



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church
Eastbourne

Record

April 2025

6 April	Shared service with Anglicans at St Ronan's.....	9:30am
13 April	Informal worship service.....	9:30am
18 April	Good Friday service at San Antonio (with Anglicans & Catholics).....	9:30am
19 April	Quiet reflection at St Ronan's – drop in anytime.....	10am-4pm
20 April	Sonrise service on beach by RSA, HCBs to follow.....	6:30am*
20 April	Easter Day service at San Antonio (with Anglicans & Catholics)....	9:00am*
27 April	Informal worship service & Church Chat.....	9:30am
4 May	Shared service at San Antonio (with Anglicans).....	9:30am

**Note these odd times*

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Power Hour – Sundays 9:30am

Breakfast Prayer – Tuesdays 8:00am

Mainly Music – Thursdays 9:15-11:15am

For pastoral care needs, please contact one of the Local Shared Ministry Team

Rev Reg Weeks 027 491 5947, Simon Shaw 562 8772,

Colin Dalziel 562 7238, Sandy Lang 562 8753

'Wars and rumours of wars'....

Each day, the TV news is full of reports on war upon war, earthquake upon earthquake, disruption and protest upon disruption and protest. It's deeply disquieting to say the least.

Earthquakes are natural occurrences, but the impact of their destructiveness is very deeply human. And all the rest results from humanity's apparent inability to live in peace.



And while in New Zealand we live in relative peace and security, physically far removed from any theatre of military conflict, the television in our lounges, or the mobile phones in our purses or pockets can immediately transport us into the thick of it in real time. It's almost impossible to shield ourselves from its impact. The constant warfare and political upheaval haunt us with the questions "Where will it all end?" And "What is happening to democracy?"

It was Winston Churchill who said in 1947:

"Many forms of government have been tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

So, in light of that, I find it rather disquieting to hear on Jack Tame's programme, 'Q&A', that in a poll of 2,000 Kiwis late last year, 32% said they liked the idea of "an authoritarian leader who doesn't have to worry about parliament or elections." And then to hear our Minister of Foreign Affairs larding his recent speech with divisive tropes from the other side of the Atlantic. Division is the seedbed of fascism.

Has the memory of Auschwitz, Dachau and Belsen grown dim? Is there a new generation arising that has no memory of fascism, and the resulting Holocaust?

The phrase with which I began this reflection is not contemporary. It came from the lips of Jesus, over 2,000 years ago, recorded in the three main accounts of his life:

"When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes and famines in various places." And so, it has ever been; and He encourages his followers to hang in there, to stand firm, no matter what.

On my shelves is a book by Victor Frankl written in 1946 and birthed from his experience of three years in four different concentration camps. During that

time, he lost his wife, father, mother and brother. Deprived of everything except a painful and almost meaningless existence, he came to the deep realisation that *"He that has a why to live, can bear with almost any how."* And he concludes his book with these words:

"...our generation is realistic for we have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who has invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who has entered those gas chambers upright with the Lord's prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips."

I felt it fitting to conclude with words written by a Jewish prisoner on a wall in the Cologne concentration camp:

"I believe in the sun even when it is not shining, and I believe in love even when there's no one there, and I believe in God, even when he is silent. I believe through any trial there's always a way, but sometimes in the suffering and hopeless despair my heart cries for shelter, to know someone is there. But a voice rises within me saying 'hold on my child. I'll give you strength. I will give you hope, just stay a little while.'
I believe in the sun even when it is not shining, and I believe in love even when there's no one there, but I believe in God even when he is silent. I believe through any trial there is a way.
May there someday be sunshine. May there someday be happiness. May there someday be love.
May there someday be peace."

Reg Weeks

Clerk's corner...

Two offices for lease: We're still seeking expressions of interest for these. Put the word out there...

PC, LSMT: We missed our March meetings as Anne and I had an appointment with the Whanganui River. So, there's no particular business PC, LSMT business to report. Of course, the unrelenting business of church administration always rumbles along in the background...!

People stuff: • Wendy McCarter leaves us shortly to take up a new position in Central Otago. Wendy, goodbye, go with our blessing. We've hardly got to know you and you're going already. We've appreciated your short period as a member of our LSMT. We will surely miss you...!
and • Eun-Joo is off to S Korea for three months but is expecting to be back here again by winter. Au revoir Eun-Joo, safe travels, happy times with distant family...!

Church chat: It's about time we had another Church Chat. This is an opportunity for you to raise any matter you would like and also for PC and



LSMT to introduce items for discussion. We suggest a Church Chat after the informal service on 27 April in the Fellowship room.

Easter: I need to expand slightly on the brief Easter service information you see on the front cover.

- 18 April we will have our usual 'Combined' Good Friday Service at San Antonio (with the Anglicans and Catholics) at 9:30am.
- 19 April Easter Saturday, drop in anytime to St Ronan's which will be open for quiet reflection between 10am-4pm. There will be a looped data show running with music and slides to aid your private meditations.
- 20 April Easter Day starts at 6:30am in the near-dark with our usual 'Sonrise Service' on the beach by the RSA. Hot cross buns and a cuppa will follow in the nearby community hall.
- 20 April Easter Day Service at San Antonio (with Anglicans) will be a tad early at 9:00am as the Catholics will have an 11:00am Mass, so need us to be well clear by then.

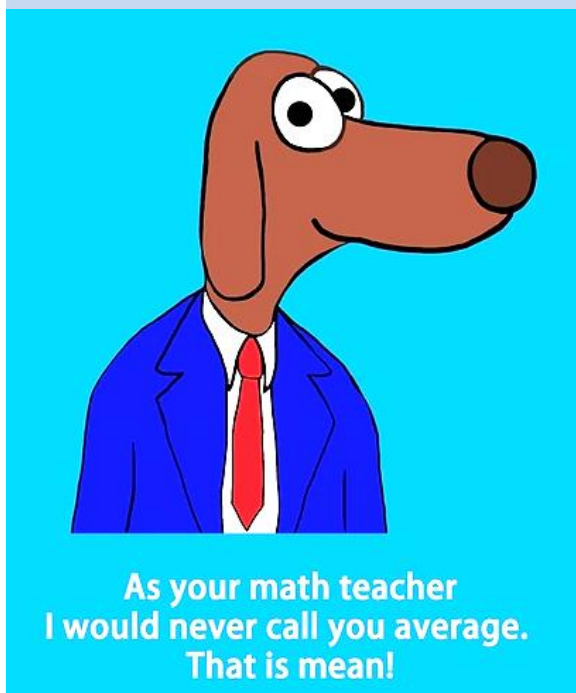


Full-moonset over Mākaro, just before dawn, Easter 2022

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Sandy Lang

Rood screen – The art of double entendre¹...

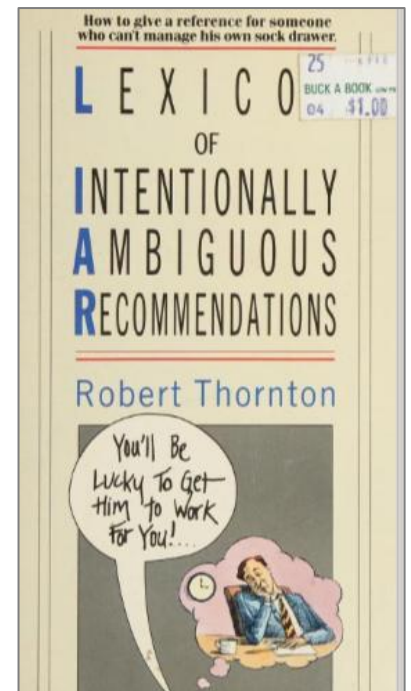


I'm sure we've all been in that awkward situation where we've been asked to write a testimonial for someone whom we don't regard all that highly. Do you write an honest report, and torpedo their chances, or do you lie?

Robert J Thornton, a Lehigh University economics professor, is the author of the 'Lexicon of Intentionally Ambiguous Recommendations' (LIAR for short), published by Sourcebooks Hysteria in Illinois. Here are a few examples of his delightful ambiguity:

¹ A word or phrase that's open to two interpretations.

- For a lazy employee, Thornton writes, *"In my opinion, you will be very fortunate to get this person to work for you."*
- You might say *"I would say that his real talent is getting wasted at his current job"* about a worker with alcohol problems. Or perhaps *"I'd make sure there are no bars in the way of this man coming to work for you."*
- *"You won't find many people like her"* might mean that she is in a class of her own or that she is disliked by everyone.
- *"I'm sorry we let her get away"* could also mean that we regret not prosecuting her.
- And the one that started it all: *"I simply can't say enough good things about this student."*



I do love the way we quickly see one possible meaning, but then, on reflection, we see another.

Jesus was pretty good at double entendre too. My two favourites are:

The Lord's Prayer. We recite it so frequently that we barely pause to think about it. The words we normally sing in church go *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us"*.

There are two distinct interpretations here.

1. We carry on just as we are, in which case we are asking God to use the same standards of forgiveness that we apply to others. I don't know about you, but in my case that doesn't set the bar very high. I know I've been guilty of forgiving someone with my lips but not my heart.
2. Or are we asking God to forgive us in the way that we would LIKE to be forgiven. If that is the case, then we need to do a lot of work on ourselves on how much we forgive others.

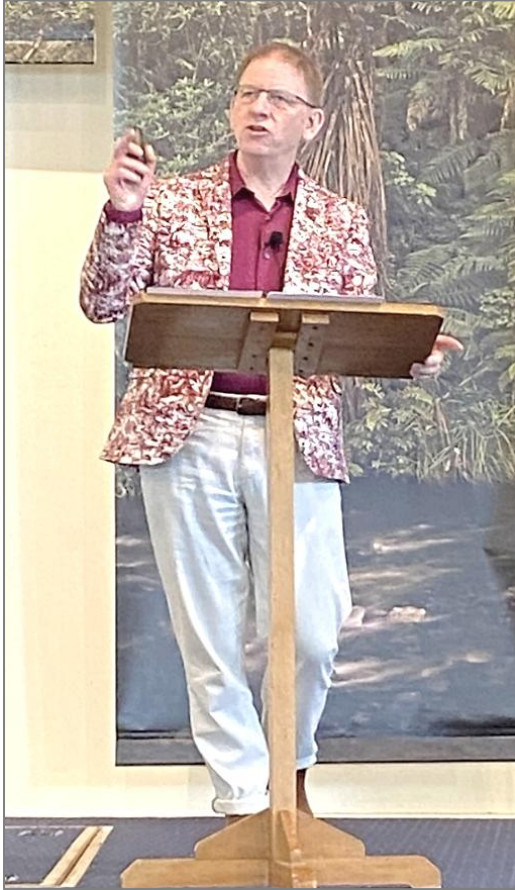
Mark 12:31 tells us to *"Love your neighbour as yourself"*. That's pretty easy – just be reasonably nice to them. But to measure how much you are required to love them, you need to ask yourself how much you love yourself and how much you care for yourself. And many of us are not as good at looking after ourselves as we perhaps ought to be - diet, fitness, sleep habits etc.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds us *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies."* Maybe that verse has a double meaning too. Maybe it's also a reminder to look after ourselves better.

John Harris

Presbytery Central gathering and AI...

I very much enjoyed the recent Presbytery Central gathering held at St Alban's in Palmerston North on 15 March. The session was opened by the irrepressible Rev David Dell, Wellington Regional Moderator. David soon had everyone joining him on his electronic keyboard in songs, some with new lyrics he had written, including some catchy rap rhythms.



The keynote speaker was Neil Dodgson, Professor of Computer Graphics at Victoria University and an Elder at St John's in the City. Neil's topic was *Living in an Age of Disruptive Technologies: AI and What it Means to be Human*. Neil gave a brief history of the development of Artificial Intelligence systems leading up to the current generative AI systems that can generate original images, text, video and other content.

As AI becomes increasingly sophisticated and more embedded in everyday systems and decision making, for example mortgage applications, health diagnoses, parole applications, it will become impossible for humans to understand the logic processes which led to an AI generated decision.

AI offers many potential benefits but also presents many new risks and challenges that, given its rapid advances, human beings will have to address in the near future.

Later in the morning Neil led a workshop on *The Ethics of using AI and other technologies in the church*. Lots of provocative questions were raised. Is it acceptable for ministers to use tools such as ChatGP to prepare a sermon? Should churches use Facebook given its morally dubious origins, morally dubious business model and leadership, manipulative algorithms and lack of content moderation?

Another of the five workshops was led by Rev Seb Murrhly from Knox Church Waitara and KCML and titled *Ministry feels tough these days: ministry in today's (secular) world*. Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy but inescapable? The secular framework we live in makes ministry difficult in 2025. Seb concluded by suggesting more people may turn to religion as life on earth becomes increasingly challenging. We all departed with much to think about!

Simon Shaw

The new imperialists...

Empires fell out of fashion, sort of, after 1945. The British Empire fell apart, followed swiftly by the French and Belgian empires. The German empire had been destroyed in WWI. The Japanese dreams of empire had been wrecked by WWII.

But the Russian empire had been reinvigorated. In the 19th century it had expanded eastwards across Asia to North America. In the west it had carved off a chunk of Karelia from Finland and, to the south, it had absorbed parts of the old Ottoman empire. In 1945 it added the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, chunks of East Prussia and Poland and asserted dominion over western Europe as far as Berlin. The Russian Empire had actually done very well. It was a pity it had sold off its North American outposts in Alaska to the USA in 1867.



But in 1991 the Russian empire fell apart as the various local colonies reasserted their independences. This was a great humiliation; Vladimir Putin was possessed with a vision *to make Russia great again*. A key to this was the reintegration of Ukraine. The Russian Orthodox Church had its roots in Kiev and, during the Middle Ages, political and religious power gradually migrated north to Moscow. The Russian and Ukrainian languages are very similar, and the Church is a common bond. The Czars had made Russia great, and the communist party under Stalin ("Steel") had made it greater. That greatness must be restored. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has fiercely endorsed the special military operations currently underway in Ukraine.

Putin's grand vision was reflected in North America where a real estate agent had the idea to "*Make America Great Again*". Why it had to be made great "again" was never stated because in most eyes it had already achieved greatness. Nevertheless, Donald Trump saw possibilities. By adding Canada and Greenland to his fiefdoms he could achieve a landmass almost as big as the Russians. In true imperial style he surrounded himself with gold trappings, welcomed effigies of himself as a king, and surrounded himself with a court of fawning sycophants, all the while riding roughshod over a population of "losers".

Besides which, he wielded the bible as a rallying symbol and was acclaimed by 'evangelicals' as appointed by God to lead 'God's own Country'. There are

moves to get him elected for a third term, which would be just short of having him appointed 'president for life' like all real monarchs. But perhaps he could bypass that and simply emulate the Roman emperor Caligula and declare himself a god?

In Eretz Israel, the '*Land of the Family of God*', the prime minister Benjamin ('*son of strength*') Netanyahu ('*Yahweh has given*') is leading a colonial war to reassert Jewish dominion over the land that God promised to Abraham and his offspring 4,000 years ago. The Palestinians make a claim on the territory 'from the river (Jordan) to the sea (Mediterranean)'. Netanyahu has the same cry but with a slightly different interpretation, which is a more ancient one, that of the kingdoms of David and Solomon, an empire which extended from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. A slight inconvenience is that Palestinians, like Jews, can also claim to be descendants of Abraham.

One should also not underestimate the imperial ambitions of China. The Communist Party is the religion of modern China and Xi Jin Ping is its high priest and emperor. The local colonies of Mongolia, Tibet and the Uighur of Xinjiang are being coerced into the Han straitjacket, while physical occupation is made of the islets and reefs of the South China Sea. Taiwan will be reincorporated into China but the forays into the small islands of the Pacific echo ancient Chinese tributary traditions.

The movement of Chinese warships through the Tasman and around Australia is cause for attention. The Japanese in 1939 were not greatly concerned with South-east Asia. Their goal was Australia and its minerals; just as the Germans in 1940 attacked Russia with a goal of grabbing the petroleum wealth of the Caucasus; and the Americans in 2003 waged a war in Iraq to preserve access to its oil.

Those of us who have lived through the post-1945 years, have been indeed fortunate. Wars have been few and empires weak. We applaud our 'democracy' and our 'democratic ideals'. But the rise of the new imperialists reminds us that peace is a fragile characteristic and that democracy does not necessarily mean the people who comprise a nation actually rule it. As the ancient Greeks used the term, '*Demos*' refers to the rulers, aristocrats and those who hold economic and/or military power ('*kratos*').

Those who do not belong to the privileged wealthy elites and their supportive sycophants in the managerial castes are the '*plebs*', the poverty-imposed, the weak, the 'losers'. The eternal drama of the *kratos* of the *demos* is reenacted by some of us each year at Easter. King Herod had built a huge temple complex in Jerusalem to demonstrate his power and wealth, and the wealth and power of the Jewish priestly caste.

The temple was a small adjunct to the vast courtyard, where the priests conducted a huge scam. Here, the common people could buy, with special

temple money, the cattle, goats, sheep and pigeons needed for the sacrificial offerings; the butchers and priests carried out the necessary functions, and then feasted well on the sacrificed livestock.



A crazed young preacher walked through the courtyard overturning the desks and tables of the money changers and priests. For this offense the priestly demos crucified him.

In Israel today an aim of many is the rebuilding of that Herodian temple and the re-establishment of the traditions and sacrificial practices of the priesthood. There are groups already sewing the priestly garments. The families who will fulfil the priestly obligations are known: their names, preserved over 2000 years, are: Cohen ('priest'), Kaplan (=Cohen) and Levi ('united').

Geoff Mann

Power Hour: Who made the rules about the Sabbath...?

Do you know who made the rule about what should happen on the Sabbath (Sunday)? Power Hour decided first that it was both, our Mums and Dads, and God, who made the rule that we should go to church on Sunday to worship God. Then they decided, no, it was the Mums and Dads of their parents who decided the rule and so on. Finally, we got back to Jesus' time and decided the Sabbath rule was even older than Jesus - maybe it was one of the Ten Commandments, #4 *Honour the Lord by resting on the seventh day of the week*. Digging even deeper they found it was actually God, and not Mums and Dads. The answer was found in Genesis 2:1 *'So, the sky, the earth, and all that filled them were finished. By the seventh day God finished the work he had been doing, so he rested on the seventh and made it a holy day, because on that day he rested from all the work he had done in creating the world.'*

So, God's rule was that the seventh day of the week was to be a day of rest and to worship God.

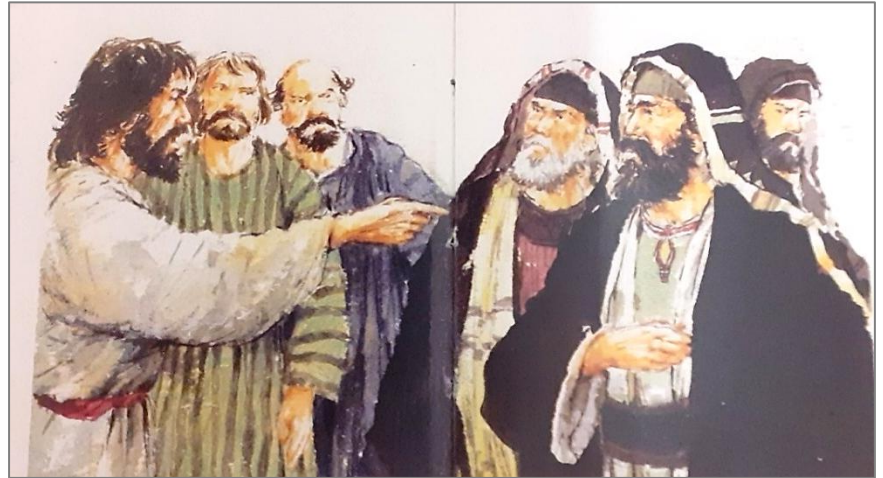
Coming on to the time of Jesus, there were many rules added by the religious leaders and Pharisees. These were mainly to do with what constituted work and rest. Power Hour then explored and was surprised at the activities which Jesus may have had to follow on the Sabbath.

In a quiz. would you answer, true or false, to these examples?

- You may not pick a flower
- You may not pick up a pen and write with it
- You are not allowed to kill a fly
- You must not put a plaster on a cut

[Answer: they are all true!]

Next, the Power Hour children used table puppets to identify how Jesus responded to the Sabbath rules. They dramatised how Jesus healed a woman with a crippled back in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17).



- First, they found that Jesus called the watchful rule-minding Pharisees,

'hypocrites' - because the Pharisees watered their work animals on the Sabbath. This was also a new word for the children. Then they found everyday examples of "do as I say, not as I do" which left them with a sense of disappointment and low respect.

- Second, they discovered that Jesus believed the day of rest was created to help people and that it wasn't wrong to heal a person with a long-term crippling condition on the Sabbath. Jesus was doing something that was very special, caring and life transforming. Was this not how God wanted us to live? Conclusively, the children agreed with Jesus and thought that he had been sensible. They thought that probably he didn't mind annoying the Pharisees because he believed strongly that loving was number one and thought the Pharisees couldn't see beyond their noses when it came to suitable Sabbath rules.

- Last, transitioning to today, they gave more thought to how they, as individuals, could make their rules for their Sabbath (Sunday) and use it differently. Here are some of their thoughts:

- Sunday should be something i.e., rest between two working weeks and should not be work. You can't work all the time. Rest is important.
- Going to Sunday church helps us to remember to worship God.
- Sundays after church should be also special times for doing something different or special for others, e.g., good things which aren't work, like visiting my grandmother/grandfather or performing at community celebrations, e.g., school kapa haka for new footpath opening.

Indeed, this is all food for thought on how we can respectfully honour our Sabbath. What rules would you make for the Sabbath?

Susan Connell

Term 1: 16 Feb-6 Apr; **School Holidays:** 12-27 Apr; **Term 2:** 4 May-22 Jun.

The 'Masters of War'...

At this time of so much global uncertainty, it is easy to despair at Man's arrogance, stupidity and impunity towards your command to us to 'love our neighbours as ourselves'.

As the leaders of the world's most powerful militaries and economies jostle to carve out their own 'Empires of Influence', the smaller nations wonder what has happened to the international rule of law and fear for their future.

We continue to be deeply saddened by the ongoing war in invaded Ukraine and the unholy warfare in what we used to call the 'Holy Land'. We weep at the current 'Slaughter of the Innocents' – the thousands of civilians killed in Gaza, Israel, Lebanon and Syria; the denial of humanitarian aid to the millions of now homeless Palestinians; and what amounts to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the West Bank of the Jordan.

Lord how can we forgive these 'Masters of War'? As Bob Dylan sang bitterly about them more than 60 years ago:

*"You hide in your mansions
While the young people's blood
Flows out of their bodies
And is buried in the mud"*

Forgive the warmongers Lord, cause the scales of hate and avarice to fall from their eyes, and hasten an everlasting peace which we all long for.

Contributed by **Les Molloy**

[An excerpt from a recent 'Prayer for Others' at a St Ronan's formal service]

Varanasi – India’s spiritual heart...

Two places in India had a profound emotional impact on me during my 19-day tour of parts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan in February. These were our visit to the banks of the Ganges River at Varanasi and our early morning encounter with the Taj Mahal in Agra – truly one of the wonders of the world.

Hindu Indians (70 per cent of the population) have four mothers, we were told:

- Their birth mother;
- Maa Ganga (Mother Ganges);
- Mother India (a form of the Shakti goddess, mother of the universe) and
- Gau Mata, the sacred cow, symbolic of the nurturing qualities of the earth.



On the Ganges at sunrise

As we wound our way through Varanasi's narrow lanes, then emerged onto one of the ghats (series of steps) leading down to the river, I nearly sobbed. I felt instantly that I had arrived at India's spiritual capital. Devout Hindus believe that dying in Varanasi leads to eternal liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth (reincarnation). That is why so many Hindus live in hospices along the river, in the hopes that by dying in this city, they will reach the state of moksha. This term means ultimate freedom and liberation, and is central to Indian philosophy and religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Families of those who have died away from Varanasi will often bring some of their loved one's ashes to immerse in the river.

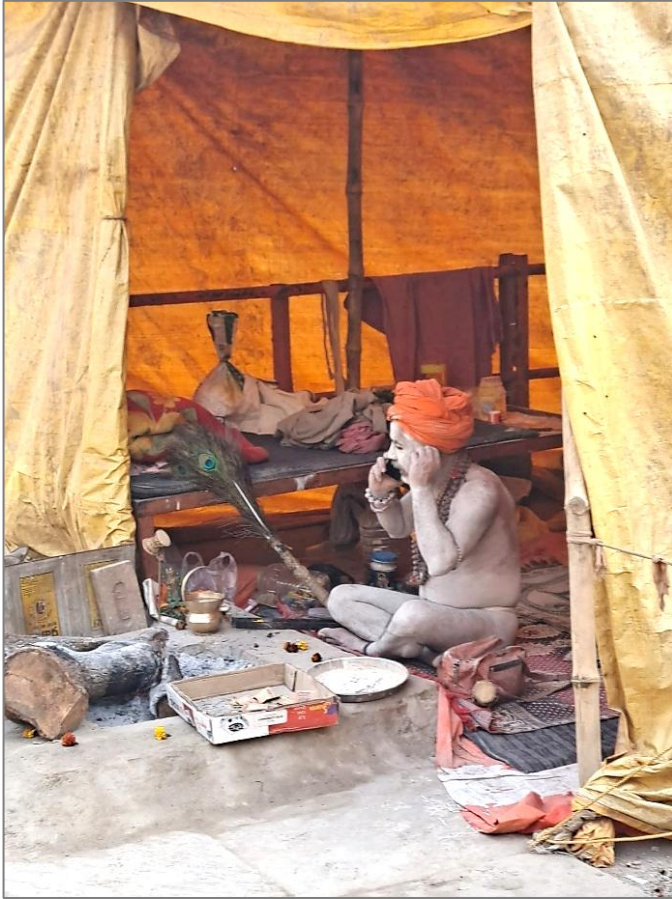


Temples, palaces and hospices line the ghats of the Kashi

Varanasi, sometimes called Benares, Banaras or Kashi, is also considered one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with roots tracing back more than 3000 years. It has withstood invasions, colonialism and modernisation, yet it feels timeless, with a strong sense of spirituality and cultural heritage. Incidentally, Narendra Modi, prime minister of India since 2014, represents Varanasi in the Parliament of India.



Throngs descending into the Ganges



A sadhu with holy ash and cell phone

We were lucky enough to experience life along the Kashi, both at sunrise and sunset. This is the most sacred seven-km stretch of the river. From our boat we could watch the dense throngs of pilgrims getting ready for their ritual bathing, the bodies of the dead on their decorated biers waiting for immersion in the river before cremation, the smoke from the cremation fires at the Manikarnika and Harishchandra Ghats drifting in the air, the pilgrims lining up in their hundreds to enter the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva. One of Hindu's three major gods, Shiva is believed to have founded the city.

We also had our own ceremony out on the water, lighting small, flower-decorated oil lamps which we then lowered into the water accompanied by silent prayers for our loved ones, both living and deceased. Considering

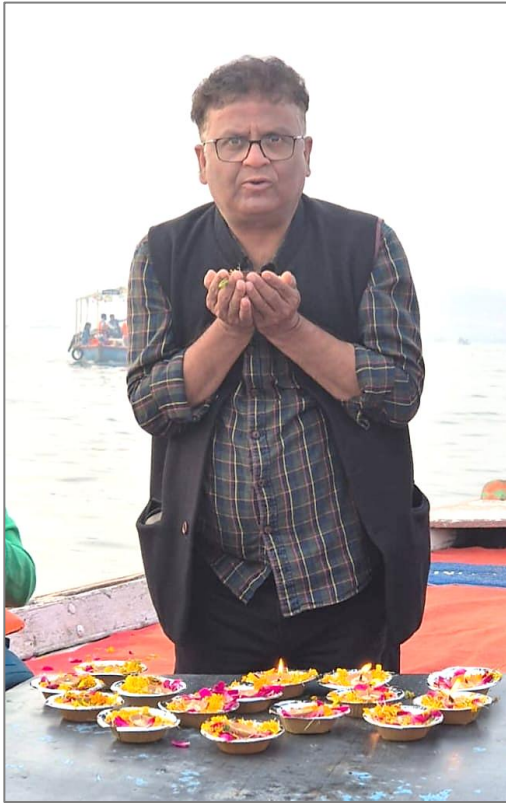
the pollution in the water, I was very grateful I was not required to do any ritual bathing!

We also walked along the ghats, watching the sadhus, or holy men, smearing their bodies in holy ash, others displaying and selling their wares or preparing themselves for their rituals, and groups of children playing happily together.

A short drive from Varanasi is Sarnath, one of four key Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India. It is here that Lord Buddha, then known as the Hindu Prince Siddhartha, gave his first sermon to five followers in about 600 BC. Buddhism began as a philosophical movement rather than a religion, with statues of the Buddha not appearing until around 150 AD.

Buddhists believe a bodhisattva is someone on the path to becoming enlightened. The Buddha takes many forms, with Jesus considered one of them. Although Buddhism was founded in India, it has never taken hold there as a major religion, with only two per cent of Indians identifying as Buddhist. Similar percentages identify as Sikhs and Jains.

The concept of karma is a core principle in all Indian religions. This posits that our actions, both good and bad, have consequences, and these consequences shape our future lives and experiences. The concept is also closely linked to the



Our guide preparing our lamp offerings

idea of rebirth and the cycle of birth and death. Indians do not hold onto resentments about the past, our guide told us, as that could bring bad karma to their lives and prevent the attainment of moksha.

I went to India hoping to understand a little more about the relationship between the different religions. How do Moslems, who are 20 per cent of the population, and Hindus, the majority religion, get along? They are two sides of the same river, we were told, flowing in the same direction. I also wanted to see for myself how a country of 1.4 billion people, where there is no social security, somehow holds itself together. I left India with an enormous respect for the people, most of whom struggle daily to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. I believe it is their strong allegiance and adherence to their chosen faiths that give them the strength to do this.

Anne Manchester



Our God calls us to worship and grow together and to show the love of Christ through serving our community.

Directory

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Contributions for the 'Record' are most welcome.
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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors.
They do not necessarily represent those of St Ronan's Church.

**And the closing date for our next *Record* for May 2025
is Sunday 27 April 2025**