

Seeds

November 2021

encourage - inspire - challenge

Augustine
United Church



In praise of letting go

Rev'd Fiona
Bennett



I feel very lucky to live in a country which experiences seasons so starkly. I am sure there could be bonuses living in a country which was always warm, but I do really appreciate our seasonal change.

The leaves turn and drop. The trees send their energy to the roots warmly buried under the soil. Geese fly south and other creatures prepare for hibernation. I have always seen autumn and winter as holding some form of welcome lockdown, though wonder if the Covid pandemic has perhaps soured that concept.

I find the changing of the seasons especially useful because they serve as a reminder that life has seasons. There are winters when we dream and prepare, or sometimes just survive; springs when new things start; summers when we feel productive; and autumns when we begin to let things go. We cannot live in a constant state of any one season; to be constantly only dreaming, or only starting new things.

Only producing or only letting go not only feels unhealthy but is unimaginable. Yet so often as humans, I wonder if in some ways we only

really value the springs and summers? I wonder if we value time to dream and prepare? If we honour the days we only survive? If we value the letting go as much as the productivity?

Perhaps it is human nature to aspire to be spring/summer active and productive beings, or perhaps there is a wisdom in learning to deeply appreciate each season of life as it sweeps us along: to savour the letting goes as well as the new beginnings, trusting that all the seasons are a perpetual movement of divine creation in which God is present and waiting to be encountered.

We cannot live in a constant state of any one season

May the autumn of the earth and the autumns in our lives be a time of blessing and grace.

*To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under
heaven:
A time to be born, And a time to die;
A time to plant, And a time to pluck
what is planted;
A time to kill, And a time to heal;
A time to break down, And a time to
build up*

*(Ecclesiastes 3: 1-3,
New King James Version)*

This Month

READY FOR COP26

Getting involved with this month's climate summit in Glasgow



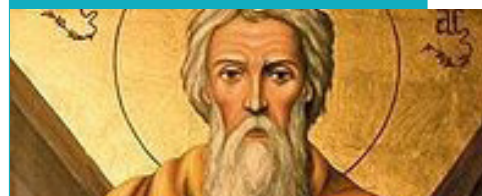
CHRISTMAS GIVING

Organisations we are supporting this December at the Gift Service



FOCUS ON ST ANDREW

Learning more about our patron saint ahead of St. Andrew's Day



BEAUTY IN BROKENNESS

Maxwell Reay explains the Japanese art of kintsugi





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Local and Global

News from the United Reformed Church

THANK YOU, JOAN AND JOHN

On Sunday 24 October, we said thank you to John and Joan Miller, who are moving to Nairn to be closer to family. They have been members at AUC for ten years – and friends of the congregation for a good deal longer.

A minister since 1962, John has shared with us much wisdom drawn from many years' church work, as well as his stories of growing up in Northern Ireland and – with Joan – an evangelical commitment to peace, reconciliation, justice and progressive theology.

We will miss Joan's warm and generous curiosity, and the sound of John piping us into the building on St Andrew's Day or to celebrate our annual Burns Supper. Go well, John and Joan.



WHERE IS PALESTINE?

A new report from Christian Aid shows how more than two decades since Palestinian and Israeli leaders signed the first Oslo Accord, there is no peace in the region, with daily life for Palestinians worsening on many measures.

The report, written by William Bell, Christian Aid's Head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy, highlights the deep inequalities dividing Palestinians

and Israelis, threatening a further escalation of violence and loss of life.

"Without justice and equality," Bell writes, "there will be no Palestine and without Palestine neither Palestinian nor Israeli can enjoy the security, dignity and prosperity that all need to thrive and survive."



'Where is Palestine? A story of loss, inequality and failure' is available on the Christian Aid website.

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

A survey of 128 organisations across the UK argues that volunteering and charity work promote good mental health far more effectively than other stress and wellbeing interventions.

Researchers from Cambridge University analysed data relating to over 26,000 employees included in the Britain's Healthiest Workplace survey. They found that attempts by employers to improve workforce mental health with coaching and stress management classes are ineffective, as are wellbeing apps and events promoting healthy sleep.

Only volunteering or charity work improved mental health, the researchers said.

It would be interesting to know if **Seeds** readers recognise some truth in that assessment or think, instead, that it is completely wide of the mark.

JACK SPONG

Bishop John Shelby Spong, a bestselling author and cleric known for his progressive theology and his support of LGBTQ+ clergy in the Episcopal Church in the U.S., has died, aged 90.

Spong made headlines in 1989 when, as the bishop of the Diocese of Newark, he ordained the first openly gay male priest in the Episcopal Church. He went on to ordain about three dozen LGBTQ+ clergy in the diocese by the time he retired, and also championed women clergy.

"He was constantly trying to make religious institutions accept people who were unacceptable," author Diana Butler Bass said. "And even when people talk about him rejecting conventional or traditional doctrine, what he was really trying to do was to get people to accept a different future."

He once said: "We're space-age people. . . if you confine [the Christian Church] to the world it was born in, Christianity will die, because that world is dying."





Christmas Giving at AUC

Each year at AUC, between October and December, we make a number of collections to support organisations who are seeking to build justice and kindness in our world. We then dedicate these as our offering at the December Gift Service.

The Gift Service this year is on Sunday 12 December at 11am, online and in the building.

Fiona writes: "I am hoping that all of our gifts will have been made and distributed before the 12th and will NOT be brought to the building that day..."

Our 2021 gifts will be for:

CHRISTIAN AID

We would invite all AUC members to consider making a donation to Christian Aid this year in place of sending each other Christmas cards. Please donate to Christian Aid directly online (www.christianaid.org.uk). Christian Aid supports emergency relief across the world, including refugees.

FRESHSTART

If you have household items you would like to donate to Freshstart to support people moving from homelessness into their own home, please take them directly to the warehouse (22-24 Ferry Rd Drive, EH4 4BR: Mon–Thurs, 9–4pm). If you have challenges with transportation, contact Fiona (minister@augustine.org.uk) or Kathleen (Kathleen.ziffo@augustine.org.uk). Alternatively, you can make a financial donation through their website (www.freshstartweb.org.uk/donate).

ROYAL EDINBURGH HOSPITAL (REH)

We are collecting money to buy small Christmas presents which will be distributed by the chaplains to people who find themselves in the REH over Christmas. If you would like to make a donation please hand in a cheque / cash to the church office, or pay online to Augustine (www.augustine.org.uk) clearly marking that your donation is for the REH.

EDINBURGH DIRECT AID (EDA)

EDA supports Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the people of Lebanon. Along with some of the Syrian refugees, EDA is continuing to help rebuild parts of Beirut damaged in last year's devastating explosion; they are working with a German NGO to do this and gain access for occasional lorry loads of supplies.

There is still difficulty accessing Lebanon, despite the government reducing tariffs on imported goods (including aid) and Beirut port partially functioning again. Lebanon has a refugee population (Syrian, Palestinian and others) of almost half of the existing 'native' population. (Imagine the UK taking in 25 million refugees!!)

EDA are looking for goods and financial support. We would encourage you to make donations of goods directly to their warehouse (29 Starbank Rd, Edinburgh, EH5 3BY. 11.30–2.30pm Wed & Sun) If you have challenges with transportation contact Fiona (minister@augustine.org.uk) or Kathleen (Kathleen.ziffo@augustine.org.uk)

FOOD BANKS

We would encourage everyone to consider putting some goods into the baskets at supermarkets that collect for local food banks, or to make a financial donation online (www.trusselltrust.org/make-a-donation/).

Photo by Caley Dimmock on Unsplash

Meet Your Neighbour

Getting to know members and friends of the AUC community

Lea Berta

A journalist, writer and 'forever student', friend of AUC Lea Berta introduces herself



Lea and her autism support-dog Baxter in a colourful autumn park, smiling. Image by Malcolm Cochrane Photography

I arrived in Scotland in 2013, under not-so-sweet circumstances but willing to make the most of it. I still do. I have always tried to infuse my multi-layered heritage into whatever I was doing: work, volunteering, study aspirations.

Also, I wish to let myself be influenced by what is new and refreshing around me. Stop, smell, see, touch and be surprised, gasp and laugh, be in awe – miracles are plenty, I find.

My original qualifications are in Communication and Community Development and I'm very grateful that this September I could 'top them up' with a BSc (Hons) combined uni degree. The subject I finished with distinction was Religious Studies.

I first came to AUC to participate in open minded discussions about Christianity in the modern era, then I also stayed for spiritual discernment and visited the Sunday service monthly, before Covid, with a kind church member who drove me and offered me a guiding company. I have always been interested in how beliefs (or lack of faith for that matter) operate in different cultures.

Another tendency showed up early on in my life too: the desire to be seen, heard and witnessed. When I was not writing or reciting poems as a primary kiddo then I was dancing, talked to groups of people and attended the acting class at high school. I was a member of the Hungarian State Opera House's Children's Choir and being on stage, playing various parts in Mozart, Strauss and Offenbach's works, was absolute bliss! Later, I was lead singer in folk and world-music bands, before relocating.

During my teenage years I became fascinated with radio presenters, TV anchors and – for some reason – librarians, so when the time came to choose a path, I waited for an opportunity to gain knowledge for

both broadcasting and libraries. And I loved every minute of it! When I was not at school, I was creating podcast after podcast, often into the night. In front of the microphone and the camera lens is where I feel I come alive the most. It also urges me to forget and heal.

A lot was gifted to me during recent years. Being an original contributor to the 2020 neurodiverse campaign *Different Minds* in Scotland with my article 'Trusting What Remains' was followed by writing my real-life based featurette 'Reasonable Adjustment' for Scottish Autism's *Autitude* for nine months now. It is lots of fun, I'm often laughing as I'm typing.

Despite my accent, I tend to receive media opportunities (Social Change, IntoWork, The Royal Society of Edinburgh) – I find that super-encouraging about Scotland. And not bad for someone with processing impairments who usually cannot fathom where she is exactly or what is happening around her. (I'm a sensory-freelancer.)

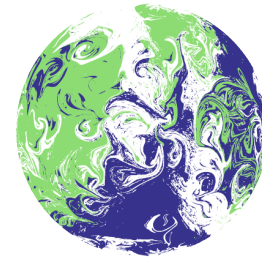
The Gospel of John (10:10) lets us know that our Lord not only wants us to be protected but also abundant. I'm learning to get out of my own way, more and more, to not block that beautiful, incoming flow of blessings on any day. My dream is to work for a mainstream radio station or similar. I am currently on a chaplaincy training course, awaiting my MSc studies in history-interpretation next year. As for my support dog, Mr. Baxter, he is keen on Human Resources, he says.

Being single at forty, and a multiple disabled human without relatives' support can be tough for me, especially around Christmas. But being a voice in God's harvest-work feels awesome all year round! And I sure have a lot to say yet.

You can contact Lea at leapublish@gmail.com.

HERE COMES COP!

As this magazine gets into your hands or onto your screen, COP26 will be beginning. A quick reminder: the United Nations COP26 climate summit, which runs from 31 October to 12 November in Glasgow ('the Dear Green Place'), has been described as a "turning point for humanity" and "the most consequential summit... ever". 'COP' stands for 'Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Agreement on Climate Change'.



**UN CLIMATE
CHANGE
CONFERENCE
UK 2021**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

Getting up to speed

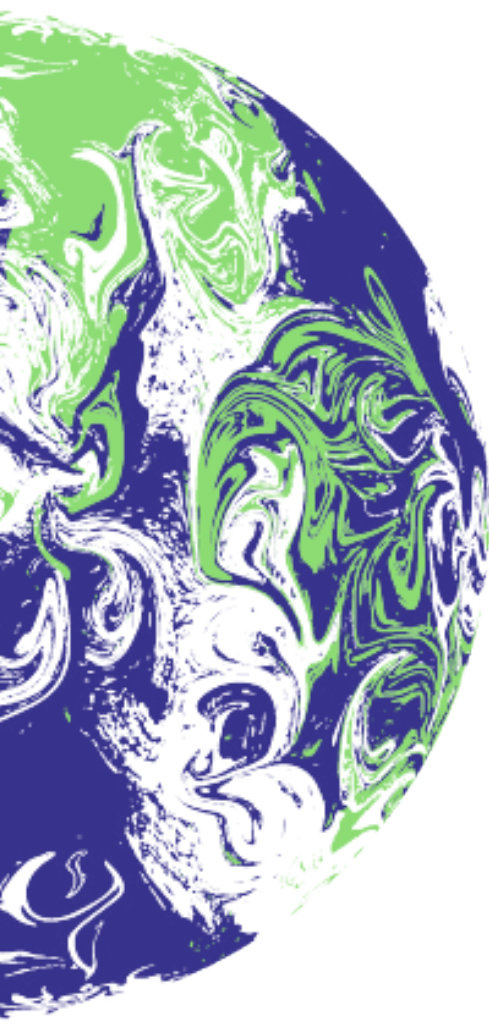
Whether you believe the hype or have more grounded hopes and prayers for the gathering, take some time to get up to speed, if you haven't already, with what COP26 is and what churches worldwide hope will happen there.

Got 3 minutes?

Watch a short video from the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) on what COP26 is and why churches are getting involved. It's on the JPIT website at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/cop26/.

Got 10 minutes?

Read the JPIT briefing on what is happening at COP26 and the key issues on which they think world leaders and the UK should take action. (Same web page as above.)



Global Day of Action

On Saturday 6 November, join people from around the world, marching through major cities, gathering in their local communities, and making their voices heard online for climate justice. In Glasgow, Christian Aid supporters will walk together with partner faith organisations, meeting at Kelvingrove Park from 11.30am. The demonstration will then march to Glasgow Green for a rally at 3pm. If you're planning to join, click 'going' on the Christian Aid Facebook event.

A prayer for real partnership

The Revd David Coleman, Environmental Chaplain for Eco Congregation Scotland, has written a prayer we can all use, whether we're marching or not.

Sustaining God:
*as our species gathers
 in your Dear Green Place,
 constrained by the damage injustice has wrought:
 so strengthen our hope;
 our resilience to disappointment.
 Move us on from 'stewardship' to partnership
 with the Life of the world,
 giving thanks for every small step;
 stirring our impatience for more.
 Show us your way of hospitality:
 of warning and encouragement
 for those who come and those left far behind:
 Christ, in the stranger's guise.
 Amen.*

What next?

When all the politicians, negotiators, decision makers, NGOs, lobbyists, protestors, journalists, caterers, entertainers, hoppers and pray-ers have gone home – whatever is decided, whatever is kicked into the long grass, whatever hopes are raised, whichever cynics are vindicated. . . there will be so much work still to do.

What will that work look like for us? In his presentation on our own Climate Sunday, Alex Peden gathered suggestions from those participating in the discussion. Lest we forget, here they are!

Question: Can you think of one thing individuals can do to tackle climate change that you think more people should know about?

- “Think about cooking equipment e.g. buy a steamer; keep the lid on the saucepan; a flask by the kettle would allow you to keep any unused boiled water hot (and only boil what you need!)”
- “Switch your gas/electric account to a Green provider”
- “Enjoy the journey when travelling on public transport”
- “Turn down the thermostats”
- “Have a kitchen garden”
- “Cut your use of single-use plastics”
- “Plant more trees”
- “Use peat free compost”
- “Instead of taking a plane to go on holiday, make the journey by train or ferry and enjoy that as part of the holiday”

It was also observed that –

- “We should be aware of the numbers of children we have worldwide, particularly in developed countries – each child carries a carbon footprint”

- “Tighter government regulation on house building would help, ensuring that all new homes are carbon neutral right from the start”
- “Nuclear fusion may be a future option for heating”

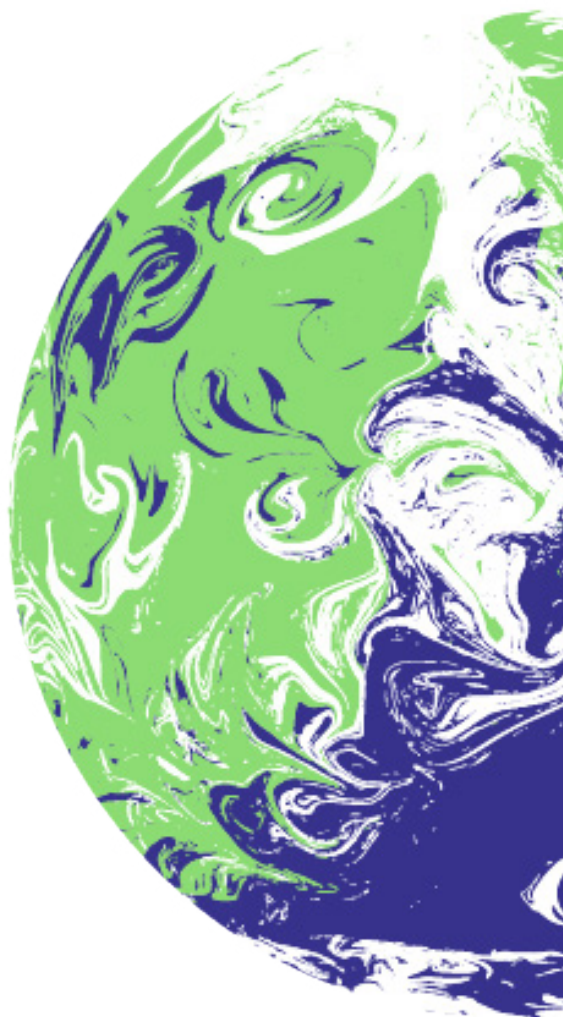
Question: What action would you most want your church / council/ government to take in response to climate change?

Comments included –

- “Government should value people’s lives over profit”
- “Continuing meetings via Zoom will reduce travel”
- “Issues/solutions can be different for individuals depending where they live, e.g. in a block of flats”
- “Tidal energy is not given enough recognition”
- “AUC may need to give serious consideration to the suitability of its building (though recognising the listing of buildings brings its own issues)”
- “There is a case for much stronger regulation, particularly on business, for energy disclosure; and for a price on carbon usage that is high enough ‘to hurt’ e.g. charging a much higher price for fuel – £5/ litre?”
- “Governments should be held to account”

Alex ended his presentation by asking us to:

- Be educated on the subject
- Remember that every little helps
- Be aware things are happening
- Never give up



Alex’s presentation can be found on the Mid-week Sermons and Reflections page of the AUC website.

Please also remember the request for additional suggestions for the noticeboard on the website to help us all to aim to become reasonably plastic-free.

Ideas should be sent to justice.peace@augustine.org.uk.

Covid Requiem

Jo Clifford writes about loss at hope, marked at a recent event in Pitlochry.

One of the many horrid things about living in Britain right now is to sense that so many people want to believe the pandemic is over and that we can just go back to the heedless way of living that prevailed before.

And in the process forgetting about the damage to the environment, the increasing suffering of the NHS, and the fact that each day there are around thirty eight and a half thousand new cases and 180 new deaths.

That's a lot of suffering to ignore. And that daily toll of death and suffering piles onto the eight and a quarter million total cases and 137,564 deaths as of today, 13 October, when I write. By the time you read this, the numbers will be considerably higher. (You can check them at www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/uk/.)

That's an acceptable price to pay, apparently, to "go back to normal". Lesley Orr, my co-writer/performer, and I felt the need to acknowledge and commemorate at least some of these deaths, and last month Pitlochry Theatre produced our *Covid Requiem* in the woods above the theatre. We worked with Duncan Chisholm,

Patsy Reid and Innes Watson, who created and played stunningly beautiful traditional music to accompany us and the audience as we did a gentle walk round the beautiful woodland, pausing every now and again to speak words of reflection and comfort.

We invited the audience to share some names of those they'd loved and lost; and we invited them to pick up a stone to represent their loved one that they could take with them on their journey and leave on a cairn as they said farewell.

The hope was, as we said, that

***"Perhaps the day will come
When we will be able to set our
burden down
Will be able to remember with thanks
those we loved
Call to mind what our loved ones
have given us
And recall with pleasure our times of
happiness together
Recall and remember without the
painful tug of grief
And our sadness will be like
something washed down by the river
to the sea."***

I hope we brought some comfort. I'm proud, at least, that we tried.



Augustine opportunities

Looking at some of the ways you can get involved at AUC over the coming months.

AUC Christmas Music

On Sunday 19 December, we are holding our Nativity. This year we are inviting everyone to learn the songs in advance of the service to join in with the Junior Church.

The words and recording of the music will be made available towards the end of November. Please watch out for an email from Fiona as to how to access them.

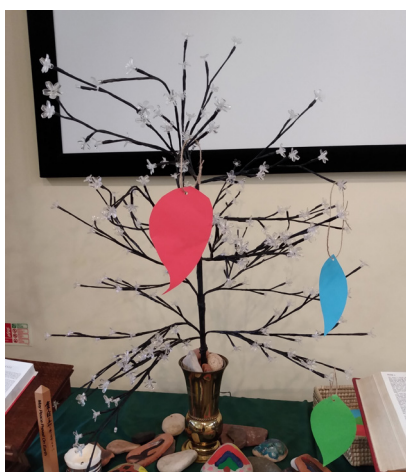
We could really do with more on the team! Do you think you could give it a try?



Drew Patrick Miller on Unsplash

Tree of Life

If you have stories of projects, technologies and innovations which are promoting the good health of our planet, please email them (with hyperlinks to their sources) to Fiona (minister@augustine.org.uk) and she will add them to the Tree of life in the sanctuary, and Alex will add them to the Tree of Life Stories on the AUC website.



We've thought hard about how best to help folk learn the tricks of the trade – there aren't many – and can assure you that it's all easier than it may look!

Interested? Want to know a little more? Drop Thomas an email at thomas.mcpolin@augustine.org.uk.

Free to Believe conference, 2022

Free to Believe's 2022 conference is on the theme of 'Keeping Hope Alive'. It will take place 14-16 July at High Leigh Conference Centre in Hertfordshire.

Speakers include our own minister, Fiona Bennett; Karen Campbell, URC Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries; and Alex Clare-Young, a pioneer minister in the URC.

Free to Believe is 'an informal network of liberally minded Christians striving for an open, inclusive and thinking Church'. For more information, go to www.freetobelieve.org.uk or get in touch with AUC church secretary Linda Harrison.

Tech volunteers needed

We have a small team of folk ensuring that our weekly services stream via Zoom and Facebook to AUC friends and members all around the world.

St Andrew: rediscover a networker

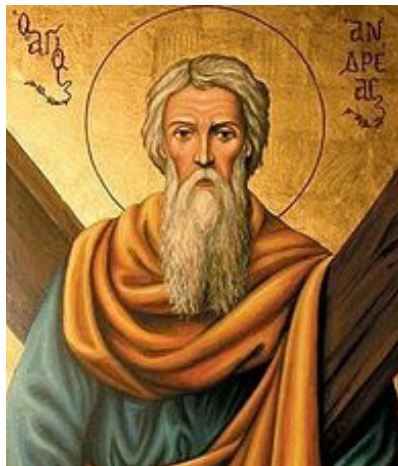
As St Andrew's Day approaches (30 November), Laurence Wareing finds out a little more about the man and the myth.

Of Great Britain's patron saints, Scotland's St Andrew is the only first-generation apostle. The gospel writers tell us he was a fisherman, but is there much else we can say about him?

Like Saint George, Andrew's legacy is emphatically international. Not only is he the patron saint of Scotland, but also (out a long list) of Russia, Romania, Amalfi in Italy, Patras in Greece, and Barbados (where Saint Andrew's Day is celebrated as the national day of independence).

In Scotland, 30 November is designated Andrew's day because he is said to have died on that day, crucified on a Saltire-shaped cross rather than on the T-shaped cross of Jesus.

Legend has it that Saints Mirin and Relugas brought the bones of St Andrew to Scotland. (To St Andrew's of course.) That's an unlikely connection but, even though Andrew's relics were certainly a European import, Scotland's claim on him was formalised in one of the nation's key historical documents, the 1320



Declaration of Arbroath. It argues that the Scots were a distinct people (from the English) who had long enjoyed the protection of "our patron or protector" Saint Andrew.

That protection was said to go back as far as the year 832 when the pictish King Óengus saw Andrew's diagonal cross revealed in the sky (this in the days before criss-crossing jet trails): a portent of victory over King Athelstan's Northumbrian army of Angles.

What else?

Andrew the traveller is said to have survived many acts of aggression – an arson attack, for example, in the city of Sinope (in modern day Turkey). Here, too, it is said that the devil incited a mob to drag him through the streets, tearing off pieces of his body and shedding his blood. But he contrived to escape and fruit trees later grew on the spot where his blood had been spilled.

He is a disciple, it seems, who not only networks but is prepared to 'think out of the box'

We might also say that Andrew appears to have been someone who took the initiative. In the Gospel of John, it is Andrew, influenced by the preaching of John the Baptist, who introduces Simon (Peter) to Jesus.

It is also Andrew, faced with the prospect of feeding a huge and hungry crowd, who tells Jesus about a boy who has just a few loaves and fishes. Anna Briggs picks up on this in her hymn 'The crowd has listened to your word'. She makes of Andrew a model of the Christian seeker who looks for ways to express God's love even from the smallest opportunities:

Use us, your friends, to seek and trace the gift that seems the smallest worth, to shape the miracle of grace, the love to feed a hungry earth.

St John, who thinks highly of Andrew (over and against St Peter, some would argue), appears to give Andrew a position authority amongst the disciples and it's he who first introduces Gentiles to Jesus. He is a disciple, it seems, who not only networks but is prepared to 'think out of the box'.

Doesn't that make him an excellent choice for Scotland's patron saint? And doesn't that also make him an inspiration for AUC's little Christian community here in Edinburgh?

Beauty with brokenness

Maxwell Reay introduces the Japanese art of *kintsugi*.

On Mental Health Sunday (17 October), Maxwell Reay was our preacher. He spoke about the impact of social inequality worldwide on the care (or lack of it) for those living with challenging mental health.

He also showed us an image of a broken and restored bowl, and explained to us about the Japanese art of *kintsugi*.

Kintsugi means something like 'golden joinery'. It is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. For some, the restored item is found to be more beautiful than in its original form. The visible gold lines suggest the idea of breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.

Maxwell suggested that we all have to deal with some kind of mental health difficulty in our lives, and that being

able to share these experiences can be helpful for others as well as for ourselves.

It also turns out that, for some who have dealt with loss, sickness, trauma, and the disruption of daily life during the Covid pandemic, the ideas and practice of *kintsugi* have emerged as sources of comfort. There have even been articles written in newspapers and academic journals about this.



In a short piece in the online British Medical Journal, Dr Amy Price (a medical scientist at Stanford University who lost her own husband to Covid) suggests that grief is an opportunity

to offer empathy by honouring brokenness to support healing.

She writes that "*kintsugi* represents healing, resilience, and restoration" and that our cracks and flaws help us see ourselves more fully.

(Amy Price's article was published on the BMJ website on 10 August 2021: www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n1906)



Members of the Young Christian Climate Network visited AUC as part of their relay pilgrimage to Glasgow. We gifted them our prayers, in the shape of paper boats, to take to COP26, and joined them in their hope that we can #RiseToTheMoment and use this year to set sail towards a more just future.

What's On?

Most of our gatherings and resources are currently online. You can find out details on our website www.augustine.org.uk.

STAYING IN TOUCH

If you wish to receive weekly updates of AUC events please register to receive the Friday email by contacting our Centre Manager (centre.manager@augustine.org.uk).

Find us on 

Check our daily posts on the AUC Facebook page.

Worship

SUNDAYS, 11AM

Join services online every Sunday through the zoom link (see Friday emails), AUC website or Facebook page.

From 7 November you can join services in the building for worship every Sunday. (No booking is required but track and trace will happen on the door and masks are required to be worn whilst inside. These will be services with communion where bread & wine/juice will be provided, but feel welcome to bring your own if that is more comfortable for you.)

Junior Church will also happen in the building every Sunday.

Sunday Social Time

The Post Service Social Time online is a valuable way of keeping in touch with each other 11.45 – 12.30pm and will continue each Sunday. Link in the Friday email. On the third Sunday of the month in-building there will be post-service coffee which people are welcome to take and walk round the meadows with others from AUC; or if the weather is poor or you are less mobile, to have seated in the sanctuary. We would like to encourage you to bring your own cup / travel mug, but there will be compostable paper cups available if you forget.

TLC Youth

SUNDAYS, 1.30 - C.3.00PM

Inclusive youth group for all young people from S1 up. Email Matt for more information.

Our Tribe

FIRST THURSDAY OF THE MONTH, 7.30 – 9.00PM

LGBTQI+ ministry at Augustine United Church.

Contextual Bible Studies

TUESDAY 12-1PM, WEDNESDAY 7.30-8.30PM, THURSDAY 12-1PM

Email our minister, Fiona, to join in.

Wednesday Blether

FIRST & FOURTH WEDNESDAYS, 1-2PM

Drop in and chat for 10 mins or the hour. Link in the Friday email.

Church dates in November

Mondays 1, 15 – Julian of Norwich book group, hosted by David Townsend

Tuesday 2 – Church Council, 7.30pm

Sundays 7, 14, 21 & 28 – Blended worship (online & in-building)

Sunday 7 – Belonging: online membership course (2pm)

Tuesday 9 – Church Meeting, 7:30pm (social time from 7:15pm)

Seeds deadline

Seeds is published on the Sunday prior to the beginning of each month. The next edition will be for both December and January. The copy deadline is **Friday 19 November**.