Welby Wisdom

Grace Davis, Producer of Torch’s Reflections Radio, recently spoke with Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby about his new book and the ways he believes the church needs to respond to disability.

Grace Regarding your book Dethroning Mammon, what inspired you to write about this subject and why do you feel it’s timely in the world today?

Justin It’s been a question that’s been on my mind since I was working in the oil industry more than 30 years ago and just trying to struggle with the way in which everything in our economy and society seems to come back to what you can measure, what you can see, what you can touch. To materialism and to money, which in the New Testament Jesus often refers to as ‘mammon’. And I was really writing it to myself: what do I do about it?

Grace So it’s a sort of self-exploration?

Justin It’s a self-exploration but I think one of the things… I was very influenced by a book I read a couple of years back, 18 months back, by a guy called Adair Turner who used to run the Financial Services Agency before it changed - at the time of the crash in 2008. He wrote a book called Between Debt and the Devil and it’s a very good book, it’s an economics book – a spiritual, a Christian book – but in it what he’s saying is that so many of the problems we’ve been facing since 2008 arose from 1992 to 2008 when almost everything that happened in our economy was based around trying to increase wealth and that in the end if you serve mammon, mammon betrays you. Therefore, with consumer debt rising again and people thinking consumers need to spend more and the only way they can in the present circumstance is by borrowing more, it seemed timely to write about the influence that has on our society.

Grace Torch Trust has transcribed your book into accessible formats: braille, large print and audio for people with sight loss. What are your thoughts on the importance of literature that is accessible to those people?

Justin Well first of all thank you very much to Torch Trust for doing that, I think that’s an incredible thing to do. I can think of a lot of better books...
you could have done it to, but there we are: you’ve probably done that! I think the key thing is that we communicate so much through literature that not to do what you do is to say to people with sight loss and visual impairment ‘You don’t count. You’re not one of us. You’re a subset. We’ll do things to you not with you.’ And I think it’s just utterly demeaning and completely wrong.

Grace Along that line, we often find people with sight loss or other disabilities that feel church just doesn’t work for them or doesn’t really make them welcome. What do you think might motivate a church to respond to this?

Justin Meeting people. Being told in clear ideally gentle terms, but if you can’t be gentle just be clear. We have the most incredible man in the Church of England called John Spence who’s one of the lay leaders of the church, who lost his sight in his fifties, and he doesn’t make anything of it, he just gets on with it like so many visually impaired people. He gets really cross if you say ‘well you’re incredibly brave’ or something like that. ‘No,’ he says ‘I’m just me’. Meeting him has changed all of us because he’s made us be aware of our need not to be unfriendly, unwelcoming, frightened – whatever – but just to get on and treat people as we should treat every person: to love them, to pray with them and for them, to argue with them, to disagree with them, to agree with them. Just to say ‘you are fully human and you have exactly the same human dignity as every other human being and we are really, really sorry when we treat you in any other way’ – which we do too easily.

Grace What would you feel is the message the Gospel has for people who are living with disabilities?

Justin Well the key message of the Gospel is found in the third chapter of John’s Gospel, verse 16: ‘For God so loved the world’, which in John means everybody, ‘that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. And that applies… you don’t ‘qualify’ for that – well you do qualify, you qualify for that by being a human being. So that’s the key message. And then in particular with reference to people with disabilities: I’m a huge fan of Jean Vanier, who says ‘The people who are considered by the world to be weak are often the ones who have the most to teach those who consider themselves to be strong’. The world’s got it wrong in considering people with disability to be weak, and considering people without disability to be strong. It’s teaching us about our humanity that we’re loved by God in Christ and that we are equally valuable. Jean Vanier’s taught me a lot about that, he’s taught a lot of people, changed the whole approach to disability, within the church, of people who know him.

Grace The book deals with Lent and the run up to Easter, so what do you think is the big message of Easter for us today, in today’s world?

Justin Oh it’s, in one sense it’s what it’s always been: that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, he is alive today and you can know him and he knows you. I think for the world today, in a world that seems obsessed with its own means of control, of controlling this and controlling that, and that thinks our fate is in our own hands, it is that the event of the resurrection, of Jesus rising from the dead, didn’t just change the outcome of things, it completely changed all the rules of the cosmos so that God reigns, not death.

Grace Brilliant. Thank you very much.

Justin Well thank you very much indeed, it’s wonderful to talk to you and I’m very, very grateful for your time. And may God bless your clients and you.
"Yes, well she goes to a Torch Group now. She said to me that she is out and about in a way that she never would have been if not for Torch."

"I know, the lady I’m befriending hasn’t got time to meet me anymore, she is so busy!"

The ladies laugh together, and then sip their tea in unison.

"I still keep in touch with my client by phone now as they are so much more confident."

I scribble furiously into my already full notebook. Capturing the conversation of *Journeying With* volunteers in Exmouth, reflecting on their clients and discussing new referrals (people who have been recommended to Torch by sight loss professionals), I am struck by the compassion and professionalism of the volunteers as they carefully consider each client and make suggestions to each other. We conclude with prayer: for each other, for clients, for Torch as a whole and for me. I am deeply moved.

Janet Eardley (Area Presence Developer in the South) and I move swiftly on to our next appointment at Devon Insight. This resource centre is well-equipped with gadgets and products for those living with a visual impairment. Those who visit the centre receive advice, information and can try out the different equipment. The MegaVoice hand-held audio Bible (NIV read by David Suchet), provided and sold by Torch, sits neatly amongst devices such as big-button telephones, speaking scales and liquid level indicators. Janet meets with the Chief Executive Officer and community officer sharing news about Torch products and services.

Back at base I am thrilled as I receive another response to my feedback form. Regional coordinators reflect on challenges and encouragements, helping me to consider how we might develop our ministry.

"Raise awareness that Torch is so much more than the local group."

"Write an article outlining the possibilities in Torch publications and the national Christian press."

"The most important thing is the one-to-one contact."

As I search our client database for information on our *TorchTalk* Groups I notice it is 9:00am and dash downstairs for our daily prayer time. Trev leads our singing and I am welcomed back ‘from my travels’. I share stories from the North East fellowship rally, meetings with other Christian organisations, learning from the Sight Loss Awareness training and information from a regional UK Vision Strategy workshop.

Together we thank God for the ministry of Torch and how this is affecting the lives of those experiencing sight loss. We recognise the commitment of the Torch community and the opportunities that God is providing with sight loss professionals. Privately I ask God for guidance as I prepare for the coming months. I reflect on all my experiences, learning and the multitude of questions I have asked. It is an exciting time for building on the newer Presence activities and formulating our Christian response to those experiencing sight loss. Now the Presence team will work together to increase the number of befriending schemes, to provide consultancy and support for churches, to work closely with sight loss professionals, to build local networks of Torch partnered services and develop relationships with national partners.

In my first few months at Torch I have been so blessed to have witnessed what Torch is doing and as I shared with Trustees, I believe that Torch is working to build God’s Kingdom here on earth. Demonstrating God’s love for us all through our actions and words, through everything we do at Torch.
Torch has made my life better

Gordon Temple, Torch CEO, reports on a recent visit to Malawi.

Two boys with albinism enjoying a large print Bible from Torch

I was privileged to spend the latter half of March in Malawi exploring once again Torch’s engagement with blind and partially sighted people in that far-off place. In the company of Michael and Janet Stafford, Torch’s International Leader, we not only spent time at the Torch braille production unit in Blantyre suburbs but also went out and about to visit Fellowship Groups, meeting hundreds of blind people of all ages.

The distance between Britain and Malawi is almost 10,000 kilometres, experienced through almost twelve hours in the air. But in other ways it is a million miles away. Britain is counted among the world’s wealthiest nations, Malawi is ranked among the very poorest. A young woman pumping water from a village bore hole – a relatively recent innovation in that rural community – asked me ‘Do you have one of these in your village?’ A man asked, ‘When you have a bad harvest in England do you go hungry like we do?’

With our focus on blind people, Torch has been drawn to the most deprived communities, with blind and other disabled people often the poorest within those communities. We are involved directly with some of the most impoverished individuals living today.

We joined ‘an Overnight’ – an all-night session of praise and worship – in the southern Shire Valley district – to which came some 400 blind people from 17 Fellowship Groups scattered across that district and from over the border with Mozambique. What else would bring so many blind people together anywhere in the world? Yet it happened in one of the very poorest places on the planet and with the object of worshiping the Lord!

With a meat stew for their evening meal and a hearty breakfast they were well fed for a spiritual feast of singing, prayer and preaching running all through the night – even through a heavy rain storm! Each went away bearing a parcel of aid shipped previously from the UK. Working here with local partner Redemption Village Ministries, our ministry here is practical as well as spiritual.

The blind led the blind! … and the sighted! The programme was led by three blind men working from a sheet of hand-embossed braille. Earlier in the trip we had visited four Torch Fellowship Groups, every one of them led by a committee largely comprising blind people with the support of committed local sighted people.

Blind people spoke often of how Torch had helped them. A common theme expressed was: ‘We have been oppressed but Torch has given us dignity, has empowered us’. Blind men who are now leading churches said how they have been able to become pastors because Torch has helped.

One blind pastor spoke passionately at ‘the Overnight’ mentioning particularly the benefit he had found from the MegaVoice audio Bible Torch had provided:

‘I want to thank God for what he has done for us. Thank the Lord in heaven for mum Janet and Pastor Mbewe and the team who arranged such a gathering as this for us. Thanking God for all we have received… money for food… clothes to wear…. and most of all the Word of God we have heard and received. For all this God should be glorified. As for me I need to thank God. I wasn’t knowing God but he brought me to himself. He has done a wonderful thing for me. As of now I am a pastor and have 110 members in my congregation. How I thank God in heaven because a few years ago I was provided with a MegaVoice. This changed my life as I don’t read braille having gone blind in midlife. This helps my spiritual life and as I serve God.’

Stanford Nakutho Dailesi (pictured opposite, lower right), a blind school teacher, wrote a poem about Torch in English braille and it is reproduced here:
Torch Trust:
The True Light for the Blind

Having been in total darkness
Living without hope for so long
With no hand to touch for a rescue
Torch Trust shines upon the blind

When Torch Trust touched me at first
I saw some people just like trees
But when it touched me repeatedly
I can see everything clear clear

The true light Torch Trust produces
Make me testify with joyful tears
Your Bibles during the church service I can read
Your song books with joy I can lead the congregation

Your booklets and magazine have sharpened my spiritual life
The basic needs you provide
Make me look exemplary and admirable
Above all, through your services
Torch Trust,
I have experienced the love of Christ
Surely, Torch Trust is the true light for the blind.

Of course these remarks are made with a recognition of gratitude to God and an understanding that Torch’s work is done in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God.

Torch’s work in Malawi has been sustained for almost 30 years. That faithful commitment in God’s service has had a deep and widespread impact on the lives of blind people and nurtured the relationships that set the foundation for its future growth and development.

Just as in the UK there’s a breadth to Torch’s work in Malawi. That’s because the distinctively Christian activities we undertake are shaped in response to the needs of the people we are here to serve. Our response is holistic: spiritual, emotional and physical.

At Torch House, on the outskirts of the southern city of Blantyre, there’s the braille press, producing braille Bible volumes and a small range of other Christian literature in nine African languages plus some in Easy English. This unit serves the region. The braille produced is shipped to other African countries, recently including Nigeria and Zambia.

From Torch House a network of Torch Fellowship Groups, meeting mostly in poor rural communities, is supported and encouraged through a programme of regular visits. These groups meet at least monthly under local leadership, often by capable blind Christians. They provide encouragement to blind people and those losing sight, and an opportunity for blind people to exercise their God-given gifting. Braille, large print and audio Bible portions and Christian readings are distributed through the groups.

Over recent years Torch’s work has been blessed and strengthened through a very remarkable partnership. Redemption Village Ministries founder Lapson Mbewe, who lives in the poor Lower Shire district, had his own sense of God’s call to respond to the needs of blind people in the communities around him. RVM works side by side in fellowship with Torch Malawi in the running of local Fellowship Groups and works with Torch’s Janet Stafford in the distribution of the aid sent by containers. Lapson reports that today RVM supports 600 blind people through 16 Fellowship Groups in Malawi and a further 450 blind people through another 12 Groups in neighbouring Mozambique.

With this direct contact with blind and partially sighted people where they live we are confronted with the physical needs, even the survival needs, of such very vulnerable people. On an annual basis and under Janet’s leadership, containers of aid have been packed and sent from the UK to Malawi for distribution to blind people and their families. To find out more about this see our newsletter International news for Praise and Prayer.

Your gifts are used to support the various facets of Torch’s work as set out above. This work is largely funded through the specific gifts made which Torch receives as restricted funds to be used exclusively in connection with this ministry.

www.torchtrust.org
Journeying With expands across the UK

Torch is delighted to announce 3 new Journeying With schemes, in partnership with Omagh Church in Northern Ireland, Copplestone Methodist Church and Pinhoe Rd Baptist Church, both in Exeter. Each church has Torch-trained volunteers who are now able to befriend those experiencing sight loss in their local area.

Journeying With schemes connect volunteers to clients for a period of six months. During this time the volunteer will have regular contact with their client – which could mean meeting at home, going out and about or chatting over the phone. Volunteers are fully trained in visual awareness, the impact of sight loss, listening skills and safeguarding. Volunteers are able to offer prayer, spiritual encouragement and signpost clients to local and national support networks.

If you think you or someone you know would benefit from Journeying With befriending, please do contact Client Services on 01858 438260.

If there is not a local Journeying With befriending scheme near you we are able to offer Journeying With by Phone, a service giving the same friendship, encouragement and support, all conveniently on the end of the phone.

We are always keen to partner with churches, if your church would like to get involved please contact us. We will provide all the training, materials, links to sight loss professionals and plenty of support. Alternatively you may already have befriending in your church and be keen to better support those who are losing their sight. Torch can offer training and support to enhance what you are already offering.

Take a break!

Don’t miss out on the holidays at the Torch Holiday and Retreat Centre this year. Specially tailored for people with sight loss, the centre is situated on the edge of the South Downs National Park and offers good food, comfortable surroundings, fellowship and fun. We have spaces left on the following holidays, so don’t delay, book now!

### 4th-9th September
**Walking Week**
Enjoy the outdoors and explore the South Downs National Park. This is an active holiday requiring a good level of fitness and involving walks of about 8 miles a day.

### 19th-22nd September
**Moving Forward**
To help and support those experiencing sight loss and their family and carers.

### 25th-29th September
**Hustpierpoint Festival**
Linking with the lively village festival for a week of music, history and interesting speakers, plus cooking demonstrations with a chance to eat what is cooked!

### 30th October-3rd November
**The Good Book Week**
Do you enjoy reading and discussion? Then this is the holiday for you. An opportunity to read and discuss Christian literature, theatre and films with like-minded people.

### 6th-10th October
**Marilyn Baker Ministries**
A refreshing time of spiritual uplift from Tracy and Marilyn, in word and song. This holiday lends itself to making new friends and meeting old ones, not just for people with sight loss.

### 4th-8th December
**Joy to the World**
A prelude to Christmas with fun, food and fellowship, not forgetting what Christmas is really all about.
Over the last year, and especially the last few months, Torch has operated through a period of great financial strain. Donation income drifted downwards during 2016 leaving Torch with very little cash with which to pay staff and bills. In a remarkable way staff cooperated in bringing about a reduction in payroll costs and we are thankful to God for a quite remarkable boost to donations over the Christmas period and into the New Year.

We are just in the process of filing our formal Report and Accounts for the year ended 30th September 2016 and are happy to supply a copy on request. They are a testimony to God’s provision for all that was essential.

Torch trusts God for the resources to continue and to develop the work we believe he has given us to do and once again we can confirm his faithfulness. Torch has been greatly blessed over the years. Our accounts show this in the value attributed to the two fine buildings the charity owns: Torch House and Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre. But equally they reveal that we operate with virtually no cash in reserve. Indeed we draw on an overdraft facility to cope with the day-to-day ups and downs. We earnestly pray for a sustained increase in donation and legacy support.

Regular and committed donations are a financial bedrock to the work. If you are among those who make Standing Order or Direct Debit donations I want to thank you greatly. Such regular donations are the only source of income upon which Torch can base any budgeting – just about everything else is unknown until it arrives.

If you would like to know more about supporting Torch on a regular basis please enquire using the form on the reverse of the mailing slip. The whole ministry relies on God’s timely provision made largely through the faithfulness and responsiveness of his servants.

If you give to the work of Torch Trust and are a tax payer you are likely to be able to Gift Aid your donations. This adds 25% to the value of your donation. If you want to find out more or request a Gift Aid declaration then please contact us on 01858 438260.

Do feel free to email or call me or Michael Heaney (Chief Operating Officer) – we’ll always be happy to talk in more detail about Torch finances.

Friendship on the phone

TorchTalk aims to provide Christian friendship, support, encouragement and fun to people with sight loss via telephone friendship groups. We have recently launched a new group for people who are Scottish or who live in Scotland. We also have a monthly Skype group. For more information speak to Jan Turner on 01858 438260 or jant@torchtrust.org

www.torchtrust.org
Something to listen to

Have you heard Torch’s very own radio show? Broadcast nationally on two stations and available globally online, Reflections is the show that brings faith and disability in today’s world to the forefront.

Renowned blind singer-songwriter and chair of Torch Trust Marilyn Baker presents the show every Sunday, guiding us through a wide range of topics, guests, readings, songs and more! Recent shows include interviews with Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury (featured on the front page), and Mike Brace, Paralympic skier!

There are plenty of ways to listen to the show so read on to find the one for you:

**RNIB Connect**
Sunday mornings just after the 9 am news
Available at rnibconnect.org or Freeview channel 730

**Premier Christian Radio**
Sunday afternoons at 4 pm
Available at premierradio.org or Freeview channel 725

**Premier’s listen again facility**
A month after broadcast
With Premier’s listen again, you can hear a show again for up to a month after broadcast. visit torchtrust.org/radio to find the link for the week you want

**SoundCloud and iTunes**
As a monthly podcast
Just search for Reflections from Torch Trust

**Omnibus CD**
Sign up monthly
Or if you have sight loss you can sign up for our monthly CD which is completely free to receive

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Day of Prayer

Torch’s annual Day of Prayer will be held on **Wednesday 7th June**. Please do join us in praying wherever you are for the diverse ministries of Torch and God’s provision to continue to fulfil our range of work.

Open Day & Thanksgiving Celebration

This year the annual Torch Open Day and Thanksgiving Celebration will be held at Torch House in Market Harborough on **Saturday 16th September**, from 2pm until 5pm. Come along and celebrate with us, find out more about the work of Torch, join in with our Service of Thanksgiving and enjoy our hospitality!

Keep in touch

You can stay up to date with what’s happening at Torch by following us on Facebook and Twitter. Just search for Torch Trust. We love to hear from you – and don’t forget you can also contact us by calling **01858 438260** or emailing info@torchtrust.org

Work with Torch

Would you like to work with Torch as a staff member or volunteer? To see an up-to-date list of vacancies visit torchtrust.org/vacancies