

## **Sorry is the easiest word...**

Pictured here, are an unhappy quartet of former top bankers, summoned before a select committee of parliament to explain how they had brought their respective banks to the brink of collapse. Apparently what was most sought after was



an expression of regret. The pundits observed precisely how these offenders had said sorry, described how they had had PR coaching so that they might appear completely sincere and remarked how they had said they regretted what had happened. Of course these are not the only culprits and realising how fast this news story is developing it may well transpire that others in power, in Government (Treasury and Financial Services Authority) had knowledge of the plight of our financial institutions and even colluded with them to try to keep things from crashing. There's bound to be some kind of conspiracy at work – there always is! Sorry is a relatively easy word once one is found out!

At the risk of sounding boring and very traditional it seems to me that the real underlying problem is the greed culture – into which many of us have been swallowed up. Not me – surely this is the error of The Greedy Fat Cats? Ah, but we've got used to living on credit, receiving handsome payouts as our building societies and pension companies have de-mutualised – we've delighted in the hitherto strong growth in property values and stocks as the pyramid of wealth grew ever taller. We now know that the pressure for fiscal growth, the lack of supervision, over liberalisation and foolhardy de-regulation, together with a fantastical bonus culture have resulted in the bottom falling out of the market and the pyramid crashing like a shaky stack of playing cards.

Where was government, why didn't they protect us – hadn't they learned after Robert Maxwell? Did the memory of the way Nick Leeson the rogue who traded derivatives and broke Barings Bank not set off any warning bells? Investigations into the Equitable Life collapse have gone oh so slowly, surely there were many warning signs and signals and lessons to be learned? Whistle-blowers, once gagged by the powerful will now emerge from the margins and tell their story; "I told you so, but you wouldn't listen", who can blame them!

If only the building societies had remained mutual companies. If only they hadn't ratcheted up the multiplier of income they would lend, which only served to inflate prices. If only they had forced buyers to put down a deposit – proving they were financially responsible and steady persons. If only banks hadn't confused merchant finance with personal finance and mortgage lending. If only building societies, now *converted* as banks hadn't hastily launched into the abyss of derivatives....if only! Sorry we were careless and reckless!

Sorry that the party is over? Sorry that it happened, and we were caught out? Sorry – we are all sorry! Sorry that the systemic lust after riches by those few who were trusted and expected to know better will now cause misery to be inflicted on many others, whilst they still retain their ill-gotten wealth.

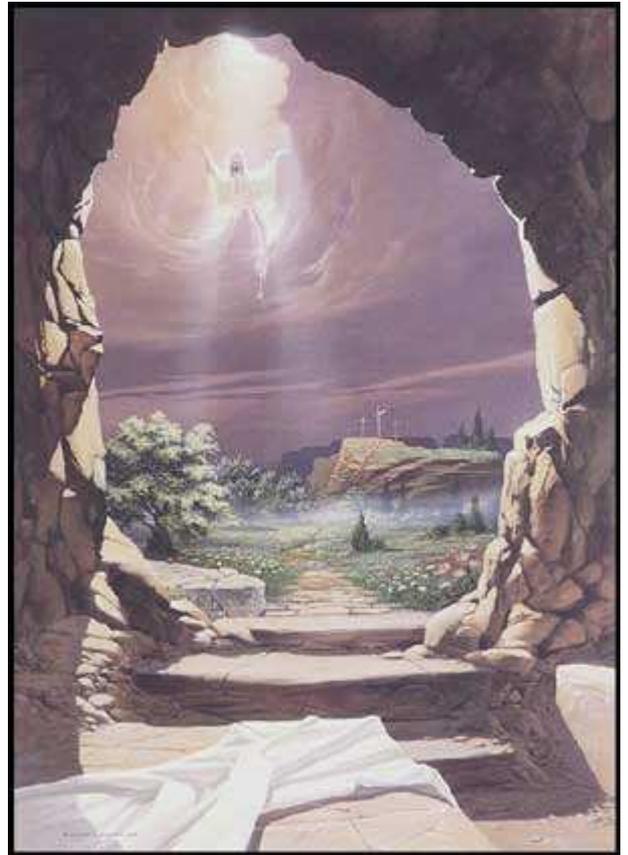
Sorry is the easiest word, but what meaning does it have? Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry made a general prophetic announcement. He said, “Times up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the message.” Of course you will better know this as, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”

‘Repent’ is the word (meaning change your life) that I want to focus on. Jesus didn't ask us to say sorry – he asked us to repent/change. He asked us to live by God's standards (kingdom values) and not by our own selfish ways. The time is now for all of us if we want to build an equitable and just society. We cannot bank on our own abilities for they are derived from our shaky, fallen values. Just like our errant bankers and leaders we are often blind to the difference between a toxic or a true asset! The bible might describe ancient and pre-technological societies, but it was able to provide a ‘balance sheet’ that would enable for reliable accountancy. If we pattern our lives on the teachings of Jesus we have a trustworthy and true order for a fair society. The way of the kingdom is characterised by personal integrity, trust, fair mindedness, even-handedness, a care for the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Christians aim for the highest standards, we often fall short, then we don't just say sorry, we repent.

One last thought. Standards for those in public life and positions of authority, were they not once ordered by a Christian Ethos? Is it any wonder with an ever increasing trend towards secularisation that the nation is slipping ever deeper into the mire? Moral standards are essential for the common good. Where will they come from if we ignore our faith? What is certain is that rules alone cannot make people good and trustworthy. Events have proved this. It takes more – it takes a conversion of an individual's way of life to that of God. That can only happen when we individually and corporately repent and change. Sorry is the easiest word, it is not enough; at best it is only a start. A.R.

## **Death and Resurrection...**

At the end of Lent we complete our spiritual journey with Jesus to Jerusalem. The gospels record Jesus' many prophecies that he would face suffering and death and yet rise again to life. He knew what would happen and evidently was in agony as his time to be glorified drew near. His disciples understood the danger but not their master's mission. They expected some kind of revolution in which the righteous would gain power and overthrow their oppressors. When Jesus spoke he was interpreted literally and yet his message was often allegorical



– spiritual and not physical. We should not be surprised that he was not understood, the disciples witnessed much, but were naive to the implications of what they had seen and been part of until much later.

Can you discern the image of the risen Christ from the empty tomb? Below him is the hill of Calvary where three crosses remain as testament to the Son of God who died as a criminal rabble-rouser. As Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday he was feted by many and yet by Thursday he had been betrayed and arrested. By Friday he had been crucified to death, buried, and his body sealed in a tomb. It was all over and the one who had raised such high hopes had been crushed. It is probable that all his teachings may soon have been almost completely forgotten as history promptly rolled on; perhaps a few miracles may have been recorded, we'll never know!

The vital fact of Jesus' death was that it was not the end, it was the beginning. That Jesus rose from death is certain – why else would his defeated and cowering disciples suddenly have rallied and developed into powerful and courageous evangelists? What was it that gave them the impetus to speak of Jesus in the face of death?

Resurrection is a revitalisation by definition. Out of something dead and buried rose a movement preserving and disseminating the teachings of an obscure Jew from Galilee. Two thousand years have passed and billions have heard of Jesus – despite his death – he is very much alive in the world's consciousness.

Christians attribute the quality of God to the man Jesus. In him they see the great interpreter of Jewish scripture as the one who became its fulfilment. Even those who do not have this faith cannot deny the lasting influence of Jesus.

Jesus overcame death; it could not and did not conquer him. Jesus is alive!

We all face death, sooner or later. It is an inevitable part of life. In following the way of Jesus I hold what the church has always taught, that his truth is life giving. We are fully alive as we conform our life and way to his way, which is God's way. It is very possible to be physically alive, but not to have life in all its fullness. The difference is a spiritual dimension which is the vital message of Jesus. The spirit is the difference between life and death. Physical life can crush the spirit, or it may never be awakened – to me this is a kind of death in the midst of life. Jesus brings a spiritual life which brings life out of death – it enables resurrection – revitalisation, renewal, rebirth.

After Easter the church moves on towards Pentecost (31<sup>st</sup> May) when it celebrates the awakening of the disciples and early followers of Jesus by the coming of The Holy Spirit, that Jesus had promised that The Father would send. As The Spirit came, it brought transforming vision and purpose from confusion. Jesus' teachings were proclaimed and written down in scripture. His message was spread throughout the world and the revolution that Jesus had always intended began to arise. The weak and oppressed became powerful, not physically, but spiritually. Jesus did not simply overthrow the Roman colonisers of Judea – his ideas conquered the whole Roman Empire and the world beyond and this process continues to this day.

Christians believe in life after death, but importantly they believe in life now and resurrection to new life in the unconditional love of God is not something that needs to await physical death and our hopes of Heaven. Perhaps the most attractive aspect of the picture is that of the gaping wide open tomb which gazes out towards the risen Lord Jesus. It is depicted as a dark place that looks out towards light – death is overcome by resurrection! In the same way the darker places of our lives can be enlightened by Jesus and we can be reborn in him. Resurrection in Christ is about a deeper meaning to life that opens us to many wonderful new possibilities. This is no story; it is real and is the experience of countless Christians.

If you would like to know more about the life and teachings of Jesus please contact me as we plan to run another Alpha Course.

Light and life in Jesus' name – he is risen. Alleluia!

Andrew

## **May!**

May following April is a wonderful time of year- all life springs up anew. The very word 'May', I'm sorry to say is pagan in origin, being taken from the Greek spring earth-goddess Maia. Christians have managed to Christianise most things, so it is also a variant form of the names Mary and Matthew, although I've never met a boy called May! In Sanskrit it means illusion.

It is also a handy little word, very polite, jolly and gentle in use...

May you have a happy month.

May the Lord bless you.

May you feel the Lord with you.

May your days be merry and bright and may all your Christmases be white!

My sister and mother and grandmother were very involved in the May Queen Pageant when I was very young and I used to get dragged around various places where lots of soppy girls dressed up in pink and other coloured dresses....

The first day of the month of May is known as May Day. It is the time of year when warmer weather begins and flowers and trees start to blossom. It is said to be a time of love and romance. It is when people celebrate the coming of summer with lots of different customs that are expressions of joy and hope after a long winter. The most important thing about May is that on the First of May 1982 Zahra and I were married!

This May we celebrate Ascension Day on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> and there will be an evening celebration of The Eucharist at 7.30pm. *May* you come please?

On Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May we celebrate Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit and in addition to our regular Sunday worship there will be an evening Songs of Praise shared worship at Pinehurst Chapel. You *may* like to come to these?

At the end of the Easter Sunday service when the tired vicar forgets the last hymn – I would respectfully remind you it says on the service booklet, "A hymn *may* be sung"! *May* we all have a happy spring-time and feel reinvigorated with the longer days and warmer weather.

*May* the Lord be with you and yours, always.

Andrew



May Queen

## **Bells! Rings! Sings!**

This is not our church bell, ours is smaller and difficult to photograph well. Our bell may not be very visible, but it is audible and I often hear pedestrians commenting in a positive manner as they pass by and children excitedly ask, "Why is the bell ringing?"

This is an ancient question, the subject of a reflection by John Donne written in 1624: - "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."



The church bell is rung, not just to call you to attend church. It is rung to indicate that prayers are about to begin. In a parish church prayers are offered for all the parishioners and the various organisations that are part of our village. Day by day prayer is offered according to the date for every aspect of life that we share in. Whoever you are, VIP or not, whether you are active in many things or not, the bell tolls for you. No man is an island – we are connected by the very fact that we live, work, are educated in, or pass through West Moors. Our prayer helps us to be mindful of the importance of each activity and that life itself is a gift. The parish church has always stood as witness to the very concept of community and its principal act of worship is Holy Communion.

When the bell rings and you hear it – it is ringing for you! Christians believe in community – Jesus told us not to be selfish, but to share with others. Just as the ringing of the bell is carried on the wings of the wind, so is the Godly message of faith, hope and charity. The bell rings and tries to strike a chord with you. The bell's ring pierces through most other sounds and is heard above all things.

John Donne tells us that our lives are interlinked and in the end any individual's loss is a loss for us all. Conversely any good you offer will be a blessing to the parish and for us all. "Therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."

Bellsings! Andrew

*Vicar's Vista July 2009*

## Going Round in Circles!

A few weeks ago Zahra and I *spun* off to London for the day and amongst other things we had a 'flight' on the London Eye. As Vicar's Vista is about me offering a viewpoint on life in general – what better in this holiday season than to *circulate* this:-



One actually has to get off, before one has completed a full *rotation* on the Eye!

Have you ever wondered why sometimes we get giddy? The earth *spins* on its axis & around the sun & the sun *spins* around the galaxy & the galaxy *spins*...

Do *Rotarians* sit at *Round Tables*? *Ring* or Probe us and find out!

The bible readings in church *rotate* on a three year *cycle*. If you came every Sunday you will have rung up a full set. Am I pressing your *button*?

*Button*, J *rings* up £millions for *lapping about* – very quickly!

The USAF is warning that their GPS satellites are suffering decaying *orbits* and all our Tom Tom's may well lead us all astray... (nothing new then!)

Getting off a Church *Rota* is almost impossible – I had to become a vicar!

Water *rotates* down the plug hole the other way *round*, down under.

'What goes *around*, comes *around*' – in other words, 'A person's actions, whether good or bad, will often have consequences for that person', *Discuss*.

Are you enjoying all the '*sphere-some*' political *spin* these days? *Discgusted*?

The holidays are here again – hurrah! Stop the world I want to get off... Hope you don't end up endlessly *circling* in a holding pattern this summer!

A Verwood hairdresser once *rounded* on me, "Oh you're a vicar, you must believe in re-incarnation then"! "No", I replied, "Christians go up, atheists go down and it's all the others who are going round in *circles*"!

Circling around for you - Andrew

## Looking Forwards!

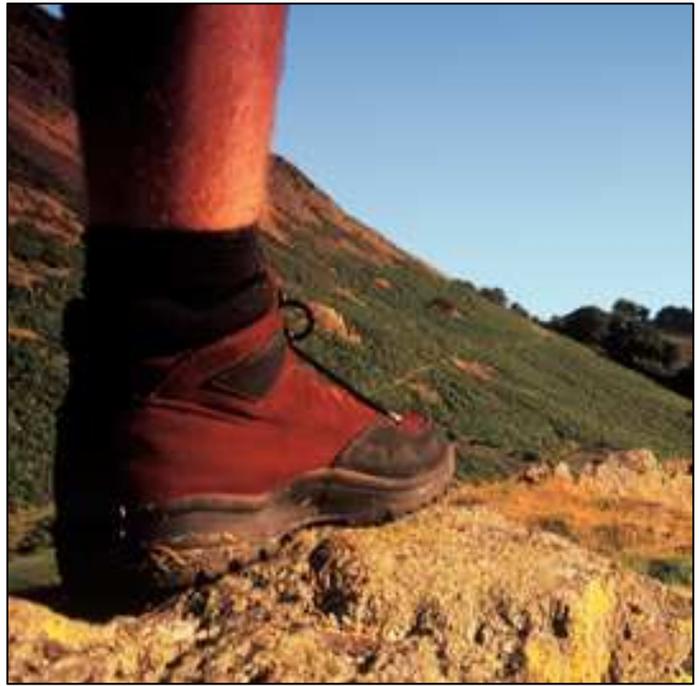
In the last Vista I was *going round in circles* – but this time I find myself *looking forwards*. I'm writing this half-way through August and except for a couple of days it's been blowy, dull and raining. So I'd best look forwards rather than back and actually there is a lot coming up over the next few weeks. Firstly and primarily our daughter's wedding.

'How are you going to give her away and do the service?' ...has been a very common concern. (*My first concern is not to trip up!*)

As I write this I'm still not sure, but by the time you read it – it will have happened so the answer will be known! Hannah and Clayton's wedding coincides with the Bournemouth Air Show – a fly past from the Red Arrows and the other traditional festivities are to *look forwards/upwards* to.

Early September will find me as Chaplain at The Great Dorset Steam Fair – a new step for me. I'm showing Bishop Graham around, so I'll have to tread carefully! My duty is to approach the Showmen, Drivers and Stall Holders. (I must get Anne to help write a liturgy for the blessing of steam engines and etc.) My maternal Great Grandfather, John Groom was a devout Methodist and Traction Engine Driver hailing from Attleborough in Norfolk. Yes, I have to admit I'm really *looking forward* to this non-too onerous duty (and *looking out* for straying heavy engines. If I suit them, (apparently I must have great enthusiasm for steam!) then I expect it will become something of a fixture – perhaps Zahra and I could *make a trip* to the Show each year.

On Sunday afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup> of September Zahra and I invite all of West Moors to join us the Vicarage Garden Fete, which will be a fun time, with stalls, activities (and steam trains) and the opportunity to raise funds for the church. The following week sees me head off on my annual spiritual retreat, spent backpack walking in the beauty and wilderness of the South West Coastal Path. This time I hope to cover the stretch from Portreath to Boscastle. Now on this walk one has to *look very carefully forwards*, because the path is slippery. Yes, I'm going to be *looking forwards* vigilantly in September and in my heart I know God is *watching over* me and you! In His footsteps - Andrew



## **Whole-e-ness & Healing (*I'm sorry!*)**

Here are a couple of saintly persons, but one is suffering from a lack of sparkle in their halo department! The halo is an artistic device to portray an aura of holiness. The halo predates Christianity and is used in various religions – it did not come into use in Christianity until 400A.D. and was used to convey the holiness of Jesus Christ. Christians are supposed to be holy – as Christ-like as possible, but let's be honest one's halo often slips.



Declaring to the world that one is a follower of Jesus is putting oneself up for examination – and when any church member – especially the vicar – slips up, it reflects badly on God. Our ‘halos’ are meant to shine brightly in the midst of the relative ‘darkness’ of the world. The church is full of saints and sinners and in reality we all have the human tendency to swing from one state to the other. What can be done? Jesus teaches us to examine our own behaviour before we deign to criticize others, but it is so much easier to spot the fault in others! “He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone...” comes to mind and “Remove the plank from your own eye before you spot the speck in another’s”. We are called to be transformed towards the glory of Jesus and hopefully be polished enough to wear our halos in Heaven one day. Seriously, the challenge of Jesus is to be a Saint and to be self-aware enough to realise when we err, and to try and make amends. When we fall out with each other we tarnish the image of God in ourselves and this weakens the body, mind and spirit. Healing is the only means to recover whole-e-ness. Jesus tells us in his ‘Lords Prayer’ that we are forgiven by God the Father, to the extent that we forgive others - it’s quite a sobering thought - forgiveness enables reconciliation and thus wholesomeness.

In October I wish to draw your attention to the opportunity to join in a day of spiritual retreat at Minstead. This is a Saturday (17<sup>th</sup> October) set aside to be thoughtful, to examine ourselves before God. On the Sunday evening (18<sup>th</sup>) in church at 6pm we will offer a service of healing and reconciliation on St Luke’s Day. I know that I have a problem keeping my halo in place and I invite us all to join in with this spiritual service towards the healing of any personal or communal division within our church. Then on the First of November the church celebrates the Saints that have set us good examples for living - the famous ones of history and then the Saints with which we have shared our lives as we commemorate to faithful departed at the All Souls 3pm Service.      A.R.

**Pause, Reflect, Remember**

November is a time when there are two events that involve us in remembering and commemoration.

On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> we will join with the whole community at the War Memorial on the Petwyn to honour those whose lives were lost as a consequence of warfare. Prior to



this on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November at 3pm in church we will welcome the families and friends of those who have been bereaved of a loved one in the past year or so. This will be our All Souls service – it is the origin of Halloween (the eve of All Hallows) which has sadly descended into a commercially inspired exploitation of ghosts and ghouls – perhaps a bit of fun at best, and at the worst contrary to Christian spirituality and unwholesome. Halloween is about valuing life as we pause before God.

The photograph above shows The Queen and various forces personnel at the Iraq War commemoration service at St Paul's Cathedral on October 9<sup>th</sup>. The human cost of the war for Britain was 21 troops killed in combat, 19 more died in accidents, five were killed by friendly fire, four died of natural causes & two more deaths are under investigation. The consequences of the war continue with British UN workers being killed. This is just part of the much larger tragedy of those who were seriously wounded and lives blighted forever. The cost to all the other nations is almost incalculable. The Archbishop of Canterbury, as the nations' spiritual head was left to offer some reflection on the Iraq war, especially difficult because he and many clergy had considerable reservations about the circumstances of the conflict. He said,

*Those who defended the action in Iraq rightly reminded us that while we talk people are suffering appallingly; while we try to keep our hands clean, atrocity and oppression reign unchecked.*

*Whatever the different judgments about the decision to go to war, we have to recognise the moral seriousness of this, and the dedication of those who carry out the decision.*

*But as we look out at a still uncertain and dangerous landscape, as we recall the soldiers and civilians killed since the direct military campaign ended, as we think of the UN personnel and the relief*

*workers who have died, we have to acknowledge that moral vision is harder to convert into reality than we should like.*

There is a difficult balance to maintain in the consideration of war – is it morally right, will it prove justifiable, will the cost be worth its dreadful price? We heard one opinion from a very old soldier earlier this year. Remember Harry Patch, the last fighting Tommy of the Great War of 1914-18, who died on 25<sup>th</sup> July? He had this famous exchange with the then Prime Minister, early on in the Iraq War. Harry told Tony Blair, *Politicians who took us to war should have been given the guns and told to settle their differences themselves, instead of organising nothing better than legalised mass murder.*

We trust politicians to make the judgements on our behalf and in truth they can only be judged with the fickle benefit of hindsight. Iraq is over (!) and now our attention is on an even more costly conflict – that of Afghanistan and spilling into Pakistan. Why do we still war, war and not jaw, jaw? Why cannot another way be found?

I close with the Archbishop's words of reflection on the Iraq conflict, *We have to go back and test what has happened in the light of the original vision; we have to find out what we have learned, what now looks different, where our integrity has been stretched or challenged.*

*We don't just put this complicated and tragic history aside without asking if our values and commitments are still intact.*

*Today our main task is simply to pause in the presence of God.*

*We give thanks for many lives of skill and bravery and patience - the lives of the servicemen and women whom we mourn together on this occasion.*

Yes, we must pause before God and remember the cost of war and re-examine our morals and values as a nation and as a people answerable to God for our actions. I mourn the fallen and I mourn that humanity cannot seem to live in the peace to which God calls each of us. Reflection on the desperate human cost of war must be the necessary part of fathoming the justification of its employment as a means to promote justice in the face of atrocity and oppression.

We must and will remember.

A.R.

## **The Birth of Hope**

Here's a jolly scene – the nativity using toy characters. This picture amalgamates the various birth narratives in the three Gospels (Mark doesn't have any birth story) into one overall scene which is more or less familiar to us all; stable, manger, sand, hovering star, shepherds, sheep, donkeys, animals, kings, gifts,



Angel Gabriel, Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, palm trees, and a 'bright sky'. It's missing a camel or two and a bit of straw but otherwise is complete.

It's a jolly, starry-skied scene and might well leave us starry-eyed like children caught up in all the glitz and romanticism of the festive season. Whatever you make of the Christmas story it is nonetheless memorable & joyful and a tale that we can enter into and retell throughout our days.

Just as toys are counted as childish things, things to move on from, so is perhaps the fairy-taleness of the *Toy Story* depicted above! As one who gets such joy from Christmastide and loves to play with 'toy' trains I write this advisedly. The point I seek to make is that the nativity scene has always existed to capture one's heart and imagination and act as a departure point for a spiritual journey. It is the beginning of the story of salvation. Yes, it invites us to love the baby, but calls us to follow the man! The 'train' in the station is waiting to depart...

The gospel accounts of Jesus' life move rapidly on to his message of hope and re-engagement with the God he wanted us to call Father. We cannot remain babies, time moves us on and we naturally outgrow our crib's and leave the nursery, thrust out into the real world. Spiritually we also need to grow and put childish things in their place. We can get them out and have a play, there's nothing wrong in being child-like, but we need to mature and allow our engagement at Christmas to develop into the marriage of a life-long relationship with the Gospel of Jesus.

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of hope. May this spirit be born afresh in us all, that we might be moved. Hope you'll come along!

Andrew