

Diary of Services and Activities

Sunday	Prayer Meeting Morning Worship* Key Club (Children aged 4-11) Evening Worship	8.00am 10.30am 10.30am 6.30pm
	Holy Communion follows the first morning and the third evening service each month *A fully supervised crèche for young children is run in the church side room during the sermon.	
Tuesday	Second Tuesday (monthly) Ladies' Prayer Group (2nd & 4th Tuesdays) venue as announced	10.15am 7.30pm
Wednesday	Men's Fellowship (3rd Tuesday monthly) Tots' Club (term-time) Prayer Meeting and Bible Study	7.45pm 1.30 - 3.00pm 7.45pm
Thursday	Thursday at Two (senior citizens – fortnightly) Followers' Prayer Group (fortnightly) at 68 Moseley Wood Walk	2.00pm 7.30pm
Friday	Good News Club (Children aged 5-11) Friday Youth Night (Ages 11-16) Missionary Prayer Group (monthly) at 1 Tinshill Mount	6.00pm 7.30pm 7.45pm

TINSHILL FREE CHURCH

Holly Avenue, Leeds LS16 6PL
Registered Charity No. 511933
website: <http://www.TinshillFreeChurch.org.uk/>

Pastor: Mr Glyn Williams, 87 Tinshill Road, Leeds LS16 7DN <i>glynwtr@aol.com</i>	Tel. No. {267 2680}
Elder: Mr Martin Sellens, 68 Moseley Wood Walk, Leeds LS16 7HG <i>martin.sellens@o2.co.uk</i>	{267 9529}
Deacons: Mr John Almond, 175 Tinshill Lane, Leeds LS16 6EE Mr Nigel Hibbard, 26 Woodlands Avenue, Harrogate HG2 7SJ Mr Graham Leng, 383 Otley Old Road, Leeds LS16 6BX	{267 8737} {01423 888246} {267 2395}

THE MAGAZINE

Nº 285



TINSHILL FREE CHURCH

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2011

On a Mission

I begin on a sombre note but I don't end on it. I was always wide-eyed and horrified at the atrocities done in the name of the monarch in Tudor times, particularly the beheadings of Anne Boleyn, Queen of England; and Lady Jane Grey, Queen of England for just nine days. I never thought such things could happen in this 'day and age', and yet in the last terrorist years these things have publicly returned.

In a Christian newspaper for July, a report is given of how a 29 years old Iraqi Christian was kidnapped, tortured and beheaded. His body is shown in the article. It's not just Christians who are targeted. Most recently we have had more than 70 die in the centre of Oslo, and on an island hosting young members of the Norwegian Labour Party at a camp. The killer looked positively pleased about it as he came to court.

The reason is that he and others are on a mission — a mission which defies logic, and where their mind is twisted to believe wrong is right. People feel they are 'on a mission', either against Christians, or against the Left Wing politically, or against the Right Wing politically, or against any other group. Some, sadly, are so twisted as to believe that they will get good rewards in the after life — how deceived can you be? Answer — as deceived as Satan can try and get you to be.

'On a mission' means going for a particular purpose — a clear cut one, and it can be good or evil. People are 'driven' to do things. They are driven because they have life, or death, in their souls. Christians are driven because they have life in their soul. God has put it there through Jesus Christ. And so they are 'on a mission' to spread life and not death of the sort we see in the examples above. Many hundreds of young and older Christians are currently 'on a mission' in Christ's love to spread the good news of God — that the Father sent the Son to be our Saviour, from the evil impulses which drive us.

ROTAS

		Cleaning	
Week ending			
August 6	Margaret Williams	Colette Hickman	Ann Mountain
13	Anne Sellens	Carole Brearley	Natalie Walker
20	Carol Getzels	Kathryn Hibbard	Deborah Williams
27	Jenny Leng	Eva Ng	Rosemary Hilton
September 3	Ruth Holder	Beccy/Ben Henry	Jennie Lewis
10	Mavis Mathers	Angela Mathers	Christine Crossley
17	Margaret Williams	Colette Hickman	Ann Mountain
24	Anne Sellens	Carole Brearley	
October 1	Carol Getzels	Kathryn Hibbard	Deborah Williams
		Flowers	
For Sunday			
August 7	Colette Hickman	14	Carole Brearley
21	Kathryn Hibbard	28	Eva Ng
September 4	Beccy Henry	11	Christine Crossley
18	Ann Mountain	25	Margaret Green
October 2	Deborah Williams		
		Library	
		Morning	Evening
August 7	Paul Crossley	Christine Crossley	Christine Crossley
14	Nigel/Kathryn Hibbard	Rosemary Hilton	Rosemary Hilton
21	Angela Mathers	Jack/Ruth Rozday	Jack/Ruth Rozday
28	Christine Crossley	Mavis Mathers	Mavis Mathers
September 4	Nigel/Kathryn Hibbard	Rosemary Hilton	Rosemary Hilton
11	Christine Crossley	Angela Mathers	Angela Mathers
18	Paul Crossley	Jack/Ruth Rozday	Jack/Ruth Rozday
25	Angela Mathers	Christine Crossley	Christine Crossley
October 2	Nigel/Kathryn Hibbard	Mavis Mathers	Mavis Mathers

		Baptist Church)
Tue 13	10.15pm	Second Tuesday Ladies' Prayer Group
Wed 14	1.30pm	Tots Club restarts after summer break
	7.45pm	Bible Study Speaker: Paul Crossley
Fri 16	7.45pm	Missionary Prayer Group at 1 Tinshill Mount
Sat 17	11am-1	Concert of Prayer for Revival at Bethel, Otley
Tue 20	7.45pm	Men's Fellowship Speaker: Paul Crossley
Wed 21	7.45pm	Deputation Meeting: Karl and Elaine Mosby
Thu 22	2pm	Thursday at Two
Fri 23	3-5pm	Asda chaplaincy
Tue 27	7.30pm	An Evening with Dr Helen Roseveare at City Evangelical Church
	7.30pm	Ladies' Prayer Group
October		
Sat 1	2-4pm	Church open for receipt of Harvest gifts
	7pm	Leeds City Mission AGM and Praise Meeting
Sun 2	am/pm	Harvest services
Advance Notice		
Sat 15th	October	– Harvest Supper Speaker: Ben Henry

The deadline for items for the October/November edition of the magazine will be Weds 21st September – all contributions to Martin Sellens please.

Thought for Harvest

You think your word or deed is very small,
 That what you say will hardly count at all;
 But God can take the seed that you have sown
 And nourish it until it is fully grown.

We sow the seed – God produces the harvest.

The Son sent the Spirit to alert us to sin and to the righteousness of Christ. Whether it be United Beach Missions, Open Air Mission events, Christian youth camps throughout the UK, Christians are on a mission to bring life, and not death — to offer the life which is found by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through His cross. My first camp was as a four year old on a huge boys' camp at Benllech Bay, Anglesey, where my mother worked on the domestic side. The merits of that, and other Christian camps, only eternity will reveal.

But then 'on a mission', or 'driven' is exactly how you would describe our Lord Jesus Christ as He came to live on earth, giving up Heaven's glory. He was most definitely 'sent' by the Father, which is what 'on a mission' means.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4: 4-5). Because Jesus Christ was sent, and had the same love as His Father, He was driven, in just the way that we think of people who have one aim in mind, with a determined attitude. He was determined to go to the cross.

The original apostles were driven and even inspired, because they were 'sent' by God — that's what the word 'apostle' means. It holds the idea of being an ambassador of Christ and the gospel. Every Christian, whether a missionary, representative of a Christian organisation, or the Christian in the street is also a 'sent one', and is driven by the life of Christ within. Some are driven to be 'on a mission' as are so many this summer. If Christ and the apostles are 'on a mission', then certainly every Christian should be — not necessarily standing on a hot (or wet) beach talking to children and adults, but having an awareness deep within that by life, word and deed, we are reaching out to a lost world.

May our holiday, though restful, have this thought in mind.

Glyn Williams

A Great Day

Last year we had the disappointment of not getting to the Lake District with Followers as the weather was wet there on our planned day, so this year we decided to book another date and try again with the Followers Prayer Group. We were able to go by car with the three lads who now form the FPG (the Followers meeting having finished in April) and the Lord was kind to us and gave us perfect weather.

Our usual first stop was as good as ever — bacon butties and goodies at the riverside van at Kirkby Lonsdale and some time by the river, then on our way to Coniston lake we stopped off at Yew Tree Tarn, where we walked round the far side of the very still water with its water lilies and deep reflections. On to Coniston and we watched the Coniston Gondola



come into land and were thankful to be well placed in the queue to get outside seating at the back of the craft. It lies very low in the water with wonderful open views of the lake banks. The boat is powered by steam so the curling steam and the regularly used hooter make the trip quite different. We were able to stretch out in

the back of the boat (see photo) and thoroughly enjoyed the trip. On disembarking we saw down the hatch into the boiler room where all the power and action happens — hidden from view, but the only way the boat would move. It reminded us of the fact that we have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives,



DIARY

August

- Tue 9 7.30pm Ladies' Prayer Group
- Thu 11 2pm Thursday at Two Speaker: Paul Crossley
- Wed 17 7.45pm Prayer Meeting & Bible Study
Speaker: Martin Sellens
- Thu 18 7.30pm Followers' Prayer Group at 68 Moseley Wood Walk
- Fri 19 10-12am Asda chaplaincy
- Mon 22 7.45pm Elders/Deacons Meeting at 175 Tinshill Lane
- Tue 23 7.30pm Ladies' Prayer Group
- Thu 25 2pm Thursday at Two Speaker: Erroll Hulse

There will be no Men's Fellowship or Missionary Prayer Group in August

Please note that work will be taking place in the church/entrance lobby/vestry during the week 22-26 August as the carpet is replaced. Thursday at Two will therefore be meeting in the lower extension room that week (25th August).

September

- Fri 2 Evening Wedding rehearsal at the church
- Sat 3 2pm Wedding of Matthew Sellens and Natalie Walker at the church
- Tue 6 7.45pm Evangelism Group at 175 Tinshill Lane
- Wed 7 3-5pm Asda chaplaincy
- Thu 8 7.45pm Prayer Meeting & Bible Study Speaker: Martin Sellens
- Thu 8 2pm Thursday at Two Speaker: Alistair Park
- Fri 9 6pm Good News Club restart after summer break
- Fri 9 7.30pm FYN restart after summer break
- Fri 9 7.45pm Elders/Deacons meeting at 68 Moseley Wood Walk
- Sat 10 2pm Induction of Ben Hutton as Pastor at Thornhill Baptist Church. Preacher: David Gayton(Dudley



Preaching Plan

	Morning	Evening
August 7	Malcolm Peters	Malcolm Peters
14	John Harris	John Harris
21	Glyn Williams	Glyn Williams
28	Glyn Williams	Martin Sellens
September 4	Alan Brearley	Glyn Williams
11	Jonathan Chell	Jonathan Chell
18	Erroll Hulse	Erroll Hulse
25	Simon Ward	Simon Ward
October 2	Glyn Williams	Nigel Westhead (Harvest)

It will be good to welcome Jonathan Chell back to the pulpit on September 11th – Jonathan is now Pastor at Salem Baptist Church in Ramsey, Cambridgeshire.

On September 25th we welcome Simon Ward for the first time. Simon is currently living in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and attends North Shields Evangelical church with his wife Helen. Simon studied full time at London Theological Seminary before pastoring a church in Essex.

Outside Appointments

Do pray for our men as they minister outside the church in the coming months:-

Pastor Glyn Williams:

Sun 7th August am Swinton Evangelical Church, Rotherham

Sun 14th August am/pm Bethel Free Church, Armley

Mon 5th September 7.15pm Leeds City Mission Committee

Wed 7th September 7.30pm Phil May Court, Armley

Martin Sellens:

Sun 18th September pm Bethel Free Church, Armley

Sun 2nd October am Hambleton Evangelical Church, Thirsk.

not seen by physical eyes, but the only way we can move with God and know His power in our lives. The physical evidence of the presence of the boiler is the steam coming out of the funnel. The challenge for us is to let the Lord's presence be seen in our lives by the way we live.

Next stop was a favourite and well tried café for our fish and chips (or sausage, chicken etc) eaten outside in the hot sunshine in Coniston village. Then we went on to do a lovely walk to Elterwater which is still, reedy and reflective with the twin peaks of the Langdale Pikes making a majestic backdrop. On the walk to Elterwater we



followed the River Brathay and along its banks came across the most unusual tree which had places in the trunk which allowed the lads to climb in or on and take shelter from the heat of the sun. That was a lovely reminder of the shelter we have when we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all individuals but we can find our place 'hiding in Him' and fitting together in His church. Elterwater was the opportunity for some pebble skimming, climbing and general shouting (some of us!) and letting off a different sort of steam!

Our last stopping place was Tarn Hows, a most stunning man-made lake with fir tree islands and coves (and a large flock of very inquisitive, aggressive, hungry geese!!). We had a picnic there and sat and chatted on a hill overlooking the lake for a while before we made our way reluctantly back to the car for the homeward trip. Where had the day gone? It was a beautiful evening for the drive home and we are so thankful to the Lord for the weather, for safety and great enjoyment of the whole day. Comments from the lads kept mentioning all they had seen in the light of the knowledge that our God made it all.

We value your prayer for the Followers Prayer Group and its role in the lives of young people.

Martin Sellens/Margaret Williams

Moving on from Relay

As most of you will know, during the last academic year I have been working as a Relay worker with the Southampton University Christian Union. This has been a very fruitful year, both for the CU and me. It has been encouraging to know that God has used the witness of the students in the CU to bring several people to professions of faith throughout the year, which I trust will prove to be genuine. Being a large group, SUCU runs a lot of events throughout the year, and it was especially encouraging to see high numbers at the Christmas carol service (over 2000 people heard the gospel preached!) and the 'events week' which ran in February. My own involvement tended to focus more on individuals, and I was privileged to spend a lot of time helping students study the Bible on a one-to-one basis.

Throughout the year I was supervised by the UCCF staff worker in Southampton. We met at least once per week for a few hours of Bible study, apologetics discussion and accountability, as well as sharing fellowship together and with other UCCF staff. I also spent a few days each month with the UCCF team for the South East of the country and attended national conferences specifically for Relay workers. These all combined to provide my training throughout the year, and they all had a great focus on the Bible and on applying the gospel of grace to every area of my life.

During the whole year I have been part of Christ Church Southampton. Since moving down I've been involved in leading group Bible studies with students and other young people as well as learning from the older people in the congregation. The church has recently called its first pastor, Orlando Saer, who I already knew from his preaching at the Reading University Christian Union during my time there. It's particularly exciting to be part of a young church, and so I am staying there for their associate scheme over the coming year, starting in September.

This is a training scheme, led by Orlando (who is experienced in this sort of work). Another recent graduate, Phil, and I will spend the year helping out around the church and receiving training and discipleship. This is the first

Fellowship News

At a members meeting on 3rd July it was agreed that John Almond should be appointed as a deacon and this was publicly recognised at the start of the Communion Service on 17th July. Do pray for John in this new role and for Gill as she supports him in it.

At the morning service on 31st July Tim and Colette Hickman brought Niamh Martha for dedication and it was good to welcome the wider family for this special part of our morning worship.

Later this coming month (August) there will be some changes (and hopefully short term disruption!) as the carpet and pulpit are replaced in the main church. It is good to be getting on with this work which has been planned for some time but which is now coming to fruition.

September will be a significant month for many – Matthew and Natalie are getting married at the church on Saturday 3rd and then are set to move to Carlisle later in the month; Ray and Vi Archer celebrate their diamond wedding on September 7th and Paul Donoghue is 18 on the 22nd. Our congratulations and prayers go to them all.

Do remember Tim Hilton as he begins his year as one of two Associates at Christ Church, Southampton in September (see separate article in this magazine), and also Andrew & Jill Lolley as they relocate to London in September as Andrew begins a 2 year full time course at London Theological Seminary.

Daniel Rozday has graduated with a Masters degree from York University and has recently secured a good job with Network Rail – pray for him as he enters his work life. Finally remember Timothy and Samuel Rozday and Matthew Hibbard as they look to go to University in September – whilst exam results are awaited for 2 of them we trust the Lord will go before each of them and be with them in this new chapter of life.

It will be good to see Karl & Elaine Mosby again on September 21st, who are on deputation, and catch up with their work and news.

What's new in the church library?

Below is a list of items recently added to the church library. I am sure you will be helped, encouraged and blessed by reading them, as I have been.

Christian living

Poems and meditations by Ray Chaplin. This book of poems and meditations was given to Wynford by the author when they met at Caring for Life. It is a delightful little book and I am sure you will be blessed by reading it.

Children and young people

Video – A Jurassic ark mystery. This video, for 7-12 year olds, aims to uncover the mystery of dinosaurs. When did they live? How did they die? What do their remains reveal? And much more.

Church history

Fire from heaven: times of extraordinary revival by Paul Cook. This is a very encouraging and relevant book for those of us who live in the Yorkshire area and who are praying for revival today. The book majors on a series of revivals which took place in Britain during the period 1791- 1840. Overall, 1,500,000 people were gathered into the Nonconformist chapels of England and Wales alone: one out of every ten of the population at that time. It is exciting to read of revivals which took place in this area. How we long for this to happen again, but it will only happen if we are fervent in prayer, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The author stresses the words of Zechariah 4: 6 *'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts'*.

Christine Crossley

Holiday time is coming up. Why not spend time reading a Christian book from the library which is open after the morning and evening services on a Sunday? There is a good selection to choose from on a wide variety of topics, and it's free!

year the church has run the scheme, so I'm not entirely sure about the details of what it will look like day to day. However, it will include one day a week at the South Central Ministry Training Course in Oxford, which aims to teach Bible doctrine and help students develop as speakers. I expect to continue in my individual Bible studies with some students, but my work will not wholly focus on students. There should be opportunities to be involved with other aspects of the church's work, though specific details have not yet been discussed. The year is also an opportunity to see what a pastor's life looks like close up and I hope this will help me think clearly as I consider the possibility of working in full time Christian ministry longer term.

I will endeavour to keep producing prayer letters throughout the year to keep people up to date. If you want to receive these please let me know and I will email/post them to you as and when I write them. For now, please join me in praising God for the provision of accommodation for the year and pray that during the coming year God would use me to bless Christ Church Southampton as I seek to serve them and grow closer to God. Please also pray that Phil would soon be able to confirm his accommodation in Southampton.

Many thanks for your continued support.

Tim Hilton

Second Tuesday — 14th September 2010

Fasting

These notes formed the basis of a Second Tuesday seminar.

1 Introduction

Perhaps some of us think about the Muslim season of Ramadan (which began on 1st August), when they hear the word 'fasting'. From dawn to sunset, no eating, drinking or sexual relations are allowed, and there has to be more prayer and reading of the Qu'ran than normal. Nearer to our culture, perhaps we think of Lent, which is preparatory to Easter. Over centuries, it has been connected with prayer, penitence, almsgiving, and self-denial, not as a full fast, but abstinence from much-loved dainties such

as cakes and chocolates.

The legalistic and ritual nature of Lent practices has held back the idea of genuine Christian fasting today. Christian fasting is not ritual, nor is it penance (paying for our sins). It cannot be a religious 'must'. It obtains no merit in itself. It must be a free will gift to God, vitally connected with prayer.

What then is Christian fasting? It is the abstinence from food and sometimes drink for a specified period of time. Our Lord abstained from eating for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards, unsurprisingly *"He was hungry"*. The purpose of the fasting (all fasting must have a purpose) was to concentrate on resisting the temptations of Satan, in full fellowship with his Father, and to prepare for His ministry which would lead to the cross. Others have tried to follow our Lord's example of forty days and forty nights, in my view totally misguided, and with many failed attempts. But the principle of fasting our Lord establishes quite clearly, by example and teaching.

2 Prayer and Fasting in the Old Testament

Ezra led a group of Hebrews back from Babylon to Jerusalem, in the book of that name. There was an air of humility and dependence on Almighty God for safety throughout the trip. Humility is a major attitude in prayer and fasting. We read in Ezra chapter 8: 22-23

"The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him. So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer".

Combining fasting with prayer means that we mean business with God. We are ready to freely give up normal necessities, for a while, to concentrate on the priority of our spiritual lives and some specific deep request to God, in this case the safety for all the families, including 'little ones', who were going with Ezra.

It was a very important matter to Ezra. It was on his heart, that his ministry as a scribe of the word of God would be used effectively to build up the believers in Jerusalem, once they had got there safely. At roughly the same

friends from Bulgan Sum to Ulaanbaatar the following day. This made a challenging situation for me, because we already had eight seats filled and one more possible seat booked. After some discussion, he finally said he was just joking around with me; a good lesson to learn about not getting too upset over little things, and just to have some fun! We then flew to Bulgan Sum with enough fuel, and had a great reception from the Bulgan Sum community since they were very happy to see our little 'Jesus plane' come back to their little town.

10 June

Today, we got to fly nine passengers from Bulgan Sum to Ulaanbaatar. It was a bit of a quieter flight from Bulgan Sum than we are used to but, again, another great flight. One of the passengers, a 16-year-old boy, was partially disabled and needed to see a specialist in the city.

There was also an 85-year-old lady who couldn't walk, and so she had to be carried everywhere she went. She would not have been able to travel the three-day overland trip to the city for medical needs.

We were very fortunate that God gave us good weather over these past few days, since it has been so windy in Bulgan Sum over the past month until yesterday. We flew north of a large storm on the way to Bulgan Sum, and stayed behind it on the way back to Ulaanbaatar. Praise God we are now able to fly again in Mongolia.

MAF operates one aircraft in Mongolia. Most of our flights support the work of the local church reaching isolated areas of this vast country with the Gospel.

To find out more about MAF's work in Mongolia and how you can pray, visit www.maf-uk.org

Editor's Note:

Chen Wei Ng and a group of friends have just returned from a short term mission to Mongolia with SIM and we look forward to hearing how he got on and some details about life in Mongolia. Do pray for this vast country between China and Russia.

I hope I have been able to show you that fasting, when in conjunction with prayer, is biblical. However, it is not a practice which must be done. It is meant to show a discipline of the body in order to pray more earnestly for matters of the soul. In this respect 1 Corinthians 7: 5 extends the discipline to a married couple's sexual life.

“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again...”

But, for all of us, married or not, physical discipline for a spiritual purpose can always be shown through fasting – God's chosen fast.

Glyn Williams

MAF News to SHARE

Back in the air

After a period of being grounded in Mongolia, we are now flying again. Pilot Ryan Van Geest talks us through his first few days back in the pilot's seat:

5-7 June

We flew five Mongolian and four Korean Christians to Mandalgovi and Dalanzadgad so they could meet up with some of their daughter churches in the countryside to encourage them and give some Bible training. The weather was great for flying, and it was nice to be able to fly pastors around the countryside again so that God's Word could be spread throughout this large country — especially for our first operational flight

9 June

We were able to fly through Tosontsengel to Khovd this morning to bring nine young Mongolian Christians with Young Life Ministries so they could lead a youth camp in the countryside near Khovd. Some of the group were able to run this camp three years ago but, for others, it was their first time participating, so they were very excited to be going out.

After arriving in Khovd, we wanted to fly off to Bulgan Sum but the airport director didn't want to give us fuel unless we could provide two seats for his

time as Ezra, Nehemiah hears that the survivors from the captivity, now in Jerusalem, were in 'great distress and reproach'. The walls of Jerusalem were still broken down. Nehemiah wept, and mourned for many days. *“I was fasting and praying before the God of Heaven”* (Nehemiah 1: 4). There is emotion and determination to pray which accompanies fasting.

Let's take one more example from the Old Testament. Isaiah 58: 1-6 sees Israel in an apparently good state – they pray daily, they delight to know the laws of God; they have fasted; they have humbled themselves, but have not seen the blessing they expected. That was because, during fasting, they were exploiting their workers; not giving to the poor; not relieving the oppressed. God's chosen fast is *“to loose the bonds of wickedness; let the oppressed go free; share your bread with the hungry”* (Isaiah 58: 6). It is for this reason that Tinsill on one occasion had a church period of fasting and gave to a charity at the same time. And so we learn that even prayer with fasting is of no avail if there is obvious sin 'lying at the door', as with Cain the son of Adam and Eve.

3 The Teaching of Jesus

In Matthew 6: 16-18, our Lord assumes that fasting is part of the disciples' lives – *“when you fast (not if), do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”*. We see in this passage that you should live normally, and not look any different when fasting, even if you are hungry, or have a headache, or whatever. You expect to feel uncomfortable at some point during the period of the fast. It is tempting to let people know that you are fasting, but this tends towards pride and therefore loss of spiritual reward which God might graciously give. The Pharisees were good at legalistic fasting, but let everyone know about it, especially with facial characteristics which they might have put on. This has nothing to do with genuine fasting which accompanies prayer, for a specific matter.

The most telling passage of our Lord's teaching which refers to believers today is Matthew 9: 14-15. John the Baptist's disciples, and the Pharisees as a separate group, were engaged in fasting as a tradition. Our Lord's immediate disciples were not fasting. There was no need to. It was a time of joy because the bridegroom (Jesus) was with them. He had fulfilled all necessary laws. But then we read:-

“can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?” (Expected answer 'No'); *“But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.”* Our

Lord's teaching here is that when He Himself is taken away and crucified, the days will come that they will and should fast. Now one commentator suggests that the disciples will only need to fast between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, after which no fasting will even be helpful or required, because Christ is Risen! Sounds feasible, but the context shows that the fasting will take place in the days to come – whereas Easter Saturday is only one full day between our Lord's cross and Resurrection. Moreover, though we always have cause for rejoicing that Jesus is risen, ascended, and exalted, the reasons for fasting as an aid to prayer still exist, namely 'mourning for sin'; some distress or crisis; some decision to be made; some missionary to choose or send out. There is still a need to pray with fasting for Revival – revival of oneself, the local church and the wider church, with its spill over into society as a whole. Wouldn't we love to see that?!

Certainly, our Lord does refer, in this passage, to things which have passed away now that He has come, and a new order of things. The old things have to do with the law and legalism; the new has to do with grace and the willing offering of ourselves to Christ's service. So ritual prayer must go, but don't give up on prayer. Make it heartfelt! So gifts to the poor (almsgiving) as a ritual expecting reward, is wrong; but don't give up on giving to the poor with a loving heart. Similarly, Jesus is saying this; fasting in the old, ritualistic way (*“I fast twice a week”* – Luke 18: 12) is totally ineffective. But don't give up on fasting itself from the heart. Do not throw out the baby with the bath-water! It is a new attitude which is required.

There is also evidence that for serious, even extreme cases of Satanic

oppression, prayer and fasting may be used – *“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting”* (Matthew 17: 21).

4 Examples in the book of Acts

In Acts 13: 2,3 *“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away”*. Note the two purposes for prayer and fasting here. One purpose was to identify who should go from the base of Antioch on the first missionary journey. Indeed as they fasted and prayed, it might well have become clear that such a missionary journey was required by God in the first place. The second purpose for the prayer and fasting was to commit Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to the work (rather like Ezra for the travel to Jerusalem and his work when he got there).

Acts 14: 23 *“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”* Here, the context is appointing elders in every church. Having visited various towns and established converts in them, Paul and Barnabas were able to appoint elders in each town and then commit the work of those elders to the Lord, with prayer and fasting. They saw the serious nature of the occasion that God's appointed elders would be fruitful in their pioneering work in the local church.

5 Some practical issues

A normal fast nowadays would be to have no food, from getting up in the morning to going to bed the same day – a period of about 36 hours when you include the two nights of sleep. This must always be subject to the health of the Christian concerned. The period of fasting may have to be rather less, say breakfast/lunch omitted, or lunch/evening meal omitted, but your doctor can advise if necessary from a medical point of view. It might even be an occasion to witness to him/her!

The other question is that of drink. Christian fasts do not normally mean keeping away from drinks, but it is not in the spirit of the fast to drink a lot of milk, as it is a food drink; better would be a fruit drink, or tea/coffee with a small amount of milk.