

United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

Year C – Lent – Easter - Pentecost

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Lent 1

MP Brassington
25 February 2007

Psalm 91:1-11

Deuteronomy 26:1-11. Honouring memories and history: recall

Romans 10:8b-13. If you confess lips and believe heart you will be saved. Everyone, whole world.

Refresh

Luke 4:1-13. temptations

Lent is gloom and self-denial. WRONG.

- George Herbert, Lent as a feast, and so it is.
- festival of growth.
- lengthening, spring growth..

Lent opportunity **recall, reflect and renew ourselves,**

- renewal always involves some kind of growth. Just as the desert period did for Our Lord.

In biology, shedding of something we no longer need. And that's the origin of giving up something for Lent.

- If we give up something we like, self denial, only to gorge ourselves on it later, then we are being rather silly. There's no point in making ourselves miserable.
- I'm not giving up chocolate, or crisps, or anything else like that. And certainly not gin.
- Lent abstinence approached this way is surely rather silly.

If I really want to emulate Our Lord's period in the desert, I will try to give up

- **unwanted attitudes**
- things that tether me to old ways of thinking.
- Prevent growth.

If you want to do something really productive –

- try to see ourselves as others see us.

- And then try to shed the attitude or way of thinking or behaving that shocks us the most about what we have seen about ourselves.
- If we imagine that there's nothing to get rid of, we deceive ourselves

That would lead to growth.

- Shedding.
- Discarding old skin, like a reptile.
- insect coming out of chrysalis, biological
- Metamorphosis is the word Paul uses to describe changing from glory to glory
- Last week, Easter
- Wesley

Jesus transformed approaches resurrection.

We too can approach Christ as we

- cooperate with his will
- align our will with his,
- work according to his teaching.
- This is Penitence. turning again to god,
- can mean hating for god Trevor Huddleston used to say that Christians need to know how to hate.
- It was easy for him to see the enemy. Ours is more subtle, more difficult to see
 - Lying deceit
 - Choice
 - Advertising

Penitence is gateway of grace

- So not a stage through which we pass, but permanent state of mind.
- Refocussing
- Ask yourself: is it God that I seek, or is it some part of me that I dress up as God.
- It is easy to fool myself

Penitence is not about feeling miserable.

We don't need to kill ourselves, make ourselves feel guilty. It is about feeling authentically human

God became man so that man might become god

So being authentically human is to approach

We do not need to hide our light under a bushel

It is not our light to hide – we have a duty to shine, so long as

'There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.' *Marianne Williamson Return to Love*

Rather than concentrating, as the gloomier versions of Christianity so often do, on self denial and guilt and thinking about what we are saved **from**, we instead keep our eyes and intentions fixed on what we are saved **to**. Glory, radiance, joy.

Make the next six weeks an opportunity to clear out the rubbish in your soul that is clouding your vision.

Preventing your growth

Then we too will be changed from glory into glory. We will, like the caterpillar become the butterfly.

So when you look in Paul's mirror you will see not so much an image as if through a glass darkly, but an image of glory.

George Herbert can have the last word.

Teach me

A man that looks on glass, on it may stay his eye, or if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heavens espy.

If he pleaseth – the road is open to all. All we have to do is to want to travel along it. Then we too will be transfigured.

Amen.

Lent 2

Today's sermon is a game of several halves, and since, unusually, I have to go nowhere else this morning, this match will run into extra time.

The first half

Lent is a time for self-examination and reassessment of priorities, and we need to do this not only as individuals, but also as a church, that is, as a group of people professing the faith of Christ born, crucified, risen and ascended. And this is a matter of the gravest importance, for it concerns the survival of this worshipping community, and of this building as a centre of Christian witness.

Today's story from Genesis tells us that before the fire of God passed before Abram, 'a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.' This is reminiscent of Moses' experience of God as he approached the thick darkness where God was. It is reminiscent of Job's experience of God, (have you seen the new film *A serious man?*) and it was Paul's experience at the gates of Damascus where he was blinded by the vision.

Darkness. Lent invites us to face this aspect of our journey towards the light of Easter. It requires us to face the terror of letting go of what stops us seeing God. Letting go of our securities, our comfort blankets, our fortresses of niceness, our efforts to try to control. We are invited to a death that involves the painful loss of things we have treasured in the sure and certain hope of life eternal—which as I have said many times before is not about some vague future, but about quality of life, in the present and therefore out of time, here and now. Paul understands this, having experienced the deep and terrifying darkness of the presence of God. It is what enables him to assure the Church in Philippi that Jesus will 'transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory'. The task of letting go of self and what 'I' want, is what the crucifixion is all about—not my will but thine. Slowly we will come to realise that 'self' is illusion. Resurrection is 'real' reality. A Buddhist message.

The Lord appears to Abram in the midst of blood and gore, in mess. Animal carcasses cut in two. Nothing nice, nothing tidy, but messy. The world is messy and it is the mess that we have to deal with. Not only do we have to deal with it in an 'if we must' kind of way, but the incarnation—in which Jesus was born in the world through Mary's pelvis and the blood and gore and placenta and umbilical cord and uterine fluids of birth—means that we are duty bound to seek out that mess. It is not enough that we come to church in our best clothes and *consume* religion: Our Lord was always criticising the Pharisees for that. We have to get our finger nails dirty. It is very difficult.

What do we need to give up and grieve for in order to do this?

The second half (*go to church door and wander through church as I speak*)

Let us imagine that Our Lord stands at the church door. What does he see?

- He might see a comfortable and affluent (in world terms) group of people who love and care for each other very much. He might wonder how they care for the people in the parish, in the world.
- He might look at who sits where in the church, and see that, by and large, the people who joined the group most recently sit at the edges, while the people who have been here longer, by and large, are in the middle. He might wonder why this is so.
- He might notice that people seem to communicate with smiles that often hide inner sadnesses that they feel unable to speak of. He might see that people are reluctant to tell each other of their deepest darkest fears, and so can not allow the transformation of 'the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory'.
- He might notice that the seating inhibits talking to each other.
- He might notice that things for children in are in a dark corner.
- He might notice that there is a lot that tells of the past.

- If he comes to a PCC meeting, he would hear that most of the energy and interest is with money, and with keeping the building looking much as it was 100 years ago.
- He might wonder why decisions are made largely by older people.
- He might wonder who will be here in 10 years' time.
- If he comes to a discussion/teaching group he would see that there is a small handful of people who take his word very seriously.
- If he looks at the parish which this church is established to serve, he might see a lot of people sitting alone watching a flickering box in the corner of the room. He might see people at night in the church car park and in the square outside the shops selling powder at vast cost for people to sniff and for others to mix with fluid to inject into their veins.
- If he looks at the parish which this church is established to serve, he might see men and women hitting each other, maybe with children standing watching. He might see children being hit, and still going to school the next day. And he might see all this in homes that are well appointed and apparently prosperous.

Our Lord might look at all this, and look at us here in this building, and think, 'ah, that's why these people are here. They are being loving and kind to each other in order to sustain them and feed them so that they can go out into the world and be my ears, and my eyes, and my hands, and my feet, and my mouth, to heal the sick, to free the captives, to tend the poor, to bind the lame, and to restore creation.'

Or would he? If he stayed longer would he perhaps see that we are being loving and kind to each other simply in order to keep us happy in the prisons that we have made for ourselves, separate from the lives of those around us who do not come to church? Would he deduce that our coming to this church for an hour or so once a week was no more and no less than a hobby like going to the gym, the golf club or the sewing circle?

The third half

For most of my working life so far I have been amongst the best educated people in the entire world. Universities of Cambridge, London, Dublin, Harvard – even Nottingham, a University that thinks it's a big name. And yet, the thoughts that stay with me are different. They are of the people who lived in small houses in the village where I was brought up, homes that I observed seemed to be very happy. The thoughts include boys and girls from a council estate in Nottingham in my church choir, who sang in Southwell, Derby and Peterborough cathedrals. The thoughts include the boys I spent time with who, should they put one more foot wrong, would find themselves inside a Young Offenders Institution. Basil Hume said 'it's true I like rogues. You never meet a conceited rogue.' And you don't.

It's easy to get sentimental about such things. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Lady Marchmain said: 'it is possible for the rich to sin by coveting the privileges of the poor.'

The fourth half

Where does all this lead us? Where does all this lead this church community?

I would like to establish a *Survive and Prosper* group to get on with what we need to do to survive and prosper. Not a group that talks, drinks tea, and then goes home, but a group that gives serious consideration to what this church must do and how to do it. If you wish to serve on this group, write your name on the sheet at the back of church. And it would be good if you would be prepared to get your fingernails dirty.

Please stand. Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and

ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Silence

Let us declare our faith ...

Instead of the prayers today:

on the card you picked up as you came in, write down

- One thing that this church most needs to do to serve the parish and the world.
- How we might do it (you're not allowed to write we need more money, or more clergy).
- Anything else you wish to write.

Please don't consult your neighbour—I want ideas from individuals. Please don't put your name on the card. I will gather the cards, and publish all the comments.

Silence

At the end:

please pray for our survival and prosperity.

Lord God of creation, stir up in our hearts the will to serve you in the world and in worship. Dispel our fears and bring healing so that Old Brampton church life may be refreshed and enriched as we offer back to you the gifts and grace you give us.

Lent 3 Derby Cathedral Eucharist

11 March 2007

Isaiah 55:1-9. Seek the Lord

1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Behaviour

Luke 13:1-9. Fig tree, manure, second chance.

It's good to be here. It was music and liturgy that seduced me as a teenager from rural Methodism to the CoE, and it was my formative years as organ student and choral scholar at Carlisle cathedral that infected me with a love for cathedral music, that will not let me go, so for me to be here is a kind of homecoming.

Before I start on the meat of the sermon, then, I'd like to thank several people.

- First, my boss David Truby for suggesting this attachment and making it happen, and indeed for suggesting that I ask Nicholas if I might sing services here from time to time.
- So then to Nicholas himself, for all that he has shown me and shared with me – long may this continue.
- And then also thanks to Elaine, Andie, the musicians, vergers and yourselves for receiving me and welcoming me, and showing and teaching me.

So now to business.

Last week, Nicholas condemned the readings as unpreachable on, and settled instead for the psalm. It strikes me today that there are several sermons to be had from the readings, with at least two from the gospel.

The first half is the kind of text that should be wheeled out when people say that some nasty accident was God's judgement on the victim. Luke tells us that there's nothing about the mode of anyone's death that speaks of God's judgement. Rather, the point is that life is unpredictable – tragedies occur, in this case brought about by an oppressive governor – but they say nothing about God. As that well known theologian Homer Simpson did say when comforting Lisa once, it's just stuff that happens. The text does tell us that in view of the unpredictability of life we should examine our own lives and rethink our attitudes so that we are ready for the end when it comes, and we never know the moment.

Rethinking attitudes is, of course, repentance and it's what the second half of the gospel is about. I don't know exactly what a fig tree is doing in a vineyard, but I assume that it represents you and me, and it's comforting that we are not to be rejected just because we don't bear fruit the first time round. There is another chance.

Now, one of the things that speaks very loudly about Jesus' teaching is its psychological authenticity, pure wisdom. For example,

- We are to be like children
- We need to reject the ties of family – not fall out with them, just not be dependent on them
 - This freedom from attachments is Buddhist

And today's gospel gives us more authentic psychology. Let's see how.

A great deal of Holy Scripture tells us that the Christian message is one of new beginnings, second chances, but this parable tells us that the second chance is fuelled by

- restricting the roots and
- covering them with manure.

So first of all, restricting the roots.

This could be like taking time out, separate, isolated from the busyness of daily life, like Jesus in the desert. Time to reflect, not to escape the world, but for refreshment the better to engage with it. This Cathedral attachment for me has been exactly such a time.

And then there's the manure

It came as a great relief to me to read in a commentary that Jesus might have been joking, that his sense of humour might have tended to the scatological. Those that know me will understand how deeply reassuring I find that possibility. I've spent 30 years earning my keep by teaching anatomy, with my hand in body parts that other hands don't reach, and of course any of you involved in University politics will know how important it is to be able to dodge flying manure, and in the villages of the Wirksworth MMA, dodging manure has once again become important to me as I travel about. My life in fact seems to revolve around it.

Manure is the product of digestion, the residue of what we take in, and then stands for a while maturing. Manure is a fertilizer. The baobab tree needs Elephant dung for germination. Rowan berries and others need to go through the gut of a bird to help them germinate. In psychological terms, you might say manure in this story can represent the residue of our experiences, good and bad.

Perhaps we as Christians should take the time to use the residue, the lessons, of our experiences and learn from them, allowing them to fertilize growth within us. We might, in the words of the BCP, mark, learn and inwardly digest our experiences, like a second digestion after regurgitation.

Using our experiences in this way we might be able to shed old ways of doing things, old ways of thinking, when we see that they have become unnecessary and possibly counterproductive. It is like a snake shedding its old skin as it grows, the pupation of larva to adult, of caterpillar to butterfly.

This shedding of old ways is what giving up something for Lent is all about. Not, I suggest, giving up something we like just to gorge ourselves on it at Easter – there's no point in making ourselves miserable. I'm not giving up chocolate, or crisps, and certainly not gin. Lent has nothing to do with

being gloomy. It's surely about giving up what we no longer need. If I really want to emulate Our Lord's time in the desert, give up unwanted attitudes that tether me to old ways of thinking.

If you want to do something really productive – and we all, every one of us, need to do something like this, I'd suggest that we all try to see ourselves as others see us. And then try to shed the attitude or behaviour that most shocks us when we so see ourselves. If we imagine that there's nothing to get rid of, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

This is penitence, turning in a new direction, repentance, transformation, metamorphosis (spiritual and biological), metanoia. Lovely words, lovely images. Read William Blake's poetry. It is the road leading to humility – nothing to do with being ever so humble, but having a right understanding of who you are before God, of knowing your weaknesses, and strengths, and whence they come. You might think so much self-examination to be selfish, but surely that depends on your intention. And anyway, Isaac the Syrian (7th century born Arabian Gulf, Bishop Nineveh) held that it was a spiritual gift from God for us to perceive our sins.

And the point of all this, this manuring the plant?

- It might give us access to deepest needs and deepest desires, reaching those parts of our souls that nothing else can reach.
- It can enable us to cleanse the temples full of rubbish inside us.
- It can allow us access to the secret garden within, pulling aside the ivy covered door, so that we can reach the divine core, allowing the divine seed within us to germinate.

There is a rather wonderful poem that talks of exactly this, and the last two verses might be known to the choristers. It's by C H Sorley and was written when he was 20, just months before he was killed at the Battle of Loos in Belgium in 1915.

CH Sorley 1915

FROM morn to midnight, all day through,
I laugh and play as others do,
I sin and chatter, just the same
As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage,
I dance and tumble and do rage
So vehemently, I scarcely see
The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not
Visit, a heart I have forgot,
A self that I have never met,
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul
Unwitting I keep white and whole,
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands
And listening ears Thy servant stands,
Call Thou early, call Thou late,
To Thy great service dedicate.

Such wisdom from a 20-year old.

I suggest to you that we use Lent to reflect on our experiences and learn from them, to open the doors of that inner temple we have not visited, the doors of that sanctuary of our soul, allowing light from the divine core to flood out, filling our new skins.

George Herbert described Lent as a feast, and so it is. It is a feast of growth – growth that involves destruction before creation, and our own inner journey of the cross. It is painful to recall, reflect,

renew. Death and destruction is a prerequisite of resurrection, rebirth, regeneration: indeed, a second regeneration by God is what Isaac the Syrian called repentance.

The prize will be such that when we look in a mirror we will see not so much an image as if through a glass darkly, but we'll see with unveiled faces, the glory of the Lord reflected to us, and we too may be transformed from one degree of glory to another.

Amen

Lent 3 WW Evensong

11 March 2007

Genesis 28:10-19a. Jacob's dream. Angels ascending and descending. I am with you always.

John 1:35-51. Call of apostles inc Nathaniel, cynic

Come and see, abide in me

Jesus says what are you looking for?. Come, and you will see

How to respond?

Do we wait to be told, or wait to see?

Do we jump in and see where it leads us?

Matthew Paris from the Times

'The New Testament offers a picture: A God who does not sound at all vague to me. He has sent his son to Earth. He has distinct plans both for his son and for mankind. He knows each of us personally and can communicate directly with us. We are capable of forming a direct relationship, individually, with him, and we are commanded to try. We are told this can only be done through his son. And we are offered the prospect of eternal life — an afterlife in happy, blissful or glorious circumstances. Friends, if I believed that, or even a tenth of that, I would drop my job, sell my house, throw away my possessions, and set out into the world burning with the desire to tell others.'

Cathedral

Different ways of being a disciple

Radio

Schizophrenics, revelation, threatening

Mendacious beggars

Interacting with city

Big nobs

Face smashed in

In and out of stores

Sounds much more glamorous than serving Wirksworth

Rural ministry: Colin, loneliness. Stebbing's story

And then people hear about what I get up to

Funerals, sermons, assemblies, teaching, walking the streets, visiting

Underestimating oneself

But no room for complacency

Different styles of ministry

Faith – Bishop's comment

Serving

Passive

Passion

Seeing Christ in all I meet

Do people see Christ in me

Different styles

Different beliefs

Intolerance
Slavery then

What about attitudes now.

I don't know what to make of some of the discussions we have now,
But I do know that I don't know the mind of God.

And all that I read about the mind of JC makes me think that if ever I draw a line between me and someone else, I suspect I'll find Jesus on the other side of it too.

William Temple wrote that 'the doctrine of the Person of Christ ... will involve restating God and Man in terms of the revelation given in Him' – which is, gentle reader, what I have tried to do. 'If we have been aware of the resurrection in life, then, and only then, shall we be able or ready to receive the final resurrection after physical death ... For only then will it be recognized as a country we have already entered and in whose light and warmth we have already lived.'

Atonement

Irenaeus captures this temporal fusion, the incarnation sanctifying each stage of life: 'He therefore passed through every age .

All this has a satisfyingly Orthodox flavour in which salvation is seen not in terms of Christ paying the debt for the (so called) sin of Adam, but as uniting human and divine, as through incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection, the divine overcomes human weakness and exalts man to divine life. This is deification, and salvation involves participation in the already deified humanity of Christ as the true goal of Christian life, accomplished through the Holy Spirit.

Abelard 1079-1142 found it 'cruel and wicked that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything' and suggested that salvation was dependent on the subjective change brought about in man by God's incarnational love

but does insufficient justice to our helplessness in the grip of sin and to Christian Scripture and authority. Be all that as it may, Abelard provides valuable food for devotional reflection,

Regeneration and restoration

You might think ... selfish, but that depends on intention.

Isaac the Syrian (7th century born Arabian Gulf, Bishop Nineveh): spiritual gift from God for us to perceive our sins, and suggests salvation through the action of the Holy Spirit in **three Ps**:

- **penitence, conversion of the will.** repentance. Repentance is the door of mercy, opened to those who seek it.
- **Purification, liberation from the passions**— that is not that we don't have them, but that we refuse to own them; studied detachment.
- and **perfection**: acquisition of that perfect love which is the fullness of grace.

recall, reflect , renewal, resurrection, rebirth, regeneration.

- A second regeneration by God. Isaac.
- Magonet's view that the two elements essential to salvation are exodus and creation.

Let Vatican II have the last words:

'Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself . . . he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world.'

All about salvation

Humility

- humility is the right understanding of who you are before God.
- Humility is that quality of a Christian that demonstrates a right relationship and position before God.

We don't need to kill ourselves, make ourselves feel guilty.
Penitence is not about feeling miserable.
It is about feeling authentically human
God became man so that man might become god
So being authentically human is top approach ,.....

We do not need to hide our light under a bushel
It is not our light top hide – we have a duty to shine, so long as

Penitence is about humility
God can act through even my ego

Penitence, turning again to god, can mean hating for god
Trevor Huddleston used to say that Christians need to know how to hate
It was easy for him to see the enemy
Ours is more subtle, more difficult to see
Lying deceit

What are we looking for?
Jesus gathers a few faithful friends. What a way to run a railway.
Nathaniel - sceptic
The wonder is that we are fit for purpose at all.

The enterprise is exploration into God.

Lent 4 WW Evensong

18 March 2007

Isaiah 40:27-41:13.

2 Timothy 4:1-18. Be watchful, endure, teach, preach, admonish. Trust in the Lord.

Psalm 30. Exaltabo te domine. Of sustenance. You lift me up. Healed me. Sustained me.

Patrick (yesterday). Could have given up, but didn't.

Sustenance

- Half way through lent.
- Tired as it happens, in need of refreshment.
- Today we remember the church as the centre of our lives, the place for refreshment, refreshment Sunday, cheering up Sunday, be happy Sunday, gouranga Sunday.

And it seems the readings think we need cheering up. There's a sense of weariness in them. Isaiah is talking to the weary, to those that are heavy laden and need rest, and Paul is weary in his letter to Timothy, ready to shuffle off this mortal coil.

But the readings are also about sustenance. And one of the reasons we come to church is for refreshment, refuelling. A vision of heaven on earth, as in the orthodox tradition. And tonight's readings do indeed comfort us. This liturgy comforts us, the sameness of it week by week allowing us to participate almost automatically as our minds are free to roam.

The psalm was a psalm of sustenance. The first Lesson one that tells us that come what may, God is there for us. We need a spiritual protector on our side, and we have one. *Great is thy faithfulness.* This is Isaiah, the servant. There's nothing servile about this servanthood. This servant indulges in some fairly robust discussions. The servant is powerful and active. This servanthood is not slavery. A servant furnishes, supplies, conveys messages. Servants are very influential. Those who serve us are often the people we talk to. They hear a lot, they give gentle advice, and their comments can influence us greatly. How many of you have heard of Jeeves and Wooster? Bertie Wooster might well have been the employer and Jeeves the servant, but there is no doubting who had the influence.

So we are being ministered to.

- We are suffering – allowing it to happen.
- We are passive – this is a kind of passion.
- **Intourist holiday.**

When I'm empty I just acknowledge it and let myself be refilled from within. I am not always in control and neither should I expect to be. And at this stage of lent, perhaps we can learn something from this passivity. We need not always be doing, seeking, being active all the time. But perhaps sitting back and reflecting.

We need a good teacher. As Paul tells Timothy, without a teacher, we can't sift the need to know from the nice to know. The need to know from the need not know. Left to our own desires, our itching ears and insatiable appetite for variety of experience will be seduced by popular teachers who peddle insubstantial trash and fables. We will hear what we want to hear – something to scratch our **itching ears**. But if we hear God's word, God does something wonderful in us. Left to ourselves, we would rather do it our way, but God changes our heart in wonderful ways, giving us a desire for His word.

Jesus is a good teacher. Arab saying: He who teaches me becomes my master and I their slave. We are, as Paul says, slaves to Christ.

I realised something only last week about Jesus' desert experiences. He was tempted to act. He refused to act. It's about not showing off. Jesus could have showed off by falling for the devil's temptations, but he didn't. And I wonder what we make of the devil? An external force, or perhaps an internal one. Perhaps the urge to show off, to glitter. I feel I am rather susceptible to that urge – it was bred into me as one of the ways to get approval. But think how many awkward situations have arisen because of a need to show off, to flex muscles, for self-aggrandisement. But it takes such a lot of energy. And at this stage in Lent there isn't much energy. Our tiredness and weariness (Isaiah 40:29) comes from a lack of inherent strength.

Where do we get the strength from? Let Jesus provide the strength. But it is possible that we can help him.

Remember last week's gospel. The fig tree was barren, but rather than have it cut down, its roots were restricted and manure was put on the soil. I see the root restriction as separation, withdrawal, time for reflection. And the manure? (How lovely to be able to talk in church about manure). Manure as fertilizer. Manure is the product of digestion, the residue of what we take in. Manure is a fertilizer. The baobab tree needs Elephant dung for germination. Rowan berries need to go through the gut of a bird to help them germinate. In psychological terms, you might say manure in this story can represent the residue of our experiences, good and bad.

Perhaps we should take the time to use the residue, the lessons, of our experiences and learn from them, allowing them to fertilize growth within us. We might, in the words of the BCP, mark, learn and inwardly digest our experiences. By so doing, we start to get to know ourselves. We start to discard images from the past, the expectations of others and the exposure of childhood hurts to the cold light of day so that they can then wither away. And however far down I go, it always seems that I have never reached the bottom of the barrel. There is always more. I need to become spiritually naked, unclothed, to see. No clothes, no barriers.

This self-examination

- might give us access to deepest needs and deepest desires, reaching those parts of our souls that nothing else can reach.
- can enable us to cleanse the temples full of rubbish inside us.
- can allow us access to the secret garden within, pulling aside the ivy covered door, so that we can reach the divine core, allowing the divine seed within us to germinate.

This last bit is important. As you'll already have gathered, I have only one message really, and it's that within us all is a divine core. It's the point of the Incarnation and Pentecost, to divinize human life. It's a frequent theme in Holy Scripture that we begin to get glimpses of God when we truly know ourselves. And this is the theme of much psychology too: know yourself, and you begin to get glimpses of the divine within. God became man not to pay debts, but to sanctify humanity, unify human and divine.

- Paul: It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.
- Irenaeus: God became human so that humans might become God.

- 3rd century writer: Harrowing of hell, Jesus and Adam. Adam arise and come forth. Henceforth you and I are one undivided person.
- In these last three weeks of Lent, imagine Jesus saying this to you, and seeing what happens. Let Jesus take over your soul, your impulses.

Jesus comes from without. He comes to meet us, he is always ready to knock on the door.
 Jesus comes from within. He is there within and always ready to hear us when we knock on that of our inner temple.

Last week I rambled about exploring God. Today I'm rambling about God exploring in us. Let God explore inside us and take over.

So perhaps, just sit back and let the inner and eternal me do the talking and walking and deciding. The inner and eternal me that is most obviously seen in childhood before the grime of the world has corrupted it and scarred it. The inner light that was the example for Patrick. Patrick had a hard time, he was persistent. He didn't bow down to the oppressor. Look at the Irish experience: underdog to major force;

Result

- Demolish the walls that separate us from each other
- And demolish the walls that separate inner from outer
- Walls of Jericho come tumbling down.

Let us pray, after St Patrick.

May the strength of God pilot us.
 May the power of God preserve us.
 May the wisdom of God instruct us.
 May the hand of God protect us.
 May the way of God direct us.
 May the shield of God defend us.
 May the host of God guard us against the snares of evil and temptations of the world.
 May Christ be with us.
 Christ above us.
 Christ in us.
 Christ before us.
 May your salvation, O Lord, be always ours this day and for evermore, Amen.

Passion Sunday 2010

Isaiah 53.16-21
 Psalm 126
 Philippians 3.4b-14
 John 12.1-8

Psalm 126. R: Restore us, Lord, as streams refresh the desert

When the Lord turned again the fortunes of Zion, we were like a man restored to life. Our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. **R:**

The heathen said 'The Lord has done great things for them.' Truly the Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad. Restore our fortunes, Lord, as streams refresh the desert. **R:**

Those that sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.
 He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed, shall come again in gladness, bringing his sheaves with him. **R:**

OT and psalm – what is that saying to us?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

Restore our fortunes, Lord, as streams refresh the desert.

May the Divine Lord fill us with faith to receive the Word, understanding to know what it means, and courage to put it into practice; through Jesus Christ our Lord

First a look at Judas

We hear a fair bit about Judas in the next two weeks. Judas is, amongst other things, a hypocrite—today's gospel is at pains to make that clear. We hear him say that money used to buy oil should be given to the poor, whereas the editor of John tells us he wanted to filch it for himself.

I don't see Judas as a particularly bad man. Just weak like us. He was recruited as an agent by a foreign government. We who have imposed our will on foreign lands, we who have been the foreign power for much of the globe, may find that difficult to understand. But with St Patrick's Day last Wednesday, it's worth remembering that things look very different to the Irish and others, to people whose lands we have occupied—are occupying.

So I see Judas's weakness as part of the story. Peter too denied Jesus and Peter's denials are also part of the story. Maybe if Judas hadn't killed himself he'd be a saint like Peter. I suppose the difference between them is that Judas allowed himself to be bought by the opposition. But then so do we all. How many of us have betrayed someone else because of a promise of some benefit, maybe just approval? Some of us may even have betrayed ourselves for the promise of approval. Judas's experience is our experience.

So while I'm not entirely sympathetic to Judas, I'm not entirely unsympathetic either. I am certain that Judas is in all of us.

And so was George Herbert.

Self-condemnation

Thou who condemnest Jewish hate,
For choosing Barrabas a murderer
 Before the Lord of glorie;
 Look back upon thine own estate,
Call home thine eye (that busie wanderer):
 That choice may be thy storie.

He that doth love, and love amisse,
This worlds delights before true Christian joy,
 Hath made a Jewish choice:
 The world an ancient murderer is;
Thousands of souls it hath and doth destroy
 With her enchanting voice.

He that hath made a sorrie wedding
Between his soul and gold, and hath preferr'd
 False gain before the true,
 Hath done what he condemnes in reading:
For he hath sold for money his deare Lord,
 And is a Judas-Jew.

Thus we prevent the last great day,
And judge our selves. That light, which sin & passion
 Did before dimme and choke,
 When once those snuffes are ta'ne away,
Shines bright and cleare, ev'n unto condemnation,
 Without excuse or cloke.

Now a look at Mary

Where did she get the nard? What is it? It's a member of Valerian family, from the foothills of the Himalayas, via Persia. It was expensive: Horace offered to send Virgil a whole barrel of his best wine in exchange for a phial of nard. Mark (14,3) and Matthew (26,7) underline its preciousness by telling us that it was contained in an alabaster flask. In the Old Testament, in the Song of Songs, nard is a symbol of the intimate nature of the Bride's love. When the perfume of nard is named, the bride recognizes her beloved as such.

Mary recognises Jesus as her beloved and so uses nard. Mary gives it as a sign of her love. This is the origin of bringing gifts to the Lord.

What do we give as a sign of ours? The Hindus do it better. We bring our gifts of music well practised and well sung, drama and readings well performed, clouds of incense, study and discussion with commitment. Life lived with guts and passion, not dried up, mean and repressed. Life as gift to the Divine. Let us be profligate with worship and life.

And in what spirit do we do it?

The message of Paul is that if we are doing it because we are told to, or because of some promised benefit, we're on the wrong track. That's what Paul used to be like. Before his road to Damascus vision, he thought doing the right thing made him a success in the effort to please God by works.

The point of Christian worship is that we do it because we want to do it. Because it gives us joy to do it. Because it is fun to do it. It's an expression of our joy, our humanity—an explosion of being human.

And more than anything else, Paul tells us not to quit. As Paul addresses the Philippians, he speaks words of encouragement, encouraging them not to give up, but to press on. Even though tough times will come—indeed, are here. Even though this Church needs to reassess its priorities and will find it painful so to do. Do not quit. KBO.

Don't be too worried about doubt, either. Doubt is faith struggling to find truth.

And what for?

Because resurrection follows the pain of passion and death. To understand the beauty and force of the Isaiah and psalm readings, we need to look what they might have meant to the people for whom they were written.

They tell of the desert, 'in the south', the arid area of the Negev (e.g. Petra). Where once a year it rains and just as in the reading from Isaiah the desert blossoms abundantly. Waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. And the people are transformed too. They come just to walk in the cool rain, to paddle in the streams and to witness the transformation from a sterile desert to an abundance of life. They come to be refreshed; to be renewed. Isaiah's great vision foretells of transformation and restoration and refreshment. Wholeness.

All this is what confronts us as we begin the remembrance and re-enactment of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem. The dark days of aridity and desertion—not for nothing are the words desert and desertion related—lead to newness and colour and blossom. The two weeks that follow today are a model for what every one of us must do as we shed our old skins—*flesh* as Paul would say. They are a model for what churches need to do in a world where the church is ridiculed by the unchurched. Some of you might not realise the extent to which this is the case, so let me tell you a story.

After a recent 9.30 Baptism I was chatting to a young lad outside. I said, 'and where do you live?'. An adult standing near said most unpleasantly 'don't tell 'im where you live.' Whatever she thought that I might do—and I have my suspicions about that—that is part of the reality of what the church and its ministers are up against. That expresses the need for us to confront what others think of us, and it's the job of all of us to confront this reality full in the face, just as Jesus does after his entry into Jerusalem on a colt, taking us to next week. And remember—look at the East Window—it is the wounds that heal.

In this week of St Patrick, let us pray in his words:

May the strength of God pilot us.

May the power of God preserve us.

May the wisdom of God instruct us.

May the hand of God protect us.

May the way of God direct us.

May the shield of God defend us.

May the host of God guard us against the snares of evil and temptations of the world.

May Christ be with us.

Christ above us. Christ in us. Christ before us.

May your salvation, O Lord, be always ours this day and for evermore, **Amen**.

Lent 5 Middleton MW

25 March 2007

Isaiah 43:16-21.

Psalm 126.

Philippians 3:4b-14.

John 12:1-8.

Thank you for a lovely St Patrick's day bash.

Ministered to
Expensive oil
Passive
Passion
Suffering

And suffering love
Suffering is part of Jesus
We neither try to pretend that it does not happen
Jesus sticks to his guns though he knows what will happen
He does not resist
He tolerates what happens to him
Human suffering on the cross

Theologians argue about what it means for God to suffer – indeed whether God suffers. But God can surely *perceive* our suffering, grieve for us and be angry for us. This is God suffering, what Origen called His passion of love for fallen humankind.' We hear talk of God's anger – but this is anger with suffering, not with us. We hear talk of God's judgement, but this is rather discernment and decision making.

Suffering – for others. This is PASSION.

Part of the human condition is to learn how to be ministered to. We spend too much time acting and serving others, but we also serve by being served. Passivity, Passion, Suffering, as in suffer the little children – allow the little children.
So we need to learn to experience the world, as well as act in it.

Resurrection follows passion and suffering for Jesus, as it will for us.
Jesus' death is a transformation *in* God. Crucifixion is followed by resurrection, new life.

If you like cosmology then it might be like the implosion of a star into the black hole followed by rebirth into the other universe. So, Jesus Christ drawn by the gravitational pull of Golgotha, only to emerge in an instant resurrected in glory. And again and again as after each fall, each error, each sin, we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start all over again.

God became man and suffered all men's woes. We didn't ask him to. **That is love.** Through the incarnation, life and crucifixion of Jesus, God enters into all human experience: *God enters man.* **That is love.** Through the resurrection man is reborn – a constant cycle of death followed by resurrection: eternal regeneration, eternal Eucharist, re-incarnation. *Man enters God.* **That is love.** We fall short, repent and are forgiven – crucifixion immediately followed by resurrection. Without repentance there is no resurrection, merely an increasing dis-ease precipitating ill-health.

Jesus tells each one of us to take up our cross.
not so much going to find a cause then taking it up, but living in the present – what you have with you now. Living in the present.

I've spent much of my life trying to change things
Pattern of my life
Don't regret what happened easily
And look at the riches that have come my way
I must try to be more grateful.

I don't see suffering as meaning tolerating patiently and sitting back.
Suffering surely calls for action

Jesus in everyone
Disadvantaged people are prophets in – people who reveal our values, make us uncomfortable.

So Jesus is Love, and let us never think we are too sinful or unprepared to meet him.

Prodigal father

Jesus is love and love takes many forms so Jesus takes many forms. It guides but does not insist. It stands alongside. It surprises. It is sometimes angry – hatred of wrongdoing. It is not always 'nice' and it is never bland or anodyne. This sounds like the hymn to love in 1 Corinthians. That is what Jesus is like. And we can see him if we try in every situation and every person. Jesus and love are often unseen until they have gone – like the road to Emmaus.

Schweitzer next

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!', and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfil in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether wise or unwise, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, the incarnation of love, whose suffering, death and resurrection transforms us, and whose righteousness dawns upon the world scattering the darkness of sin, death and injustice, grant us grace and glory.

Let us pray, after St Patrick.

May the strength of God pilot us.

May the power of God preserve us.

May the wisdom of God instruct us.

May the hand of God protect us.

May the way of God direct us.

May the shield of God defend us.

May the host of god guard us against the snares of evil and temptations of the world.

May Christ be with us.

Christ above us.

Christ in us.

Christ before us.

May your salvation, O Lord, be always ours this day and for evermore, **Amen.**

Lent 6 Elton Evensong

Palm Sunday

1 April 2007

Standing at the gates of the city.

The city of wrong.

- Imagine Jesus and friends
- Set his face
- Now he's there
- A strengthening party
- A gesture to the Jews
- Donkey

Standing at the gates of the city.

The city of wrong.

- Jesus faces his demons and by suffering the passion absorbs them into himself
- Passion, suffering, tolerates

Standing at the gates of the city.

The city of wrong.

- Jesus faces his demons
- Jesus takes us with him
- We must face our demons

What are our demons?

First, the way we soil others.

- In the garden - confront
- Peter's denials
- Mob justice – peer pressure
- Pilate wriggles - economical with the actualité and weakness

Second, the way we soil ourselves

- All this means ourselves - what we do to ourselves.

FROM morn to midnight, all day through,
I laugh and play as others do,
I sin and chatter, just the same
As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage,
I dance and tumble and do rage
So vehemently, I scarcely see
The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not
Visit, a heart I have forgot,
A self that I have never met,
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul
Unwitting I keep white and whole,
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands
And listening ears Thy servant stands,
Call Thou early, call Thou late,
To Thy great service dedicate.

May, 1915

Standing at the gates of the city.
The city of wrong.

- Love your enemies
- Embrace our demons
- And Love our demons
- Exposing them to the light of Christ
- Jesus suffered, tolerates
- In the garden - Joseph ministered to him

Then: City of wrong to city of gold

Amen

Wirksworth 5 April 2007 Maundy Thursday Eucharist

Do this in remembrance of me. No matter what we think happens to bread and wine at the prayer of consecration, these words take us back to Jerusalem two thousand years ago. But these words work the other way, too: they bring Jerusalem of two thousand years ago here today, to this place, in this place. And not just the words, but all the action and the whole occasion: the upper room, the meal, Jesus and the disciples knowing that something nasty was going to happen, and the togetherness of the disciples, even the one who had something to hide.

'Do this in remembrance of me' brings it all into the present. That is what sacraments do. And they bring with them all the intervening years as well: all the Christians of the past, all the joys and

sadnesses of history. The whole of the past concentrated into the words and action of the consecration prayer: we open the door of Dr Who's Tardis and find ourselves in the vastness of history. This notion of space-time is a bit at odds with western European linear time, but it is inherent in folk-memory, in community-memory, and is very much a living part of middle-Eastern culture, even today. It is Hebrew zikkaron, and, fascinatingly, has something in common with notions of space-time known to the particle physicist.

Every time the Lord's supper is celebrated, the past is gathered up and presented to us. And then in the heavenly banquet, past and present are refreshed and ejected, launched into the world transformed. In an instant, the caterpillar of the past becomes the butterfly of the future. Rebirth. Or, if you prefer astronomy, the entire universe is compressed, sucked into the infinitely dense black hole of crucifixion, the bloody, dirty hole of the crucifixion, and propelled with infinite acceleration, dispersed to create the glorious new universe.

This is a magnificent vision. All Christian theology and history concentrated into the moment at every Eucharist. No wonder we should celebrate it with all possible splendour and theatre and solemnity and joy. The entire cosmos gathered up and borne for an instant by the priest. You can imagine what a great burden is placed on the priest at that brief moment in the holy mystery.

Renewal is a major theme of foot washing too. Imagine Jesus and the disciples' feet. No stout brogues. I doubt that they would have been so lacking in fashion sense as to wear socks with their sandals. Who knows what they trod in. So in washing their feet, Jesus was taking a bit of a risk. Not something that in our ridiculously clean, 'nice' world, many would relish today. This is a cleansing, like Baptism. A washing away of the dust on our feet, the past. It's a confession. And as we wash each other's feet we might confess our weaknesses to one another. In my sermon here on the Sunday before Lent, I suggested that we should use Lent to try to see ourselves as others see us, and give up the things that shock us about that vision of ourselves. As we wash each other's feet, then, we might tell each other of these things, and ask for help in giving up our addictions. In truth, we should be washing each other's feet as a preparation for HC at every Eucharist.

Foot washing was something that Jesus did for his disciples. It is an act of service. It expresses God's will and purpose, and gives us a model to emulate. It brings the past with it, and it shows us how it can be transformed by service to others. It too is a sacrament that gathers up the past for service to the future.

Each of us is a sacrament, too. Each of us has all our past within us. We are the sum of our memories. All our past is included in our genes – genes from the primeval soup at the moment of creation are in every one of our cells. And, sisters and brothers, all this past is sanctified tonight in these sacraments. We are cleansed. We are fed. We are, and heaven knows I need this, forgiven. We have the meal set out by the gracious father for the prodigal son.

We are accepted, and empowered. And we too are launched for future service. That is why we celebrate the institution of the Holy Eucharist, and wash each other's feet.

It is a thing most wonderful. Nothing in my hand I bring, but rather, just as I am.

WW Good Friday 2007

In the garden

Last Sunday, Palm Sunday, we arrived with Our Lord at the gate of the city of wrong, as Rowan Williams called it. Our Lord paused for refreshment and then went in. This is a journey that he did not shirk or evade. Neither must we. He faced his demons straight on. So must we. We embark on a journey through Jerusalem, a journey into our souls. Our Lord during this journey abandoned his will, abandoned his self, and by his passive suffering he absorbed the evil into himself. This takes great courage. Let's see how we get on as we go with him.

O let me see thy foot-marks, and in them plant mine own.

Denials

Peter's denials got him out of a difficult situation and saved his skin – for the moment. But later, he wept, overcome with remorse. It is hard to read or hear any of today's news without being confronted by denials. How can a secretary of state deny responsibility for her system of allocating doctors' jobs that has so demonstrably failed? How can a head of state deny his part in a situation that sees three quarters of his people starve while he lives in luxury?

Do we deny the truth simply because of our need to save face? But it is not the face that suffers, as Peter found out. It is the inner self, that inner sanctuary of the soul that is the Christ within. It is myself that I harm when I deny what is evident to others.

Lord, help us to see ourselves as others see us, and give us courage to face the truth.

Mob justice, crown of thorns, away with him

The Times, March 16, 2007. Attack in North Kensington. Last night police sources said that the victim had been a "nice lad" and a promising A-level student who had never been in trouble with the police. His family live in North Kensington. A young man was surrounded by the gang. A witness said: "Some of the gang had armed themselves with 3ft wooden sticks from a skip. It was almost like a lynch mob. They were all ganging up on that one poor lad." Witnesses say that teenage girls egged on the attack with shouts of "Kill him, kill him" before the victim was surrounded. At one point the victim raised his arms to fend off blows from sticks. A resident was in her kitchen when she heard a girl shouting. She said: "I opened the window and then I saw this young man lying on his back in a pool of blood. The girl was still there — she was crying and was on the phone."

Lord, give us the strength to stand up for you, and not to be seduced by wrong.

Pilate wriggles

Pilate was not altogether a bad man. He needed to please his superiors. How often have I felt like that? He could not afford to let Caesar get the impression that he couldn't control the crowd. He needed to placate them. How often have I done that? So he tried to wriggle out of responsibility. When the Glasgow express crashed near Kendal last month, Richard Branson was on the scene, within minutes almost, crowing that it wasn't anything to do with him. It is most certainly to do with him and with us all. We are all responsible for electing the government that regulates the railways. We are all responsible to some degree.

- First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.
- Then they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist.
- Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.
- Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.

Lord, help us accept responsibility for our actions, and their consequences. Let us not try to shift the blame on to the shoulders of the innocent.

Holy Scripture: It is finished

Harry Williams was chaplain at Trinity College Cambridge in the 1960s and was there when the former foreign secretary R A Butler ("Rab") came as Master. Williams writes in his autobiography "My favourite memory of Rab as Master is something which he wouldn't have remembered. It was his spontaneous reaction to the Passion story in St John's Gospel, which was read with intervals of appropriate music. As we came out of chapel he said to me with an obvious lump in his throat: "Terribly sad story that." After having had to fill my head with what the wordy theologians had written about the fourth Gospel, it was refreshing and moving to hear Rab's immediate, instinctive reaction to it.' It is the immediacy of the story, the circumstantial detail and the sheer authenticity that tell me that all this happened. That people are indeed cruel. God became man and suffered all men's woes. We didn't ask him to. That is love. Through the incarnation, life and crucifixion of Jesus, God enters into all human experience: *God enters man.*

Holy Scripture: In the garden

Through our denials, through *our* misjudging the innocent, through our own passing the buck, and through our own failing to stand firm against pressure, we are all there at the crucifixion, hammering in the nails. As R A Butler said, this is a terribly sad story. But it is not hopeless.

We look forward to the empty tomb. We look forward to regeneration, refreshment, renewal that comes after the darkest hour. And in our daily lives, we do not need to beat ourselves up after each slip, each mistake. We fall short, repent and are forgiven, and move on – crucifixion followed by resurrection. The most difficult part of this might be forgiving ourselves, but we if we imagine that our fault is so bad that not even God can forgive us, we are guilty of even greater sins – that of spiritual arrogance presuming to know the mind of God, and Judas' sin of inverted pride that his sin was too grave to be forgiven. God will forgive the true repentant – that is the Christian message.

The story does not stop today: today is, to be sure, a crucial (pardon the pun) phase, along with Incarnation, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. But today we are at the lowest point. But metamorphosis and rebirth will follow, and the butterfly will emerge gloriously resplendent. This is a constant cycle of death followed by resurrection: eternal regeneration, eternal spiritual re-incarnation. *Man enters God*. This is salvation.

We started in the garden, and now we're back in the garden. We see the door in the wall covered by ivy. And furthermore we have found the key.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. T S Eliot

O guide me, call me, draw me, uphold me to the end; and then in heaven receive me, my Master and my friend.

Easter Day 2007

WW Bradbourne, HC
8 April 2007

Acts 10:34-43.
Psalm 118:14-24.
1 Corinthians 15:19-26.
John 20:1-18.

*Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise
Without delays,
Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise With him mayst rise:
That, as his death calcined thee to dust,
His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.*

Today we celebrate Christ's rising, and what better way than with George Herbert. It is a splendid festival, and, as usual with the Christian story, startlingly relevant to everyday life. Resurrection after crucifixion is not just history, it's about our experience, about what we do to ourselves.

We crucify ourselves by doing things that were done to Jesus: we deny the truth like Peter, we pass the buck like Pilate, we side with the majority in choosing evil like the crowd. We crucify Jesus and we crucify ourselves, that divine core within. And when the enormity and seriousness of what we've done strikes home, we are sick in the stomach.

It is at such moments that we're in the empty tomb, we are the empty tomb. We know the desolation of Mary Magdalene when she says 'they have taken away my Lord.' This is the true Mary speaking, completely open, completely vulnerable. It is at these empty-tomb moments that we too are at our most open and most vulnerable. We lose the outer crust of self.

In the empty tomb, Jesus' outer crust, the clothes and headwear, are left in position as if the body has simply dematerialised, and the clothing that had been wrapped around the body has just collapsed. It is as if the butterfly leaves the cocoon of earthly clothing. The butterfly, the imago, unlimited by gravity to the surface of the earth, and soon, at the Ascension, to be unlimited by time. Thus is death transformed.

In the garden, the risen Jesus asks the desolate Mary what troubles her, but through her tears she doesn't recognize him. Not unreasonably, she supposes him to be the gardener.

AND SO HE IS. Listen to these words preached on today's Gospel by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes to King James I on Easter Sunday 1620.

Christ may well be said to be a gardener, and indeed is one. The first, the fairest garden that ever was, Paradise. He was the gardener, it was of His planting. And ever since, it is He That as God makes all our gardens green, sends us yearly the spring, and all the herbs and flowers we then gather. So a gardener in that sense.

But not in that alone; but He it is who gardens our 'souls' too, and makes them like a well-watered garden; weeds out of them whatsoever is noisome or unsavoury, sows and plants them with true roots and seeds of righteousness, waters them with the dew of His grace, and makes them bring forth fruit to eternal life.

But it is none of all these, but besides all these, no over and above all these, this day if ever, most properly He was a gardener. Christ rising was indeed a gardener, Who made such a herb grow out of the ground this day as the like was never seen before, a dead body to shoot forth alive out of the grave.

In the desolation of our vulnerable and unprotected selves at empty-tomb moments, renewal begins. Christ couldn't escape the horror of crucifixion, and neither can we escape the pain of losing self; it's a necessary prerequisite for healing, salvation.

In the freshly weeded garden, new life sprouts. The young saplings are watered by Mary's tears, by our tears. Our empty vessels are filled to overflowing by the river of life from Christ's pierced side. *See, the stream of living waters, springing from eternal love, well supply thy sons and daughters, And all fear of want remove. Who can faint while such a river ever flows?*

Just sit there and be filled, and be freed from the cocoon of ego, freed to seek the delightful. Be freed to change course and lose the attachments that tether us to ego and closed-mindedness, the cause of all the diseases of humanity.

And this new growth happens every day.

- The joy that we find in work and that transforms its tears and sweat into happiness and delight.
- The wonder and curiosity that welcomes what's new and regards it not as threatening but enriching.
- The confidence that lets us abandon the shelter of our disguises and defences, and open the doors of our personality so that others can enter, both we and they richer for the contact.
- The conviction that in spite of all the suffering we witness or undergo, the cosmos is on our side, and works not for our destruction but for our fulfilment.

All this is resurrection, all this is Easter, all this is Christ Jesus the gardener at work. All this is GOOD NEWS.

Today is the day we're handed the key that unlocks the door of the Easter Garden: the day of which Blessed George Herbert wrote:

*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, 2007

Carsington, MW
15 April 2007

Acts 5:27-32. Apostles questioned for teaching.

Psalm 118 (14-end)

Rev 1:4-8. Freedom from our sins, coming on a cloud, alpha and omega.

John 20:19-31. Thomas.

It's become apparent to me that you don't normally have a psalm in this service. Since you don't in the Eucharist either, I thought I'd start today by telling you something about the psalms.

- Story book
- Book of inspiration
- Spiritual reflections
- Full of humanity
 - Depression, elation, mind-altering substances, cruelty
- Bible with NT and psalms
- Quotes
 - grin like dog
 - I have more understanding than my teachers
 - Neither delighteth he in any man's legs
 - Cup runneth over
 - Valley of the shadow of death

Several sorts

- Thanksgiving, royal like this morning's 118
- Trust 23
- Wisdom (1, 119)
- Royal 110
- Hymns 104
- History 78
- Liberation 114
- Complaint 57 psalms

Complaints

We don't complain enough

We come to church and pretend that all is well, so people laugh at us

Israelites had no such hang ups. They said what was on their minds. They ranted at God. They were honest.

And this brings me to Thomas

Thomas gets a bad press. Doubter, sneered at by the sort of church people who don't allow people to be honest.

- Lazarus raising story. Thomas is a great supporter of Jesus in the Lazarus story when he knows that trouble is brewing. No hesitation then. Thomas the loyal supporter who said what was on his mind and did not pretend.
- Let not your hearts be troubled. He is the one in the let not your hearts be troubled, you know where I am going, has the courage to say, no we don't. And he says this because he doesn't want to lose Jesus. Thomas the loyal friend who said what was on his mind and did not pretend.
- Then Jesus is killed. Thomas probably distraught. His own empty tomb. You've missed him, they say. A likely story says the disconsolate Thomas. I'd like to believe it, but dare not. So distressed that he says I can't believe it until I see it. Thomas the disconsolate, who said what was on his mind and did not pretend.
- Then he gets his wish. Thomas the happy. Thomas the ecstatic. Thomas the Indian.

So what?

- This is not a story about being told off for doubting. The opposite. Jesus is happy to demonstrate the evidence and does not criticise Thomas.
- It is a story about encouraging us to do what Thomas did. To say what is on our minds and not pretend. To put our hands into Jesus' wounds.
 - The risen Lord still has wounds.
 - wounds that do the healing.
 - The liberator is present in the wounds of the suffering.
 - Acknowledge wounds and they will start to heal. The Venite – harden not your hearts
In the wound will god's new creation be established. Wesley hymn.
- no easy answers. To face the pain before we can enjoy the resurrection.
- Shadowlands. We can't have the happiness of yesterday without the pain of today. That's the deal.
- Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.
- By saying what was on his mind and not pretending, Thomas took risks. He made himself vulnerable and risked criticism from Jesus. He didn't get it.

Thomas was no doubter. He simply refused to base his faith solely on the testimony of others. He needed first hand experience. So did Paul. This is good. Religion is about exploration, and exploring yourself is one of the most important investigations. 2nd commandment – no use if you don't love yourself.

Nouwen:

- Pastor constantly invites his fellow man to ask real, often painful and upsetting questions, to look behind the surface.
 - Thomas was a pastor.
- The contemplative critic takes away the illusory mask of the manipulative world and has the courage to show what the true situation is, he knows that he is considered by many as a fool, a madman, a danger to society and a threat to mankind.
 - Thomas was a contemplative critic.
- More than anything else, he will look for signs of hope and promise in the situation in which he finds himself. Matthew's Mustard seed.
 - Thomas did this.

Holiness comes from honesty and being yourself. Taking risks, Making mistakes, acknowledging truth, not pretending. Thomas was himself, honest and true. Thomas was holy. We should be more like him, not less like him.

Easter 2, 2007

KI Evensong

15 April 2007

Psalm 16. Preserve me O God. Fair ground.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Awake, etc. Zion etc. Despised etc. All the Messiah stuff.

Luke 24:13-35. Emmaus road.

This morning was Thomas, and now Emmaus.

Recognising Christ and being receptive to his instruction.

Gloomy disciples. Talking to a stranger. Letting the stranger explain to them.

Still not recognising.

Desolation of Emmaus

Jesus did not escape, we cannot escape.

We crucify ourselves by doing things that were done to Jesus: we deny the truth like Peter, we pass the buck like Pilate, we side with the majority in choosing evil like the crowd. We crucify Jesus and we crucify ourselves, that divine core within. And when the enormity and seriousness of what we've done strikes home, we are sick in the stomach.

It is at such moments that we're in the empty tomb, we are the empty tomb. We know the desolation of Mary Magdalene when she says 'they have taken away my Lord.' This is the true Mary speaking, completely open, completely vulnerable. It is at these empty-tomb moments that we too are at our most open and most vulnerable. We lose the outer crust of self, just as at the resurrection, Jesus' left the outer crust of earthly body.

Present in our darkest moments

Footprints in the sand

The Lord appeared to the disciples at a time of great turmoil and confusion in their lives. He taught them truths that were appropriate to their particular states, and when they received those truths, and made them their own, He appeared to them, replacing their confusion with deep understanding, and their sorrow with joy. T

Unsure of where we are going, or how.

One foot in front of another.

He walks with us for a while in our journey through life.

Open-ness to the unfamiliar

The disciples could have remained wrapped up in their own conversation and ignored the stranger who traveled with them, but they did not, they sought His opinion.

Certainly, that is a temptation that we face in our journey through life. The combination of extremely attractive forms of home entertainment, and a growing sense of fear and mistrust of strangers tends to keep us at home in our leisure time.

Recognised by doing not necessarily speaking

Breaking of bread

It may not be in what you say that people recognise God

You never know who it is next to you

You can predict what effect an action will have

Medical students visiting me

As soon as we recognise him, he vanishes

Light bulb moments

Temptations about showing off

Crucifixion being about what we do to ourselves

Peace and forgiveness are the same thing

Invitation

The disciples invited Jesus to stay with them. So must we. If we don't, He will continue on His way. We have to consciously invite Him in to eat with us, that is, we must appropriate good to ourselves.

What happens?

In the garden, the risen Jesus asks the desolate Mary what troubles her, but through her tears she doesn't recognize him. Not unreasonably, she supposes him to be the gardener.

AND SO HE IS.

He weeds out whatsoever is unclean or unsavoury, sows and plants them with true roots and seeds of righteousness, waters them with the dew of His grace, and makes them bring forth fruit to eternal life.

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- The conviction that in spite of all the suffering we witness or undergo, the cosmos is on our side, and works not for our destruction but for our fulfilment.

All this is resurrection, all this is Easter, all this is Christ Jesus the gardener at work. All this is GOOD NEWS. All this is PEACE, reconciliation.

Closing Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, Stay with us in every part of our journey, no matter how full of doubt or fear we may be. Through your Holy Spirit, open our eyes, we pray. Help us see you as our Risen Lord in all your beauty and loving power. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, lead us through the difficulties of our life on earth by the truth of Your Word so that we can learn to do what is true. Help us to break the bread of life with You and with others so that we may share in mutual love, and so learn to live the life of heaven. O Lord, open our minds with spiritual truth that we may see You clearly as You are in Your spiritual kingdom. **Amen.**

Keep us in peace, O Christ our God, under the protection of thy holy and venerable cross. Save us from our enemies visible and invisible, and count us worthy to glorify thee with thanksgiving with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and for ever, world without end. **Amen.**

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, grant us a spirit of wisdom and insight to know him clearly. May God enlighten our innermost vision that we may know the great hope to which he has called us, the wealth of his glorious heritage to be distributed among the members of the church, and the immeasurable scope of his power in us who believe. **Amen.**

Easter 5

Family Service

Acts 11:1-18. Gentiles, eat what you like, dream
Revelation 21:1-6. New age, And I John (Bainton)
John 13:31-35. Love one another

First lesson – no boundaries

Different aspects to love

America

Hugh – intelligent but lazy

Too much concern results in smothering

Learning to let go, as Jesus did

as soon as things started going well, he moved on
cross

Samaritan love – picked up, dealt with and moved on.

Four words:

- agape. general affection; feelings for a good meal, one's children, a spouse. Being content, holding in high regard. Self-sacrificing, giving love to all, both friend and enemy. NT commonest.
- Philía. friendship, a dispassionate, virtuous love. Loyalty, enjoyment of an activity. Also NT.

- Charis. charity, care. Also NT.
- eros. passionate love, with desire and longing. Desire for wholeness. Appreciation of the beauty within that person, or even becomes appreciation of beauty itself.

Love of love
Bulgakov
Wisdom

Easter 5 collect

Almighty God, who through your only begotten son Jesus Christ has overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life, grant that as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect, through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Ascension Day 2007

Luke 24: 44-53

Then the risen Lord said to the disciples, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Walsingham. Is it really like that?

Russia 1986 and 1987. So many churches dedicated to ascension and transfiguration. I'd not heard of many here. I wondered how many.

It's well known that CoE clergy only work one day a week, and so you'll not be surprised to find that I spend most of my time surfing the net. That accounts for my bad eyesight. And one of the sights I discovered recently was the NPOR – yes, it gets worse. Then the realisation that I was to prepare this sermon came to me, and I

Ascension: 33 churches in England (none RC)
over 500 Trinity

Are we afraid of this great festival. Too poetical, too romantic, too conceptual, too abstract perhaps for the Anglo-Saxon mentality?

How can we explain it? This is how it seems to me.

Ascension – the cosmic dimension, or rather lack of dimensions

We can see the Christian story as a saga of the making good of humanity. Divine approval given to being humanity by God taking human form and flesh and entering into all human experience birth to death and all stations between, happiness, sadness, suffering, death. These events took place at one time and in one place. The resurrection tells of its moving without the confines of time as Our Lord appears to the disciples apparently haphazardly.

And the Ascension makes the Christ-salvation event available to the entire cosmos. To all, in every place, and throughout time. From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same; from the big bang with Wisdom in the stardust to the future, whatever that may mean. As the Eucharist concentrates all salvation history into the consecration prayer, so Ascension is a kind of cosmic counterpart that makes Christ Jesus available to all and in all, the bursting into the cosmos of the risen Lord.

And now there remains one step in the salvation mechanism: the infusion of the wisdom of God, the infusion of the spirit of god, the means by which the wisdom of God built into us at creation is energized: wait 10 days for the last step in the salvation mechanism.

Ascension as personal journey

God took on human form at the incarnation, and now today we celebrate the taking back into the Godhead of the risen Lord. God returns to himself, goes deep inside himself before sending another comforter, another strengthener to inspire us – celebrated in 10 days time. This journey into Godself is, I like to think, a model for the way in which we can journey into ourselves, we must journey into ourselves, the better to equip ourselves for service. This is a call to searing self-examination and prayer, the better to gain wisdom and insights in the service of others.

Christ's teaching is for me profoundly psychologically authentic. All Christianity is for me a personal journey, a journey into oneself, and paradoxically the more one goes into oneself, the more one is free from oneself, and free of oneself. The aim is to be free to be available for others, as Christ was, and aware of not imposing oneself on others, as Christ never did. It is a leaving behind of self, just as Christ left behind human flesh.

Ascension as salvation

Rising above is always a metaphor for release, for a yearning (eros) for better things. Such yearnings are part of the human condition. An abused young man I know in the city aches for better things, and talks in just such terms to look forward to a better life. So ascension as something to aim for.

With Thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously
And sing this day Thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

God became man in order to raise man to God. The ascension marks the end of the work Christ came on earth to do. Christ ascends whence he came and, having become human, he takes humanity with him. The Ascension unites earth to heaven, humanity to the Godhead, humanness to divinity: sanctification, divinisation, redemption, call it what you will.

And this image is something that we can keep our eyes fixed on as we try to do his work and live for the kingdom. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Jesus' teaching is what the Christian life is about. In the words of the Herefordshire carol, This is the truth ...

Thus he in love to us behaved, To show us how we must be saved; And if you want to know the way, Be pleased to hear what he did say.

George Meredith (1828-1909)
He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.

For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup
And he the wine which overflows
to lift us with him as he goes.

Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

By your Ascension draw us into you, O Lord, and set our affections on things above, so that we may sing till heaven is filled with our songs and we are lost in you. Amen.

Ascension

Sunday evening sermon

Psalm 68. Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered.

Isaiah 44: 1-8.

"But now listen, O Jacob, My servant,
And Israel, whom I have chosen:
Thus says the LORD who made you
And formed you from the womb, who will help you,
'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant;
And you Jeshurun whom I have chosen.
'For I will pour out water on the thirsty land
And streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring
And My blessing on your descendants;
And they will spring up among the grass
Like poplars by streams of water.'
"This one will say, 'I am the LORD'S';
And that one will call on the name of Jacob;
And another will write on his hand, 'Belonging to the LORD,'
And will name Israel's name with honor.

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. 'Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. 'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any other Rock? I know of none.'"

Ephesians 4:7-16

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Weekend
Tensions
Why is the church so sneered at
honesty
being true to oneself

These two lessons are both about calling. We are between Ascension, at which divine approval was bestowed on humanity, Jesus' humanity being assumed into the Godhead, and Pentecost, the time when God's spirit is sent to us, available to all who accept it, ready to be assumed into humanity. Two way exchange, Humanity goes to God, God comes into us (if we let him). So in a very real sense, Pentecost is the last act of the Incarnation process, it is, if you like a re-incarnation every time we take a breath and breathe in the spirit of God.

Consequence of Pentecost is the descent of the spirit of God.

He came to himself – said of the prodigal son
Internal examination
Weeping for joy at the banquet
George Herbert

This weekend I've been on ICME, POT weekend about mission in the local community. I've heard about problems, challenges, inspiring stories through constant sustained action and prayer.

I'm ashamed at my lack of faith
I'm ashamed at my doubting the power of prayer.

I feel quite inadequate.
Presiding at the table
Forgiving sins
Article

Then Mission and ministry in the local community
Conflicts between manager/leader and priest
Being or doing

Managing: vision, strategy, empowerment

And then what does the community want?
It wants us here
Does it want to pay for us>

Maundy Thursday 2010

Has it ever struck you with how at home the Jews and early Christians are with parts of the body, and bodily functions. They think nothing of talking at length about wombs, circumcision, hearts, body, blood, eyes, ears. They are much less prissy than us. They are much more basic and down to earth than respectable Anglicans pretend to be.

Today we hear a lot about body and blood, and I'm going to say a few words about blood and body – specifically feet.

First blood.

The film *Gandhi* again, when early in the film, Gandhi and Charlie Andrews on a crowded train, and Andrews invited up to the roof. An Indian says to him 'I have friends who are Christian: they eat flesh and drink blood every Sunday.' It's meant to be a friendly greeting! In today's culture of flesh-eating zombie films and vampire films and video games, Christianity has a hard time getting through to the unchurched used only to these ghoulish images of flesh and blood. And I have a confession to make: I would be ashamed to tell you how very recently it was that the penny dropped about the real significance of blood in Christian theology, and the reason for this is that I

looked on blood from a medical point of view, whereas the key to the issue is in the layman's point of view.

Picture someone attacked in the street, lying bleeding in the gutter. As the blood seeps away, so does the life-force. Lack of blood equals death, so *blood equals life*. For Jews and Muslims, ritual preparation of meat to eat involves draining all the blood so that they are not guilty of consuming the God-given 'life force'. The blood that marks the doorposts in the first Passover (Exodus) signifies that the house will be preserved: *blood equals life*. And so the blood of Jesus, the blood that flows from his crucified side gives life to the world. All the references to blood of Jesus in Holy Scripture and in many rather gruesome hymns refer to the giving of life. The sacrifice on the cross is life giving for exactly this reason.

There are parallels between the blood that circulates in our blood vessels and the blood of Jesus.

- Blood brings nutrient to the cells of the body. What more nutritious than the Sermon on the Mount, the two great commandments, the parables?
- Blood contains red cells that bring oxygen to the tissues. Jesus brings us the oxygen of his life. Get rid of the smoke of duty and shoulds, and instead take up the clear air of freedom from worldly burdens. We are in the world, but not of the world. This is yet another parallel with Buddhist teaching, and Hindu.
- Blood contains white cells that fight disease and maintain health. Isn't that exactly what the teachings and example of Jesus can do for us?
- Blood removes rubbish from the tissues of the body, and contains platelets that plug holes in the blood vessels. The resources of the church are there for us when we feel burdened, and life overcomes us. *Come unto me all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.*

So now when I hear of the 'blood of the lamb', I understand it as, quite simply, the will to do the divine will, that is, obedience to the divine. As St John's Gospel has it: 'Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you shall not have life within you' (John 6:53). And in the passion gospel we hear that when Christ's body was pierced, blood and water flows out to sanctify the whole earth.

+++++

Now feet. For most of the people on the planet feet are even more important than they are for us. Feet in bad condition means no work. Feet need to be cared for. Washing feet an example of great service and kindness. And naked feet of the very rich look just like naked feet of the very poor.

The symbolism here is obvious.

Imagine Jesus and the disciples' feet. No stout brogues. I doubt that they would have been so lacking in fashion sense as to wear socks with their sandals. Who knows what they trod in. So in washing their feet, Jesus was taking a bit of a risk. Not something that in our ridiculously clean, 'nice' world, many would relish today. This is a cleansing, like Baptism. A washing away of the dust on our feet, the past. It's a confession. And as we wash each other's feet we might confess our weaknesses to one another. In truth, we should be washing each other's feet as a preparation for HC at every Eucharist.

Foot washing was something that Jesus did for his disciples. It is an act of service. It expresses God's will and purpose, and gives us a model to emulate. Washing the feet of others is a model for my ministry. Last week I was on silent retreat for two days. I discussed with my confessor the things that pulled me apart in this job. Especially the tensions of having to be a confidant, pastor, teacher, business manager, administrator, fundraiser, rural parson, suburban priest, Bearing in mind all the upheavals of the last year with ADDO and LG etc, I think I've done pretty well to come through it this far this well. But when I am trying to balance all those aspects of my ministry, I need to remember Our Lord's example of washing feet. Pedicure. It might mean cleaning the feet first, getting rid of disease, but always, always, it means keeping your feet and mine on the ground.

+++++

Dealing with real human issues again gets me back to the body.

St Isaac: Union with God is a mystery that is worked out in human persons. The personal character of a human being who has entered on the way of union is never impaired, even

though he renounces his own will and his natural inclinations. This is how the human personality comes to its full realization in grace.

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Christmas 1620

In the old Ritual of the Church we find that on the cover of the canister, wherein was the Sacrament of His Body, there was a star engraven, to shew us that now the star leads us thither, to His body there.

And what shall I say now, but according as St. John saith, and the star, and the wise men say, 'Come.' And He, Whose the star is, and to Whom the wise men came, saith, 'Come.' And let them who are disposed, 'Come.' And let whosoever will, take of the 'Bread of Life, which came down from Heaven' this day into Bethlehem, the house of bread. Of which Bread the Church is this day the house, the true Bethlehem, and all the Bethlehem we have now left to come to for the Bread of life, - of that His life which we hope for in Heaven. And this our nearest coming that here we can come, till we shall by another *venite* come, unto Him in His Heavenly Kingdom to which He grant we may come, That this day came to us in earth that we thereby might come to Him and remain with Him for ever, 'Jesus Christ the Righteous.'

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, the incarnation of love, whose suffering, death and resurrection transforms us, and whose righteousness dawns upon the world scattering the darkness of sin, death and injustice, grant us grace and glory.

Amen.

Good Friday 2010

Prodigal son

We all need to be forgiven

We all want to be forgiven

If we are brusque,

If we are gushing

If we are quiet

If we are ebullient

All of us do things in moments of

All of us do things that are misinterpreted by others

All of us do things for the best of reasons that have consequences we might never know of

We are all caught up in the web of sin of the world

That allows us to benefit from the tea industry that ...

That is the product of big business patronising and controlling the lives of the powerless

That allows us to benefit from pension funds invested in businesses that oppress workers in this and other parts of the world

We tell ourselves that fair-trade tea makes us pure and holy, whereas ... water

We all need forgiveness

Come the heavenly father at this sacrament and receive forgiveness

And if you feel the burden needs to be shed in front of someone else, let me quote from the Book of Common Prayer

In *Return of the Prodigal Son*, for example, Nouwen describes love and forgiveness as unconditional. Though this is not a novel idea, Nouwen's approach is arguably unique as he approached this theme from the angles of the younger son, the elder son, and the father. Each captures the unconditional

quality of love and forgiveness in their own way. The younger son's life shows how the beloved lives a life of misery by thinking he can be loved only by meeting certain qualifications of the lover (which he fails to meet). The elder son's actions shows how the beloved can be depressed because he thinks he should receive greater love because he has done all the right things (i.e., that he has met these qualifications). The father alone understands how to love and forgive and is able to do so and be happy. Nouwen explains that we are the younger son at times (when we think we don't deserve the love or the forgiveness) and the elder son at times (when we think we deserve love or that another doesn't deserve it more than us), but that we are all called to be like the father (and that only by being like the father can we come closer to being loved as we should be loved).

The man who has lost everything so has nothing else to lose