

MUSINGS FROM THE MANSE

Tier Four Edition – No.2 – January 10th. 2021.



In my sermon last Sunday, I mentioned how confusing it can be for people visiting our churches for the first time. Not that they are at the moment, but hopefully they soon will be. Remember the new estate being built next door (to Goring). Hopefully our new neighbours may check us out. Unknowingly we have developed rituals which have nothing to do with actual worship; the various formats of streaming services tend not to have these in the video. This format is becoming very popular. Could this be the beginning of making church as we know it redundant? One such confusing ritual is when we stand up or sit down etc. In many churches' folk have established a tactic where they tend to sit at the back of the church instead of filling up from the front. Perhaps this enables a quick getaway, or the preacher can't see them drifting off to sleep. Visitors often are forced to migrate to the empty front area of the church. When a baptism party are seated in church, they are directed to the front but that's a good thing. However, I see the look of uncertainty and concern in their faces as the service moves on. I would always announce what we are going to do next for their benefit. Last time I did that "please stand as the offertory is taken" I was rebuked by a seasoned member. You don't need to tell us what to do we know it off by heart when we see the plate being picked up. Ever heard of a Russian physiologist, Ivan Pavlov*? Obviously, the needs of the visitors were invisible to them. We really need to think how and why we do church. Is it for ourselves, is it for God, is it to help seekers? Hopefully its all three. But it is so easy to get locked into a kind of holy habit that isn't God centred. The language, rituals and symbols we use and take for granted are often stumbling blocks.



Back when I was a new Christian, I asked an Elder in my church what **I H S** stood for on one of the banners. He said in a wise voice, simple 'Jesus our Saviour', someone else overheard his answer and corrected him, "don't take any notice of him it means 'In His Spirit' or perhaps 'I Have Suffered'". I was none the wiser I didn't pursue my question any further, I never really thought about it again. Many years later at Westminster College we had an open day. One of the visitors asked a senior New

Testament lecture what that IHS symbol meant on the communion table. He kindly provided the answer. "It is the first three letters of the name Jesus". The woman thanked him and went on her way. Dating all the way back to the third century, Christians shortened the name of Jesus by only writing the first three letters of his name in Greek, **ΙΗΣ** (from his full name ΙΗΣΟΥΣ). The Greek letter **Σ** (sigma), is written in our Latin alphabet as an "S," resulting in the monogram being commonly represented as **IHS** (the letter J was not in common use until the mid-18th. Century). That's the simple answer I could give a longer version but there is not enough space here, shame. Another dated tradition we maintain even though we could now use **JES** in our current pronunciation and spelling.

ZOOM BIBLE STUDY

I will lead a series starting Jan 27th. That will run into **Lent** which starts Feb 17th and will take us to Easter. It will be on Wednesdays at 7:00pm. These will be open to both **Sompting** and **Goring** folks. Send me an email if you are interested and on the day of the session you will receive a zoom invite. [andwood@ntlworld.com].

A humorous reflection on the language we use...
A dad was listening to his young daughter say her prayers. "Dear Harold," She prayed, "please bless mummy and daddy and..." At this point, the dad interrupted and said, "Wait a minute, sweetie. Why are you calling God 'Harold'?" The girl looked up and said, "That's what they call Him in church. You know -- the prayer where we all say, 'Our Father who art in Heaven, Harold be Thy name.' "

PUZZLE CORNER

Answer to last week – Tracy. They are Tracy's mothers' children not Tracy's.

Question Which of these letters is the odd one out? "**A F H K L N Y Z**"? (it's not 'A' the only vowel).

Andrew and Jill

**Pavlov. He found that objects or events could trigger a conditioned response. Often without the responder knowing why or what they were doing.*