

The Country Link



Kelso
Country
Churches

~~~~~ **March/April, 2024**

Dear Friends,

It is wonderful to see Spring flowers breaking forth in all their colours out of the ground and I have even noticed some lambs in the fields already. There are signs of new life everywhere, and of course at Easter we celebrate new life. We also however celebrate Good Friday, and Jesus dying in agony on the Cross, having been betrayed and denied and tortured; sadly around the world there is so much pain as well, not least in the Holy Land. As some of you are aware, I spent several years working in Israel and Palestine, and I thought it might be of some interest to know what Easter in the Holy Land was like for me:



## Palm Sunday

We held our service at the Scottish Church in Tiberias on Sunday evenings, so in the morning I worshipped in the Anglican congregation in Nazareth. On Palm Sunday the congregation joined with other denominations in a procession through the streets of Nazareth. The scout band led the way, the young men and woman playing pipes (Yes, Arab bagpipes!) and drums. We followed behind waving palm branches. It takes well over an hour, but we finally come to the church where we hold a shortened service, followed by a welcome lunch.

## Maundy Thursday

The journey from Tiberias to Jerusalem takes 3 hours along the Jordan Valley, before a steep climb from Jericho to Jerusalem. The Maundy Thursday service was at the Lutheran church in the heart of the maze-like Old City. As Jesus washed the disciples' feet, so

the feet of some of the Arab parishioners are washed. It is always a humbling experience. Remembering the Last Supper, when Jesus and his friends shared a Passover meal, so we celebrated communion. It finishes with the peace, which is always meaningful since we came from different denominations and different nationalities, though the majority were Palestinian Christians. After the benediction, some of the congregation processed through the narrow lanes of the Old City to Gethsemane, where some ancient olive trees still grow – some date them to Jesus’ time. We sang various hymns as we go, and at Gethsemane remembered how Jesus is betrayed by a kiss from Judas, deserted by his friends and denied by Peter. It is a sombre end to the day.

### Good Friday

An early start as we had to be at the Via Dolorosa for 6 o’clock in the morning, when the Protestant churches walked the way of the Cross. Other denomination had their ‘slots’ later in the morning. I stayed overnight with friends in East Jerusalem, and as we entered the Old City we were stopped by soldiers, who questioned why we are out so early. After some time we were allowed to go through the Damascus gate and into the Old City. Dawn was breaking when we meet with the others and proceeded to walk along the way of the Cross, stopping for prayer and meditation 14 times as we remembered how Jesus carried the cross to Golgotha. There is a cross, and we would take turns to carry it, though it is heavy and awkward. More people join us on the way, having been delayed by army checkpoints. It takes us three hours, but finally we reach the Holy Sepulchre Church, traditionally the site of Calvary. There is a breakfast nearby, then we say our goodbyes, as I have to drive back to Tiberias, where we hold a service in the afternoon. There is another army checkpoint on the way back. I have been strip-searched before, and on two occasions my car was ‘strip-searched’ too, but on this occasion I smile at the soldier and wish them ‘Shabbat Shalom’, the traditional greeting for the Jewish Sabbath, and that seems to do the trick. When I reach Tiberias, some people are camping by the lakeside, having barbecues, while I make my

way to the small church by the lakeshore, where a small group of us gather.

### Holy Saturday

A day for me to recover, but for the Arab Christians, it is a day to visit the tombs of loved ones in graveyards.

### Easter Day

We held a dawn service on top of a turret in the extensive gardens of the Scots Hotel in Tiberias overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The turret is a remnant of the old Ottoman wall that used to surround the town. I would get up about 5am and walk through silent streets. Everything is dark, but there is the strong scent of the flowers. It is easy to imagine Mary Magdalene coming to the tomb early in the morning with the spices to anoint Jesus but finding the rock blocking its entrance rolled away. Several people join me and as we share communion, the sun starts to climb above the Golan Heights, making the water on the Lake glimmer with reds and oranges. It is a special moment. We shared breakfast afterwards. Sunday is a normal working day in Israel, so our service was always in the evening. There was only a small congregation, but for Easter people travelled from all over the Galilee, and some pilgrims visiting Tiberias join us, as the cry goes out yet again,

**The Lord is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

Our services in Stichill and Makerstoun may be different, but do come along and join in. You will be very welcome.

Happy Easter

*Colin*

## *Preaching Plan for March/April*

**Weekly services start at 10.30am unless otherwise stated.**

### **March**

|                  |              |                                        |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| 3rd              | Makerstoun   | Jim Smith                              |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | Stichill     | Sophia Duncan                          |
| 17th             | Makerstoun   | Charles Orr                            |
| 24 <sup>th</sup> | Stichill     | <b>Palm Sunday</b> Fran Selkirk        |
| 29 <sup>th</sup> | Stichill     | <b>at 7pm Good Friday</b> Worship Team |
| 31 <sup>st</sup> | Ednam 9.30am | <b>Easter Sunday</b> Kelso North 11am  |

### **April**

|                  |            |                                      |
|------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| 7 <sup>th</sup>  | Makerstoun | <b>Communion</b> Rev. Colin Johnston |
| 14 <sup>th</sup> | Stichill   | Caron Young                          |
| 21 <sup>st</sup> | Makerstoun | Fran Selkirk                         |
| 28 <sup>th</sup> | Stichill   | Jim Smith                            |



*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.*

## *Parish News and Updates*

As Easter approaches, we can look forward to longer daylight and watch signs of new life burgeoning all around us and it lifts our spirits.

Worship in our two churches continues as each season in the church calendar is acknowledged and celebrated.

Two of our much loved and respected preachers who have taken our services for several years have had to bow out due to illness. They are Elizabeth Findlay and Rev. John Shields and we send our good wishes and prayers to them both.

This has resulted in the Worship Team stepping in to cover these services and we are blessed to have Jim Smith, Sophia Duncan and Charles Orr who are willing to lead worship at fairly short notice.

We are also blessed to welcome another preacher into our church family. Caron Young has recently moved to Makerstoun and on chatting over coffee and cake after a service there, we were delighted to learn that she does pulpit supply occasionally and was willing to help out in the Country Churches too. **Praise the Lord!**

The winter months take their toll too as we get older and Jim Fleming, senior elder and stalwart of Makerstoun Kirk, has been in poor health at home and now in hospital. Lilian is a constant support to him and he has had several visits from his many friends and family.

Joan Duncan has also been unwell for a few months and we wish her a good recovery.

Kathy Wilkie is improving after her fall and is walking more easily now.

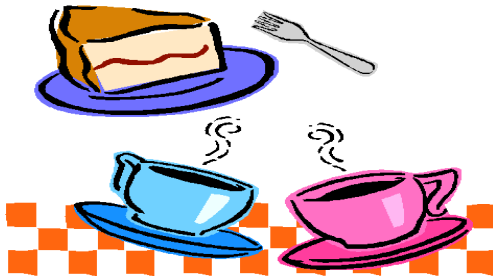
Our good wishes and prayers go out to all those who are no longer able to attend church through ill health.

Stichill Church Hall

# COFFEE MORNING

Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March

10am - 12noon



Entry £5                      children free

Sales table and Raffle

Proceeds will go to the Church of Scotland  
Guild Projects

Come and enjoy coffee/tea and home bakes with  
friends, old and new

## *A Cautionary Tale from Hume's Past*

Hume burial ground lies under the shadow of Hume Castle and is one of the most peaceful and beautiful of grave yards.

It is difficult to believe that anything untoward could have happened there. However, according to an article printed in the Berwickshire News in January, 1906, the quiet 'God's Acre' received one day the mortal remains of a man who had died in life's prime, leaving a desolate widow and family.



At dead of night, the widow stole to the spot that she might look for the first time on her husband's grave. As she approached, she was appalled to see two men engaged in opening the grave which had just been closed over her beloved husband. With a frenzied impulse, she snatched a spade which lay nearby and brought it with all her strength upon the head of the nearest man. The other miscreant took to his heels, leaped over the low wall, and vanished in the darkness. The poor woman tottered away a few steps and fell down in a dead faint.

When she came to herself, the grey light of morning was stealing through the trees. As she raised herself to her feet, she saw to her amazement that her husband's grave was apparently intact. However, it seemed confirmed by the fact that two men disappeared that same night from the district, and were seen no more. They were the gravedigger and a servant on a neighbouring farm, and it was surmised that, afraid of being recognised, they had fled from the locality.

The full truth only came to light after the lapse of long years when the grave was opened for the plucky woman herself. There lay an un-coffined skeleton only a foot or two beneath the green turf. It was not that of the rightful tenant of the sepulchre, whose coffin was found intact beneath.

A fractured skull showed the cause of death – it was the body snatcher whom the widow had felled. His comrade must have returned, found him dead, and huddled the corpse out of sight, perhaps never noticing the insensible woman.

### **A Footnote to this story**

One of the most notorious resurrectionists in the period was a Dr. Lowry, who lived at a little cottage near Coldingham called Homefield.

He was hand in hand with the city anatomists and with all the “body snatchers” of the district, and his house was made the place of safe deposit for the plunder of the eastern church yards.

When a grave had been successfully rifled, the “corpse” was conveyed to Homefield, which stood near the main road, and passed in through a low window in the gable, still called the “Resurrection Window”. It was concealed in a vault until it could be dispatched to Edinburgh.

Dr. Lowry was long suspected, but nothing definite transpired to connect him with the detested practice until the authorities searched a carrier’s cart, and discovered a dead body packed in a rough box. The doctor was magnanimous enough to come forward and confess himself responsible.

He was tried at Greenlaw and sentenced to imprisonment.

Prisons were curiously conducted in those days, and it is somewhat startling to find that Dr. Lowry put up his sign and carried on his profession from within the very precincts of the jail, where he was undergoing the penalty awarded by law!

My thanks to Jim Smith, Session Clerk and fount of knowledge on this area where he has lived all his life. Jim has compiled many booklets on the four parishes which make up Kelso Country Churches. His latest publication is of the village of Lempitlaw, and he would be happy to supply copies of any of his books at a cost of £10; £5 of which goes to church funds and £5 to cover the cost of printing.



**The World Day of Prayer Worship Service** was held in St Andrew's Church, Kelso on 1<sup>st</sup> March and attended by representatives of all our churches in and around Kelso.

The service had been prepared by the Palestinian Christian Women and was very powerful and poignant. Their theme was from Ephesians 4: 1-7, "*I beg you....bear with one another in love.*"

Three Palestinian women told their stories and each story is a powerful witness to Jesus' call to bear with one another in love.

This is Eleanor's story:

*My skin is wrinkled like the trunk of an olive tree. Like them, I have witnessed many wars and violence.*

*I am a Palestinian Christian – a member of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Holy Land.*



*I come from a deeply rooted old Jerusalem family. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, my great grandfather established St. George's Orthodox Church which enabled Christians living outside the city walls to have a place to worship.*

*That church remained in existence until the catastrophe, or Nakba, of 1948, when 750.000 Palestinians were forced to flee, disperse and become refugees. My family was included. Due to heavy shelling and bombardment, my parents ran for their lives. They took shelter at my mother's cousin's home, hoping to return soon to their original home and St. George's Church. That never happened. Today, my parents' home and St. George's Church have become the Confederation House, an Israeli cultural centre.*

*Prior to fleeing, my parents' Jewish neighbours offered to store the treasures of the church, including icons and precious communion cups. They promised to safeguard my parents' property and belongings until the family's return.*

*and implemented humanitarian aid in development programmes which served all people, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender As my brothers and I were growing up, my parents' remembered their*

*neighbours graciously as they waited for the big day of return. They imagined themselves collecting these sacred treasures and thanking their neighbours for keeping their promise. Sadly, my parents have passed away without realising that dream. And yet, I vividly remember that, despite their suffering, my parents were always thankful and spoke kindly about these Jewish neighbours. My parents taught me how to bear with others in love, always remembering to be grateful for those who do good.*

*As I have gone through life, as a Palestinian Christian living in Jerusalem, I have chosen to be fully engaged with all members of the community at local and global levels. I learned from my parents' example how important it is to stay together with others, even when life is harsh and difficult.*

*My commitment to my community started when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My Arabic teacher engaged me in running errands for her humanitarian work. She was gentle and loving, which helped me grow to value working to make life better for others.*

*Later in life, I designed and implemented humanitarian aid, and social and community projects. These projects served all people, regardless of religion, ethnicity, gender, status or need. I was privileged to help hundreds of women in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to sustain their families as breadwinners. Many of these projects have grown and spread to other areas, positively impacting many lives.*

*Life has not been easy. I have setbacks, obstacles and even threats. I firmly believe that our community can be strong together if there is genuine love, understanding, gentleness, humility and patience. Since my childhood, I have known that life is fragile, and peace is not a guarantee. I could have left the country of my roots, but I made the choice to stay and live out Jesus' command to love others as God has loved us.*

The symbol of an olive tree is used throughout the service which represents the three generations through the trunk, branches and leaves of the olive tree.

## Useful Contacts

**Website:** [www.kelsocountrychurches.org.uk](http://www.kelsocountrychurches.org.uk)

**Church of Scotland Charity No. SC000958**

### *Prayer for Holy Saturday*

On Holy Saturday, everything stopped. It was the Sabbath day; Jesus' body lay in the tomb. The disciples scattered and hid. The world held its breath:

God of all things, we know that around the world there are so many people waiting. Waiting for you. Waiting for light in the darkness. Whether they are waiting for an answer to prayer, for healing, for new opportunities, or for something else completely. We pray for all these people and all the situations they are facing. Be with all who are waiting today, and bring them answers to their prayers as soon as it is your will to do so.

Give them strength, patience and comfort as they endure this time of waiting. Help us also, to support those who are waiting. Give us the words to say and the patience to wait alongside them.

May we fully trust in God's timing and the hope that he has promised to us. **Amen.**



*The entrance to Hume Graveyard*