church by the end of the year had been projected in October to be around CHF 219,000, which would have been the lowest level in real terms ever recorded. Instead it reached CHF 273,000, which was more or less its net worth just before the COVID-19 lockdown period.

So was it all a false alarm? That might be a better question to put to someone who didn't raise it themselves but still, I would claim that it wasn't. In terms of financial trends, it's never an easy call to make since if you flag a perceived,

financial catastrophe too soon, then it won't be taken seriously. Raise it too late, however, and you can have the distinction of being the one to let the finances fall over a cliff. Flippancy aside, however, it was certainly true that the situation at the end of August, which wasn't a whole lot better by October, was certainly on course to register a significant deficit. The combined effect of multiple deficits is to reduce the net worth to within range of bankruptcy. External opinion largely concurred with the estimate that without a change of direction, the Church's life expectancy might not exceed 2030.

You may also remember, that the analysis of the Finance Sub-Committee indicated that the financial health of the Church was a symptom, not a root cause, of an underlying concern. Congregation members were not being any less generous than before in their giving. There were just fewer of us. A period of five years was estimated as a reasonable timeframe in which to raise the alarm, to generate funding for an immediate turnaround, and to launch a recovery plan for the Church, designed to boost its life, expand the Congregation and sustain it in every respect. Fiscal health is just one of the easier ones to measure.

So far, two of those objectives have been achieved. Following the alarm raised by the Minister and others, the Congregation achieved a breakthrough in terms of income by the end of 2023. A recovery plan was also launched. As you'll have heard a few times now, the Church has seen its communications strategy strengthened, both online and offline, outreach has been made to the local community, notably in the hospitality, media and undertaking sectors (a somewhat odd mix, to be sure, but hopefully just the start of a longer list). The Bring-a-Friend Christmas Quiz Night on 12 December in the Salle was a little under-attended but still a fun evening for all who attended and a clear demonstration that if anyone would like to organize an event, it can take place.



Most important so far was probably the set of Future Focus meetings held in early 2024 but these will be reported on at greater length elsewhere.

If you'd like to get involved in the recovery plan in any way, please remember that you can volunteer at: [Church of Scotland - Geneva Congregational Survey \(office.com\)](https://www.churchofscotland-geneva.org.uk/congregational-survey)<sup>1</sup>, e-mail [ntbraunsch@bluemail.ch](mailto:ntbraunsch@bluemail.ch) or [mackenzieje@hotmail.com](mailto:mackenzieje@hotmail.com), or just ask the Minister or your Elder for more details.

So finally, how well are things going in 2024 now? That's a bit hard to say. The income during January and February has not kept up with the budgeted figures but it has been higher than the levels at the same time in 2023. Freewill Offering pledges (<https://churchofscotlandgeneva.ch/congregational-life/church-finance/>) are encouraging and this is the sort of commitment which the Church needs since significant expenditure levels tend to start around March to April each year. A change to 2023 is needed though since relying on one-off generosity, while lifesaving in the short-term, is not the best basis on which to plan for the future, and it would not be right to assume that a reduced Congregation will simply dig a bit more deeply into its pockets each Christmas. The solution rather has to be to stop our Congregation reducing and instead to build it up and that should be the real measure of success. The financial statements provide a good barometer and we need to remember that our balance sheet does reflect our health as a Church in one important regard. 2023 saw an impressive boost. 2024 has started in a modestly encouraging way. The question now is how well we can build it up from here.



Ewart MacKenzie  
Treasurer

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<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ShareFormPage.aspx?id=DQSlkWdsW0yxEjajBLZtrQAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAYCXfnRUM0tSV0FHRVNNMUZTRzc3SkJGRIFDSjJVRY4u&sharetoken=b2qDspNMEuKrFKVZHJJM> is the website address to use if you're reading this in hard copy.

## Mission Partnership News

We continue our support for our two mission partnerships in Nepal and Malawi via financial assistance, musical events and prayerful consideration. We have recently sent remittances to both to help with expenses for the first half of 2024. Here is some news from the two: Graeme and Meena Clugston are now back in Lalgadh, after a prolonged stay in Australia for Graeme's cancer treatment. In a recent e-mail, Graeme said they are in Kathmandu, where the Nepal Leprosy Trust, which is the governing body for Lalgadh, has held its annual meeting. We wish Graeme and Meena God's help with their renewed commitment and look forward to hearing from them and seeing them on Zoom at services.

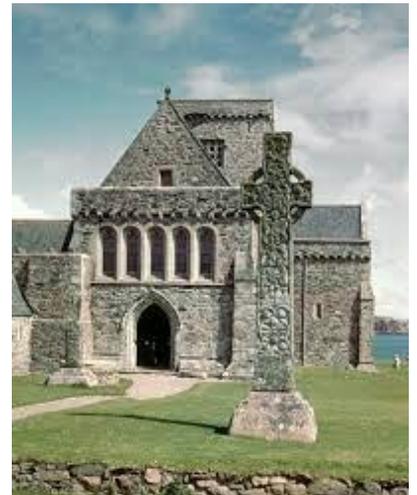
In Ekwendeni, the sports programme goes from strength to strength. The latest news from Shupo is that one of the young women in the netball club, Trisa Nsaku, has been selected as a "shooter" for the national Under 21 team to take part in the preparation for the Youth World Cup 2025 qualifiers in Pretoria in mid-March. If the team is successful, they will go forward to the main competition, to be held in Gibraltar in September 2025. We wish Trisa and all the Ekwendeni team blessings for this important endeavour. For the record, Malawi is currently 7th in the world rankings for netball out of 46 national teams in the World Netball Federation.



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## Pilgrimage trip to Scotland, June 2024

Following the success of our last year's pilgrimage visit to Scotland, Joanne Evans-Boiten, former associate minister in Rotterdam and a member of the International Presbytery, has proposed a second pilgrimage visit, open to people from the whole Presbytery, which we are entitling "From Coast to Coast with Columba and Cuthbert". This will take place between 8th and 16th of June 2024 and will include some of the sites visited last year, but extending the tour to include Scottish border abbeys and the holy island of Lindisfarne, home to St Cuthbert, as well as revisiting Iona and meeting the Warden of Iona Abbey. The journey within Scotland/Northumbria will be by minibus, with the same excellent driver as last year. You are invited to make your own flight arrangements, and otherwise all hotel accommodation (B&B) and coach travel will be included in the price. We still have a few places available on this visit. Anyone who would be interested in taking part is invited to contact Peter Tulloch (tulloch.peter1@gmail.com, +33 642 56 80 12) for more details, by the weekend of 16-17 March.



# Church and Local News

  
**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH**

## LIFE, DEATH AND ETERNITY: LIVING WELL AND DYING WELL FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

A 4-part course on Wednesdays at 14.30 till 16h00 in Holy Trinity church this Lent. Each session will have a break in the middle and will end with a short act of worship.  
 Refreshments will be available.


<https://bit.ly/3SFVp7D>

**Week 1 - Wednesday 28 February**  
Breaking the silence - Canon Daphne Green

**Week 2 - Wednesday 6 March**  
The spirituality of death and dying - Canon Alan Amos

**Week 3 - Wednesday 13 March**  
Physical, Mental and Practical Aspects of Death and Dying - Dr Pierre Laravoire and Mr Mike Gunton

**Week 4 - Wednesday 20 March**  
Nunc Dimittis - Learning to let go - Canon Daphne Green and the Revd Glen Ruffle

Holy Trinity Church, Rue du Mont Blanc 14bis, Geneva

  
**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH**

**ANGLICAN COMMUNION**  
IN OVER 165 COUNTRIES


## Lent Lunches

Join for FELLOWSHIP and FOOD every Tuesday in Lent, 12h15-14h00 as we explore the global Anglican Communion to which we belong

-  20th February: Martha Jarvis  
Archbishop of Canterbury's UN Representative  
Peacebuilding around the world
-  27th February: Revd Michael Rusk  
The Episcopal Church: Anglicans in America
-  5th March: Revd Duncan Dormor, CEO of USPG  
The Future for Global mission in the Anglican Communion (joining us by Zoom)
-  12th March: Masiwa Gunda, World Council of Churches, Anglicans in Zimbabwe
-  19th March  
Revd Glen Ruffle, Anglican work at the UN

Said service of Holy Communion in church at 12h15  
 Soup, Bread & Cheese lunch in the hall at 12h45



A grateful member of the congregation asked me to thank our youngest usher for his smiling welcome and efficiency with hymn books and orders of service.

Thanks Jaco!

## SOUFFLE DE PRINTEMPS



**AOA**  
Amis de l'orgue - Auditeurs de Calvin

10<sup>ème</sup> festival d'orgue 2024 à l'Auditoire de Calvin

SAMEDI 13 AVRIL À 18H

**Duo W**  
Vincent Thévenaz, orgue  
Vincent Barras, stamophone  
Mozart, Fauré, Queen

SAMEDI 20 AVRIL À 18H

**Paul Goussot**  
Ciné-concert avec orgue  
L'Aurore film de F.W. Murnau

SAMEDI 27 AVRIL À 18H

**Zeltzin Perez**  
**Stefanie Scheuner**  
**Elisabeth Hubmann**  
Orgue, clavier, piano  
Piazzolla, Lygett, Händel

SAMEDI 04 MAI À 18H

**Els Biesemans**  
Bach, avant et après  
Bach, Tunder, Böhm



Avec le soutien de **FONDATION LECLERCQ**

**Auditoire de Calvin**  
1 Place de la Tacconnerie, Genève  
(à côté de la cathédrale St. Pierre)

Toute information utile sous  
[www.aoa-calvin.ch](http://www.aoa-calvin.ch)

Entrée libre - collecte



**ISC GENEVA**

*The joy of the Lord is (y)our strength*  
*Nehemiah 8:10*

Have you wanted to spend time with God and others to deepen your faith and joy in the Lord? If so perhaps this weekend is for you.

The Ignatian Spirituality Centre in Geneva, invites you to come away from your busy schedules for a time of silence, prayer and reflection in the beautiful surroundings of St Maurice.

During this weekend you will spend time in silence, be accompanied by your personal Spiritual Accompanier/Director and be together in a prayerful presence with your fellow retreatants.

The weekend offers various opportunities of encountering God through silent personal and communal prayer.

From Friday, **12 April 2024** 18.30 CET to Sunday, **14 April 2024**, at 16:00 CET

**Hôtellerie Franciscaine**  
Rue Antoine de Quartéry 1, 1890 Saint-Maurice

Recommended donation: **CHF 320**  
to cover accommodation, meals & refreshments

For more information or to register visit our website: [www.isc-geneva.ch](http://www.isc-geneva.ch)

## New Church of Scotland Learning Platform

Jesus calls us now to follow him, just as he did with his first disciples. All of us following Jesus – activating our faith, living out all that God teaches and grows in us. Following Jesus together – encouraging each other to follow with faith and courage.

Church of Scotland Learning is designed to support learning together across the Church.

On our Church of Scotland Learning platform you will find a growing variety of materials for us all to grow in faith, discipleship and mission. You don't need to be an expert, and no one is going to assess you.

The topics offered include Exploring Discipleship, Spiritual Gifts, New Ways of Being Church... Maybe you've not done anything like this before or for a while.

This is for you!

Register and explore [Church of Scotland Learning](#)

You can read more about the learning platform on the Church of Scotland website:

## [New courses to support leadership and help faith to flourish added to Church of Scotland Learning | The Church of Scotland](#)

### **Baptism**

On February 25th Laurence was a very proud and emotional grandpa as he baptised our youngest grandchild Dáithí James Míceál Gibney- who behaved impeccably.



And finally, Micheal Bruce noticed this in the Times:

Calvin Coolidge, whose centenary of being elected US president falls this year, was noted for not using ten words where one would do.

He once returned from church to be asked by his wife what the sermon had been about. "Sin," he said. "But what did the preacher say about it?" his wife went on.

Coolidge paused, then said: "He was against it."



# Local Church Review

## St Andrew's Scots Kirk, Sri Lanka.



Our congregation is one of 12 in the International Presbytery of the Church of Scotland – 10 in Europe (outside the UK), one in Bermuda, and St Andrew's Scots Kirk, Colombo, in Sri Lanka. Every five years or so, the presbytery thinks it's time one of these congregations was "looked at and seen to".

We Presbyterians love our technical terms, and the technical term here is "Local Church Review". Our own congregation was last reviewed in November 2022. This Spring it was the turn of St Andrew's Scots Kirk.

St Andrew's Scots Kirk opened for worship in 1842. As the name suggests, its original role was to serve the Scottish colonial community. At the beginning of the 20th century, it moved to its present location (77 Galle Road, Kollupitiya, Colombo), where an iconic church was constructed.

Since SASK became part of the International Presbytery in 2008, it has had three reviews: one in 2013, towards the end of a 10-year ministry by John Purves; a second in 2018, when the late Jim Sharp was interim moderator; and the third, over the course of a week last month.

I led a team of three, all from our congregation. The others were Jane Broere and Christine Colliar. But we were accompanied by our spouses, Han, Ian, and Vivien, and the folk in Colombo didn't make distinctions. All of us were welcome to take part in any of the extensive programme. It was particularly helpful to have Han, convener of our own finance committee, in conversations with the congregation's treasurer and auditor.

On February 13, Christine and Ian attended the Tuesday lunch-time service, which caters for those who work in offices and other high-rise buildings that surround the church. A week later, Vivien and I did the same. In between, we all spent a memorable week seeing the work of the congregation, meeting with elders and other leaders, having tea with Rev Roshan and Rebecca Mendis, and sharing in the main service of worship at 9.30 am on Sunday.

In the years since independence, many Scots left Sri Lanka, and the congregation gradually became what it is today: a predominantly indigenous congregation, including both Sinhalese and Tamils, that sees itself as international and, while Reformed and Presbyterian in conviction and style, open to Christians of all traditions.

St Andrew's is the only congregation in our presbytery based in the Global South, and one from which the rest of us have much to learn. It is deeply, and passionately, involved in the Christian service to the local community in Colombo and beyond. You can read about its many projects and browse its back catalogue of newsletters on its website: [scotskirk.lk](http://scotskirk.lk)

In distant Sri Lanka, we found an exciting congregation full of unusually gifted people, dedicated to serving God and the local community. Not your basic, average, everyday, run-of-the-mill Church of Scotland congregation – but trying to do in its very different context what we are trying to do in ours.

*Páraic Réamonn*



You can read a more full report from Páraic on our website.

## They returned to their country by another road.

Twelve pilgrims from Emmanuel Episcopal church in Geneva arrived in Jerusalem at the beginning of October, 2023. We were part of the group, which was led by Jerusalem Peacebuilders. As pilgrims, we were a little nervous to be in the Holy Land, where all the Bible stories took place, and where Jesus walked among us. We all had our own hopes and expectations for the twelve days together in Jerusalem, then Tiberias in Galilee, and back to Jerusalem to walk the way of the cross.

Our introductory talk was based on Matthew 2:12 'Then they returned to their country by another road', because our guide knew we would be changed by our experience and go back a different spiritual road. Little did we know that, like the wise men, we would take a different physical road also.

Our hotel was across from the Old City, full of narrow streets and filled with souks. We were there doing Sukkot - the festival of the tents - and Jewish people were constantly arriving to go to the Western Wall to meet with family, to pray together, to celebrate. There was a joyous, party atmosphere, yet with Israeli soldiers on every street corner watching everyone as they passed. The streets have changed over the centuries, but we could still imagine Jesus and his family arriving in a similar festive mood for Passover, which we read about in Luke chapter 2, only with Roman soldiers watching everyone.

Our group would go exploring the streets of the old town in the evening, but I had tutorials and Ian and I would explore alone quite late. We got lost the first evening and a Jewish man stopped and asked where we were going. We wanted to see the Western Wall, which the group had seen from a vantage point earlier that evening. 'Come with me,' he said. 'But we're not Jews,' we answered, afraid we were going to offend him. 'We don't have head coverings. Are we even allowed to go?' 'Allowed?' Our rescuer said, 'The wall is for everyone, it's open for prayer 24\*7' And he took us through airport style security checks straight to the wall, me to the women's part and Ian, now with kippah, to the men's. Surrounded by Orthodox Jews, praying, celebrating, lots of children, and toddlers in pushchairs, it was a real family festival going on into the small hours.



The Mount of Olives was the most memorable place for Ian. We had an outdoor service amongst the olive trees looking over the valley to Jerusalem, and could hear the praying coming from the Western Wall. Our guide reminded us that Jesus would regularly walk from Bethany to Jerusalem, and stop here to rest and teach and pray. We know that Jesus wept over Jerusalem from this spot - see Luke 19. We looked over the Kidron Valley and the Jewish graves to the Muslim graves under the old wall of Jerusalem, and between these the Christian presence of St Stephen's church. Then we walked down, as Jesus would have, to the Garden of Gethsemane. One olive tree there was over 2,000 years old. The trees share their roots, the oldest nurturing the youngest over

centuries - so much to learn from this!

While based in Jerusalem, we visited Bethlehem and the church built around the cave where some people claim Jesus was born. This seemed more like a tourist attraction. We had a hope-filled meeting over lunch with a young woman who went through the mentoring programme of Jerusalem Peacebuilders. She told us of her work as a Palestinian Christian in the West Bank, of the troubles she faces daily, yet of the future she hopes for with the Jewish young people she worked with every year as part of the programme.

The most memorable place for me was the Judean desert and our walk there to St. George's Greek Orthodox monastery. We saw the valley of the Wadi Qelt which is thought to be the valley of the shadow of death from psalm 23. We prayed in the cave where Elijah was fed by ravens - see 1 Kings 17. What touched me most though was talking with the Bedouin who transported tourists up and down to the monastery on their donkeys. They are the outsiders to both Palestinians and Israelis, live in shacks and eke out a living by selling trinkets to tourists. Jesus went into the Judean desert to be alone, to get close to God in the miles of sandy rock. He would surely also have met groups of wandering nomads, caring for flocks, and marginalised by most of society.



On 7th October we were gathering in the hotel foyer to drive north to Tiberias by Lake Galilee when a siren sounded. Everyone carried on as normal, it must be a test, just like Switzerland. As we headed north, we saw many police and military vehicles heading south, blue lights flashing, and roadblocks. 'They're playing games,' our Palestinian driver said. But, we could see a vapour trail in the sky, and it wasn't from an aeroplane, and driver and guide started receiving a stream of messages, cars were parked under bridges, and there were armed roadblocks. Ian checked the Jerusalem Post website and learned what was unfolding in Gaza. Our fellow pilgrims' phones started pinging. We stopped for lunch. When we got back on the bus, our son pinged from Cambridge, 'Why haven't you answered, the BBC website is going crazy, are you ok?' We were. Our guide was keen to keep to the itinerary as long as possible and we arrived at our hotel in Tiberias - think Lake Neuchâtel meets Italian riviera. We called Muriel Pearson who is Associate Minister for St Andrew's Church of Scotland in Jerusalem and Tiberias. She came and talked to the group. 'I won't have a congregation tomorrow as everyone has been told to stay at home...if you hear any planes they will be military because there are no airports near here.' When everyone was in bed we slipped into the Sea of Galilee and swam with the non-stop growl of military planes overhead, all headed in the same direction: south.

The following day we went to church in Nazareth. This was an incredibly moving bilingual service. The minister gave the sermon in Arabic then started from the beginning in English! We sang the hymns together, some singing English, some Arabic – the hymnbook was printed especially to accommodate simultaneous bilingual praise. We visited a site under the Convent of the Sisters of Nazareth which some people think was Joseph's house, where Jesus grew up. There was a first century street, where we could imagine Jesus running as a little boy.

The next morning we convened as a group. People were getting scared. One couple had already left for home, EasyJet had suspended flights to Geneva, some of the borders were closed to Palestinians, and there was talk of them closing completely should Israel invade Gaza. We asked our guide his opinion, should we continue as planned and head back to Jerusalem the following day?

'You'd be mad, your hotel is in occupied East Jerusalem, most of you have American passports and the police are fining everyone they see on the streets. A rocket landed 50m from my house in Bethlehem,' our guide said. 'My family is okay', he added nonchalantly. It was decided. We would leave that day for Amman. We were given one hour to book our flights out of Amman, a prerequisite for getting into the country. Our tour guide had arranged for our coach to drive to the border, and a Jordanian tourist company would send a coach with a guide from Amman to meet us on the Jordanian side, facilitate our visas and take us to a hotel in Amman. With flights booked, we were given 12 minutes to pack and get on the bus. Borders were closing, we were told. We need to go now. Bags to be packed, bills to be paid, half-written postcards left at reception for posting, we got on our bus and headed to the border. The queue was long and there were many pony-tailed teenage girls in military fatigues carrying machine guns in their exquisitely manicured hands. At the Israeli side we left our guide, his West Bank visa did not permit him to enter such a secure area. Our Palestinian driver lived in Jerusalem, with a different status, and so was able to take us to no-man's land. It took us two and half hours to clear both sides of the border. 'No photos,' we were told, by a Jordanian, holding his wrists together like he was wearing invisible handcuffs.

The Jordanian guide who met us hugged me. He was genuinely concerned for our well-being and understood the turbulent emotions we were experiencing. On the bus, he told us some of Jordan's history, including the first wave of Palestinian refugees arriving in 1948 after the Arab-Israeli war. Later, our taxi driver to the airport told us that he was Palestinian, the son of some of those refugees. His heart is still in Palestine, though he has never lived there.

Our pilgrimage, cut short by the devastating violence from Hamas and the devastating war which has resulted, took us in unimaginable directions. We glimpsed what life is like for Orthodox Jews, American Jewish settlers, Palestinian Christians, Muslim Palestinians, and Arab Bedouin. It was only a glimpse though, into a very complicated and deeply hurting situation. Like Jesus, we can weep over Jerusalem. And pray.

Christine Colliar

Notes: Jerusalem Peacebuilders: <https://www.jerusalempeacebuilders.org>

Muriel Pearson's blog about her ministry in Israel: <https://murielpearson.com/about-2/>

