

Vicar's Letter – November 2014

November is a month *to remember*. November 1st is *All Saints' Day* when the Church remembers and celebrates those women and men of every age who have provided a glimpse of heaven on earth. November 2nd is *All Souls' Day* when all other Christians who have died are remembered in services which commemorate the 'Faithful Departed'. Just three days later, we "*Remember, remember the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason and plot.*" Then, the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month marks Armistice Day in 1918 when the guns finally fell silent. We stand in silence to remember all those whose lives have been tragically cut short by warfare.

Loss of memory is deeply disturbing and frightening. For some people living with Alzheimer's disease or vascular dementia, whole episodes of their past can be beyond recall; they forget where they have been and what they have achieved. Family and friends can become anonymous strangers, and sufferers forget who they are and whom they love.

What is the difference between *memory* and *remembrance*? *Memory* concerns the recollection of facts. However, *Remembrance* describes a much more profound process. To remember is to invite the past into the present. When we do this, people, places and shared experiences can be so valued and cherished that greater meaning, depth and joy are brought to our lives today.

Remembrance can be holy ground. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, St Paul gave instructions on how the Eucharist should be conducted in churches, i.e. in *remembrance* of Christ. In this context, the New Testament Greek word for remembrance, *anamnesis*, is more than mere commemoration; it means a sacramental presence. In other words, the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are so movingly remembered and celebrated that they have the spiritual power to transform lives in the present.

November is a month of many services and events. One of the most poignant and powerful is the short service of Remembrance which takes place at the Whiteladies Road War Memorial (outside the former St John's Church) at 10.50am on Armistice Day, Tuesday 11th November. Many schools and local organisations will be represented, and this year's hundredth anniversary of the start of the First World War may prompt a huge attendance figure.

At the end of the month Advent commences. This year, our Advent meditations during the Tuesday evening masses will draw inspiration from the words of well-known Advent hymns. I would also like to recommend an Advent book – *The Christmas Stories* by Trevor Dennis (SPCK, London, 2007). Dennis was Vice Dean and Canon Chancellor of Chester Cathedral until 2010. He was also the most inspirational teacher during my theological training! Canon Dennis examines the Biblical narratives in the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke and concludes that the Church needs ‘the vision of the God in a manger, and must allow this vision (together with that of God on a cross) to shape its theology and practice.’

In November, the clocks have gone back, it is getting dark by late afternoon and, if the wind blows from the north, the cold can be biting. We are just one month from the light and joy of Christmas, but first we have to wait. The trouble is that we are not very good at waiting. In a culture of instant communication and obsessive planning we often find it difficult to simply allow the future to become the present in its own time. Deferred gratification is an alien concept to many. However, as Christians we are called to be different and to have a wider perspective which is informed by God’s Spirit. So when this month of remembering draws to a close, I wish you God’s blessing as together we watch and wait.....

Yours in the service of Christ,

Fr Kim Taplin

McCrae's Torch

At the second battle of Ypres in 1915, a Canadian Medical Officer pencilled a few verses on a page torn from his despatch book. Colonel John McCrae's poem, *In Flanders fields*, has since become a powerful and evocative anthem compelling remembrance of a lost generation and the cause for which they sacrificed their lives.

The final verse pleads:

*Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high,
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

What is it that we value most in our lives? Faith. Freedom. Family. Friendship. Fulfilment in work. Peace. These are *McCrae's torch*. These values are why he and countless others fought and gave their lives. Like the Olympic torch, McCrae's flame is passed from person to person, from generation to generation. We must not allow ourselves to suffer moral and spiritual amnesia. We must not 'break faith'. We should hold the torch of these values high, and we must let no power or persuasion deter us in our task.

IN THIS MONTH.....NOVEMBER 1894

(Excerpts from Canon Bromby's letter on the Octave of All Saints and its Spiritual aspects.)

DEAR PEOPLE OF ALL SAINTS AND OTHER FRIENDS,

Before proceeding with some Octave thoughts of another kind, let me beg you earnestly to lay to heart the fact that there stares us in the face the absolute necessity of self-sacrifice in the matter of alms-giving during the coming All Saints tide. Let us take a leaf out of the book of the Salvation Army for once. They do wonders by means of a "Self-denial week" from time to time. Will you join with me in making this a "Self-denial Octave"? Let each one of us settle at once upon some one thing at least that we can give up for God and His Church. Let us make it something that will cost us some self-sacrifice, and then let us give the price of it in money at one of the Celebrations during the Festival.

I suppose that quite a thousand or twelve hundred regular All Saints' people will be attending at least some of the Services. If every one of you will try your best to carry out this plan there will be no difficulty in raising the £600 which we want. And this thought leads me on to the immediate subject of my letter - so intimately connected are the temporal and spiritual aspects of the Church's work. You will see from the List of Subjects how I have tried to work out the sub-divisions of the leading Idea **. It was a task even harder than I had expected it to be. One of our Preachers writes to me, "You have set me a terribly hard task - and all your preachers too. It does seem rash to attempt what awed S. Augustine for so long!" And writes another, "I am afraid I should not have undertaken to come if I had known what coming involves!" Such words help us to show our great indebtedness to our Preachers, all of them busy men. They further have their message for ourselves with regard to our own preparation for the Octave teaching. Our danger is to be expressed by no other words than "Spiritual dissipation". Excitement - Sentiment, the comparison of one preacher with another

- the criticism of their sermons; these things may land us in a state very far removed from edification. They may lead to exhaustion and reaction and revulsion of feeling.

Let us not, however, be content with seeing our danger. Let us face it and conquer it by God's good grace. The very linking of self-sacrifice and self-denial with the enjoyment of our spiritual luxuries will be one safeguard. Another help will be to go carefully through the subjects of the sermons beforehand in our own private prayers and meditations, noting down any thoughts God may give us, and then comparing them with those of the preacher. Another good plan would be to resolutely spend a little time after every sermon in quiet prayer, assimilating spiritually all that we have heard before we talk to others about that which has been said. With deep searchings of heart let us earnestly place all our beautiful Festival-time beneath the power of the Holy Spirit, and at our Master's feet, beseeching our Father in heaven to grant us, for His sake, even more blessings than in days gone by.

Your friend and Servant in Christ,
H B Bromby.

** The general subject of the Sermons was "The Psalm of the Saints - psalm 119 - its revelation of the Motives and Rewards of Sanctity." The general subject of the Addresses to Communicants was "The Uplifting of the Natural into the Supernatural." The preachers for the 1894 Octave were Fathers: H W Hitchcock, (S Mary Mag. Munster Square); H Scott Holland, (Canon of S Paul's Cathedral); V Stuckey Coles, (Pusey House, Oxford); C G Lang, (Vicar of S Mary the Virgin, Oxford); W H Bolton, (Rector of Saltash); G H Ball, (Chaplain of S Raphael's Home, Torquay); A Gurney, (Vicar of S Barnabas Pimlico); J P F Davidson, (Vicar of S Matthias, Earl's Court); A J Worlledge, (Canon and Chancellor of Truro); J R Illingworth, (Rector of Longworth); G Body, (Canon of Durham); and H B Bromby, the Vicar.

Harvest Charity

Thank you to all who contributed to our Harvest Charity which this year supported the Save the Children Fund in their efforts to relieve hardship and suffering in Syria and Gaza during the present conflicts. A total of £596.72 was raised. This included the sale of refreshments at Doors Open Day, open plate collections at Harvest services and the raffle at the harvest lunch. A magnificent result. Well done everyone.

**Reflection on icon of Virgin Eleousa – Mother of God of Loving Tenderness
Given at Evensong & Benediction on 7 September 2014**



Here we see the Icon of Mary, Mother of God of Loving Tenderness or the Virgin Eleousa. Eleousa comes from the Greek *eleos* meaning mercy or pity. I think this type of icon of Mary is my favourite. Yes, I love icons and use them for my private meditation. I have various icons above and around my desk in my study.

The idea behind the icon is that it *questions us, but will only speak to us after we have turned our backs on the reign of the flesh, to accept the Holy Spirit, who alone can flood us with perfect joy.*¹ The perspective of the icon is reversed so that the vanishing point is not at the back of the picture but in the front, so the story is 'opened up.' The figure comes to the viewer out of the interior. It is not painted, but written. The Orthodox Church has great love of icons and they burn candles and cense them. A true icon takes months to be 'written' and each stage is done with prayer

While some more protestant Christians think that to venerate or have devotion to Mary, Mother of God is to worship her. As we are aware that is a very wrong assumption. However, more and more Christians are beginning to look at and use icons in Fresh Expressions, especially in the Sacramental and Contemplative Fresh Expressions movement. In all icons Mary points to Jesus. Jesus is the The Way and Mary points to The way, she tells us we must follow Him.

In this icon we see the relationship between the Mother and Child as one of deep love and great affection. Sometimes the force of his love is shown by one sandal hanging off his foot.

¹ QUENET, Michel *The Icon* p. 90

He embraces Mary cheek to cheek, he is pushing himself up against her body with great energy and in some of these icons his right hand grasps the corner of her veil. Sometimes the Child has His arm right round her neck to get as close as He can to her. In the Eleousa icon 'Mother of God of Vladimir there is the text from the Song of Songs' (2:6) – his left hand is beneath my head and with his right hand he embraces me'.

Those of us who have had close relationships with children will recognise that intense hug that almost strangles you as the child tries to pour all its love into you, my daughters used to call it a 'squeazy squashum'. So in this icon we see just how much God in His wonderful unconditional love for us wants to hug us, but we tend to hold God just a little away from us. We should allow Him to envelop us in a close hug. Look at the intensity of the love shown between these two figures. For those who feel that God stands at a distance waiting for us to make a move towards Him and to 'let Jesus into our lives' – as I have heard some evangelicals say – may find this image a bit of a shock. God doesn't wait, rather His love is that of a boisterous eager child clinging to his mother's clothes and her hair and nuzzling against her face and neck.

This icon isn't cool and dignified, it is very human and rather untidy! God really cannot bear to be separated from us. It is the love of God searching for us like an unself-conscious, undignified loving, clinging child. We are so keen to package God up into a certain image that this image quite overturns our relationship with Him. He needs us as much as we need him and he needs us in an honest and intimate way.

As a feminist and a wife and mother I have travelled a long way to actually having a devotion to Mary. I see her as a wife and mother struggling with the everyday problems of bringing up this extraordinary child. So she stands beside me when I get down with all the burdens of family life. I see her virginity, not as literal virginity, but as her autonomy, she stands alone against convention and for me represents the individual. As symbolising the Church she prays with us – not for us. As the young teenage single girl who became pregnant she stands with all single mothers. As the mother who watched her son die a criminal's death she stands with all who face injustice. Mary stands solidly with us – one of us.

God does not want to be separated from us, God does not want to be shut out of any corner of our being, so in this icon we see the image of invading love, a love that does not recognise boundaries. This should continue to overturn, day after day, the myth of the distant God who needs to be sought out far away and persuaded to come near. God's loving kindness is there ahead of us.

So this image of seeing God as a hungry child clinging with love to the Mother represents the relationship between us and God

May we follow Mary as she points us to the Way – Jesus – and let us allow God to hug us intensely as a boisterous, loving child.

Let us now join Mary and all the saints as we sing praises to our most loving God in the hymn *Tell out my Soul*

Liz Badman

(with thanks to Rowan Williams for his inspiring addresses on Diocese of Monmouth Pilgrimage to Walsingham 2000)

Remembrance Day 2014

Short Service of Remembrance

Whiteladies Road War Memorial

outside former St John's Church

**10.50 am TUESDAY 11th
NOVEMBER**

TWO-MINUTES SILENCE AT 11.00 AM

'Lest we forget' - All most welcome

Arranged by Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham & Redland. Local schools are supporting along with those who live or work in the Whiteladies Road area.



**SERMON PREACHED AT ALL SAINTS CLIFTON ON 12 OCTOBER 2014, TRINITY 17 @
8am & 11am
The Heavenly Banquet**

**Exodus 32 1-14
Philippians 4.1-9
Matthew 22.1-14**

Many are called, but few are chosen

It is that time of the year again – all the political parties are having their Conferences in the build up to the General Election next May. Each party is laying out it's manifesto, most seeming to run down the other parties, each trying to convince us that they, and only they, have the right message, and they and only they can make things better; and we have to decide which politicians to believe.

Sometimes the 'mud-slinging' can get a little out of hand. The world is a dangerous place and people will try to exploit each other and we want the politicians to lead us through the political jungle.

Sometimes it seems that the Church is like that as well. We tell people that God loves us whoever we are, decent people, as well as liars, cheats; God loves us and everything will be OK. God welcomes the wicked as well as the good. We like nice stories about God, where everything ends happily ever after, we want to be inclusive and let everyone in. The Christian life is not like that.

Matthew was writing for the Jewish community who were converting to Christianity, so his Gospel is very Jewish and dark, and at times is apocalyptic. This parable appears in both Matthew's and Luke's gospels. In Matthew's version the wedding feast is given by the King for the Son.

It is important that we know some basic facts about weddings in Jesus's day, to better understand the context of the parable. In Jewish society, the parents of the betrothed generally drew up the marriage contract, it would be what we call an 'arranged marriage'. Then the bride and groom would meet, perhaps for the first time when the contract was signed. The couple were considered married at this point, but they would separate until the actual time of the ceremony. The bride would remain with her parents, and the groom would leave to prepare their home. When the home was ready the groom would return his bride usually without notice. The wedding ceremony would then take place and the wedding banquet would follow. The wedding banquet was one of the most joyous occasions in Jewish life and could last up to a week.

Let us look for a moment at what a parable is.

It is a riddle, a puzzle turning the ordinary into the extraordinary. Although parabolic teaching existed before Jesus he made it more radical, telling a homely story in a puzzle fashion, which in turn demanded change in the thoughts and actions of the audience. This was most disconcerting to a Jewish audience.

Jesus introduces the parable with the words....'the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his Son...'

This parable is about the coming of God's kingdom, and especially about the arrival of the Messiah.

When the servant/slave goes out to tell the invited guests it is time to come to the banquet, the invited guests find excuses not to come, though they should have made their excuses beforehand. In order for the king's honor to be satisfied the tables must be filled. In the

Messianic banquet the initial guests are the Jews, those invited from the highways and byways are us, the Kingdom. The wedding invitation is extended to anyone and everyone, total strangers, both good and bad., the whole human race.

Here is the intimacy of a meal, a banquet, does this signify the Passover – or for us The Eucharist ?

The rejection of the invited guests symbolizes the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. The King finds wedding garments for all the uninvited guests, but one refuses to wear his wedding garment. This is a great insult to the king to refuse to wear the garment provided for the guests.

In the book of Revelation we read that those in heaven are wearing white robes and we learn that the whiteness of those robes is because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. We must trust in God's righteousness and not our own. As the king provided wedding garments for his guests, so God provides salvation for humankind. And unless we have that we will miss the wedding feast.

But do we want to know this harsh king who judged the person who refused to wear the wedding garment? We really do not want to know about judgment on the wicked, or about demanding standards of holiness, or about weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The bible tells us that God will wipe away every tear from every eye. Well, yes the bible does tell us that, but in the right context. God does not act like the soothing parent who settles the crying child. We are grown up, not babies and so God wants us to act like grown ups. We should learn that our actions have consequences, we cannot go charging through life doing what we want. We must realize that moral choices matter and we can't go around throwing our toys out of the pram for someone else to pick up. God forgives, his forgiveness is a deep mystery, but we must be aware of what we have done, not go through life thinking our actions don't matter, we must be sorry.

Many do not like this parable because of the message it gives, it is not a message we want to learn. Looking at the leaders of Israel in Jesus's day and their followers we see they are like the guests invited to the wedding – God's wedding party that he is throwing for his Son. They are the guests who refused the invitation. They refused to recognize him in Gallilee and now they refuse to recognize him in Jerusalem. The Messiah is here, they had waited for so long and this is the great party that God had been planning for ages, but they did not recognize him and they did not want to know. This was not what they expected the Messiah to be like.

But then God's messengers went out to the rough parts of the city and gathered up the riff raff the marginalized, the nobodies, those whom society looked down on and wanted to forget. *They* rejoiced that they were invited, that God's message was for them .

And what about us today? We want to hear that God wants and loves us exactly as we are and there is no need for change or growth. But this is not what it is about. Jesus meets and loves us where we are and as we are, he heals us and frees us and his love refuses to let us stay as we are, we blossom and we grow – our lives are transformed we are healed and so our lives are changed forever.

God does love everyone, the worst of us but he wants us to change. I really feel I began to understand God's love for all and his touching and healing the worst of us when I did prison visiting. I visited sex offenders who are regarded by other prisoners as the lowest of the low. The one's I visited and built up a relationship with knew they were at the bottom of the heap, knew that they could not be cured, but also knew God's love and were learning to day by

day change their lives. Here was one of the places where I felt closest to God's endless, healing love. God hates what they are doing and the effect it has on others and on themselves, but the point of God's love is that he wants them and us to change.

The man who did not want to wear the wedding garment provided for him is the one who did not want to accept God's healing love and to change.

The point of the parable is that Jesus is telling the truth, that political and religious leaders sometimes like to hide. God's kingdom is one in which love, justice and truth, mercy and holiness reign supreme. And those are the garments we should wear for the Heavenly banquet. Refusing means that we are opting out.

The Eucharist is a taste of the Heavenly Banquet, so let us put on our wedding garments of Love, Justice, Truth, Mercy and Holiness and come as we are to the Feast – healed, restored, forgiven.

AMEN

Purple Vestments

Many of us remember Dulcie Mason for her love and life long devotion to All Saints. She was a very lively lady with a wicked sense of humour and shared many stories recalling life in Alma Vale Rd and All Saints old and new. She also had a very strong faith rooted in her life long commitment to All Saints

Thanks to a legacy left to All Saints by Dulcie, we have been able to replace the current purple vestments which have become worn and fragile with a new set of 3 purple chasubles . These have been made in the same fabric and style as the red and green sets purchased over the last 2 years.

These vestments will be used for the first time at the All Souls Day Requiem Mass.

We give thanks for the faith, love, fun and generosity of Dulcie and especially remember her at this time.

Organ

The organ restoration is now underway with the instrument's vital parts removed to the organ builders' workshop. So our next fund-raising event is on the horizon: AN EVENING with MR HANDEL - with pudding tasting.

Come and enjoy 'Mr Handel's' company, delicious chamber music for voices and instruments, and scrumptious puddings to taste at the interval. This event will be held in the Sacristy so numbers are limited. Book early! Tickets £12. If you have a pudding that you regard as your 'speciality' and that you are willing to make and let us taste, please sign the list on the Organ Appeal board in the Atrium.

Bishop Mike Hill, Address to Synod 2014

Anyone who was involved with Archbishop of Canterbury visit to our diocese in September, cannot but help to have been encouraged and inspired by his energy, his total lack of stuffiness (don't call me Your Grace, I'm Justin) and his evangelistic zeal, drive and competence.

I have so many good and moving memories: the Archbishop responding to a grilling from sixth formers; Standing Room Only at Bristol Cathedral; being prayed for by a bunch of Koreans at Hope Chapel; the Archbishop with the street pastors of Kingswood talking comfortably and naturally with clubbers; the time with our clergy and lay ministers; the Malmesbury baptisms and the magnificent Eucharist in the Cathedral on Sunday morning followed by a discussion on education chaired by the Dean.

These are all memories I will cherish...

One part of the weekend that was hidden from the sight of most was on the Saturday evening when we held a dinner with my staff and the Archbishop and his staff.

We asked him honestly whether our commitment as a Diocese to invest exclusively in our growth programme was a wise thing. The Archbishop was very clear that this was the only appropriate decision, indeed that it was the only sensible decision that dioceses in the Church of England could and should make in the current climate.

Many of our churches are growing and yet still too many are not, but we continue to pray, that as we plant and others water, so God will give us the growth.

For me this needs to be based on a major and honest re-assessment of what we think we are doing in our churches in a post-Christian community. Lesslie Newbigin has rightly pointed out that the challenges of evangelisation in a post Christian culture are more complex than those faced by the early Church, which of course ministered into a pre Christian context. Too much of what we do, too much of our cultural self understanding is based, I believe, on the assumptions of Christendom and will frankly just not be fit for purpose.

A missionary church requires more theology not less. A 'theology lite' church will certainly not be fit to meet the apologetic challenges of the world in which we have to contend for truth in the market place of ideas, some of which are deeply destructive of humanity.

Of course the great danger in our world is that the great god of our consumerised world – choice – means that the call to discipleship becomes just one of a set of generally superficial lifestyle choices. Thus denominational affiliation amongst the young is non-existent and the overall feel of Christianity in the West is that of a tired and ever so slightly indulgent faith. Let me remind you of a basic truth of the response to follow Christ. Bonhoeffer put it starkly, "...when Christ calls a man or woman, he bids them come and die."

I am really proud of you all and this great diocese and what you are doing. The Archbishop was gracious in his appreciation and encouragement of what we are trying to do, for he recognises that we are trying to work with the reality of what's going on around us.

Our task is exciting, thrilling and highly risky. God, in Christ has shown His commitment to us in that, "whilst we were sinners Christ died for us."

Let us pray that our commitment to Him and His purposes will be robust.

+Mike

This is an edited version of Bishop Mike Hill's Address to Synod, for the full version please visit www.bristol.anglican.org/2014/bishops-address-20th-september-2014/

A short video summarising Archbishop Justin's tour of the diocese is available on our youtube channel at www.youtube.com/user/DioceseofBristol

