



St John the Baptist
Scottish Episcopal Church
Perth

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April and May 2025

Rector's Reflections

Dear Friends,

The darkness of winter months seems to be coming to an end, and the promise of light and spring seem to be upon us. Seasons are a wonderful thing. In the Church's Calendar, of course we find ourselves in the season of Lent, a time for self-reflection, a time to take stock, as we follow in the footsteps of our Lord. We await of course yet another season, the new light of Easter, and of resurrection, all promises of things yet still to come.

I do hope that you will support the Services and activities planned over Lent and Easter at St. John's. It is a very special time in the life of our faith, and a time when we can be together on a journey of hope and love.

In those wonderful, and powerful words in our Lent Liturgy, 'Christ give you grace to deny yourself; take up your cross and follow him'. We all have crosses to bear in life, some much harder than others. Yet, this is what we as Christians are called to manifest in this life, so that in the life to come our reward will meet us.

May this Lent be a time for all of us to look deeply at ourselves, to bear whatever cross we have been given, and to enjoy the celebration of Easter when that new light dawns upon us all once again.

Easter Light, by Royal Rhodes

The light, a "bright abyss" a bookman said,
Has burned away the winter's cleansing hold.
Each rhyme I thought gave order left me dead.
Every longing left me numb and cold.
A dumb unword, a Godspeak, angeltongue
Spoke divine unmeaning in my brain --
Thoughts so terrible in horror hung,
Exposed as on a cross, I now refrain
Repeating. Fractured bones and bowels fail,

Flawed, and fail in me -- sweet misery --
Either this was vision or a nail
A mind in perishing at last can see.
Shadows fled as life begins to start:
The stone that rolled away had been my heart.

May you and yours have a very happy and blessed Easter when it comes.

Much love,

Dean Graham

Weekly Services

Sunday	8.30 a.m.	Holy Communion
Sunday	10.30 a.m.	Sung Eucharist
Thursday	11.00 a.m.	Communion, coffee and a chance to chat

Special Services

6 th April	10.30 a.m.	Passion Sunday
13 th April	10.30 a.m.	Palm Sunday
20 th April	10.30 a.m.	Easter Sunday
29 th May	11.00 a.m.	Ascension Day

Please see notice overleaf of services taking place during Holy Week

In Defence of the Pharisees

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! – Matthew 23:13

The Pharisees sometimes get a bad rap in church. We hear that they were self-important and sanctimonious, failing to practice what they preached and believing themselves better than other people. Jesus goes on quite the rant about it in Matthew 23.

But my feeling is that Jesus got quite so frustrated with the Pharisees because they were *so nearly right*.

In Judaism of the time, there were three main branches of religious thought: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. The Essenes were isolationists, retreating into their desert monasteries to live minimalist lives, avoiding contamination with the world. The Sadducees were the Temple priests, descended from priestly lines, elite and rich and powerful.

And the Pharisees? They were teachers arising from the ordinary folk. They believed in the resurrection of the dead (unlike the Sadducees) and in free will (unlike the Essenes). They were strongly against the financial corruption and elitism of the priests, and were in favour of helping the poor and opening the worship of God to all. They were the ones who believed that God is present in everyday life, and that we serve God by serving one another in community, not just by worshipping in the Temple. When Jesus said that the greatest commandment was the Shema (*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength*), and added that ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ is *like it* (Matthew 22:38–39), he was saying something utterly uncontroversial to any Pharisee.

Jesus tells his followers to follow the Pharisees’ teachings (Matthew 23:3) before beginning his diatribe against hypocrisy. Pharisees come to listen to his teaching (Luke 5:17) and invite him to meals in their houses (Luke

7:35; Luke 14:1). Pharisees warn Jesus when Herod wants to kill him, and appear to be genuine about it (Luke 13:31).

Although we tend to think of them collectively as ‘the Pharisees’, they weren’t a monolith. Different schools of thought argued over, for example, whether to associate with Gentiles, or how to pray. Some Pharisees argued that Jesus was of God, while others disagreed (John 9:16). Some were involved in plots against him (John 11:53). Some became followers: Nicodemus, a Pharisee (John 3:1), and Joseph of Arimathea, who as a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43) was presumably either a Pharisee or a Sadducee, are the ones who bury Jesus (John 19:38–40).

We tend to assume hostility when we read that Pharisees ask Jesus questions ‘to test him’ (e.g. Mark 10:2) – and to be fair sometimes the questions definitely were traps (Matthew 22:15–22). But in fact asking tricky questions and debating the Law was and is very much part of Jewish culture. Pharisees believed that God calls us to use our human reason to determine what God wants of us, based on an understanding of the spirit of the Law. The debates and questions were an intrinsic part of that, and asking Jesus hard questions was, at least for some of them, a sign of respect. (Remember that Jesus, aged twelve, was found in the Temple ‘asking questions’ and amazing the scholars with his own answers to theirs (Luke 2:41–42).

The Pharisees were very much in debate about how to apply God’s Law to everyday life. So in the Gospels we hear a lot about, for example, the Sabbath laws because what constituted work on the Sabbath, and when you might be permitted or even commanded to work anyway, was *very much under active debate* at the time. Jesus was contributing to that debate.

Jesus calls Pharisees ‘hypocrites’ when he sees them preaching rules and restrictions they themselves don’t follow; he calls woe upon them when they get so hung up on determining every last detail of the Law that they forget the purpose of it is to help us treat each other well; and he calls them out when they start thinking of themselves as more valuable people

because they follow more of the Law than other people. He's harsh on them because they *know* that the spirit of the Law is the important part; they *know* that we should love our neighbour: they understand enough to be able to *do better*.

Of course, by the time the Gospels were written down, the Romans had destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and also many of the monastic settlements, leaving no place for the Sadducees or the Essenes. The Pharisees, with their idea that you could worship God *anywhere*, were the only group left. (And in due course it was their ideas and debates that became the foundation of modern Judaism.) So for the Gospel writers it was the reactions of the Pharisees that were important to record, and especially to note the *contrasts* between their teaching and behaviour and Jesus's. Because at the time the *similarities* were obvious.

And today, two thousand years in the future, we have lost a lot of this history, and we have gained the accretions of centuries of antisemitism, and it's easy to read the Gospels assuming that the Pharisees are simply Bad Guys. But if we think of Pharisees as The Bad Guys, we can miss where Jesus's complaints against them apply to us. We can be so sure that we are right that we don't notice when other people are struggling; we can be ever so doctrinally correct but fail to follow through with our actions in how we treat other people; we can put limitations on God's grace and put barriers in the way of hearing and following Christ.

And we miss the important parts the Pharisees got right that we should follow. God is alive and working amongst us. He calls us to serve him and love him in our everyday lives, by loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Rhiannon Miller

Jesus at the Pharisee's House, by Otto Semler



Birthdays!



Alan McPherson 80

Jean Hendry 80

Dean Graham 55
215



Spring Lambs near
Muthill.

Photograph by David
Wilson

Fellowship

In February we enjoyed a very wide-ranging presentation from Chris Rose on what has been his lifelong interest, which is anything to do with trains. Whether it was the historical development of the railways during the 19th century followed by the dismantling of so many local railways by Beeching in the 1960s, miniature railways, steam engines, modern trains and the technicalities of them over the years, Chris' expertise, knowledge and enthusiasm was impressive and enjoyed by us all. It made me think about all the railway lines and routes I had travelled on in the 1950s and 60s, including the line between Leuchars and St Andrews during my student days, which had all disappeared by the early 1970s.

At our most recent meeting in March on a cold afternoon we relaxed as we heard about and enjoyed Bill Bracewell's photos of his and Christine's holiday last year with their son and his family in Sri Lanka. Their accommodation during much of the trip seems to have been in tents but they looked in the photos to be more like luxury villas and certainly didn't resemble anything that I would recognise as a tent or the location as that typical of any campsite I have ever seen! We discovered that Sri Lanka is clearly a beautiful tropical island country despite being slightly smaller in area than the whole Island of Ireland but having a population of over 22 million.

Our next meeting is on Monday 14th April and those attending are invited to bring in a favourite book. The book does not have to be of great literary merit. It can be fiction or non-fiction or a nature or art related book with lots of pictures, whatever makes you like it and why it is special to you. The plan is that while sitting and conversing in our groups we chat about our books and why we have chosen these books or why they are special to us. I suspect our choices will be very varied. All will be very welcome.

Jean Hendry

Duck!



Mandarin ducks were introduced to the UK from China and have become established in parks and ponds following escapes and releases from captivity.

The male has elaborate and decorative plumage with orange feathers on the side of its face, a purple chest, large orange feathers that stick up like sails on its back and pale orange flanks. The female

is not as brightly coloured, with grey head and white stripes behind the eye, brown back and mottled sides. This disparity in colouring is sexually dimorphic.

Compared to mallards, the mandarin is shy, preferring to seek cover in overhanging vegetation but when used to humans they can become bolder, a behaviour being shown on Gannochy pond by the two males and a female who seem to be quite at home there.

Lots of recent activity indicate the breeding season has begun, and as no hybrids have ever been recorded, there may be a mandarin family on the pond later this spring. Hopefully, photos will follow.



Joyce Sampson

Lectionary April and May 2025

April 6th Fifth Sunday of Lent

Isaiah 43. 16-21, Philippians 3. 4b-14, John 12.1-8

April 13th Sixth Sunday of Lent, Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50. 4-9a, Philippians 2. 5-11, Luke 19. 28-40

April 17th Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14, 1 Corinthians 11.23-26, John 13.1-17, 31b-35

April 20th Easter Day

Isaiah 65.17-25, I Corinthians 15.19-26, Luke 24. 1-12

April 27th Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 5. 27-32, Revelation 1. 4-8, John 20. 19-31

May 4th Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 9. 1-6, Revelation 5.11-14, John 21. 1-19

May 11th Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 9. 36-43, Revelation 7. 9-17, John 10. 22-30

May 18th Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11. 1-18, Revelation 21. 1-6, John 13. 31-35

May 25th Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16. 9-15, Revelation 21.10, 22-22.5, John 14. 23-29

May 29th Ascension Day

Acts 1.1-11, Ephesians 1. 15-23, Luke 24. 44-53

HOLY WEEK AND EASTER AT ST JOHN'S 2025

Palm Sunday



8.30 a.m. Holy Communion
10.30 a.m. Sung Eucharist with
Procession of Palms

Wednesday



7.00 p.m. Stations of the Cross with
incense

Maundy Thursday



11.00 a.m. Holy Communion
7.00 p.m. Sung Eucharist with Feet
Washing and Vigil, ends with Compline at
8.30 p.m.

Good Friday



12 – 3.00 p.m. Good Friday Devotions,
led by Dr Mike Hull and Liturgy of the
Lord's Passion.

Easter Sunday

7.00 a.m. PACT Dawn Service at
Quarrymill
8.30 a.m. Holy Communion
10.30 a.m. Sung Eucharist

The Wilderness

‘The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose...For in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert.’ So did Isaiah prophesy, c. 35. However, implementation of this prophecy had to wait till 1964, when the National Water Carrier was inaugurated. Fresh water is transferred from the Sea of Galilee to the populous middle of Israel and towards the arid south. The Sea of Galilee is fed by the River Jordan; tributaries come from the hills of Syria and Lebanon, and enter Israel at Banyas, whence it flows south. From it, water is drawn for drinking and agriculture. The Israelis claim to have made the desert bloom, but at a cost. Fruits are composed mainly of water, and desert communities, for example the small town of Arad where we stayed in 2000, have turned to light electronics, plastics, military technology and computers.

Two thousand years ago, the desert was watered by meagre seasonal rain and sometimes flash floods. From earliest times water was available in oases, or kept in cisterns, such as those at Masada, Herod’s hill fortress where the Zealots made their last stand in AD 73. Thus it was possible to live in the desert, as the Bedouin have done until very recently with their camels and herds.

Jesus’s temptations in the Wilderness are described at Matthew iv 1-11 and Luke iv 1-13, with a perfunctory mention at Mark i 13. John does not record it; perhaps he did not think it important enough or he recognised it as an allegory rather than a factual event. One is tempted to wonder how Jesus could have survived forty days without food or water, as is implied in the text, and anyway, how did the gospel writers know the details? Forty days is, of course, a reference to the forty years of the Israelites wandering in the Wilderness, thereby linking Jesus with his Old Testament background.

It has been long debated what the significance is of the Temptations. The general view is that they are a parable confirming Jesus's unswerving pursuit of his mission as God's son, announced just beforehand at his Baptism by John in the Jordan. Many hermits in later centuries shared the sufferings of Christ by an ascetic existence in the desert and renouncing the world. For us weaker brethren, some denial of comforts and pleasures in Lent is a modest token of our commitment to the Christian faith.

David Willington



About to burst: rhododendron that hasn't yet been caught by Jack Frost

Photos by Patricia Noel-Paton

Mimosa, Madeira



St John's Green Ticket Scheme

The Scottish Episcopal Church is committed to attaining 'Net Zero' carbon emissions by the year 2030 and is encouraging individual members of the SEC to strive to that aim in their own lives. It is our hope our Green Ticket Scheme will encourage each of us in that aim.

The scheme has been running at St John's for a few months now having been launched for the start of new church year in December. If you aren't familiar with the detail, then please collect from the back of the church a booklet which explains what it is all about. The Green Tickets themselves are in the pews with more available at the back of the church.

Many of you have started participating and we have a few Green Tickets in the offering plate each Sunday – thank you to those of you have taken the time to fill in a card. Contributions have covered all four areas of Transport, Food, Home Energy and Buying Habits – and have varied from 'big' to 'small' changes.

Two of the 'bigger' items are:

"Switched from a hybrid to an E.V." (Electric Vehicle)

"I have recently had solar panel installed."

Most are more modest contributions but no less valid and important.

"Have been trying to limit times I wash up just a few items."

"Turned off lights in bathroom – no-one there!"

"Avoiding buying salad during winter months – opting for seasonal root veg. instead."

One of the more interesting ideas was 'No Spend January' where the contributor attempted to restrict spending to just fresh food and some essentials and largely to use things in the cupboards.

I know that many in the church are already routinely taking carbon emissions into consideration when making decisions. It would be lovely to hear more suggestions. More Green Tickets have been taken from church than have so far been handed in so if you have tickets at home then don't be shy – please fill them in and place them in the offering plate.

Cath Bodrell – Eco Group



Bible Study

Gordon and Ruth are planning to run another five-session series of Bible studies in May and early June, probably on Wednesdays. More information to follow.

Pause for Thought

A poem by actress Rosalind Russell:

Trust Him, when darkest thoughts assail thee

Trust Him, when thy faith is small

Trust Him, when to simply trust Him is the
hardest thing of all.





‘The Face of a Child’

Yesterday Bruce and I were privileged to attend an event hosted by Christian Aid and the Friends of St Andrew’s Jerusalem, who support the Church of Scotland’s work in the Holy Land. We heard from four partners from Israel, Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territory. Two of these four very courageous Palestinians, not permitted under Israeli law to meet each other in the Holy Land, particularly impressed me.

Leila El Ali is Director of Najdah, a development MGO which works with Palestinian women and child refugees in Lebanon. Leila is a gender advisor and a promoter of Palestinian national and human rights with a particular focus on women. She is an advisor to the Faculty of Arts at Beirut Arab University. She is also a central and national Palestinian member of PLO. Her description of the utter destruction of so many camps was heartrending: 40,000 people internally displaced - that is they are refugees within their own country.

Even more impressive was Peter Nasir, born and raised in East Jerusalem. He is the General Secretary of EJ-YMCA (East Jerusalem YMCA). This is a Palestinian community-based organisation working closely with Christian Aid to empower youth and communities through many programmes - but especially youth participation. Giving soft skills to young folk is very important so they learn to protect themselves in groups and then may represent their local communities. Many live in constant fear of having their residency revoked. He told how Shadi arrested him while still in pyjamas, despite his parents’ pleas. At prison, beaten and shackled, he fainted several times, but was held in prison. His family advocated for his release, and after forty four days he was released and placed under house arrest.

This story so moved me that I asked Peter what gave him hope. He said there was nothing inside himself to give hope, but he continued because

of the children. 'Seeing a smile on a child's face made all the difference - the face of a child keeps me working.'

Elaine Cameron, St John's Christian Aid rep

Christian Aid Week 11– 17 May 2025

Do you recall last year's Perth Book Stall for Christian Aid, at Kinnoull Church?

It was so successful, raising over £1200, that Gerry Watson is offering one this year:

Saturday 10 May from 10.00 - 4.00 pm:

Teas & coffees available in the church hall.

Gerry is again looking for second-hand books and is happy to uplift from St John's. I assured him that St John's congregation were certainly up for this! He will even collect from your home if you ask.



Sunday May 11: Justin Walker will be the Christian Aid speaker at our 10.30 am service. Justin is keen to become involved with raising awareness and campaigning on global issues. We have been impressed by his knowledge and enthusiasm.

Saturday August 30 Big Brekkie event:

Wendy Duncan and I judge that the time is again right for a face-to-face event, rather like what we did four years ago in the Cathedral, just after Covid. We are currently exploring venues – we will keep you posted!

**Christian Aid 80th Anniversary Service
St Giles Cathedral Edinburgh 17 May 2025 at 19.00**

A Line to God

A poster found in a church:

When you enter this church, it may be possible that you hear the voice of God.

However, it is unlikely that he will call you on your phone.

Thank you for turning off your mobile.

If you want to talk to God, enter, choose a quiet place and talk to him.

If you want to see God, send him a text while driving.

Contributed by Jackie Thomson.

From the Editor

Thanks very much for everyone's contributions to this issue. All entries to the editor, David Willington dwillington@hotmail.com for our June/July issue by **Sunday 18th May**.

Just a reminder that there is a tin at the back of the Church if you wish to make a donation towards the costs of producing *Quest*.

Contact Information *indicates member of the Vestry

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