

Extraordinary powers



We give you thanks, O God, for the riches of our faith, and for the inheritance we share with your ancient people and their descendants. Keep us faithful and make us wise, that at the last we may feast at your table with all those you call your own. Amen.

Finding God on the smallholding

by Jeni Parsons

Every April I sit in the fields, somewhere, quietly watching and waiting to see if help is needed. With primitive breeds of sheep like ours, small and wiry, help is rarely needed. The lambs are born with narrow head and shoulders and

come easily without great fuss. The ewes push them out quite slowly, in stages, and within two minutes the lamb is up and trying to suckle. The lamb is wet and slippery like a human baby and the ewe dries it off by licking.

All this happens while I sit nearby. These are not tame pets, though they are fairly used to me now. I crawl nearer very slowly and speak quietly to the ewes. My only intervention will be to spray the lamb's navel cord to stop any infection. God's attentiveness to us is of this sort – quiet, close, watching and listening, speaking words of gentleness. 🐏

“ Endeavour seven times a day to withdraw from business and company and lift up thy soul to God in private retirement.”

Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), American Congregationalist and Baptist missionary

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Acts 4:5-12

At issue is the healing of a man who has been lame all his life. But that is not the real reason why Peter and John have spent a night in custody. The authorities are fed up with them and who can blame them? They draw attention to themselves, they preach heresy, they twist the meaning of the sacred scriptures and they draw unruly crowds. The authorities simply want them to shut up and go away, but that shows no sign of happening. So Peter and John find themselves in front of the court, defending their words and actions.

Peter makes his defence. There is no apology. Peter's language is provocative – the cornerstone of God's plan of salvation is the one “whom you crucified”. It is Jesus, Peter says, who has healed the man, Jesus who brings salvation. It is clear that Peter and the others are not going to stop their activities any time soon.

It is evident that something extraordinary is happening and that it is proving popular. Seeing trouble ahead, and no doubt hoping it will burn itself out like so many other renewal movements, the court wisely lets the disciples off with a warning.

It will not always be so. The stage is set for a long and tragic war between Judaism and Christianity, whose horrific results can be seen into our own times. There is much in the book of Acts about which we rejoice, but there is also much we have cause to regret. 🐏

World Malaria Day

by Christine Clark

Over three billion people in 106 countries live with the risk of malaria, with most of the half-million annual deaths occurring in African children. Today is World Malaria Day, which aims to promote education and understanding of malaria, and share information on control strategies, particularly prevention and treatment.

Several excellent charities provide practical help in this area, as well as fundraising,

education and research, and participating in dialogue with governments. Two of the smaller charities doing great work are the Butterfly Tree (www.thebutterflytree.org.uk), which runs health programmes in the rural areas of Zambia, providing nets and educational workshops, and Shelter Box (www.shelterbox.org), which provides insecticide-soaked nets to areas that have been flooded, as these are now prone to the insect infestation more than ever.

These are just two examples of outreach, although there are many more. What better way for us to obey Jesus' commandment, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves? 🐏