

Fr Hoyal Writes

'Be of Good Cheer'

Despite a promising start to Spring as regards our weather, it wouldn't hard to be pessimistic about the world just now.

It is certainly not hard to construct a convincing litany of woes.

The earthquake-tsunami in Japan is just the latest in a concentrated series of disasters in recent months – among them, other destructive earthquakes in China, New Zealand and elsewhere, and terrible flooding in Brazil and Queensland.

News of radiation leakage from the quake damaged nuclear installations at Fukushima is chilling, reassurances notwithstanding,

There is certainly little joy on the Afghan front – among the latest service victims brought home via RAF Lyneham and Wootton Bassett is a former Bristol Grammar School pupil. A disturbing number of soldiers from our region have also lost their lives in that murderous conflict.

The unrest in the Middle East causes concern, and not just because of higher oil prices globally, and dearer petrol at home, with its knock-on effect on viability of businesses.

Coalition forces operating in Libya look dangerously close to overreaching the original UN mandate to create a no-fly zone. Can we countenance another Iraq?

In the UK we face the controversies over government cuts in grants and services, with the prospect before us of months of marches, strikes, demonstrations, and hooligan/extremist damage.

The problems of civil protest apart, many of our citizens face redundancies, reductions in standard of living, and lower pension expectations.

For church people, there are worries about falling numbers of stipendiary clergy, further amalgamation of parishes, and no obvious closure to wrangling over women bishops. The inauguration of the Ordinariate may not have helped in these matters.

Of course, such issues are trivial in relation to increasing persecution of Christian groups in the wider world. A recent estimate puts at around 100 million the number of Christians experiencing at least some degree of persecution for their faith, making Christianity easily the largest persecuted religion.

But enough. Despondency and pessimism, so easily played to, are not the proper preserve of the Christian.

Realism is in order, and so it should be. Cloud-cuckoo-land is no place for followers of Jesus. But unless realism is accompanied by a mature and convinced commitment to those great theological virtues of faith, hope and love, it is less than Christian

I am old enough to remember saintly Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey preaching in the 60s on the text: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.' (*John 16.33*).

Ramsey duly noted that a more accurate translation would be 'In the world you *have* tribulation.' That's rather the way things are, and we must not be surprised.

He was right, of course. Our faith doesn't make troubles magically disappear. It gives us the spiritual apparatus to cope with them. Even amid our tribulations we can take heart. Christ has already overcome

the world's power to harm us spiritually. Even in great suffering, at the deepest level we can be of good cheer.

As a brilliant handler of the Resurrection, Ramsey insisted that Easter happens *because of* Good Friday, not despite it. Never were faith, hope and love more tested than then. But never were they more triumphant. Theirs was the energy that rolled away the stone.

Easter is not a happy ending tacked on to a sad story. It is the glorious outcome of embracing a troubled world with love and commitment despite the cost.

Christ has shown us how it is through cross and passion that we come to the glory of resurrection. It is the Lamb who was slain who is alive for ever more.

So have a Happy Easter, yes! Say your prayers and keep going – especially if things are tough and you are gritting your teeth. And be of good cheer. He has overcome the world, and in him so shall we. Faith and hope and love remain fully in order.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard Hooker".

About Suffering

"About suffering they were never wrong ,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; "

These were the thoughts that occurred to W.H. Auden when in Brussels December 1938. He was in the Musee de Beaux Arts looking at the great pictures *The Fall of Icarus* and *Bethlehem* by Pieter Brueghel.

I was in Brussels , looking at these same pictures the weekend of 11th to 13th March, the weekend there was a conference at the EU parliament in Brussels to decide what possible action, if any, to take against Colonel Gadafi's regime in Libya, and the same weekend an earthquake and tremendous tsunami hit northern Japan

I too thought how well Brueghel understood, and expressed the human position of suffering. Brueghel, c 1525 -- 1569, was himself living in terrible times of conflict of faith and politics in the Lowland, and must have seen great suffering; yet he observed how the ordinary people, the peasant population just got on with the things they had to do.

In *the Fall of Icarus* everything turns away "Quite leisurely from the disaster"; the ploughman in the foreground goes on ploughing, the fisherman goes on fishing -- yet something amazing had happened, "a boy falling out of the sky". We only see the legs of Icarus as he disappears into the water, in the right hand corner of the picture, close by a passing ship. The shepherd has noticed something strange, high above in the sky, but it is hard to make out Daedalus, so near the sun, looking down on his fallen son.

In "*Bethlehem*" Mary and Joseph have come to pay their taxes but their arrival is hardly noticeable in the picture which is alive with all the details of everyday life in mid winter Flanders. The tax collectors are collecting and everyone is busy. There are children sledging and skating.

Here is the whole poem: *Musee des Beaux Arts* by *W.H. Auden*

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters; how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully
along;
How when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood;
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot

Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance, how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may have heard the
splash, the forsaken cry
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on."

Auden must have intimations then, and when in Berlin with Christopher
Isherwood of the troubles, and possible suffering that lay ahead for Europe.
In 1939 he and Isherwood sailed for New York.

Well, - we must all get on with our lives.

I believe that Brueghel's "Cruxifixion" which has been in private hands in
Britain until recently, has now been saved for the nation. I expect it will be
on public view so, wonderful to think, we should all be able to see it.

Anne Hancock March 2011

Sermon preached by Canon Brendan Clover at Evensong on
Sunday 27 February 2011

The fourth chapter of the Revelation of St John the Divine is a
timely reminder that God created us for worship: that is our
ultimate destiny, the end of our journey; to be lost in '*wonder,
love and praise*' reflecting back to God that awe and wonder
and beauty he is in himself, and to see the face of Christ.
Think of that – this is why God made you, to spend eternity
gazing upon the divine: '*Now we are seeing a dim reflection in*

a mirror; but then we shall see face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.' The very premise of catholic worship is that here we have a glimpse of the eternal '*when sacraments shall cease*': here and now we join with angels and the redeemed and the elders who worship the Lamb.

This Church is not a religious association, but the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a body of believers. It is - to use the mind-numbing jargon of theologians - an eschatological reality: the Church is the beginning of the end. The Church only makes sense if you believe that God has given us a share now in His final purposes for creation. Worship and fellowship and work, day by day and week by week in our churches doesn't always look like the end of the world nor does it look like the anticipation of God restoring His divine purpose for everything and yet, if it isn't that, it has failed: it has become religious 'activity'.

So today a stark challenge - how do we show ourselves to be not 'religious' people but inhabitants of a new world, inhabitants now of the realm of heaven?

The way we commonly use the word 'religion' is to describe one area of human experience or human aspiration or language. Some people are 'religious'; that's very nice for them and some people are 'musical' (I am as a matter of fact) and that's very nice for them: it's a characteristic of people. And if it's a characteristic of people then of course there is always the quite considerable risk that this characteristic is something that you exercise in your leisure time: it is something which hangs around the edges of what most matters. Being busy I don't very often practise playing the trumpet. A religious association is a group of people who are religious and who like being religious. But the church ought to be a community of people who really don't like being religious

at all: it should be a community of people who believe that they already live in the new creation: and a new creation is not a leisure activity, it is a life, a perspective, a vision, an energy which sets out to make a difference to everything.

So back to the challenge, how do we show ourselves to be not religious people but inhabitants of a new world, inhabitants now of the realm of heaven?

One answer is that worship contains the words and acts and images that speak of a new creation: that's why it is something strange, counter-cultural and revolutionary; and that's why worship is never a waste of time. It really is not meant to be useful or purposeful. IT IS MEANT TO BE WONDERFUL.

And there are very many ways in which it can be wonderful, just as there are very many ways in which it often isn't! But that's the point of worship: to spend even the short time most of us do, daily or weekly, in giving thanks to God is not just to say something about the fact that we like doing religious things, rather than musical or sporty things, it is to say that there is something human beings have to do to be human: and that is to give thanks, to reflect back to God the glory of God's gift. The very fact of worship fully, enthusiastically, conscientiously, joyfully, done is one place where we begin to say who we really are.

John Henry Newman

I Cor 13.12

Rev. 5.6ff



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ABOUT THE KINGDOM

Sermon preached at All Saints by Jessica Smith, Parish Reader, Sunday 13 February at Solemn Mass (Gospel of the Day: Matthew 5.21-37)

I remember, when I made my first Confession, over thirty years ago now, being given a useful booklet to help me prepare for it. One piece of advice in it suggested reading the Sermon on the Mount - Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7 - with the further suggestion to ponder what citizenship of the kingdom of God is, and let it inform me how far I fall short. Well I did, and it did. I have read The Sermon on the Mount in one go many times since then. It encapsulates in the words of Jesus himself what life lived in the kingdom, the Christian life lived in its fullness, is about. In other words it's about discipleship. Earlier in Matthew's gospel Jesus has proclaimed "Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near". The Sermon on the Mount is what repentance looks like.

These words of Jesus have been extolled by believers and unbelievers alike as 'great (or even the greatest) moral teaching' but to understand it that way only is to miss the point, or rather to miss several points. Similarly we are not to read it or hear it read and be discouraged because we can't possibly take on board its impossibly radical exhortations. Teaching it most certainly is, but it is not a code of practice. It's really not a matter of do this, tick the boxes and you'll get good marks - to say nothing of swift absolution in the

confessional - and it's certainly not a yardstick by which we can believe ourselves entitled to judge others. It's different from the teaching contained in the parables of Jesus. It's much more direct and unequivocal, and for that reason probably far more uncomfortable to take on board.

Starting last week we have four passages from the Sermon on the Mount for the Sunday morning gospels leading up to the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Last week it was the verses concerning our need to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. There was also Our Lord's assertion that he had come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them - and indeed it is clear from Matthew's account that we are meant to make the connection between the Sermon on the Mount and the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai in the Book of Exodus. This week we've heard the teaching concerning anger, adultery, divorce and swearing. No doubt by now it becomes crystal clear, if it wasn't already, why the Sermon on the Mount is a seminal passage for intending penitents!

What it does is to address what is at the very core of our being and to show us how we may be transformed into the gloriously full human beings God intended us to be. He created us in his image and he has revealed himself to us in his son Jesus Christ. It is a huge stumbling block for many who either haven't yet come to faith or have given up on what they perceive to be the unequal struggle to maintain it. Or, as one writer put it more humorously, "I've tried turning the other cheek, Lord. What is your next absurd suggestion, please? Cutting off my right hand, perhaps?"

The use of hyperbole, of exaggeration, by Jesus, is a popular rhetorical device used for emphasis. It makes what is being said memorable, as witnessed by many of the sayings having been absorbed into the repertoire of proverbs and folk wisdom of contemporary culture, such as 'turning the other cheek' and 'going the extra mile'. (It's debatable, of course, whether these are the

common currency they were once.) More importantly, it makes us realise that these really are mighty matters, that forestalling temptation and dealing with potential problems before they become actual or chronic ones is an imperative part of a disciple's calling. The way we respond and behave as individuals is of paramount importance. One temptation which can be insidious, and seems to be becoming more widespread with high speed communication, is in imagining that by joining forces with others to defeat the evils of this world we are somehow exempt from looking into our own hearts. It is not that the uniting in a common cause is itself a bad thing – certainly not - but that it may persuade us that by 'doing good' we are good and the two don't necessarily tally.

The Sermon on the Mount makes abundantly clear the individual disciple's responsibility for acknowledging and dealing with sin. Unresolved anger has immeasurable repercussions because it nearly always ends up being directed at those who don't deserve it. Look at what happened to Our Lord himself, brought about by the anger and insecurity of both the occupying forces and the indigenous population in an unstable country. Look also at how he dealt with it, turning the other cheek as he himself preached, refusing the way of anger and dying under its burden. Be reconciled, says the Lord. Deal with anger straight away and don't let it fester. This, he warns, must take precedence even over worship. So simple and yet so difficult and costly, such that most of us make a very poor fist of it, so to speak. Deal with sexual temptation right away before the initial impulse gives way to lies and hurt and betrayal and devastation. The world may tell us otherwise but 'my kingdom is not of this world' as the Lord would later say to Pilate. Going against worldly wisdom may indeed feel like having a limb amputated, but we might think of it as pruning – getting rid of that which is unproductive and harmful so that vigorous new growth may be generated. God himself is ever faithful and, being made in his image, we too are to be faithful in relationships. Disciples should be known as people who are truthful and keep our word, mean what we say without needing to give undue

emphasis which calls our integrity into question. Or, as Shakespeare put into the mouth of Hamlet's mother, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

If we feel daunted by the Sermon on the Mount, well then so we should. Whoever said discipleship was easy? Certainly not Jesus! "In the world you will have trouble" he said. But we are to imitate his example in trusting God to give us what we need. Our needs will be different from his because he was without sin. The anger he expressed was righteous anger. There is such a thing and we do see it in action. The elderly Northampton lady who last week weighed in with her handbag on a gang of men rifling a Jeweller's shop could be said to be exercising righteous anger. She didn't stand to gain personally by her action and there was a considerable risk in taking it. When all is said and done, though, righteous anger, like proper pride, is comparatively rare.

How then do we take on this bracing and challenging teaching? Well, we could do worse than look again at today's Collect, (which we can easily do if we take home our pew leaflets.) '*Grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations.*' In our frailty we do fall prey to temptation and we need not only to pray for strength, protection and grace, but to believe that God, who desires that we grow more and more like him, will grant us what we need to do it.

In Matthew's gospel, when Jesus had finished teaching, the crowds followed him down from the mountain and he began to heal – starting with the leper, the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, followed by a host of others. Demanding and difficult as the Sermon on the Mount is, we mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that it's the gospel in a nutshell, because it isn't. If I may return again to the Confessional, measuring ourselves against what we need to do and be to attain citizenship of the kingdom of heaven are not the only criteria. What we can also fail to do is to realise how much God

loves us and longs for us to turn to him for healing. That must also inform our self-examination. It's not about beating ourselves up but being open to his love. "Take time to just be with God and let him love you" as one confessor put it. Making ourselves responsible for our personal sins is a fundamental requirement of discipleship, but 'There's a wideness in God's mercy ... there's a kindness in his justice', as Faber's hymn puts it. We need have no fear of turning to God in repentance; we need only look forward to his gracious forgiveness. Imagine for a moment what it might be like if we really did all take responsibility for our own sin. Why, the kingdom would be very near indeed, wouldn't it?

SERMON FOR CLIFTON COLLEGE

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT 2011

**PREACHER:
IAN YEMM
ANGLICAN CHAPLAIN
UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND**

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'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me.' (*The Jesus Prayer*)

Cast your minds back for a moment to the beginning of this year, the 1st of January 2011. I wonder if you were one of those people who made a New Year's resolution. Perhaps, you were even brave enough or foolish enough to make more than one?

Well we are a quarter of the way through the year and looking back, where are you with that resolution now? Did you promise to be more regularly on time for classes, more diligent about your studies, have you been more respectful of your parents, argued less with your siblings, have you kept your room tidy, spent less time staring into the bathroom mirror, perhaps you've been to chapel more often?

When you are at my stage in life and the number of your waist measurement and the number of your age appear to be in constant competition you might be one of those people who join a gym in the first few weeks of the year, only, never to set foot inside. Recent statistics show that British adults spend about thirty-seven million pounds a year on wasted gym membership and, most of them join in January.

Wednesday, just passed, was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent when Christians are marked on the head with ash with the words 'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel' and as this is the first Sunday of Lent, I want to offer you some advice. Don't be tempted to treat Lent as a time to make the

equivalent of a New Year's resolution that you can give up in forty days time when we reach Easter.

I accept that fasting or giving something up for Lent has been part of the Christian tradition since the beginning, echoing those forty days Jesus spent in the desert fasting and being tempted and there is nothing wrong in this. But there is always the danger that giving up chocolate for Lent and then, in six weeks time, gorging oneself on the Easter Eggs that we have stockpiled in preparation, will have enabled nothing, taught us nothing, and changed nothing.

And this is exactly what Jesus is trying to illustrate in our Gospel today:

There are two men. One thinks he is the bees knees because of all the things he does for God and the other knows that he is anything but because he falls short of what God intends for him. And so he says: 'God, be merciful to me a sinner'. The first man goes away exactly the same as he was when he arrived, perhaps, even a little more smug, but the second man goes back home in a better relationship with God.

So often we find it difficult to understand exactly what is meant by the word sin. In particular, it is my experience as a

University Chaplain that students are quick to reject a list of wrongs that they should not commit or a list of rules that they must keep. This rarely leads to a helpful understanding of sin, but often leads to an unhealthy sense of guilt that keeps many people and too often, keeps young people like you away from our Churches. Sadly, for many the Church has become like that gym; a place where the person in need never sets foot inside.

So what is sin? In today's Gospel, the first man thinks there is nothing left for him to do, he is already better than all those around him. His self satisfied and judgmental attitude has led him to forget that he is still God's work in progress. The second man has recognised that he needs to continue to grow and so he asks for God's forgiveness in the areas of his life where he falls short. He has not forgotten that he is God's work in progress and he has not forgotten God's love.

In our first reading from Jeremiah, we are reminded that we are like clay in God's hands and that he is the potter. Yes, we are made from the dust of the earth, but God takes that dust, waters it and moulds it and when things go wrong, if we allow him to, he starts over again and remoulds us. I am suggesting to you that sin may often simply be our forgetfulness of God,

our forgetfulness of his love and our forgetfulness of God's desire to be in relationship with us.

So what is Lent about? The word Lent means Spring. It is when sunlight shines into the darkness of winter. It is the dawning of a new season in our lives. It is when we ready ourselves for change. It is an opportunity to remember what we have forgotten that you, and I, even your teachers and your parents, are God's work in progress.

Do everything you can this Lent to be open to this wonderful, Good News. As we gather together this morning in God's presence and in the presence of each other, let us remember for a moment that all of us are lumps of clay from which God desires to bring about a whole variety of beautiful things, not only for us, but for the whole world. This is why Lent is a season to act charitably towards those in need, to fast compassionately in solidarity with those who are hungry and to pray as we remember that Jesus will die for us on Good Friday in order that we might live and be free.

So, what should you do for Lent? Here is my top tip for Clifton College and it comes from an old tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christianity called the Jesus Prayer. Make time, just for a

moment, and remove yourself from the distractions that are usually all around you. Then, take a piece of string like this and each day in Lent tie a simple knot and pray the words on today's service sheet: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God. Have mercy upon me.' And in that moment of stillness, simply remember.

At the end of Lent, tie the two ends together and this prayer rope will represent your willingness to be God's work in progress, your openness to a new relationship with God and with each other and your readiness to meet the risen Jesus on Easter Day. And perhaps, this simple and ancient prayer may help to transform your forgetfulness of God and enable you to be moulded by God, every day of the year.

Amen.