

No time like the present

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Acts 8:26-end

Philip should probably have consulted the church leaders before baptising a foreigner. He should have suggested to Queen Candace's servant that he might like to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem for a few months, and attend a course of preparation classes. But these were the heady days when the implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus were beginning to be understood. "What is to prevent me from being baptised?" asks the eunuch, and Philip has no answer. His unintended venture into evangelism has proved surprisingly successful, and now he has to deal with the consequences.

Peter has not yet had the vision that for him opens up the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul, that

great apostle to the Gentiles, does not appear until the following chapter of Acts. Yet in this astonishing story, against all expectations, outside the rules, an Ethiopian comes to faith in Jesus and is baptised into eternal life.

In the centuries that have passed, the Christian faith has inevitably become institutionalised. Our role in the world has changed beyond recognition. But still we read these stories, and know that, miraculously, life is stronger than death, and that with the Spirit of God let loose in the world, anything can happen. Each year the Easter season helps us to recapture a little bit of the excitement of the Gospel, and gives us a small encouragement to expect astonishing things of God. ☺

We give thanks, O God, for the baptism that draws us into your family in union with believers past, present and future. Help us to know the power of your Spirit; that we may draw others to your love. Amen.



St Philip baptising the Ethiopian eunuch, St Mary Abbot, London

The Church Fathers

Part 6, Clement of Alexandria

by Richard Gunning

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) was born of pagan parents but as a young man converted to Christianity. He travelled widely and in AD 180 reached Alexandria, where he began teaching at the city's catechetical School.

Clement's writings draw heavily on Stoic philosophy and, in great contrast to his contemporary

Tertullian, he argued for the equality of the sexes. Christ is neither male nor female, Clement suggested, and God the Father has both male and female aspects. He likened the body and blood of the Eucharist to milk from the breast.

As for martyrdom, Clement taught that while all good Christians should be unafraid of death, they should not actively seek a martyr's death. To do this was not to pay sufficient respect to God's gift of life. ☺

Walking with Rosie

Resurrection joy

by Gillian Cooper

Rosie and I go into town. As we enter the car park, Rosie starts to squeak with excitement. She bounds out of the car, and pulls me towards the shops and cafes. She knows where we stop for coffee (me) and treats (both of us). She knows which shops have biscuits behind the counter. And she knows who to stare at to get admired and fussed over. She

extracts every bit of fun from the outing, until we head back to the car, both exhausted from pulling on the lead.

Rosie is reminding me about joy. It is, of course, what Easter is all about, but it is easy for us to forget. After a dark time of stress and grief, Rosie is pulling me back into Christ's resurrection light. It is impossible to see Rosie's frantically wagging tail and not share her joy at being alive and being loved (and being given food, of course). ☺

“Let God's promises shine on your problems.”

Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983), Dutch Christian watchmaker and writer