

# United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

## Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

### Year A –Lent / Easter / Pentecost Ascension

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### Lent 1, Year A 10 February 2008

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Some of you have heard this before

None of the characters in the Garden of Eden story comes off very well IMHO

- YHWH
- Eve
- Adam garden shed
- Serpent

sin of Adam, so-called Fall: covering up our real selves.

- pretending to be what we are not.
- boasting, showing off – exactly what JC refused to do at his temptations. He was invited to ...

Lent is about giving up, some say

- not silly stuff
- but giving up what we don't need

we sure don't need pretence and hypocrisy.

The layers we don't need, persona, masks

On Friday I had the privilege of officiating at the most difficult funeral I have yet taken.

- death of a young mother
- grieving husband and two daughters, one aged 7 or so, to say nothing of the rest of the family.
- truly agonising to stand there, three immensely courageous people, one clutching a large teddy bear, weep and grieve during the service.

We were very raw, utterly exposed, nothing covering our tender, true, selves. Vulnerable, without coverings,

They seemed very close to God at that service

no barrier there for God to have to get through.

We have no need of masks, of figleaves. I was raw and exposed too on Friday.

- rest of the day difficult to get through.

- wanted to withdraw into a cave, as Jesus did.
- The trouble is that in recovery I started to put on again masks of hardness and cynicism.

It really is very difficult. But we need to trust in God.

Laying down what we don't need implies that we have examined ourselves, and made some decisions about ourselves, recognising our own gifts and knowing our own faults and failings. And as we are honest about our failings, we are sorry for them. And as we are sorry for them, we try our best to work against them; from sin to holiness. This is **repentance**.

Trusting in God is **believing**. We don't claim to know, we claim to believe. So trust God.

**And God is love.** This simple truth we never fully grasp because we try and complicate it and see it through the layers that we cover ourselves with. But it is the Gospel.

Repent, believe, Gospel. That's what Jesus said when he began his formal ministry '**Repent and believe in the Gospel**'.

**Lay down what you don't need, and go on your way lighter. My yoke is easy and my burden light.**

## Lent 1, Year A 10 February 2008

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

None of the characters in the Garden of Eden story comes off very well.

- YHWH is irrational, tetchy and unreasonable
- Eve is devious
- And Adam is nowhere to be found. Where is he? Recovering from Surgery? In his garden shed, hiding from the wife, the first henpecked husband?
- The serpent comes off best, I think, doing what serpents do.

The sin of Adam, the so-called Fall has nothing to do with genitals or scrumping apples. It is covering up, certainly, but covering up our real selves. It is wanting to be other than what we are. It is pretending to be what we are not. It is boasting, showing off – exactly what Jesus refused to do when he was tempted in the desert.

These layers we put on are masks, Latin *persona*, and because they cover us up they stop others seeing our beauty, and they stop us from seeing clearly, like distorting lenses in front of our eyes, like the shards of glass the Snow Queen injected into little Kay.

Lent is about giving up, some say.

- don't give up silly stuff like chocolate, or butter, and I've no intention of giving up gin
- but giving up what we don't need any more. Give up stuff that tethers us, stuff that ties us down, holds us back, stops our flying.

Let go of the layers we don't need, the *persona(e)*, the masks. Letting go of these unwanted attachments will propel us towards detachment, such as Jesus recommended: detachment from possessions, from family ties, the better to allow the divine core within to flower. The kingdom of God is within you. Open minded like children, listening like children, risk-taking like children. Childlikeness. Detachment, open mindedness. All disease comes from over-attachments: hatred, closed mindedness. This is Jesus' teaching. This is Buddhist.

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- truly agonising to stand there, three immensely courageous people, one clutching a large teddy bear, weep and grieve during the service.

We were very raw, utterly exposed, nothing covering our tender, true, selves. Vulnerable, without coverings, very close to God. There was no barrier there for God to have to get through. We have no need of masks, of figleaves. I was raw and exposed too on Friday.

- the rest of the day difficult to get through.
- I wanted to withdraw into a cave, as Jesus did.
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Repent, believe, Gospel. That's what Jesus said when he began his formal ministry '**Repent and believe in the Gospel**'.

**Lay down what you don't need, and go on your way lighter. My yoke is easy and my burden light. This does not mean that Jesus asks us to pick up an extra burden. It means that when we have shed what we don't want, as Jesus instructs, we will find our burden is indeed light.**

## Lent 3 24 February 2008,

Matins Brassington, HC Idridgehay

**Exodus 17:1-7.** water from rock

**Psalm 95.** *Venite*: refers to Exodus event

**Romans 5:1-11.** Since we are justified by faith, endurance produces character, character produces hope, hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

**John 4:5-42.** Samaritan woman at the well.

**Water** is a common theme in today's readings

In the OT lesson, in the Venite, in Psalm 1 (Brass only) – poured in Romans

- Common reference in many psalms
- can see why so important in the middle east
- Water of wisdom, Rehydrating the parched soul, Like as the hart
- Water of life: it makes things grow, it is about three quarters of body weight
- can see why so important in biology. dehydration. Le milieu intérieur – le milieu divin
- Refreshing the parts other beers do not reach. It heals (Ezekiel, Psalm 23, Revelation).

**And water is what the Gospel is about.**

- longest conversation in the Gospels. The woman argues with Jesus.
- encounter between a physically thirsty Christ with the spiritually thirsty Samaritan woman.

### Messages

- Christ has a message for all, even those, especially those, who argue with him.
- Christ meets us where we are. The meeting at the well was a "chance encounter" for the woman, but we have the chance to encounter God anytime, anywhere – like the Martini ads.
- Christ accepts us as we are. Jesus didn't come scolding! He didn't even bring up the woman's living situation until late in the conversation. Even his disciples were surprised to see him talking to a woman - a Samaritan woman - in the heat of the day.
- Christ has a gift for anyone who will receive it. "If you knew who I was, you would ask for living water." (Water of life -- the kind of water Mary discovered.)
- The only barrier is not recognising him.
  - Samaritan women recognised him.

- Mary Mag recognised him.
- An Inspector Calls.
- Do we? Where is Christ? Who is Christ?
- People who quietly get on with their Christian lives, sustaining others.
- Each of us made a Christ at baptism. Our job, not someone else's. With perseverance in the epistle.

The Samaritan woman told her friends and neighbours, and they believed. How can we get the message across to our friends and neighbours? What is the message that we want to get across, and is it worth the trouble? Presumably we think so.

Now there's another way of looking at the exchange, and that is as a conversation between two parts of ourselves. The God within seeking a conversation with the self-deceiving part of ourselves.

Deliver us from evil ....

The God within begging us for a conversation.

### Lent 3 - Evensong WW 24 February 2008

Psalm 40 Expectans expectavi

Joshua 1:1-9

Ephesians 6:10-20

Paul's passage about the armour of God is so famous that it was rather a heartsink moment when I saw that it had come my way. My mind went back to a sermon I preached here one morning about peace and the confusing messages that HS gives about it.

Clearly Paul expects his audience to be entirely familiar with the costume of warfare, and the notion of warfare, and I discovered yesterday that this can be no surprise. Paul was writing to his mates in Ephesus, now southern Turkey, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Then Greece, of course, one of the centres of Greek philosophy. Ephesus's most famous philosopher 500 years earlier was Heraclitus, whose writings, a bit like Paul's have come to us only as fragments (we don't know what provoked Paul to write these letters).

Logos: the principle underlying all things, the ordering principle of the world, the laws of nature, natural science perhaps

Heraclitus wrote

- Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one.
- Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos ...

Now, bearing in mind that logos can be translated as 'word', listen to this:

- In the beginning was logos, and logos was with God, and logos was God. Logos was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him was not anything made that was made.

Is it a coincidence that many scholars believe John's gospel was written in Ephesus? The connexion is startling to me: Heraclitus of Ephesus and logos; John's Gospel, probably written in Ephesus, and logos.

What has all this to do with the armour of God? Nothing. Or has it .....

You know how important local heroes are. Brian Clough in Derby, Florence Nightingale, Alan Bates in Bradbourne, Heraclitus in Ephesus, and it wouldn't surprise me if Paul knew all about Heraclitus, and knew that his readers would know all about Heraclitus. So now let's consider the armour of God, and warfare once again in the light of what Heraclitus wrote about war.

Heraclitus views strife or conflict as maintaining the world:

- war is the father of all things
- war is the father of all and king of all

- it is necessary to know that war (*polemos* – politics??) draws people together, and justice is strife and all living things come into being through strife and necessity

There is something there about fighting for justice.

War and killing feature much in Hebrew Scripture.

- In the Book of Deuteronomy we read: *Kill him. Be the first to stone him. And then let everyone else stone him too.* If we look a few verses back we understand who we must kill: *even your brother or your son or your daughter or the wife you love or your closest friend.* We are told we must be ready to kill the people closest to us.
- In Revelation Christ is described as a warrior: *Now repent, turn from your sin. Otherwise I will come to you soon and wage war against them with a sword that comes out of my mouth.*
- He is described as a warrior riding a white horse. *Out of His mouth came a sharp sword to strike the nations.*
- Christ is a warrior who is going to fight us and all nations for our sins. *His word has the power of a sword. This word will be a judge and fighter on the last day.*" (John 12:48)

War is indeed in our liturgy: Sabaoth, hosts, armies of God. Martial music. Dettingen and Utrecht Te Deum.

Maybe it's a different kind of warfare

- in Exodus 15:3,
  - Masoretic text: The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name
  - Septuagint: The Lord is crushing war.
- Isaiah 42:13
  - Masoretic text: The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man . . . like a man of war
  - Septuagint: The Lord God of hosts shall go forth, and crush the war
- Judith 9:7 and 16:3: God breaks the battles.

God is here the destroyer of war: God the destroyer, like Hindu Shiva, one of the Hindu trinity.

Jesus talks of peace. His words *peace be with you* remind us during the Liturgy that the condition of unity with God is peace with God. Jesus himself probably uttered these words as *Shalom aleichem*, and shalom in Hebrew means not simply a condition without war but being complete, being whole, a wholeness possible only in God. Healing, salvation. Wednesday night.

But maybe peace comes only with warfare, internal warfare, struggle, jihad.

Paul in tonight's letter, written while he was in chains, tells us to be ready for combat in order to achieve wholeness. We are called to inner peace - peace with God, peace with our brothers and sisters, peace with ourselves - and at the same time battle with the world because *the whole world lies in wickedness.* (1 John 5:19). Look at the public scandals, the mealy-mouthedness of those in power, the deception of the financiers and industrialists, the way each one of us deceives ourselves about ourselves and the truth is not in us.

I am more and more coming to the conclusion, however heretical it may be, that the Hebrew scholars who interpret *Deliver us from evil* to mean *deliver us from the evil part of ourselves* to be true. We must be at war, internal war, struggle against inner devils.

We need to go to war in order to clean out the stables. Lent, the time for a spiritual spring clean. This is what Paul's on about. And when we are finally let the God within expand to fill all our skins, then the militant will have been transformed into the triumphant. And our lights will shine out clear as the day, our faces radiant with that light.

Let us pray for the church militant, here on earth, and in our souls. When it has done its job, there will be no need for battle, warfare, struggle.

## Lent 4 Mothering - 2 March 2008

Elton, Middleton Euch

Exodus 2: 1-10

### **Colossians 3: 12-17**

### **John 19:25-27**

### **Exodus 2: 1-10**

Moses in the bulrushes

### **Colossians 3: 12-17**

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing, sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

### **John 19:25-27**

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Refreshment Sunday, Laetare be glad Sunday

Mother as nurturing new life  
the trouble we go to (Moses in the bulrushes)  
We all nurture things – jobs, other people, trainees

We do this for the new life of love (Coloss)

Then we have to let go, pain of parting (Gospel), but this enables glorious new life.  
Must not keep apron strings – mothering become smothering  
the pain of parting, but the joy of resurrection

Then the flowering of glorious new creation

Like Lancelot Andrewes: 3 births: incarnation, resurrection, Pentecost

## **2008 Easter Vigil Sermon, 22 March 2008**

Let us pray.

O Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, eternal Wisdom, inspire my words to illuminate the mystery of the Godhead for the minds of them that listen. Amen

Why not let the scriptures speak for themselves? What a story: the story of our salvation—we have been saved, we are being saved, we will be saved. Or liberated, or enlightened. Then there would be no need of a sermon, and maybe that would be right. But circumstances and Rector demand a sermon, and, if I may add a personal note, I count it a privilege to be here in the pulpit, for this is the first and last sermon I shall preach at a team event as Assistant Curate.

We remember at this time of year the events 2000 years ago that continue today and every day. And here's how.

We make mistakes, we leave undone those things that we ought to do, and we do those things that we ought not to do, knowingly and unknowingly—we sin if you want to use that word—and we need to come to terms with that, every time. The story of Jesus tells us that no matter what we humans

do to each other, and to ourselves, and to the world in which we live, if we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and if we do not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father, and if we *intend* to lead a new life following the commandments of God; if all this, we *will* obtain forgiveness of the same. We can pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start all over again. We have, of course to live with the consequences—but that's another matter. There's always hope for us if we acknowledge our right relationship with the God of loving-kindness. This is true humility: to know where we stand with God.

Yesterday we recalled a crucial (pardon the pun) stage in this salvation process.

- Some say that we are saved by the cross. I don't.
- Some say we are saved by the resurrection. I don't.
- I say we are saved by the whole process from creation through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension to the coming of the spirit at what I still like to call Whitsuntide, at which we are born again, and again.

### **Let's start at the very beginning**

Remember the reading from Proverbs you heard earlier? Wisdom as the lady, Sophia, contrasted with the prostitute, the whore of ignorance, the seductive devil. Divine lady wisdom as the pre-existent Christ, present alongside the creator at creation, the unformed shapeless stardust of which the universe is made. And if pre-existent Christ-wisdom is the stardust of the universe, Christ-wisdom is in every one of us.

Then comes the incarnation. Through Christ the cardinal point, cosmic history is concentrated for one brief moment into the Nativity. The old black and white universe taken into Mary's belly and transformed in her uterus into the Technicolor new covenant. Mary's womb, wider than the heavens, containing the whole of creation. As with any birth in which every baby is a culmination of everything that has ever happened before—parents and grandparents and all the forgotten generations. Past, present and future woven together.

In the words of Charles Wesley: 'Our God contracted to a span incomprehensibly made man.' And in the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict: 'When the eternal word assumed human existence at his Incarnation, he drew time into the sphere of eternity. Christ is the bridge between time and eternity ... In the Word incarnate the presence of eternity with time becomes bodily and concrete.'

Then came yesterday—the universe contracted down again into a bloody, black hole. But now, hope again as we wait for the resurrection. In the words of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, one of the fathers of Anglicanism: 'And now at Easter reborn. A brotherhood we grant was begin at Christmas by his birth, as upon that day, for "Lo, there was he born." But so was he also at Easter; born then too, and after a better manner born. His resurrection is a second birth, Easter a second Christmas when heaven is wedded to earth. And born yet again at Whitsuntide. The coming of the Spirit is the third birth.' The 're-incarnation' of Christ into each and every one of us.

All we have to do is accept this wonderful gift.

### **All these births lead me to biology—are you surprised?—to some talk of 'down there'!**

Think what birth requires: a process of gestation. A process of quiescence before the new creation bursts onto the scene. Pregnancy gives time for the egg to grow in the uterus, the potential for growth in an egg giving us the egg as a symbol of Easter. (Presumably the fecundity of rabbits gives us the Easter bunny.)

Last year, Gill presented us with an engaging image of this period between crucifixion and resurrection being like men at work on the roads, Severn-Trent it seems at the moment. Today, my image of the work going on inside the Godhead between crucifixion and resurrection is that of divine gestation, divine metamorphosis. In zoology, metamorphosis is associated with the caterpillar passing through a pupal stage in the chrysalis. The pupa, the chrysalis; an apparently inactive stage. A death of the old.

But then what happens: metamorphosis into the iridescence, the glory, the beauty of the butterfly.

The period between crucifixion and resurrection is for me just such a chrysalis full of potential. The onlooker sees nothing, hopeless and bereft as were the disciples. And then—wonder of wonders—the

Lord appears, Mary Magdalene through her tears taking him for gardener. The gardener, another image of tending creation, bringing about metamorphoses. By the resurrection, Our Lord is no longer limited by earthly existence. The shedding of the old, the 'bursting from the spicèd tomb' (as St Patrick's Breastplate has it). New life bursting the bounds of the old. The limits of being in one place at a time are annihilated.

Then at the Ascension, the limits of space vanish as Christ-wisdom is taken into the cosmos, and the Lord is available to the whole universe, giving the cosmic Christ. And Pentecost symbolises the Spirit being enfleshed into us all, born into us all.

Do you see in these events that there have been some sheddings: shedding the limits of the body, the limits of geography, the limits of time? The shedding of the old, the shedding of what we no longer require, is what we have been doing in Lent—giving up things that we no longer need, so that we go on our way lighter and less encumbered. So that we might all the better let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify God's name.

### **So what?**

The Easter affirmation: 'Christ has been raised from the dead' is about an event that reaches to the heart of Christian worship, but which must burst out into the world in which we live. Many of the casualties of modern society—addictions (and we all have them), alienation and suicide—are the result of the failure to apply the values that Our Lord has shown to us. We have marred the divine image within through our pride and a lack of selflessness.

With the resurrection, God placed unique value on the message and values of Jesus, and on our human life and our potential to share in the life of God. In Jesus, risen from the dead, we have a new way of relating to God and each other.

We need to let God work in us. This is the challenge. People talk about cooperating with God. I say it's not so much that we need actively to cooperate, but rather that we need passively to stop resisting. If we let the layers of self fall away, the divine Christ-wisdom within will fill our skin. The divine blueprint is there, just as all our genes are within each and every cell of our bodies. We just let it happen.

Holy Scripture records the cooperation of Mary the mother of God once she recognized the Angel for what he was. She let it happen. (And Joseph, by the way—an unsung hero in my view.) Holy Scripture records the cooperation of Mary Magdalene once she recognized the gardener for what he was. She let it happen. And the Holy Wisdom that is in each and every cell of our being demands that we let it happen within us. Let's use this chrysalis-time to recommit ourselves to allow the flowering of the divine purpose within each and every one of us.

I'm in a kind of chrysalis at the moment, neither one thing nor the other, mind both here and in Chesterfield. What kind of butterfly will emerge I know not, but this I do know—I will continue to do all I can to encourage those souls in my cure to engage in the pursuit of beauty and delight. That is where the divine will within us is to be freed for action.

I've already quoted St Patrick, and in a week that began with St Patrick's Day, bearing in mind all the resonances that that it has for me with part of my soul and lots of my chromosomes in the Emerald Isle, I conclude with words of Blessed Patrick that speak of the God within and around us, and tell us how to engage in the pursuit of beauty and delight.

*I bind unto myself today the strong name of the trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, the One in Three.*

*I bind this day to me forever by power of faith Christ's incarnation, his baptism in the Jordan river, his death on the cross for my salvation; his bursting from the spicèd tomb, his riding up the heavenly way, his coming at the day of doom I bind unto myself today.*

*Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me; Christ to comfort and restore me; Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

*I bind unto myself the name, the strong name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three, of whom all nature hath creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word; praise to the God of my salvation, salvation is of Christ the Lord!*

*Keep silence*

To the most gracious and indescribable God be all honour, might, majesty and power, in every place and throughout all ages. Amen

## Easter Sermon 2008

Imagine the distress, imagine the perplexity when they saw that the body was not there. The clothes lying as if the body had simply dematerialised in an instant. Perhaps it did. It is such an extraordinary story that either Christianity is the biggest hoax in history, or else it is true. It is true, of course, and it tells us to be of good cheer: there will be the bad times, but they will be followed by the good.

The Jews still wait for the Messiah: we think he came 2000 years ago. Therein lies a trap for us: we think we have the answer. Well, we have part of the answer, but we must remember that the example of Christ needs to be applied anew every day in our changing world. The images of Jesus and his message that we had as children, or last year, or yesterday, are not necessarily the images appropriate for the tasks of today. This demands work—exploration and reflection. That is the task that Easter sets us: bringing to our society afresh the healing example and teachings of the risen Lord so that we might dwell not as Christians so often seem to on finger-wagging and gloom and guilt, but on delight in our lives and our relationships.

The Sunne arising in the East,  
Though he give light, and th' East perfume;  
If they should offer to contest  
With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,  
Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?  
We count three hundred, but we misse:  
There is but one, and that one ever.

## Easter 2, Year A, 30 March 2008

**Eucharist WW, MW Carsington**

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9. Blessed be the God and Father.

John 20:19-31

I spoke to my niece last week. How are you? OK thanks, all the usual stuff, you know, (I might have used another word than stuff). And then in the background I heard her husband, a confirmed atheist say sarcastically: usual stuff, Christ risen, and all that.

Christ risen, so it's all OK. Hunky dory and we can all get on with being nice to each other as Christians are.

But no, Christ having risen is rather a challenge.

- **Think of Peter.** He was the special one chosen to receive the Keys of the Kingdom, but he was also the one who abandoned Jesus when Jesus was most alone, denied him three times. Now after the resurrection he has to confront the man that he denied, he has to confront his past attitudes.
- **And today Thomas.** Jesus is risen. *Oh yeah, sure he is. Show me. Prove it.* As a result of the resurrection, Thomas has to confront his cynicism, his doubt, his unbelief.

The Easter experience – new life – means that we **all**, like Peter and Thomas, must confront uncomfortable truths about ourselves. The Risen Christ forces all our baggage, our guilt and shame, to the surface. The Resurrection means having to confront who we actually are.

Think how ashamed Peter must have been to have to look into the face of his lying. How ashamed Thomas must have been to have to confront his disbelief. How ashamed I was to see a student's mother in a wheelchair, when I'd always assumed he'd invented her as an excuse for poor results.

The thing is that, having been brought up sharp to the reality of shame, Peter and Thomas, and I, are accepted. We are forgiven. The great thing is that the reality of Peter's denials, and Thomas's doubt are not in the least condemned by Jesus. Peter **is** the rock on whom the church is built. Thomas's need for evidence **was** affirmed by Jesus.

I like the Thomas story: it gives us permission to question. I like questioning and pushing at boundaries to see how elastic they are. We need to explore. And the reason is that, unlike the Jews for whom the Messiah is yet to come, for us Christians the Messiah came 200 years ago. Jesus' message might be the same today as it was then, but the context is different. We have to apply the message afresh for the situation that we're in. We're mistaken if we think that the message must be applied now as it was then, or 200 years ago, or last month, or even yesterday.

I'm interested in architectural history, and when I was young, I joined the Victorian Society as a life member, which you could do then for not a great deal of money. I still am interested in it, and still am a life member. But if I could resign my life membership I would. I don't like the way the Society opposes reasonable schemes for Victorian buildings, often undistinguished churches and railway stations, that would make them more suitable for today's needs. This is preservation gone mad. The mediaeval builders didn't work like this: if you go to St Alban's, or Southwell, or Lincoln Cathedrals you can see different styles next to each other as the masons worked in the then current styles without any attempt at preserving the style of the original.

The church is a conservative organisation. We can all be guilty of wanting it to remain like it always was. The thing is, it has never always been anything. And there's a danger that we church people are like the Victorian Society: wanting things to appear to stay the same in the pursuit of some idealistic romantic dream. That was not Jesus' way: there was nothing romantic about flights to Egypt, childhood in Nazareth, stomping around the Judean desert, the blood and gore of torture and crucifixion. Like him, we live in a messy world and we must confront it and get our hands dirty. Like Thomas we need to ask questions and push at boundaries to see how best to put our Lord into action.

**Why must we?** Look around: what will the church be like in 10 years' time if we don't do some fresh thinking for the needs of the world in which we live? There are some difficult questions.

- Why do people who say they believe in the resurrection – more than half the population, it seems – avoid coming to church?
- Why is it that when the church is full for a funeral, we assume that everyone knows the Lord's Prayer, when they clearly don't?
- How do we deal with people for whom terms like *Holy Communion* and *Eucharist* are meaningless, even the word worship devalued?
- How do we deal with people for who associate eating flesh and drinking blood with horror video games, zombies and vampires?
- Why are churchgoers seen as set-apart, clubby and hypocritical?

We need the courage to ask questions and seek evidence, Thomas-style, and then act on it, Jesus style. Through Thomas's desire for truth, the spirit created a living faith in that once-doubting Apostle. In the first reading, we see that the Spirit led many of that group into living faith, and when a body of believers *truly* believes, others also will be brought to faith through their witness. When we act on what we believe, perhaps others will be brought to faith through our witness.

I'm sure that people need something to fill their inner void. They go to football matches and pop concerts for it. They go to shopping centres in an attempt to let retail therapy fill it. The trouble is, I strongly suspect that we will never be able to fill it unless we've seen it, confronted it, and found the top of the bottle, as it were.

This means letting the resurrected Jesus point out to us those assumptions and behaviours that we used to have, but now are embarrassed and ashamed about. Like Peter, like Thomas, like me.

Thomas said 'My Lord and my God', submitting his life to Christ. Let **us** use Thomas's words to submit to Christ more deeply, more openly, and in a way that is more responsive to the situation in which we live – NOW.

### **Easter 3 BCP, The Second Sunday after Easter**

Almighty God, who has given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Epistle. 1 St. Peter 2. 19.

The Gospel. St. John 10. 11.

From the epistle

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: **by whose stripes ye were healed.**

It by the Lord's stripes, his wounds, that we are healed, made whole, saved. And since every one of us is made a Christ at baptism, it is in our wounds, our vulnerability, that we heal. It is in exposing them, as Jesus did, that we heal. We have no need to hide them. There is a notion that a façade of smoothness impresses others, that we must do all we can to hide our imperfections. Read the website of some commercial concern: they all read as if they are perfection incarnate. Even the church, which should know better, tries to pretend that things never go wrong. How misguided this is! You know how infuriating it is to deal with bureaucrats who refuse to acknowledge that they've made a mistake. You know how healing it is when someone acknowledges that they got it wrong. And perhaps you have witnessed the effect of letting someone else see by your tears, your wounds, that they have offended or abused you, how effective this can be in bringing reconciliation, forcing reassessment, resurrection.

It is by our wounds, our stripes, that we heal others, just as Christ's wounds heal us. This is a call for honesty, for courage to show your face to the world in its joy, its tears, its delight and its agony. Never mind about pretending that all is well: accept the fact that we are not in control: the Lord is in control. He is the shepherd who tends the flock.

### **Easter 3**

**Elton, Carsington**

**Acts 2:14a,36-41**

**1 Peter 1:17-23**

**Luke 24:13-35**

The Emmaus road is the road we are on in life  
Emmaus make the most of what comes to you.  
Don't ignore the evidence of your eyes.  
appreciate it while you've got it  
be open to recognise it  
grab life by the balls  
seeing Jesus in all we meet  
being mindful, eyes open, alert

live in the here and now  
no regrets, no resentments (Easter is forgiveness)  
no looking over shoulder  
live now  
me and Hugh

My departure  
Give Andrew a chance  
Respect what he brings  
Don't go on all the time about what used to happen

Repent – turn in a new direction  
Stop looking over your shoulder and live in the present

lightness of touch  
making them see for themselves  
light dawning  
too good to last

hearts burned within them  
as he showed them the significance of the OT  
he had always been there

## Year A, Easter 4, 13 April 2008, WW Eucharist

Acts 2: 42-47  
Psalm 23  
1 Peter 2: 19-25  
John 10: 1-10

### Lambs

#### **I came that all may live abundantly.**

It is not possible to live life on this planet without the image of God is within us being maimed in some way either by what we do and shouldn't, or what is done to us. We need healing! And we are surrounded by things that advertise themselves as quickfix solutions, *false shepherds*. False shepherds like

- following the latest fashions
- the latest brand of coffee
- having a new this or that
- retail therapy, and so on and so on

But the truth is, these things are not satisfying: the effects don't last. They are like candyfloss, insubstantial, sticky and full of air. All wind and ...

Because we set them up as idols, and we become obsessed by them, they steal our liberty and make us do things we regret more – in theological parlance, they prevent us doing what God put here to do.

As the gospel tells us, there are lots of these tempters that sing their siren song. They all, in the end, lead us up a cul-de-sac. They don't guarantee the safety of the sheep in the fold, and they don't lead to the rich pastures outside the gate.

Jesus says he is the way to the rich pastures.

And if you want to know the way, be pleased to hear what he did say. Jesus is the good shepherd, **Jesus who came that all may live abundantly.**

#### **How does he do it?**

**The epistle tells that it is by his wounds that we have been healed.** Made whole, saved, liberated, redeemed. And since every one of us is made a Christ at baptism, it is in our wounds, our vulnerability, that we can be agents of healing for others. We have no need to hide them.

There is a notion that a façade of smoothness and perfection impresses others, that we must do all we can to hide our wounds. Things go wrong: let's acknowledge it. Even the church, which should know better, tries to pretend that things never go wrong, that problems don't exist.

This pretence never works! You know how infuriating it is to deal with bureaucrats who refuse to acknowledge that they've made a mistake. You know how healing it is when someone acknowledges that they got it wrong. And perhaps you have witnessed the effect of letting someone else see by your tears, your wounds, that you too are vulnerable. Perhaps you have seen how effective this can be in bringing reconciliation, forcing reassessment, resurrection. The truth is that positive thinking blinds us to reality.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, shows us another way. He doesn't pretend, the Gospel is about his wounds. He lives in the present: he cares nothing for rules, he cocks a snook at the Pharisees, at the jobsworths, at the Jews, at the Romans.

He is free of attachments to things and attitudes, free of obsessions. In the desert, he didn't yield to temptations to show off. And he shows his wounds, he is vulnerable.

Jesus' own story has so many elements that strike me as true because they speak of the way people are, as I am, have been and always will be. And it's that honesty, that authenticity, that is attractive.

It's the sight of wounds that tell us a person is speaking from experience, with freshness and straightforwardness. It's that lack of guile that attracts people to Jesus, makes them feel secure around him, and it's all of that in us that gives each of us the ability to serve those in distress, to provide the safety of the sheepfold.

So here's a call to confront issues openly and honestly. A couple of weeks ago I outlined some of the problems that appear to me to confront the church – this church, the churches to which I am going: how to reach the unchurched, those who don't know the Lord's Prayer, who see something macabre in eating flesh and drinking blood. Asking what it is we do that turns away the majority of citizens. And all these confront me on the edge of Chesterfield too.

### **And I can only work effectively to address these if I am honest about myself**

Here in honesty of preaching

In my sermons, I have tried to be honest about myself. I hope I've never been holier than thou.

- Harry Williams: never say anything that isn't true for me
- expensive because I have to go deep down inside myself, look honestly at personal issues that confront me.

St Isaac the Syrian:

- It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins, imperfections.
- When we are face up to and recognise our faults, then the opportunity comes for the spirit to change us.

Confronting ourselves is essential.

Those who are aware of their own imperfection are inevitably the most tender, compassionate, and understanding of others who are bruised or weak. It is the self-righteous who are not suited to God's purpose.

### **And in this self-examination we need to lay the past to rest (Midsomer Murders)**

Last week we heard the Emmaus road story.

It's a story in which people could not see the possibilities of the present because they were obsessing about the past. We all do it.

Laying the past to rest is difficult. I'll confront this problem in my new parishes – my predecessor was immensely loved. I am not him, and that will probably make the first year for them and for me.

And similarly for my successor here. I urge you when Andrew comes, to accept him for what he is, and welcome what he brings. This is a complex curacy: 10 churches, 10 ways of doing things, lots of people telling you 'that's not the way we do it here'. It just doesn't matter.

So be open to what he brings, because the church needs renewal. If we find the church, or any organisation within it, simply existing for the comfort of a few, we should consider how it needs to be altered. The universality of the church demands that.

### **I came that all may live abundantly.**

And now, friends, this is my last WW Sunday Eucharist as Assistant Curate. At the end of this mass we will say the *Te Deum laudamus* as we give thanks for each other and propel each other to the future. No, not say it, but shout it – to the proper words, of course!

Since summer 2006 you have entertained and provoked me as I have, I hope, entertained and provoked you. I thank you for the fun we have had together, the delight and joy. And remember this, without delight and joy, we are in hell.

Joy and Charity, JC, Jesus Christ. Listen to George Herbert:

AS on a window late I cast mine eye,  
I saw a vine drop grapes with *J* and *C*  
Anneal'd on every bunch. One standing by  
Ask'd what it meant. I (who am never loth  
To spend my judgement) said, It seem'd to me  
To be the bodie and the letters both  
Of *Joy* and *Charitie*; Sir, you have not miss'd,  
The man reply'd; It figures *JESUS CHRIST*.

## **Easter 4, 13 April 2008**

### **Derby Cathedral Evensong**

Ps 63.1-9, 117  
Genesis 7. Noah  
Luke 19.37-48. Temple cleansing

I spoke to my niece last week. How are you? OK thanks, all the usual stuff, you know, (I might have used another word than stuff). And then in the background I heard her husband, a confirmed atheist say sarcastically: usual stuff, Christ risen, and all that.

Christ risen, so it's all OK. Hunky dory and we can all get on with being nice to each other as Christians are.

But no, Christ having risen is rather a challenge.

- **Think of Peter.** He was the special one chosen to receive the Keys of the Kingdom, but he was also the one who abandoned Jesus when Jesus was most alone, denied him three times. Now after the resurrection he has to confront the man that he denied, he has to confront his past attitudes.
- **And think of Thomas.** Jesus is risen. *Oh yeah, sure he is. Show me.* As a result of the resurrection, Thomas has to confront his cynicism, his doubt, his unbelief.

The Easter experience – new life – means that we **all**, like Peter and Thomas, must confront uncomfortable truths about ourselves. The Risen Christ forces all our baggage, our guilt and shame, to the surface. The Resurrection means having to confront who we actually are.

Think how ashamed Peter must have been to have to look into the face of his lying. How ashamed Thomas must have been to have to confront his disbelief. How ashamed I was to see a student's mother in a wheelchair, when I'd always assumed he'd invented her as an excuse for poor results. Or like gossiping about someone you think you won't see again, and then weeks later, lo and behold, there they are. How shaming is that.

Christ's resurrection forces us to confront our past attitudes, the things we thought we'd buried. We need to spring clean ourselves in order to move on. And cleansing is what the readings are about: it

is obvious even to me. YHWH sending the flood to wash away iniquity; Jesus throwing a wobbly at the iniquity in the Temple courtyard.

Let's consider the flood a minute. I want to go off on a tangent to the Black Sea. There was a time when the Black sea was much smaller than it is now, a lake, with no connexion to the Mediterranean. You can see this by studying the depth: deep in the middle but only a narrow shelf around the edges. And the original lake is the deep bit.

There is a school of thought that holds that the flood that we heard about in the first lesson was caused by rising sea levels in the Med (nothing new about melting ice, despite what the currently fashionable middle class obsession with global warming tells us) breaking through where the Dardanelles now are, inundating the area around the small Black Sea. Noah's flood. Water gushing in to cleanse the old. So now the Black sea is connected to the Med, but only through the narrow opening.

Because of the almost non-existent flow, and the fact that the Black Sea drains a huge area of eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus and western Asia, it has a peculiar constitution, the deep layers high in sulphur concentration and without oxygen – a kind of dissolved hydrogen sulphide. Now, the ancient civilisation around the Black sea means large numbers of ships plying the waters, then as now. The sea of mythology in Jason and the Argonauts. And there are lots of shipwrecks in the depths. No oxygen below the 100 fathom line means that wood-boring mollusks can't survive, and so the wooden shipwrecks of antiquity remain well preserved, even after thousands of years.

What has all this to do with ....?

It's a bit like our minds: wrecks down at the bottom, relics of the past that don't see the light of day. Crouching in the depths.

Now the trouble with the mind is that the longer something is suppressed, buried, ignored, the more forceful will be its inevitable eruption. And this is paralleled in Black Sea science too: marine scientists are concerned that the layers of the Black Sea will invert: the anoxic deeps will come to the surface, killing the things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts that inhabit the great and wide sea, with catastrophic effects on the local economies of Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia.

Whatever the ecologists say might be the cure for the Black Sea, I say that for the sake of our spiritual health we need to go diving, taking the oxygen of Christ to these preserved bits of the past in the murky depths, and bring them to the surface. A clear up, a cleansing of the rubbish that we collect around our souls, the rubbish that can only be cleared away by Jesus Christ (this morning's gospel told us that).

We need to clear out, so that we will not let the attitudes of the past impair our judgments now. Think how many conflicts and arguments are caused because of the assumptions people make based on past experiences. To be sure, we can't avoid this entirely, but let's be aware of these past attitudes so that we see them for what they are, and they don't remain buried, ready to erupt with violence to ruin the local ecology. If we don't confront them, we'll find these wrecks of the past perverting our motives. We'll be like the moneychangers in the Temple who steal funds from the present, that is the Temple faithful, persuading them that they need to do things that belong to the past, things that in truth are harmful to their well-being, harmful to their personal and spiritual economies.

These spiritual clear-outs, are necessary for past and future.

Laying the past to rest – Midsomer

planning for the future. And in my position, I need to do this. Here are some questions that I, shortly to take up the cure of souls in two parishes, need to consider

- Why do people who say they believe in the resurrection – more than half the population, it seems – avoid coming to church?
- Why is it that when the church is full for a funeral, most clearly don't know the Lord's Prayer?
- How do we deal with people for whom the word worship is devalued by the celebrity culture?

- How do we deal with people who associate eating flesh and drinking blood with zombies and vampires?
- Am I to be anything other than the chaplain to the middle-aged and elderly members of an establishment club?

I need the courage to confront the past, to ask questions and seek evidence, Thomas-style, and then act on it, Jesus style.

This means letting the resurrected Jesus point out to us those assumptions and behaviours that we used to have, but now are embarrassed and ashamed about. Like Peter, like Thomas, like me. We need to cleanse our psyches so that we don't let the buried wrecks impair our ability to do God's will now.

We might be afraid that we will suffer from exposing our wrecks to the surface – let sleeping dogs lie, pretend it doesn't happen (as the Church, which should know better, so often pretends that things are well). Well, it might be painful, but it's by his wounds that Jesus heals, the wounds that remain visible. It's by exposing the wrecks in our depths that we can be healed, and go on to heal others.

As Peter found. Peter let Jesus down, but even such a humbling experience did not bar him from ministry. On the contrary it equipped him for it. Such a humbling experience established Peter far better for service in Christ's name. It's a simple case of gratitude: if we know our own lack of worth, we are not subject to illusions about it and pride that causes us to think ourselves better than others.

It's a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins (Isaac). Those who are aware of their own sin and have felt God's forgiveness are inevitably the most tender, compassionate, and understanding of them that are bruised or weak. It's the self-righteous who are not suited to God's purpose.

Having been brought up sharp to the reality of shame, Peter and Thomas, and I, are accepted. We are forgiven. Peter **is** the rock on whom the church is built. Thomas's need for evidence **was** affirmed by Jesus.

*If* we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and *if* we do not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father, and *if* we *intend* to lead a new life following the commandments of God; *if* all this, we *will* obtain forgiveness of the same. We can pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start all over again. We have, of course to live with the consequences—but that's another matter. There's always hope for us if we acknowledge our right relationship with the God of loving-kindness. This is true humility: to know where we stand with God. Humility, humus – earth, earthed.

That's the Easter message that greets us in the Risen Lord. The Risen Lord who forces the hidden monsters of our depths to the surface. When Thomas was confronted by his, he said 'My Lord and my God', submitting his life to Christ. Let **us** use Thomas's words to submit to Christ more deeply, more openly, and in a way that is more responsive to the situation in which we live – NOW.

## Easter 5, 20 April 2008

passage read at funerals - should not be  
vision of heaven like the blocks of mansions in South Kensington  
or like Nancy Mitford's cottages round a village green inhabited by one's friends

rubbish

We read too much into the Bible, and not enough into Jesus' advice  
There's a wideness in God's mercy that will not tolerate our attempts to limit it

it's about God's prodigal love  
extravagant prodigal love of the father  
loves us where we are (lots of mansions) but loves us too much to leave us there  
we are to explore, have a duty to explore, aiming for the Father (which is in the gospel)

What are we aiming for  
theme of longing in these readings: Stephen (acts), psalm, Epistle  
Longing for God

Obedience: hearken

We are allowed to see God's face where Moses was not: it is the face of Jesus, the only Son who reveals the glory of the Father. God's word pitching his tent among us. He is not only now the concrete standard or norm for all our living.

And if you want to know the way be pleased to hear what he did say

The destination is simply the Father who is love and who has first loved us.

It is strange to be told that believers will do even greater things than the Son because he has returned to the Father. Here is another reason why we need the Spirit, as Paul will explain (1 Corinthians 2: 12), to help us understand the gift we have received, what it means to be living stones in that spiritual house, living mansions in the city of God.

Comforting message for the disciples who were about to lose him.

**Not just toeing the line here in the hope of good behaviour being rewarded**  
but living now. having life abundantly

examples: be like children

and the many mansions bit is that there is no single right way: we work out the way for ourselves  
(take responsibility for ourselves)

The over-riding thing is to live with delight  
make the most of what we have –

AND help everyone else we come across to do the same  
We don't have to kill ourselves as we do it

That is loving our neighbour as ourselves

This is how we get these  
Commercium admirabile

## Sermon Easter 5

Zechariah  
500 BC  
Promise of new life and new kingdom

Rev  
New life and new kingdom  
River of the water of life – Pattison's image of pastoral care. healing of the nations  
(Tree of Life)  
Inclusive – everyone

New beginnings  
Easter is a new beginning – orthodox easter today  
Pope – theologian, clear thinker  
Personal – transition for me  
This church – interregnum  
Liz  
This country

Resurrections all over the place  
Transformations  
Each time we fall short and regret it, we are repenting, we are resurrected  
Symbolic act  
Ascension – symbolism of our resurrections being incorporated into the Father

So: hope

What do we need to do to make the most of these new beginnings and new hoe?

As the Pope Benedict XVI says, we lose nothing by letting Christ into our lives  
We are not diminished by submitting to his power

Be not afraid, fling wide the doors.

Renewals require assessment of where you are  
self examination  
love your neighbour  
searingly honest  
hard work

Paul - mirror

Church – renewal. Examine every organisation of the church to ask how is it furthering the work of Christ. If we find it is simply existing for the comfort of a few, we should consider how it needs to be altered.

Parable

Words for pondering

Peter Baelz

The vision of the Kingdom prescribes certain fundamental criteria for evaluating the goals and objectives of a fully human society. In God's kingdom there is universal peace and harmony, combining justice and prosperity in a truly personal and fulfilling community. Its universality ... puts into question any social or economic system which allows the world to be divided into the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, or allows one group of people, whether a class or a nation or a group of nations to pursue its own welfare at the expense of the welfare of others.

## **Year A, Easter 7, Sunday after Ascension**

### **Derby Cathedral Eucharist**

Acts 1:6-14

I Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Let us pray.

O Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, eternal Wisdom, inspire my words to illuminate the mystery of the Godhead for the minds of them that hearken. Amen

It is good to be here – thank you for allowing me to come once again. Earlier this week, I thought I wouldn't make it because on Monday I was lying in theatre in DRI fully conscious with at least three things like skewers stuck into my left eyeball for surgery for a detaching retina. For the last few days I've been wandering round seeing things as if through a glass not darkly or dimly but waterlily and vaguely; with only the promise of restitution of clear vision at a time to be determined not by me, but by God—and I mean of course the ophthalmic surgeon.

This ain't a bad image for the Christian life, as others far more eminent than I have said. But it's also a pretty good message for this time of year. I'm a great fan of the festival of the Ascension, last Thursday. When I'm Archbishop of Canterbury I'll declare Ascension to be always on a Sunday so that its celebration is not just a matter of the faithful few fighting bravely against the attractions of

Thursday evening shopping, or bookgroup, or pilates or whatever. It's a great festival because, like the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, it lifts our minds to what we are saved to – glory, radiance, joy—rather than concentrating, as Christians so often seem to, on gloom and guilt about what we are saved *from*.

- I meet Christians who say we are saved by the cross: not I.
- I meet Christians who say we are saved by the resurrection: not I.
- I meet Christians who say we are saved by the cross *and* resurrection: not I.

I say we are saved by the whole process from creation through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension to the coming of the spirit at what I still call Whitsuntide, next week, at which we are born again, and after which we can be born again and again every time we recognise the Holy Spirit at work within us: a kind of re-incarnation of divine wisdom at work within us again and again and again.

This is the salvation process for me, and it assumes at least two things.

First, a recognition that we are human beings. Plantigrade primates—that is, apes not archbishops. We need not pretend to be anything else. Holy Scripture tells us that in today's readings: Be glad of who and what you are **Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it. Be content with who you are, and don't put on airs.** Epistle

Don't put on airs. Don't put on church faces. Be yourself, and if the churchy hypocrites tell you off about it, give 'em the two word intellectual answer.

There is nothing shameful about being a plantigrade primate, a human being. If there were, why would the Ineffable God have taken the trouble—and what trouble—to become one? God in becoming Christ Jesus took on all our experience, and at the Ascension all this was incorporated into the Godhead, all our humanity, all human experience. Even eye operations. Even our hurts—the signs of being human. The Christ who ascended to the Godhead was the wounded Christ (stained glass window), the wounded healer, insulted, spat at, nailed, kicked, beaten, thirsty. Not some unreachable ideal. By his stripes, his wounds, we are healed—and it is through our brokenness, our woundedness, that we can act as channels of healing for others. We do not need to pretend to be what we are not—that's the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden where they tried to cover up who they were. The Christ who ascended is not someone who knew nothing of our human experience, but someone who wept and toiled and mourned and died. And loved. Humanity with all its imperfections is divinized: 'God became man so that man might become divine'—the interpenetration of divine and human.

This is how I read David Garnett's message in this month's Diocesan rag/redtop. The notion that the soul is good and the body is bad has perverted Western Christianity for too long, and has led to all sorts of abuses, flagellations. I see no need for it in early Christian doctrine: the humanity of the body is a good thing.

- All soul and no body—no good!

We have a duty to care for the body as well for the soul (if they are separable, which I doubt spiritually and biologically), we have a duty to look after ourselves, we have a duty to enjoy life, to make the most of what has been put at our disposal—this is the talents parable. Without delight we're in hell, and we have a duty to pursue delight, and—here's the difficult bit—do all in our power to allow everyone else to do so as well.

So to enjoy being human, to enjoy being what we are, and not put on airs and graces, is the first assumption on which my notion of salvation rests.

The other assumption is that we have in us a longing for something else. And I'm certain we all have this hole within. Some people go to football matches for it. Some people long for chocolate. Some people go shopping—and we see the agony when suddenly it dawns that shopping power is being curtailed by economic circumstance. But everything fails to satisfy what Schopenhauer calls "a certain trace of silent sadness... a consciousness that results from knowledge of the vanity of all achievements and of the suffering of all life, not merely one's own."

**A certain trace of silent sadness**—the God-shaped hole within. If you like Wagner operas you might see this God shaped hole in the character of Hans Sachs. Or in the Tristan chord—longing, eros.

Some of us call this the inclination to the divine. I think it is in our every cell, put there as a result of the divine-human exchange that took place in Mary's uterus as she nurtured the growing embryonic Lord within her. We are God's, we belong to God, we are of the divine, from the moment of creation. We need to let this urge for the divine, flower through prayer and meditation and worship—and enjoyment of life. Our response is to hearken to it: a word that carries with it a sense of listening, certainly, but also one of acting in accordance with what we hear: aligning our will with the divine will. It's a difficult job amidst all the static we get from consumerism and the evils of advertising, but we bash on in hope.

This is why we need the Ascension: to rekindle, restore our sense of hope in a world where we hear and see too much of the nastiness of humanity, where we hear of people who ignore that longing for the divine, who shut it out. I need it a time when I am curdled by what I hear from Amstetten in the Danube valley, or from Bacup in Lancashire.

To end, I hope these lovely words of two favourite writers will inspire and comfort us as we celebrate the holy mysteries and engage in the wonderful exchange of the eucharist.

Hear what comfortable words St Irenaeus saith:

God the Logos became what we are, in order that we may become what he himself is. The glory of God is a living person and the life of man is the vision of God.

**Hear also what Bishop Lancelot Andrewes saith on Christmas Day 1605**

It is most kindly to take part with Him in that which He took part in with us, and that, to no other end, but that He might make the receiving of it by us a means whereby He might "dwell in us, and we in Him;" He taking our flesh, and we receiving His Spirit which He imparteth to us; so we by His might become "partakers of the Divine nature."