

Dear members and friends of SEC,

The months of June and July feature the annual Wimbledon lawn tennis championships and, every four years, the football World Cup. For some people these events, especially lumped together, are the biggest bore and turn-off we could imagine; others are glued to their televisions during these competitions, especially when British sportsmen are involved.

Today, more than at any other time in history, we live in a spectator society. Many of the great dramas that intrigue us take place, not in the context of our own immediate lives and relationships, but on screens of various sizes. It may not be sport; it could be politics or drama. We sit in the closeted safety of our own living-rooms and state our opinions about whoever or whatever may happen to be under the media spotlight. The deeds of people we have never met, and will surely never know, set the emotional frameworks for our own lives – which, left to themselves, seem rather poor and uninteresting. Likewise the compulsive novel-reader can't put a book down because it's so much more absorbing than the humdrum of daily life.

To what extent has this spirit infused the church of Jesus Christ, and especially the way we encounter God's Word, both in the private reading and public hearing of it? It is a question that each of us would do well to ponder. On the last Lord's Day in June we were looking together at Luke 13:1-6, where we read of two tragic incidents: Pilate's killing of some Galilean worshippers and the collapse of the tower of Siloam in Jerusalem, killing eighteen people. Unbelievers are much more likely to comment on other people's deaths than to seriously contemplate their own. They discuss other people's death from a safe distance, as detached observers and commentators.

So what does the Saviour say in such circumstances? 'Unless you repent, you too will all perish'. He says it twice, for emphasis. Death is not a story, not something that only happens to people that we hear about on the news. Death is the wages of our sin, something that will happen to us all. We must count on it. But Jesus also speaks of repentance – of turning from sin with loathing and hatred, and turning to the righteous Saviour. Repentance, indeed the whole Christian life, is real and active. Never treat the hearing of God's Word as a spectator sport. For 'the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can *do* it' (Deut. 30:14).

Your brother and fellow-servant in the Lord Jesus,

Paul Yeulett

Missionary news

Andrew, Daphne, James and Rachel Swanson - Cyprus

Andrew and James are now gradually working towards the time when James will take over the work. Andrew hopes to fully retire next summer. The Cyprus church is very grateful for the gift of 50 'Christian Hymns' with covers and a music edition from SEC. The African brothers in the church particularly enjoy using them at the weekly prayer meetings.

John Taylor of Norway – a report from Joy Carson

Some years ago we used to get regular visits from John Taylor, a missionary with E.M.F. in North Norway. He would describe the little churches to whom he ministered and show us something of the country which was, and still is, his home. He had no tales to tell of thriving churches and many conversions, just steady plod in a beautiful but spiritually hard part of the world. The population was sparse and widely scattered and the young tended to drift to the South where it's not dark for two months every winter and the climate and job prospects were better.

John and his Norwegian wife, Oline, still live in North Norway, not far from Tromso and well into the Arctic Circle. He is retired now, but still serves the churches there as he is able. As we were travelling up the coast and our boat had a short stop near where they live, we were able to have a very brief time with them before being summoned back on board. John is so 'Norwegianised' now that his native tongue took a little while to get going and Oline's English was easier to understand. He still ministers to the little church in Sorreisa. When we asked how many members, they said, "Five, and that includes us." They are all elderly! When asked about what to pray for, they reckoned that the situation in Norway was very much like our own. They had driven for about forty-five minutes each way just to meet two people they did not really know, for a very short time, but who were fellow believers. We watched them walk away up the road, and felt honoured to have met them.

Our own way led North and to places with names that I remembered from John's visits to S.E.C., Berlevag, Vardo and Kirkenes where there were churches for him to encourage. They are all in the farthest N.E. corner of Norway. The sea is the quickest route between these little coastal towns, but by road it's about 150 twisty miles between each one, and that at the end of a 535-mile drive from Tromso. It only served to increase our respect for a good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ.

The state church in Norway is Lutheran, but what Luther would make of it we were in no position to judge. Of those buildings we visited, there seemed to be possible glimmers of light here and there, one even calling itself, 'Evangelical Lutheran'. We saw a Baptist Church in one town, and a building called Bethania in another, but that was all. There are many more Bible believing congregations in the South of the country where most of the population live.

But the eyes of the LORD
are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in
his unfailing love.

Psalm 33:18