

March 2016, Passiontide and Easter thoughts from Father Charles:

Looking Toward the Cross

The cross is the main symbol of our faith, and we see it everywhere – particularly on necklaces and pendants, as bracelet charms and ornaments of all kinds. You quite often see a whole Rosary worn around someone's neck (as demonstrated in this year's Brit Award Ceremony!). In many cases these ornamentations are not indications of personal faith – though for many the wearing of a cross is a very important statement of faith and identity.

During the season of Lent, and more particularly in Passiontide, our eye is drawn to the cross; we walk toward the cross, the objective of our Lenten pilgrimage, in a reflective and penitential state. We make use of this season to prepare ourselves through prayer, service, study and discipline, so that, at the Festival of Easter, we are better able to see God's presence in the whole of creation and in our life.

The Meaning of the Cross is Death

Simply put, the meaning of the cross, to which we journey, is death. From about the 6th century BC until the 4th century AD, the cross was an instrument of execution that resulted in death by the most tortuous and painful of ways. In crucifixion a person was either tied or nailed to a wooden cross and left to hang until dead. Death would be slow and excruciatingly painful; in fact, the word *excruciating* literally means 'out of crucifying'. However, because of Christ and His death on the cross, the meaning of the cross today is completely different.

The Meaning of the Cross is Life

For us, the cross is the intersection of God's love and His justice. We remind ourselves that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is a reference to Jesus that points back to the institution of the Jewish Passover (which we can read about in Exodus 12). You recall that the Israelites were commanded to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and smear the blood of that lamb on the doorposts of their homes. The blood would be the sign for the Angel of Death to 'pass over' the house, leaving those inside in safety. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John recognized Him, and saw this link, saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" In saying this, John identified Jesus and his place in God's purpose; that God himself, in the person of Jesus, would be the perfect sacrifice for our redemption.

Why?

Many would ask why Jesus had to die in the first place. This is the over-arching message of scripture and tradition - the story of our redemption. In scripture we read that God created everything from nothing, the heavens and the earth, and He created man and woman in His image and placed them in the Garden of Eden as stewards on the earth. This was an act, not concerned with power or control, what indeed does God have need for power or authority? It was an act of creative love, one of the great mysteries of our Christian faith – along with the Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption and New Creation. It is relational; the absolute and asymmetrical loving relation of dependence upon our God.

How do we respond to this loving relationship? We read in Genesis the symbolic account of how, due to temptation, Adam and Eve fell from God's grace. Through history, and our reading of scripture, we see that humankind continually fails to 'live up' to the promise of God. A promise first made to the People of God in the Covenant God made with Abraham the father of all nations and again with Moses; and made freshly, to us, in the New Covenant which sits at the heart of our beliefs.

Yes, but *why* did Jesus have to die?

Jesus uses 'covenant' language, echoing the previous promise and showing his intention in that going to die he will bring about a new exodus, a new deliverance. A deliverance not from the Romans but from sin and evil which are the chains that imprison humankind.

The clear answer as to why Jesus had to die comes from his own teaching. Jesus provides three explanations. First, his death is *experiencing God's judgement on sin* (on our behalf) and the imagery he uses for this is very recognisable to his listeners. He talks about drinking from the cup that alludes to passages in scripture (the OT) which are about God's punishment of human evil and wilful disobedience.

Second, his death is *a ransom* that accomplishes our redemption. It is the process of buying back something that has been lost or has transferred into the hands of another. Again Jesus' listeners will have connected this to the redemption of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. So the death of Jesus will enable a new exodus, a new liberation of the people of God.

Third, Jesus is *the servant of God*. It is the servant who bears the people's sin and therefore wins for them forgiveness and freedom. This would again be clear to those who listened to Jesus. In his teaching he made clear references to Isaiah, for example '*he poured himself out to death, and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sins of many*' (Isaiah 53:12).

These three images come together in the last meal that Jesus shared with the disciples. The Jewish Passover meal is reinterpreted through his forthcoming suffering, death and resurrection. This will redeem them and us from our 'slavery' in a new exodus and establish the covenant that God offers to each one of us.

The Paschal Greeting:

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:

he has given us new life and hope

by raising Jesus from the dead.

God has claimed us as his own:

He has made us light to the world.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

With Easter Blessings,



“Our Place in God’s Purpose”

The Parish Conference
Saturday 5 March 2016

Understanding our Mission

The purpose and tradition of All Saints are of fundamental importance. The Foundation Stone of the old church was laid on 3 November 1864 and with this act so too were the defining features of our church. In particular that it should be open to all (the Pew System was not approved), accessible each day and every day, and that the Catholic teaching of the Church of England should be outwardly and inwardly expressed.

Our most recent church history booklet describes how we must *‘strive for the best expression, in time, of that which is timeless and eternal. No generation has the monopoly of the truth.’* The author goes on to describe how the understanding and insights of doctrine at the time of writing (1970s) were not apparent back in the 1870s when All Saints was first opened and engaged in worship and mission. The author says ‘the basic truth remains the same: but its expression must be today’s expression, for today’s society’.

How then, do we express our Catholic faith inwardly and outwardly today? Our mission remains the same, *‘to proclaim ways for human beings to be reconciled to God’*, and this has inward significance (in terms of our own growth) and outward purpose (in terms of our impact on the local and wider community). But what is ‘Today’s Expression’?

Partners in the Purpose of God

We often talk about mission as our responsibility, but there is an alternative perspective. This is that mission is not the primary activity of the church but is an attribute of God. Moltmann (1975) advanced this idea saying ‘it is not the Church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world, it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the Church.’ This means that the role of the church becomes that of being God’s chosen partner, to participate in the work He is already doing in the world.

This activity of God, that’s already up and running and in which we participate, impacts on the whole of creation and flows from His very own nature. The term used to describe it is *‘Missio Dei’*, and it tries to capture the overflowing of the love of God’s being and nature into God’s purposeful activity in the world.

As the mission of God flows from His very being it will reflect the nature of God as three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A characteristic of mission must therefore be about relationship, since the Trinity exist in a perfect relationship of love. This means that justice, human well-being, right relating, and care for the created world become features of our missional activity as we partner with God's purpose.

When I was first ordained (back in the 1980s) the Anglican Consultative Council attempted to define the 'five marks of mission'. This they saw as 'partnering' with God to:

- Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- Teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- Respond to human need through loving service
- Seek to transform unjust structures in society
- Strive to safeguard the integrity of creation

These five marks are still very relevant, possibly more so, since the traditional structure of the church is increasingly challenged by limited and reducing resources and, what feels like, an increasingly secular culture. The need to reflect on what we are and do, and reimagine what we might be and how we might go about this becomes increasingly urgent.

Our Purpose

If it is God's will that the Church, as believers, comes to share His heart for the world and therefore become participants in the *missio Dei* then we need to be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

There are many ways of understanding mission and our place in participating in the work of God, but the problem comes when we translate this into the reality of what we actually do. How we invest our energy and focus our thinking, as individuals and, specifically, as the church at All Saints Clifton. How do we recognise and stay true to our foundation, become active in our context here in Clifton (and Bristol) yet also have sight and influence more widely, and participate, as partners, in the *missio Dei*?

The Parish Conference

On Saturday 5 March, during Lent and whilst the Pilgrimage theme is running, we will have our Parish Conference. The purpose of the Conference will be to allow ourselves to listen to, be guided by and enabled through the Holy Spirit to reframe our place in participating in God's Purpose here. My expectation is that we will develop a real sense of purpose with some clear actions and objectives that are in keeping with our foundation and will both give us a real place in the *missio Dei* and also re-energise and motivate us for the next episode in the life of All Saints.

The Parish Conference

“Our Place in God’s Purpose”

Saturday 5 March 2016

The Programme:

9.30am Mass in Church

10.00am Coffee and Tea (available all morning)

10.20am About Today

10.30am Our Strong Foundation

11.45am Building for our Future

12.45pm ‘Working’ sandwich lunch

13.15pm Our Place in God’s Purpose

14.00pm Prayer and close

IN THIS MONTH MARCH 1880

Ten Years of Almsgiving at All Saints’

The Churchwardens have drawn up a most interesting Statement of the amount received for the last ten years in the Offertory at All Saints’ Church. The whole sum amounts to £38,880 7s 10d. This is, indeed, a noble offering to have been devoted to God in one single Congregation. It amounts to very nearly £4000 a year. This sum includes what has been offered for the Building and Decoration of our Church, for the Stipends of the Clergy, and for all Church Expenses, and also for the Mission Work of the Church abroad, for Home Missions for Hospitals, for Houses of Mercy for the Recovery of the Fallen, for many other purposes, and for the Poor of other Parishes to whom the Alms of the Congregation have been given, more and more largely, year after year. It might well take a whole Diocese ten years to raise such a sum, and there can hardly be a clearer proof of the love of the

Congregation for God and His Church than such perseverance in liberal almsgiving. In the year 1871, when a great effort was made to build the New Nave, the Collections amounted to more than £6000. In three other years they exceeded £4000. It would hardly have seemed possible to those who were most sanguine about the encouragement of Almsgiving through the offertory at the time that All saints' was built that a Congregation, by no means rich, would have made such generous efforts on behalf of their Church, and of the various needs of others. We hope that none of us will ever unlearn the joy that we have so often found in giving of our substance to God at His Altar.

Two things lie before us, both of which must be done. First there is our Easter Offertory. At Easter the friends and lovers of All Saints' must clear off the whole of the remaining Building Debt which has now been reduced to about £300. In the meantime they must not let the church fall again into debt for Expenses. We want every man, woman and child that loves All Saints' (and there are 900 to 1000 of them) to make the best offering that they can on every Sunday, as part of their worship of God. If this be done we shall soon see All Saints' out of debt. That is the first point. Our second must be, when all our Debts are paid, to do all the good that we can to all who want our help in any part of the Church. We long to see, even more than for the last ten years, All Saints' a Blessing to the Whole Church.

From the Bishop: In the Lord's service(s)?

"Show me the way your weekend services are going and I'll tell you how your church is going"

Thus spake Bill Hybels at a recent coaching seminar. Immediately, I found myself asking, "why would he say that?" After all, you can argue that our churches are much more than simply what we get up to on Sundays for an hour and a bit. And you would be right.

So why would Bill say this?

I think there maybe a number of reasons. Firstly, the way we worship communicates what we really value. Of course we are there primarily to express something to God. The Anglo-Saxon word from which our word, 'worship' derives is the word 'weorthscipe,' which means to ascribe honour and value. Worship is how we express together what we want express in relation to our belief in God.

But I wonder if you have ever wondered what someone who might be entering your church for the first time might conclude about what you truly value?

- Organ music?
- A sing song?
- The person leading the worship?
- Being part of a well established club which is friendly for its members?
- A physical lack of warmth and comfort?
- Worship songs?

The list of course could go on. Please note that none of these things are intrinsically wrong - though being cold and uncomfortable can be a big ask – but I don't think any of us feels that any of these things are the most important components of our Sunday worship.

I wonder if it would be true to say that what we do on Sundays, in part at least, is the 'shop window' of who we are. If that has any truth then what we do and the way we do it is really important.

How well I recall when I was a child thinking that Sunday was the most boring day of the week. My family didn't go to church, the shops were shut, everything seemed closed. We were so sad that the big treat on Sunday afternoons was to go out for a ride in my Dad's car...

How different today. Sunday, sadly is like any other day. Shopping Malls are open and packed and if the Government has its way will be open for longer. If you have children who are into sport then most of it takes place on a Sunday morning. Theme parks and National Trust properties are open. There is much to compete for our time and attention. Here's my point. There is so much you can do on Sundays that unless Church has something authentic to offer, people will just not come. Increasingly that seems true.

Oh I know we don't want to talk about 'bums on seats', but I have never met a clergyperson or other church leader who really didn't want to see more people in church on a Sunday. That's why Christmas attendances give us some hope. I don't think we can avoid talking about numbers of worshippers – it never bothered St. Luke when he wrote Acts of the Apostles!

I can see the problem, but coming up with a cure is really tough and I suspect many of you find the same. However, I think I want to venture one suggestion as Easter comes around yet again with the amazing message, HE IS RISEN!

I think if all of us in our churches at some stage over the next few months sat down in our Church Councils and had some sort of discussion around the theme of, "how might we better express the risen life of Christ in our worship?" it might just mean that together, we could think again.

Many of my clergy colleagues tell me that many members express hostility to the idea of "changing what we have." I have often joked as someone who goes around churches that if people are celebrating the fact that Jesus is alive, their body language is extremely deceptive!

Worship really matters. It is a primary, if not **the** primary call of the Church. I think we should set the bar of at least seeking to inspire people so that they might be better motivated and equipped to go into the world and live the new life that Jesus secured for those who trust him because of the Easter message.

HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! Let's show the world that this is not a vague hope but a reality we want to live and to celebrate. And let our services reflect His new life.

+Mike

PARABLES FOR LENT

All Saints Parish Retreat 19-21 February 2016

See notes on Fr Rowan's addresses following this report

This year we met again at Abbey House, Glastonbury for our early Lent weekend Retreat. We were most privileged to have Dr Rowan Williams (previous Archbishop of Canterbury) as our Retreat Conductor.

As we had such a distinguished theologian for our conductor we were a full house - 27 resident and 3 coming in at times during the day. Mealtimes were a bit of a squash with two dining rooms, and it was really rather cosy in the chapel during Mass and the Offices.

On the journey from Temple Meads to Glastonbury I asked Rowan how he would like to be addressed, he said definitely not as Lord Williams (he is a Life Peer), not Archbishop as he has retired, and so we decided on Fr Rowan.

We started by meeting in the main sitting room and introducing ourselves, as there were some people who did not know each other, Some coming for the first time, some from the 8am Mass and most from the 11am Mass. Some came from far afield – Margaret Hunt, who used to worship at All Saints and sang in the choir and Fr James Monro, Mary Benton's brother, who at one time was a GP in Street.

The Daily Offices were led by members of the daily Office Team – Liz, Caroline, Mary and Brendan. And the serving and administrant duties shared by Caroline, Vicky, Mary and Liz.

After Evening Prayer everyone had arrived in time for supper and after a very noisy meal we went into silence in time for the first address in the Chapel. The Retreat had started in earnest.

In the first address Fr Rowan introduced us to the theme of the Retreat, and said we should make contact with reality. Reality is at the core of the heart of the Triduum and the sense of the word is radically altered. Silence, not talking, makes us more vulnerable and it is a gift to be more oneself; it is a gift of space where we can walk more slowly, eat more slowly. Jesus worked through stories which were designed to change us; Jesus engages and causes change.

The parables we were going to look at were:

Parables of the Kingdom – Mark 4 and Matthew 13

Parables of Losing and Finding – Luke

Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke

Parables of the Vineyards – Luke

He reminded us again that Silence is a gift, not an imposition, we were to be ordinary creatures of God.

The first evening ended with Compline led by Fr James Monro.

The weather on Saturday was not very good, but I did manage to go out in between showers and spend sometime in the garden by where Marlena Fitzner's ashes were buried. She had been a very much loved member of our group of Retreatants for many years, and I missed giving her lifts this year. I found myself telling her all about this retreat, she would have loved it.

Mass at midday was celebrated by Fr Charles. The afternoon was free to do whatever we wished, walk, sleep, read. With Fr Rowan's relaxed manner we were able to relax and just let ourselves Be and accept what happened.

Jesus emerges from the Wilderness – the Kingdom of God has arrived. Fr Rowan told us that it just around the corner, there is growth and the world goes on becoming itself, The spark of God's image is in Life. We must be patient and let go the urge to be in charge, let Life happen and God pours His life into it. The life of God is simmering beneath us, so let the water rise in the well of our being. God casts a net which is swaying in the vast ocean – God's love sways in the ocean of us.

We looked at the parables of Losing and Finding – interdependent creation.. God has created a world where everything is interlocking. God has chosen to need us. Parables – The Lost Pearl, The Prodigal Son. Are we so cold in relationships that Love doesn't overflow? Are we so insecure that we are jealous?

On Saturday evening we looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Jesus tells a story; how do we love ourselves? Love as you belong in God's world in your relationships.

Sunday evening ended with Compline and an informal Benediction (those who were able sat or knelt on the floor) led by Fr Charles.

Sunday morning was a little better weatherwise. The final address looked at the parables of the Tenants in the Vineyard in Mark 12 and The Labourers in the Vineyard Matthew 20. See *notes below from Fr James*. Fr Rowan finished his addresses by saying that God in the Eucharist says 'be my creation and I will give Creation back to you.' Parables are woven into what Jesus is and does – new Creation is a disproportionate distribution of Love. Jesus is the great living Parable – Life lived, broken, offered and shared.

The silent part of the Retreat ended with the Mass at 11am celebrated by Fr Rowan. At the end we presented him with a card signed by all and a book token for £100. He had to leave then to be driven back to Temple Meads by Fr Charles and Helen as he had to be back in Cambridge by 6pm.

We ended with a noisy lunch!

The dates for our 2017 Retreat are 3-5 February and the cost will be £148. As soon as we have a Conductor the Retreat will be advertised.

Our thanks go to the Director and staff at Abbey House for making us so welcome.

Liz Badman, Licensed Lay Minister

Glastonbury Retreat 20-21/2/16

Dr. Rowan Williams

Parables make things strange and things new. They change our ways of seeing and put us in touch with our real selves. This can be quite unsettling.

Teaching must be for learning and changing, not reciting. We change as we are ourselves and in touch with God at the same time.

In Mt. 13 Jesus explains parables- some refuse to learn, some refuse to see.

Parables are converting relational stories, leaving us with work to do and new vision.

Mt. 13, Mk. 4

Growing parables of the Kingdom

Jesus came from the wilderness and announced that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The Kingdom is around us, but not quite there. It's there, so we don't have to plan for it. We need to be put in touch with the reality that is there in a process of growth. We can hold the seed, but not the life. But God's life is where ever we look. We need a patience like God's own patience.

We are not to step in and sort it out ourselves- that's the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Be patient. Let things growth at their own pace. Yet the urgent thing is to be patient! Let go of the urge to be in charge of everything. God lets go and lets life happen sacrificially in its own time.

The same thing and theme is in the growth parables pushing into the central vision. We need to be still enough just to stand and see it happen in the well of our own being.

The fishing net of God's loving design moves around and we are in it.

Other parables of preciousness and riches- selling all you have to buy it.

Jesus puts the question- what will you give for that? The theme of urgency comes in again.

We need to continually ask 'what do we want?' and 'what will we give for it?'

We need a new birth and a new beginning to live in this new world.

Jesus is saying you can grow or you can wither, that's the spirit of the universe.

You can't stay still. Staying comfortable is not an option.

Jesus is saying 'do you want to grow because you can?' Tune yourself to the reality of God around. Make it a natural process with the life of God on our side. It's costly.

Lent is the time to do this. Picking up the hints of the luminous world that is God's needs a slowing down. Urge to serve others. Growth is not just for us, but our growth bears fruit for others.

Ask to be more sensitive to the life of God that is coming through. Be alive and well in the hands of God.

Luke 15

Parables of finding and loosing

These open up another dimension of the journey into reality, to the love that is at the heart of all things.

They give glimpses of things in ordinary human experience, but with excessive reaction in 'parables of disproportion'.

If God has made the world, the loss of one little bit is the loss of all of it.

Here is continuity with the way Paul talks about the whole balance of things wobbling- everything is affected. There are no spare parts or spare people in the kingdom; all is interweaving and interlocking. Human dignity is inseparable and indivisible.

God is saying to us, 'if I lose you I am less God'. He knocks on the door as a beggar asking us. God's response is out of proportion, as if his life depended on it.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son the father watches for it all to come into alignment again.

The elder brother has to face the fact that he has never rejoiced in or been confident with his relationship with the father. The story asks us if we are jealous of the love between others.

The church often tries to control divine love as if there is only a little bit to go around.

God says to each one of us that we are the one that he needs. We need to tell ourselves in prayer how much we matter to our maker, and that we are grateful he sees us as the most important thing in the universe.

Luke's gospel is about people on the edge of things.

Lk. 10

Parable of the Good Samaritan

The lawyer wanted to know where to stop treating people as neighbour, so Jesus tells a story, and does not give a definition.

You do not love yourself boxed in, but in relationships in God's world.

The parable is a complete reversal of question asked. Your neighbour is the one who is good for you.

How do I know how to receive? God finds us often through the unexpected person outside the covenant of grace, rather than those we would expect to be channels of grace.

It has sobering things to say about structures and realities of Church. People who feel abandoned by the Church find grace in other people, things, strangers. It is not cozy, for no parable is. There are sharp things to say for clergy.

If you never quite know where the grace of God is coming from, you never really know when you will be called upon to bring it. **God makes neighbours**, with no prior organization, in the mystery of interlocking lives and identities.

The neighbour is the unexpected outsider who pops up unexpectedly to deliver the grace of God. Check out the Books of Ruth and Jonah, written in the time of Ezra.

God can send Samaritans to heal the wounds inflicted by priests and Levites.

Mt. 20, 21 and Mk. 12

The parables of the labourers and the tenants in the vineyard

Jesus' parables are an echo chamber with themes recurring again and again. The elder brother says I deserve more, but the father says all that I have is yours. Similarly in the labourers in the vineyard- the owner says why should you be jealous if I assume to be generous. God has only one wage to give- himself- the wholeness of his life and joy- he has

no more to give. The penny shaped object received in communion reminds us of this. There is no more to give.

The labourers cannot begin with thanksgiving, but with negotiating. God is beyond contract. Those who were late are as good as anyone else. We need to be grateful, not negotiating. We need gratitude ultimately for the God who gives what he is.

In the other parable the vineyard is given into our hands, but we want it on our own terms, ignoring the owner and refusing the very fact that he has created us. We see this in the ravaging of this planet as we see ourselves as self created.

The tenants want to be self-made men rather than those who receive, by erecting a barrier against God himself, and a barrier against what we are, pretending that we are not creatures. We see warfare against ourselves in this parable.

In both parables people deny God's freedom to give and love, and so deny their reality.

The parable of the tenants is placed just before the passion narrative. The end different in Mt. and Mk. It is the death of tenants in Mk. In Mt. we go on to read of the Son rising from the dead, and not ultimately what the listeners say about putting the tenants to a bad end. Jesus rather ignores the listeners, and what happens next is the resurrection.

We need to read the parables as the evangelists did, on this side of Easter.

The return of God is in the face of the stranger; the disciples did not recognize Jesus at first.

Parable means comparison in Greek. Jesus is the living parable in his life, death and resurrection.

All Saints Clifton

**MOTHERING
SUNDAY**

6 MARCH 2016



10.30 am

Family Mass

with

Blessing & Distribution of Posies

*Followed by special
Mothering Sunday
Parish Lunch*

*Tickets on sale now
Everyone welcome*

Holy Week 20– 27 March 2016



Palm Sunday 20 March

8.00am	Mass and Palm Distribution
9.30am	Family Mass and Palms
10.45am	Festival Mass, Procession and Palms
6.00pm	Stations of the Cross and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in Holy Week

7.00pm	Mass with short Homily
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Maundy Thursday 24 March

7.30pm	Solemn Mass of the Last Supper Followed by Watch of the Passion until midnight
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Good Friday 25 March

10.00am	Family Service (and hot cross buns)
12.00noon	Devotion (for one hour)
1.30pm	Solemn Liturgy of Good Friday (with the Bishop of Swindon)

Holy Saturday 26 March

11.00am	Creation of the Easter Garden and Blessing at noon
8.00pm	Great Easter Vigil and First Mass of Easter

Easter Day 27 March

8.00am	Easter Mass
9.30am	Family Mass
11.00am	Festival Mass and Procession

