

## **April 2016, Eastertide and Spring Thoughts, from Father Charles:**

**Easter is just past** and we are filled with new hope and new confidence in the magnitude of God's love for us and for creation. Spring is arriving (albeit in fits and starts) and we look forward to seeing more of the 'natural signs' — bird song, warmth in the sun, a sense of 'difference' in the air, evidence of 'new creation' — that echo our own spiritual celebrations at church in Eastertide.

During Eastertide (the fifty days taking us up to Pentecost) we continue to celebrate the great event of Easter, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In passing, it's worth noting that the word Easter is very much embedded in the English language. Most other languages refer to Easter using a form of the word 'Pascha' (both Greek and Latin, referring to the 'Passover'). The Anglo Saxon and Teutonic word 'Eostur' refers to this time of the year and, apparently, means 'season of rising'. Regardless of the accuracy of this explanation I very much like the idea. Especially as the connections between resurrection and the creative acts of spring are so visible to the eye; and so frequently used as images to help our understanding in scripture.

Throughout Eastertide there will continue to be a variety of events and activities. Starting with the **Feast of the Annunciation** on Monday (4 April, moved from the usual date because of an early Holy Week), and moving on to the **Uganda Link - Fork Supper and Auction (Friday 15 April)**, the **Orchestral Celebration Concert** on the 22 April, and **Ascension Day** in the first week of May (Thursday 5 May).

### **The Annual Parochial Church Meeting**

With spring, comes that time of year when we will hold the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM), this year on Sunday 10 April. The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Elect Churchwardens (at the **Annual Meeting of Parishioners**)
- Address items of business (at the **Annual Parochial Church Meeting**) that include:
  - Receiving reports on the electoral roll of the church, the proceedings of the PCC, the church finances, the buildings and property of the church and the work of the deanery synod.
  - Electing people to serve on the PCC and, every three years, to the deanery synod.
  - Appointing sidespersons for the church.
  - Appointing an independent examiner for the PCC accounts.

It is fitting that this event takes place after the Parish Conference ('Our Place in God's Purpose') because it very much reminds us that the function of the PCC is to co-operate with the parish priest to promote the whole mission of the Church; pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.

So whilst it is, of course, important for us to be concerned with the matters of the building fabric (from leaks to lighting, and windows to walls) it is our primary concern to work out how we, as the Church (and includes the use of our Church buildings), engage as partners in the *mission Dei* in this place.

How we do this, and also how we take forward the thinking that emerged within the Parish Conference, will be part of **'The PCC Awayday'** planned for 21 May (at Trinity College).

Consequently, it would be great if we not only looked at the content of the **2015 All Saints Annual Report**, but also familiarise ourselves with the output from the Parish Conference (essentially: 1. Our Strengths – current and of our tradition; and 2. Ideas for action - concerning how we might apply these strengths within our own context.

### **'Our Place in God's Purpose' (The Parish Conference)**

I'm sure you'll have had the opportunity to look at the outcomes from the Parish Conference we held in March. I was delighted with the number of people who attended; it gave a real feeling of interest and intention. Also the contributions, of thought and ideas, and the engagement of all gave the day a big sense of purpose.

In addition to the boards exhibited in the Atrium there is also a file and printable copy of **'The Conference Output'** which is available from Wendy, in the office, or me (in printed or digital form).

So, Eastertide continues to be a period of considerable activity and a time when we rejoice in and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. It is also a time to look inwards, outwards and forwards to better understand how we enable the New Covenant with God to operate in our lives and in our church.

With Easter Blessings,



**BOOK REVIEW: *Cranky, Beautiful Faith: for irregular (and regular)***

***People – Nadia Bolz-Weber***

***Accidental Saints: Finding God in all the Wrong***

***People – Nadia Bolz-Weber***

Nadia Bolz-Weber is an American Lutheran Minister, but a very unconventional one. Before she found her calling as an ordained minister she had been a drug addict, an alcoholic, a former stand-up comic – and she is covered in tattoos!

She was brought up in the sect Church of Christ, which is a group of fundamentalist, creationist, homophobic churches, and not to be confused with the United Church of Christ, which is in communion with the Methodist Church in USA. I have some experience of the Church of Christ as some of members of my American family are members – and I find it very disturbing. If you don't follow their fundamentalist ideas they believe you will be cast out from God.

*Cranky, Beautiful Faith* is the account of how she climbed out of the darkness she had slowly fallen into, how she became clean and slowly accepted that God loved her even though she was an awful mess. She says, "I felt guided by God the whole time I sojourned outside of the Church."

"Much later, in my mid-thirties and after PJ (her friend) died, was when I realized that what I really wanted, more than anything, was to be a pastor to my people – preferably young, urban, smartasses who wanted something more than the categories of late-stage capitalism to tell them who they were – I had, through the right combination of time, sobriety, and therapy, ceased being angry about the fundamentalism of my childhood. But there was one problem with my being a pastor: I'm a lousy candidate. I swear like a truck driver, I am covered in tattoos, and I'm kind of selfish. Nothing about me says Lutheran Pastor."

This book goes on to tell how she went to seminary, met her husband, Matthew who is also a Lutheran minister, was ordained and she set up the House for All Sinners and Saints. She tells this around the Gospel account of Mary Magdalene and the Easter story.

I fell into *Accidental Saints* during Lent, quite by accident! She tells stories of people and happenings woven into the Liturgy and ritual and shows how a group of flawed people (like us?) can catch the beauty, fire and grace of God and be swept up and changed. I was deeply moved by her writing.

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a passionate, honest, open-hearted woman whose love for humankind, especially damaged individuals is inspirational. I would encourage you to consider reading her books, she is not a conservative, polite, nice-speaking person, but she works with imperfect people and lives the Gospel teachings of 'feed the poor' and 'love thy neighbour', she is driven by God.

*Liz Badman Lay Ministe*

## FEED THE POOR OR GO TO HELL

Who are the Poor?

That question brings so many categories jumbling around in my head. Who do you think the poor are?

There are options as to how we do this – we can approach it at a literal level, we can look at it from a deeper spiritual level, or we can do both.

Well, we see the hungry and the homeless on our streets; we read of the ‘invisible poor’ who live in hostels, bed and breakfasts; most of us know of at least one person, or family, struggling on benefits and living in poor housing; and what about those who have jobs but they are on no hours contracts and minimum wage – the list goes on. This is how most people think of the Poor and they are right to do so.

Most, if not all, of us here do something towards helping the homeless on the streets, here at All Saints a group goes out in August on a Saturday with food for the homeless, we are part of the Soup Run organised by Churches Together in Clifton, Cotham and Redland. We give money to Aid Charities.

As the Refugee Crisis worsens we give money to Charities helping these people. Recently local people set up a scheme whereby they took unwanted food from restaurants and supermarkets to The Jungle in Calais and cooked meals for the Refugees there.

We pray.

But I ask myself, was this the only thing that Jesus meant when he said ‘feed the hungry’? To give money to charity or buy someone a sandwich may leave us with a warm feeling, but is that enough? Should we be feeding the hearts and minds of those we consider to be The Poor? When we pass people in the street begging for money, give food and sit with them, talk to them, get to know them, try to see Christ in them. Be Christ to them, in relating towards them positively with a smile. Meister Eckhart said there is a tiny spark of God in each one of us, so remember that when we are about to turn away and ignore someone in need, or because they don’t appeal to us in some way, they too are part of God’s Creation..

And who are the thirsty? Yes those who need a drink of water, tea, coffee etc. When I was working in the Parish Office there was a man who was homeless, but had somehow set himself up so that he walked from place to place and he had regular stops where he could either have food, or shelter. He came to us about every six months and I gave him water, which is what he asked for, but would share any food I had with me. He didn’t express a Christian faith, but his respect and wonder for God’s Creation touched me deeply.

We should be feeding the Poor with Living Water – Christ. Here I would like to read you something about the Living water, from a sermon that Rowan Williams preached in Llandaff Cathedral some years ago, and is reproduced in his book *Ponder these things*’:

‘We are meant to think of all those Old testament stories about meetings at wells – Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Zipporah, of the angel who shows Hagar the well in the desert when Abraham has banished her from his home; of Jesus himself and the woman at Jacob’s well in Samaria. The well is where the great meetings occur that take forward the history of God’s people – as if, beneath all the changes of history and development, the bubbling freshness of God is always there, coming up again and again from the depths. But we might think too of Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman in the fourth gospel, that the refreshment Jesus gives becomes itself a well of water springing up in the believer’s heart, words echoed later in the Gospel (7.38), when he speaks of the streams of living water flowing – literally – from the ‘belly’ of the believer. Mary stands for all the history of God’s people, the steady knowledge of promise and faithfulness; but she is also the first

explicit believer in Jesus: from her womb flows the river of life. And when we echo her 'Yes', the freshness of God in Jesus flows from the centre of our being too.'

Welcome the Stranger. In this simple statement we see the Middle Eastern Code of Hospitality which was an important part of the life of Jesus and his followers and all at that time. It still is deep in the Arab and Jewish make-up. I have said before that my step-father was from a Syrian-Lebanese family and it was very much the code I was brought up with. If your enemy (or someone you don't like) is in your tent (your home) he or she should be treated with the same care and respect that your friends are treated with, it is showing hospitality or Love in the widest sense. Though, of course, when you are outside the tent you might be at each other's throats! We may dislike someone intensely, sometimes for the most irrational or bizarre reasons, but to shut them out is to shut out Christ, in whose image they are also made. If we welcome people we don't know or love, hopefully respect and love may gradually grow.

A previous Parish priest, Fr Peter Cobb told me many years ago that Love isn't having warm soggy thoughts about people, it is reaching out and doing Loving things for that person, even those we don't like or understand. Not an easy thing to do sometimes, but possible.

Clothe the Naked. Who are the naked? Possibly they might be those who have strayed from their Faith, or those who are materially wealthy but spiritually empty. We might clothe them with the love of God by our loving example.

Visit the Prisoner, well there is a need for Prison Visitors at Horfield and other prisons. There is need for people to stand beside offenders who have been released from prison and are trying to get back into the world again. I have been a Prison Visitor and a man I visited, this was at a prison for vulnerable offenders i.e sex offenders, said to me that their sentence began the day they were released and stepped out in the open again. Then there are those who are imprisoned in their own minds, in addictions, in abusive relationships, in forms of mental health issues. How do we be Christ-like with them?

In tonight's reading Jesus tells us that if we ignore or deny those in need – the Poor we will 'go away into eternal punishment'. What is hell? Well, I don't think it is like the paintings of the Medieval Church – have you seen the great Judgement window at Fairfield Parish Church. But I do believe that those among us who have had any sort of mental health issues know very well what Hell can be like. You are locked into your own self, feeling cut off from everyone, nagged by our demons. It is a pretty lonely place. So if we cut people off, ignore people we could be sending them 'to Hell'.

We are the Poor if we deny love and respect to others. I remember the Evangelical church I went to as an impressionable teenager where we told

'Don't talk to ..... They are not one of us/like us/ haven't been saved/ they ask questions and so are troublemakers/ not respectable etc.'

Perhaps we should **Welcome the troublemakers!** They might open our hearts and minds up.

At our Parish Conference on Saturday we looked again at the Five Marks of Mission and Marks 3, 4, and 5 brought home to me the message of tonight's reading:

3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

So we should see Christ in all and so we grow more Christ-like, otherwise we fall into a Hell of our own making, eating into us, festering, and so we will wither.

Jesus calls us to be political, to be activists, to get out of our cosy shells and help The Poor.

In the Beatitudes Jesus says:

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

I would like to finish by reading something from a book by an American Lutheran minister, Nadia Bolz-Weber:

‘The fact is, that we are all, at once, bearers of the Gospel and receivers of it. We meet the needs of others and have our needs met. And the strangeness of the Good News is that, like those in Matthew 25 who sat before the throne and said *Huh? When did we ever feed you, Lord?*, we never know when we experience Jesus in all of this. All that we have is a promise, a promise that our needs are holy to God. A promise that Jesus is present in the meeting of needs and that his kingdom is here. But he is a different kind of king who rules over a different kind of kingdom. Being part of Christ’s bizarre kingdom looks more like being thirsty and having someone you don’t even like give you water than it looks like polishing your crown. It looks like giving my three extra coats to the trinity of junkies on the corner than it looks like ermine trimmed robes.

That is the surprising scandal of the kingdom; it looks like the same crappy mess that bumps us out of our unconscious addiction to being good, so that we can look at Jesus as he approaches us on the street and says, *Man, you look like you could use a good meal.*

*Nadia BOLZ-WEBER Accidental Saints: finding God in all the wrong people.*

## **IN THIS MONTH....APRIL 1896**

A letter from Franz Joseph Land

*[A letter sent to Revd W Renton Pascoe, then Curate at All Saints, by a member of the Jackson-Harmsworth North Pole Expedition which left Archangel in August 1894. Father Renton Pascoe was at the time British Chaplain at Archangel and held two special services for the Expedition on the day of departure. This letter was sent home to England on the “Windward“, the Expedition vessel, in 1895, was sent back to Archangel, and finally reached Clifton in 1896!]*

“Elmwood, Cape Flora, Northbrook Island, Franz Joseph Land.

An opportunity, which may not occur again for some time, of dropping you a line, having come about, in that the ice is breaking up fast, and the ship, when once clear will soon be on her way home.

I do not know whether any of the others are writing to you, but I will assume they are not, and therefore tell you of some of the principal incidents which have occurred up till now. After leaving you, we made a good passage out of the White Sea, and two days after getting into Barents Sea we came upon our first ice, in the shape of drift ice, probably from the Kara Sea.

The fantastic shapes presented by the pieces, the beautiful colour, all shades of the most lovely blue, struck me as wonderful, and although now I am used to this colour, and the shapes assumed, yet I never fail to admire this lovely phase of nature. Our progress to Harbarova was practically unimpeded by the ice, and we made a good passage. There we found our dogs ready waiting for us, in charge of the Samoyede\* who had brought them. We were delayed there five days, partly because there was some difficulty in getting the large supply of reindeer meat, and also because in getting into anchorage out of the tidal current in the strait, which was every now and then bringing large pieces of ice through from the Kara Sea, and which might have damaged the ship, we ran upon a mud bank. This, however, we soon got off again, without the ship sustaining any damage. From there we were ten days before Franz Joseph Land was sighted, and during this time we had several times come across ice, but had either skirted it or easily gone through it. When first sighted, the land looked so plain that we thought we should soon be there, but such was not the case, for we were almost fourteen days beating about in the ice, and at last almost despairing of getting here last year, when an opportunity offered of getting through the almost impenetrable ice-pack which skirted the shore for about fifty miles out, and we arrived on September 7th 1894, and very relieved we felt I can assure you. By that time, winter had set in, and it was soon seen that the ship would have to winter here. We therefore remained on board until everything was got on shore, houses built, everything under cover and snug, and we removed into the houses in November. By that time the Arctic night was upon us, from October 29th, till the end of February, and a long dreary time we found it. How joyfully we welcomed the reappearance of the sun you can easily imagine! So also the advent of the birds which soon followed.

Now we have perpetual day, though summer has not yet begun. We have also finished our season's sledging, the last party having returned a little over a week ago. Particulars, you will be aware, I am not at liberty to give you. I can, however, say that we are all well and no mishaps have as yet occurred.”

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\*The then Editor added a footnote concerning the Samoyedes that they were “Russian subjects, but are savages and idolaters. The Russian church has a successful Mission among them.”

**Columnist's note:** *There is very little surviving correspondence from this Expedition, apparently. It was led by Major Frederick Jackson, (1860 - 1938), and completed the survey of the western part of the archipelago, but a further journey north was made too late in the season and they had to turn back on account of ice. They hospitably received the Norwegian explorers Nansen and Johansen when they arrived at Cape Flora in 1896, after their own attempt on the Pole. Nansen and Johansen stayed with the Expedition for seven months before travelling back with them on the "Windward", which returned to London in September 1897, having covered about 1140 miles and added about 500 miles to the chart of Franz Joseph Land. Jackson was an explorer of phenomenal energy, who also served his country in the Boer War and in both World Wars. He spent his last years with his second wife in a houseboat on the Thames named "Afterglow". You can find out more about him from [queensroyalsurreys.org.uk/personalities/003.html](http://queensroyalsurreys.org.uk/personalities/003.html)*

### **Lent Meditation, 15 March 2016**

Luke 14.26 - Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple

Well- anyone who reads this passage out of context would conclude that at best Jesus was a megalomaniac and at worst the leader of a strange cult that encouraged people to leave behind the people they are most connected – their family..

And in a way it must have been even more disturbing at the time that Jesus wrote these words. Family, blood ties and loyalties were the corner stone of Jewish life. Think of the ten commandments- honour your father and mother. What was he saying- absolutely shocking- then and shocking now. That I think was his intention- to jolt and surprise. And yet perhaps there is also something compelling and dramatic about this language. Remember when Jesus said I do not come to bring peace but a sword.

Ancient Hebrew was not a lukewarm language- there was no word for example for "like"- you love or hate. Immediate, passionate and dramatic. And Jesus spells out the challenge of following his way in dramatic language because there is no other way of making his point. This was the beginning of a new world order – of love, inclusion and universal welcome- beyond the qualified boundaries of family and kinship, beyond the separation of people who were slaves and free, beyond the rules that divided men and women. How else would you get the message across except by such dramatic speech?

The foundational corner stone of Jewish life and practice- the Ten Commandments was being turned on its head "Honour your father and mother". No Jesus says "Hate...- and even life itself" Yes, hate life itself- your life, your own preoccupations, satisfactions priorities. That is a huge challenge- I love my life- my friends my interests, my relationships- the people whom I love and who love me.

I was talking to someone who was bereaved last week. She described bereavement as living in two realities - walking along with me and my dogs, enjoying the countryside- and yet below there was another place of loss, peace, memory and sadness that was every bit as real. Beyond our everyday lives- when we stop we dip down into the closeness of God in



prayer and in sacrament, we find another reality that is incomparable and the true pearl of great price.

One of the translations of the Greek word for sin is "Hamartia" which literally means missing the mark – not an introspective analysis of what we have done wrong but more like looking at where we could direct ourselves to God.

So that statement about hating your life - it's not a life denying statement- it's a life reorientating statement. To fix on the truths of our life that brings us alive. Rowan Williams in his recent talk in Bristol describes that the start to prayer and contemplation is to be honest and real about our own humanity. But what this little gospel passage leaves out is the next bit- equally important – "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple".

The word is interesting -It's not MY cross but THE cross- it's not about the individual crosses that we have to bear. It's more about understanding that the cross is the symbol that joins our lives with that of God- the struts of wood that point horizontally and vertically and intersect where our lives and God's life meet and touch. We are called to be people that bring that reality of God's love and inclusion and make them visible in the world- that is what it means to bear the cross and it is different for all of us. As Rowan reminded us yesterday, every time we do that then the word becomes flesh again and incarnate in our world.

Jesus' message is all too important- there is no time to prevaricate or be ambivalent. And that is a huge challenge to us- that could leave us feeling inadequate and not up to the challenge of his call to our deepest selves.

But we can be comforted- we are called by a love that is beyond imagining which will never let us go. We are all heroic failures but little by little that call can never leave us. As Augustine says- Lord you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. Little by little we are brought home again to that love.

A poem and a prayer to end with:

### *The Call*

From our low seat beside the fire  
Where we have dozed and dreamed and watched the glow  
Or raked the ashes, stopping so  
We scarcely saw the sun or rain  
Above, or looked much higher  
Than this same quiet red or burned-out fire.  
Tonight we heard a call,  
A rattle on the window pane,  
A voice on the sharp air,  
And felt a breath stirring our hair,  
A flame within us: Something swift and tall  
Swept in and out and that was all.  
Was it a bright or a dark angel? Who can know?  
It left no mark upon the snow,  
But suddenly it snapped the chain  
Unbarred, flung wide the door  
Which will not shut again;  
And so we cannot sit here any more.  
We must arise and go:  
The world is cold without

And dark and hedged about  
With mystery and enmity and doubt,  
But we must go  
Though yet we do not know  
Who called, or what marks we shall leave upon the snow.

Charlotte Mew (1869-1928)

A final prayer

Lord in these days of mercy,  
make us quiet and prayerful;  
in these days of challenge,  
make us stronger in you;

*Rev'd Ginny Royston*

**Rowan Williams, *Theology and Meditation***

**University of Bristol, 14 March 2016**

This lecture was a highlight in a series of events celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Department of Religion and Theology. All the speakers have a connection with the department, as students or teachers. The Rev. Dr Rowan Williams, formerly Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Christ Church, Oxford, taught in the department in the 1990s when he was Bishop of Monmouth; and for this event he was described as the Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, rather than as the former Archbishop of Canterbury and Baron Williams of Oystermouth. The event was fully booked and the Great Hall was almost full, so here are some notes for those who would have liked to attend – with the caution that the reporter (Gillian Clark) is not a theologian.

RW quoted a fourth-century writer [Evagrius Ponticus]: 'to be a theologian is to pray truly'. He explained that 'theology' is talking about God, and prayer is the mental activity appropriate for talking about God. 'Talking about God' is saying the 'least stupid' things we can say about God, and 'mental activity' is more than thinking: it covers mind, feelings, sensations, all that is going on. He drew on some Eastern Christian theologians, from around 500 to 700, to illustrate what he meant: Diadochus of Photice, Isaac the Syrian, Mark the Monk, Maximus the Confessor. He said little about methods of meditation, except for a brief mention of focus on breath, or on a phrase such as 'Lord have mercy on me', to still the mind and block distractions.

The point of theology, he said, not to be other than human, but to find what is natural to us as human beings and to be natural in relation to God. Contemplation and understanding are

natural to us; they are both intellectual and emotional. Before we can begin to imagine transfigured humanity, we need to recognise what it is to be human and what there is in the world. Diadochus used the image of an outline sketch, in monochrome, which can be coloured by the Spirit.

We need to 'prune away' the idea that God owes us something and needs to be reminded of that. Mark the Monk said that God gives the gift of freedom from fantasy, and many writers use the image of 'breaking' the heart, which is the home of thought and feeling and symbolises the centre of being. Meditation detaches us from self-image and self-sufficiency. It makes us remember both the grace we have received and the sins we have committed; RW interpreted 'sins' as the occasions when we have seen others only in relation to our own concerns. We need to recognise, not to manipulate; we need to restore the harmony of seeing, feeling, and thinking.

Silence is not denial of language: we are at a loss for words because there is too much to say. Ascetics who withdrew into solitude do not cut off the world, but find its relationships too thin and bloodless – this is not, RW added, everyone's calling. But one saying he quoted speaks to everyone: Diadochus on looking eastward in winter. When it is cold and dark and bleak, we look to where we know sunrise will come.

*Gillian Clark*

