

2015 Annual Report

When a believer dies we do not sorrow as others which have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4.13). We have lost our beloved sister Thelma this year and continually pray for her husband Ken that after 50 years of married life he may be enabled by the Lord to adjust to living in his home without that familiar face and voice; or living with and being looked after by his daughter. We do pray for him. In the words of Denham's hymn:-

Our sister has gained her release
From all that distressed her below,
Made meet for the kingdom of peace,
Where pleasures eternally flow.
She triumphed by faith in His blood,
Who did for His people atone,
Then flew to the bosom of God
To reign with the Lamb on His throne.

When the Lord Jesus Christ said to the thief on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23.43) it is clear that both their bodies remained behind to be entombed or buried. Jesus was referring to the soul which "flies away" (Psalm 90.10); His soul returned to His body on the third day and the glorified Man remains in heaven until He returns. Then shall the thief, together with all those who have died believing, return to rejoin their reconstituted bodies and be gathered to complete the greatest and most populous kingdom there has ever been; together with those believers still alive upon earth at that time. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14.13).

I expect you find reading the extensive lists of people and places which occur in the Bible tough going seeing that most of the places are lost in the mists of antiquity and the people were known only, for the most part, to their own generation. However do bear this in mind above all that no believer's name or achievements in the Spirit are lost upon God. Indeed we may go much further than that – not simply not forgotten but "all live unto Him" as the Saviour said in Luke 20.38.

We have also had the great joy of a recently converted brother coming among us, full of the freshness of new life and first love to the Saviour. His coming has been a great encouragement to us all and especially to those who labour in the Sunday School. For he was in the Sunday School at Union Baptist, Aldeburgh 47 years or so ago, and used to walk with his brother and Pastor and Vivienne round the marshes and especially to the allotments to view his brother's sweet peas which were his delight. The memory of swimming in the sea in those days with other Sunday School children is still fresh. It is not easy to evaluate to what extent pleasant associations have a powerful influence by the Spirit of the Lord in applying the word of salvation to our hearts. We believe it to be so, however, and we try to provide a surrounding of trust and friendship as well as instruction to our children. As yet our brother has not been baptized nor received into membership. We earnestly hope that we will be able to report both happenings this time next year.

Our Sunday School work and its associated bonus activities lays important foundations for the future; it plants a seed that it may please the Lord to water and cause to grow. Some may be saved while still children; others may be saved much later in life. We long for the salvation of all without delay, for who knows what a day may bring. The church is grateful to Marcus and Rebecca for their constant preparation, never knowing how many will turn up on a given Lord's Day. But the Sunday School is gradually increasing and becoming more established.

Psalm 90 holds a particular affection for me and you will have noticed that I began the service with it. It was written 3500 years ago by Moses and is the earliest Psalm. The Lord has spared me to reach my 80th birthday and there are others of you gathered here today for whom this is also true. We give thanks together. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength

they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (verse 10). Bearing fruit in old age (Psalm 92.14) is a consummate joy, but above all brings glory to the Lord; for that Psalm says, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age...to show that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him”. The poet reminds us that it is “the last of life for which the first was made”. Conversely, the passing of the years makes you wonder what you have done with your life, how little has been accomplished, and may be to some of you even now a rallying call. It urges unbelievers to waste no time in turning to the Lord Jesus Christ. God is angry with the wicked every day. And to such this very Psalm says (verse 9) “all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told”.

But Psalm 90 is also a delight for the young. “O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days (verse 14). For those bearing the burden and heat of the day also. “Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it” (verses 16-17).

The buildings are much older than any individual even as the work is greater than the individuals who currently are custodians of these premises. In the Lord’s goodness within the last few years we have been enabled to have new lighting, doors and windows. The sound system is still being tweaked. And this year has seen a new roof, replacing possibly an original. A neighbour has commented how nice the roof looks. If the roof goes the whole premises are lost. So we are glad to have had the resources to keep upsides. The work in every instance has been excellently done to the highest standards of advice and workmanship. Excellence is the hallmark of that salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ has wrought for us. It is perfect in every part; perfectly suited for each sinner’s case as we have discovered. We have no excellence in and of ourselves but we have loved the taste of it in our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to see it reflected wherever we may.

During the October half-term of last year we held our 8th annual Foxley church houseparty. Its aim is both to refresh physically and instruct spiritually; to bond all ages as a family; and to unite like-minded brethren to be together as our guests.

Our church website is an active part of our ministry and Marcus is our very excellently qualified webmaster. He has worked incessantly week in week out to place the weekly ministry on-line and scarcely ever falls behind despite his workload. When he is unable to do that I receive messages asking if I am unwell and therefore unable to preach; we are glad there are keen beneficiaries of the ministry. Do access it, for while the ministry is potentially international my desire is that it would be of benefit to Suffolk brethren in particular; especially should there be isolated brethren not receiving Reformed ministry in their own local churches.

It sometimes happens that it seems that many of our acquaintances are seriously ill. I have copies of Swift to its Close, for the terminally ill, available freely here today; it is also available for downloading from the website. The next issue (in June) of the neighbourhood evangelistic letter which we send out bi-monthly will be the 77th. When we read newspaper articles we note their contents; but if, for example, they are political we don’t immediately rush out and join a political party. We would like to see folks coming to our church services as a result of their distribution; but we aim to provide as much of the neighbourhood as time and resources will allow with a consistent, faithful presentation of the gospel so that those who read will be aware of the truth of its challenges, implications, promises and invitations. Door to door visitation is not something our members and friends can easily do as many journey considerable distances to be here. This is our chosen means of disseminating the gospel and “holding forth the word of life” (Philippians 2.16). We ask you to join us in praying the Lord’s blessing upon it. We pray for a like blessing upon the posters outside the premises.

I am currently preaching through Matthew on a Lord’s Day morning and Deuteronomy at the midweek service and these may be accessed on-line. Though I move from one Gospel to another on Sunday

mornings I am pondering whether I might, when Matthew ends, as an exception work through Malachi.

The offering today is for the Trinitarian Bible Society. To serve on the committee is a labour of love, dear to my heart, and the church supports me when I make the time available to attend meetings. The word of the LORD is right (Psalm 33.4). Because that word is very pure (Psalm 119.140), every word of it (Proverbs 30.5), the Society has strict principles of translation summarised in its famous saying, "as literal as is possible and as free as is necessary". Receptor languages do not always, or often, permit identical word for word translation. But an effort is made to minimize those expressions which have to be phrased another way.

A few copies of the Society's magazine the Quarterly Record are freely available also for those who normally may not see them. We encourage you to join the Society. On September 19th two Suffolk speakers are engaged to speak at the AGM, Dr David Allen in the morning and myself in the afternoon at the worship service. We would love you to come by coachloads or minibus. Especially we want young people, teenagers and twentysomethings to come as it is of utmost importance that a rising generation be lovers of the Authorised Version and fully aware of the importance of its place at the heart of our churches and, indeed, of society.

The heart of the local church is the presence of the Saviour. And while as under-shepherd I value the contributions, seen and unseen, of every member of church and congregation, it is the devotion to the Chief Shepherd of each participating believer which characterizes and pervades the loving unity with which the fellowship has been graciously blest at this time. Such unity is fragile insofar as it pertains to frail human beings but as strong as the electing love of the Father who shows mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments (Deuteronomy 5.10) and we treasure it in every manifestation of service.

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and not suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matthew 24. 42-46).