



President's Letters - 2015-2016

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President's Letters

EARLY JANUARY 2015

It's pretty much exactly two years since I heard from Jonathan Edwards (previous General Secretary) that I was the only person nominated to become Vice President of BUGB 2013. Of course churches and ministers still had to vote, but the ball was definitely rolling....

It seems a long time ago ... (the system has changed - the next VP will only have a year's notice) ... and much has happened in these 24 months as I've tried to prepare myself for this role ... the strongest thread running through these months has been a lot of talking to God - much in the Moses ("I can't speak") or the Gideon ("I'm only ...") tradition. I'm not the same person I was then. I've already had some amazing and challenging experiences and met some wonderful people, but I guess most of all, my relationship with God has changed and I've learnt so much ... so ... if it were all to stop now - that would be ok with me because it's been great.

And this somewhat dull January day, when I look ahead into the next few months, I am gulping at what lies ahead. Yes, maybe we could call a halt now! An official letter from Neville Callum, the General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, inviting me to lead a Bible Study at the Congress in South Africa in July, arrived today. And yes, I knew it was coming, but it still adds to the general message that by brain is telling me at the moment ... shades of Moses and Gideon again.

So, I went for a walk. Up a hill just on our doorstep. It's a really, really steep hill. By car there are places where you might have to go down to 1st gear - that steep! And car is how we often - usually (actually) - travel to the top before walking out over the Beacon. But today I walked. Every last step. And as I travelled, the walk became a spiritual metaphor for me.



It told me that however steep or daunting the way ahead - it was do-able. That I should go at my own pace, no-one else's ... although a bit of push beyond my comfort zone wouldn't go amiss from time to time. That it is ok to stop and get my breath ... bite-sized pieces, not the whole chunk at once.

As it was January, I was suitably dressed, but as I travelled, I discovered that I had to discard things - gloves, hat, scarf. At the top I was caught by the wind. Strong, noisy, pushing me over ... 'we do not know where it comes from, where it goes, but we see its effect' (John 3). Looking down over the vale, the town in the distance, the hills, the river snaking through the countryside, I was reminded of a piece I'd written for Jacob's Well - standing looking over Yate - about God looking over this landscape of people and place and seeing change and transformation sweeping through as his kingdom comes

I turned to go home feeling a the sense of well-being that exercise and musing with God can bring. I started back down the steep road, and remembering the recent advice of Bear Grylls to Ben Stiller - "lean ahead, not back, as you go downhill, it stops you slipping. It's counter-intuitive, but it works" - I tried it. And it does work! And I plunged headlong down the road at twice my normal speed ...

So that's it. I am back on track.

Today I read ... Paul, to the saints who are in _____ and are faithful in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1.1). That's me and you.

Jenni

In March, myself and my husband John had the amazing opportunity to visit BMS Missionaries who are working alongside various partnerships in Thailand. It is a beautiful country, and although everything was dry and dusty while we were there, in need of the rainy season which wasn't due for another six weeks or so, the friendly and helpful people we met more than made up for that. Thailand is a holiday destination, but we were not there to visit the beaches! For sadly it is also a destination for those who want to take advantage of the sex industry, and it is a country with a significant refugee problem.



In the thirteen days we were there, our senses reeled from all that we saw and experienced - from the cosmopolitan and huge contrasts of Bangkok, to the dusty Karen villages near the Thai-Burmese borders.

In Bangkok we visited Sarah and Paul Brown who are working with *Night Light*, a charity that works alongside women working or trafficked into the sex industry. Alternative employment in a jewellery business, and recently in the cake-making 'Freedom Bakery', mean that women who want to leave can earn a reasonable income. It was a privilege to join the team one evening in a night club where we were able to chat with the working women.

Mai Sot on the Thai-Burmese border was our next destination - 10 hours in an overnight bus from Bangkok - where we were hosted wonderfully by Charmaine and Bob Trendell, and where we also met Brian and Lydia English. This is an area close to very large refugee camps which have been in existence for at least 20 years, some of those having actually lived there for that length of time. The work here is done in partnership with Compasio, who run homes for abandoned and abused children, work with a number of refugees, and with those who live and work on the city's rubbish tips. Our short visit here made a huge impact on us.



On to Chiang Mai, a large provincial team in the north where we met up with Judy Cook who runs Hope Home for mentally and physically handicapped children. Meeting the children was lovely and full of joy and seeing how their lives have been enriched by the care and attention they receive was amazing. Judy also works alongside CAM - an Aids ministry which not only cares for people with HIV/Aids but also delivers excellent educational resources for churches and villages.

Then off onto switchback roads as we wound our way up into the mountains to meet and stay with the Karen Baptists in two of their villages. The Karen tribe are the largest group of Christians in Thailand which is predominantly Buddhist (95%), with Christians not even reaching 1% of the population. It was wonderful to receive their hospitality as we stayed in people's homes and joined in their worship services. Then ... back in the jeep for the six hour journey back to Chiang Mai before returning to Bangkok the following day and home to the UK.



It's impossible to adequately sum up this trip. It was eye-opening and challenging - not just what we saw, but also the heat (highest was 43°) and the extreme air pollution. We felt incredibly strengthened by the prayers of friends back home, which was wonderful.

As we reflected on the experience, a number of things have lodged in our minds - the unconditional, non-judgemental love and care we saw being given to marginalised people and

the dedication of people just like you and me in challenging situations. And flowing from that, these questions have surfaced in my mind - where are the rubbish tip people in Britain today? where are the prostitutes and trafficked? where are the abandoned and abused children and the refugees and immigrants? And what are we doing about them?

Jenni Entrican



My 91 year old Mum comes to visit. She still lives on her own and is a woman with a mind of her own! It is good to see her as she can't easily travel nowadays, and normally I go north to Scotland to visit her. We're aware that I will have less space to do so once this coming year kicks off, so this week, with its beautiful sunshine, is an important one. The visit concludes with a large family gathering on the Saturday. Great to see everyone -



three generations together, walking on the Beacon, sitting in the sun, laughing, eating together - clearing up together! Lovely. Still, an awareness of preparation deliberately put on hold. Absolutely the right thing to do. Budgeted for. And only as they leave and sheets are washed and tiredness threatens, does the niggling voice raise its head ... 'look at all you've got to do! Why did you waste ... hang on ... waste? ... that time?' Begone!

Two days later a full and exciting day at Baptist House with John, re-living our recent BMS World Mission trip to Thailand and catching up with the team organising the Assembly. All credit to BMS as they take us through the 'de-brief' - asking questions, prompting us to reflect and critique and ask 'where does that leave us?' The whole experience, from deciding where to go, what my interests and concerns were, orientation day, arrangements, actual amazing ... visit, to this day of looking back and looking forward. Magnificent!

And the Assembly organising team?- doing a great job, really helpful and talking with them gets the creative juices flowing. (No-one paid me for this. Honest!)

The next day, lovely coffee and conversation with one of the Regional Ministers as we talk through - masses of stuff actually - but focus on a day for Women in their region in 2016. Reminds me again of the value of iron sharpening iron. As always it seems so surreal to be getting things organised for 2016! Yet my diary for 2015 almost full - especially the weekends - and 2016 weekends are nearly full too. At this precise moment, I am living in the '*Joy and Excitement*' mode, not the '*Fear and Anxiety - how can I manage?*' one. It will return, but that's ok - for one thing 'how can I manage?' is true; for another I am learning to re-orientate my thinking to 'God is the one who is in control' (or in the words of the recent sermon series at the church we attend - one sermon privately preached for me alone - "*Go in the strength you have ... am I not sending you?*" Judges 6.14); and lastly, because I have asked God to turn my mind to him and the joy of his presence. And he will.

Preparing for the Market place sessions at the Assembly. Getting excited as ideas take shape. Will need to enlist help though - can't do it on my own - but that's as it should be. Stupidly it has taken me a long time to learn this. Perfection and superwomen banished. Working together is so much

more fun it may take a bit of arranging, but it's worth it on so many counts.

Finding Richard Rohr's meditations on Paul really telling...

Dipping into new book - 'Did God kill Jesus' by Tony Jones....

Reading a long forgotten favourite prior to our visit to the BWA Congress in Durban S Africa in July (scary Bible study to lead - not thinking about that right now) - 'Cry the Beloved Country' by Alan Paton..... so many beautiful yet haunting passages ...

The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that they are not mended again..... It suited the white man to break the tribe, but it has not suited him to build something in the place of what is broken. They are not all so. There are some white men who live their lives to build up what is broken - but they are not enough ..

Because the white man has power, we too want power, but when a black man gets power, when he gets money he is a great man if he is not corrupted. I have seen it often. He seeks power and money to put right what is wrong and when he gets them, why, he enjoys the power and the money....

But there is only one thing that has power completely, and that is love. Because when a man loves, he seeks no power, and therefore he has power.

Preparing for the talk to our home church on the Thailand visit with my husband. I did say that working together was much more fun ... Not only slides and talk to prepare, but cake and cheese scones! Put together a lovely slide presentation, then found that the PDF file that we produced wouldn't work on the church system. Stress! Enough to be talking without this - why does technology reduce me to an anxious wreck when I can't get it to do what I want? I've already talked with other more technologically advanced friends about how to travel around the country with my presentations. It's time to buy Office for Mac. The only way to sort out any possible glitches. There is no place for extra stress on this journey ... But the presentation did go well in the end ... phew! Great to spend ages chatting with folk afterwards. They are real interested and supportive ...

Shopping for a couple of outfits with daughter and husband. Have a £10 voucher for a certain shop. Be good to find something there ... I can't forget I'm a Scot!

An evening with my Support Group, this time at the home of my friend JH, an Anglican priest whose Quiet Days I go to regularly. She has taught me so much about generosity, hospitality and quiet sitting with God. The garden of their home, designed by her award-winning garden landscape architect husband is absolutely beautiful, with new vistas opening out into different areas, and a massive, amazing adult tree house and rope swing - I always go on the swing when I visit and gaze up at the sky as I pump it up. It's lovely to be there with my friends who have come together again to eat together and to listen and to pray - especially for me. What a blessing. This time I have an

extra treat - the following day is one of J's actual Quiet Days and I am going to stay over till the next day. A gift!

Praying for the day on Ukraine at Lambeth Palace with BMS and Tony Peck from EBF.

Visiting Baptist House - sharing with the staff team about the Presidency; talking through practicalities about the Assembly, the Market Place sessions, the website; visiting with a local minister to talk about their community garden ... a busy day, but stimulating. It's great to get to know people there - they have been so supportive.

Hairdresser ... preparation for events after the Assembly ... tiredness ... taking space ... messages from friends who are thinking of me ... more preparation ... a few glitches ... and now, today, we travel up to Peterborough for the Assembly tomorrow.

Tomorrow will be Saturday 16th May 2015. The next chapter begins ...

Jenni

TWO SIGNIFICANT VISITS IN LONDON

Hello again

31 May 2015

Last week I was in London. Two days. Two significant visits - a very interesting juxtaposition of two homes. The first, very grand indeed. The second, a dream on its way to reality. Both associated with women whose name starts with E.

I'll start with the second E. Ella's Home. The vision of Emily Chalke who, after working for a number of years in Bangkok at the Night Light project for trafficked and prostituted women, back in the UK, hears from a woman, Ella, whom she had known in Bangkok who is now in London and in need. Out of that contact, the dream of Ella's Home is born. A refuge, opening doors to recovery for women who have suffered trafficking and/or sexual exploitation by providing a safe and restorative home. The aim also, to become sustainable through developing small enterprises which create employment and training opportunities.



It was a chilly and damp morning as my husband and I navigated our way to Brick Lane and Kahaila cafe. We were hoping for a lovely latte - which we got, AND a delicious almond croissant - but more, we were going to meet up with Paul Unsworth, a Baptist minister who had the vision to have a Christian presence right in the heart of Brick Lane. (Check out their website for more on their journey, vision, projects and Christian presence (www.kahaila.com)).



Despite there being few people around outside as we arrived, the cafe had a good number of customers - folk on laptops, groups laughing and chatting together, and in the corner, on the sofa, Paul, his baby daughter, and Jo, a Youth Outreach Worker who, as part of the Reflex project run by Kahaila, works in Holloway prison to support women there through delivering outreach, mentoring and accredited non-formal Education courses.

When Paul left, we were able to meet Laura who is working alongside Emily to make Ella's home a reality. She filled us in on the difficulties the project had encountered in their search for premises and their hopes for a possible base in the near future. Then Emily arrived, fresh from a radio interview about the 400 mile run to raise £30,000 for Ella's Home (<http://www.ellashomerun.com>).

Despite getting soaked on the way back to our friend's flat, it was an inspiring morning. Having visited Night Light when we were in Thailand in March, and supporting the BMS Dignity Project¹, I want to encourage and cheer such courage!



And the first E? Whose home were we visiting? Well, we didn't exactly visit the home so much as the garden ... quite a different scenario going to Buckingham Palace for one of the Queen's Garden Parties.

The previous day the Queen had sat robed in splendour recording for the nation the new government's plans for their term of office. I picked up comments on Face Book and on 'Have I got news for you?' of the incongruity of her situation compared to the situation of people whose lives will be affected by the proposals put forward - no doubt the irony was not lost on her also.

Whatever your take on royalty v republic, whatever your opinion of the class system, what I saw the following day was a person of privilege, yes, but one who within the constraints of her role has shown and shows regularly an amazing interest in people - just people (I will not say 'ordinary people') all over the world.

I was invited into her garden (park! - it made me think of Oscar Wilde's lovely book, *The Selfish Giant*², a place where normally she can experience some privacy. I was given some delicious sandwiches and cakes to eat and music to listen to. I was offered the opportunity of meeting quite a number of people whom I would never normally have met - a dinner lady from Yorkshire who had worked for 46 years in the same school; a lady in a wheel chair who lectures on the Holocaust; a Glasgow civil servant who works in fraud; and, really interesting for me, first female Bishop in the Church of England, the Revd Libby Lane, Bishop of Stockport. All women actually.

I did not personally meet the Queen, but I observed her in action - at least an hour long journey, from the steps leading onto the garden, to the refreshment tent. A journey of concentrated conversation with a huge variety of people from various walks of life. People who have lived their lives generously, but usually without recognition, given an opportunity to have their voices heard and their undoubted achievements recognised. A small 89 year old woman who is offering them the gift of her interest and attention. As I said, monarchy may or may not be your thing ... but you may still have ears to hear ... yours,
Jenni



¹ www.bmsworldmission.org/dignity

² <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/owilde/bl-owilde-selgi.htm>

Hello again ...

30 June 2015

It's been on my mind to write for quite some time given that I'm almost seven weeks (seven weeks??!) into the Presidency, but it has been really busy. Really enjoyable and at times quite tiring. (I put the diary together!) When I was at the NAMs conference two weeks ago - one month in - I told them that I had made:

... four train journeys; 3 bus journeys; 2 tube journeys; 2 by taxi; 1 by coach; 1,819 miles by car; I've had a whole variety of engagements; tonight will be the 6th different bed I've slept in; I haven't counted the number of people I've met and the meaningful conversations I've had ... John and I have been given - 5 mugs, two tea towels, two pairs of socks (one bright pink for me, and one grey for my husband), some flowers and a jar of pear chutney all from the generous north!

And since the NAMs conference there has been another two different beds, and 620 more miles!

And it has been fascinating and fantastic and such a privilege.

So as I've come to write, I've been asking myself, 'what thoughts are reverberating?' and there is one that's germinating. So I'd like to throw out a few undeveloped reflections which I am certain will be but scratching the surface, but may well be developed further as the year progresses, especially if you engage with me in the reflecting. Mainly, it's about ***having one's voice heard.***



I've always had the hope as I approached this year that I could somehow find ways to give people voice, to connect with hidden voices. Part of my exploration of that was to say to the Associations that I'd like to visit people and places who would never expect a visit from a BU President. And I've been searching for opportunities to invite myself to go and listen and hang out with folk - often on the back of an expenses-paid visit to a region.

And the idea of writing on the Daring Greatly footprint is part of the picture too - and already that has felt important, even sacred, as people have considered and shared what they want to write about their past and their future. I especially want to listen well, to individual people, to the wider picture, and to the Spirit.

In Jacob's Well, part of our ethos was that anyone's voice could be heard when we gathered together - even if that was the first time they had been with us. Obviously easier in a smaller type of gathering, but to offer the space where one could answer a question, or voice an opinion still needed a pretty drastic re-think of the practicalities, how to put together these times.



Recently I read somewhere about the idea of the democratisation of space. This is something that is particularly important for millennials³ ***who are looking to participate in meaningful ways. For them excellence is of far less importance than inclusion.***

Yet in most churches, even the physical arrangement proclaims a different message and that's

before the monologue of sermon-speaking gets underway. ***How can we allow ...invite ... people to engage and grapple with the issues of our world, faith and culture in a more inclusive way?***

This is a big question for the Baptist family - and in trying to answer it, we need to engage with issues around tradition, power and powerlessness, integrity, culture, vulnerability and fear and scripture. To name but a few!

Voices need to be listened to. Speech and language therapists work endlessly to give people voice. Their national campaign aims to help us recognise the importance of having one's voice heard. They say 'without voice we can be imprisoned and denied proper participation in family life, the community ...'

Translate that to the church. Watch the flash mob bringing their message alive⁴. Their song puts it succinctly - 'Give me voice, I want the world to know how I feel, what I think ... give me voice there's so much I can bring ...'

While speaking with Emily Chalke who, alongside Kahaila Cafe, is working hard to bring Ella's Home⁵ into being, she said of those trying to escape prostitution, 'there are no survivor voices.' No survivor voices. What do we hear from those words? The Poverty Truth Challenge in Leeds and Glasgow, have the strap line 'Nothing about us without us is for us.' Sometimes the important thing is just to have one's story heard and believed. It does not necessarily need to go further. But at other times, justice and mission require that voices are heard loudly and persistently.

What will it take us to listen?

Yours

Jenni

³ the demographic cohort following Generation X. There are no precise dates when the generation starts and ends. Researchers and commentators use birth years ranging from the early 1980s to the early 2000s.

⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=8d3vrkKk5m4&feature=iv&src_vid=7XtXfRYplso&annotation_id=annotation_777737

⁵ a refuge for trafficked and prostituted women in London

Well, hello

How does one reflect on, make sense of, the opportunity of a life-time in just a few words? This is my attempt... knowing that there will be more to discover and learn and enjoy over the coming months and years.



Just a couple of days ago, my husband and I returned from a trip to South Africa. We travelled first to Cape Town for three days, then onto Durban for a week to attend the Baptist World Alliance Congress (remember Birmingham 2005? ... or if you were really fortunate, Hawaii 2010!). Five years on, it was in South Africa. Fewer Europeans and Americans travelled there, but many more Africans - wonderful! After the Congress we travelled for another four days north into the country via Swaziland to the Kruger National Park, returning via Johannesburg, or Jo'burg as it's known there. Truly a wonderful and amazing two weeks.

We travelled with a large group of Norwegian Baptists who commonly organise a tour on these occasions - they are already planning 2020, Rio de Janeiro! It was a great experience of friendship and sharing. In addition to the Norwegians and a few Brits, there were people from Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Bulgaria and the Netherlands on our tour. As we set off each day on the coach, prayer was offered for the day in a variety of languages.



The Congress itself was great! Such an opportunity to meet and talk and share with many from all over the world, and to gather groups together to support one another and to encourage new ideas and pray. The variety of music was amazing, there were five large celebrations with speakers from around the world and a variety of seminars and, of course, morning Bible studies in a number of languages. My privilege and

challenge, was to lead one of these hour and a half studies. (It did go well, thank you to all who were praying for me.)

It would be easy to start to detail the minutiae of our trip, but what I'd like to share are three experiences ~

The first two are from our days in Cape Town; the third from our last day in Jo'burg, just before we flew home.

Number one...

Robben Island. The island prison which held, amongst many other prisoners during the Apartheid years, Nelson Mandela. We travelled across on the ferry from Cape Town on a bright sunny day to this lovely island which is still inhabited and is now a memorial to those years. We had an interesting and amazing guide, Lionel Davis, who was himself a political prisoner confined to an isolation cell at the same time as



Mandela. He told us some of the history - of how Black and coloured were moved from their homes to segregated townships, of the demeaning passes which they had to carry always and the restrictions which were placed upon them. Of how Blacks and coloured were assessed as to their race and ethnicity by whether a pencil would stay in a person's hair, or by the colour of their skin matched against a brown paper bag. The more brutal behaviour in prison was to those who were dark black, including significant food deprivation in spite of the gruelling work in the quarries.



What was amazing to hear was how the incarceration affected those who were there. Instead of being alienated from one another as the guards and powers wanted, they embraced the diversity and supported one another, sharing the food and even teaching some of the White guards to read. Instead of increased separation, it built within the people a commitment to live together in harmony.

Number two...

As a group we had the privilege of visiting **Langa, a**

Black township in Cape Town. The people who lived there had been consulted about such visits and had agreed to people coming in order that they would be ambassadors for those who lived there. Here we walked around streets, past the poorest shanties, the slightly more 'affluent' bungalows, the flats and dormitory blocks, a clinic, library, school and a number of churches - visiting one for part of its service. What was disturbing was the discovery that the building and rehousing programme for



those living in the shanty dwellings to government built flats, only seemed to function just prior to local elections, after which, the promises made were reneged on until the next round of elections. Much had been improved since the dismantling of apartheid, but much still needed to be achieved.

Number three...

The morning of our departure we went to **Soweto in Johannesburg** (South West Township), and visited the scene of the killing of Hector Pieteron, a young boy, on 16 June 1976. That event had begun as a peaceful demonstration by the school children of the Township against the recent imposition of Afrikaans as the language of education. The transformation of the peaceful demonstration into bloodshed sparked riots around the country. We stood at the memorial site in the bright sunshine, looking out over the Township and the road along which the school children marched with their petition. We visited the museum detailing the struggle of the Black people against the repressive apartheid regime. We walked from there to Nelson Mandela's house, a few

streets away - 'a short walk in Soweto' our guide suggested... compared to 'the long walk to freedom' his people had to take.



And there was pain, standing and walking in that place. The pain of injustice. The pain of struggle against oppression and denial of basic human rights. The pain of bereaved families. It seemed a privilege to be there and to hold that pain - even for a short time.

~~~~~

Three experiences. All moving. Stories already well known, yet somehow more forceful and poignant and present when one has the opportunity to stand in these places, on that soil.

Places and situations of pain, injustice and manipulation - but also hope, recovery and new life. The world has seen the beauty and potential of truth and reconciliation demonstrated by the South African people... an ongoing story. And as I felt the encouragement of Lionel Davis's words, and the weight of pain standing in Soweto, I knew then and I know now, that around the world there are still injustices to fight... and hope to discover.



'...what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'

Micah 6.8

Yours

Jenni

Hello friends

It's quite some time since I last wrote - at the end of August, having been busy in the first fortnight leading an event for women, and participating in Sunday services and a Retreat Day in Shoeburyness, I became busy with family stuff - celebrations and illness - and I was not ready to write. So I didn't.



Since then, it's been on my mind. I imagine a faithful group of people who are interested to hear what is happening in my year and what is on my mind, so, it is to you I write.

When I was a teacher, I would often find the gremlins approached as I prepared for the new term towards the end of August. Somehow I felt that I had forgotten how to teach. I would have visions of standing in front of a class with nothing to say, and with children swirling around me out of control. All it needed was one hour, less, in front of the class and I was sorted! Into the groove once more. Gremlins put to bed till the next time.

Sometimes there is a mirroring of such in the spiritual life. A sense that we cannot. Cannot be, cannot do... what God might expect. Sometimes this lasts for quite some time and becomes a wilderness experience, sometimes it is like the teaching experience, a nighttime fear which stretches further than the night, but is suddenly washed away by the gentle swirling of the Spirit, feeding our souls and setting us on the road again.

This summer a number of comments and thoughts dropped into my lap - some my own thoughts, others sent, or picked up in reading and browsing - all circling around this theme.

'My child, it's you I want, not some ideal you, just you. I love you and care for you as you are. Rest in my love. Relax. Stop trying so hard to be...'

'Our shared brokenness is what connects us to each other and to God. You are not alone and you are so loved... Preach from your scars not your wounds...'

'I beg you, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions

themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live in the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far into the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.'

'Ps 103:1 Let my whole being bless the LORD! Let everything inside me bless his holy name! Seriously? everything? ... what if this is the very thing God hopes for most - not the polishing up of our shiny selves, but instead our whole self.'

'Free fall with me, let yourself go. I need to strip away your layers... let me do it. Control. That's it, allow me to strip it away... willingly give it to me, allow me to be the one in control... plunge then into the soothing, cleansing, life-giving water. It will set you free.'

As you pick up into the busyness of autumn and approaching winter, may you be held in the powerful yet gentle arms of God. May you know wisdom and grace, and find peace to sustain you.

As I travel I know that there are many who need to know this. It's about courage, and being real, and following our Lord. Be blessed.

Yours  
Jenni



Hello again

Having written yesterday, I realised that there's something else I wanted to share just now - simply how much of a privilege this Presidential year has been so far. Already I look back on really amazing opportunities, and I look forward to such a varied and interesting diary. When I visit people and situations it is humbling and encouraging to see how our Baptist family embrace their calling to be the people of God where they live. Having conversations with people, and knowing that God's Spirit is not only in the conversation, but in one another is such a blessing and one of the highlights of the opportunities of this role.



Just to illustrate, I'd like to try to give you a flavour... a taste of the last sixteen or so days, and a wee peek into the days ahead.

Just over two weeks ago I set off in the evening to Swindon from where, early the following morning, I set off with one of the Southern Counties Baptist Association's Regional Ministers. Over the next two days we were going to visit five church planting/pioneering situations. It was a really great two days! Such a joy to meet people, who in quite different contexts, were trying to live out God's kingdom in their situation. People thinking creatively and strategically about the potential for engagement in new build estates; people living in high priority neighbourhoods offering themselves by being there, listening, encouraging, serving, standing with people in their pain; an old church building being re-imagined for the community; working with people of peace; a beautiful community garden and a thriving allotment; people having the courage to try new things and discovering the excitement of stepping out beyond their comfort zone. It was exciting and inspiring to see God at work in faithful and courageous followers.



Then a day or two later at Gloucester cathedral I attended the inauguration of the first Anglican diocesan Bishop, Rachel Treweek. Her sermon reminded us to 'walk dripping through our world, soaked with the water of our baptism, leaving wet footprints in our wake.' An arresting image and calling! Being given the opportunity to speak a few words privately to her, and to have conversations with other ecumenical

representatives and Anglicans, reinforced that together we live our our faith in a hurting world, whatever differences we have in our ecclesiology and beliefs.

A couple of days later it was off to Sofia in Bulgaria with our General Secretary Lynn Green and others to attend the Council of the European Baptist Federation. On the first night there is a roll call of all the countries attending. This is always a highlight for me as we are reminded of the very large number of European and Middle Eastern countries that make up the EBF. Some large unions, and some really small, coming together for encouragement and support, but also in order to grapple with the critical situations that are sweeping Europe. To hear at first hand how many European countries are welcoming the stranger is indeed humbling. For instance, for the last four years Lebanon has been coping with an influx of Syrian refugees and the refugees now number a quarter of their total population! Some countries have been working extensively with refugees and



asylum seekers for many years and have built up support networks and strategies that they are willing to share. Having the opportunity to meet and talk with leaders from all over Europe was indeed a privilege and such a gathering is a great example of how to live in unity and harmony within our diversity.

And now today I'm on my way to London the meet up with those engaging with the smaller churches of our Union, of which there is a significant proportion

(approximately half of our churches have memberships of 40 and under) and I'm looking forward to hearing their stories. Then at the weekend I'm joining with one of our Union's six churches, who this year are celebrating their 375 year anniversary. Yes, six churches were founded in 1640! What a legacy of faithful witness. The following day it's off the Conservative Party conference as a member of the Joint Public Issues Team who are welcomed at each Party conference to engage with MPs on matters of concern; issues we care deeply about and want to highlight with them... then off to the BU Council and a weekend with the Yorkshire Baptist Association.

What a privilege, what an excitement! I thank God for our Baptist family, for his presence with us and for his calling to each of us to be salt and light in our world... to use a well-known phrase... in ways known and ways yet to be made known.

Thank you for your prayers.

May you be blessed as you follow him.

Jenni

Hello again

Since I last wrote I've been doing a significant amount of travelling - if you follow my Facebook page 'Daring Greatly' you might have seen snippets of that. It's been a full-on couple of months, and it's been great, and it's been challenging, and it's been exhausting at times, and full of delight at times. If you were to ask me, six months into the year-long role, how I was doing, my reply would be 'I'm having a ball!'

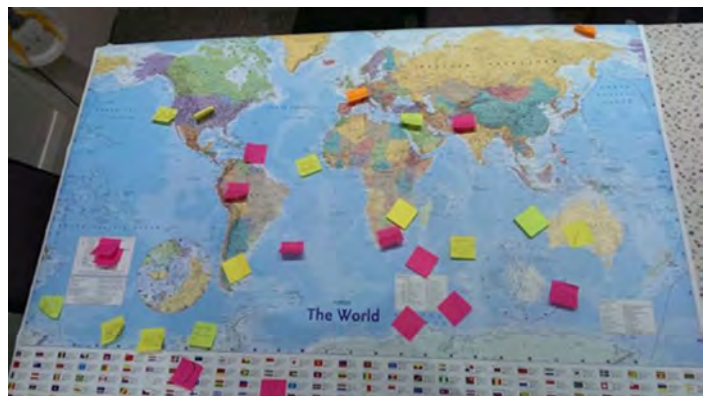


As I have preached in churches, led retreat days, attended the Conservative Party conference, the Cenotaph, spoken to ministers' gatherings, been to Baptist House, Baptist Council, Baptist Steering Group, and visited an amazing range of initiatives,



I've tried to listen to God and to trust him in all things. I've been moved by conversations which are clearly Spirit-led, I've been encouraged by emails and comments... and there have been times when I've felt I completely depleted and have had to ask serious questions about how I'm managing time and energy and I've had to grapple with issues like 'whose responsibility is this?' or 'to what level am I responsible?' or 'whose expectations am I trying to meet?'

All of this is a huge privilege. Both the amazing opportunities and the excitement of seeing people engaging with God within their contexts and really grasping the importance of discovering what being the people of God looks like in our changing culture. And the opportunity to learn myself about what 'too much looks like' (too much being a phrase that easily springs to mind!) - and finding it's not necessarily about doing less, but sometimes about doing differently - and how I try to live each day with God, and how I still struggle with doing that sometimes, but he's always there and always welcoming. I never realised how my theme of 'Daring Greatly' would apply to me as much as to others!!





Recently I have come across three phrases - two of which excite me, and one which saddens me... one minister speaking about their wonderful cafe and re-built building and how it is used said "The community takes precedence..." And another, a small church whose vision has included a space in the main street of the town which, amongst other things, is open for a two course community meal at affordable prices every Friday (wonderful mince pie and veg!), believe that they offer 'A place to be... and a place to be in the heart of the community.' Absolutely wonderful. And the one that saddens me? It saddened the heart of the person who told me of... 'Christians who are prepared to sacrifice relationship in favour of doctrine or style.'



As I said, 'Daring Greatly' continually challenges me - to be real, step outside of my 'safe' constraints, discover more of what it means to follow Jesus. My hope and prayer is that it might also challenge you.

With love and prayers for all, especially in this Advent season as we await the coming of the Christ child.

Jenni

### ***Postscript***

In my next letter I intend to write about those currently working alongside asylum seekers and refugees. Since being asked to speak at the BWA in a European session on what our churches are doing to aid asylum seekers and refugees in this country, I have been meeting with some of those and our hope is to set up a network of churches across the BUGB so that good ideas and good practice can be shared, and that many more of us can find ways - both simple and complex - where we can be involved.

Two thousand and sixteen, a new year for us all. And another letter... hello to you in these early days...

"... lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...

... with all humility  
and gentleness.

With patience... bearing with one another... making every effort..." Ephesians 4

I have tended to dislike the whole idea of New Year resolutions, of looking back and then making promises to try harder, be kinder, eat less, exercise more. Not because I don't want to do these things (more or less), but because the expectation has always filled me with a sense of guilt and dread. Setting oneself up for failure. Guilt that my resolutions from the previous year have not been met, knowing that my intention to eat less and exercise more will only partly be fulfilled... so now I don't make any New Year resolutions. Full stop.

But that doesn't stop me reflecting and reassessing. I do that frequently. I do it when circumstances force me to - like mid-November last year when I was drained from packing a lot of engagements into a short space. Engagements which required much intense listening, quite a bit of travelling, and certainly new experiences for me, some of which were beyond my comfort zone. All of which were also life-enhancing and enriching.

(I wrote a little of this in my last letter.)



That time was hugely profitable for me on a number of levels, and one of them was that I did the kind of thinking that perhaps others find they can do at New Year. With God, I examined what had been happening, I wrote and reflected on some of the reading I had recently been doing, I spoke to a trusted friend who was not afraid to ask awkward and mind-stretching questions, and I came to conclusions and decisions which will stand me in good stead as I travel into 2016 with all the new opportunities it will hold. So, I have a good start on this year... and what feels to me a good pattern, for I know that I will come up against a brick wall again, a different one, quite possibly more challenging, and the only 'resolution' that will be of use to me then, is 'let's look honestly at this with God.'

~~~~~

At the end of last year, my friend, and Director of Urban Life⁶, Mike Pears, wrote on the question - 'What Makes a Good Conversation?' - which I posted on the Daring Greatly Facebook page.

Good conversation is emerging as a key practice for those exploring peaceful approaches to mission in urban and marginal places. Conversation is not what we do as a prelude to mission or when the 'real work' is finished - rather it is the work. The conversations that are particularly transformative are those that seek to build bridges between people from quite different backgrounds and situations. Conversation of this kind could be thought of as Christian hospitality - making room in our own selves for others.

Good conversation it seems is however surprisingly difficult to convene. Good conversation means opening up to others and in doing so making space to talk about things that really matter. There is a risk here that we might be changed - even profoundly changed - through this kind of conversational encounter.

It prompted another good friend to point me in the direction of a book - Turning to one another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future. In its introduction, Margaret Wheatley writes:

'I believe if we begin talking with each other - especially those we call stranger or enemy - then this world can reverse its darkening direction and change for the good. And I know... that the only way the world will change is if many more of us step forward, let go of our judgments, become curious about each other, and take the risk to begin a conversation.'

And it prompts me to ask the question - How many conversations have you, and I, started recently with people we are not used to talking to? What stops us doing this? Embarrassment? Fear? Maybe this is something worth reflecting on. Maybe this is even a New Year's resolution worth making!

Two friends, Carmel Murphy and Stuart Blythe have just posted on the Daring Greatly blog - something else worth reading and acting upon!

This coming year, may you discover ways in which God wants you to Dare Greatly, and find the courage to take those steps with him.

yours
Jenni

⁶ <http://urbanlife.org/>

Hello

Just today I was asked to put my name to the statement that the Joint Public Issues Team⁷ (JPIT) of which we Baptists are partners, are issuing on the humanitarian needs of Syrians -

'2000 years ago not so far from Jordan and Syria, Mary, Joseph and Jesus were displaced. They were forced to rely on the good will of those they did not know and their needs were met by the generosity of strangers. The biblical story of Jesus' birth reminds us that behind the huge figures of displacement are stories of real people who through no fault of their own find themselves innocent victims of war.'

Real people.

Innocent victims.

Mind-blowing situations.



Two weeks ago I met with a large group of asylum seekers and refugees who attend 'Reach', a holistic work that Baptists in Huddersfield have been running for over 14 years. A place, and a people, who welcome asylum seekers and refugees to a weekly drop-in for food, friendship, English classes, clothes, activities, toys and book for their children, household goods, help with their appeals and form filling, help to understand the UK culture... the list goes on. Currently there are also weekly Bible studies in Farsi, and a welcome to church.

It is a place where displaced people not only receive support, help and friendship, but offer it themselves to the new asylum seekers and refugees who arrive weekly. It's a place where those who run 'Reach' find their lives immeasurably enriched by these encounters, as well as being saddened and humbled by the circumstances which have caused these articulate, educated people to flee their homes. But also, it has to be said, at times, it is a place of frustration and weariness due to the difficulties and complexities needed to unravel claims for asylum.

It was a privilege to meet them; women and men from Iran, Syria, Eritrea... to ask them their name, smile into their eyes, find out where they have come from and how long they have been in the UK. To hear how grateful they are for this haven of support and friendship - genuine caring. To offer

⁷ http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/459879/_Governments_must.aspx

a prayer or a hug when tears welled up. To meet some at church the following day, the love of Christ visible in their faces, introducing me to someone new, who had only just arrived in this country.

Fourteen years this work has been going on. Impressive and encouraging.

Previously I had visited two other churches - equally impressive - one in the Midlands, and one in the North-East, who are also working alongside asylum seekers and refugees. They are relative newcomers to this having been going for five and two years respectively. There are many similarities to the Huddersfield group, but also differences. Each has developed according to the people they have met, and the gifts, skills and ideas of those in the churches who have felt the calling to be involved in such.

In one, the route to becoming involved with asylum seekers and refugees has been through two allotments, and by becoming trained as be-frienders. Having done the course and been allocated someone to befriend, the minister writes 'It soon becomes clear that each vulnerable person needs more than one person to help them. My church has been brilliant in helping me care for my friend. Lifts, visits, meals, invitations to watch football matches on TV, arranging some volunteering for him...' He says 'It is just straightforward welcome.'

The man himself has written about the experience - 'Since being befriended through Restore, my life has completely changed. I have become a part of this Baptist church, and found a new family - people who love me and trust me... here people treated me like a human being, contrary to what I experienced in all three of the detention centres I have been through since claiming asylum... I would like the church to see how powerful their ministry of welcome is to those who have known only hostility since they arrived in Britain.'

In the second church, this work had started through some church members inviting some asylum seekers to an Alpha course. In just under two years this church has started English classes, drop-ins with games, clothes, food, crafts, hairdressing, help with forms and appeals, often resulting in supporting people in their court appearances. A large number have become Christians and come to both the church and the Alpha course.



This is obviously not a new phenomenon, yet the scale of migration at the moment is immense, and it is something that we cannot hide from, even as we struggle to know what to do, give, fight for, that will make a difference in hugely complex situations.

I am reminded of two particular things I learnt at the orientation day at IMC in Birmingham prior to going to Thailand with BMS last year. The first

was about the importance of listening to the stranger, the humble, lesser person. Recognising that we do not in fact know it all. Some of the most important lessons we will ever learn are from someone who is different from us.

And the second was, when we meet someone who is a stranger, someone who is from a culture that is a bit different and perhaps a bit alien to us, what do we focus on? Do we focus on what is different between us and them? Or should we instead focus on what is the same between us and them?

Recently I've been reading Nadia Bolz-Weber on Matthew 25 where Jesus says, "I was hungry and you fed me." She points out - 'Christ's presence is not embodied in those who feed the hungry'. That is - we are not being Christ to them. Rather,

'Christ's presence is in the hungry being fed... the imprisoned being cared for... it is a holy place where we meet others' needs, and have our own needs met. We are all the needy and the ones who meet needs. To place ourselves or anyone else in only one category, is to lie to ourselves'... ...'We never know when we experience Jesus in all of this... but the promise is... our needs are holy to God, and in the meeting of our needs, Jesus is present and God's kingdom comes.'⁸

Please God, that you will awaken in each of us a compulsion to find what little or large thing that we can do to come into that holy place.

yours
Jenni

These three Baptist churches are only three amongst many others who have been grappling with the various issues and discovering ways to help, encourage and support, and they can be a resource for others who are just starting out on this journey. Check out the articles on this website which tell stories of how people are engaging with this, and making a difference. It's important reading.

You may also be interested in *Mapping The Response To The Refugee and Migrant Crisis In The European Baptist Federation (EBF) Region*.

Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*, 2015, 48.

⁸ Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints*, 2015, 48.

Snippets from my Journal, early January

'I should have known, the life of the Spirit is never static.' Sue Monk Kidd wrote these words at a time of uncomfortableness... Lord, in our discomfort, help us to discover what new thing, what direction, is being birthed.

Epiphany - a time of revelation, seeing differently, seeing with new insight, new light... what do I need to reflect on, for that light to illuminate? Dear God, teach me, gentle me into a sense of being, that turns to you instinctively, drawn by your love and warmth that I cannot but feel compelled, like a magnet, to come to your side. God of light and love and power and compassion, I need you.



Sometimes I am so aware of the weight that I can carry about different situations. It pulls me down and I feel the gloom of them on my life. I look ahead to the many engagements ahead, other matters... I would pray with faith and your Spirit. Help me to discover your peace and power in my asking, that I might pray with a glad heart, knowing that you are there and praying with me. Knowing that these concerns need not be a weight and a darkness to my soul. Light of the world, shine on them.

Joel Gregory at the Baptist World Alliance Congress, Durban, July 2015 -

'Do not trade what is significant for what is important.' In these last four months of Presidency, God, what is significant for me, compared to what appears important? Joel again, 'Don't be driven to find the door that everyone else is finding.' God, give me courage to be different. 'There is always something or someone to pull you away from your door.' God help me be alert and wise to know what that is happening...

...Come to me to set your priorities. Don't exhaust yourself by trying too hard.

Specialty4U

First Sunday of the year, visiting a monthly church for significantly disabled people, prior to leading a Vision Day for them at the end of the month. A lot happening, food, conversation, affirmation, prayer, singing, God's narrative shared. This is impressive and has been going for seven years. Lives being changed. God's Spirit here.

Snowy Yorkshire

Actually not snowy the first day, only bitterly cold. Amazing morning with Reach, asylum seekers

and those who run this resource (mentioned in February letter) Another long-standing commitment by those involved - 14 years. Faithfulness. Visiting Hebden Bridge, no longer flooded, but much, much to be done. But this is a community working together, sharing the difficulties and the pain, sharing food and laughter in the midst of distress and financial repercussions. Standing in the freezing cold, totally messed up, church building, Hope Church is still holding fast to its name and heritage - pop-up church is now the order of the day.

Succumbing to infection

As my temperature rose and the infection settled on my chest, I cancelled two days ahead, believing, hoping, that I would soon be better. The pattern continued for nearly two weeks. Each two days I would cancel the next two ahead. And although I was enabled to fulfil most of my engagements over the next three weeks, as soon as I arrived home exhausted, I slept! This is what I wrote on Facebook ~



These past 16 days I have been rediscovering that waiting is also part of Daring Greatly. A chest infection and bronchitis have effectively put a stop to my activities, as engagement after engagement has had to be cancelled. And I, anxious to get back into things, do not appear to have a say in the timing of that. So, learning again about putting things down and resting, mixed at times with the frustration of one step forward and two back. Being grateful for warmth and stillness, sleep and being cared

for, books, oranges, hot chocolate and beautiful flowers. Recognising yet again that being 'in control' is a false God. Looking ahead, with less anxiety about preparation not done and engagements to be re-booked, knowing... at least for the moment... that this moment is what we only ever have.

Nuggets from Eugene Peterson and Nadia Bolz-Weber

God uses us just as we are to give witness to him: to service, to praise, to help, to heal, to care, to love. He doesn't put a halo on us so that everyone will notice that God is present and alive to make sure God will get proper credit. And God doesn't seem embarrassed to be mixed up with lives such as ours, sometimes indolent, not infrequently faithless. He doesn't keep his distance from us to protect his reputation.*⁹

And...

I keep making mistakes... even the same ones over and over... I simply continue to be a person on whom God is at work... Never once did Jesus scan the room for the best example of holy living and send that person out to tell others about him. He always sent stumblers and sinners...¹⁰

⁹ Eugene Peterson

¹⁰ Nadia Bolz-Weber

Godly Play ~ the story of the Good Shepherd

Twice recently I've used Godly Play to tell this story. It allows the listener to enter into the story and find themselves there. There is no 'right answer' to be found, rather a reliance on the work of the Spirit on the listeners as they ponder. Previously I had used it in Thailand with extremely severely handicapped children. This time it was in the Cotswolds with the group who were exploring the way forward for Specially4U, and in rural Devon where good relationships are being built with families over an early Sunday morning bacon butty. The good shepherd, shows us where the good green grass is, and the cool refreshing water, and will always walk with us in the dark and dangerous places... I wonder if you have ever been in a dark and difficult place... I wonder if you know that the good shepherd knows your name?

A surprising recollection from the past

Three times these two months I have been led to tell the story of a young boy whom I used to care for during some of the Sunday services many years ago. He had a very rare mental condition and needed one on one attention when the children went out. We connected through music, specifically the Fisherfolk Album of songs for children - 'God is for you.' It started with 'If I were a butterfly... I'd thank you God for making me, me.' Poignant. When I would meet P, he would grab me and start to sing... Jenni, Jenni... if I were a butterfly.



Most of the songs were short and simple, but one song based on Romans 8:19 - 'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.' was a long and complex song with the chorus, 'and all creation's straining on tiptoe, just to see, the sons of God, come into their own.' When this song started, P's demeanour changed. He moved his seat so that his knees were touching mine and he took my hands and bowed his head forward towards my knees. All through that long song, he sat like that. It was a profound moment. God's Spirit was palpable.

Listening to the saxophone

At a recent Association Ministers' Conference, I sat in the front preparing to speak. The worship group were leading us, and right in front of me, less than a foot away someone was playing the saxophone. It was so beautiful. So meaningful. Sometimes it followed the melody line. Sometimes it was silent. Sometimes it improvised... following a different path, but still somehow connected, still part of the whole.

... that's it... there could be more to say, but time's up... the rest of the day beckons. Be blessed.

Jenni

Hello again

If you have been following me on my Daring Greatly Facebook page, you will know that I have been pretty silent this past month. From that you could have surmised two things - one, that I wasn't doing anything of note, and two, that Facebook and I are not really well acquainted. Well, neither would be completely true, although the second one is nearer the truth. Much to my surprise I have enjoyed Facebook, although I do not turn to it instinctively. Some of my friends will know that I have 'liked' and infrequently commented on their posts during this time, but not taken the time to post myself.

And actually 'time' is what this is about. I haven't written because my energies have been taken up with being on the road, speaking, leading groups, preparing, sharing life and faith with others, attending meetings. And although it's been really busy, it's also been very rewarding... for me at least!

I had a number of engagements where mission was the topic... with leaders of small churches; leaders of different sized churches; a community who were doing great things with folk from the neighbourhood, but wanted to explore further; with people in pioneering situations. And the descriptive phrases which I had been given to work with, mentioned 'creative' and 'contextual', alongside mission... as well as, from the pioneering group, 'What I wish I'd known when I started out!' (leading an alternative-style church).



And, in every situation (I think), I started by subverting the title! Oh, we didn't throw out creative and contextual, but I wanted us to start somewhere else. Because for me, the BIG Q in mission is

How are we connecting with people whatever we are doing?
or to put it another way

How are we being **church for those who wouldn't come to church?**

At a Ministers' conference earlier in the year I asked what our lives as Christ followers would be like **if our first priority, our main focus was discovering what following Jesus looked like...**

And I read from an Iona prayer ~

Jesus when you said 'Come out with me',
I didn't know you were heading for the gay bar,

then the brothel,
then the asylum seekers' hostel...
What kind of guy are you?
I want to talk to you, about me.
It's important.
... you seem to be avoiding me.
people, always people, and you're giving them all
more attention... where are your nice friends?
... I'm standing here... waiting for you
finally to come out of that homeless shelter...
What do you mean? You are waiting for me to come in too?¹¹

... and I've been using that since. It's a challenge which few of us feel we take up as well as we could. I'm so glad that the radical Jesus does not abandon us when we struggle to follow him... 'I will not leave you orphaned', but following him has to, in some measure, be about Daring Greatly and courage, being real, stepping beyond our constraining boundaries - even tiny little steps beyond.

As I talked with people about how we might connect with people in such a way that they might start/continue the journey to faith, I shared two lessons that stood out for me when, prior to visiting Thailand, I attended the orientation day at IMC in Birmingham where BMS train people for work abroad. The first is about **the importance of listening to the stranger, the humble, lesser person**. Recognising that we do not in fact know it all and that some of the most important lessons we will ever learn are from someone who is different from us.

And the second was, when we meet someone who is a stranger, someone who is from a culture that is a bit different and perhaps a bit alien to us, what is it that we focus on? Do we **focus on what is different** between us and them? Should we **instead focus on what is the same** between us and them?

In my travels I have seen anxious people. I have noticed people who only feel comfortable sitting beside those whom they know, and talking to those with whom they are familiar. My husband has only travelled with me on a few occasions, but even as the President's husband, there were a couple of times when no-one spoke to him. **No-one**. Going around in my head is the phrase - 'sit or mingle'. It's a daft phrase perhaps, but it speaks to me of a picture of a people who are uncomfortable, uncertain about how to talk with others, be hospitable to one another, somehow glued to a safe space, even as they feel in their heart that they would like to be different.

Often in my sermons I have shared something of Eugene Peterson's understanding of the first chapter of Ephesians. I've said something like this ~

God is with us in this. God is actually the one doing the stuff. The phrase that Eugene Peterson uses, '**Practise Resurrection**' is really helpful when it comes to Daring Greatly. He says when we

¹¹ from Wild Goose Chase, Iona Publications.

'Practise resurrection... we live our lives in the practice of what we do not originate, and cannot anticipate and we continuously enter into what is more than we are.'

There's something immensely powerful here. Something hopeful. Something about giving up, or giving over, control alongside consciously aligning ourselves to the God of resurrection. Peterson also points out the remarkable opening passage of Ephesians 1. One long Greek sentence containing seven verbs - doing words - **seven verbs about what God is doing with and for us** - he blessed us, he chose us, he destined us to be his adopted child, he bestowed upon us - drenched us with his grace, he lavished it upon us, he made things known to us, and he gathers everything up.

Peterson says this of this sentence - **'God starts everything.** There is not a single verb commanding us to DO something, not so much as a hint or a suggestion that we are to do anything at all. No requirements, no laws, no chores, no assignments, no lessons... he goes on - **The practice of resurrection is not a do-it-yourself self-help project. It is God's project and he is engaged full time in carrying it out.'**

Personally, I need to keep on knowing that **whatever I do/whatever you do... needs to flow from my/your identity as a child of God** where we allow ourselves to receive, be bathed in the grace of God.

Yesterday I was writing the final Daring Greatly blog where I highlighted some of the wonderful nuggets that the eighteen wonderful contributors had written over this year, and this is from one of them...

'... she talks about some of the things we did, some of the arguments we had, some of the changes we inaugurated and some of the possibilities we opened up. We did not think of ourselves as doing anything particularly important or special. We were doing what was in front of us; responding, with as much faith and integrity as we could, as much wisdom as we could summon, and sometimes with tears and laughter, to the situations that we were in.

...maybe daring greatly is to do with faithfully, and with integrity and hope, living who we are, and letting God do whatever it is that God wants to do through it – without being too anxious about what that might be.'

I came across this recently ~

'... the doorway to your destiny

lies in the back end of a room called

What's in your hand?

That room is only accessed through courage.¹²

Yours in hope

Jenni

¹² Gemma Ruth Brown of 'No More Traffic/N Ireland' quoting Karl Martin

It has been an extraordinary experience for me, this year of Presidency.

I have met masses of people I would never normally have met... shared with them about God's engagement, encounter with us... encouraged them to enlarge their boundaries, to dig deeper within themselves. I have talked and listened and heard. I have watched and pondered.



I have visited such a variety of places... South Africa, Thailand, Bulgaria, Berwick on Tweed [our northern-most Baptist church - sadly didn't manage the Lizard, our southern-most one], from west to east, south to midlands, to Yorkshire... I have been to the Cenotaph, the Royal Garden Party, a Bishop's Inauguration, the Conservative Party conference... I have visited churches, cafés, drop-ins for asylum seekers, a soft play area, people's homes... I have been to Councils, meetings, services for those with disabilities, conferences, retreats... even I am getting tired as I read this!

And today I have been writing the words I will share at the Assembly later this month. This is part of it -

The other week I looked back on notes I had made in September 2013 after talking with a wise friend, when I had been thinking about what the Presidency would mean and what I might bring to the role.



Underlined was the word CLAIM

CLAIM how I want the year to be -

Who do I want to talk to?

Who do I need to speak into my life?

If, at the end of the year, I want to think *'that was a great year'* what would have happened to make it so?

Look for an IMAGE/CONCEPT that's BIG enough to hold the kind of thing I might want to say...

And for me, at least, it has been a great year. And I know that people have been affected and encouraged. God has been good. But there's one thing I want to reflect on.

One of the things that had come to me early on in my preparation, was about **giving people voice**... a place to be heard, an opportunity to speak. If possible I wanted to take people with me. I wanted to visit those who might not expect to meet me. And to some extent I did achieve that. These letters and the Blog and the Facebook

page, all of which I have enjoyed, have opened up a wider forum, although if I had been a more persistent FB contributor... and there was plenty of actual face to face engagement. Masses of interesting people to meet and fascinating enterprises to visit. There are conversations, still in my memory... the local Conservative councillor met at the Party breakfast at the Conservative Party Conference... Emily Chalke running from Edinburgh to London to make Ella's Home for women coming out of prostitution, a reality... a community meal in Devon, a flooded church in Yorkshire, someone deciding to go forward for Ministerial Recognition, people who have emailed me...



Yet, if I were truthful, I feel that I did not wholly achieve my hopes about giving people voice. Having come from a very interactive style of church gathering, I did not manage to integrate that style into many of my visits. I became a sermon-giver again. [I confess I rather enjoyed it!] But it seemed a step too difficult to initiate something interactive in an unfamiliar setting.



But this is something I cannot let go as I go forward from this year...

Fairly recently I met a Professor of Geography who told me about this project he has been involved in called '**Unearth Hidden Assets**: through Community Co-Design and Co-Production.' The idea was to engage the local people in creative ways, to explore community projects. To involve people, by listening to their stories, and going on a journey of discovery with them where they could co-produce solutions and

find that **they were the hidden assets** in any undertaking. 'It was life changing, special... we all developed as people'. 'Never again will they say, "We're just..."'

Last month I was invited to take part in the YCF Round Table [Youth, Children and Family]. It's about conversations between those involved in particularly in that area, with the objective of offering new ways to encourage spiritual life. Beforehand we had some reading to do - and we were all struck by this sentence from Westerhoff '*So the gift can be given*'

How do we nurture faith that is living, imaginative, curious, provocative, beautiful, seeking, peace-loving and healing?

How do we? Giving voice is part of this. He was relating this to children... I would relate it to all of us.

I've mentioned these things because I **still** want to work towards listening and encouraging voice... giving people opportunities... expecting a valued contribution brought from those whose opinions are often not sought.

At a retreat day I led last week, someone wrote a reflection on the sealed box and the invitation to step out of it...

We only imagine the box has a lid

If the box were closed, wrapped and sealed, we would have suffocated a long while ago

The box is open

... but we like to think it's holding us securely inside

We've grown accustomed to keeping our eyes focussed horizontally

We've deceived ourselves into forgetting to look up

*God gives us a 5-sided box
as the freedom of no limits would be too much for us womb-born creatures*

*There's a floor of history, sides of identity, labour, ideas, relationships... but no lid
never a lid*

If we look up and focus we will see there is no lid

*That's where the light gets in
That's where there's growing room*

*The box is not sealed,
it never was
We just prefer to think it is.**

Daring Greatly has become enmeshed in my being. Our boxes are not sealed. I want to keep on stepping out of mine to follow Jesus. I pray that for us all.

Thank you for the privilege of being Baptist President this year. Thank you for the blessing you are and the blessing you have been. On the 14th of this month Rupert Lazar will become the next President and I wish him and you, all God's rich blessings as you travel on with God.

yours
Jenni



*Thank you, Nikki Jenkins.

