

THE LIFEBOAT

In February 2019 a group of us returned to Lundy Island - a rock in the middle of the Bristol Channel. Many of us have been on a journey together and with God for 15 years so, as you will read later, this has been a journey of continuing revelation and seeking to interpret what we have heard in the light we have at each stage of the process. On the most recent occasion we stayed at the old lighthouse and on the first day the Lord spoke to us through a painting on the wall [a photograph of the original is below] that depicts a real-life scene at Ilfracombe. It is called *Lunching the Lifeboat*. Throughout the week the Lord interpreted the painting to us and, as always, added more.



THE STORM

As I sit down to write this paper the building is being rocked by 70 mph winds as Storm Gerald is at its height. At the exact same time the Government are gathering in the division lobbies to vote on Brexit: deal or no deal.¹ It seems to me the coming together of these two events is extremely prophetic of the gathering 'storm' on the nation many have seen on the horizon and which the Lord revealed to me back in 2005.

In February 2005 I went to Lundy Island on retreat. On the first afternoon as I was walking the cliff path near the old lighthouse, the Lord suddenly placed in my spirit a sense that a great 'storm' was coming on the whole world - not just the British Isles - and that there were significant preparations that the people of God needed to set in place beforehand. This was not only a spiritual 'storm' or a single actual tempest but a whole series of catastrophic seemingly natural and political events and outcomes that would increase in intensity and frequency over a period of years until every aspect of modern society had been severely shaken. The result would be the gradual but systematic removal of the many and various 'pillars' or 'props' society has relied on rather than God for a number of generations. I am convinced the first signs of the 'storm's' approach were felt from the financial collapse of

¹ In June 2016, on a 72 per cent turnout, 17,410,742 people voted Leave - the biggest vote in British history for anything. Although the British public voted 52% to 48% in favour of Brexit, about 73% of all MPs favoured Remain. The attempt by Government to frustrate Brexit by a two year long fear and misinformation campaign in order to thwart the democratic decision of the people has created the greatest constitutional crisis of modern times.

September 2008 and the strength of the 'storm' has been increasing gradually ever since.

How do you react when you hear the prediction of a great storm? What we do will differ depending on who we are, what kind of personality we have, where we live and our personal circumstances. We might batten down the hatches, lock ourselves inside and sit it out. We might take ourselves away on holiday and leave our family and property to the mercy of the elements or we might make some practical preparations e.g. put the sandbags out if we live close to the sea or a river that has recently flooded; or we might rush to the shops to get enough milk and bread to see us through. Usually these responses and last minute preparations are adequate enough but the type of figurative 'storm' that is on the horizon for our nation and the world is of an entirely different magnitude and requires a more considered mature response that must involve listening to God and putting into practice what He says. The vast majority of those around us are not listening to God and are therefore unable to discern what is really happening or where events are leading.

How can we prepare for something we cannot perceive? Paul writes to the Corinthians:

*'The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.'*²

Therefore it behoves those of us who are watchmen and have a measure of discernment and understanding to take the warning seriously and to prepare a spiritual 'lifeboat' whilst there is still time and opportunity. Be certain everything we hold dear: our homes, families, churches, finances, pension funds, health care, education, police and justice systems - EVERYTHING that comprises our society as we know it will be shaken by this 'storm'.

Where is this 'storm' in scripture?

There are a great many references in the Old Testament prophets to something referred to as the 'great and dreadful Day of the Lord'. Isaiah 13 summarizes the magnitude and severity of a time when God Himself will act sovereignly to judge the sin of nations who have not honoured or served Him and who have repeatedly flouted His laws and mistreated His people.

In His end-time discourse in Matthew 24 Jesus outlined a most turbulent time - a tribulation [ordeal, distress suffering] - that would come over the whole world in the years immediately preceding His return.

Please read the whole of Matthew 24 & 25.

In chapter 24 Jesus outlines the following:

False Messiahs vv4-5;	Wars and rumours of wars v6;
Nations and kingdoms vying for power and domination v7;	Famines and earthquakes v7;
Persecution and death for Jews and Christians; real hatred because of the Gospel v9;	Mass rejection and turning away from the faith v10;
Betrayal of the true believers by false or fearful brethren v10;	False prophets/teachings v11;
Increase of wickedness i.e. what the majority consider is acceptable behaviour v12;	The love of MOST will grow cold v12;
The one who stands firm will be saved v13;	The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world v15;

² 1 Corinthians 2:14.

The Temple will be rebuilt v15;	The abomination that causes desolation will be set up there v15;
A mass flight of Jews and Christians to places of refuge v16;	Great distress throughout the whole world vv21-22;
False signs and wonders v25;	Supernatural darkness and activity [darkness means no growth for food commodities = famine and death] v29;
All nations will mourn; unprecedented levels of death v30;	THEN Jesus will return for His people vv30-31.

What Jesus outlined is dreadful; a relatively short but fiercely intense time of sifting in the nations.

The parables outlined in Matthew 25 make it clear that in the approach to this season Jesus expects us to make personal preparations as well as to unreservedly put our money and resources to work for the Kingdom. He also warns that even the believers will be sifted as the faithful remnant become distinct from those who are just nominal church goers.

It is reasonable to ask *'Why would a loving heavenly Father allow such a severe judgement and time of testing on the world and especially for His people?'*

The answer is simple: in order to turn the hearts of a rebellious and disobedient people back to Him. The Bible is full of illustrations showing how it is necessary for a turning back to God to always be preceded by a humbling. Invariably this comes through difficult and challenging events. What is different now is the context: this has never before happened on the world-wide scale that is ahead. Yet it is prophesied in scripture...

"At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken - that is, created things - so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."³

It is a sobering fact to consider that our loving Father God is also a destructive all-consuming fire whose holiness, righteousness and justice are not to be taken lightly or whose Word is not to be messed with or disregarded. In the light of this it is reassuring to read what James writes:

"Mercy [always] triumphs over judgment!"⁴

Where are we at in respect of this 'storm'?

We cannot be absolutely certain of where we are on the Biblical timeline. Ever since Jesus' ascension people have been predicting the date and time of His return and to a lesser extent these things have always been present in the world. Nevertheless there has most definitely been an escalation in these signs. For example:

In recent years we have witnessed a vast Islamic migration from east to west, which has allowed the silent infiltration of those with extreme views to settle amongst us in plain sight, many gaining positions of influence within our communities, councils and governing bodies. This migration has coincided with a significant move by society generally towards extreme levels of tolerance for all manner of secular and humanist worldviews e.g. in Scotland in 2018 there were more humanist weddings than those conducted by the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church combined. At the same time as this liberal agenda has become prevalent, the voice of those who hold personal and religious convictions that are not in line

³ Hebrews 12:26-29.

⁴ James 2:13.

with those dictated by the spirit of the age and 'evangelised' by the media has been effectively silenced.

It is not racist, but realistic and pragmatic, to state that a small minority amongst these people hate liberal western society which they wrongly believe is representative of Christianity. They despise the 'people of the Book' - both Christians and Jews - and will do everything within their means to see them removed from society. There are parts of our inner cities [e.g. the predominantly Muslim Saviletown, Dewsbury, West Yorkshire] where our police forces dare not go because these areas are already under Sharia Law.

There are several outcomes to the above. One is a very real rise in extreme right-wing overtly racist anti-Muslim lobbies. This will only lead to more and more social divisions and '*rivers of blood*' as prophesied by Enoch Powell in 1968. Another outcome is a very real shift to the completely opposite pole - the extreme left - which through its close support for the legality of the Palestinian Territories sadly includes a degree of anti-Semitism which people generally fail to acknowledge as racism. Left unchecked this latter view will eventually lead, as the Bible prophesies, not only to a wide-scale persecution of the Jews but also of those in the church who support and stand with them.

Please Revelation 12 but especially verses 13-17.

Closely associated with this is the battle over the Promised Land: we have to keep our eyes and ears alert to what is happening in the Middle East especially between the key-players America, Russia, Syria, Iran, Israel and Palestine.

It will do us well to remember this is above all a spiritual battle, not a natural one and Satan will not be satisfied until he has thrown every effort at attempting to breakdown society based on our Judeo-Christian heritage and eliminate God's people from the earth. This battle is set to intensify as Messiah's coming approaches, even though he knows he will not win.

The 'storm' is brewing in other areas of life too. For example: the world's economy is extremely volatile; the banking and financial systems are increasingly unstable. The strongest world economy since the 2008 financial collapse has been China's - but that is now heading for crisis. If China's economy suffers then others will follow like dominoes. In the U.K. particularly, the lead up to an uncertain Brexit has resulted in growing political and social unrest partly in fear of unstable economic outcomes. It is not an exaggeration to say we could see riots over food and fuel shortages on our streets before long. This fear may well be grounded and Brexit may prove to be the catalyst God uses to propel firstly the U.K. and then Europe followed by the rest of the world towards the end-time scenarios many of us have foreseen.

We are seeing unusual weather patterns: floods, droughts and intense storms. In 2018 there were 14568 earthquakes over 6 on the Richter scale; 2200 in January - February 2019 alone.

The relatively new disease Zika virus, caused by the release of human mutated Aedes mosquitoes, is spreading from South America throughout the earth with as yet unknown long-term consequences for all the babies born with it.



The EU continues to push for the 'two state solution' in Israel. Zechariah 12:1-9 clearly states that God will judge those nations who seek to divide and attack Jerusalem.

In January 2019 the Pope released his personal logo in preparation for a forthcoming visit to Morocco. It is a symbol combining the cross with the crescent of Islam. It is entirely possible that within a few years we will see the emergence of a One World Religion led by the Pope from Rome but with its centre in Jerusalem. The religion will be Chrislam. This movement began in Nigeria in the 1980s as an attempt to foster peace between Muslims and Christians by blending

elements of Islam and Christianity. Its followers stress the commonalities between the two faiths and they recognize both the Koran and the Bible as holy texts. Catholics emphasise a mutual belief in 'one God' especially that Muslims revere Jesus, honour Mary, and value the moral life. People who are dubious about these bridge-building efforts are dismissed as 'bigots' and 'Islamophobes.'

All of the situations outlined above are ever-changing and continue to evolve almost daily so there is much more that could be written about the brewing 'storm' and its nature but my task is to move beyond focusing of the 'storm' itself to consider what its effects might be on the church, the Jews as well as our neighbours and friends.

Thankfully Father God's nature is still to love first which means that although He will definitely allow the 'storm' to increase in severity until it has accomplished all that it must, His mercy is already at work in preparing His rescue plan ahead of time and releasing it to those who have ears to hear and hearts to discern as well as eyes to read and understand the signs, times and seasons. In Matthew 24: 37-39 Jesus said:

³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

When I returned from my retreat on Lundy Island and began to share what I had heard from God I felt a bit like Noah myself, especially as the world economy seemed rosy and stable enough at the time. Nevertheless my husband and I began to implement the preparations we needed to set in place and have resolutely done everything we can since that time to encourage others to prepare their hearts and homes as well.

There are several thoughts and challenges that spring from this section:

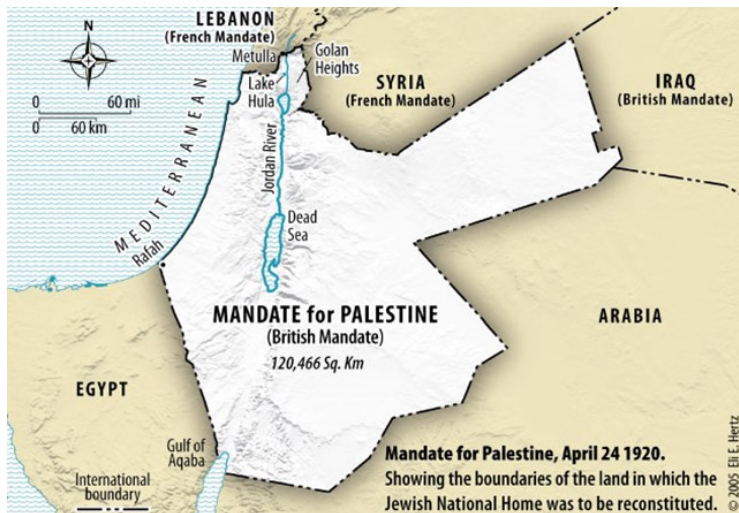
- Do you believe in the gathering 'storm'?
- If so, what are you doing to position yourself to be ready? What does that really mean?
- In what ways might practical preparations differ from spiritual ones?
- If you are already preparing, are you paying more attention to one aspect than the other?
- What is your reaction to the thought of being persecuted?
- How might this shape your preparedness?

Please read and reflect on Psalm 31: 19-24. What does this passage teach about the nature of our true refuge in times of trouble?

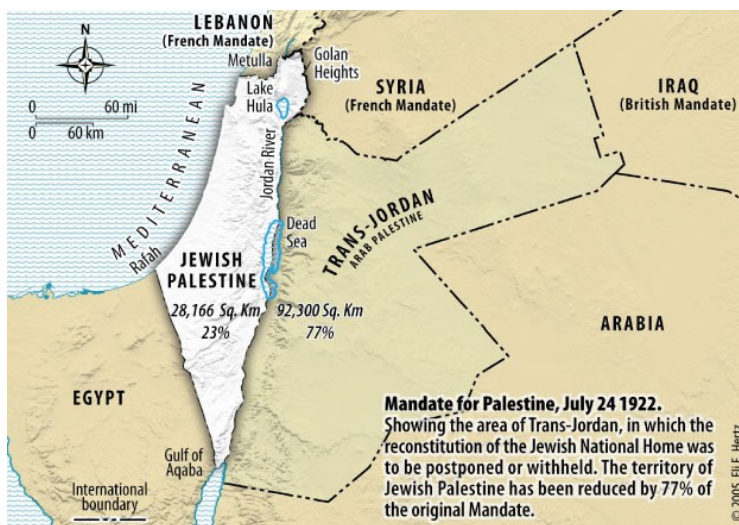
THE WRECKAGE

The coastline surrounding Lundy Island is littered with wrecks. Some remain partially intact but the majority are completely broken up, splintered into parts; disintegrated. This is what I see is already happening to our nation as the severity of the 'storm' increases. As has already been said everything we have depended on and replaced God with will gradually break up and become useless.

History shows clearly how much God was with us throughout WWII. There are many instances when He sovereignly intervened to support and protect our tiny vulnerable island nation against the tyranny of Hitler's Third Reich. One of our greatest national sins came in the years immediately following the end of the war and the facts are largely unknown by the populace. Even when known the spiritual significance is generally overlooked:



A return to Biblical teaching in the 19th Century brought back the significance of the Promised Land and the Jewish people to the British church. This rise in Biblical understanding came alongside the founding of modern Zionism by Jewish political activist Theodore Herzl. He argued strongly that a Jewish national home for the Jews within their historic ancestral land would ease persecution. Others, possibly with Genesis 12:3⁵ in mind argued that a Jewish homeland would also guarantee the nations of the world with peace and security.



In 1917 General Allenby captured Jerusalem from the Ottomans - a significant factor in the subsequent fall of the Ottoman Empire. Several key leaders in the British Government of the day supported the Zionist cause.⁶ On November 2nd 1917 Lord Balfour, on behalf of the government made a solemn promise to Lord Rothschild as representative of the Zionist Federation that the British Government would support the creation of a homeland for the Jewish people within the land

known as Palestine. From 1917, the British army ruled Palestine until a civil administration was established on 1 July 1920. Britain was granted a Mandate for Palestine on 25 April 1920 at the San Remo Conference of the principal allied powers from World War one. On 24 July 1922, in a unanimous vote, this mandate was approved by the League of Nations. Great Britain was thus entrusted with the responsibility to administer the area delineated by the "Mandate for Palestine" in accordance with the provisions of the articles of the Mandate - described as a 'sacred trust of civilisations'. The extent of the Land promised is shown on the first chart above. However, in December 1922 Britain cut away 77% of the land [see above] earmarked for the Jews and gave it to Abdullah Faisal bin Hussein, creating the new country of Trans-Jordan or Jordan, as it was later named.

In 1947 U.N. Resolution 181, recommended the remaining 23% of the territory be further partitioned with the result that in 1948 when the homeland was finally created we gave just 18% of the land to the State of Israel.

Please read 2 Samuel 21:1-14; Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17 and Hosea 5:10.

Clearly our covenant making God takes the breaking of covenants - even when made by a previous generation - and the moving of boundaries most seriously even if our people, our government and the leaders of the world do not.

⁵ "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

⁶ Prime Minister Lloyd-George, Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour and Secretary of State for War & Air Winston Churchill.

I believe this single issue of our breaking the 'sacred trust' given us is the base line and point from which God began to lift His hand of protection that had given us great victory over our oppressors in the war. From the 1950s onwards we have successively passed over 50 unrighteous laws and seen the gradual unfolding and break down of family life, society, morality and godly values. The cracks are already discernible in our public services. For example the wonderful staff of the N.H.S. and police and all emergency services press on determined to do their best under extreme pressure despite increasingly limited resources. The same cracks are evident in other spheres: education, industry, transport, armed forces, judiciary and government.

The basic building block of all society is the family unit. This has been severely challenged since WWII with the result that today the majority of couples with children are unmarried. Many families comprise children from multiple fathers many of whom are absent or even unknown. The compound effect of this over several generations has resulted in a general lack of parenting, discipline, respect for authority and life-skills amongst the 20s-40s generation throughout society but especially in certain socio-economic groups. Feral children and knife crime is a growing problem in many towns and cities so much so that more people than we imagine carry knives or other weapons ostensibly for self-protection. Unfortunately I envisage all of these things only increasing as society continues to break down and the institutions - many of which were founded by the great 19th Century Christian reformers - break up.

In the Bible there is no distinction made between the nation and the people of God within the nation; they are one and the same.

Please read Exodus 19:1-8 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.

From the time God brought His children out of Egypt until now His heart for all His people, both Jew and Gentile, has always been for us to be set apart fully to Him; to love and serve Him and Him alone. Through a succession of covenants - each one added to the previous ones, not replacing them - God reinforced His faithfulness and commitment to His plan to restore the relationship of fellowship and intimacy of relationship that had been broken at The Fall. The way for this to happen once and for all was the awesome result of Jesus' sacrificial substitutionary death for all humanity followed by His victorious and glorious resurrection.

God's heart for His people has always been that we would be a distinctive sign and witness to those around us of who He is - His abundant love; His purity and holiness; His creation, mighty power and supreme authority over all He has made; His just and righteous Kingdom. His heart was that in knowing and experiencing the lavishness of His love for us we might in turn represent His Kingdom in the world by living as a holy people, as sons and daughters of the King of kings. In this way we might be the instrument that demonstrates the light and truth of His Kingdom to those who continued to live under the yoke of unrighteous leadership and the darkness of cultic ways and practices. To enable us in this task God placed Himself - His Spirit - within each one of us meaning we have singly and together powerful potential to accomplish much for Him. However just as Israel failed, the church in the British Isles too has failed. Through the replacement of simple relationship with ritual, structure and organisation over generations we have removed Jesus as the plumb line in the church. As a consequence God's plumb line over our nation is one of judgement. Let us not deny the truth: our situation is grave.

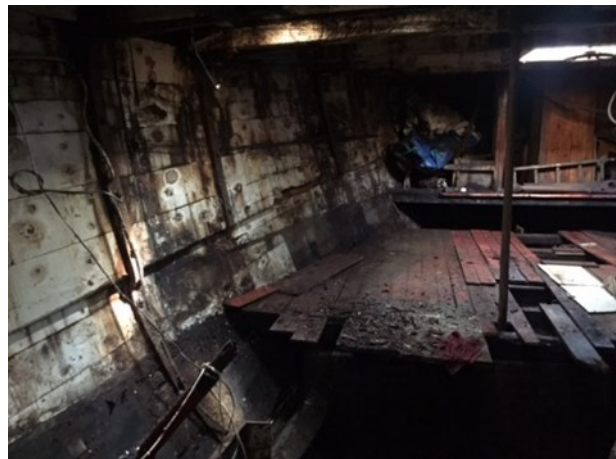
Please read Amos 5:11-24 and 7:7-9.

Whilst there is much good and valuable work being done in the name of Jesus in pockets all over the country, we can see splinters from the wreckage of the church mirrored in the debris of society as all the great social institutions once founded by believers have, along with much of the church also turned away from their roots. In many cases these organisations have set themselves resolutely against their historic and godly foundations and the church has been complicit in this. We get the society we deserve and God treats us accordingly. No wonder the church in Britain no longer has the position and respect it once held.

On a return visit to Lundy Island with a small team of people in February 2012 the Lord repeatedly emphasised to us that the institutional church in our nation was on the rocks; about to collapse and break up. In a joint waking vision two of our number saw an earthquake split the floor of the parish church and EVERYTHING in the structure of the church - the pulpit, choir stalls, altar, reredos, font etc. - tell into the chasm. It crumbled at its foundations. The Lord said there would be no mending of the situation; the old had to be cut off at the root so that new life could come.

The travesty of any wreckage is its victims: as I write this I see a great many people floundering in the sea. The 'vessels' they have been trusting in have broken up. They are in a state of shock and panic; frantically treading water, hoping and praying to be rescued. These people are:

- The general populace: our family, friends and neighbours who are in total shock having lost the things they placed their trust in.
- Jewish fugitives fleeing an unprecedented rise in global anti-Semitism.
- Gentile believers who either ignored or were never exposed to the prophetic warnings. They were unable to discern the signs of the times and as a result were not prepared.
- Muslim fugitives fleeing a rise of anti-Islamic backlash in the cities as the majority are blamed for the actions of a radical minority.



As a result of our compromise the British church system - which even in its most modern expressions is still based primarily on a Roman pre-reformation human-led top-down model of governance - and its finance-dependent structure is on the rocks, it is showing signs of breaking up. It could be described as being like a Victorian vessel that used to be carried across the oceans by the wind in its sails but is now confined to dry dock and rotting away from the inside out, completely unseaworthy; no longer fit for purpose. This analogy describes a church that is no longer a fit shape or appropriate model to reach the world being shaped by the uncertainties of the 'storm' around us.

- What is your reaction to all that has been written about the wreckage? Do you see it in society? Do you see it in the church?
- What do you perceive God is doing, if anything, to reshape His church?

THE LIFE BOAT

In order to not only survive but to also have a hope of helping and 'rescuing' the many victims the 'storm' throws up, we need a different type of 'boat' altogether: something very like a lifeboat!



What is a lifeboat?

The comparison that can be made with the Victorian vessel is that they are both boat shaped; after that the comparison ends. The lifeboat was never a cruise liner, for entertainment or lecturing or teaching; it was never a trading vessel or a trawler. It is an emergency vehicle with one task only: to rescue people in danger of perishing in the hope and expectation they will be saved.

Therefore the lifeboat is built in an entirely different shape; something specially designed to ride over the waves at speed; something that is much smaller, agile not cumbersome and with much more sensitive steering. It is also thoroughly equipped for every eventuality. Its highly trained staff can not only do everything needed to give emergency first aid they are also able to radio ahead - to call on others to get ready to receive those being brought ashore so they can be ready to respond to their next summons.

On the evening before our small group left Lundy Island in 2012 I was led to climb to the top of the old lighthouse and stand on the former lamp platform. I was alone and began to worship God. As I did so I became aware of something like smoke around and above my head. I tested whether this was just my breath because it was cold, but it persisted even when I stopped singing. My friend walked up to join me from the harbour and as he arrived up the stairs into the lamp room he told me to quickly put the light out because I would be a distraction to shipping. There was no light; it was me! As I gave myself unreservedly to God and dedicated myself to be a beacon and fire-igniter for His Kingdom, He had supernaturally lit me up!! My friend and I then placed two candles on the lamp platform. What happened next took us both by surprise: through the magnification of the glass in the windows of the lamp room we saw these two tiny lights spread outwards not only across the whole island but across the Bristol Channel into the South West, Wales and on towards the Irish Sea.

It was with this experience still in our hearts that a small group of us arrived back on Lundy in February 2019. This time we actually stayed at the old lighthouse (known as the Old Light) where, over the course of a few days the Lord taught us from the island's history that the lighthouse was actually built on Beacon Hill which had been the site of a 2nd - 4th Century Celtic Christian community. On our corporate journey with God over many years (not just the

four days spent on Lundy!!] He has continually challenged us to look to the past to find answers for the present. When Israel was under judgement the Lord said through Jeremiah:⁷

This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'

Ancient gravestones in the cemetery alongside the Old Light predated the Council of Arles [314AD] which gave Constantine's official approval to Christianity within the Roman Empire. It was with a sense of profound awe that we received in our spirits the understanding that the believers whose graves we stood beside had lived and died in Britain without knowing or ever experiencing religious freedom. God seriously challenged us to dig deep to attempt to discern the spiritual D.N.A. these people carried because just as those who 'man' a lifeboat are bold, brave and courageous so had these believers been in their generation. What they were carrying in their spiritual D.N.A. is something the church needs again today.

Through this experience we have come to understand there is something in our land, something very precious to God - a much simpler way of being His people - that has for centuries lain buried which, if we will work to understand it, and seek God's help for its appropriate interpretation for today, will actually provide us with a different way of being church throughout the period of the 'storm'. It will be a very modern form of 'lifeboat' - a real means of rescuing people in order to see them saved [spiritually as well as physically] but it is also a very ancient means of bearing and carrying God's light to those around us. Like the lighthouse on Lundy, this 'lifeboat' is an Old Light.

'When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁸

'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.'⁹

THE OLD LIGHT

Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset claims its foundation as being around 63AD¹⁰ following the influence of the tin trader and uncle of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea. There is no factual evidence for this but when we gave time to ask the Lord about its authenticity He indicated there was enough truth in the synopsis that someone from the Holy Land visited the area, probably for trade, in the earliest days of the Roman Empire in Britain. This could have been Joseph, a Roman convert or a travelling Celt. Whichever it was, the gospel that was brought in those very early days of the first century would have been completely rooted in the Hebrew scripture, as well as the Hebrew practices, expressions and patterns of life. Very shortly after its arrival at Glastonbury the gospel was quickly taken up and inculturated by Celts who gave their lives to be missionaries in order to thoroughly evangelise pagan western and northern Britain centuries before St. Augustine landed at Canterbury.

It is right to share a warning at this point: we must guard against romanticising the Celtic Church and whilst some of its aspects may resonate with us today we must not seek to recreate it. In my opinion a great deal of modern Celtic spirituality owes more to a romanticising of the past and the lives of the saints, almost to the point of saint-worship, but without any real belief for today in the power of the same God who used these fearless saints of the past to evangelise and see society changed whilst living in an era of persecution in a thoroughly oppressive pagan society. In this way I see a setting aside of biblical truth that is then replaced by tradition and ritual and, in some cases, very flaky theology. We are therefore

⁷ Jeremiah 6:16.

⁸ John 8:12.

⁹ Matthew 5:14.

¹⁰ <https://www.glastonburyabbey.com/chronology.php>

to look objectively at the facts and ask God what, if any, of these things He means us to pick up and reinterpret for today; it is their spiritual D.N.A. we are searching for - the essence of who they were in God and who He was in and through them.

Who were the Celts?

The Celtic people were a series of tribes from the area of Galatia in modern Turkey who over time migrated across Europe, hence the term Gaelic. They settled largely in Ireland, Wales, Cumbria, Scotland, Northumbria, Cornwall and Devon as well as Galicia, Spain and Britany, France. The various tribes had broadly common cultures and languages but were not a unified political entity. They formed loose tribal confederations depending on the strength of their chiefs and the nature of the common enemy they faced. The Greek and Roman descriptive terms '*keltoi*' [from which Celt derives] really means 'barbarian'¹¹ a term which aptly describes their warrior-like nature. When going into battle they would bleach their skin to look more fearsome and the front row always went to fight naked, apart from blue paint on their faces and their terrifying battle cry. These people were tough and extremely courageous!!

Second - Fourth Century Celtic practices and patterns of life

The Celtic church existed in Britain beyond the Council of Whitby [664AD] but it gradually lost power as an increasingly Christianised society required a change of ministerial emphasis from an evangelistic model towards the pastoral one based on the parish system which the Roman model of church supplied.

God used the Celtic remains at the Old Light on Lundy to direct us towards an exploration of a much earlier period of time: the particular beliefs, practices and patterns of life in the second - fourth centuries. This was a time when Britain was still pagan, governed by an oppressive empire and the native church roundly persecuted.

The first British Celtic believers lived in times of great change and on the edge of a number of physical, cultural and spiritual changes. The Romano-Celtic world of the late 3rd - mid-late 4th century was marked by a sense of crisis as the gradual withdrawal of the protection of the Roman Empire left a general sense of insecurity, uncertainty and a feeling of threat; a scenario not unfamiliar to ours in Britain today.

The gathering together of believers in loose association provided corporate reassurance, security and sometimes refuge. Gatherings centred round a key teacher (rather like a rabbi) in small groups, usually no more than twelve. These underground groups became hidden centres of worship, teaching, prayer and discipleship. Jesus' great commission was taken seriously:

*'Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*¹²

Once a believer had been thoroughly discipled [this usually took about three years] they would, in turn, be sent out to form another community in a different location as the Spirit led and directed. Whilst each community was autonomous they were also interdependent as they took great pains to network and relate to one another. Pachomius [292-348AD] founded a community of 7000 formed entirely from small cells of no more than 12.

The lifestyle was primitive and tough - living by faith, off the land and barter rather than being supported through tithes or tribute. But the Celts were tough individuals who were able to

¹¹ See Acts 28:4; Romans 1:14; 1Corinthians 14:11; Colossians 3:11.

¹² Matthew 28:18-20.

survive in unfavourably precarious physical circumstances; they were noted for disciplined hard work and knew how to defend themselves and their communities.

Recognising that the majority of the people surrounding them were pagans the Celts travelled throughout the rural areas, populated by the majority, as part of their intentional missionary strategy. The life of mission began to comprise what it meant to live in community and living in community took on the meaning of a life lived entirely on mission.

These missionaries lived simple lives marked by holiness, poverty and chastity but fearlessly tore down pagan altars, fasted to overcome demonic strongholds, fed the poor, met the needs of the suffering & needy, extended hospitality and performed many miracles, signs and wonders. Through all of this they saw thousands won for Jesus many of whom they, in turn, disciplined and sent out. It was in this rather low-key understated way that the gospel was spread throughout the South West, Wales and Ireland in those very early days.

Second - Fourth Century Celtic spirituality

Undoubtedly the very earliest seed of the gospel planted in our land by God was based in the Hebrew scripture, Hebrew beliefs and patterns of life. The Celts travelled from Galatia across Europe so we can assume that some of those Gentiles whom Paul addressed in his letter to the Galatians were not just generally Gentile but also specifically Celts. As with all expressions of Christianity early beliefs and practices from a new movement eventually settle down to become enshrined as tradition so in the short summary that follows I am deliberately choosing to ignore patterns from later Celtic spirituality (the Mass, liturgy, the argument over the dating of Easter etc.) in order to paint a very simple overall picture of original Celtic Christian spirituality.

The early Celts believed in:

A great big God who was the source and centre of the whole of life: Creation, humanity and every aspect of life reflected the presence and purpose of God. The natural world pointed beyond itself to its Creator and was essentially created good but subject to sin because of The Fall.

A covenant keeping God: Coming from a tribal society the Celts understood the nature of covenant. This meant they understood God's ongoing love for the people of Israel and the place for them in His heart plans and purposes especially their inheritance in the Promised Land. They also understood that through the death of Jesus they too were partakers in that same covenant. This meant that every aspect of God's nature was theirs because they were in Christ. So they did not allow their thinking to be consumed by earthly matters but resolutely, in faith, set their faces to do the work God called them to do thoroughly believing in Him as their provision, shield, protection and very great reward.

The Word of God: Unlike us the Celts did not have a multiplicity of personal Bibles on a shelf hence the reason they gave up to three years of their life in study and discipleship under their teacher. They recognised the Bible to be the ultimate source of authority for morality, church doctrine and the fundamental order of society; it was alive, living and active. They interpreted the Old Testament in the light of the New and held a trinitarian doctrine years before the doctrine of the Trinity had been formulated! In line with Jewish thought their interpretation of the scripture was always practical and literalistic.

Missionaries believed the Bible to be authoritative over and against any other document so they soaked their minds in scripture allowing it to permeate their thinking at every level to produce disciples who thought biblically and lived by biblical values. This thorough knowledge of the scripture meant they were able to use them effectively in their mission.

The power of the blood of Jesus: The Celts understood the ways in which the demonic are at work in society but also in the corruption of humanity and nature which had been created 'good' by God in the beginning. They knew the reality of living in a spiritual battle but used the fullness of the power of the blood of Jesus to live victoriously and take ground. Spiritual discipline - especially fasting and prayer - enabled them to discern and combat the demonic.

Part of the evangelisation of the Celts related to the undoing of pagan Celtic 'pollution' of the land [also streams, groves, woods and wells] that had taken place through magic rituals and literal human sacrifice. Therefore they sought out spiritual 'high places' and cleansed them as thoroughly as Josiah did in Israel.

Celts only began to evangelise an area once they were certain they had gained the spiritual victory over the ruling powers of darkness. This they did through intercession with fasting and the prophetic cleansing of the land using prayers to bind the opposing spiritual forces. After receiving the breakthrough, standing stones were either carved with crosses - declaring the new ruling power to be Jesus - or in later Celtic times removed completely and used to build churches. There are stories of encounters between Druid magicians who like Pharaoh's magicians tried to counterfeit the works of God. Therefore mission and evangelism were perceived as power encounters between two opposing kingdoms.

Miracles, sign and wonders: Celtic missionaries mixed action with faith: they expected to see God work in the miraculous in their ministries. These things were seen as God's authentication of their preaching and a sign of their holiness and closeness to God. The connection between the miraculous and the conversion of those who witnessed these things is made time and time again. They had an expectation that God would act. The power and spiritual authority of the Celts flowed from their ascetic lifestyle and continual pressing into God and the pursuit of His presence.

The creation of sacred spaces [open heavens] through worship & spiritual warfare: The Celts believed the whole of life is spiritual so carried a sense of living in the eternal not just the here and now. Therefore the boundary between eternity and the present is a false one: we are created as spiritually beings and entrusted with spiritual power and authority through Jesus' death and resurrection. Once the ruling powers of darkness have been overcome the Kingdom of God in heaven should, through the saints, affect and change the earth and society in which we live. The closeness of God can be perceived and encountered by anyone - not just a priest or specially set aside person.

Lives lived wholly for God through holiness, prayer and intentional mission: The Celts strived for holiness: to live godly lives in the midst of the temptations of society not separated from them. The presence of God's glory on them was attractive and made them popular as people sought them out. They believed that God has never stopped seeking to be reconciled with the world that has gone astray and their mission came as the overflow from thankful and grateful hearts for their own salvation. They expected God to be present and at work in peoples' lives.

Prayer was expressed in the laying down of the whole of life to put God first, to exemplify the Christian life, to practically help the poor, needy and marginalised others; to preach the gospel and serve God's will and purposes. In this way prayer was both healing and life-giving. They believed God's power to bless was infinitely greater than the enemy's to wreak havoc so constantly prayed blessing on people and circumstances in order to bring God's Kingdom from heaven to earth to influence and change situations especially in terms of God's protection.

Believers' baptism: The Celts baptised believers by full immersion.

Being itinerant: The Celts were by nature wanderers. As scattered tribes they migrated across Europe westwards. The earliest Christian Celts saw this journeying as akin to that of Abraham, the children of Israel, Jesus Himself as well as Paul and apostles. They learned about holiness and radical obedience from the Desert Fathers. In Britain the earliest missionary journeys saw people deliberately chose an isolated place [e.g. cave, copse or island] where they could base

themselves, wrestling in fasting, prayer and spiritual warfare until they felt they had received the spiritual victory and open heaven.

Whilst they wandered, this was never aimless; they travelled intent on mission; to preach the gospel with such an intention that a local Christian community would be birthed. They listened to God and through selfless radical obedience followed the leading of the Holy Spirit which meant they were willing to be led by God in a remarkable fashion.

The fact the early Celts lived under persecution denotes that some became martyrs. Official tolerance from 314AD brought an end to martyrdom until the arrival of the Saxons but the extreme devotional life of prayer and asceticism of the Celtic believers was looked on as fanaticism by the authorities.

Community: Despite their natural instinct to be a wandering people, the uncertainties of life under Roman rule and real levels of persecution meant the Celtic church also placed a high value on the kind of sincere friendship and fellowship found amongst the true community of believers. The *lifestyle* was simple, informal, gathered around the spiritual teacher who in later Celtic tradition was known as an Abbot. These leaders were appointed solely because of their inspiring lifestyle: wisdom, holiness etc. Within the community believers lived in agreed mutual accountability through the forming of deep transparent relationships which gave rise to mission. Early Celtic believers had no set liturgy but followed the leading of the Spirit as outlined by Paul in Ephesians 5:18-20:

'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The missionaries embraced poverty to identify and to be an example to others. They fasted for closeness to God in order to overcome spiritual powers making the way open for the gospel. Everyone used whatever gifts they received to support and edify the whole community.

In 314AD Constantine's edict ruled for Sunday worship whereas the Celts followed the earlier Saturday custom that reflected the Jewish Shabbat. Their Sabbath began on Friday night until Sunday morning. They also kept the Biblical feasts. In celebration of the Lord's Supper the Celts gave both bread & wine.

Communities maintained simplicity of lifestyle with generous hospitality which placed concern and compassion for the poor uppermost in the Celtic expression of the gospel which demonstrated passion for the marginalised as demonstrated by Jesus for all social outcasts: tax collectors, sinners, women, poor, sick and afflicted. The poor were deliberately brought into communities in order to feed and teach them. This commitment to the poor, weak and deprived bore witness to the power of their words as their lives authenticated their message.

Communities were able to build wherever Christianity was widely embraced by society. The buildings were simple: wood, wattle and daub, not stone.

The role of women: The extent to which women were granted status and security within family and marriage was greater within Celtic society than in Roman or Saxon society. But it was not equal as we would understand today. However, Celtic spirituality saw all humanity as brothers and sisters in the cause of Christ so both men and women were able to aspire to a life of prayer, holiness and mission.

What was the D.N.A. (essence of the faith) of the early Celtic church?

I hope you will agree with me that in digging down into the roots of our British church heritage reveals something of great value. These largely unknown but brave Celtic believers carried

something in their spiritual D.N.A. which we need again today. They lived in an uncertain time - the Empire was retreating and the whole fabric of society at the time was uncertain and under threat. Just as today the ordinary people at ground level were in need of rescue as what they knew as society crumbled. Into this scenario the fearless Celts embodied a living Spirit-led organism, exhibited tremendous faith and saw God perform mighty miracles. They understood the spiritual realm as well as the natural and were serious, sober and obedient as they followed and obeyed the leading of the Spirit on a day-by-day basis in the simplicity of childlike relationship Father - Son/Daughter. As they did so they carried God's glory and were radiant beacons of His light and love, effective in reaching many for the Kingdom, in the very darkest of days. Little by little God used this movement which had begun underground to change society.

In 664AD the Council of Whitby reshaped our national expression of church and since then we have strayed significantly from our roots. We have preferred the safety and security of centralised controlled organisation to the freedom and fluidity of the organism the Spirit gave to the early followers of Jesus. We have chosen religion, human plans and understanding over the excitement and adventure of a living dynamic relationship following God's continually revealed will. We have become rigid, static and unbending characterised by conformity, dead works and a powerless form of godliness. We have chosen to honour people through titles and positions more than we have honoured God with the result that we blindly follow autocratic human reasoning rather than the Spirit's. We have taught people how to behave in a Christian manner but failed to make true disciples who know their own self-worth under God and have lives characterised by holiness, transparency, honesty and integrity. We have traded duty, obligation and a professional clergy for the beauty and joy of being simply interdependent servant-hearted co-workers in the gospel; lovers of Jesus and His family. We have failed to teach the fulness of the Word of God, the true deep nature of our covenant relationship with God, the power of the blood of Jesus, the requirement for personal holiness and our inability to be the true church of God when we are severed from the Hebraic roots of our faith; from Israel and God's purposes for her. We have chosen buildings over communities; the one-person ministry over the Body and compromise with the Spirit of the Age over radical obedience. I could go on as our sins are many...

The real D.N.A. of the Celtic church was that they were completely in love with and passionate about Jesus. They were bold, fearless and trusted wholeheartedly in their covenant partner - God. They understood that without God in their lives they had nothing: He was their source, life, truth, way, provision, healing, shelter, refuge - their all in all. They had also learned this profound but straightforward truth:

*'He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.'*¹³

Launching lifeboats for today

As stated at the beginning of this paper, our small group has been on this journey with God together for at least 15 years. During that time almost all of us have come out of mainstream forms of church - not because we sit in judgement on the people concerned - but because God had placed within us a deep desire for something more than what we perceived. That something more is Him; our hearts have longed to be allowed to spend time resting in His presence; to hear His voice and simply obey His instructions; to receive His heart for the poor and to be allowed to do something about it. Many of us have longed for the intimacy of true community over and above just belonging to a Sunday congregation; to be part of something that is lived out every day of the week, warts and all, not falsely created on a Sunday morning and then have no bearing on the rest of the week.

¹³ Isaiah 33:6.

The seemingly drastic action of stepping outside the 'boat' of mainstream church has caused most of those I meet to feel misunderstood, judged and guilty (one person recently said everyone thought she was 'bonkers'!) which is exactly why we need to continue to gather together. The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way:

*'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'*¹⁴

It is in gathering together that we are able to enjoy much needed fellowship, share meals, share openly and honestly with one another which builds intimacy and transparency in relationships; build one another up, listen to God corporately, use our gifts, teach, disciple and pray. But this is a very different way of gathering than we have been used to. Jesus says to Nicodemus:

*"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*¹⁵

This implies that everyone born of the Spirit is free to follow the promptings and direction of the 'wind' of the Spirit of God. When contemplating this imagery recently one amongst us had a picture of an autumn scene: the trees were bare and the ground covered in leaves. As the wind blew some of the leaves were blown into groups of two or three, others into heaps of slightly more whilst others danced around on their own for quite a while before being blown into an existing clump for a period of time. This beautiful picture recreates very well the informal simple modus operandi used by the underground church not only in the Celtic days gone by but here and now all over the world. The challenge is for us to consciously become less organised and structured - less meeting based - and more open to allowing the Spirit to gather us according to His days, times and seasons. Part of this will be a return to gatherings around the Biblical feasts, not the Roman ones, and the simplicity of the Hebrew Shabbat; making room to spend time in His presence, listening to His voice and simply doing what He says. He will not fail to set passionate hearts like this ablaze.

As we stand on the cusp of the 'storm' and see the institutions in our nation increasingly shaken and crumbling we find our society has as much an uncertain future as that of 2nd-4th Century Celtic Britain. The 'lifeboat' God gave at that time was the incarnation of the glory and light of God through the believers. They did not fail in their challenge; the light they carried did not go out, in fact it burned consistently (like glowing coals) for over 600 years during which the British church grew phenomenally and impacted society whilst officially under persecution for much of that time. God is offering us the opportunity to take up our own torches, lit from the glowing embers of who they were and the living vibrant faith they carried for our own time and season as He is preparing us to see the Kingdom advance powerfully in a time of great adversity.

- Why it is that a church that is persecuted and underground cannot possibly have the same structure as one above ground.
- Is living in genuine 'community' really possible for God's people today? How might that look in your locale?

In the natural a lifeboat, like Noah's Ark, is something very specific prepared in advance. It is too late to start preparing once the full intensity of the 'storm' hits. Therefore we need to carefully consider what it was the early Celts encapsulated and ask God how we are to interpret this for our generation whilst we still have the money and opportunity to do so. It has taken our small group 15 years to grasp the full meaning of what the Lord has been trying to teach us since the first time we came together. Therefore it takes time, patience and

¹⁴ Hebrews 10:23-25.

¹⁵ John 3:8.

considerable faith and trust in God to launch out from the safety and security of one way of being to another. The mind-set changes we have worked through have been massive.

The early Celtic church was only ever a remnant within a much larger society but it was an incredibly important and significant one. In the 2nd-4th centuries it was an underground hidden movement that was so powerfully ablaze with the Spirit of God it impacted and changed whole communities. Despite persecution the ruling powers of the day were powerless to extinguish the glowing flame that led to the transformation of society at the time. Eventually God used the foundation laid by this underground body of believers to be the plumb line for the whole fabric of society: our Judeo-Christian heritage, morality and values.

I believe God is offering us the exact same opportunity: to be a real power force of influence for His Kingdom in the reshaping and rebuilding of society when the 'storm' finally recedes. But that rebuilding has to begin NOW; within a people who are willing to be wholly abandoned to Him and His purposes: those who are fearless and willing to open their mouths and not be silent in the fight for righteousness and justice; who are willing to open their homes and use their God-given resources to rescue those adrift; to become believing communities that provide stability, support, security and refuge throughout the period of the 'storm'.

It is too late to prepare the 'lifeboat' when the 'storm' is at its height. It needs to be prepared, equipped and resourced in advance. Therefore, I believe God means this change needs to happen within a remnant people who are willing to be prepared and equipped, ready to meet the great challenges we will all face. Whilst there is certainly a change in mind-set that needs to happen concerning the nature and ministry of the Body, the change that is needed is more than just spiritual; it is extremely practical as well.

Please read the story of Noah in Genesis 6-8.

Noah was alert when God warned Him of the coming storm. In view of the mocking and indignity he must have faced it would surely have been far easier for him to simply ignore the warning or try to place it to the back of his mind as he got on with normal life but he did not do that. The Bible says Noah did everything just as God commanded him¹⁶ and that obedience appears to have been unquestioning. His preparation was not a last-minute thing; on the contrary it was carefully considered, thought through and God's instructions followed to the letter to bring about the very detailed and costly practical preparations needed to save his family; those who became the foundation for a whole new society at the time.

- Does your fellowship perceive that God could well be giving His church the greatest opportunity to demonstrate the gospel since WWII?
- How ready is your church in your town or village to respond to those whose lives are shaken or collapsing around them?
- How would you identify your fellowship of believers on the scale of 1-10 in moving towards carrying the simplicity of the Celtic flame?
- Consider Noah: what does the Ark represent to you? Have you ever thought of your home as a refuge and/or storehouse? Who might that be for?

Persecution

None of us likes to consider we might be the generation who are called to lay their lives down for being a follower of Jesus, His Kingdom and standing with Israel. But, in speaking of the end-time spiritual battle Revelation 12 verse 11 is very clear as to how the church will overcome:

¹⁶ Genesis 6:22.

“They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

In His end-time discourse in Matthew 24 Jesus said in verse 9

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”

We need to wake up to understand this end-time persecution is not something just applicable to a vague group of ‘others’ who live somewhere else in the world (many of whom have already experienced persecution for decades) but something that is breaking forth here and now, across America, Europe and although we do not like to admit it, across the British Isles too.

- What is your reaction to what has been said? Does it have a ring of truth to your spirit? Is this something that has ever crossed your thought processes before?
- Is it better to have a plan that is never used or to be caught unawares?

Over the last 20 years humanity has been very subtly drawn into a web of communication and information technology which has allowed the authorities and powers of the state as well as multinationals to amass a huge amount of data about each one of us. We have ignorantly and unwittingly provided the state with an intimate level of personal intelligence about our family, close associates, our likes and dislikes etc.etc. Most of us did not perceive the danger until it was too late. We have mobile phones, computers, I-Pads, satnavs and hi-tech cars which give our exact location through inbuilt telematics technology. We have multiple contacts saved in each device, even whole groups of people and all of these devices silently betray who are our closest family, friends and associates at just the click of a button.

If you accept that one day you may be hunted because you are a follower of Jesus or you expect to assist others who are themselves being hunted then please pray through these things in your Christian community and ask the Holy Spirit to show you what you might do together as your initial response. Make a plan. Have a backup and then a backup for the backup. Above all do NOT ASSUME anything of what is normal for you today will remain normal because when a storm hits land it changes the landscape; things that look to be solid get ripped up and things that do not have a firm foundation disintegrate.

There are a number of questions we can think over from this section:

- What practical preparations do you need to make?
- Have you got an emergency food storehouse? Is this just for you and your family? Could it be enlarged enough to bless your neighbours as a means of you showing them the love of God in action?
- What might be the things in relationship between the church across your town that actually hinder what God means to do rather than help? What can be done to address these things now?
- Are you prepared to carry out your mission ‘underground’ if necessary?
- Have you ever considered you may be called to provide refuge or protection for those who are victims of the ‘storm’? If so, then what practical preparations are you making?