

# HIDDEN RIVER CIRCUIT DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES

## Edition 22: JULY 2026

Welcome to the July edition of Circuit reflections, as we think about the spread of the Bible throughout the world, being ourselves, the place of miracles and invitations and friendship.

Take your Bible and ponder on the stories and the words in the passages.

Take your hymn book and sing to the God who speaks through poetry and song.

Take your time and wait for God to speak to you and bless you.

Thanks to Peter Box and John Hill for their contributions this month.

Please send any comments and thoughts you may have to [kedrayton1@gmail.com](mailto:kedrayton1@gmail.com))

Printer and Distributor: Richard Brinck-Johnsen Circuit Administrator

### Contact Details of Hidden River Circuit Staff:

Rev Dr Gary Hall (Superintendent Minister) [gary.hall@methodist.org.uk](mailto:gary.hall@methodist.org.uk)

Rev Nancy Ndoho [nancy.ndoho@methodist.org.uk](mailto:nancy.ndoho@methodist.org.uk)

Deacon Helen Webster [helenweb2@gmail.com](mailto:helenweb2@gmail.com)

Rev Denise Yeadon [deniseyeadon@btinternet.com](mailto:deniseyeadon@btinternet.com)

Richard Brinck-Johnsen (Circuit Administrator) 07587 956881 [hiddenrivercircuit@gmail.com](mailto:hiddenrivercircuit@gmail.com)

### Pastoral Lay Workers:

Anne Kelsall 07513155879 [hiddenrivercircuit.pastoral1@gmail.com](mailto:hiddenrivercircuit.pastoral1@gmail.com)

Vickie Heydon-Matterface 07352451336 [hiddenrivercircuit.pastoral2@gmail.com](mailto:hiddenrivercircuit.pastoral2@gmail.com)

Stephen Allen 07467035211 [hiddenrivercircuit.pastoral3@gmail.com](mailto:hiddenrivercircuit.pastoral3@gmail.com)

## WEEK 1. JULY 5<sup>th</sup>: CELEBRATING THE 500<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF WILLIAM TYNDALE'S NEW TESTAMENT

By Mr Peter Box

**Scripture.** 1 Peter chapter 1 v 22 to chapter 2 v 7

During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe was in ferment: religion, which formed the centre of much, faced critical change. A man named Martin Luther put forward his protestations, the practice of raising money by means of “indulgences” needed reform!! Indulgences were a certificate granted by the Catholic Church that reduced the temporal punishment (time in purgatory) due from sins already forgiven. Originally earned through good deeds, indulgences later became widely sold for cash. People bought them to shorten their own future time in purgatory, or the time of deceased loved ones.

Protestants argued that salvation was a free gift from God, not something for sale.

There were other learned people that agreed and developed these ideas, major social change was afoot. Passions ran very strong, and armed conflict bubbled up in many parts. Ironically King Henry the eighth stood out against this “reformation” which Luther advocated and in 1525 The Pope gave Henry the title of “Defender of the Faith” . Amongst all of this a shadowy Englishman named William Tyndale, arguably, had as much influence as any of the well known names which lasts down to our present age. In 1526 there appeared a New Testament written in the English language, so simple that even a “ploughboy” could read it. For the first time in Christian history ordinary people could read God’s word. The power of this fact is immense.

“Justification by faith” is a central point in The Letter to The Romans St. Paul draws this idea from the account in Genesis of Abraham’s obedience. In the passage we focus on here the practice of obedience is made abundantly clear, our way of life, the way in which we treat each other and how we revere Jesus is here laid before us. Without doubt those that vehemently opposed the printing of scripture in the local vernacular could see that the idea of “the priesthood of all believers” would inevitably lead to the draining away of the power of “the church”. Up until this point in Christian history God was to be approached through the intercessions of a “priest”. The author of 1 Peter puts this on its head!! Nowhere in the NT is the word “priest” used in connection with the apostles. Jesus is preached as our salvation, this is witnessed to in Hebrews ch 12 and elsewhere. We know because He tells us that He is the way to The Father.

William Tyndale (c1492- 1536) sought to be out of public view for the obvious reason that he became a hunted man. Thought to have been borne in Gloucestershire and spent his early life there. His university career led to him being a highly regarded scholar and he became an ordained priest. His disappointment of not securing a position in London led him to becoming a roving preacher. This turn in his fortunes caused some to brand him a heretic!! Because of his activities in bringing English translations of scripture into the hands of any that wished to have it he was eventually burned at the stake!! His last words when he was burning at the stake in 1536 were “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes!”. Just three years later, King Henry VIII officially authorised the Great Bible in English, drawing heavily from Tyndale’s work.

The lasting legacy of Tyndale’s work is that we not only have the genius of his translations, much of the expressions he used have found their way into our common speech (“the apple of my eye”, “let there be light”, “scapegoat”, and “fight the good fight” for instance) but we have the truths that come to us from Christ our Lord. Those cornerstones that give solid foundation to our spiritual lives. Not until the reign of James first (1603-1625) were English translations “authorized”!! The so called “King James” version drew heavily on Tyndale’s work and is still highly regarded, we have much to be grateful for. In the time of Queen Victoria organisations calling themselves “Bible” societies sprang up which led, in part to many different “translations” in multiple languages. This trend went hand in hand with empire building and missionary zeal. The influence of those original “reformers” has cast a long shadow and to advocate the teachings we see in scripture can still get anyone of us into trouble.

The complete Bible has been translated into 801 languages, and at least some portion of scripture has been translated into 4,152 languages. In English alone there are estimated to be over 900 versions. The discovery of older manuscripts, the evolution of language and different language philosophies ( word for word compared to thought for thought, or paraphrasing for easy understanding) all contribute to the need for new translations, including ones in sign language and braille, and one of the latest is the Inclusive Bible: the first Egalitarian Translation is a unique, progressive English translation that aims to strip away patriarchal bias, sexist language and social stereotyping from Scripture. Mission Assist is a UK charity that enables volunteers to work from home to help translate Bibles into even more languages as yet not written down, which you could join. In addition, the Bible Society, founded in 1804, still aims to make the Bible available, affordable and deeply integrated into contemporary culture worldwide.

**Prayer:** Jesus our loving Saviour, Priest and Friend.

Open our hearts and minds to the truths contained in your Holy words of scripture.

We give thanks for people such as William Tyndale who risked everything so that this may be so.

Guide us in the ways of righteousness as we read and dwell on The Word which has been put before us.

As we reflect on what we see in the Gospel message may we come to realize the power for good it holds for each and everyone that accepts it. Amen.

**Hymn:** All hail the power of Jesu's name H&P 252 (STF 342) by Edward Perronet

1. All hail the power of Jesu's name! Let angels prostate fall; Bring forth the royal diadem, And crown him Lord of All.	The God incarnate, Man divine, And crown him Lord of all.
2. You seed of Israel's chosen race, You ransomed from the fall, Hail him who saves you by his grace, And crown him Lord of all.	4. Let every kindred every tribe On this terrestrial ball, To him all majesty ascribe, And crown him Lord of all.
3. Hail him the heir of David's line Whom David Lord did call,	5. O that with yonder sacred throng We at his feet may fall, Join in the everlasting song, And crown him Lord of all!

## **WEEK 2: JULY 12TH: JUST AS I AM: A Reflection by John Hill**

**Scripture: Ps. 139**



**Jan's story** Karen has asked me write about the faith element of my transgendered life.

John-Jan are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin for John is transgendered - Jan is his female alter-ego. Here is part of my story – but where to start?

I am what I am, Lord, and I have it on Biblical authority, that You do not make mistakes.

So, here I am Lord, blessed by You, affirmed by You. But let the following tell my story. For starters..... but where to start? My story will start at the tender age of 13 and a few months, but whilst I think that the die was cast well before then, why start at 13 years and a few months?

Let me cut to the chase. For a number of years I thought that I was the only person on this earth to be like I was, but fast forward to my third year at high school. In the March of that year, 1954, the popular magazine 'Picture Post' covered the story of Robert Cowell, British racing driver and WW2 fighter pilot.

The story covered the transitioning of Robert Cowell by way of gender affirming surgery to become Roberta Cowell. It was hailed as pioneering surgery and was loosely referred to as being a 'sex change'. Reading that story I can vividly remember thinking 'I wish that could be me', but whilst it showed me that I was not the only one, more importantly, in that moment it gave me a description of what I was. I continued with that 'idea' for some time as a comforting thought, before learning that other labels were current. Notably 'transvestite', how I hated, and still do, that word. The slang alternative 'Tranny' was a more comfortable term. One thing however would not change – it was my most closely guarded secret, and remained so for many years.

After that moment of enlightenment, and many 'one size fits all' - who am I? what am I? where am I? excursions into the bewildering land of gender dysphoria, I finally landed in my comfort zone – I was, like it or lump it, transgendered and there I have remained for many years. More importantly though, it was something that I just could not escape from. By the 1970's I realised that come what may my gender dysphoria was here to stay, and that begat a problem of its own.

(Living as a closet transgendered person is never easy. Secret expressions of this other identity are fraught with the risks of in-advertent discovery, and secrecy creates its own guilt! To tell or not to tell – a decision not to be taken lightly. The clock cannot be turned back and once out, the genie can never be put back into its bottle. Life has to be lived with the now public knowledge of the person you are.)

So, here I was and life was about to tighten the screws for I had grown up in a Christian home and all that I had learned could not dissuade me from the belief that because of what I did I was unacceptable to God, The 'hounds of heaven' had done a good job. I perceived the teaching of my Church as the total antithesis of how I felt and my inability to overcome my demons served only to illustrate the poverty of my faith. Over and over again my thoughts revolved around one thought only 'can I be trans- gendered and still live to God's glory'. I sought the truth, not favours. Words written by John Bell kept running through my mind. 'Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?' (StF 673, v4) By the grace of God I was to learn that the answer to both is yes. It was not an Emmaus road experience, but an illustration in the sermon of a visiting local preacher

Sitting in church that Sunday morning I (that is John) was, to all intents and purposes, just another regular guy in a pew – except of course that I wasn't. For many years (longer than I cared to recall) I had wrestled with, succumbed to, and kept as my closest secret this overwhelming desire to cross the gender divide and express this female 'other me'.

For some time I'd been waging war with my own private 'hounds from hell' and had finally reached the point of accepting, as a given, that I was transgendered and that my cross-dressing was the expression of my other gender identity. At long last I had established a base line concerning 'the both of me', I was what I was. The question that remained was 'could I cross the bounds of gender and still live to God's glory?' Looking back to that Sunday morning it was as though God tapped me on the shoulder and whispered 'Listen up, there's something I want you to hear'.

Three things are all that I can remember about that Sunday morning's service: it was an LPMA (Local Preachers Mutual Aid) Sunday, the preacher was an out-of-Circuit Local Preacher and, more importantly, a true story that he used by way of illustration. The story concerned a young woman, let's call her 'Claire'. Claire was a very keen and competent horse rider. She was also very active in her local Church serving in the Sunday School and in other Church roles.

One day whilst out riding her horse the unthinkable happened – Claire was thrown and taken to hospital, alive, but with severe injuries that had left her paralyzed from the neck down. The local preacher who was relating the story told how, some days later, he went to visit her in hospital. He admitted that he went to see Claire in some trepidation, not knowing what he could say to her or how she might respond. They talked for a while during which time Claire, reflecting on her injuries, made a remarkable statement of her personal faith that made a deep and lasting impression upon her visitor. 'Rather than not being able to serve God because of what I (now) am', she said, 'because of what I (now) am, I can serve Him in a unique way'.

Through those words I realized that God had spoken to me too. They answered my question - could I cross the bounds of gender and still live to God's glory? Because of what I was I could serve God in a unique way. Some time later I wrote this prayer, one of many that I have penned charting my journey as one of God's transgendered children:

*"It's strange, Lord, but I never thought that I should finish up being thankful for what I am. I am thankful Lord, because I realize that rather than not being able to serve You because of what I am, because of what I am, I can serve You in a unique way!"*

Somehow, and not as a result of any action on my part, that prayer has found its way onto the Internet. Somehow it has been able to reach a (potentially) far greater readership than I could ever have imagined as I left Church that Sunday morning.

In the context of my prayer, Claire's words carry an underlying message of God's love for each of us whether we be LGBTQI+, or what ever. God looks beyond the flawed image that we see of ourselves. God sees our potential and the unique way in which we can be of service. 'Accept yourself exactly as I have made you and then let Me use you in a unique way'.

BECAUSE of what **I am** Lord, **I can** serve You in a unique way! That's the message for you as it was for me - that in our own way we are all unique and each of us can serve God in our own unique way! Amen.

**Jan's prayer:** Lord, is it asking too much that the both of me might be acceptable in your sight? Can I cross the bounds of gender, and still live to your Glory? I'm asking questions, Lord, not favours. Amen.

**Hymn StF 345** by Charles Wesley

1. And can it be that I should gain

An interest in the Saviour's blood?

And can it be that I should gain

An interest in the Saviour's blood?

Died he for me, who caused his pain?

For me, who him, to death pursued?

Amazing love! How can it be

That Thou, my God, shouldn't die for me?

2. 'Tis mystery all: the immortal dies!

Who can explore his strange design?

In vain the first born seraph tries

To sound the depths of Love divine.

'Tis mercy all" Let earth adore

Let angel's minds enquire no more.

3. He left his Fathers throne above –

So free, so infinite his grace –

Emptied himself of all but love,

And bled for Adam's helpless race.

Tis mercy all immense and free;

For, O my God, it found out me!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay

Fast bound in sin and nature's nights:

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,

My chains fell off, my heart was free!

I rose went forth, and followed Thee.

5. No condemnation now I dread;

Jesus, and all in him, is mine!

Alive in him, my living head,

And clothed in righteousness divine,

Bold I approach the eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

## **WEEK 3: JULY 19<sup>th</sup>: ANDREW - THE DISCIPLE WHO INVITES OTHERS**

**A reflection by Karen Drayton, with thanks to Colin Ella, retired local preacher in Doncaster**

**John 1.43-45, John 6.8-15 John 12.20-36**

I used to work as a midwife in Rotherham Hospital, North Yorkshire. One day as I arrived for my shift on the postnatal ward, a volunteer who worked on the ward, Val, ran up to me, very excited and exclaimed – “I’ve found Jesus!! I’ve found Jesus!!” I thought, maybe he was under one of the beds?!! but she had found Jesus in her heart, after years of being a Jehovah’s witness. The joy in her heart, and her lifelong commitment to Jesus since then is something that still brings a smile to my face.

In the New Testament, it was Andrew who was the one who burst out with great enthusiasm “we have found the Messiah” and for each of us that is the most wonderful, profound, satisfying and saving discovery we can ever make.

This is not a discovery we can keep to ourselves. It is a breakdown in personal integrity if we do. If we have found a cure, we surely should share it with others? DT Niles, a 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer, famously said, “Evangelism is just one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.”

There’s a story of a man who died in New York aged 63. He had never had a job in his life, but had spent his entire life in college getting a string of degrees after his name. As a young lad, a wealthy relative left him enough money to support him every year providing her stayed at college when it was to end. It was a life of learning but never putting anything into practice.

We too have found the Messiah. We have learned about him, know his faithfulness and help in difficult times, but we are no better than a lifelong student if we do not express our faith in practical and helpful ways. Actions speak louder than words.

Andrew, one of the first disciples of Jesus, is an intriguing character, in the few times he gets a mention in the New Testament, he is always introducing someone to Jesus.

Firstly, he brings his own brother to Jesus. Secondly, he brings the boy with the loaves and fishes, and thirdly, along with Philip, he brings a party of Greeks to Jesus.

Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, and this is often the hardest place to witness, where people know us in all warts and all. When Jesus looked at Peter, he looked with a concentrated, intense gaze, a look that went deep and saw the possibilities in Peter, the Rock.

Jesus looks at us and sees us for what we can become. In that rough and ready fisherman Peter, he saw the foundation of the early Church. He saw strength and courage and wisdom yet to be discovered and used for God’s purposes.

An observer watched Michaelangelo applying his chisel to a huge block of shapeless marble. He asked Michaelangelo what he was doing and he answered - “I am releasing the angel that is imprisoned in the marble”. So too can Jesus shape our lives and release us from our prisons.

The disciples looked at the huge hungry crowd and despaired of being able to nourish them, but not so Andrew, who finds the lad with the loaves and fishes. He was looking at what this typical fare of the very poor would become in the hands of Jesus. When someone is brought to Jesus we cannot measure what will happen or what will become of it.

An old German school master used to doff his cap and bow to his students at every lesson.

Asked why, he said “ You never know what one of these boys may become some day”.

He was right, for one of his pupils was Martin Luther.

Greek tourists were always very inquisitive and visiting Jerusalem they wished to see Jesus. Perhaps they thought a chap with a Greek name might help them so they asked Philip. However, Philip went to Andrew for advice and he was very clear about what he had to do and he led the Greek visitors to Jesus.

Andrew reminds us of our twin witness of learning from Jesus and sharing what we have learned.

This low key, unsung disciple was instrumental in initiating a Gospel which was to go out throughout the world. The Roman roads would lead out the message and the universal Greek language would tell it out.

And so, through them, and all the generations in between, we have found Jesus. We have found him in our homes and lives, in the domestic everyday places where we have lived, where Andrew found his brother. We have found Jesus in the miracles where we have offered what little we have to Jesus and found how he multiplies and blesses our small gifts. We have found Jesus when we redirect others to him, and tell of all he has done for us.

May God give us the courage to share the Good News “We have found Jesus!”

**Prayer:** Imagine your world without Jesus in it.

Give thanks for all you treasure about knowing him.

Give thanks for those who introduced you to him, and nourished your faith.

Think who you could share your feelings about Jesus with.

Consider how you could demonstrate God’s love to others in a new way.

Amen.

**HYMN: Singing the Faith 35, a lovely invitation and celebration hymn by Graham Kendrick**

1. The trumpets sound the angels sing,  
The feast is ready to begin;  
The gates of heaven are open wide,  
And Jesus welcomes you inside.

2. Tables are laden with good things,  
O taste the peace and joy he brings;  
He’ll fill you up with love diving,  
He’ll turn your water into wine.

*Chorus: Sing with thankfulness songs of pure delight*

*Come and revel in heaven’s love and light*

*Take your place at the table of the King,*

*The feast is ready to begin, the feast is ready to begin.*

3. The hungry heart he satisfies,  
Offers the poor his paradise;  
Now hear all heaven and earth applaud  
The amazing goodness of the Lord!

**WEEK 4: JULY 26<sup>th</sup>: MIRACLES OF HEALING: A Reflection by Karen Drayton**

**Scripture: Luke 10. 1-24**

Recently I heard a story of new Christians in India not burying their dead, but waiting for three days in expectation of the body rising to life again. They were mocked for being literal, superstitious and backward. But isn’t their faith great? How do we explain the miracles Jesus demonstrated, yet say – it was for others, not for us? It was for then, not now? How do we get to believe in the miracles of Jesus when we do not see great miracles of resurrection and healing in our lives?

In The Chosen, the series about Jesus' life, Jesus says – “some need healing, but not all”. James, one of the disciples is portrayed as having a disability that prevents him walking well. Jesus sends out the disciples two by two and gave them the authority to heal. This troubled James – they will laugh at me and say – “Ha! You think you can heal us when you are not healed already?” Jesus said to James– “Do you want to be healed?” – “Of course!” replies James.

Jesus responds by saying “Hundreds – no thousands!- can have a story of healing. And that is their story. But your story is one of proclaiming God's greatness without being healed. To know what really matters is not the body, but what is in the heart. To show people that you can be patient with your suffering here on earth, because you'll spend eternity with no suffering. Not everyone can do this. How many people does God trust with this capability – of believing and healing but not being healed themselves? So many people need healing to believe. But you are going to do so much more than that!”.

Words of wisdom indeed!

God sees more than a beautiful, fast-moving body. He sees the heart, the soul, the motives, the language we use, our thoughts. Often our hearts need more healing than our bodies. Our attitudes and conversation, our thoughts and behaviour need reforming.

Our healing comes when we find ourselves having true strength in spite of our weaknesses.

You will be healed – it is only a matter of time.

I love this poem by Gerard Hughes, and it was read at my husband's funeral, after his long seven years of deterioration with the cruel Motor Neurone Disease. Surely this is faith? To believe this without seeing it?

**Poem: A Marvellous Healing by Gerard Hughes**

It was a marvellous healing	Lungs that had so utterly failed him
After months of asking,	Sang out with strength and boldness.
Of waiting;	
After the desperate, slow deterioration,	He ran
The warring tides	Through the unfamiliar sunlight,
Of faith and doubt:	Drinking it in,
To be released in an instant from every pain.	Experiencing it all at once
	The thousand and one feelings
It was as if the very molecules of his flesh	That for so long had been denied him.
Had been infused, invaded	
With the life of God	It was a marvellous healing:
Until he was filled, fit to burst,	To be so totally restored,
With the shalom, the peace,	Made whole,
Of the Father's rule.	Rebuilt.
	It had just surprised him,
Limbs that had fallen flaccid with weakness	A little,
Waved and danced with joy;	That he had to die
	to receive it.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help us to believe even when we don't see the miracles we would wish to, for ourselves or for others.

Give us the faith to trust you, and offer that faith to others, even when we don't understand the mystery of your ways.

Help us to be more honest in the ways we look at ourselves, to realise how we could be more whole - gracious and forgiving, kind and affirming, peacemakers and faithful, courageous yet gentle, just like you.

Help us to spend more time in your company, learning by listening and reflecting on your ways.

Amen.

**HYMN: Singing the Faith 653, by our wonderful Methodist hymn writer Fred Pratt Green**

1. O Christ, the Healer, we have come  
To pray for health, to plead for friends.  
How can we fail to be restored  
When reached by love that never ends?

2. From every ailment flesh endures  
Our bodies clamour to be freed;  
Yet in our hearts we would confess  
That wholeness is our deepest need.

3. How strong, O Lord, are our desires,  
How weak our knowledge of ourselves!  
Release in us those healing truths  
Unconscious pride resists or shelves.

4. In conflicts that destroy our health  
We diagnose the world's disease;  
Our common life declares our ills:  
Is there no cure, O Christ for these?

5. Grant that we all, made one in faith,  
In your community may find  
The wholeness that, enriching us,  
Shall reach the whole of humankind.

