

# United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

## Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

### Year C – Trinity

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#### Pr8

Today's gospel story comes shortly after the transfiguration story. If you remember, Jesus goes up the mountain and the disciples see him on top with Moses and Elijah, figures from the past. Peter suggests building shelters on the mountain for these three, as if to keep them there, to anchor them to that place. It didn't happen. Then soon afterwards, we have Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem.

I've talked before about faces, and the need to remove our spiritual cosmetics so that, like Jesus, we see clearly and the world sees us as we are. I've talked before about Jesus coming down from the mountain with a shining face, and of people whose faces light up when they are doing what they were put into the world to do. But today I want to explore another aspect of that expression. *Setting his face to go to Jerusalem* – it tells of determination, resolution, maybe even pigheadedness. According to the gospels Jesus knows what will be facing him, and he does not flinch. Twice we're told in today's reading that he 'set his face toward Jerusalem'. He had to steel himself for the fate that awaited him in the city that killed her prophets. You can imagine how tempted he might have been to turn back. But instead having acknowledged the past, and brought it with him—Moses, Elijah on the hilltop—he refuses to look back and dwell on it.

Later in today's gospel, his mates encourage Jesus to punish the village that refuses to receive them. Instead he tells his disciples to move on—what's done is done. How often do we obsess about the past, going over it again and again, making ourselves cross and embittered?

Our literature is full of warnings against 'looking back'. In the Greek myths, Orpheus went to the Underworld to seek his dead wife, Eurydice. He was allowed to take her back to the land of the living on condition that he would not gaze upon her until they reached the 'upper air'. But he looked back and in a flash she vanished. In Genesis, the Lord warns Lot, Abraham's son, to flee with his wife and children from Sodom and not to turn their faces back toward the destruction that will follow. Lot's wife looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt.

Jesus' comment that foxes have holes and birds have nests, but that he has nowhere to lay his head is not to be interpreted in a self-pitying way—oh woe is me. Far from it, it's a celebration of the fact that he is not tethered to anywhere or anyone except the Divine will, and he goes where that takes him.

That's a message for us: to go where the Divine will takes us, not necessarily where we think we should be going.

Being the vicar of these three parishes is not what I imagined being a vicar would be like. I imagined a single church where I could say my prayers with the vicarage next door. I imagined the vicar and the church being in the middle of the wider community. The place where the church and I are part of the wider community is the village over there—and it's not where I live. I imagined a whole load of other things too that used to be true in the CoE but no longer are. After just a few weeks as a curate, I soon came to realise that I had to deal with the situation as it is, not as I might have wished it to be, or as I knew being a vicar used to be in the old days. I had to, and have, set my face to go forwards, starting from here, not from *there back then*. That is what we all have to do as we plan for the future. As it says in Ecclesiastes 10.7: do not ask why things were better in the old days—it's not an intelligent question. As I've said so often before, we often wish to relive history as if it hadn't already passed away, and so we fail to live in the present.

Looking back leads to the evaporation of what we most desire, or our being turned into something as hard as stone. Neither leads to eternal life. Looking back is sometimes our solution to the fear we experience by looking ahead. However much we may wish otherwise, evasion is never a good thing. We must confront reality now and work with that. We must steel ourselves—set our faces—for what's coming rather than bury ourselves in the past. As Jesus says: leave the dead to bury their dead.

The past can be a refuge only because it is easily manipulated by our present desires. We imagine we have control over it. The kind of control that the two disciples in the Gospel try to exercise is the control of time. 'Let me do this first, then I'll join you,' they say to Jesus. Like Orpheus with the gods, these would-be disciples try to bargain with Jesus about time. We do just the same with our diary-driven lives. Each of us bargaining our time. It's our own diaries, our own agenda, that make us unfit for the kingdom of God. We want to be part of it, we pray for it to come, but only when we're ready for it and only when we have the time for it. Jesus is not bargaining or controlling. His face set toward Jerusalem, toward what was to come.

He teaches us to say 'thy kingdom come', but we need to remember that that kingdom is not in the past, behind us. It's ahead of us still. And we have no chance whatsoever of being fit for it unless we put the past behind us and start planning for the future starting from where we actually are.

Gill

- NS, four days a week
- takes time
- first six months simply following me around
- whether or not she takes the occasional service remains to be seen
- be kind to her. no soon have you whipped into OB shape

## Trinity Sunday sermon

Schoolmaster: Now you're sure you've got the Catechism all buttoned up, Foster?

Foster: I'm still a bit hazy about the Trinity, sir.

Schoolmaster: Three in one, one in three, perfectly straightforward. Any doubts about that see your maths master.

- Does the existential phrase imply sameness? 'it's i alludes to YHWH, thus identifying Jesus with the God of old.
- Jesus, though, nowhere says 'I am my Father'. He *goes to* the Father (14:12), and he *prays to* the Father (14:16). The Father is glorified *in* the Son not *as* the Son (14:13). Jesus is subject to the will and purpose of God (10:30), and to God's command (20:21). Jeuss acts at the Father's behest.

- Son and Father are one in being and action (10:30), because the Father has willed it so, not because the Son takes it upon himself (5:30)

Father and Son/Word (and wisdom) create and exist together before creation,

John describes the three persons existing and interacting within love (17:23) in such a way as to *suggest*, if not explicitly state, unity of substance. And God is love. What could be more Trinitarian?

'The native place of heat, the quality in us answering to this fire, is the heart, and the Heart of the Church is the Holy Ghost. These two join to this work, Christ to give the tongue, the Holy Ghost to put fire into it. For as in the body natural the next, the immediate instrument of the soul is heat, whereby it worketh all the members over, even so in the mystical body, a vigour there is like that of heat, which we are willed to cherish, to be "fervent in the Spirit" [cf Rom 12:11], "to stir" [cf Tim 1:6] and to blow it up [cf 1 Thessalonians 5:19]; which is it that giveth efficacy to all the spiritual operations.' *Bishop Andrewes*

Trinity arose 'implicitly to do justice to the cross of Christ'.  
The divinity of Jesus *requires* the Trinity, and *vice versa*.

### **Father and Son**

The Father sends the Son in the ultimate act of selfless love.  
Logos-Jesus is with God at the beginning as the Word through whom all things were made.  
The Son acts by the Spirit laid upon him.

The Father also sends the Spirit after the Resurrection, 'another comforter'. Despite all that has been written before and since the Great Schism, John tells us that the Son, too, sends the Holy Spirit.

### **Spirit**

Genesis.  
Psalms,  
inspirer of prophets and as an agent of change.

Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah and Simeon

The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert and strengthens him to outwit Satan.  
He returns to Galilee full of the power of the spirit.

He promises that the Father will send the Advocate, and when it appears in Acts 2, it does so with 'such an explosion of new life that the Church's mission thereafter has the appearance of a new type of mission or mission in a new way.'

Pentecost as part of Incarnation

Cornelius: the most unlikely people can be agents of mission: it is not for churchy Christians to judge who may be members of their select clubs.

In all these narratives the emphasis is on the Holy Spirit as catalyst, guide, and inspirer, risk taker. The Spirit empowers and emboldens all that let it, and, like a certain famous lager, refreshes the parts other agents can't reach.

All we have to do is listen to and cooperate with the Spirit.

Like Our Lord, we may need to retire to solitude in order to discern the radio signal among all the interference. This contemplative act is itself a vital part of mission. It 'strengthens for service'. In the monastic communities, which grew in part from the desert dwellers, it provides opportunity for critical contemplation, something that Henri Nouwen rightly emphasizes is essential to point out 'the illusory mask of the manipulative world' by showing things for what they are. Society may consider such a contemplative 'a fool, a madman, a danger to society and a threat to mankind', but such prophecy is part of the violence, power and energy of mission necessary to clear the decks (cleansing the Temple again). It enables signs of hope and new growth, as from the mustard seed.

Nicodemus

Born again of spirit

I have been saved  
I am being saved  
I will be saved  
Not a once-and-for-all thing

I don't feel saved at the moment  
I live in hope

Wind/breath  
Spirit moves where it will  
Take risks

Look at the churches  
How many take risks  
How many exist just in order to preserve tradition, and only for the sake of tradition  
What would happen if the spirit moved this congregation, me, you.

### **Trinitarian economy and doctrine: community**

love, sharing, community, self-forgetfulness, beauty, hope, fun, peace and joy.  
All this could be subsumed into the phrase *delight amongst equals*.

Mission is not about inflicting our views on others. The Trinity is a community of equals, remember!

Community  
Williams  
belong and not belong  
count and not count  
balance  
trinitarian sharing, balance

wisdom is love, light and knowledge  
trinitarian sharing, balance

### **Trinity in the wider community: inter-faith dialogue**

- Hindu
- Buddhism
- Islam
  - **Asma al-Husna:** All-Compassionate; All-Merciful; Pure One; Source of Peace; Inspirer of Faith; Guardian; Greatest; Creator; Maker of Order; Shaper of Beauty; Forgiving; Patient One; Abaser; Judge; Avenger; Resurrector.

### **The numinous Trinity**

- I have heard senior clergy
- The trinitarian richness and inclusivity of liturgy brought me in and held me,
- Beauty. Not doggerel hymns and playschool prayers
- 'Christianity is, at heart, a mystery religion, but the mystery is too often forgotten or denied: our liturgies are written in the language of a civil service memo, and seekers ... are often met with superficial responses or an embarrassed silence.' Our Lord was a Jew who, as far as we know, was loyal to the worship of the Temple in all its richness and splendour. He did not reject his traditions. The virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which you belong and which confront you is not, says Alasdair MacIntyre, 'conservative antiquarianism', which is exactly how it is portrayed by some Christians, but something that 'manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present.'
- Cathedral congregations, Orthodox church
- the *mystery itself* is part of its attraction.
- In all its complexity it has something to offer seekers who want to be challenged and stimulated.
- John Polkinghorne systems, both particle and cosmic, that depend on balance, community, sharing, and mutuality.

Brokenness

Life is messy

We break the bread, break the body of Christ,

Eucharist is taking this brokenness and making something beautiful out of it.

## Nativity of John the Baptist (Trinity 3)

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85

Acts 13:14b-26

Luke 1:57-66,80

**Isaiah:** desert, don't be afraid to create something new, uncharted territory

**Acts:** build on tradition to create something new, will take you out of the wilderness

**Luke:** Preparation, Desert, Asceticism

Desert, wilderness common features

In preparation for something

For what: Coming of the Lord, the kingdom

### What does the kingdom mean?

Subjective response to God's bounty.

All we have to do is say yes, and then the kingdom of God is here now.

BUT

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.

1915

Stripping down to essentials

Getting down to the core

Layers away

Humility. Stebbing. What it's not

So what: Quietness

K of G: We don't have to wait till we die

It is there waiting to be unwrapped, layers fall away, open the door

This is repentance – baptism of the spirit  
not feeling shameful or guilty  
Reorientating ourselves so that the divine core to flower and blossom – Isaiah's flower.  
Myself, ordination

Life is a love song we sing to Jesus  
The glory of God is a living person and the life of man is the vision of God

## Trinity 4

Six new priests were ordained in Derby cathedral yesterday. I am the only one whose 'first mass' is the BCP liturgy. I am the only one likely regularly to say the BCP liturgy regularly, and furthermore the only one likely to feel it a privilege so to do.

A privilege not because I feel at home with its theology—I don't, though its emphasis on the benefits for self-examination is welcome, if not taken too far. But a privilege for other reasons.

The BCP reminds us of the origin of the Church of England. It is, to be sure, a document of political control and expediency, but it remains the document by which the Church of England identifies itself doctrinally. If you want to know what Anglicans believe, read the BCP collects. It is the document to which I had to swear allegiance yesterday, and the prayer for the Queen's majesty reminds us that, like it or not, she is the Head of the Church. On the basis that the monarch represents the Almighty, and yet also the monarch represents the people against the excesses of politicians, I don't mind that – there is something about the interface between human and divine that accords with ancient doctrine of the church.

It was the BCP that seduced me from Methodism when I was a teenager. It was the poetry that brought me in, language the mission tool. It was, more than this perhaps, the knowledge that these same words had been said week by week without fail in that place for over 400 years (assuming 1549). This sense of continuity with the past is exactly what sacraments do. 2000 years of Christian history concentrated into the words and action of the consecration prayer. Every time the Lord's supper is celebrated, the past is gathered up and presented to us, then launched into the world transformed. The entire universe is compressed, sucked through the black hole of the messy and bloody crucifixion, to be dispersed with infinite acceleration to create the glorious new universe. The entire cosmos gathered up and borne for an instant by the priest for one brief moment in the holy mystery.

Christianity is, at heart, a mystery religion, but the mystery is too often forgotten or denied by matiness and banality. People of all ages are seeking a sense of otherness, and if the BCP can start to fill that search for me – and it did very counter culturally for a teenager – then perhaps it can for others too. Then tradition: Our Lord was a Jew loyal to the worship of the Temple in all its richness and splendour. He did not reject his traditions. The virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which we belong is not conservation for conservation's sake (which I oppose), but is something that through recognising what the past has made available to us, enables us to adapt and develop these traditions for the future development. Tradition has much in common with trade, exchange, development. It has nothing to do with staying the same.

So this mystery, this BCP liturgy, despite the mess that gave birth to it, is a compressor of space-time, personal, historical and cosmic; it is a vehicle for the otherness of the divinity, and as part of our history it is a springboard for Christlikeness in the future.

What a privilege.

## Trinity 6, Proper 10

15 July 2007

HC Brassington, Bonsall

- Deuteronomy 30:9-14. **observing his commandments** and decrees that are written in this

book of the law, K of G **is not in heaven**, neither is it beyond the sea. **No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.**

- Psalm 25: 1-10. To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. All his paths are faithfulness etc
- Colossians 1: 1-14
- Luke 10: 25-37. Good Samaritan

### **Attacked by robbers? What are these robbers?**

- Of course, we may be attacked by others.
- But psychological robbers:
  - the way we choose to react. Concentration camp story.
  - ourselves, our pride, our selfishness, our determination to prove that we are in control. The things that rob us of who we really are. They might be obsessions, attachments, things that we are dependent upon. Things that limit us. Things that prevent us from seeing all the possibilities of the world that are open to us.
- Sin is a life un-lived, and we so often limit the way we live in order to satisfy these inner compulsions of ours. Thus we limit ourselves. Sin
- The things that hide the divine light that is within us by covering it up. Like a lens that distorts our view of the world, and distorts what people see when they look at us – mirrors at fairgrounds, shards of glass in Snow Queen that entered Kay, made beautiful things look ugly and *vice versa*.

And eventually we collapse, on the way down from Jerusalem to Bethany.

### **Going down**

- At our lowest we are vulnerable, receptive to help.
- At rock bottom – as if layers of pride around us have been stripped away by our fall

### **And who comes and helps us?**

- Not the glamorous, not the fashionable, not the attractive.
- Not the people who do things because they obey the rules: road to Jerusalem – priests would be passing, thinking they were doing the right thing.
- Rather the things that we least expect. We don't need to do anything to ask for help, it just comes. But we have to be ready to receive it: completely stripped of our pride and dignity.

### **And look at the help**

- Utilitarian, useful, practical. No finger wagging, no shoulds, no conditions. No hanging about to be grateful to. Think of all those presents you got when you were young from your aunt or whatever,. Stuff you didn't want and didn't need, and yet you were made to write thank you letters you didn't want to write. Pointless rubbish. None of that.
- The Samaritan didn't hang around to be said thank you to. Neither did he hang around to supervise – he went on his way. Came back later to see that you are OK.

### **Kingdom of God**

**It is not in heaven**, or beyond the sea, **No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.**

It is very near, but these layers separate us from it.

It's at moments of down-ness and being helped that the K of G is very near. Not when you're dead, but here and now: the kingdom of God is within you. But we can't get at it because of all those layers we cover ourselves up with. Layers. Dolls. Shrek

### **So what?**

We try too hard.

The comforting message from this is that however awful we may feel at moments of down-ness, we can stop trying. Take comfort in the fact that they can, if we choose, let them lead us to the kingdom of God. Just accept what is offered – don't be proud like Edna Birch.

Hell then is our failure to accept the K of G. It is not somewhere we are sent: it is a state of mind that we propel ourselves into by refusing the love of God.

And help is always on offer, always ready to come a meet us. It is we who so often feel unworthy, but this is our choice. We only have to choose to accept.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,  
Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here;  
Love said, You shall be he.  
I, the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,  
I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:  
So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert 1593-1633

## Trinity 6

July 15

WW Evensong

Psalm 77

Genesis 32:9-30. Jacob wrestling, facing God

Mark 7:1-23. Tradition, what goes in comes out etc

Bringing oneself to the face of God

### Faces

Beginning of purity laws – hinder parts.

OT: wounded but blessed. I saw God face to face. Or did he?  
Fighting, engaging, thinking, working. Arguing. Not just accepting.

NT: rejection of purity laws.

Hypocrite – face hidden behind mask

Contrast of those who play only lip service, face hidden, with full face stuff.

Subversive food law disregard

It's not that we fall because of the result of what we eat, or do, or do not do. We fall because of what we are, or how we choose to hide what we are.

The nature of humanness: Divine spark within

- Spirit of god
- Light within
- Made of clay
- Lights made of clay
- Breathed over

### What is this mask behind which we hide?

Is it ritualism that Jesus Christ was worried about?

Hiding inside earthbound laws, human desires, lusts, obsessions, dependencies. Things that rob us of our true selves – link to this morning.

Divest them for a lightness of being as one discards these vestments of pride. Only the raw uncovered face looking out. Only the raw uncovered vulnerable face visible to others. Nothing to resist with now. Naked.

Stripping off the conceit (Magnificat), exalting the humble and meek within.

We cover ourselves with things

That is what Eden was all about

The sin of Adam and Eve is simply wanting to be what we are not

The essence of humility: knowing where you are with God, looking full into his face, and letting him look full into yours. Prodigal Son going home ready to say all:

Repentance: a prerequisite of forgiveness

Or NOT. Gracious Father didn't give him a chance to say it all.

So then how do we see the face of God? Not by mindlessly following laws and rituals anyway. Not by hiding our face from the gaze of God. By letting in the light of Christ to all those unsavoury parts of our souls. And yet, I want to keep them hidden because I am so ashamed of them.

What Jesus criticizes is pretence, and here the mindless practice of pointless rituals that cut the Pharisees off from others. Things that hide their face. And that are a barrier between man and the divine. And if the divine is within, these rituals are things that distract us from looking with clarity on ourselves within: we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

This is a struggle. There is always struggle with God in man's relationship with god. Psalmist is often struggling. One third.

The dark night of the soul

The darkness of God, the absence of God.

Christians in church pretending all is well. It jolly well isn't.

The presence of God is a real struggle. Perhaps I am trying too hard. This morning: Samaritan, only when down that help comes.

### **Jesus and worship**

Here is Jesus. What will he think of our worship tonight? God became human in Jesus, and nothing we could do to him made God turn his back on us. But have we become like the ritualists who think that going through the motions is the thing?

I'm not arguing against tradition. Our Lord was a Jew loyal to the worship of the Temple in all its richness and splendour. He did not reject his traditions: he built on them. The virtue of having an adequate sense of the traditions to which we belong is not conservation for conservation's sake (which I oppose), but is something that through recognizing what the past has made available to us, enables us to adapt and develop these traditions for the future development. Tradition has much in common with trade, exchange, development. It has nothing to do with staying the same.

Has getting the detail right become more important than the message, the atmosphere, the mission?

Is any part of our religious ritual getting between us and the Lord. Are the stained glass or the preaching or the flowers or the music all ways for us to reach God? Or has any of them stagnated, and become an end in itself.

Or worse, is it a barrier for others?

Why do people in WW not come?

What impression do we give to families on occasional office visits?

Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for their obsession with practices that cut them off from others, and cut off others from the Lord.

The Bible readings today pose the question, is there anything we could change about our way of doing things that would make it easier others who don't worship regularly to come in the door?

This is not about adulterating the truth. And we should not feel we have to give up forms of worship that lift our own souls to the Lord: we need to worship too. But it is worth asking whether there is anything at all in our forms of worship which, if we changed it, would help others come closer to God, without our having to move further away.

What we surely want to avoid is that Jesus comes to church next week - as he might, and as we must devoutly wish that he would - but afterwards says to us, as to the Pharisees, 'These people come near me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'

## Trinity 7

**Mary Magdalene**

**22 July 2007**

**Elton, WW (baptism), Middleton**

**Song of Songs 3:1-4**

**2 Corinthians 5:14-17**

**John 20:1-2, 11-18**

Ephesus, South of France

Jesus' wife

The mother of Jesus' children

Da Vinci code

12 references

Mark and Luke: relieved of seven devils

Prostitute? An inference from a word in Hebrew scripture

Only someone Jesus had healed of demons, but what demons we don't know.

Always there

At the cross

At the resurrection

The apostles of the apostles

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.

Plants the seed in our hearts

Nurtures and strengthens us, if we let him

*waters our souls with the dew of His grace, and makes them bring forth fruit to eternal life.*

This is some model

Always there

Crying, supporting, witnessing, telling

Mary Magdalene

did not expect great things to happen to her

operated out of the love that Christ taught her and her life was made whole – her life was made new.

She teaches us that no matter who we are, or what cards life has dealt us we have hope because of God's deep and unconditional love for us. Our lives are constantly being made new.

As we hear in 2 Corinthians, the love of Christ urges us on. Love is what pushes us forward, what gives us courage, what gives us hope and what gives us life. Mary Magdalene uses her love of Christ to push her on. Even when she thought that Christ was dead and gone, she used her love of him to give her hope and help push her forward. Now that she has found Christ resurrected, she has discovered that everything that is old has now been made new through the love of Christ.

So what a great day for a baptism: making new, witnessing to the Lord. Mary Mag: enabling new

creation

There's so much rich symbolism in the baptism: light, water, oil, chrism, clothes – all elements keeping us in touch with 2000 years of Christian tradition from the earliest days of the Church.

### **Light of the Easter Candle**

- to show us the way

### **Olive oil**

- Olive oil to cleanse and strengthen, as athletes use oil before a contest

### **Water**

- a sign of creation
- Washing away the old times and bringing new life in Christ
- it's a kind of regeneration, renewal, rehydrating the inner parts.

### **Chrism**

- Chrism – Christ – the spirit, in a way sealing Christ's presence within Harry, new life sealed within
- Anointing with oil as Christ was anointed with precious oil
- Harry is now a Christ, as we all are, able to show care and love and delight to the world.

### **Candle for Harry**

- signifies the light of Christ within him, as it is within us all, and is a measure of how we can encourage him as that light to live life to the full so that he can light the way for others.

### **And lastly posh clothes**

You're dressed up, I'm dressed up. Showing off creation and creativity. When we come to church, we don't leave behind creation, we bring it with us. We honour ourselves and each other by these fine creations, and if we honour one another, we honour the creator.

- So through Mary Magdalene's example, and these symbols and signs we celebrate Harry's incorporation into Christ's mystical body – that is, the creative community of church.
- And we've all agreed to help Leanne and Paul raise Harry in this community of faith. I hope they will be encouraged by knowing that we are here, and that we can be relied on.

Harry George, welcome to the community.

## **Trinity 8**

**MW Elton, Euch Bradb**

**Genesis 18:20-32**

**Psalm 138**

**Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19)**

**Luke 11:1-13**

Abraham, demanding, bargaining with God.  
God seems very weak to be so easily swayed.  
Or is he?

Jonah

Children – we try pretend not to understand them, so that they have to work out for themselves what it is they want. Like in my last job.

So perhaps this is what's happening here.

And perhaps that is what's happening when the disciples ask Jesus how to pray. He tells them to ask for what it is they want.

Abraham talking to God.

Us talking to God, God getting us to tell him what we want

Conversation

Not just praying by saying how wonderful God is but actually talking to him.

Perhaps this is all it is

The friend at midnight – That is us. God telling us to behave as he behaves.

Bread – not just literally

Forgiveness, acceptance. Prodigal son, second chance.

Only if we are forgiven

Temptation - don't test us more than we can bear.

Go to god direct and accept no substitutes, no false idols like cosmetic surgery, or dieting, or physical things, or the latest fashion

Be persistent

God knows all, knows what we want, but he still wants us to ask

That is, perhaps we only then know what we want

When I've formed the words with my mouth, I know whether I want it.

Don't ask for what we want but what God wants.

We'll come to see that prayer changes us, unlocks God's purpose in us, makes us see what it is we need to do.

Amen

## The Ninth Sunday after Trinity, BCP

I have said it before and I say it again, our Lord's words are so often unpredictable and surprising, no more so than today: *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

What are we to make of this apparently 'anything goes, the end justifies the means, free-market' message?

The retired Bishop of Derby, Jonathan Bailey, once said to me that in his opinion, the parables were intended to give a simple message, and the worst thing we could do with them was try and see something of significance in their every detail. In other words, they were not allegories. Good speakers choose details of their stories to suit the audience, so we need to interpret them in the light of this and then apply the message to our own circumstances. This is so with all Holy Scripture, and it is difficult, especially with Paul's letters since we can never be certain what provoked him to write them.

So, it is not the detail that matters, rather the message. And what is the message of this morning's gospel? It seems to me that it is quite straightforward:

- Use what comes your way to plan for the future.
- Use the means of the culture in which you are placed to further the cause of right.
- The steward was commended by the master for his audacity, so take risks. David took risks with Goliath: it worked.
- Don't be lazy, no need to take things lying down.

This is much like the parable of the talents: make good use of what comes your way.

Paul this morning tells us about the need to choose wisely, so using what comes our way to plan for the future, depends on our choosing the right kind of plan. And the danger it is so easy to fall into is to think that we've got it right.

How do we get it right: that is the question. I am the person least qualified to preach at anyone: I can only tell you about my mistakes. Perhaps that is how we seek right: by recognizing mistakes for what they are, and keep trying anew.

So be shrewd, be crafty for Christ, but never be complacent.

## Trinity 9

5 August 2007

WW Evensong

Hail Mary x 5. Irish experience

The way we say the LP.

Do we just say it, and that is enough? Is it some magical incantation, the very act of which is itself efficacious? When we say it, are we expressing pious hopes that God will bring it about if we shout loud enough? Or does it demand a response from us, does it demand action?

It's a curious thing that in the best known of all the Christian prayers there is no reference to Jesus, or Christ, or spirit, or Trinity. Although I am no Islamic scholar, I can't see anything in it to offend a Muslim. It is recognizably Jewish: here are extracts from the Kaddish.

May the great Name of God be exalted and sanctified, throughout the world, which he has created according to his will.

May his Kingship be established in your lifetime and in your days.

May his great name be blessed, forever and ever. May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life, upon us and upon all Israel.

He who makes peace in his high holy places, may he bring peace upon us, and upon all Israel.

This is not surprising given that Jesus was a Jew. And because this prayer comes to us in large measure from Jesus' lips, this Jewishness has not been much meddled with, apart from difficulties of translation. When we consider that so much of what we call Christianity is actually Paulinity, or Augustinity, it's refreshing to find something that no-one has 'improved on'.

**Let's look at it.** Don't over-examine it, but take a big picture view. Imagine that it is being read by someone with no Christian background. What will they see? Perhaps that there are two parts to the prayer:

- part about a father-figure and our relationship with it;
- part about our relationships with each other.

Two parts, two great commandments: Love God, and neighbour as self. Love of neighbour *is* love of God. Rahner, *The self bestowal of God upon man which sustains him in his love of neighbour has its supreme and eschatologically victorious point in history in Jesus Christ, and for this reason in the love of every other man Jesus Christ is loved at least anonymously.* I think this explicit linkage of God and neighbour *is* peculiar to Christianity. The other is calling God *father*, to which I return next week.

Now look at it again.

- The first part, *Our Father to on earth as it is in heaven*, sums up the Kaddish. It's all about God and God's kingdom. The verbs are all *wishes*: let things happen, in hope.
- But in the second part we ask for things of God, in fact we *demand* things: give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us. And the more I look at it, the more it seems that the second part is the key to the way in which we might attain the first: God's kingdom.

In the first part we talk to Our Father in *heaven*, as opposed to our father on earth. I don't see this as signifying that heaven and God are somewhere else, beyond, unattainable, but rather that God is something other than the fleshly fathers we know, or once knew. Heaven is the place where God's will is done, so earth becomes heaven when God's will is done here, and remains earth when it withdraws from the will of God. Seeking the will of God is a key part of this prayer, **and this is the central point of tonight's address.**

The prayer recognizes our dependence, our need to ask, our powerlessness, the futility of our attempts to control. Look no further than how cross people get when it dawns on them that we can't control cancer cells, or bacteria, or the weather. So in this impotence:

- we demand what we need to get through the day (not just bread).
- we acknowledge that we are in need of forgiveness, or tenderness.
- we recognize, or we should, that we have no hope being forgiven unless we forgive.
- we recognize that there is in us a gravitational pull towards earth, towards the gutter, away from heaven, and that we are weak, and need strengthening.

All this I'll look at again next week and the week after, but for now just note that we can not, it seems, do all this ourselves.

Now I ask: do we just sit back and wait for God to accede to these demands, like the Thessalonians, or do we act? This prayer calls for action, unquestionably. Action requires courage, and the prayer recognizes this, and that we are in a hard place. It sees us for what we are: humans dependent upon, not in control of, the natural world. We are vulnerable, and we need to know that we are products of God's creativity, which is his love.

### **Dependence or freedom?**

Unfortunately, this parent-child image often leads to a culture of dependence in Christians, a culture of timidity. Often in the gospels Jesus tells us to be like children if we want to attain the kingdom of God. And when you think of *Gentle Jesus meek and mild*, or, *Christian children all must be mild, obedient, good as he*, you can see how some have interpreted this.

But for me, the opposite is the case. We are to be like children not in this emasculated way, waiting to be told what to do, but children in the way that children explore, and take risks, and try new things, and move on, and make the most of what they are given. Like children in being imaginative: see children at play, happier with a cardboard box and their imagination than with the latest Jedi knight figures. Children open, *in your face*, up front, independent in thought. It is in this sense, I believe, that Jesus encourages us to be as children, this imaginative liberating sense. This is a very subversive message. Children are honest, open, straightforward: imagine how the political processes of the world would grind to a halt if people started being honest, open and straightforward. That the church has tried to control its followers, and keep us in subjection for 1500 years and more is a disgrace, a sin, a crime.

In the *thy will be done* clauses, God wants us to align our wills with God's, and of course we need to discern God's will. This is not simply a case of accepting whatever is handed out to you. Discernment is an active process, like experimentation in science. The Gospels say, again and again, that God's will is that we are to make the best of our gifts and talents. That is easy when you know what your talent is, but when you don't it is more difficult. And nothing is easy in the face of all the distractions that society provides for us, or when we can so easily mistake our ego-driven will for God's. So prayer and listening are steps along the road to discerning God's will. Listening, not babbling on to God, but listening.

Making the best use of our talents is bringing together our deep gladness with the world's deep need. It means cooperating with, and using, nature creatively and responsibly. It means living delightfully not miserably, it means enabling others, not stifling them. It means replacing attachments to attitudes, to possessions, to practices, to clubs we are dependent on, with attachment only to God. After all, he came down to earth from heaven to show us how we must be saved – saved from tunnel vision, from selfishness, from isolation, from prejudice, from being cut off from each other and therefore from God. And saved to 360 degree vision, openness, to freedom to merge our deep joy with the world's deep need. Discerning God's will means getting rid of all the upholstery that has accumulated around us. It requires a return to childlikeness.

Let me give you an image.

WW Junior. One of the older pupils came in, obviously going off on a hiking or scouting trip, with bag and rolled up sleeping mat. He was confident, radiant, fully human, in tune with something. I wondered what on earth I could do to interest that young man in Jesus's message: he was, in so many ways, already in touch with it, utterly at home in his skin; his heart and God's will aligned. It seemed in a brief moment as if obstacles would part before him, as the waters parted before the Israelites as they aligned their will with Yahweh's. This is the childlikeness that I speak of, the childlikeness that is the key to entry of the Kingdom of God – here are now if we let it.

Through the acknowledgement of our dependence, of our humility (that is, our proper place before God), the layers of earthbound upholstery are stripped away so that we can see more clearly, uninhibited by clutter. The LP liberates us for action. And don't let us be half-hearted in our action:

Holy Scripture repeatedly tells us that God favours brave risk-takers like David confronting Goliath; God favours the unconventional like the fishermen told to do what they'd never done before; God favours those who make the most of what they've been given.

When our will is thus aligned with God's, the waters part, the door back into Eden is flung wide, the kingdom of God is here.

## Prayers

- Reflect on what our gifts are.
- Reflect on where our deep gladness and the world's deep need might converge, that is, on what only each one of us can give to the world.
- Listen to what God is saying to us.

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests; Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

## Trinity 10

Last week we looked at the prayer as a whole. We noted its two parts, the first in which the verbs expressed wishes, the second in which the verbs were commands. I said it seemed to me that the second part of the prayer, the give us, forgive us, lead us not and deliver us clauses, were the means by which we might attain the first, that is God's kingdom - heaven on earth. Perhaps they are the means by which we can go some way to the conversion of earth to heaven by enabling God's will to be done here on earth. The key is aligning our will with God's, and today we get some clues about ways in which this might be done.

### Give us this day our daily bread

'Daily' is a difficult word, not used anywhere else in Greek, and so we're not certain of its meaning: it could mean what we take it to mean, or it could mean 'give us today tomorrow's bread', or what we need for tomorrow. This allows for a little bit of forward planning, which seems not unreasonable, perhaps.

But however we resolve it, if we're asking, we're saying that we are powerless. We are dependent on cosmic powers, sunshine and rain to name but two. And so we ask, demand. And if we're asking, we are acknowledging that we are hungry, that we are lacking. Consider the beatitudes:

- those who know their need of God, the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.
- God will satisfy those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires.

It could be an allusion to the Eucharist – and this is how many in the early church saw it. Or perhaps 'give us now a taste of the bread we shall eat in the Kingdom of God': give us a foretaste of heaven. Bread for today, but also a foretaste of the bread of heaven, the presence of Jesus at his table, heaven on earth. All very Psalm 23: Exactly the emphasis of George Herbert's Love bade me welcome (Herbert): you must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat – so I did sit and eat.

For me, this section also means simply *keep us going, give us what we need to get through the day*. We don't live just by having our material needs fulfilled, we need courage, hope, inspiration, creativity. And I suggest that this is a useful, practical interpretation of this part of the prayer, to take stock at the beginning of the day of what is likely to happen to you, and plan wisely for that, being careful with your energy and effort knowing what you might face before bed. This is the kind of thing that is recommended in the wisdom literature – intensely and immensely practical tips on daily living.

**But the most important thing about the section is that we ask – out loud.** I asked last week if the prayer was simply an incantation, or was it a guide to how to pray. Surely the latter: we don't just say it, but we do what it says. So when we ask for today's needs, I suggest that we list them in some detail. For example, I need creative inspiration tomorrow to make plans in Bradbourne, I need

energy to deal with a dying man and a grieving family. I need rational thought to decide whether it's worth spending money on another pair of glasses for only very marginal improvement. You get the idea. The reason I think it's worth asking **out loud** in this kind of detail since I know, and it's a common observation, that saying things out loud quite often makes things seem different, changes the perspective. It can make us realise that that is not quite what we meant, and it can make us re-examine the issue more thoroughly. So ask for our daily needs, and ask in detail.

### **Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who (have) trespass(ed) against us**

This is the hardest bit of the Lord's Prayer: it tells us that we have to be willing to change. Can I ask to be forgiven unless I forgive? It's in our capacity to forgive that we show we've been forgiven.

And asking to be forgiven hits me here as the important thing. And I'll go further, actually putting into words our thoughts. We can't, it seems to me, verbalise our shame without regretting it.

There is something uniquely and completely healing about verbalising our shame. The prodigal Son recognized this: I will arise and go to my father and will say to him ...

It seems we don't have to repent publicly. Father of the prodigal son, welcomes with open arms and comes to meet us before we have a chance to greet him and ask for forgiveness. All we have to do is turn towards him.

Eckhart went further: truly to have committed a sin is not sinful if we regret what we have done. Tell that to the magistrate. The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon received. Tell that to the jury on the paedophile case.

### **But do we feel forgiven?**

So what does that say about all those who seek, but for whom the prize seems elusive? Is it because we find it difficult to forgive ourselves?

We are not perfect. Paul – instead of the ...

We are all bound to fail because we set such a premium on success (whatever that is). Perhaps we should remember that 'If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.' Chesterton.

We need to accept our own failure, and forgive ourselves. Repentance to be 'therapeutic rather than vindictive'. Paul saw that the only way to change a human heart was through acceptance and forgiveness. It is only when I find someone who does not criticise my behaviour that I can find the will to do something about it: I need help when I'm down, not just on the way back up. Love our enemies – and one of our enemies is our reluctance to forgive ourselves.

### **Guilt and healing**

Guilt is one of the most destructive human conditions: guilt. Funerals.

It gives rise to shame, to horror, to tears. But Isaac – a great gift to have been shown one's sins. The forgiveness that comes with all this frees us from the tyranny of guilt (Colossians) that disables.

And for the exposure of guilt, or what is causing it in us, we need to dig deep down into our psyches – we must put our whole existence on the line. We have to work.

Penance is the surgeon's knife that can shed light on the problem, and then forgiveness comes with understanding.

This is confession, and it's fundamentally about love.

Forgiveness/healing is about letting God love the hell out of you. Sozein

The healing of guilt is to my mind what so many of Jesus' acts of healing are all about: possession, demons, disabilities – guilt.

It is hard work. All healing comes from God's grace but with human cooperation: the contribution of the sinner is needed. And when we know we've been forgiven, we can forgive others.

One of the early church fathers: 'it's a bit like teaching a child to do something. The parent does it carefully a few times, then steps back and says now you show me. God forgives us and then steps back and says now you show me how to forgive.'

It is almost as if the act of putting them in into words itself releases the guilt and lets it out. And it is humbling to do this in front of someone else. That is what best friends are for, that is what the confessor is for. In my experience the confessor has heard it all before, and is unshockable. It takes great courage to tell someone else, and there is a great deal of shame, but then we have the resurrection part of the story, since we arise changed and renewed. One must assume that confessor's advice comes from God. Always what is God's will.

What takes place in us when we accept it affects all those with whom we come in contact because it changes the way we relate to everyone and everything. And if we think that our sin is too great to be forgiven, that's inverted pride. It's an unchristian attitude.

### **Finally**

So these two sections of the Lord's Prayer have something in common for me. And that's the need for us to put into words our needs and the things that we accumulate guilt about. Not just thoughts, but actual words. And as for doing this with someone else, if you have a friend who will listen to you, you are richly blessed.

Give us our daily bread .. and part of that daily bread is the knowledge that we are forgiven. That liberates us from carrying around the clutter that weighs us down. And that, liberation, is what the Christian Gospel is all about. Liberation from distraction so that we can align our wills with God's, and so make heaven here on earth.

O my Saviour, lifted  
from the earth for me,  
draw me, in thy mercy,  
nearer unto thee.

Lift my earth-bound longings,  
fix them, Lord, above;  
draw me with the magnet  
of thy mighty love.

Lord, thine arms are stretching  
ever far and wide,  
to enfold thy children  
to thy loving side.

And I come, O Jesus:  
dare I turn away?  
No, thy love hath conquered,  
and I come today.

Bringing all my burdens,  
sorrow, sin and care,  
at thy feet I lay them,  
and I leave them there.

William Walsham How, 1876

## **Trinity 11, Proper 15 2007**

**Euch WW, Bradb**

Jeremiah 23:23-29  
Hebrews 11:29-12:2  
Luke 12:49-56

Coo. What a Gospel. How have clergymen and the C of E ever become associated with respectability, with middle-class comfort, with boringness, when there are bits like this?

This passage comes after Jesus has condemned pretence, warned us about our obsession with material security, and advised us to be on our guard. And its two messages are that if we follow the master (1) there will be conflict, and (2) we must learn to read trends in the world around us.

How does this fit with the bringer of peace we celebrate at Christmas? Is there something odd about the Christmas stories in the gospel? There might be ...

Or perhaps our notions of peace need examining. Peace, shalom, salaam, salvation, redemption are really all the same. If you ask an Israeli about peace, they might well say that it means security, and security means being well defended, and that means being ready to fight. And that's so not only for modern Israelis, but also in Hebrew Scripture: battles, tent pegs through heads, lovely stuff.

This is far removed from the awful, colourless niceness that some Christians seem to exude, the sort of complacent blandness that makes me want to stick two fingers in their eyes. Is this really what peace is all about: papering over cracks and doing whatever's necessary to offend the fewest people, even pretending that things are otherwise?

Think about Jesus in Palestine. He was talking to a group of people who were just becoming familiar with his message, who were members of families, quite probably, that would disapprove of his subversive and counter-cultural message. So perhaps he needed to shock them to get them to see what he was driving at.

He attacks families. Well, families can be quite stifling. Old family loyalties can conflict with, for example, the loyalties of the newly married. Family loyalties can be evil (gangsters). Families can be exclusive, xenophobic. Over mothering becomes smothering. Church families can be so matey that they exclude visitors and newcomers. Perhaps these are some of the unhealthy aspects of family that we should wage war against, so that we'll be free of unhealthy attachments, the more ready to fight what needs to be fought.

If you want an abscess to heal quickly, you take the knife to it and drain the pus. Be assertive and clean out the diseased tissue. You have to break into the abscess first.

You can't heal something if it's not broken: that's what the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension story tells us. And it is that breaking that we will shortly re-enact and take into ourselves in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

So how best do we take action to clear out the unhealthy bits of society? What can YOU do: individually. It's not someone else's job, it's everyone's job. And be in no doubt: we, the church, the clergy, are largely irrelevant in this country today. The CoE is a minority institution with a majority complex: it thinks it's important. It is widely mocked: perhaps that's a good thing. The church seems to do best when it is persecuted. Perhaps we should encourage this persecution.

The Epistle tells us not to lose courage, not to lose faith, but to press on. Perhaps we will find peace and redemption only when we have been disturbed enough to see the extent of our pretence. When we've shattered the complacency that stifles: the butterfly emerges only after shattering the constraining case of the chrysalis.

Peace on earth and goodwill among men are like heaven, promises for the future. Until then the church militant here on earth has a revolutionary job to do. Not the church petulant, or the church hesitant, but the church militant.

'the church exists, despite all its failings and all its historically acquired clutter, because the disturbing, provocative, impractical, loving and utterly God-centred Jesus got himself crucified. The God vindicated this God-centred way of life, love and being by raising Jesus up.' David Jenkins 1984

When 'peace on earth and goodwill among men' is accomplished, and the church triumphant rules, the church will have done itself out of a job.

God the disturber: Jonah's life.

God the shaker-up.

God the destroyer.

## Trinity 11, 2007 Eve

Evensong WW

Lord's prayer 3

Matthew 6:9-13

Luke 11:2-4

### Lead us not into temptation

Does God test us by trying to lead us astray? Everything was taken away from Job, but he remained faithful, his sufferings justifying mankind, a foretaste of what the crucifixion and resurrection are all about. Is the prayer saying 'I know I need testing so that my nature can be purified, but when you send them, please don't overestimate my capacity to withstand them.' Paul said: 'God is faithful, and will not let you be tempted beyond his strength.' (1 Corinthians 10:13).

So God is a kind of PE master then: running marathons in the rain may hurt, me boy, but it'll make a man of ye.

The words trial/temptation are not ideal, and 'lead us not into temptation' is poor as translation, because temptation for us tends to mean just a kind of impulse to do unworthy or sinful things. But look at this in the context of Jesus' own day. He often talks of the great time of trial or judgment that is coming. At that time we'll find out what we're really capable of, just as we often say you don't know what someone's made of until they're under pressure. The trouble is, Jesus was wrong. But then again, perhaps he wasn't. All Jesus' teaching has or me a deeply authentic inner psychological meaning. And perhaps all we ask in this bit is, when we come to issues that force us to decide just how much God matters to us, we really have to put our (eternal) life on the line. And God says, *don't assume you know how much you're capable of. Pray that when things get really difficult, you will have the resources to meet it.* So we might pray: *please God, don't push us into the time of crisis before you've made us ready for it. Don't push us until you've given us what we need to face it.* And that's good, because for every one of us there are times when we discover what we're made of and sometimes it's not very pleasant, and we realise we're not up to it. We discover what we're made of when we're up against it.

### and deliver us from evil

Is there a kind of force in the universe drawing us towards evil? Is evil:

- simply an absence of God?
- the devil?
- the evil part of us?
- inhumanity?
- separation from God?

God created the cosmos and thought it very good, so did he create evil as well. And if the devil was part of creation, and then fell, what does that say about God? That he's not in control after all, or that he wants to test us (PE master again)?

There is a Jewish tradition that says this part of the equivalent prayer in Judaism is 'deliver us from the evil part of us.' I like that, because it is authentically me. St Paul: the evil that I don't want to do, I do; and the good that I wish to do, I don't. And this brings home the point that every act of evil I do begins as a thought in my head. If I could stop it there, it would be grand. And we can train ourselves to examine all our thoughts before putting them into action. It stifles spontaneity a bit. It dampens the unthinking, automatic response. But maybe this is a good thing. Taking substances dulls our ability to stop automatic responses – legal substances like alcohol and illegal ones like dope, but then perhaps tea does too: I wouldn't know, I drink so much of it.

It probably originally meant save us from the Evil One. Because the time of crisis is when the Devil, the enemy of humanity, is enjoying himself. He's having a wonderful time, because at a time when we are fearful and uncertain, when we are raw inside, and vulnerable to manipulation, that's when all that's most inhuman in us tends to take over, making the most of our weaknesses, irrational fears, unthinking reactions, automatic responses. The devil, then, need not be an external force, but just the forces that result when we panic. The great God Pan, pandemonium. And we can still quite rightly hope to be delivered from all that. Deliver us from evil: set us free. *Set us free from all those things, the fears, the sins, the selfish habits that keep us prisoner and that make us unable to face crisis.*

Pray that we may be set free from acting unwisely. Pray that we may love those bits of us that lead us astray. Pray that we may love our enemies, our internal enemies, those parts of us that are fearful. Pray that we may love the hell out of ourselves.

### **And now some reflections on the prayer as a whole**

*Our father, our bread, forgive us, lead us, deliver us.* Not my and me. Community is implied. A fairness of distribution seems to be called for. How do we respond to this today, when even those who consider themselves poor in the west are incomparably rich in comparison to so many? How do we respond to this when some commentators, alarmed by the rise of consumerism in India and China, seem to think it appropriate to stop them having what we have had for over a century? This is another sermon, and possibly not by me since my views are politically incorrect and will offend the trendy middle-classes who go on Climate change walks.

The second word: Father – this is where the prayer is most definitely not Muslim or Jewish: they would never dream of being so familiar with the Divine Spirit. But consider that most wonderful of all the parables, the one that sums up all Christianity: the parable of the gracious father, or the prodigal father, or, if you must, the prodigal son. Is the parable a reflection of God? *You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: so I did sit and eat.* Is the parable a vision of heaven where the returning son decides to accept what is offered and so is in heaven, and the other son, the one who has stayed behind and is the dog-in-the-manger rejects what is offered, so is in hell. *You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: so I did sit and eat.* Perhaps that's what hell is – not a place, but an attitude of mind. Heaven where there is no pride, no stand-offishness; a poetic way of saying that God wants the world to be without pride – the sin that leads to all others. We can all be in heaven, all we have to do is accept what is offered. *You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat: so I did sit and eat.*

It's a radical prayer. Every single bit of the Lord's Prayer challenges our assumptions about who we are and who God is and what the world is like. We pray for revolutionary changes in the world we live in. A change to a situation where what God wants will happen, there will be no pride, no arrogance, the hungry will be fed, and forgiveness is the first imperative in all our relationships. That is not the world we inhabit now. What are we going to do about it? In this morning's gospel we heard Jesus say that he comes to shatter complacency.

### **And finally, how have these three sermons changed me?**

I've found them quite difficult, because there's so much to say, and when I sit down to type, I find the motor activity of fingers on keys stimulates my thought processes the more, so I think of more to say. I am, after all, trained as an academic. I've said repeatedly that Jesus' teaching is superbly and supremely psychologically authentic: whatever it means on the surface and in the story, every one of his messages means something striking about the inner personal battle that goes on in our souls. I think the thing that has hit me most, and changed me most is this.

Story about Dublin funeral.

I've said each week whether this is simply an incantation, the mere rehearsal of which will result in magical change in the world, or whether it is a call to private devotion and public action. Surely the latter. We need to do what the prayer says, not just say it. It demands action. If it changes me and you, it is capable of changing the world.

### **Another Lord's Prayer**

Father, we know our dependence on you and the created world.  
May your Spirit heal us so we can align our wills with yours us.  
Help us through each day with the resources we need, and stop us from over-reaching ourselves.  
Help us to forgive those who have wronged us so that we may ourselves be forgiven.  
Set us free from the pride, the fears, the selfish habits that keep us prisoner and that make us unable to face crisis and work for your kingdom.

**Amen**

## Trinity 12, 27 August 2007

### Proper 21

#### Euch Elton, Tansley, Matlock Bank

Jeremiah 1:4-1

Hebrews 12:18-29

Luke 13:10-17

Since I was ordained in 2006 I've been struck by the tension between

- finding time to serve parishioners, visits, distressed, funerals, baptisms, preparing talks etc,
- the demands of the institution: deanery meetings, chapter meetings, training meetings, bishop's social events, filling in forms, maintaining the institution

It all gets rather out of hand.

It's a tension that comes across in today's readings: the tension between obeying the rules of the institution, as against the needs of the flock, in this case the woman crippled with disease.

What would Jesus make of all our meetings in the parish, in the MMA, in the deanery, in the diocese, in the church? Would he think that we were putting more energy into maintaining the institution rather than looking after the flock?

There's a hypocrisy (he used that word) about pretending to exist for one thing, but in fact existing for another. Jesus is censorious about very little, but always, always about hypocrisy, pretence, complacency. Today's Gospel tells us clearly that people matter more than rules and institutions. We need to take bold and risky action. I'm free to say things like this because I'm too old to have a career in the church.

We don't need to feel unworthy of such action. Jeremiah: you will be given strength to do what is necessary.

You may say it doesn't matter: in the face of all the things wrong with society and the world, there is nothing any one of us can do, but if we all just concentrate on what is near us, and do-able, then we would make a great deal of difference. We can start with ourselves.

#### How do we do this?

- If you want an abscess to heal quickly, you take the knife to it. Not just sticking plaster. Clean out the diseased tissue. Break into the abscess first.
- We can't heal something if it's not broken. We can't be healed unless we realize the extent of our brokenness: that's what the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension story tells us. And it is that breaking that we will shortly re-enact and take into ourselves in the sacrament of HC.
- The crippled woman in the Gospel asked to be healed. She recognized she was broken.
- We can start this process by doing what Hebrews tells us: getting rid of all the clutter in our minds so that the **unshakable essentials** stand clear.

The clutter in our minds. The shoulds, the conventions, the things we do because our parents expected it of us. The things that prevent us from being free to do God's will, to seek God's will, to align or wills with God's. Things like

- being tethered to old ways
- being concerned more with institutions than people
- not being like children
- Guilt – crippled by guilt (today's gospel)

This will help to rid us of hypocrisy and complacency:

God the disturber. God the shaker-up. God the destroyer.

Perhaps we find peace and redemption only when we have been disturbed enough to see the extent of our pretence. When we've shattered the complacency that stifles: the butterfly emerges only after shattering the constraining case of the chrysalis.

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,

    Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here;  
Love said, You shall be he.  
I, the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,  
I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame  
Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:  
So I did sit and eat.

1593-1633

## Trinity 15

Evensong WW

Eating flesh and drinking blood  
Hebrew metaphor for giving whole person to Jesus's way of life.

A personal relationship. A very close friendship.  
An alignment of wills.

Calvin: as he takes us into his life, and, as we take him into our lives, we are joined with him in spiritual unity and in his ministry for others.

For to be intimately related to Jesus, or to be encountered by Jesus is to open ourselves to the possibility of putting him on, of receiving his image, of growing in him, and maturing in him, and becoming new creations in him.

That is, we eat the bread of life in order to live spiritually. Augustine in his Hunger for Jesus, Augustine: "our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

Adam and Eve created as icon of the divine creator.  
But wanted to be what they are not, So they are banished, but free.  
By choosing to want to be what they are not, they chose not to be servants of the divine within.  
Aching to get back again

We are created icons of Christ, but we cover it up figuratively.

But many of us don't quite know how to act on these hungers. Yet we really do hunger and thirst for meaningful and legitimate intimacy with Jesus. How?

Freeing from distractions  
Idols: money, attitudes  
Open like children

Brought up with it, but still it's distant, perhaps

My experience in Powerscourt

O my Saviour lifted  
I have to have faith that this is so – it doesn't always feel like it. But that is what the Resurrection story is about.  
But as Simon Peter says:  
"Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Jesus as friend. When you think about your friends, it's not so much that you dwell on what they look like. Rather, your friends have more to do with how you feel about their presence; how greatly you need their presence. The presence of friends enriches you. Friends give you comfort and joy. Friends give you meaning and hope. Friends mean life, the life of encounter.

I: sinner, imperfect, no matter how I try. But lay down the guilt at the foot of the cross. Powerscourt again.

He: the perfect human, the image of God

They: others

Two models of salvation:

Only those who assent

Cosmic – all, but you have to accept

Maybe we try too hard: Divine love. Mark Townsend.

Holman Hunt painting

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you and you with me." That picture is as clear to me today as it was more than 50 years ago. And I confess to you that I believe its message as much now as I did then: the simple yet utterly profound promise of a personal relationship with Jesus who is the bread of life, come hell or high water.

Our prayer is from the Breastplate of St. Patrick of Ireland:

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,  
Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of every[one] who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.  
Amen.

## Proper 19

12 September 2010

Here is Jesus talking to the religious jobsworths and nitpickers, the people who put duty before compassion. He uses two stories about people losing things, searching for them, and finding them.

Is this a message for me to spend my time in places of ill repute, talking to the lost, rather than propping up a strange institution? Some people interpret it as such, and only as such. But that always makes me uncomfortable for it's based on the assumption that we who go out are not lost, and are making judgements that they, the others, are lost. Yes, we must feed the hungry and tend the sick, but maybe there are other messages here that we need to apply to ourselves as individuals. What is Jesus trying to tell those who put rules before people? What is he hinting that they might themselves have lost?

I suggest that he is trying to tell them that in their punctiliousness to keep rules and tick boxes, they have lost themselves, their humanity, their sense of joy and fun – lost amongst rules and regulations; lost amongst their *amour propre*, their pride.

Luke's two short stories come immediately before the story of the man with two sons, the story of the gracious father, the story of the so-called prodigal son. Another story of lost and found, and since I don't have to preach on that next week because it's NOT the gospel set for next week (why not?), I'm merging the three stories. In the father and two sons story, both sons are lost: one lost in recklessness and wilfulness, the other lost in playground-style envy and resentment. Both of them

have a twisted relationship with their father. Sometimes we are like the son who goes off, deliberately sticking two fingers up at some authority figure: the boss, the taxman, even in

days gone by what we imagine to be the vicar. Sometimes we are like the son who stays at home, begrudging others' successes, others' good fortune, and angry with our friends for having things we lack. In sermons, my guess is that we hear more about the son who went a-wandering and a-squandering, probably because the church was much into trying to control people rather than help them develop. Jewish commentators, on the other hand, concentrate just as much, if not more, on the stay-at-home, sulky son.

If we're honest, it's easy to think of ways in which we behave like one or other of those sons. But I think that it is our calling to move beyond that. We will find eternity and peace (which is a quality of mind, and nothing to do with idleness or sitting having fine thoughts all day) when we become like the *father*: compassionate, forgiving, welcoming, ready to put the robe on someone who comes to us for help.

This robe is interesting, and very significant. The father has carefully kept it. In our bibles the phrase used is *the best robe*. In the Greek it is *stolein tein protein* – the *first* stole, the proto-stole. Imagine the lad before he goes off, dropping his clothes on the floor (an experience of clothes management well known to us all). The father picks up the stole, carefully folds it, and puts it away. Heartbroken, having lost his son, the father still is trusting that things that are lost, people that are lost, can still be found. The first stole is kept for the hoped-for homecoming.

And that – homecoming – is what this is all about. It is about what Christianity is all about. Homecoming, forgiveness, shalom, atonement, reconciliation, HEALING. Coming home to the Divine. We can identify what we have lost, and make our way back home, through what the church calls repentance, re-turning, RETURN. Through repentance we approach the divine by surrendering.

I come to the conclusion that getting lost is a good thing. Keeping young people attached to apron strings, or parents' purses, always ends in tears. We need to be lost in order that we know what it is we need to seek, or re-seek, or re-turn to. And it's not a matter of going back in time to things we used to love, or to things that take us back to our childhoods, but rather a matter of going home to our real selves, to that inner sanctuary of the soul that we shut out through our wilfulness, our recklessness, our pride, our amour propre, our self-importance, our resentments. We can't reach that inner self, that bit of the Divine within, unless we have been lost, and when we return having lost our sense of self, our *amour propre*, the dignity on which we are so keen to stand.

Pertinent quotes from T S Eliot

*East Coker* Love is most nearly itself  
When here and now cease to matter.  
Old men ought to be explorers  
Here or there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity  
For a further union, a deeper communion

*L Gidding* 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.

In my pastoral ministry to parishioners and others, I find that nearly all our spiritual sickness comes from a sense of guilt or shame about the past. Such guilt and shame often—not always—come from our not having accepted ourselves for the maimed humans we are. Guilt and shame come from our thinking that we are in charge of our natures. We are not. We are, every one of us, potentially able to do the most horrid things to other people. If we haven't ever

committed such atrocities, it's just because we haven't been in circumstances that have tested us. This is, in theological language, the sin of our origin, our nature, *Deliver us from evil: do not put us to the test*. And it is this sort of 'sin' that we need forgiveness for.

We come to church and we confess our sins. Do we sometimes just say the words without giving them any thought? Let me tell you how confession began in the early church. It began by two friends, mates, pals, talking to each other openly and unguardedly opening their hearts and fears to each other. Imagine two monks talking like this as they wandered through the monastery gardens, or cleaned out the monastery stables, or prepared the meals. This is how confession developed, and if you have never experienced it, you have missed out on one of the great healing acts of the church.

This repentance is not a matter of repentance of guilt, but a repentance of *homecoming*. When we confess our sins, we feel a great liberation, a great sense of coming home. RETURNING.

In the parables that we are reflecting on this Sunday, we have the assurance that Jesus is never indifferent to these pleas. The shepherd seeks out the lost sheep, finds him, places him on his shoulders, and brings him home. Look at sheepdogs. They don't run barking after the sheep. But, as the sheep wander off, they watch, then run like hell, and get in front of the sheep. Then they lie down across the path where the sheep were wandering. So when the sheep came up to them, they were gently turned towards the right direction.

That is our challenge for mission to care for the lost, not for our own cosy club, but for the lost. First, think and pray; second, run like hell; and third, be found lying about. And the lost includes our selves. We are no use to anyone else

unless we recognize our own need for homecoming. Our own longing for the Divine.

- Jesus said, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.
- Paul said, This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost.

John Henry Newman

Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom,  
lead Thou me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far from home;  
lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou  
shouldst lead me on;  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now  
lead Thou me on!  
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still  
will lead me on.  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
the night is gone,  
And with the morn those angel faces smile,  
which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

## **Trinity 16, 23 September 2007**

**Proper 20**

**Euch WW, Carsington**

Amos 8:4-7

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Luke 16:1-13

Today's Gospel startles me once again with just how shocking and unexpected Jesus can be. Listen to this translation of part of the passage:

Streetwise people are smarter than in this regard than law-abiding citizens. They are on constant alert, looking for angles, surviving by their wits. I want you to be smart in the same way—but for what is right—using every adversity to stimulate you to creative survival, so that you'll live, really live, and not complacently just get by on good behaviour.

Jesus says if only we put as much effort into working for him as we do into trying to avoid the washing-up, or ironing, or hoovering, or cheating the ....

Today's Gospel tells us to be crafty for Christ:

- Use the ways of contemporary culture to further the cause of right.
- Take risks like the steward did—he was commended for his audacity.
- Don't be lazy, or take things lying down.

This is much like the parable of the talents: make good use of what comes your way.

It's a call to action, and to shrewd action, planned action, cunning action.

The epistle can also be read as a call to action. Paul tells us to pray. Gandhi demonstrated that a national day of prayer can bring a government to its knees. Prayer, whatever else it may do, unlocks God's will in us, releases God's purpose. It is the key that unlocks the forces of good in the world. So a call to action as well.

And Amos gives us something to wage war against: oppression. Isn't Amos just wonderful? Cows.

We can all recognise the big boys of oppression: torture, imprisonment, exploitation—easy to spot. It's easy to see how this might be applied worldwide, and at the moment to Zimbabwe in particular.

But what about ways we might not think of? There is always a personal message in Our Lord's teaching, so what about oppression in our personal relationships? How might **we** oppress others?

Christian teaching always, again and again, shouts that we must live with delight and joy and commitment. I came that you might have life and have it abundantly. And if I am to live to the full, I am to do all in my power to enable others to do likewise. I must not take anything away from another person, anything that oppresses someone else, belittles them.

This is one of the issues that the curates considered on last weekend's training course: how easy it is for persuasion to become manipulation, and manipulation to become bullying.

Sometimes a bit of manipulation is a good thing if the result is to reduce the amount of pain in the world. Someone intent on suicide, for example, may be manipulated from that course of action. The general view would probably be that that was a good thing. There is something in that about the common good, the intent of the manipulator – is it selfish or not?

But 'persuasion' or manipulation simply to satisfy the self-esteem of the perpetrator, to make the perpetrator feel good, is always wrong. This surely is bullying, oppression. It takes something away from the victim.

It's rife in the workplace, daily life, even the church. It occurs every time we feel we are not being heard, or we feel a put-down. I am not talking about robust argument, for example when someone disagrees with us – that's a compliment for it means we've been taken seriously. I am talking about when we feel patronised, stamped on, ignored, talked over. This is bullying. It requires action.

My story about Faculty meetings.

And then there is an inner personal meaning. It is easy to let our inner negative thoughts 'bully' our positive ones. The inner demons, of which CS Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters*: our fears, our hesitancy, the caution that paralyzes. The things that bully the forward-looking part of ourselves into cowardice and negativity. The demons – and their name is legion – that all Jesus's healings set out to conquer.

So what can we do?

- We can do the equivalent of curling up and dying. Suffering in silence. Letting ourselves be crucified. I thought Jesus died on the cross so that we didn't have to.
- Or we can do the equivalent of fighting—rising again after the insult.

So, like charity, I begin at home with myself, and I ask each of you to consider these questions for yourself.

- How can we use the ways of contemporary culture to oppose oppression when we encounter it?
- How can we ensure that **we** don't oppress anyone, bully anyone?
- How can we ensure that we don't allow the devil within to stifle our true natures and creativity? Remember, Jesus said, 'I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.'

And this takes us back to what Paul calls prayer, or reflection, or meditation. Self-examination.

I give you permission to challenge me robustly if you think I'm doing any of these destructive and self-destructive things.

Amen

## Trinity 18, Proper 22, Eucharist, Elton

7 October 2007

**Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4**

**2 Timothy 1:1-14**

**Luke 17:5-10**

There is great comfort and encouragement in these readings. Paul writes to Timothy like a parent to a beloved son or daughter making their way in the world, or a mentor writing to a student in reassurance.

The Gospel message is about faith, and that faith isn't easy, but we don't need a lot. Faith is compared to a mustard seed – tiny, 1 mm across, yet the mustard plant grows to be big enough to shelter birds. In our part of the world we might say instead *mighty oaks from little acorns grow*. So it's not the amount of faith that matters, but the quality.

Paul calls us to 'sincere' faith, an inside faith. Not an external faith, not piety for show. This kind of faith requires us to go deep inside ourselves so that we see ourselves as others see us. Our Lord condemns very few things outright, but he always condemns hypocrisy and pretence, those who pretend to what they're not.

Pretending to what we are not is something we're tempted to do. It's what the Garden of Eden story is about: we cover ourselves up (fig leaf), we hide our true selves behind attitudes, rules, behaviours, tribal rituals.

We find ourselves only by getting rid of these barriers to perception. We come into God's presence not by mindlessly following rules, but by letting God look full on our nakedness: Just as I am. This is the essence of humility: knowing where you are with God, earthed (humus).

When we do this, we start to take responsibility for ourselves instead of blaming others. When we see the beams in our own eyes, we become more humane, more loving, more forgiving of the motes in our neighbours' eyes. We become more delightful, more delighting, more creative, less rigid.

This is liberation. It is salvation. It is the way to holiness and wholeness, for once the fig-leaves of pretence covering our own true selves have been exposed to the light of Christ, the more quickly they fall away to reveal the simple beauty within.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'twill be in the valley of love and delight. When true simplicity is gain'd, to bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd, to turn, turn will be our delight, till by turning, turning we come round right.

- Take courage from Mother Teresa's doubts.
- Take courage from your own doubts and even from mine.

There is always struggle with God in our relationship with god. Psalmist is often struggling. Struggling brings new life: think how the chick has to struggle through the shell, or the shoot through the earth.

*Walter Hilton*

travel light and without hindrance, so if you want to be a spiritual pilgrim you are to make yourself naked of all that you have – both good works and bad – and throw them all behind you; and thus become so poor in your own feeling that there can be no deed of your own that you want to lean upon for rest

If you do so, ... you shall see in your heart, wholly and fully, your will to have nothing but the love of Jesus and the spiritual sight of him, as far as he wishes to show himself.

## **Trinity 18 BCP WW**

**7 October 2007**

Lord, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1: 4-9

Matthew 22: 34-46

What think ye of Christ? The Son of the God, the example of perfection to which we aspire? And to love my neighbour as myself using Christ Jesus as the example of perfection seems to me the essence of Christianity.

Just think how this message has been perverted over the last 2000 years, especially by those who have used the church as a means of gaining and maintaining power over their neighbours. Manipulative ministers, power-seeking presidents ... imagining that the divine will was entirely congruent with their own, replacing selfless service with personal promotion. Like those in today's Gospel trying to trip Jesus up. It is no wonder that the church is held by some as an example of hypocrisy and posturing. It is no wonder that so many of my children's generation who think about the deeper issues of life, have turned away from it.

We do not serve our neighbours by wagging our fingers at them. It is hubris to imagine that we are in any position to finger-wag. It is abuse, a pathetic attempt to bolster our own self-image by trying to take what does not belong to us: someone else's freedom. Jesus never finger wagged except to hypocrites and pretenders. As Joel Edwards, leader of the Evangelical Alliance, said recently, it would be wonderful if 1000 fingers wagging could become 2000 arms outstretched.

Loving our neighbours as ourselves demands that we first must love ourselves and take responsibility for ourselves. Jesus so often ministered to others by holding up a mirror so that they could see themselves more clearly and realise the extent of their own imperfections. When we see ourselves as others see us, when we see the beams in our own eyes, we suddenly become more humane, more loving, more forgiving of the motes in our neighbours' eyes. We become more delightful, more delighting, more creative, less rigid. It is a spiritual gift from God to perceive our own sins. Only then can we turn again. In the words of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, 'I turn with groaning from my evil ways, and I re-turn into my heart, and with all my heart I turn to thee.'

This is liberation. It is salvation. It is the way to holiness and wholeness, for once the fig-leaves of pretence covering our own true selves have been exposed to the light of Christ, the more quickly they fall away to reveal the simple beauty within.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be, and when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'twill be in the valley of love and delight. When true simplicity is gain'd, to bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd, to turn, turn will be our delight, till by turning, turning we come round right.

Then we shall be able to love our neighbours as ourselves in love and delight.

## Trinity 19, Proper 23

14 October 2007

KI Eucharist

**2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c.** Healing, leprosy

**2 Timothy 2:8-15.** avoid wrangling over words. Jesus entered into all human experience. As do we. Since he survived, so do we. To be human is to be approved by him. No need to be ashamed of humanity, demonstrating truth through our humanity.

**Luke 17:11-19.** 10 lepers, go and see the priest. As they went, healed. Only one thanked.

- Skin disease, not leprosy, scaly, scabby. ?psoriasis, dermatitis.
- Healing
- Cleansed as they began to obey Jesus (aorist tense), and Naaman also.
- JFDI – cleansing as they began to do it. As Jesus' brother James says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17).
- Epistle: What you believe matters less than what you do. 'warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words.'
- Healing, my job, your job. Can require surgery.

### Healing wholeness

- Salve, salvation, wellness
- Not necessarily cure
- peace taking charge of yourself, responsibility for yourself, not being dependent on others
- Peace: can't have without battle
- Lord God of hosts
- borders, peace within
- accepting yourself. Just as I am.

**Nouwen Wounded healer** the first and most basic task of the Christian leader of the future will be to lead his people out of the land of condition into the land of hope. Therefore, he must first have the courage to be an explorer of the new territory in himself and to articulate his discoveries as a service to in the inward generation.

**Nouwen** minister as contemplative man, guided by vision of what he has seen beyond the trivial concerns of a possessive world. Not subject to whims. Constantly invites his fellow man to ask real, often painful and upsetting questions, to look behind the surface of smooth behaviour, and to take away all the obstacles that prevent him from getting to the heart of the matter. 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. But he is not afraid to die, since his vision makes him transcend the difference between life and death and makes him free to do what has to be done here and now, notwithstanding the risks involved.

### And just as I am I come to the eucharist:

- that we may live in him and he in us. This is itself a healing ministry, the Eucharist the original Christian healing ministry
- Why special healing services when Eucharist is? Good question.

### Finally, lest we forget Christ, let's remember that he does not forget us.

- Go back to the Gospel again: 9 walked away and did not say thank you.
- They had forgotten Christ. But he had not forgotten them, and he does not forget us.

### This is truly a message of hope.

In the name of God and trusting in his might alone, receive Christ's healing touch to make you whole.

## Trinity 20, Proper 24

21 October 2007

Euch Brass, Midd

Genesis 32:22-31

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Luke 18:1-8

Today's readings call for **persistence, prayer and positive outlook**, or if you like, don't give in to despair. Plenty reason to despair:

- patent insincerity and lies of many politicians
- wriggling out of responsibility, the abject failure to display humility
- dishonesty of organisations, the fat cats
- the Middle East, Iraq, Burma, Korea ...

Plenty to distract us from concentrating on God.

**So the need for persistent prayer.**

**Why bother – what use is it? What do we expect from it?**

- CS Lewis – prayer doesn't change God, it changes me.
- Prayer 'does not change God's purpose, it releases it' – it is 'the key that unlocks the forces of good in the world.'
  - enables us to cooperate with God – God needs our cooperation for his purposes to be fulfilled.
- Prayer focuses our minds for action, internal action or external action.
  - action is demanded. This is serious – there's no point in praying for something unless we are prepared to change.

**How**

So many ways, so many personalities.

Not just sitting with your hands together in church. No special posture or attitude or state of mind.

Many ways of doing it.

- Working Doing your job well
- Tending creation
- Creating
- God-directed thoughts
- Working things out using your God-given intellect – ratiocination – discernment
- Any kind of talking to God – communing with ourselves (God within).

It is useful to put this into the context of regular disciplined prayer. Perhaps in the morning, or in the evening. Kelham on the bog. With others. We have daily prayer in the mornings and most evenings at Wirksworth.

**Ranting** at God is prayer. Ranting is OK. We must be honest with God and with ourselves. It's not just sitting there and pretending that all is well when it's not in a terribly Anglican nice sort of way. About one third of the psalms are rants at God. By so doing, the way forward often becomes clear because a rant can help to clear out rubbish that was blocking the view.

Then there's **silence**. Just listen to God, and for most of us, since we aren't aware that God speaks directly to us, that means listening to our innermost thoughts. Take time to sit in silence, to listen to what your 'conscience' is telling you. That is prayer. Listen don't babble on. Be silent.

**Study:** scripture or devotional material

**Prayer**

Prayer, the Church's banquet, Angels' age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;

Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tower,

Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,  
The six-days'-world transposing in an hour,  
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;

Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,  
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,  
Heaven in ordinary, man well dressed,  
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,

Church bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices, something understood.

George Herbert

### **And the direction of gaze?**

- look in
- look up and out so that we can check our bearings. Like on a journey. You have to look outside to see where you are
- look at God: never mind what I want, what does God want?

### **Despair?**

- All this does drive out demons, negative thoughts, the imps that sit on our shoulders and try to deflect us from what we know to be right.
- CS Lewis Screwtape
- Mark 9:29 - Nothing can drive out this kind of thing except prayer.
- Healing as things become apparent during prayer. Painful at first.

**Prayer is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquility, the root of a multitude of blessings, and their source.** St John Chrysostom

## **Trinity 21, Proper 25**

**28 October 2007**

**Euch Bons, Idr**

Tax collector Pharisee

Link to Adam and Eve, covering ourselves up before the Lord.  
Need for Nakedness before God  
Humility

What is humility?

**the right understanding of who you are before God.**

Not humbless, Uriah Heep, self denigration, hate yourself, or call yourself names, or say you aren't worth anything.

- **Humility is that quality of a Christian that demonstrates a right relationship and position before God.**
- **Humus, earth: earthedness**

John the Baptist was humble: *not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals*. He knew who he was in relation to Jesus.

the tax gatherer here "*Lord have mercy on me a sinner*"? Jesus called him humble. He knew that before God, he was a sinner.

God does not want us to think too highly of ourselves. Instead, he wants us to think **soundly**. Whenever I start getting prideful and begin thinking that I know a lot about the Bible, or how big my website is, or whatever else I can boast about, the Lord reminds me of how utterly pompous I really am.

- Does God need me to carry out His will on this earth?

