

Leaflet

Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES
No 582 June 2008

Pulpit Diary

Jun 1

9.30am End of year Service led by Spectrum
10.30am Morning Worship

Jun 8

9.30am Family Worship
10.30am Morning Worship (Crèche and special activity for children)

Jun 13 Friday

7.30pm Pre-communion Service

Jun 15

9.00am Communion
10.30am Communion
(Crèche and special activity for children)
3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

Jun 22 – Aug 10 inclusive

9.30am Family worship
10.30am Morning Worship (Crèche and special activity for children)

Aug 17

10.30am All Age Worship with children from Champion's Challenge

Aug 24

10.30am Morning Worship
Springboard and Spectrum: start of First Term

Aug 31

10.30am Morning Worship

For information about church organisations, please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri, 9.30am–12.30pm):

Mrs May Brown

e-mail: greenbankchurch@btconnect.com

The pastoral team can be contacted through the Church Office:

Rev Alison Swindells

email: alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk

Mrs Anne Oxbrow

Minister's Log

Dear Friends,

You may have heard about the *Church without Walls* national gathering, which was held at Ingliston during the first weekend in May. You may even have had the opportunity to go along. If you did then you would have been able to hear some high-powered speakers at the various seminars which



were organised. You would also have found representatives from congregations up and down Scotland. Over a year ago congregations were invited to purchase a tent and use it in some way to tell the story of their congregation's life and witness to their own community. Afterwards the tents would be sent to Christian Aid or other agencies for emergency relief purposes.

Churches from as far apart as Caithness and the Borders responded to the invitation and it was exciting to wander around the tents and discover the many ways in which congregations are reaching out to their parishes. This was an opportunity to gather some ideas and you may be hearing more about these from the Mission and Service Committee in due course! In a time when we are more used to talk of dwindling congregations and declining rolls it made a change to hear the good news stories.

I'm aware that as a congregation we too have good news to share. Yesterday we celebrated Pentecost with all age worship. During that service a number of our hymns were led by young people from the praise-band. Later on, in the evening, I was privileged to spend time with them and their friends in QII when we were exploring some of the questions, which they are asking about the Christian faith. To have so many young people interested in the Christian faith is a credit to all those who have been involved

in the Christian education and nurture of our children and young people and as a congregation we are very grateful to them. We have also been blessed by the presence in our congregation this year of our Faith-share student, Rev Cogitator Mapala from Malawi who has spent some time with

Springboard and QII. I'm sure you would join me in wishing him well as he completes his studies and prepares to return home in the Autumn. I would also like to take this opportunity of wishing QII every blessing as they head off to Peru in the summer. Please remember them in your prayers.

This summer also sees a development of our outreach to children of primary school age in the parish with the running of our first holiday club *Champion's Challenge* in August (places are still available and can be booked through the Church office). At the same time we are reviewing the provision we make for young teenagers from s1 to s3.

I am very aware too of other changes that will be taking place over the summer as people hand over roles and responsibilities within the congregation and its various organisations. Change is not always easy and indeed can sometimes be very challenging. But there is one thing that does not change and that is the Good News that we and every other Church congregation have to proclaim – the love of God for the world revealed in Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

I hope that this summer provides you with an opportunity to relax and find renewal and refreshment.

Wishing you every blessing,

Alison I Swindells
Minister

QII in Peru ... final bulletin ...

... then ...

In May 2007 QIers were welcomed with pizza to the house of Willie McPherson (Chief Exec and founder of the Vine Trust) where they first learned about the Trust's work with street children in Peru. These vulnerable, traumatised children are denied the basic human rights of protection, health and education and the Vine Trust's work (with Scripture Union Peru) help provide them with a home, an education, and the opportunity of a vocation. Our evening with Willie proved to be the launch pad for a faith-strengthening and fun year. QIers decided then they would like to raise money to replace the children's centres' old minibus, a target of £13,500!

... now ...

Fast forward a year and we now approach the final planning stages; with vaccinations underway, final flight payments being made and gearing up for Spanish language lessons, there is a heightened sense of anticipation and excitement about our project. We are absolutely thrilled to announce that, by the time we leave, we will have raised **£15,000!** The Vine Trust (<http://www.vinetrust.org>) are now ordering the minibus which should be in place when we arrive and we hope to have QII's name painted on it!

... between ...

Our year's fundraising activities have included busking in the Festival and Farmers' Markets, soup-pot Sunday at church, street collecting, Christmas family ceilidh, bag-packing at Sainsbury's and Morrisons, providing music at Murrayfield rugby and various private functions, silent auction. Hazel Macaulay deserves renewed thanks from us for her inspiring ideas, limitless energy and occasional nail-biting in the fundraising programme!

... to you ...

In addition, we have been greatly moved by the generosity of our congregation, both groups and individuals, who have so willingly added to our funds. These are too numerous to list here, but we hugely appreciate your involvement. It is a tremendous feeling to know that such support and goodwill exist within the Church and this generous backing is also wonderfully motivating for us as leaders. To all these friends of QII, THANK YOU!

... still to come ...

- John Watt's magnificent cycling challenge of 130 km will have just taken place around Loch Rannoch. Well done, John! More information and sponsorship opportunities on www.justgiving.com/johnwatt.
- Phil Barnes' participation in the Edinburgh Marathon.
- QII's show, directed by Phil, late June. Look out for more information around the church.
- Guides and Scouts sponsorship events.
- Private birthday functions (with Peru donations being offered instead of presents).

... and finally ...

Look out for us at one of the services in mid-July before we set off on 28th July!

Rachel McWilliam

World Mission

Global food crisis

The recent disasters in Burma and the Sichuan province of China remind us once again that life is fragile for many millions of the people with whom we share our world. It is clear however that lessons have been learned; international aid, and those expert in disaster relief, are available for immediate distribution and action, although, in the tragic case of Burma, this has been prevented by what a British cabinet minister called "malign neglect" by those in power.

Recently, organisations including the UN and Christian Aid have been trying to highlight a hidden, slow-burning disaster – in the words of the head of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) a "silent tsunami" which is driving an extra 100 million people into poverty. Global food shortages have provoked riots in a number of countries, and according to our Prime Minister rising food prices pose as great a threat to world prosperity as the credit crisis, and threaten to reverse the progress that has been made in alleviating poverty. Sharp price rises have left the WFP with a £377M shortfall in its budget, meaning that it will have to cut some of its food aid programmes among people who live on 50 cents a day and have nothing to fall back on. The causes of the crisis are complex, and are reckoned to include climate change, rising consumption in some parts of the developing world (particularly India and China), land being turned over to biofuels production, speculation on the futures markets, and panic buying and hoarding.

The charities Oxfam and CARE (Christian Action Research and Education) have called for fundamental changes in the international aid system. According to Barbara Stocking of Oxfam, "the aid business will not be able to tackle global hunger while it remains stuck in the past, seeing food crises as one-off events and not tackling the underlining problem – chronic poverty". And for Christian Aid, structural change is essential if we are to tackle poverty, as it is aggressive market liberalisation policies forced on poorer countries by rich countries that have left many of the world's poorest exposed.

One World Stall

Thanks to all who have bought fairly traded goods. The stall will be back in September. In the meantime, keep looking out for the fair-trade logo in shops and supermarkets. Yes, the prices may be a bit higher, but remember that we in the rich West now spend a lower proportion of our income than ever before on food...

Brian Barron

YOUTH MINISTER

As many of you will be aware, we are currently looking for a part-time Youth Minister. Details of the position can be found on the church website (<http://www.greenbankchurch.org>).

If you know of anyone suitable who might be interested please encourage them to contact the Minister.

QII Not-in-Peru

Celebrity culture, world poverty, our Christian faith, careers night, Fairmilehead Church youth group and Citilife project (teen mums associated with Wester Hailes children's church) have all featured at QII in the past few months.

For their input, we are grateful to Prof David Fergusson, the Barnes' friend Pip, our minister Alison, John Adair, Gillie Davidson, Robert Simpson, Richard Dunbar and Fairmilehead's youth worker, Meg. We have also enjoyed games of rounders in the valley!



We are absolutely delighted to welcome a new group of S3s whose participation and friendship further strengthens all that is QII!

Rachel McWilliam

Reflections of a Christian Aid collector, May 2008

Sunday afternoon: deliver envelopes to my 'district' – 41 properties, meet some of the residents in their gardens.

Monday evening, 7pm: head out to start collecting. Find people in in 29 homes, 22 give donations, some have the envelope ready including one full of change. 7 people decline the opportunity to give, one says she got two envelopes – one probably came with her church magazine from Morningside Parish the previous weekend; she says she will give through her church. One person returns the envelope unused, some ask if I have any spare envelopes as theirs can't be found. A teenage lad answers the door at the house occupied by people from S Asia and we talk; last year a lady answered the door and we communicated by gesture. Spend some time talking to a lady who has recently moved into her house – the property was empty last year. At the last house the child-minder answers the door, she knows nothing about an envelope for Christian Aid.

Tuesday evening I go out a little later: 12 homes to visit. Find a childminder in at the first house I call at. She cannot unlock the front door but comes to the side door to speak to me. Two other people answer their doors, decline to give a donation; no reply from the other 9 homes. Decide to return.

Again to the block of flats that is on my way home, no reply from the entry system but the lady I met the previous evening is going out and she lets me in. Go round the flats, ring three doorbells, no reply to any. Coming back down the stairs I hear footsteps, stop to talk to the gentleman going to his flat upstairs. He says he is a Christian, but he does not give to Christian Aid. I comment about how his neighbours must work late, and he replies that he

Duty Teams

- 1 **Jun** Tom Walker, Stewart Hunter, Frank Hutson, Alison Murison, Valerie Macniven, Paul Maxwell, Bill Frazer, Fiona Grant and Leslie Stokoe.
- 8 **Jun** John George, Kenneth Aitken, Alistair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead and Tony Foster.
- 15 **Jun (Communion)** Stuart Sanders, Moira Davidson, Stuart Macmillan, John Murison, Fiona Greig, Alasdair Swan, Sandy Cameron and Sally Stephen.
- 22 **Jun** Ian Thom, Alison Berrill, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Michael Turnbull and Greig Scott.
- 29 **Jun** Walter Crosby, Brian Barron, Donald King, Donald McLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young and Kathryn Sangster.
- 6 **Jul** Roger Bland, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Keith Winton, Eileen Campbell and Robert Nimmo.
- 13 **Jul** John Rutherford, David Allan, Richard Denison, Kenneth Htet-Khin, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones and Colin Winchester.
- 20 **Jul** John Ritchie, Eric Brown, Stewart Coghill, Ralph Davidson, John Htet-Khin, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman and Ian Thomson.
- 27 **Jul** Alan Armit, Edith Armit, Patrick Cadell, Iain Davidson, David Ferguson, Michael Pearson, Neil Ross, Malcolm Waters and Elizabeth Mackay.
- 3 **Aug** Tom Walker, Stewart Hunter, Frank Hutson, Alison Murison, Valerie Macniven, Paul Maxwell, Bill Frazer, Fiona Grant and Leslie Stokoe.
- 10 **Aug** John George, Kenneth Aitken, Alistair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead and Tony Foster.
- 17 **Aug** Stuart Sanders, Moira Davidson, Stuart Macmillan, John Murison, Fiona Greig, Alasdair Swan, Sandy Cameron and Sally Stephen.
- 24 **Aug** Ian Thom, Alison Berrill, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Michael Turnbull and Greig Scott.
- 31 **Aug** Roger Bland, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Keith Winton, Eileen Campbell and Robert Nimmo.
- 7 **Sep** Walter Crosby, Brian Barron, Donald King, Donald McLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young and Kathryn Sangster.

doesn't really know his neighbours apart from the elderly lady on the ground floor. I said that I knew her as I had collected for Christian Aid in that block for many years, and that I came from Greenbank Church. He tells me his gran used to live in the block; when he discovers that I collected from her he asks if we can say the Lord's Prayer together.

I finished my collecting for Christian Aid this year saying the Lord's Prayer with a total stranger on the landing in a block of flats. I thanked him and went to leave; he said he might come to Greenbank one Sunday. I said that there is a service at 10.30am and that he would be most welcome.

Joan Ritchie

Congregational Register

Omitted from the on-line version of the *Leaflet*

Church Flowers

Provided by

Delivered by



June

1st Weir Family
8th Winton Family
15th Malcolm Green
22nd Dunbar Family
29th Bill Frazer

Fiona Watt
Katy Maguire
Diana Hastings
Liz Foster
Catherine Ferguson

July

6th Jennie Johnston
13th Elaine Abbot
20th Catherine Hardie
27th McKinley/Chalmers Wedding

Joan Cameron
Gina Millar
Irene Horne
Doris Laing

August

3rd Rutherford Family
10th Agnes Warburton
17th Frank & Betty Hutson
24th Winton Family
31st Hutchison Family

Dorothy Whitehead
Fiona Kelly
Catherine Maclennan
Anne Morham
Pauline Grant

September

7th Lorna Sharp

Margo Fraser

Monday House Group

Are you interested in joining a new House Group meeting for Bible Study?

If so, you are most welcome to come to the Monday House Group's first meeting on **Monday 8th September at 7.30pm** at 9 Riselaw Crescent.

We plan to use the *LifeBuilder Bible Study* materials from Scripture Union, starting with John's Letters. Copies of the study notes are available from Wesley Owen, and from the Bookstall, priced £3.99.

If you would like any further information, please contact me.

Joan Ritchie

Please deliver material for the September *Leaflet* to the Editors' pigeon hole by 10.30am on Sunday 24th August.

Coffee Rota

June

1st Caroline Kehoe & Dorothy Whitehead
8th Hazel Macaulay & Julia Dunbar
15th *No Coffee* – Communion
22nd Mairi Stevenson
29th Maurice & Alison Berrill



July

6th Rosemary McCulloch
13th SLA Trustees (Brian Barron)
20th Vivien Hutchison, Rona Sommerville & Roddy Morrison
27th John & Joan Ritchie

August

3rd Ian & Moira Davidson
10th World Mission (Catherine Hardie)
17th Anne Kinnear
24th David & Janet Ferguson
31st Jill Powlett-Brown

Crèche Rota

Supervisor



Helper

June

1st Sandra Farrer
8th Heather Kay
15th Kirsten Pink
22nd Rosemary Collier
29th Vivien Hutchison

Fiona Trew
Christine Wallace
Flora Pollock
Catherine Webb
Fiona Trew

July

6th Valerie Macniven
13th Alison Ambler
20th Cath Brown
27th Ishbel Clark

Christine Wallace
Flora Pollock
Catherine Webb
Fiona Trew

August

3rd Hazel McLachlan
10th Janet Ferguson
17th Elaine Crummey
24th Lorna Peers
31st Julia Dunbar

Christine Wallace
Flora Pollock
Catherine Webb
Fiona Trew
Christine Wallace

September

7th Eileen McKinnon

Flora Pollock

Morning Coffee

A big thank you to all who helped to serve the coffee (and clean up after) throughout the year. I am sure the Congregation welcome the time of fellowship after the 10.30am service.

I am pleased to let you know that through the generosity of donations I was able to give another £300 to SLA, towards their work in India, and a further £300 to QII, who are aiming to raise enough money to buy a mini-bus[†] to help children in Peru. I wish them a safe and happy trip.

Isobel Thom

[†]They succeeded – see the article on page 2. *Editors*

GREENBANK PARISH CHURCH

PROGRAMME FOR SESSION 2008/2009

2008

10 Aug (Sun)	09.30	Final Summer Family Service
11 Aug (Mon) – 15 Aug (Fri)	10.00-12 Noon:	Champion's Challenge Holiday Club
17 Aug (Sun)	10.30	All Age Worship with Champion's Challenge Participants
20 Aug (Thur)		Pre-school – start of first term
24 Aug (Sun)	9.30	Springboard – start of first term
	10.30	Spectrum – start of first term
10 Sep (Wed)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
15 Sep (Mon)		Pre-school closed
24 Sep (Wed)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
28 Sep (Sun)	10.30	Harvest Thanksgiving
3 Oct (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting
5 Oct (Sun)		Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 9.30 and 10.30
19 Oct (Sun)		No meeting of Spectrum or Springboard (Activity for children)
20 Oct (Mon) – 27 Oct (Mon)		inclusive: Pre-school closed
1 Nov (Sat)		Charity Christmas Card Sale
2 Nov (Sun)	9.30	First Sunday Service, led by the Kirk Session
	15.00	Time to Remember – A Service for the Bereaved
9 Nov (Sun)	10.30	Remembrance Service (Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual)
11 Nov (Tue)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
16 Nov (Sun) – 23 Nov (Sun)		Guild Week
30 Nov (Sun)		First Sunday in Advent Start of Christmas Offering for Christian Aid
7 Dec (Sun)	9.30	First Sunday Service led by World Mission Committee
10 Dec (Wed)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
14 Dec (Sun)		Third Sunday in Advent 10.30 All Age Gift Service Springboard and Spectrum – end of first term
18 Dec (Thur)		Pre-school – end of first term
21 Dec (Sun)		Fourth Sunday in Advent 9.30 Communion Service 10.30 Lessons and Carols (Activity for children) 19.00 Carol Party
24 Dec (Wed)		Christmas Eve 19.00 Christmas Eve Family Service 23.30 Christmas Eve Watchnight Service (Carol singing from 23.10. Service ends at 00.10)
25 Dec (Thu)		Christmas Day 10.30 Family Service for Christmas Day
28 Dec (Sun)	10.30	Morning Service (Activity for children)

2009

7 Jan (Tue)		Pre-school – start of second term
11 Jan (Sun)	9.30	Springboard – start of second term
	10.30	Spectrum – start of second term
16 Jan (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting
18 Jan (Sun)		Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 9.30 and 10.30
21 Jan (Wed)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting

2009 (Continued)

27 Jan (Tue)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
1 Feb (Sun)	9.30	First Sunday Service, led by Help the Homeless
8 Feb (Sun)	10.30	Uniformed Organisations' Service (Springboard meets as usual)
11 Feb (Mon) – 19 Feb (Mon)		inclusive: Pre-school closed
1 Mar (Sun)		First Sunday in Lent Start of Lent/Easter offerings
	9.30	First Sunday Service led by Springboard
		Annual Meeting of Trustees after 10.30 service
3 Mar (Tue)		Guild Fund Raising Event
4 Mar (Wed)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
6 Mar (Fri)		World Day of Prayer
8 Mar (Sun)		Annual Business Meeting of Congregation after 10.30 service
13 Mar (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting
15 Mar (Sun)		Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 9.30 and 10.30
29 Mar (Sun)	12 Noon	Spectrum 3 – Project Lunch (after 10.30 service) Springboard & Spectrum – end of second term
1 Apr (Wed)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
2 Apr (Wed)		Pre-school – end of second term
5 Apr (Sun)		Palm Sunday (Activity for children)
	9.30	First Sunday Service, led by The Guild
6 Apr (Mon) – 10 Apr (Fri)	19.00	Holy Week Services (in Morningside Parish Church)
12 Apr (Sun)		Easter Day 9.30 Communion
	10.30	All Age Celebration (Activity for children)
18 Apr (Sat)		Scout Jumble Sale (Provisional)
19 Apr (Sun)	9.30	Springboard – start of third term
	10.30	Spectrum – start of third term
20 Apr (Mon)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
22 Apr (Wed)		Pre-school – start of third term
3 May (Sun)	9.30	First Sunday Service
4 May (Mon)		Pre-school closed
11 May (Mon) – 16 May (Sat)		Christian Aid Week
18 May (Mon) & 19 May (Tue)		Pre-school closed
26 May (Tue)	19.30	Kirk Session Meeting
31 May (Sun)		Pentecost 9.30 Pentecost Communion Service 10.30 Pentecost Celebration Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 9.30 and 10.30
Apart from 21 June (Communion), arrangements for services in June remain provisional and details will be given nearer the time		
2 Jun (Tue)	19.30	Congregational Board Meeting
7 Jun (Sun)	9.30	First Sunday service led by Spectrum 3
19 Jun (Fri)	19.30	Pre-Communion Service
	20.00	Pre-Communion Kirk Session Meeting
21 Jun (Sun)		Communion Services at 9.00, 10.30 and 15.00 Springboard and Spectrum meet as usual at 9.30 and 10.30
28 Jun (Sun)	10.30	All Age Worship End of term for Springboard and Spectrum Congregational Picnic
1 Jul (Wed)		Pre-school – end of year

There is a Crèche at the 10.30am service every Sunday throughout the year

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time for silence...

What a noisy world we inhabit. There are now relatively few easily accessible places where one can enjoy tranquillity and silence. Wherever we go we are surrounded by noise. Much of it is tolerable and even acceptable: the background hum of daytime traffic, the quiet conversations of fellow passengers on public transport, the penetrating and persistent questions of little children, the carefree laughter of people enjoying themselves. But why should we endure uncomplainingly the bass beat escaping from open car windows, the raised voices of those who think everybody wants to know the business they are discussing on their mobile phones, the loud shouting of obscenities by football supporters celebrating a win or consoling themselves after a loss? We want peace and quiet; we need peace and quiet; with the ancient wise man we say, *There is a time for silence...*

Constant noise can affect the health of those exposed to it.

At one time it was taken for granted that deterioration in hearing went with certain jobs. Nowadays, however, health and safety regulations insist on noise in the workplace being reduced so far as is practicable and workers protected from it, either by the use of hearing protection or by the alteration of working practices. Even musicians in orchestras can experience dulling of their hearing if the seating is not properly arranged and they become human sound absorbers! Sadly, hearing impairment can eventually lead to deafness. Although there is a greater awareness of the specific needs of deaf people, all too often they still find themselves unable to participate as fully as they would wish in many activities and can feel excluded from the world of hearing people. A recent campaign by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People challenged the public to imagine a world without sound. "Take a moment to imagine if you couldn't hear birdsong at dawn or danger signals in the street, enjoy wonderful sounds like a baby giggling or listen to your favourite music." We may complain about the level and persistence of noise around us, but the silence for which we long is surely not the absence of sound experienced by deaf people.

There is a strange story in the Bible about a particular kind of silence.

Elijah, prophet of the one true God, had engaged the prophets of Baal, a rival religion, in a spectacular confrontation, culminating with their defeat and killing. Unfortunately for Elijah, Queen Jezebel was also a devotee of the same false religion and threatened to have him killed in retaliation for his defeat of her co-religionists. It was when he was on the run and hiding in a cave that he had an uncanny experience. Feeling very sorry for himself, he had complained to God, only to be told to go and stand on the mountain side. *Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.*



In the Bible wind, earthquake and fire are recurring symbols of God's mysterious presence. In this story, however, they have been emptied, left meaningless, no longer able to speak. The Lord was *not* in the wind, *not* in the earthquake, *not* in the fire. Even today wind, earthquake and fire can still inspire terror, but only because of the destruction they can cause, not because they bring God close to us in might and majesty.

The traditional noisy and turbulent symbols may have failed Elijah, but God was not absent.

After the wind, the earthquake and the fire there came... and this is where scholars and translators have found it hard to know what Elijah felt or heard. Was it the traditional "still small voice"? A low murmuring sound? The soft whisper of a voice? A gentle whisper? The voice of a gentle breeze? Was it a sound or silence? It has been suggested that it was the kind of silence so intense that you can hear it. Perhaps the ancient writer wanted to describe a silence beyond our understanding, that we can rarely find today. It was in this silence, this sound of sheer silence, that Elijah found God again. Elijah did not find God where he might have expected to encounter the divine. For Elijah the unexpected replaced the expected. As has been wisely said, "The Lord's puzzling absence was the prelude to his surprising presence."

Can we find more time and space for silence in our lives?

How rarely do we make a deliberate decision to sit quietly and do nothing, to empty our minds of all the thoughts that tend to crowd them, to become quiet, hushed, motionless. Of course God is no more restricted to the silence of our creating than he was confined to the impressive natural phenomena of long ago. However, we allow ourselves to be so distracted by the noisy world of which we are part that we are unable to hear what God may be saying to us.

There is a balance to be maintained in this. On the one hand, we may approach sensing the presence of God as we have been taught to tackle every other problem — by sheer hard work. We grit our teeth, become very determined, and try, try, try. And nothing happens. On the other hand, we may go to the opposite extreme, sit back and hope that God will do something. But this is simply idleness! Here we come up against a paradox, one of the many

in Christian thought and practice: While prayer and worship are what we do, their outcome does not depend on our perfect performance of them. Rather, we believe, with St Paul, that the Holy Spirit can take our struggling, faltering words, our inarticulate longings, our mixed motives and our wordless silences and reshape, refine and reinterpret them. *If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. God's*

Spirit does our praying in us and for us... And so let us learn to let go of the excess mental and spiritual baggage which weighs us down, to exclude the noises of many kinds which surround us constantly and seek to experience something of that sound of sheer silence in which, like Elijah, we may receive afresh our marching orders for the next part of our earthly journey.