



# July 2023 Newsletter



## WELCOME

### LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

### PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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## WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

Many of you will be aware that I spoke recently at the Free Church (Continuing) assembly as the delegate from our own denomination. I gave all my time – just fifteen minutes! – to address the urgent matter of the reunification of the smaller Scottish Presbyterian churches which, crucially, share the same *doctrine, worship, and government*.

While I can well understand those who are of a mind that such a reunification simply will not take place, for a variety of reasons, it is important to understand that the fragmented state of the Scottish church is a scandal and a shame upon us as Presbyterians – because our presbyterian forefathers believed that a state in which multiple denominations were found adhering to the same Standards was a sinful and schismatic state – as well as a serious barrier to the effective proclamation of the gospel (Jn 17: 21, 23). Simply put, it is a sinful state requiring repentance somewhere. And repentance should doubtless begin with any office-bearers who are unconcerned with the fragmentation of the body of Christ and who are not trying, in some way, to heal it.

There are currently several Presbyterian churches in Scotland which claim to be ‘reformed’ and to be the true, and perhaps the *only* true, heirs of the Scottish Reformation. The events which led to this sorry state of affairs are too many and too complex to deal with here, but it might be useful to try to take a look into our past to try to understand our present and to see whether there can be a way forward.

In this newsletter and the next, we will look into our past and, via a brief look at our present, will try to outline a path for the future. Let’s begin with the past and with,

***The First Scottish Reformation (1560)***. This was an international movement to ‘re-form’ the church in respect of what it taught (doctrine), how it was ruled (government) and how it approached God (worship). Scotland was one of the many European nations which embraced such a reformation and those at the heart of the movement were determined that the shape of the reform should be determined by the Bible – not by church Tradition.

As a result, many people in Scotland embraced a new and biblical body of teaching (with its central message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone), a new system of government (in which rule by elders of equal authority replaced the hierarchical priestly system) and a new form of worship (which purged previous unbiblical forms not found under the New Testament). Although this was a movement of the people, the passing of an Act of Parliament in 1560 meant that this new system of religion became the *established faith in Scotland* and so, from 1560, *Scotland has been – officially - a Protestant country*.

Sadly, in the years following the first Reformation, Scotland moved away from its Presbyterian system of church government (see above) towards an Episcopalian system of government (rule by bishops who were overseers of the ministers and appointed by the state). Although the King drove the adoption of this new system, it was unpopular with most of the people and was contrary to the system of government originally established in the reformed church. This takes us to

***The Second Reformation of 1638-1649***. This second reformation is, sadly, less well known than the first. Briefly, there are three important parts to it.

The first part occurred in 1638 when the King, with the support of the bishops, attempted to alter the worship of the church by introducing a prayer book containing obvious Roman Catholic tendencies. The fuse was lit – particularly by Jenny Geddes who threw her famous stool when the new book was first read in St Giles’ cathedral – and a popular revolt took place which culminated shortly afterwards in the signing of the

***National Covenant of 1638***. By this covenant, the government, the nobles, the churchmen – and, indeed, most of the Scottish people – swore to commit themselves to the restoration of the Scottish church to her reformation purity.

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This groundswell of reforming zeal, evidently connected with an outpouring of the Spirit of God, led to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland rediscovering its liberty and, in its famous meeting in Glasgow in 1638 – its first free meeting for many years – it courageously asserted its spiritual independence and outlawed all the innovations in government and worship which had been introduced since the Reformation.

The second step in this reformation happened five years later, in 1643, when – at the initiative of the Scottish church – a covenant was drawn up and entered into by Scotland, England and Ireland. Its purpose was to *preserve* the reformation in Scotland, and to *further* the reformation in England and Ireland with a view to bringing them more into line with Scotland. This was known as the

***Solemn League and Covenant of 1643.*** This covenant was sworn by the Scottish Parliament, the English Parliament (which ruled over the Church of England, and which was dominated by puritans at the time) and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Significantly, the English Parliament had already begun the process of reform: it had abolished bishops and appointed an assembly of theologians to reform the church. And so, as a result of this new covenant with Scotland, the English Parliament decided to augment this assembly with Scottish commissioners and, after over a thousand sittings from 1643-1649, the Assembly produced the series of documents known as the Westminster documents. They were: *The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Form of Church Government, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Directory of Public Worship.*

As the Westminster Assembly produced these documents, they were adopted by the Church of Scotland as the *new constitutional documents of the church* and it was hoped that, as part of their covenanted obligation, the English church would follow suit. Sadly, it did not – but these documents became the covenanted standards for the Church of Scotland and, with this process, the reformation of the Scottish church and her restoration to apostolic doctrine, government and worship was complete.

**This period, when the doctrine, worship and government of the Church of Scotland were settled by the church and by the state – in that order and working in a harmonious manner not seen before or since – was the ‘high-water mark’ of the reformed church in Scotland.**

**At this point, at last, she had attained to where she wanted to be: Reformed in doctrine, worship, and government. All that remained to be done was to conserve these attainments and to press on with her God-given task of evangelising and discipling the nation.**

It is sad to think that a church like the Scottish church that we have just described – covenanted, faithful, free, and *united* – should have so degenerated as to become as she is today: fragmented and, largely, unfaithful. Sadly, this declension has not been as recent as many think - indeed, there was a significant and increasing measure of declension from the adoption of the Revolution Settlement of 1690 onwards (a settlement of the church which the forefathers of the RP church did not accept since it compromised both the freedom and covenanted status of the church).

Of course, the main source of the problem lay with religious leaders who were themselves, in one way or another, out of sympathy with the covenanted Westminster Standards and who, therefore, began the process of subverting and eroding them. However, a more subtle problem lay in the methods which they employed in achieving their ends – methods which, through their subtlety and ambiguity, often divided those who were trying to stop them. This was due to the uncertainty in their minds as to how best to respond to them (see, for example, the lack of agreement amongst those opposed to the Declaratory Act of 1892 as to how to respond to it – leading to division in the ‘constitutionalist’ ranks between those who separated there and then to form the Free Presbyterian Church and those who briefly stayed in but found themselves ostracised from the main part of the Free Church later).

Sadly, and gradually, the church capitulated to the assaults made on the very forms of doctrine, worship and government which she had solemnly promised to uphold: in *doctrine*, commitment to the Westminster Confession was gradually relaxed; in *worship*, the psalms were replaced by uninspired songs and, afterwards, accompanied by instrumental music and, in *government*, the king, bishops and landowners began to interfere.

Thankfully, this process of declension was met with resistance, but successive conflicts led to major divisions in the Scottish church in 1690, 1733, 1843, 1892 and 1900 – as well as other lesser ones. Sadly, as alluded to above, those who were opposed to all those attacks lacked clarity as to how to respond to them with the result that *the divisions did not always fall as one would have expected.* And, in many respects, this is the critical point.

For example, some *reluctantly* entered the Revolution Church of Scotland in 1690 deeply unhappy at how it was constituted leaving others behind with whom they sympathised and who would later go on to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church; only 40 years later, in 1733, many remained in the Church of Scotland although they were deeply unhappy with its treatment both of heretics in the church and with those who felt compelled to leave and who went on to form the Secession church in 1733; 100 years later, in the Disruption of 1843 which gave birth to the Free Church, many ministers, elders and people continued in the Church of Scotland although they were grieved at the concept of patronage and, while they were in deep sympathy with those who left to form the Free Church, they felt it was their duty to continue to fight patronage from within (a fight which was, incidentally, successful later that century). Finally, in 1893, many remained in the Free Church, refusing to leave with those who left to form the Free Presbyterian Church that year, even though they believed the Declaratory Act passed the previous year was unlawful: They were of the opinion that the ‘unlawfulness’ of the Act meant that they should stay in to try to overthrow it.

Undeniably, the result of all that is that now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while there is an established church which has been markedly unfaithful to these covenanted attainments for many years, *most churches now have within them people who believe wholeheartedly in the original attainments of the Scottish Reformation church*. Sadly, due to the lines of division being somewhat blurred, they are now found in different churches and are often prohibited from working together because of their church structures and their internal discipline and are often seen to be one another’s adversaries rather than colleagues and, in some cases (such as the Free Church and the Church of Scotland), their denominational affiliation leaves them in harness with those who are far less like themselves than those in other denominations!

Astonishingly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are still following the agenda of those who have tried to alter the reformation church down through the years! Rather than recognising the historical problem, boldly taking the initiative, and setting an alternative agenda and regathering around our original documents, we still act as though there was a Robert Rainy in our churches trying to introduce a Declaratory Act. And we are, of course, far more adept at finding reasons for separation – reasons which become ever more odd, ever more peripheral, and ever more unconvincing – rather than finding reasons to be together, reasons which lie clearly before us in our Westminster documents.

Party spirit, ecclesiastical identity, and a loyalty to a *perception* of what our forefathers stood for, or might have done were they us, is just not enough: To be blunt, the one who is not content to rally around the Westminster documents as the basis of unity is the one who is being separatist. Those documents were conceived and drafted in prayerful, earnest conference by people *who had many points of difference between them*. Why are they not good enough for us? Why must there always be another shibboleth in Scottish Presbyterianism to hinder a closing of the ranks? And why does fear of what might be lost always trump hope for what might be gained?

With the current division, the consequent discouragement, the thinning of our ranks and the hopelessly confusing nature of our witness to the world, the Devil is indeed well pleased.

However, none of this is meant to paralyse. Our covenants and our Westminster Standards – based, as they are, upon the Bible – remind us that our nation will rise again and prosper. It is up to each generation to examine itself and to follow the God ordained path of reformation and repentance which will secure such spiritual prosperity. If we fail to seize our opportunity, and rest content with our indefensible, wearisome and fruitless divisions, we will only bring more years of darkness and discouragement (as happened to Israel, when she refused to recognise Moses and, sadly, secured for herself a further forty years of needless Satanic oppression). If we, at least, show an openness to such a reunification, the Lord will not hold us guilty or withhold a blessing from us, and for that we should be glad. On the other hand, there is a way forward for us all...

(to be continued)

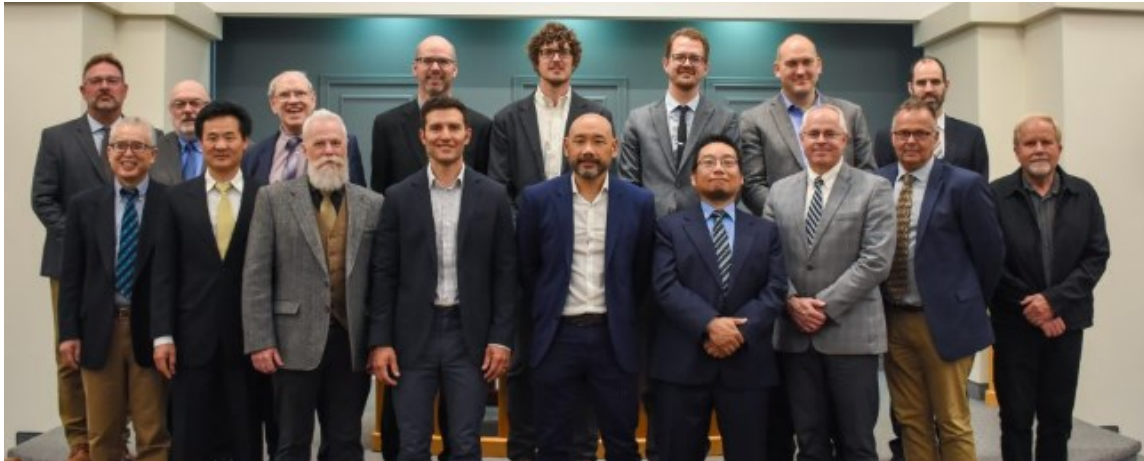
## NEWS & EVENTS

### REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CANADA

At a special meeting of Presbytery on Friday May 12, 2023 the Canadian Presbytery of the RPCNA formally became a separate denomination forming the **Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada**. The meeting was held in the Ottawa RP Church building and there were over 100 people in attendance with others watching via livestream from various places around the world.

The congregations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada, are as follows:

**Almonte** – Hillside RP Church, **Kitchener** – New Creation RP Church, **Ottawa** RP Church, **Russell** RP Church, **Squamish** – Coram Deo RP Mission Church, **Surrey** – Nissi RP Mission Church, **Toronto** – Evangelical Presbyterian Church, **West Vancouver** RP Mission Church, **Vancouver** AP Church.



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### FALSE PROPHETS—THE KNOCK AT THE DOOR



“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15)

In our day, and on our own Island, false prophets are all around us. Many of us have answered a knock at the door not to find a familiar face standing there or even to find someone sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which ought to be a welcome sight to any believer. Rather, as we open the door we discover that we are faced with two people, greeting us with smiles, seeking to share the Gospel according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and to invite us to their church. They don’t introduce themselves as Jehovah’s Witnesses, but upon asking the question, our suspicions are confirmed.

## WHO ARE THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

In 1852, Charles Taze Russell was born in the United States in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. He was raised in a Presbyterian Church. In his late teens, he concluded that he could not reconcile an eternal hell with a merciful God. He went on to question many other historic Christian doctrines and determined that the historic creeds and confessions were contrary to true Christianity. Russell preached and wrote extensively. In 1881 he formed the *Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society*, which he moved to New York in 1909, where it remains today. They did, however, move from Brooklyn to Warwick, New York in 2016, having sold their Watchtower building complex for a reported \$340 million. Russell died in 1916 and by the time of his death, his writings had become widely distributed throughout the world.

The Watch Tower Society officially renamed themselves Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931 and a number of groups separated from them over the years. This is contrary to what Jehovah's Witnesses claim about the unity of their denomination in contrast to other churches who have experienced division.

The Jehovah's Witnesses hold Charles Taze Russell in high esteem, although they do not consider him to be their founder. Rather they consider Christ to be their founder and that Russell was used of God, to restore what they believe to be the true faith, which was lost. Their own website states, "C. T. Russell used the Watch Tower and other publications to uphold Bible truths and to refute false religious teachings and human philosophies that contradicted the Bible. He did not, however, claim to discover new truths." This is an important difference between the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, as the Jehovah's Witnesses do not rely upon visions or new revelation. This leads to the erroneous conclusion that Jehovah's Witnesses are merely teaching the Bible. The problem is that they have misinterpreted the Bible, so much so that they are not a true church, rather a cult (indeed, one of the largest cults in the world). They treat their Watchtower magazine as an infallible interpreter of Scripture. Moreover, they have their own inaccurate translation of the Bible, the New World Translation, which has been translated in such a way as to affirm many of their own teachings. There are said to be around 8.7 million Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the world today.

## WHAT DO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TEACH?

Their doctrine is heretical. For instance, they **deny the trinity**, stating that a belief in three persons in the Godhead is the equivalent to a belief in three gods. In turn they **deny the deity of Christ**, teaching that Jesus was the first created being, created as the archangel Michael, before the creation of the world and when He was born on earth, He was a mere human and not God in human flesh. Therefore they do not believe that Christ's death had any efficacy to turn away God's wrath from repentant sinners.

Additionally, they **deny that the Holy Spirit is a person, let alone God**, teaching that the Spirit is an impersonal force coming from God. Famously, **they teach that there is no hell**, with references to hell referring merely to the grave. Moreover, they teach that the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7:4 are a literal number of faithful Jehovah's Witnesses, referred to as 'anointed ones,' who will go to heaven. The remainder of Jehovah's Witnesses will be resurrected and live forever on earth, while those who do not believe the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses will be annihilated out of all existence.

They believe that humans have **no immaterial soul**, rather the soul is simply the life within a person. They also insist that **God must be identified by the name Jehovah**, hence the name Jehovah's Witnesses. Essentially, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses, **salvation is by faith in Christ and their good works**, essentially association with their religion and obedience to its rules.

The Watch Tower Society, and post 1931, the Jehovah's Witnesses, made a series of **failed predictions** about the end of the world. For instance, they prophesied that the world would meet its wicked end by the year 1975, where they used the phrase, "stay alive till 75." Their own publications stated, "Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in the old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world's end." (Kingdom Ministry, May 1974) Scripture makes it clear as to how we identify a false prophet, "when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him" (Deuteronomy 18:22). Christ Himself stated that only the Father knows the day and the hour, which the Jehovah's witnesses so often foolishly tried to predict, "But of that day and hour no one

knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32).

## A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES

In response to the Jehovah’s Witnesses teachings, scripture provides clear answers. Concerning **the trinity**, there are three persons in the Godhead (Matthew 28:19). The Father is God (John 4:23), the Son is God (John 1:1) and the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4). Concerning **the deity of Christ**, the difficulty is that their own New World Translation Bible does so much to distort many of the references to the deity of Christ. In response, we can nonetheless point out to them that even their own translation attributes deity to Christ, as He received worship from his disciples, when only God ought to be worshipped, “they did obeisance to him” (Luke 24:52 New World Translation). Scripture plainly teaches that not only is the Holy Spirit God, as stated above, but **the Spirit is a person**, with the attributes of personality, for instance, with a mind (Romans 8:27) and a will (1 Corinthians 12:11).

In terms of their contention that **hell** does not exist, Scripture teaches that hell is indeed a real and fearful place of conscious eternal suffering (Mark 9:44). Should a Jehovah’s Witness insist that there we have **no immaterial soul**, we could again simply ask them to read their own translation of the Mount of Transfiguration, which reads, “and look! there appeared to them Moses and Elijah conversing with him” (Matthew 17:3 New World Translation). As God buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34:6), how then could Moses appear on the Mount, whilst his body was in the ground, if there is no immaterial soul? As to their insistence that **God must be identified by the name Jehovah**, Scripture refers to God by many names, such as almighty (Genesis 17:1), Lord (Psalm 8:1) and Father (Matthew 6:9). Finally, **salvation** is not based upon our works, but rather grace, which is God’s unmerited favour. Works are the fruit of salvation, not the basis of it (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The Jehovah’s Witnesses may appear, on the surface, to be preaching Christ and avidly sharing the faith. In reality, however warmly they may greet us as they knock on our doors, as we examine their beliefs it becomes clear that they are a religious cult, who deny the basic tenets of the Christian faith and Christ as the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

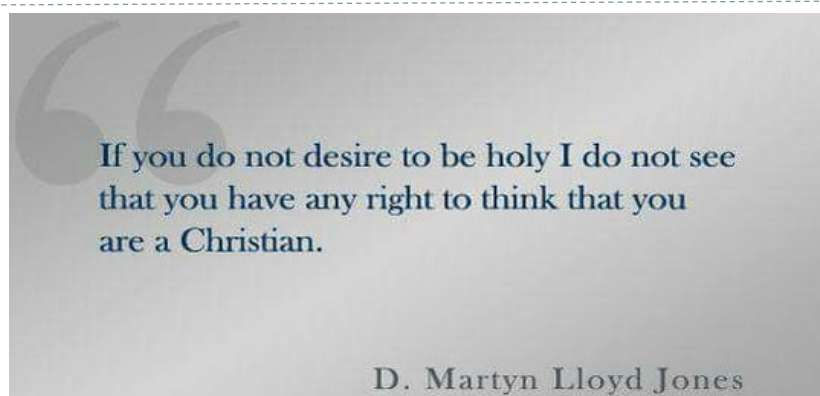
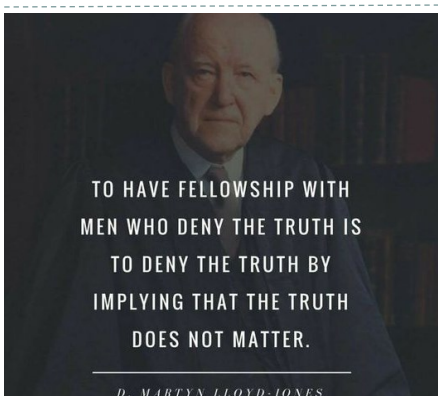
## PRACTICAL AND SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS

For anyone who has ever held a conversation with a Jehovah’s Witness, you will quickly realise that they have their go to texts. On the most part, they are very much indoctrinated and unwilling to engage or reason with anything which is contrary to the teaching of the Watchtower.

Practically speaking, in order that we are not caught off guard, it can be very helpful for us to know beforehand what they believe, in order to respond to them Biblically. This may even involve, as we have already suggested, quoting and asking them to read certain passages from their own New World Translation Bible, where we are sure that these passages are translated accurately. They will also attempt to quickly move on to different subjects when they are unable to respond with a coherent answer to a particular issue. In such a situation, it is important to reiterate and drive home these truths, rather than allow them to pass over them, without considering the implications.

Spiritually speaking, we must remember that our aim is not simply to win an argument. We ought to recognise and denounce their false teaching, yet pray for these lost souls who have providentially ended up at our own doorstep. We ought to take the opportunity to share the true Gospel, rather than simply denounce their false gospel. Some of us can say that we have been in fellowship with former Jehovah’s Witnesses, who have come to Christ. The Lord is able to save to the uttermost, even a blinded and hardened Jehovah’s Witness.

**Scott Maciver**



# Children's Corner



Dear Children,

Since we moved to Stornoway over a year ago, we've been gradually learning about the plants and herbs which are growing in the beautiful garden around the manse. I don't know if you have plants or herbs in your garden – but you're very welcome to come and visit ours anytime!

I'll just mention some of them. We have rosemary, a fragrant herb that has health benefits for your stomach and can be boiled in water and sieved to make tea (maybe you can try some when you come round!) We also have chives, which helps your heart and reduce swelling, and we have lemon balm which helps to take away stress and worry and indigestion, improves your appetite, and helps you to sleep! And these are just a few of the wonderful herbs growing here. It's so clear that God has created all these for our good!

I've been reading recently about a very special plant that grows in the tropical forests that can be used as a medicine. It's called the Rosy Periwinkle plant and this plant is very special because it helps children who have a special form of cancer get well again.

Do you know when sickness began? When God created Adam and Eve, they never got sick at first. They would never have died either! They only started to get sick after they sinned. And ever since then, because we're sinners, we get sick too and sickness and death will always be part of this world until God makes a 'new heaven and a new earth' (2 Peter 3: 13).

But, although we didn't deserve it, God shows his love and kindness in still giving us all these plants and herbs. He gives them so we can be healthy! Sadly, we don't find out enough about them to make proper use of them and, instead, we often end up becoming more and more unhealthy – especially when we start eating things that are damaging to our bodies rather than the healthy things God has given us: things to keep us healthy and to heal us when we're sick!

But even though having a sick body is a problem, I'm sure you know it's more dangerous to have a sick soul than a sick body? And I'm sure you know as well that there's no herb in the world that can cure your sick soul. But, again, God shows even greater love and kindness by providing a special cure for that. It is the blood of His son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, if you don't know that your soul is really sick and that it needs healing before you die, you need to ask God to help you understand that. And you can ask him too to apply the special blood of Jesus Christ to your soul, because 'the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1: 7).

I hope you will take time to think about this and to pray about it as well. If you feel your soul is sick and that it needs healing – ask him for that precious medicine that He alone can give you.

With my love and prayers,

Mrs S