



Image of the day - St Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork

Boris Johnson a 'lousy unionist', says leading Orangeman



Photo - The Grand Secretary of the Orange Lodge, Reverend Mervyn Gibson

Boris Johnson has proved himself a “lousy unionist” with his Brexit “betrayal” of Northern Ireland, a leading Orangeman has said.

Rev Mervyn Gibson said the region had been left a “place apart” from the rest of the UK as a consequence of the Brexit achieved by the UK prime minister, with the creation of economic barriers with Great Britain.

Speaking in a personal capacity, Rev Gibson, who is grand secretary of the Orange Order, said unionists should focus not on protests but on strengthening the Union going forward.

January 2, 2021

He acknowledged that the consequences of new trading arrangements agreed in the Brexit Withdrawal deal would see Northern Ireland's economic orientation shift toward Dublin.

"I think we've been betrayed, there's no other way to say it," said Rev Gibson.

"Sadly we trusted Boris Johnson when he said there would be no border down the Irish Sea, that we wouldn't be any different, that we leave Europe as one United Kingdom.



January 2, 2021

“Sadly that is not the case. He has made Northern Ireland a place apart, he has given up some sovereignty to Europe, you’ll have Europe making certain laws and enforcing certain things in Northern Ireland and we’ve no representation at the European Parliament, so he’s abandoned us in that way.”

He added: “Actually some of Boris’s speeches he’s referring to ‘Britain’ and not the United Kingdom anymore.

“We’ve been betrayed before. Churchill tried to betray us, Thatcher betrayed us.

“They were great prime ministers but they were lousy unionists. The jury’s out whether Boris is a great prime minister, but he’s already proved to be a lousy unionist.”

Winston Churchill offered a united Ireland in exchange for the Irish state joining the UK’s war effort in 1940 and Margaret Thatcher signed the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which gave the Republic more of a say in the affairs of the North.

“We have to make the best of it,” said Rev Gibson.



January 2, 2021

“There is no good shouting about it, there’s no good protesting about it, we need to get on with strengthening the Union and the centennial gives us a great opportunity to do that, to build on the next 100 years for Northern Ireland.”

Loyalist activist Jamie Bryson also characterises the Northern Ireland Protocol as a “betrayal”.

He has penned a rebuttal to the contention of the European Research Group’s legal advisory committee that Brexit has not undermined UK sovereignty.

Mr Bryson has called for unionists of all shades to come together in a collective forum to co-ordinate their opposition to the protocol.

“It seems that such a forum is an essential mechanism for the development of a collective unionist and loyalist campaign to see off the threat to the Union posed by the protocol,” he said.

“The unionist and loyalist community is a broad church, with many differing views on social and broader political issues, however the one unifying component is the Union.

“It would be a derogation of duty to defend the Union if such a collective body did not come together with the sole purpose of developing a legal, political, community and civic strategy.

“Such a strategic movement is necessary to resist efforts to annex Northern Ireland off into what effectively amounts to an economic united Ireland.”

Christian Author Joni Eareckson Tada tests positive for covid-19

Popular Christian author and speaker Joni Eareckson Tada has announced she has tested positive for coronavirus.

In a Facebook post in Joni and Friends, a disability ministry she founded, she said “It has been a long hard day, but I know people are praying because Ken’s and my spirits are bright.”

She is currently receiving monoclonal antibodies treatment.

The author’s medical background makes her part of the of the vulnerable group as she just recovered from breast cancer for the second time last year. She was first diagnosed in 2010 and then 2018.

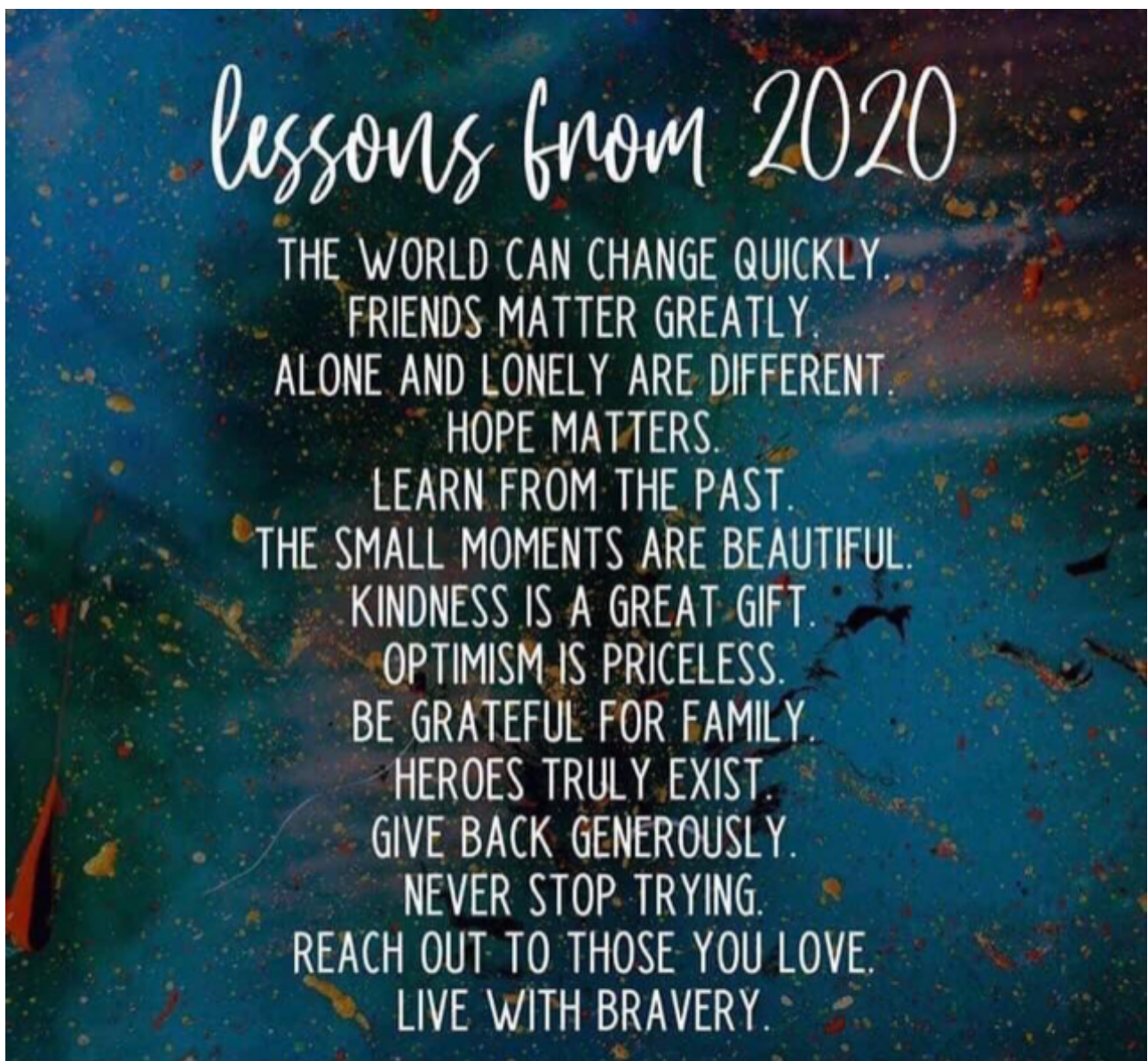
In her latest update about how her coronavirus treatment is going, she wrote on Facebook: "What COVID meant for evil, Christ meant for good," adding that her lungs are responding well to the treatment.

Joni’s approach to prayer for health is to focus 80 per cent on trusting in God’s goodness, and 20 per cent on the physical restoration of the body.

Given Joni’s medical background, including having just recovered from cancer for the second time last year, this is “just the beginning of her road to recovery,” Joni and Friends wrote. She recently tested positive after experiencing flu-like symptoms.

When the coronavirus outbreak began in the US in March, Tada—who has written and spoken extensively on faith amid suffering—emphasised God’s sovereignty during the pandemic.

“Jesus knows exactly where the virus is and where it is going next, who will get it and who will not. Since our Saviour always does what is wise and good, he has prudent purposes in this disease and its impact,” she said, going on to describe her own vulnerabilities should she become infected.



January 2, 2021

“Personally I am staking my life on that because I am a person at great risk. I am an aging quadriplegic with fragile lungs and an immune system that can be easily compromised,” she said. “But I am following all the protocols and I am bolstering my confidence with the same assurance that we giving the people we serve through Joni and Friends: The world belongs to Almighty God.”

Kirk explores personal calling stories through new Talking Ministry series

Each month throughout 2021, the Church of Scotland’s new ‘Talking Ministry’ series will share a personal story from those serving in Christian ministry in the widest sense, including those who have responded to the call to one of our four recognised ministries: Full-time Ministry of Word and Sacrament, Ordained Local Ministry (OLM), the Diaconate and Readership.

Alongside these personal stories, there will also be new monthly discernment resources filled with questions, prayers and reflections to help encourage your own reflection on how God might be calling you at this time.

Rev Dr Lezley Stewart, the Church of Scotland’s recruitment and support secretary, said:

“At any time we know there are lots of people thinking about how to live out their Christian calling – in the local church and community, in the presbytery - and for some, exploring



a call to the four Recognised Ministries of the Church of Scotland.

“Throughout 2021 we want to encourage that discernment further. Through a series of monthly Talking Ministry stories, we hope that the experiences of others will act as a springboard for personal exploration. The stories will cover a variety of ministry service: ordained, non-ordained, local and national – and we hope you will be inspired by each and every one.

“Each month’s story will also have an accompanying discernment resource - to encourage your own contemplation and questioning, and the invitation to speak with others about your unfolding story. The call to service for any Christian is never static, and the Spirit is always moving and shaping how we might be called in this time and place.

“The recruitment team recognise that, in the personal stories of those who explore a call to the recognised ministries, it is

often a journey of many steps - and one that comes with surprises too. Not everyone is called to the recognised ministries, but in talking about ministry, we can openly encourage discernment in the widest sense.

“We are always talking about ministry in the recruitment team, and we want to normalise those discussions for all who seek to serve. God is still calling, and let’s not be shy about talking about it!”

The first Talking Ministry feature will be published later this month on the Church of Scotland website and then shared across Facebook and Twitter.

Children ‘need education about gambling perils’

The harm caused by problem gambling should feature in Northern Ireland’s school curriculum, public health experts said.

The impact of advertising on children should be properly assessed, clinicians from the Faculty of Public Health warned.

Recovering addict Philip McGuigan lost more than £100,000.

The Sinn Fein Assembly Member said: “It is impacting children at a much younger age and in bigger and bigger quantities and it needs tackled otherwise we are going to have a growing epidemic of problem gambling among young people.”



Psychological distress, the breakdown of relationships and bruised finances can also result from placing wagers, the Faculty said in a submission to the Stormont department examining future regulation.

The charity represents large numbers of public health professionals, including in Northern Ireland.

It added: “The review of the gambling legislation should take a multi-department approach in minimising potential harm and we would support the introduction of gambling education in the Northern Ireland schools curriculum, an assessment of the impact of advertising on children and young people, (and) further research into the impact and accessibility of online gambling and gaming platforms.”

It also called for a UK gambling strategy to reduce the harm caused to families, children and young people.

It followed overwhelming public support for creation of a regulatory body, official documents show.

January 2, 2021

Mr McGuigan said: “Gambling now in the era of digital technology is reaching children at a much younger age.

“You can gamble on the iPhone, iPad, gaming companies are now actively targeting young children and initiating them into gambling practices.”

In the Republic, gambling among teenagers has more than doubled in the last four years, a study found.

Mr McGuigan said that means 1,200 people aged 15 and 16 are problem gamblers.



The Faculty said: “Harm from gambling can be experienced at the individual, social and community/societal level.

“This may take the shape of relationship breakdown, interpersonal conflict, emotional/psychological distress, health, and financial impacts.”

It responded to a consultation on the future of the gambling industry held by the Communities Department.

The establishment of casinos was backed by more than three-fifths of those canvassed and a majority believe restrictions on bookmakers’ opening hours should be relaxed, the department’s report said.

Nine in 10 support creating a regulatory body for gambling.

Almost all those questioned (97%) agree that the industry should help fund research, education and treatment of problem gamblers.

More than two-thirds (68%) agree the law should be amended to remove the £1 stake limit on society lotteries.

The Church of Ireland expressed “deep concerns” about increasing the volumes of money involved with gambling machines.

It added: “As such we would like to see no increase in stakes and specifically no ability to use debit/credit cards, apps or other mobile payment systems for these machines.”

The Methodist Church in Ireland said there should be no contactless payments as a direct form of payment for gaming machines.

January 2, 2021

The Betting and Gaming Council, which represents the industry, said: “Gaming machines in betting shops in Northern Ireland and Great Britain have the highest safer gambling measures on any gaming machines in the world.

“Our members’ machines enable customers to set time and spend limits and provide regular safer gambling messaging.”

It warned against “duplication” of regulatory requirements which would place a further financial burden upon operators but recognised the need to update the rules.

The 4 main themes people researched in the Bible in 2020

Bible Gateway has revealed the four main themes that people engaged with on its site this year.

The US site allows users to read, search, study, compare, and share the Bible in more than 200 versions and more than 70 languages.

In 2020, it found that people were searching for topics relating to the unpredictable year that 2020 was.

Bible Gateway said searches in each of the four areas occurred at least ten times more in 2020 than last year.

1. Social

Societal-related searches soared in May after the death of George Floyd. Anti-racism protests sparked across the world demanding justice after a video showed a white police officer knelt on Floyd’s neck for several minutes.

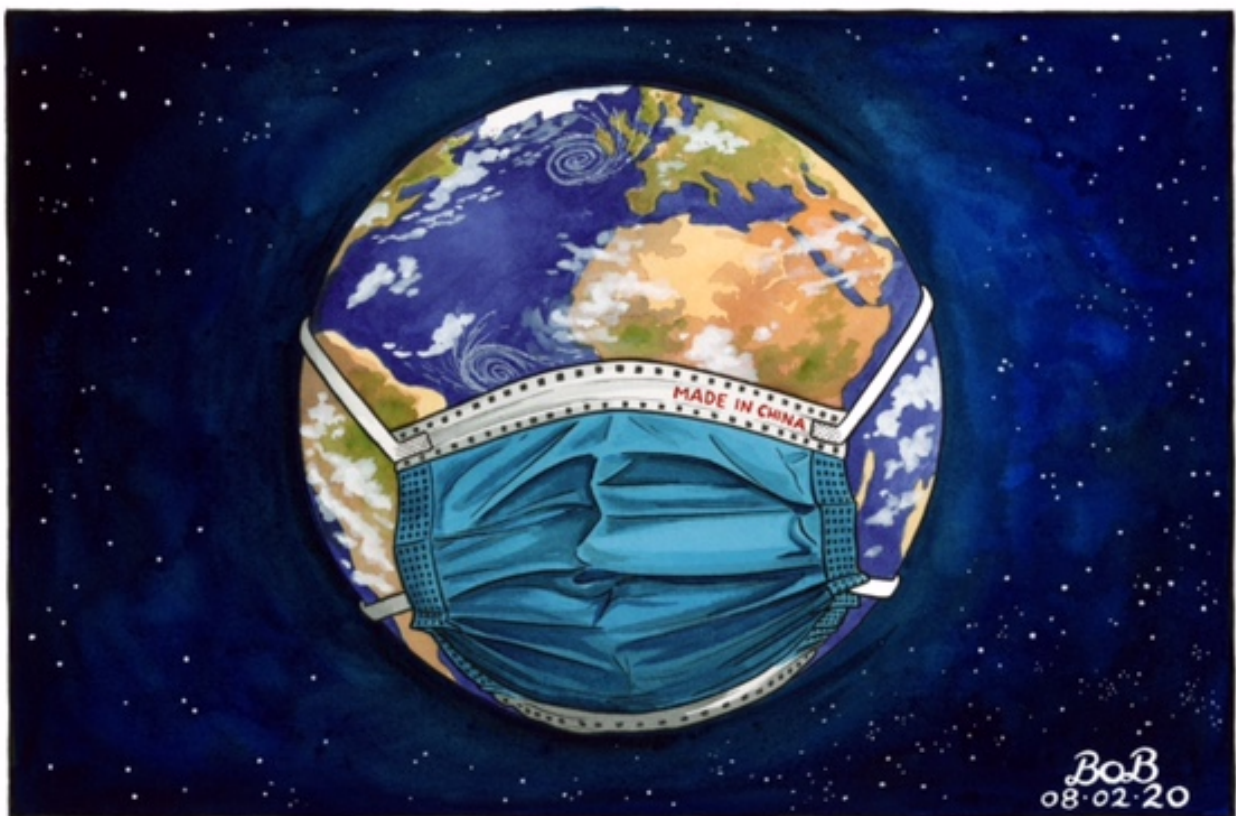
January 2, 2021

Bible search terms included such subjects as racism, justice, equality, and oppression.

Notable Bible verse results included Proverbs 21:15: “When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers” and Isaiah 1:17: “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow”.

2. Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic sparked several concerns and questions about pandemics. It was the second most searched theme on Bible Gateway. Key topics associated with it include disease, pestilence, and plague. More than 1.7 million people around the world have died so far from the virus.



Notable verse results included Exodus 23:25: “Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you” and Jeremiah 33:6: “Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security”.

3. Political

The US presidential election caused people to search political themes in 2020. The election between now President-elect Joe Biden and President Donald Trump was full of controversy, even after the results were announced. Main topics people searched for included praying for government and obeying government authority.

Bible verse results included Timothy 2:1-2: “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” and Romans 13:1: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God”.

4. End times

Bible Gateway said all the tumultuous events linked to 2020 triggered more interest in the end times. People were curious about how current events related to Bible prophecies. For example, many Christians discussed whether the Covid-19 vaccine could be the mark of the beast. Key search topics included signs of the end times and end of the world.

Key verse results included 2 Timothy 3:1-5 : “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people” and Matthew 24:36: “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”.

The long read

J. I. Packer, ‘Knowing God’ Author

James Innell Packer, better known to many as J. I. Packer, was one of the most famous and influential evangelical leaders of our time. He died Friday, July 17, at age 93. He was one of the most influential Christians of his time.

J. I. Packer was born in a village outside of Gloucester, England, on July 22, 1926. He came from humble stock, being born into a family that he called lower middle class. The religious climate at home and church was that of nominal Anglicanism rather than evangelical belief in Christ as Saviour (something that Packer was not taught in his home church)...

... Although Packer was a serious student pursuing a classics degree, the heartbeat of his life at Oxford was spiritual. It was at Oxford that Packer first heard lectures from C. S. Lewis, and though they were never personally acquainted, Lewis would exert a powerful influence on Packer’s life and work. When Packer left Oxford with his



doctorate on Richard Baxter in 1952, he did not immediately begin his academic career but spent a three-year term as a parish minister in suburban Birmingham.

Packer had a varied professional life. He spent the first half of his career in England before moving to Canada for the second half. In England, Packer held various teaching posts at theological colleges in Bristol, during which he had a decade-long interlude as warden (director) of Latimer House in Oxford, a clearinghouse for evangelical interests in the Church of England. In that role, Packer was one of the three most influential evangelical leaders in England (along with John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones). Packer's move to Regent College in Vancouver in 1979 shocked the evangelical world but enlarged Packer's influence for the rest of his life.

Read more at -

[[] <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/july/j-i-packer-died-evangelical-theologian-knowing-god.html>]



Pointers for prayer

Today we pray for the UK's new financial commitments in 2021. The recent Spending Review included the aid budget being slashed to just 0.5% of GNI and didn't commit to a permanent £20 uplift in Universal Credit.

Today we pray for people who will be homeless in 2021. As we look towards the new year, people experiencing homelessness will once again be faced with a new set of distinct challenges.

Today we pray for COP26. The global climate conference, rescheduled from 2020, will be taking place in Glasgow in 2021. We pray for ambition and action from world leaders on climate change, and pray that those already affected by climate chaos would be kept safe.

January 2, 2021

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph & Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this Christmas and the blessing of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit be with you. Amen

Almighty God, you make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our judge. Amen.

Today we pray for the transformation which Jesus brings. This Christmas, we remember the coming of Jesus to our world, and the promise of hope which that brings with it.

Today we pray for those facing redundancy at present. This year, record numbers of people were made redundant during lockdowns and waves of the coronavirus, as Government support changed.

Speaking to the soul

The shepherds “hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished.”

Luke 2:16-18 NLT

Just imagine if this was happening now. Bethlehem would be swamped with news reporters and film crews, and all the shepherds would have microphones thrust in front of them.

The world would be hanging on their every word and the details of their amazing story would have been cross examined with forensic care. As it is, we have to rely on Dr Luke who sums up the whole story in just a few dramatic words. In short, the shepherds confirm that the words of the angels about Jesus' birth were absolutely true and they then went out to tell everyone the astonishing story.

Good news cannot be hidden. I always love watching new Christians. You rarely need to tell them that it is good to share your story with other people, because it's so obvious. What else would they do? I remember Jimmy becoming a Christian. His life had been turned upside down by Christ and so, obviously, he sat down at the lunch table at work the next day and told everyone. A crowd formed because it was such a gripping story and within a short time one of his work mates decided to follow Jimmy's example and follow Jesus for himself.

If you have become a Christian recently that's wonderful, and I'm sure you will be keen to share your story. People will love to hear what you've experienced. But for many of us it is a long time since we became Christians. By all means talk about how you became a Christian but often it is more powerful to share what God has done in your life recently. Speak of the peace that God gave you when you faced a recent bereavement or disappointment, or speak of an answer to prayer. Like the shepherds we need to share what we have recently seen and heard.

QUESTION

What good news would you like to share?

January 2, 2021

PRAYER

Lord, thank you that the shepherds were so keen to share what they had experienced. Give us a similar enthusiasm to share your good news.

