

# the Journal

Baptist Union Retreat Group

Autumn 2012

## STONES OF HELP

*There is a long history of stones large and small being used to commemorate historical events and as a reminder not to forget. Here Ed Thackeray explores some ways in which stones can be used by Christians today*

One relatively new Christian was puzzled when the congregation was called upon to sing the hymn *Come, thou fount of every blessing*. At the end of the service he tackled the minister, 'What is my Ebenezer and how do I raise it?' He is not alone. Over the years many others have asked the same question about Robert Robinson's 1758 hymn.

I notice that the hymn was not included in *Baptist Praise and Worship* and where it is found in modern hymn books the words of the second verse have been altered. Ebenezer, evidently, is no longer a problem.

The answer to the question, 'What is my Ebenezer?' is to be found in 1 Samuel 7. There we read how the Israelites, who were being attacked by the Philistines, came to Samuel and pleaded with him to pray for God's help. So Samuel offered up a sacrifice and asked God to spare the Israelites. The Philistines lost the battle and retreated back home. 'There Samuel took a stone and set it up as a monument between Mizpah and Jeshanah, naming it Eben-ezer. "This is a witness," he said, "that the Lord has helped us."

Ebenezer literally means 'stone of help'. In Robinson's hymn, after raising his Ebenezer, he continues 'Hither by thy

***Here I raise my Ebenezer,  
Hither by Thy help I come,  
And I hope, by Thy good measure,  
Safely to arrive at home.***

help I come'. Many Non-conformist churches, including

Baptist churches, bear the name Ebenezer, presumably suggesting that inside the building people will be able to discover God's help and strength.

Today memorial stones are common-place. As well as in graveyards engraved stones are often set into the walls of buildings to commemorate those who have laid the foundations and contributed to the cost of the edifice. In my



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[www.burg.org.uk](http://www.burg.org.uk)

The Baptist Union Retreat Group is a Founder Member of the Retreat Association.

*All views and opinions expressed in this Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of BURG or of the members of the Committee.*

# Group IGR

A Group Individually  
Guided Retreat

will be held

at

## Holland House



Monday 3rd  
to

Thursday 6th  
December.

The cost will be  
£275-£290  
depending on how many  
decide  
to come.

This covers full board  
plus times with a  
Spiritual Companion /  
Director  
in beautiful  
Surroundings.

For more information  
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hometown we recently placed such a stone into a prominent building in memory of a local hero of the Second World War.

Of course most town and villages in the UK have war memorials erected to remember the fallen and the tragedies of war. But when did we last hear of one erected to signify that God's help had been received?

Sometimes pebbles or stones are used in worship. During a church festival we designed a prayer corner where people could make their private devotions. In a bowl was a collection of washed and rounded pebbles from the beach. People were invited to hold a pebble in their hand as they prayed and afterwards to place it in another bowl, filled with water, which was placed in front of a wooden cross.

Similarly pebbles are sometimes placed before a cross or other Christian symbol to represent burdens or sins brought to Christ.

When my mother died we buried her ashes in a special place. Each family member present placed a stone in the ground alongside them and we laid others with them to represent her grandchildren who couldn't be there. These were stones of remembrance I suppose.

It is the tradition of one American Indian tribe, whenever there is a problem to solve, to carry a stone with them. The heavier the stone is the more they will be reminded of the urgency to solve the problem. They will only throw it away when the problem is no more.

### **Reminder of a problem to be solved**

It might also be good to carry a stone around as a reminder of someone or something to pray for. The heavier the stone the stronger the reminder. I've never tried it but it could be an interesting experiment, better than tying a knot in my handkerchief.

It could be my own little Ebenezer not erected in some prominent place but pulled out from my pocket with my keys or small change. It could be a reminder each time I open the door of my house to thank God for home and family and for warmth and security and perhaps also to pray for the homeless. It could be a prompt to thank God for the riches of his creation and the gift of his Son when I hold it along with the coins I'm about to spend in the supermarket. It could also prompt me to think of fair-trade and pray for exploited workers in other places.

Perhaps it's not a Baptist thing, too much like counting rosary beads but I might give it a try. There are plenty of pebbles on the beach. In the future there may well have to be one less.



## NOTES FROM A QUIET DAY (1)

# A Pilgrim Day' in Devon

The South West Baptist Association held one of its two Annual Quiet Days at The Mill House, near Sampford Peverell in the heart of the Devon countryside recently. Organised by Rev'd Elsie Howell, the day (10 am – 4 pm) was attended by more than 20 people.

I had the pleasure of leading this day in an upper room in a beautiful secluded farmhouse, with quiet gardens surrounding it. Although the weather was very unsettled, we had a few good dry spells which allowed people to make a **Meditation on the Move** 'meditation on the move', treading slowly along a labyrinth (skilfully marked out with rope and tent-pegs by Keith my husband!), forming a 36' diameter winding path.

The idea was to carry a text in the heart, and to see the twists and turns of life and faith, spending time in the heart of the labyrinth beside an ever-burning flame. The candle wonderfully stayed alight in its lantern for the whole day, despite wind and rain-storms, reminding us of Jesus, Light of the World.

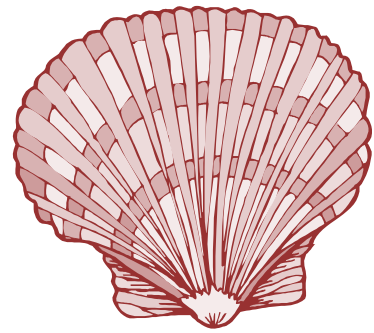
The theme was to contemplate the unforced rhythms of God's grace, and with music and poetry to relax into times of silence, follow Christ's invitation to take a walk with him, **Contemplating the rhythms of God's Grace** work with him, watch how he is at work in the world. Current newspaper items and charity brochures helped focus thought around the good that is happening in the world, inviting us to see what God is doing, and get involved alongside.

The pilgrim way was decorated with scallop-shells, and each person was invited to claim one of the shells as a reminder of the journey to the still space at the centre, towards Christ, the Light of the World.

We enjoyed Communion together, and a light lunch, with coffee, tea and cakes at intervals – food for body and soul!

The next SWBA Quiet Day will be in January – probably at Abbey House, Glastonbury. Why not try to come along?

*Heather Andrews*



## IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

God of all wisdom  
remind us  
that true worshippers  
come  
to learn from you  
to listen to you  
to become one  
with you  
in spirit and truth.

Remind us  
that we need  
to be patient  
waiting quietly  
emptying our minds  
of all that would  
distract  
preparing ourselves  
to welcome you  
as you come close  
to us.

Remind us too  
that after worship  
there is  
the sending  
the mission  
the going  
in spirit and truth  
as your people  
back  
into  
the world.

**Southwell Baptist Church**  
On Saturday 3 November

a  
**QUIET DAY**

based on Psalm 139,  
led by David Ardron, is planned at Southwell Baptist  
Church, Nottinghamshire.  
Email [david\\_ardron@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:david_ardron@yahoo.co.uk) for details.

## NOTES FROM A QUIET DAY (2)

# A Eucharistic Quiet Day

When some friends from France came to stay with us for the first time they were surprised to find that we could cook meals that were tasty and nutritious. They considered themselves to be the experts at good cuisine and we Brits to be hopeless. However there are differences between the two cultures. It is said we eat to live and that the French live to eat. Well they do still have a two-hour lunch break. Meals are not to be rushed but to be savoured. This I came to realise when Dorothy and I were invited to a special family celebration in the north of France. Aperitifs were served from 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We eventually sat down at table at 7 o'clock and left at midnight.

The meal was several courses long. We didn't overeat, but lingered over each savouring and appreciating what was before us. There were long breaks between courses for conversation, for speaking and listening, for interaction with others. It was all civilised and I can still remember details of the occasion some twenty years later.

In France the table still has a prominent place, a central position, so important is the shared family meal. Some say it is spiritual, a mass, a communion service, a left-over in a largely secular society. Compare this with some of our modern British eating habits which are so often casual and solitary in front of the television set.

All this I recalled at a recent quiet day, or rather a quiet morning, which was conducted as an extended eucharist. We started with a time of quiet preparation. The scene was set by listening to Ann Lewin's 'Prayer is like watching for the kingfisher. All we can do is to be where he is likely to appear and to wait.'

**God is not to be rushed** (*Candles and Kingfishers*) Waiting is not popular in our instant society where everything is required yesterday. But God is not to be rushed and the in the realm of the Spirit we must learn patience.

So we took our time. A prayer of invocation helped us draw nearer to God but there was no rushing on: more waiting, anticipating, listening, sensing the nearness of God. There is something very special about being in a group where everyone is quiet together before God.

And then an opportunity to open ourselves to God, to confess our sin, to acknowledge our shortcomings, to seek forgiveness and to be reassured of his forgiving love. Again we took time over this, participants moving to different points in the building or even strolling outside.

Then a reading from the the Wisdom of Solomon (Apocrypha):

*Who can learn the counsel of God, or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is*



### FORGIVE US LORD

Lord,  
forgive us  
when we try to make  
you king  
of our ideas and plans;  
when we use your name  
to get our own way.

Forgive us  
for believing  
we know better  
than you  
for thinking  
that what was right  
for the Church  
yesterday  
is how it always  
must be.

Before we speak,  
in your name,  
before we act,  
in your name,  
before we claim your  
authority  
in anything,  
teach us to go with you  
into a quiet place  
to be still,  
to listen  
to learn,  
to understand  
your will  
for our lives  
for the Church and  
for the world.

*worthless, and our designs are likely; for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent you holy spirit from on high.*

(Wisdom 9:13-17)

This was followed by a responsorial psalm, a reading from one of epistles and a gospel reading - all from the lectionary set for the day. Nothing was rushed. No sermon was preached. Time was taken to read through the passages again and to meditate over them seeking God's wisdom and understanding.

At lunchtime we came to the table. Grace was said and intercessory prayers offered. The meal, which we had all contributed to, was relaxed. There was laughter and conversation, quietness and thoughtfulness.

And while we were eating, the leader took bread, gave thanks and broke it and offered it to us around the table. He ***We ate, remembered and were quiet*** reminded us that Jesus told his disciples: 'Take, eat this is my body.' We ate and remembered and were quiet as we thought of the disciples in the upper room.

And after lunch, after we had eaten, he took the cup, gave thanks and passed it around the table. 'Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins...' And we drank and remembered and were quiet.

Then there were further opportunities for quietness and prayer inside and outside the building before we came together for prayers of blessing and dismissal.

This is a format for a quiet day which I'm sure can be varied both in length and in content. This participant appreciated the opportunity to spend more time over communion than is possible on a Sunday morning in a typical Baptist Church.

*David Pountain*

Almighty God,  
inspire us through your Spirit  
to recognise your truth  
in the Bible.

Open our hearts and mind  
to understand not only written words  
but to comprehend the Word made flesh in Jesus.

Help us to welcome Jesus into our hearts  
so that our lives may speak of his love  
more loudly and eloquently  
than the words of our mouths.

## LENT RETREAT

The 2013 Lent retreat will be at Holland House. Leaders are Geoff Colmer and Alison MacTier.

**Rev'd Geoffrey Colmer** has been the Regional Minister/ Team Leader of the Central Baptist Association since 2004, where he is responsible for pastoral care of churches and ministers. Previously he served churches in Rye and Melton Mowbray.

Geoff was formerly a professional musician, playing bassoon in the English Northern Philharmonia, the orchestra of Opera North. He still plays for pleasure and performs as part of Horizon Ensemble. He is interested in the relationship of faith to the arts.

Geoff has been involved in the formation of an Order for Baptist Ministry, and moderates the Core Group. He is married to Cazz, a primary school teacher, and they have two sons. They live in Milton Keynes, 'the world's best new city'. Geoff blogs at 'Wonder and Wondering'.

**Alison MacTier** is Director of the Retreat Association. She is a trained spiritual director and leads regular quiet days. Alison worked as an editor in book publishing before transferring her skills to the Charity Sector. She worked in communications at Bible Lands before taking up her role with the Retreat Association in 2008. Her interests include tennis, walking, music and photography.

They have chosen the title: **"Songs in the Key of Life – how music can express different experiences in our journey of faith."**

See: [www.burg.org.uk](http://www.burg.org.uk) contact Gill Roberts for further information. Address page 2

# MUKLISTO

*'Watch your language' is not so much about blasphemy but about political correction and not offending others. This is in the spirit of Christ but there are occasions when it is difficult to dispense with potent Biblical imagery.*

A few weeks ago, on the BBC's Sunday Programme, Professor John Hull, spoke about some of the language we use in Church. He is blind and pointed out how blindness is often equated with stubbornness and darkness with evil and sin. For Christians Jesus is all that is good for he is the light of the world and he tells his disciples not to hide their light but to make sure that it seen by all.

I found this interesting because our son and daughter-in-law are both blind and have been so for most of their lives. They quite happily talk about going to town to 'see' what is in the shops. They 'watch' a television programme and they commonly use 'see' in the sense of perceiving and comprehending. Our daughter-in-law is disappointed not to have seen her daughter in the way that most mothers see their children and feels disadvantaged.

However the Bible uses darkness and light, blindness and sight to express spiritual realities. The expressions are there and we can't get away from them.

I appreciate that we have to be sensitive in the way we use language. In future I shall be careful not to offend but it is going to be difficult to avoid talking about light and dark just because they are such potent images.

When I visited what is now DR Congo some years ago, the ladies of Kitega Baptist Church in Kinshasa presented me with a shirt with Lingala words printed upon it: 'Muklisto adjali muinda' - 'Every Christian is a light or lamp.' Alongside the words was a picture of a Bible and a picture of a hurricane lamp. In a country where a regular electricity supply is a rarity the image of a hurricane lamp, shining in the darkness of the night, speaks eloquently of the Gospel good news bringing life and light and hope into their world.

DEP

*The shirt presented by the ladies of Kitega Baptist Church, Kinshasa*

## BEACONS OF HOPE

Living God  
light of the world  
we praise you  
we worship you;  
you dispel  
the darkness of trouble  
you give life  
and joy  
and guidance;  
even though powerful  
forces threaten  
and destroy,  
with you  
there is no reason  
to tremble or  
to fear.

Lord  
stand with us now,  
stand with Christians  
today,  
wherever they are  
in the world  
encourage us  
enable us  
to shine like lamps  
guiding beacons of hope  
for people living in  
the darkness  
of fear.

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*The Editor welcomes contributions, related to the retreat movement, in the form of articles, reports, prayers and poems but cannot always guarantee to include them.*

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