

Heath Street

BAPTIST CHURCH



A Sermon by the Reverend Dr. Nathan Eddy

Co-Director, Council of Christians and Jews

I want to start by thanking Ewan and yourselves for your support for Jewish-Christian dialogue. Ewan and I met a few years ago at the installation of our colleague in Hampstead Garden Suburb Free Church, and Ewan reached out to meet to hear more about CCJ. That's rare amongst clergy. I know how busy churches can be, and I don't take your creativity and commitment, nor Ewan's, for granted. The event Ewan organized for Shavuot was one of the only in all of North London in recent months. Heath Street is leading not just in nonconformist circles but also among all the churches in North London.

I am guest preacher on behalf of the Council of Christians and Jews a few times a year, and usually I begin with a word of description about CCJ and our history. But today I want to begin instead with something of a disclaimer, or apology, to use the philosophical sense of the term—a preemptive argument for Jewish-Christian dialogue to bring on board those of you here who may have questions or doubts or concerns about dialogue with the Jewish community

whilst the war in the Middle East is continuing. CCJ is not a pro-Israel or a Christian Zionist organization; we are a dialogue organization. But is dialogue even the right approach, given the situation in Gaza and the West Bank?

There have been several church statements this summer critical of the Israeli government's handling of the war. On 4th July, the United Reformed Church approved an emergency resolution on the government's actions in Gaza, building on an earlier statement issued by the World Council of Churches at its Central Committee meeting in June. Methodists and Quakers issued similar calls at their annual gatherings earlier this year.

The URC resolution “denounces the ongoing military attacks in Gaza. General Assembly is invited to endorse this and call for a renewed commitment to dialogue to resolve this conflict peacefully”. It concludes with a call on URC members to pray for peace in the Holy Land and “to provide practical support by contributing to the Methodist/URC

Gaza and Lebanon Justice Appeal and to write to their MPs to demand that the UK government immediately ends all arms sales to the region and ends its military collaboration with the Israeli Government and Israel Defence Forces”.

However, the URC resolution also takes pains to draw attention to how the Jewish community is experiencing the rise in antisemitism in the UK. The resolution notes “the deep affinity that many Jews in the UK enjoy with the land of Israel”. The resolution also explicitly names historic Christian complicity in “overt and covert antisemitism”. Finally, the WCC statement explicitly condemns all forms of racism, including antisemitism, anti-Arab racism, and Islamophobia.

Here in North London, where I also live, we have a special responsibility to consider these Jewish-Christian dialogue aspects. The majority of the UK's 280,000 Jews live in London, and most, as you probably know, live here in North London. In fact, I've heard it said that the Borough of

Barnet is home to the biggest single Jewish population between Tel Aviv and New York. North London is a unique place with a unique interfaith balance, as we know. And whilst Islamophobia and antisemitism are at high levels, and Jewish and Muslim communities are reporting isolation, fear, and anxiety, we Christians have a special responsibility. Historically, nonconformist churches have been at the forefront of campaigns for liberty of conscience and belief—we invented the idea, drawing on our own experience of persecution. There is long precedent for our congregations to speak out on the freedom of all to practice their religion in the UK.

To wind up my longwinded apology for Jewish-Christian dialogue in a time of war, I want to say that it's possible to advocate for safety and justice for Israelis and Palestinians, as well as to speak about antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other kinds of racism here in the UK. In fact, our concern for Palestinian rights can ring hollow unless we have wider concerns for justice and safety closer to home. It's possible to hold both positions.

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Moreover, as Christians we have a special responsibility to think of our Jewish neighbours, because of the long history of antisemitism that the URC statement and the Quakers drew attention to. Supersessionism, to use a technical word, in its sharpest form, is the belief that Christians have replaced the Jewish people as God's people. But supersessionism also has a milder variety, as some have noted—a kind of embarrassed silence thrown over the Old Testament. One scholar calls this 'economic' supersessionism—that is, in the economy of God's working with the world, the story of Israel is skipped over. We start with universal creation, move on to the fall, and jump straight to redemption in Christ. There are very good reasons for skipping some truly difficult texts in the Old Testament. But we throw the baby out with the bathwater if we also skip the overarching story of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures, the promises of God to the people he loves.

So much for my apology for CCJ. In a time of existential crisis in the Middle East (in a time of existential threat experienced by Palestinians in the West Bank and agony experienced by innocent families in Gaza; as well as,

on the Israeli side, deep insecurity and lament over the fate of hostages still being held by Hamas), in the UK, it is still important for Christians to be aware of Jewish communities around us, as you are here—and of other faith groups. In my mind, it's a case of training our ears to hear other voices in our own scripture; other ways our own texts have been interpreted and are still being interpreted.

I think Psalm 23 is a good test case for this kind of training. I think this because the psalm is so familiar, rightfully so, that we read it as Christian scripture—"the 23rd Psalm". It is familiar as a text for funerals—rightfully so. We think, or at least I do, of Lake District scenes of gamboling sheep rather than images from the Middle East. That in itself isn't a problem; the problem is when we forget the other contexts.

This focus on a world beyond this one is perfectly appropriate for Psalm 23, and it's found in Jewish tradition as well. The medieval Jewish commentator Ibn Ezra, who may have died in London, notes that the table spread in the midst of enemies in verse 5 symbolises the heavenly

banquet and suggests that the faithful forgo the pleasures of this world to focus entirely on the pleasures of the world to come. Their only concern is to do goodness and mercy, as in the last verse of the psalm.

But others in Jewish tradition interpret the psalm as a parable for the whole people of Israel in the wilderness—after the Exodus, when Israel was led from Sinai to the promised land—that great arc of a story, teased in Genesis, which begins properly in Exodus and carries right the way through to Moses' dramatic sermons on the cliffs of Moab overlooking the promised land, at the end of Deuteronomy.

The Targum, the ancient translation of the Bible into Aramaic, often includes glosses or creative interpretations. It translates the first verse of Psalm 23: "The Lord fed his people in the wilderness; they lacked nothing". This interpretation picks up on the word "chasar", to be lacking, and notes that it appears in the very beginning of Moses' first sermon in Deuteronomy: "These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you, you have lacked nothing". (Deuteronomy 2:7). I also recommend the book *A Rabbi Reads*

the Psalms, by North London's own Jonathan Magonet, who taught for many years at Leo Baeck College in Finchley.

In the Midrash on psalms, the table spread before the psalmist in verse 5 is taken, in this view, to refer to the manna in the wilderness that the Israelites were provided with in the desert. One commentator even notes that the psalmist has his or her head anointed with oil, a word that can also be translated as "fat"—clearly, this is a reference to the fat of the quail that were showered on Israel wandering in the wilderness.

In this view, Psalm 23 is very much about this world: The desert was a place of testing and trial, for Jesus as surely as for his people Israel, but the wilderness wandering is also remembered fondly in the Bible; the prophet Hosea recalls it as a kind of honeymoon, a time of intimate connection between God and the people he loves. Psalm 23 in this view is about journeys and times of struggle in which we face big decisions but also in which we know God is present. It's about the whole people of God, not just individuals.

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The Psalm leads Israel into trust in the midst of these struggles. Notice that the psalmist starts out in the first person—“the Lord is my shepherd”—but the psalm shifts emphasis as it proceeds. Right in the centre stand the words: “You are with me”. The psalm leads us, if we wish to, from talking *about* God in the third person—“the Lord is my shepherd”—into a kind of prayerful direct address—“**you** are with me”. We shift from talking about God to talking to God.

Nor is this a naïve trust; the shepherd God of Psalm 23 is ready for the rough and tumble world. The rod and the staff can be used as weapons in case of a human or animal attack. Although we might associate the psalm with children and safety—and that’s not a bad thing—it also speaks to people facing adult problems. Psalm 23 knows that the world is a complicated place—a place of blessing and promise, but also of struggle and suffering. Despite the struggle, despite the difficulties of the journey, Psalm 23 can help us say, “you are with me”—even in the darkest valley.

Situated in this way in the wilderness story, Psalm 23 is radically open–

ended. Just as Deuteronomy closes the Torah on the verge of the Promised Land, looking ahead into the future, a literal cliffhanger ending on the cliffs of Moab, so Psalm 23 looks ahead, and says, over to you; over to you to continue this story, to write the next chapter of being the people of God.

In drawing attention to these Jewish traditions of interpretation, my concern is not to shut down any of our cherished and valuable readings of Psalm 23. My concern is that we also listen for other voices in this psalm, in addition to our own. Can we hear the Jewish people saying this psalm, joyful or fearful, trusting or anxious, on their journey alongside us, right here in Hampstead? Where a Jewish person feels the presence of enemies, can we acknowledge that fear and vulnerability?

The Shepherd’s Life by James Rebanks, published in 2015, was a bestseller because of his flinty descriptions of the joys and challenges of shepherding in the Lake District: the weather, the traditions, the sheep. But what I enjoyed most about the book was Rebanks’ reflection on what brought him to return to Matterdale, Cumbria,

west of Penrith—an area which his family have farmed for 600 years—after studying history at Magdalen College, Oxford. He thought he’d never return, but a deep connection to the land and rhythms of rural life drew him back.

At the end of his book, Rebanks reflects movingly on his favourite time of year: the spring, when he can lead his animals up the mountains to the high pasture. He concludes with a strikingly 23rd Psalm-like image: drinking from a mountain stream with his flock.

He writes:

*I lie down by the beck and cusp out a handful of water. I slurp it.
...I breathe in the cool mountain air, and watch a plane chalking a trail across the blue of the sky. The ewes call to the lambs following them as they climb up the crags. This is my life. I want no other.*

This is our life, here in Hampstead. These are our communities, our neighbours, our synagogues, mosques, churches. This is our story, it’s not done yet; there are chapters still to be written here at Heath Street and across Hampstead and North London.

Like Rebanks, as difficult as life here can be, I want no other community—and I hope you’ll join me.

Taizé Pilgrimage



The Church of England's Diocese of Lincoln led a pilgrimage to Taizé, France, in August this year, and we were joined by a few people from around London, including those from Heath

Street Baptist Church, through our mutual connections. The community of brothers at Taizé have been welcoming young adults since the 1950s, offering hospitality and inspiration. August 2025 was a special anniversary



for me, being 30 years since my first visit there. I was encouraged to go the first time by an Episcopal priest I knew back in Oklahoma. That visit changed my life, and it has always been my hope to share something of Taizé with others, and let God do the rest. This year we were a small group of 17 and joined by Bishop Nicholas Chamberlain—impressively, he was able to sleep on the overnight coach journey there! Most of our group, including the bishop, had



never been to Taizé, and so the journey together was a real act of faith. We encouraged everyone to sleep under canvas—extra tents were brought with us for those who didn't have one. Each of us were given tasks to do: working in the shop, cleaning the floors, serving meals, washing up afterwards. We attended prayer together three times each day and joined in with daily Bible reflections. There was free time, but not a lot of it. After all, it was a pilgrimage and not a retreat! As pilgrims, we took part in the daily life of Taizé and this kept us in a rhythm of praying, eating together, studying, working, resting, sleeping. It was glorious. Our theme for the week was “hoping beyond all hope”, and this meant latching on to a hope that God wishes to give each of us, especially when the world feels bleak. We need courage to hope. May that special gift we received there encourage us to remain pilgrims of hope. Until next time!

—The Reverend Clay Roundtree,
Director of Ordinands and
Vocations for Lincoln Diocese

Taizé is a truly wonderful place that leaves you with a sense of connection and fulfilment towards not just religion but towards friends, family and yourself. There is much to discover through your experience, whether it be through sharing interpretations of Bible verses or taking a walk through the silent garden. You get to meet many new people from all over the world, finding friendship and even love. I had the privilege of watching love blossom before my eyes, a surreal sight to see.

There were no limitations in the ways you could find a connection with God. I very much enjoyed the silent garden; the picturesque and quiet landscape really left me in awe of the beauty of nature. The daily routine was also comforting, as you begin to feel a sense of familiarity through the repetition of each day while remaining eager and excited for new activities to explore. Each prayer was filled

with music, and you could hear all kinds of languages spoken. As someone who went to Taizé to explore my beliefs and develop a closer relationship with God, I can confidently say that the entire experience was unforgettable. I had the freedom to express myself, surrounded by people who listened and shared my beliefs. It was also refreshing to learn about the beliefs of others, both from different denominations and from those who just had differing perspectives. This enabled me to adapt and broaden my knowledge while also gaining more curiosity and an appreciation in different fields of the religion. I have no doubt that those who choose to go to Taizé will not regret it and will gain a deeper understanding of both themselves and their own faith.

—Avie



Organ Marathon

I had a rather unusual request over the summer—to host the performance of an organ piece which was due to last between 17.5 and 26.5 hours, in two sittings. However, it came from Matthew Lee Knowles, and so not strange at all. Matthew first came into contact with Heath Street over lockdown, when he was looking to record a song cycle and was astonished at how quickly we managed to record quite a number he'd composed. After some discussion over the state of the organ blower with Martin Renshaw, who has been carrying out some works on the organ recently, we decided it was “safe to proceed”—and as they say, the rest is history. As I understand, it's the longest through-composed organ piece in existence, but we will have to wait to hear from the Guinness book of records if our

performance of it qualifies us for a place in the book.

—*John-Henry Baker*

FOR SAMUEL BECKETT AT HEATH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

To get people talking about this event, I spent several hours in Hampstead, putting flyers through letterboxes and talking to people on the street. On the day, I often found myself outside, funnelling people in. I found that quite a few people needed an explanation and enjoyed the music more when they knew how it had been composed. To give an example of this, a lovely elderly couple stayed for only a few minutes, then came out and commented that the music

was a little traumatic! I said I was the composer and they were mortified, but I told them not to worry. We talked for about twenty minutes. I took them through my methodology, how I had painstakingly turned every letter of Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* into music and that I was creating a space which invited any state of mind the listener had at that moment to come to the fore or sink to the recesses. They went back in, stayed for half an hour and told me it was one of the best musical experiences they'd ever had! Patience, compassion, kindness, honesty and curiosity. Because of this, I rarely had the opportunity to just sit down and listen, but when I did, I enjoyed how the sound was waiting for the silence and the silence was waiting for the sound. When I reflect on this event I am

enormously thankful to the church and everyone in it for trusting us to make history in their beautiful space and to Kat Farn for wanting to play it and pushing herself to the brink to see it to completion.

—*Matthew Lee Knowles, composer*

YouTube links
Composer:
[youtube.com/
a6nhKe8K0mI?si=TriJbi8ZrWGQZWY1u](https://youtube.com/a6nhKe8K0mI?si=TriJbi8ZrWGQZWY1u)
Organist:
[youtube.com/
watch?v=CCIBs7gMZZM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=CCIBs7gMZZM)

London Sacred Harp

Sing shape note music at Heath Street! On the second Tuesday every month, London Sacred Harp sings from *The Christian Harmony*, an American shape note tune book, in the basement from 7.30 to 9.30pm.

Shape note music is a form of four-part *a capella* harmony singing which has been traditional in the American South since the nineteenth century, using a distinctive shape note notation, which makes it particularly easy to learn if you don't read music. Over the past twenty years, many people in the UK and Europe have been attracted to the vibrant harmonies and soaring poetry found in various shape note song books. The music is almost exclusively sacred but we are not a religious group and welcome those of any faith and none.

New singers are always welcome to come and try us out. There are no auditions and no commitment; you can come once or many times as you please. And you don't need to be able to read music or have a



so-called “good” voice. We have loaner books. We take a collection to cover hall hire costs, asking people to contribute £5 if they can—if this is difficult, don't worry but do still come. There are many shape note videos on YouTube which will give you some idea of the sound of this music, but it is best heard live!

London Sacred Harp also sings from other shape note tune books three other times a month, so if this type of singing grabs you, you can sing shape note music weekly at various venues in central London. All the details and dates are on our website and our Facebook page.

www.londonsacredharp.org

Harp Ensemble

After a busy year of music-making, the young harpists at Hampstead Harp Centre are getting ready for their Autumn concert at Heath Street Baptist Church.

Since January, they've enjoyed playing pieces from O Mio Babbino Caro and Here Comes the Sun to Shostakovich's Jazz Suite and The Godfather. This term's programme includes Earth, Wind & Fire's September and Fauré's elegant Pavane. The ensemble helps children build chamber-music skills, learn about harp care, and grow in confidence, with an end-of-term concert to celebrate their progress!



Prayer Meeting

A few of us have recently started meeting for prayer on a Friday evening at Heath Street. We start at 6pm and finish at approximately 7pm. It has been a great and valuable opportunity to share in prayer with each other. If anyone else would like to join us for the prayer meeting, please see Penny, Ling or Gaynor.

Upcoming Concert

SUNDAY 26TH OCTOBER, 5PM

Join Side by Side Collective as they explore a fusion of styles and origins, using both folk music and the music of J. S. Bach as starting points for musical developments and journeys. Featuring musicians who are equally comfortable in the symphony orchestra and in free improvisation, this programme offers a blend of the familiar as well as the unknown.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HAMPSTEAD

QUIZ NIGHT

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PLUS PRIZES

Readings

OCTOBER 5-11

LAMENTATIONS 1.1-6

5th Ottilie Johnson
6th Sarah Harper
7th Elya Ghasempour
8th Maral Agin
9th Edward Humphreys
10th Dusol Lee
11th Fiona Ranford

OCTOBER 12-18

JEREMIAH 29.1-7

12th Josh Somers
13th Ali Ghasempour
14th Ewan King
15th Zahra Safaryazdi
16th Tom Somers
17th Lydia Baker
18th Gaynor Humphreys

OCTOBER 19-25

JEREMIAH 31.27-34

19th Juno Lee
20th Thaddeus King
21st Julie Benoit
22nd Wilf Merittens
23rd Grace Jiang
24th Evelyn Baker
25th Anselm King

OCTOBER 26-NOVEMBER 1

JOEL 2.23-32

26th Elisa Ghasempour
27th HK
28th Nesa Thorne
29th Hyun Ju Lee
30th Frida King
31st Phoebe Jiang
1st November Isabel Somers

& Prayers

NOVEMBER 2-8

DANIEL 7.1-18

2nd Theresa Thom
3rd Susan Le Quesne
4th Esme Baker
5th Joachim King
6th Birgit Leuppert
7th Nomsa Ndebele
8th Cole Ellenbogen

NOVEMBER 9-15

JOB 19.23-27

9th Robin Thorne
10th Annie Fang
11th Leila Ranjbar
12th Mysie Johnson
13th Beryl Dowsett
14th Laura Somers
15th John-Henry Baker

NOVEMBER 16-22

MALACHI 4.1-2

16th Emad Eisapour
17th Leo Patterson
18th Coco Ellenbogen
19th Nathalia Bell
20th Babak Agin
21st Jen Finamore
22nd for all who attend Oldtime Nursery

NOVEMBER 23-29

JEREMIAH 23.1-6

23rd Rhona MacEachen
24th Eleanor Patterson
25th Monsignor Phelim Rowland
26th for our community choir
27th Selena Barrera
28th Kylo Layton
29th Andrea MacEachen

Love is a catalyst

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES



Sundays	11am	DIVINE WORSHIP Including our Children's Sunday Club stories, crafts, drama and play for all ages Live stream also available on request by e-mailing johnhenry@heathstreet.org at least 24 hours in advance
	7pm	CONTACT CLUB
Mondays	4:30pm	STORYMAKERS CLUB An after-school club aimed at children between the ages of 7 and 13
Tuesdays	9:30am	OLDTIME NURSERY Introducing old melodies and traditional stories to a new generation of children
Thursdays	10:30am	OLDTIME NURSERY
	7:30pm	HEATH STREET CHOIR REHEARSALS
Fridays	3:30pm 6:00pm	STORYMAKERS CLUB PRAYER MEETING We meet in the downstairs kitchen to talk and pray. Do come and join!





Please see the church website for updates

www.heathstreet.org

For requests regarding church membership,
Baptism or opportunities for Christian ministry in the church,
please contact the minister

Copy for the next Newsletter

should reach Eleanor Patterson (eleonorlaise@gmail.com)
not later than **Wednesday 19 November**

Church Officers

Gaynor Humphreys (Treasurer)

Wilf Merttens (Church Secretary)

Annie Fang (Deacon)

Minister Ewan King

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