

The Link

April 2020



The new normal

Dear Friends,

As we batten down the hatches in the hope that the pestilence of the COVID-19 pandemic passes over us, let me, as a historian remind you that the 20th year of the last three centuries has proven, on the surface, pandemically perilous.

In 1720 there was a deadly pandemic of bubonic plague. It started in Marseille and was later called "The Great Plague of Marseille." We perhaps think bubonic plague was confined to the 15th century, but on this occasion, almost 100,000 died. However, the people remembered God's Word, *"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* God heard! Amen! Following this pandemic, God raised up Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and George Whitefield. The 1730s and 1740s were years of great Revival in the church.

In 1820 the first cholera pandemic occurred, somewhere in Asia. Among the affected countries, we can list Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. And this pandemic has killed about the same number of people. About 100,000 officially registered deaths. The main reason for the infection is the consumption of water from lakes infested with this killer bacterium. However, once again, the people remembered God's Word, *"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* God heard! Amen! Following this pandemic, evangelical mission around the world accelerated exponentially. These were the days of David Livingstone, Mary Slessor and Hudson Taylor. The 1830s and 1840s were years of great Revival in the church, and of course, many still speak of the 1859 revival in our own land.

In 1920 one of the most unrelenting pandemics occurred. This Spanish Flu infected about half a billion people and killed 100 million. The Spanish flu holds the official record for the deadliest pandemic officially recorded in history. However, once again, the people remembered God's Word, *"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* God heard! Amen! Following this pandemic, God raised up fearless and fired-up preachers, who would be whirlwinds in their pulpits and see many trusting in Christ. One notable example, Bangor born preacher, W.P. Nicholson. Many Belfast born dock workers heard the Gospel and trusted in Christ. The 1930s and 1940s were years of great growth in the church, and of course, many still speak of the influence W.P. had on the church, and on their own lives, even today.

In 2020, we see history repeat itself. Coronavirus has been labelled a pandemic by the World Health Organisation and its impact on us personally, familiarly, congregationally and nationally is unprecedented since the days of the First World War. That little verse quoted above is included in a wider context,

"Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place." 2 Chronicles 7:12-15

We've observed in 2020 the heavens being shut and wildfires ravage Australia, we've observed locusts ravage the grain fields in Kenya and other parts of East Africa, and now, pestilence. Let us, friends, during this time, seek God's face, and pray! But, let's not lose sight of that key verse from the sermon series and Joseph story, *"what the enemy meant for evil... God meant for Good!"* Let's pray, that the church, Jesus' bride, will be revived after this pandemic, including our First Dromara Presbyterian Church. As we think of the people God raised up after these historical pandemics- could God raise you up? Are you ready for that great challenge? Are you using this time, saying, "here am I, use me!"

I want to assure you, we continue to do all we can for you at this time. Our services are still being broadcast onto Facebook and the Internet every Lord's Day at 11:30am and 6:45pm. Thank you to our Link magazine editorial team; Ruth, Audrey and Peter for ensuring the next edition is still produced. This will be a digital copy for you to read in the comfort of your own homes, and once we are back to normal, we will produce a hard copy for those people who don't have digital access.

With continued prayers and every blessing. Looking forward to renewed fellowship with you all very soon!

Your Pastor,

Scott



Feast

In 2019 a new group was formed for young adults in church. This caters for all those who are 18 plus but who still have their own teeth. We meet every month for bible study and usually a social activity of some sort. Much thought was put into naming the group and long conversations took place analyzing bible passages and trying to find something which fitted with the primary aims of the group to bring together young people who had left the youth organisations and were less involved in church life. While most of the committee were very focused on a name which had biblical roots Rev Scott Moore continually brought the discussion back to food. He maintained that the group would provide a feast for the body and the spirit. Anyone who has attended and watched the merciless way he attacks pizza will know what he actually meant.

Throughout the year we have tried to focus on a character in our studies and to identify the parallels between that character and ourselves. We initially studied Joseph and more recently have been working our way through the sto-

ry of Ruth. It has been brilliant to gather together for food, good craic and most importantly bible study and discussion. The leaders have been really encouraged by those who have joined and attended and more so by the depth and honesty of the group discussions. There are over 30 in the group when we can all get together which is difficult given the social calendars which we young people operate but every meeting has been really well attended with seating sometimes being the biggest problem! The thoughts and prayers of some of the group have been so encouraging and we have been able to learn much from each other and crucially, from God's word.

We have gone out on a few occasions as we try to gradually introduce some of the more rurally minded of the group to the wider world. We visited the Escape Rooms in Belfast one Autumn Saturday. These rooms depend on solving clues to find the combination to open the door and get out. For some of us, had the manager not given us playschool level clues our bodies would still be decomposing in those rooms! Thankfully some of our number were up to the challenge and we all managed to get out!



In late November we had our Christmas dinner at AJ's in Crossgar followed by our own private cinema screening in Comber. We have also had some interesting activities at Church Road with party games which were enough to leave some of us needing physio and others who watched Scott take part in the Cornflake Box challenge needing counselling!

A huge thank-you to all our members who have made the first year of Feast so rewarding and so enjoyable. We as leaders have taken as much from our meetings as the members and it has been brilliant to make contact and deepen relationships with old and new friends and see familiar faces sitting round the table again.

David Annett

Youth Club

IGNITE P4-P7 age group

7pm to 8:30pm

SYNC High school age group

8:30pm to 10pm

Another year of Youth Club has passed us by so quickly – how times flies!

It's always great to see new faces arrive, full of energy and excitement, as they take part in the various games and activities and always sad to see our more senior members leave, but how quickly they grow up into young adults.

On a typical evening, members enjoy the opportunity to participate in group games, football, basketball, netball, volleyball, unihoc, table tennis, snooker, pool, air hockey, board games, play station, Nintendo, Wii and of course there are those who are happy to sit around, chat and listen to music. Midway through each night, we come together for a ten minute epilogue, announcements and tuck shop.

Ignite

This year we had several outings. In October, P4 and P5 went to 10 pin bowling in Lisburn, while P6 and P7 went to Lisburn swimming pool, followed by McDonalds.

In December we went to the Pantomime to see 'Mother Goose' and in February, members enjoyed a new venue, High Rise in Lisburn, which is a Clip 'N' Climb challenging indoor climbing facility which was great fun, followed by McDonalds.

Throughout the year the children were also treated to pizza and ice cream nights. Outdoor team games were enjoyed during the clearer evenings.

SYNC

Sync members enjoyed an outing to 'We are Vertigo' inflatable theme park at Newtownbreda in October, followed by a visit to McDonalds. In January, we had an archery night in the main hall.

In February we went on another outing to Dundonald Ice Bowl with the choice of skating or 10 pin bowling and then finished with (yet another!) McDonalds to finish the night.

In March we had two special guests, Danny and Becky, from Logos Ministries International who came along to Ignite and Sync and organised games in the main hall and took the epilogue. We were so pleased to see almost 80 young people come along to this special night, all of whom participated and enjoyed the games and listened attentively to the epilogue. We finished a great night with pizza and ice cream.

We are really encouraged and blessed to see so many young people come along each week to both Ignite and Sync. We hope, pray and trust that each child will realise that God loves them, Jesus died for them, and that they can have their sins forgiven and have that assurance of one day being in Heaven.

We thank God for the opportunity, as leaders, we have of showing God's love to each child and sharing epilogues each week.

Our annual Soup Lunch raised £1,139.27, which was split between two charities; Logos Ministries and Open Doors. Logos Ministries International share the Gospel to schools and





churches locally and throughout the world. Open Doors are an organisation who train church leaders, provide practical support and emergency relief, and support Christians who are persecuted for their faith.

Many thanks to all who helped with the lunch and to everyone who came along and supported us and for your generosity.

This year Youth Club were really pleased to partner with Youth Fellowship again in hosting Blaze 2020, a youth event for high school and older, held on 7th March 2020. This was a really encouraging time to see our young leaders prepare, pray, and take leading roles in the event itself. See more details of Blaze 2020 in separate item.

This year, we unfortunately had to finish Youth Club prematurely on 13th March due to the Coronavirus. We pray that you and your families will remain in good health.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each leader for your time, hard work and dedication to Youth Club each week; it is really appreciated.

Thanks also to our congregation for your prayerful support throughout the year. Hopefully we will see you all in September.

Brian Copes



Blaze 2020



With it having been a few years since we last ran a “Blaze” event it had been set on the youth leaders’ hearts of First Dromara that we should run a similar sort of event this year, with the timely name Blaze 2020.

Blaze 2020 went down as a roaring success all praise be to God. We shall briefly try to give you a glimpse of what happened on the 7th of March 2020.

With a crowd of between 40-50 young people aged 11 plus, the service was kicked off with a short welcome by Matthew Reain followed by the opening prayer from our minister Scott Moore.

After this we had a quiz hosted by Jonathan Rodgers and Nadine Hamilton, which served as an icebreaker and got the young folk mixing together and having some banter.

The Band then proceeded to open the worship and we were all really blessed by the lively and uplifting music, thanks of course to the musicians (Joy and Leah Spiers, Peter Copes, Simon McCracken, Jonny Rodgers and Ross Stewart) who did a fantastic job.

A short word then followed on all that takes place at both Youth club and Youth Fellowship and how all young people, no matter what their circumstances, would be more than welcome to come along to the above organisations.

John Weir was the guest speaker interviewed by Brian

Copes, and he impressed on us that night of the work that God had done through him and how He gloriously saved him. John was brought up on the Donegal Road, Belfast. His whole life revolved around football from a young age and he had no interest in God, however in his late teens a footballing injury meant that he had to give up his dream of becoming a professional footballer. During this time an elderly cleaner from the hospital had been praying for John’s soul and it was through this woman’s prayers that John came to know the Lord, and now lives by faith serving the Lord. It was a powerful testimony demonstrating the power of prayer and how the Lord works in wonderful ways.

The testimony was followed by a few more praise items before John brought his sermon.

John’s sermon was simply entitled “five types of people John meets in his everyday life” and was taken from Joshua 24. The five types of people John meets are listed below:

1. People who are saved, and they know it – (these people have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour)
2. People who profess to be saved, however are not living the life (These people you may see in church, however when you get to know these people you will notice that they are no different from a worldly person)
3. Backslider, and far away from God (these are what you

may refer to as a Prodigal son, at once these people were on fire for God, however different things have led them astray. A relevant passage is Matthew 13 – the parable of the sower)

4. People who are not sure if they are saved or not (these people lack assurance, because they do not know if they are saved or not, they will not witness, there will be no joy. 1 John 5:13 “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”)

5. People who aren't saved, and they know it.

John then went on to say that every single one of us is one of the numbers listed above and that only if we are number one we can be assured and confident of salvation.

He concluded the sermon by mentioning that no-one knows the day or hour when the Saviour returns, and we need to be prepared to meet the Lord. It was a thought-provoking sermon and one that each one of us needs to take into deep consideration.

The night was finished off with a fantastic supper which



was put on by Ruth Rodgers and Pauline Stewart.

All in all, it was a fantastic night and one that will live long in the memory of all those that attended.

Finally, a big thanks must go out to all of the team from those setting up behind the scenes to those speaking on the night. It was a great team effort and without everyone's hard efforts the night could not have happened.

Joshua and Matthew Reain





Celebrating 60 years of ordination with the Rev. Ronnie J. Wilson BA, Minister in First Dromara 1960-1967

In February we were privileged as a congregation of First Dromara to welcome back the Rev Ronnie J Wilson BA to mark the 60th anniversary of his ordination. Here he tells us about his memories at First Dromara.

Tell us about yourself, where did you come from, what was your upbringing and how did you end up being called to First Dromara Presbyterian Church 60 years ago?

I was born in Belfast, and most of my youth was spent in Belfast. I was the eldest of three sons, but unfortunately my youngest brother died about 10 years ago. My other brother is a retired Presbyterian minister living in Belfast. I was brought up in Bloomfield Presbyterian Church in East Belfast, and of course in those early days, I attended Church very regularly. I grew up through Sunday School and the different organisations there, particularly the Boys' Brigade which had a huge influence on my life. As I say, I enjoyed my time in Bloomfield and through the preaching of God's Word in church Sunday by Sunday and other services, the day came when I committed my life to Jesus Christ. It was later when I

*heard the call of God to serve as a minister. So, I went to Queen's University Belfast and Assemblies' College in Belfast (as it was known then). I soon became a licentiate and served as an Assistant in Newington** Presbyterian Church in North Belfast, and I enjoyed my ministry there very much. Later, I heard the fact that I had been placed on the list for First Dromara Presbyterian Church and I was placed last to preach on that list. I can't remember the names of the other ministers on the list, but it worked out well, and I enjoyed coming here on the 3rd January 1960 to preach on trial.*

What happened that day?

I came to Dromara that morning by bus and I was met at Kinallen Corner by the late Jim McGowan (Joan's father), and he drove me up to the church. I spent the day with Fred and Christina Meeke (Myrtle's parents). On Sunday morning, I preached from St.

John's Gospel on the passage, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest Thou me?" and in the evening I preached the passage, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Don't ask me what I said, but that's what I did. It was the evening service that I particularly remember. All was going well, and I was leading the opening prayer when suddenly, with my eyes closed, I sensed a great darkness had come over the Church – the lights had gone out! Something had happened to the power supply. Somehow, a torch was provided, and fortunately, the service was able to continue as the lights came on. Ironically enough, the hymn that we sung when the lights came on was the Evening Hymn "The day thou gavest, Lord hath ended, the darkness falls at Thou behest". God moves in mysterious ways!

What was life like in Kinallen Manse?

I have to say that 60 years ago, it was



fairly basic in comparison now to the requirements for Manses. For example, there was no central heating, no double glazing, no water from the mains. We had to pump up water using an electric pump. If it broke down, we had to lower a bucket down in the Manse yard. The committee, thankfully, very quickly took pity on us and we got connected to the water main supply on the road. We also had company in the Manse – we had a colony of bats in the roof-space, and they visited us from time to time! The seven and a half years here were very happy and very memorable.

The congregation celebrated its 250th anniversary in 1963 when you were here. Did anything significant happen during that year?

Yes, it was significant in the sense that it was a very special occasion and we produced a short history. But it was really February of that year that was significant. In February, the General Assembly decide on who is going to be the next Moderator of the General Assembly and I wanted the new Moderator who was to be installed in June, to come here in June, and conduct the 250th anniversary. I had the letter written in February, but I didn't know who it was going to be, so I left a blank space. When I heard, I wrote in the name and set off to post it. Unfortunately, there was a tremendous fall of snow! 1963 – there was very big drifting outside the Manse and down the road to Kinallen Corner, which was

where the nearest post box was. I had to take a staff in my hand, and there was a blizzard going that evening, as I made my way to the post-box at Jim Magowan's grocers' shop. I battled down to post the letter, but what I didn't know was that that letter was going to lie in the box for about a week, because the post office vans weren't driving because of the bad snow.

Fortunately, the letter arrived with the new Moderator, and he told me afterwards, it was the first letter he had received of that kind, and the services took place as planned on 30th June 1963.

During your time here, were there personalities and characters that stood out to you? Who do you remember fondly?

There are so many! I find this the hardest question to answer, because there were so many people to pick out. I think firstly, I remember the main office bearers, Boyd McIlveen, the Session Clerk. George Irvine Snr was the Church Secretary, and of course, Willie McCullagh, was the Honorary Treasurer. I can visualise all the members of Session and all the members of Committee, and that is very special. There were other members too, who I had personal contact with over those seven and a half years. For example, immediately coming to mind was the late George Ervine, who was our Church Organist. He was always a very good friend of mine and I was sad to learn of his passing not that

long ago. He used to take me in his racing green Jaguar car to play table tennis at the East Down Church League. The whole Ervine family were very good to me over those years. And then there was Myrtle Meeke and her mother. Myrtle played the organ from time to time, and I had a good relationship with her and her parents. Both taught in the Sunday School all those years ago. There's also Ina Harte, who died a few weeks ago, the Captain of the GB, and her senior Lieutenant, Marina Ball. And then there is Sarah McVeigh, the wife of the Church Officer.

Ardana School was the Church Hall in those days, and there was this fire for heat and it was always blazing – the place was always roasting! Same with the Session Room that was upstairs. Willie McLaughlin lived on the Aughnaskeagh Road and he was the postman, but he was a good friend as well. Jim Magowan and his wife, Bob Graham and Mrs Graham who had their shop on the Aughnaskeagh Road, Jane Kerr and her husband who were former missionaries, Sydney Young who died recently, and Jim Elliott, too. Lots of people who I had close connections with. There was also William Wright Skelly and James Young Skelly.

It took me a while to realise that these men were brothers as people locally just called them William Wright and James Young. I could go on and on! Hubert Greer, who I was talking to recently, so many people. I have to stop somewhere!



**What did life post-Dromara look like?
Tell us about where you went and
what all you've done since?**

That is a big question, because it entails the next 50 years! I got the call in 1967 to go to Portstewart, and I was there for 32 years. It was a big congregation, a big seaside congregation, with lots of visitors from all over the world in the summertime. A congregation of about 500 families in those days. I had two Sunday services, a mid-week service and various organisations. It was a very busy congregation; very time consuming and demanding. During my time in Portstewart, I conducted over 900 funerals and several

hundred baptisms and weddings. I was very glad when I was coming near to retirement, and to be relieved of that responsibility. It was very demanding, but God blessed me with good health and that was a wonderful thing. I still enjoy that as best as I can. When I retired, we went to Ballymoney to live. It was good to not be in Portstewart and let my successor get on with the job and be removed slightly from the congregation. Very quickly after I retired, the Rev. Trevor Magowan asked me to do some pastoral visitation in the congregation of St James'. It has about 500 families there in Ballymoney, and I agreed. I've been doing that for the

last 20 years, and I enjoy it; you could say I never really have retired! I play indoor bowls and we play in a charity league in the district, and I engage my time in doing a bit of gardening, too. It is the relationship with my family that is very important to me. To have them around is a bonus and it makes my retirement very content.

**Do you have a favourite hymn and
favourite Bible verse?**

I am very grateful to God and to the congregation here in First Dromara Presbyterian Church, for giving me the opportunity to begin my ministry here. It was here that I really learned the



practicalities of pastoral ministry; how to run a congregation, how to conduct services, how to deal with people at critical points in their lives, and to endeavour to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ.

I have to say that I have no particular favourite hymn, but I do like singing the modern hymn, 'Jesus is Lord' and

the Evening Hymn, 'Abide with Me' (or the funeral hymn that is sung at football matches!). The verse I cherish is Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not onto thine own understanding, but in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct Thy paths."

**** Newington Presbyterian Church,**

North Belfast, has close links with First Dromara. Mr Wilson was Assistant Minister there in the late 1950s; but Mrs Malcolmson's daughter and her husband, the Rev. Tom Greer served here in the early 2000s and Mrs Ervine's daughter and her husband, the Rev. David McIlwaine served there until retirement in 2019.



First Steps

We had a great start to the new session of First Steps in September with more new faces from our local community along with the regulars that come along each week.

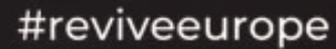
We meet each Monday during term time 10-12 noon. Unfortunately this year we had to stop our sessions in early March due to the virus (so 2020 will be a year to remember). Can I take this opportunity to thank Patsy again for all her hard work and dedication throughout the years at Tots.



We welcomed a few new faces in the kitchen this year for which I am very grateful. Thanks to Lorna Moore, Karen Walker and Jill Edgar. Also to Isobel Irvine for much needed help on the main floor and the fantastic crafts she creates each week. Plus not forgetting the other ladies who make it all possible Marina, Grace and Julie.

Judith Redmond



The logo for IFES Europe, featuring the text 'IFES' in a bold, white font above 'EUROPE' in a smaller, white font, all contained within a dark blue square.The word 'Revive' written in a white, cursive script font.The hashtag '#reviveeurope' in a white, sans-serif font.A photograph of Sarah Breuel, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a teal blazer over a black top. She is standing behind a wooden podium, smiling and raising her right fist in a gesture of triumph or prayer. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on her. The podium has several white pens or markers on it.

We came to Revive because God is hungry for more of each one of us. God wants to ignite a fire inside of me and inside of you that will transform us forever. He will use the fire inside us to set this continent on fire!

Sarah Breuel

Lorna Moore was part of the IFES Europe team which organised the Revive Conference held in Germany at the start of 2020.

I work for an organization called IFES Europe – the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

IFES Europe supports students across the continent and draws alongside national CU movements. Our vision is to see 'students built into communities of disciples, transformed by the Gospel and impacting the University, the Church and society for the glory of Christ'. We have various training events, resources and conferences for

students throughout the year, and Revive was 2019's student evangelism conference.

Revive was just amazing, and it is hard to believe that it has been and gone. I hope in this update, you'll be able to see a little bit of what happened, but as you'll understand, it is often hard to express in words a great experience! There are many, many highlights.

Our prayer was that students would meet with Jesus Christ, as we called on Him to move in Europe.

Our prayer was that students would be refreshed in their personal walk with God, enjoy fellowship with brothers and sisters from across our diverse continent. Our prayer was that they were enthused and equipped to return home and share His name, continually praying for revival.



In our celebrations we looked deep into our own hearts. This came out of the conviction that revival starts in our own lives. We explored things in our hearts that are hindering us in going deeper with Jesus and idols we need to repent of. We then focused on the University as the primary place for mission as students and challenged students to think about how they can bear witness to Jesus on their campuses.

We came together as a European family, asking God to Revive our continent and looked at our heritage (why Europe is where it is now, spiritually). We prayed and asked God to move afresh in Europe.

We had 3,000 participants from 68 different countries joining together for fellowship, worship and teaching and it really was a little glimpse of heaven.

Revive was huge, but it also felt personal and it was just wonderful to see students connecting with others, sharing their lives, faith and ideas. Walking past thousands of smiling faces and hearing the laughs was *just* wonderful!

Every day, we had two main teaching sessions, and in the

afternoons, students had free time, seminars and the opportunity to be involved in an 'Ideas Hub' of various topics to do with student ministry. The days were busy, but there was also space to allow everyone to reconnect with friends and to make new ones. I enjoyed seeing faces and catching up with folk I had met at previous IFES events.

Just as the disciples spent so much of their time in the Upper Room in Acts 1-5, we were incredibly blessed to have an Upper Room at *Revive*. In this room, we had constant prayer, worship and pastoral care. It was an opportunity for individual prayer and reflection and a space to contend in prayer for revival in the different nations in Europe. In one afternoon, 90 students asked for prayer. Such a beautiful opportunity to pray for one another.

Keep praying!

During *Revive*, 49 people (that we know) became followers of Jesus for the first time! It is amazing to think that God used this conference to revive individuals. It gives us hope and an encouragement that our continent will be impacted greatly for the Kingdom. Pray





for those new believers as they adjust to home life, grow in faith and tell friends/family of their decision to follow Jesus (perhaps in difficult circumstances). Give thanks for our new brothers and sisters!

Feedback - from Denmark

It is always lovely to be able to hear feedback and below is just one example of that. The General Secretary of the IFES movement in Denmark said the following:

“People felt like Europeans and Kingdom citizens. Countless meetings with brothers and sisters from other countries mean that our students have gotten a new perspective on how God is at work in different contexts and they have taken other countries and movements to heart. They were able to share and learn from brothers and sisters.

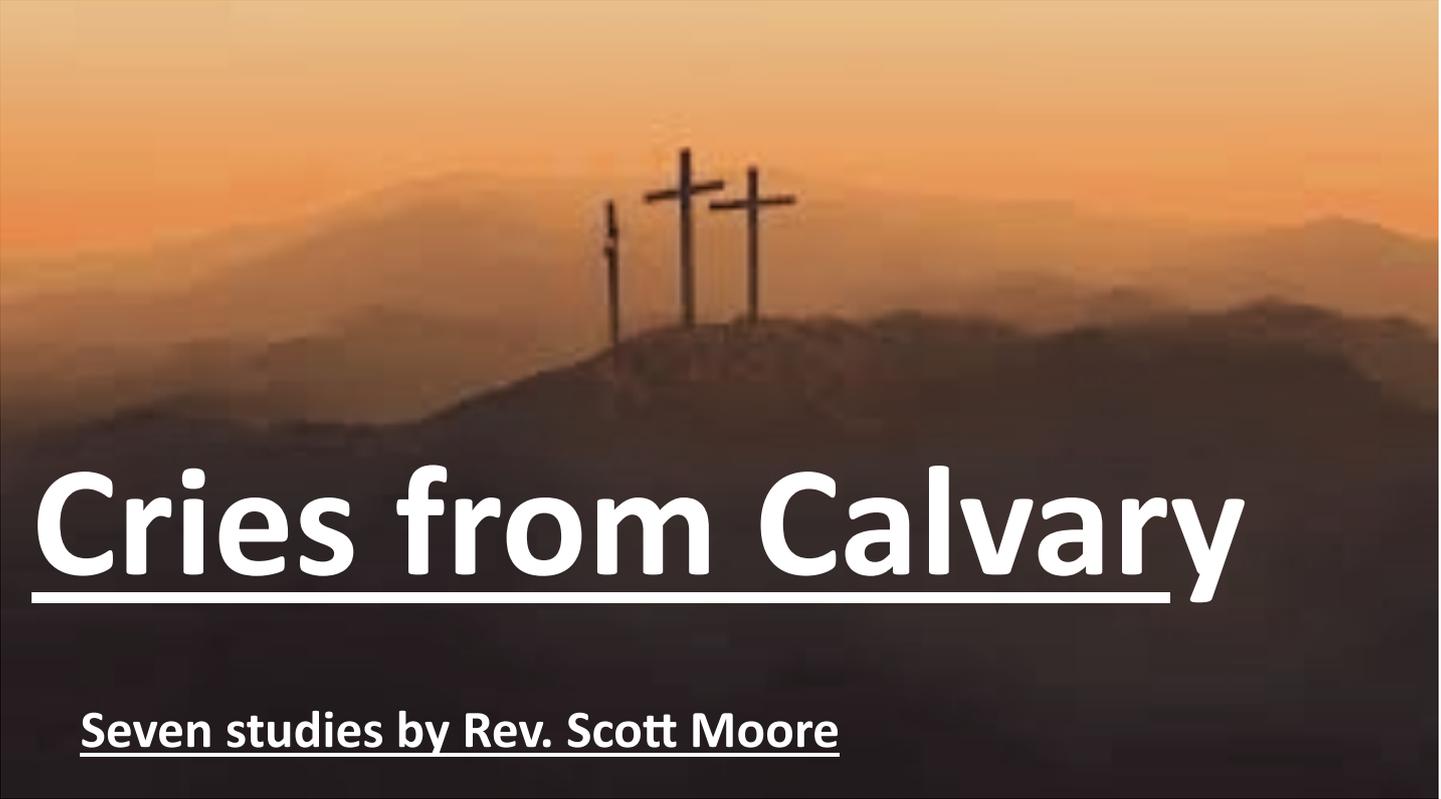
Many express a renewed expectancy for God to move among us – also in Denmark and they came away with a

new commitment to witness to their friends and fellow students. They left with a greater confidence in God to move, when they would dare take a bold step. They left with greater emphasis on prayer. They left with a clearer understanding of their place in the mission of God”

Although Revive is over (until the next one in 2022), I am staying on with IFES Europe. I’m now working with five others as part of the Regional Team, which supports national CU movements, students and staff in leadership development, seeker Bible studies and evangelism, and develops pioneering movements. I will be the administrator of the team, and project management, logistics, social media, publications, as well as investigating how we best support and monitor national movements. I began on 1 March, and although I am extremely grateful to some friends in 1st



Dromara who financially support me and pray for me, I still have to continue to raise my salary for this work, as IFES Europe is a faith-based mission. I’m excited to see student ministry continue to develop across our continent.

A photograph of three crosses on a hill at sunset. The sky is a warm orange and yellow, and the crosses are silhouetted against it. The hill is in the foreground, and the background shows a hazy landscape.

Cries from Calvary

Seven studies by Rev. Scott Moore

Karl Marx, famous for his writings on communism, before death said: "Go away! Last words are for fools who haven't said enough already."

What if you knew death was coming soon? I think we'd choose our last words more carefully than Mr. Marx. Seven times, as Jesus hung on the cruel cross (we've looked at three so far), He spoke.

The first three sayings that we've observed were uttered between the hours of 9am and 12noon. However, this fourth saying wasn't until about 3pm. Christ has been on the cross for six hours and is now close to death. We hear these awful words, *'And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, le-ma sabachthani?" Which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark 15:34.*

Out of the seven sayings, this is the central cry; three lead up to this cry and three follow it. At this point, the Lord Jesus Christ is

reaching the peak of His sufferings. This heart-rending howl is probably the most profound of all of the cries we have heard so far. This is the hardest of these hard sayings, yet mysterious words, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* We are going to observe three things that help us see that this cry is both a benefit and an encouragement to us today, especially as we prepare ourselves for the Easter season and as we come around the table of the Lord this Good Friday.

Firstly, this saying has a meaning.

Mark tells us just one verse before this cry, *"At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon."* This is darkness is supernatural. Mark has just told us, at 12noon when the sun should be at its highest in the day, everything is dark. Let's be very accurate here, this could not have been an eclipse for this

was Passover time (during the full moon), also the longest recorded eclipse has lasted seven minutes, and this was now three hours. This was definitely an act of Almighty God.

Picture this strange scene. One minute the cruel, crucifying, cantankerous crowd are jeering and yelling, then the sky above them gets darker, darker and darker. All of a sudden, the jeering and yelling ceases and the crowd grows scared and are afraid to move. The only sound ringing in the ears of the crowd are the moans and groans of the crucified as they fight for breath. Imagine the fear; they don't know how long this darkness could last.

This darkness was a visual aid. Remember, these people around the cross were Jews. Darkness in the middle of the day meant something to them. Jews who were well schooled and versed in their Old Testament would have known that darkness is men-

tioned in the book of Exodus as one of the 10 plagues and it is also referred to again by Isaiah the prophet as a form of judgement. God is turning a dark shadow on Calvary because this darkness speaks of sin and wrath.

For the first time in eternity, Jesus as the second member of the Godhead does not enjoy the light and smile of His Father's face. This is divine darkness and it stirs in Him the response: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus quotes Psalm 22 as He cried out in agony. Some hear these words, quoted from the psalmist and they think He is calling for Elijah to return, but He's not. He's using God's word and He's saying He is actually, for the first time in eternity, forsaken. God the Father had actually turned His back on His only begotten son and the darkness shows that.

Look at how Jesus addresses God. "My God." For the first time, not Father. This is the deepest part of Christ's sufferings. Worse than the unquenching taste of the bitter vinegar, worse than having His beard plucked from His face so that He was marred beyond recognition, worse than the thicket of the thorny crown unroyally rammed onto His brow, worse than the nails that pierced His hands and feet. Never before had His father turned His back.

Secondly, this saying has a reason.

Why did our Lord Jesus cry out these words, "why have you forsaken me?" It's not that He didn't know why, after all, He knew this

was His duty and His destiny.

Why? The visual aid, given to us by God is the key to understanding this cry.

God is saying through the darkness, this Roman crucifying device (the cross) is the place of divine judgement. This isn't just a visual aid; this is definite and actual judgement and poured out wrath. God condemns and judges just one thing- sin! So you may ask, why punish Christ, considering He is sin-less? Here, Christ is representing His people and bearing the sins of all of His people throughout time across the world. At this point, my sin and your sin, was laid on Him. As Isaiah 700 years prior to this event prophesied "*and the Lord laid on Him, the iniquity of us all.*" As God looked at the son He loved, hanging on the cross and suffering under the weight of our sin, He turned His back. Christ was alone and forsaken.

John Bunyan, describes in his famous Christian allegory (Pilgrim's Progress) a murky place called the slough of despot. This place is like a waste ground containing all of your sin. Imagine a sewer where your sin was bubbling away, and the stench is awful. The dung heap gets piled upon every day. Then imagine this eerie, stinking, hazardous, vermin attracting, disease brooding pile of toxic waste is then emptied on Christ. God looked and saw this emptied on Christ and He turned away. As you would! Every sin- every lie, every theft, every pornographic image, and every lustful thought- emptied on Christ. That's the reason for forsaking! You and me! Treated like we should be treat-

ed!

The hymn writer put it well, "There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin; He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in."

Thirdly, this saying has a result.

You might well now ask, so what?

This cry from Calvary teaches us that sin is foul! In society we have a light view of sin. White lies, a little fib, a wee mistake, a wee glance, a little misdemeanour, a little stain on your character. Sin is ugly, it caused the Father to forsake His son. Sin is serious, don't joke about it. When we're tempted to treat sin lightly, remember, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Listen to the siren of warning here. This is how God treats and deals with sin. If you've not yet realised that Christ was forsaken for you, realise that you need to, or this is how God will treat you for your sin.

However, as well as teaching us that sin is foul this cry points us to a love that is fantastic and forever. What love we see here at the cross. Another hymn captures this well, "*I'm forgiven cause You were forsaken, I'm accepted, You were condemned, I am alive and well, Your spirit is within me, 'Cause You died and rose again. Amazing love, how can it be? That You, my King would die for me?*"

Amazing love! You might feel alone, but no one has ever been as alone as Jesus Christ was as He was forsaken on the cross. The question, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The sound from Heaven in answer to this, I hope, is you!



Why do you look for the living among the dead?

He is not here,

but has risen.

Luke 24:5