

June 2017

Stirring up the Mud: thoughts from Father Charles

Ascension to Pentecost

A whole variety of events are taking place, it seems, at this same time! On Wednesday 14 June we will host the Deanery Confirmation. At that time we will have a group of young people and adults who have emerged from within our own community at All Saints. This event will be taking place, with great appropriateness, in that time immediately following Ascension and Pentecost. When our thoughts turn to the ascension of Christ to the Father, so that he was able to send us the gift of the Spirit.

At much the same time as the Confirmation we will have the General Election, and our Atrium will turn into a polling station. As I write this today, just prior to June, I think any guess as to the outcome of the election is unwise. The predicted 'Conservative landslide' seems to have somewhat faded. And it's also true that our ability to predict seems to have declined – the evidence for this being the success of the unexpected: Brexit and Trump for example.

Much more disturbingly, we have, once again, had to withstand the incomprehensible brutality of people whose single purpose is the satisfaction of hatred to bring fear, division and anger amongst others. Manchester, the Kabul bombing and the killing of the Coptic Christians in Egypt being three examples, of many such, in our world.

Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit comes at a time when the 'mess of humanity' is fully evident. Yet, as Christians we are embedded within this mess, we are not observers.

Standing in the Jordan

Rowan Williams, whose ability to express the almost inexpressible, describes our Christian embeddedness thus:

"Baptism does not confer on us a status that marks us off from everybody else. To be able to say, 'I'm baptized' is not to claim an extra dignity, let alone a sort of privilege that keeps you separate from and superior to the rest of the human race, but to claim a new level of solidarity with other people. It is to accept that to be a Christian is to be affected – you might even say contaminated – by the mess of humanity.

This is very paradoxical. Baptism is a ceremony in which we are washed, cleansed and re-created. It is also a ceremony in which we are pushed into the middle of a human situation that may hurt us, and that will not leave us untouched or unsullied. And the gathering of baptized people is therefore not a convocation of those who are privileged, elite and separate, but of those who have accepted what it means to be in the heart of a needy, contaminated, messy world.

To put it another way, you don't go down into the waters of the Jordan without stirring up a great deal of mud!" (Rowan Williams, Being Christian, 2014)

Up to our Knees in the Mud

How might we make sense of being up to our knees in mud? As is often the case Rowan Williams provides a framework of sense on to which a super structure of depth is built. He points out that our framework is a mixture of Sacrament and Word – which lies at the very heart of our life of faith here at All Saints – as individuals and as the worshipping community.

To be more exact Williams offers a framework of Baptism, Scripture, Eucharist and Prayer. It is through a better understanding of this combination that we begin to discern a response to living in a messy world.

The Present and the Past

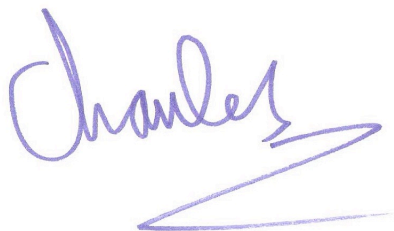
Initially my perspective here was very much set in the present. The focus was on the events that are happening right now in our world – global and local. Yet, on reflection, our world has always been 'messy', and it is in this that the framework offered by Williams remains constant.

It seems to me that our response to our world's plight now remains much as it has over the centuries. Our action, our response, is shaped by our baptismal commitment; our effort to hear what God wants us to hear in his Word; the desire of the Living God for our company in the Eucharist; and our willingness to let Our Lord pray in us (and act through us).

The first act here being Baptismal commitment, of which Rowan says:

'Perhaps baptism really ought to have some health warnings attached to it: "If you take this step, if you go into the depths, it will be transfiguring, exhilarating, life-giving and very, very dangerous.'"

With prayers and blessings,



The Physicality of Prayer

Rowan Williams

Reprinted from: **New Statesman 8 July 2014**

The Christianity I was originally formed in was not very ritual-minded: it was both intellectually alert and emotionally intense – the best of a style of Welsh Nonconformity now almost extinct – but tended to look down on physical expression of belief (other than singing, which I suspect was regarded as not really physical). Only when the family joined the Anglican Church when I was in my early teens, after we'd moved to another town, did I discover a sense of worship as a physical art, involving gesture, movement and colour. I still have a vivid memory of my first experience of a solemn Mass with procession at Easter, when I was, I suppose, about 12 – the awareness of a deliberate strategy of involving the senses at many levels.

The mild High Church atmosphere of those years was, for me, an environment that made strong imaginative and emotional sense, and indeed is still the kind of setting where I feel most instinctively at home, rather than in more simply word-oriented styles, or in the heated atmosphere of “charismatic” worship, repetitive song and unstructured prayer – although I've learned to be nourished by that, too, in many circumstances. But the ritual that is most significant for me apart from the routines of public worship and the daily recitation of the fixed words of morning and evening prayer owes more to non-Anglican sources.

Readers of Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* will recall the somewhat unexpected appearance there of an account of the traditional Greek and Russian discipline of meditative repetition of the “Jesus Prayer” (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner”). Practically every Eastern Orthodox writer on prayer will describe this, and many in the tradition also describe some of the physical disciplines that may be used to support it – being aware of your breathing, sitting in a certain way, focusing attention on your chest: “bringing the mind into the heart”, as the books characterise it.

The interest in uniting words with posture and breath is, of course, typical of non-Christian practices also; and over the years increasing exposure to and engagement with the Buddhist world in particular has made me aware of practices not unlike the “Jesus Prayer” and introduced me to disciplines that further enforce the stillness and physical focus that the prayer entails. Walking meditation, pacing very slowly and co-ordinating each step with an out-breath, is something I have found increasingly important as a preparation for a longer time of silence.

So: the regular ritual to begin the day when I'm in the house is a matter of an early rise and a brief walking meditation or sometimes a few slow prostrations, before squatting for 30 or 40 minutes (a low stool to support the thighs and reduce the weight on the lower legs) with the “Jesus Prayer”: repeating (usually silently) the words as I breathe out, leaving a moment between repetitions to notice the beating of the heart, which will slow down steadily over the period.

The prayer isn't any kind of magical invocation or auto-suggestion – simply a vehicle to detach you slowly from distracted, wandering images and thoughts. These will happen, but

you simply go on repeating the words and gently bringing attention back to them. If it is proceeding as it should, there is something like an indistinct picture or sensation of the inside of the body as a sort of hollow, a cave, in which breath comes and goes, with an underlying pulse. If you want to speak theologically about it, it's a time when you are aware of your body as simply a place where life happens and where, therefore, God "happens": a life lived in you.

So the day begins with a physically concrete and specific reminder that your own individual existence is breathed through by a life that isn't your possession; and at moments of tension or anxiety during the day, deliberately breathing in and out a few times with the words of the prayer in mind connects you with this life that isn't yours, immersing the anxiety and dispersing the tension – even if it doesn't simply take away pain or doubt, solve problems or create some kind of spiritual bliss. The point is just to be connected again.

The mature practitioner (not me) will discover a steady clarity in the vision of self and world, and, in "advanced" states, an awareness of unbroken inner light, with the strong sense of an action going on within that is quite independent of your individual will – the prayer "praying itself", not just human words but a connection between God transcendent and God present and within. Ritual anchors, ritual aligns, harmonises, relates. And what happens in the "Jesus Prayer" is just the way an individual can make real what is constantly going on in the larger-scale worship of the sacraments. The pity is that a lot of western Christianity these days finds all this increasingly alien. But I don't think any one of us can begin to discover again what religion might mean unless we are prepared to expose ourselves to new ways of being in our bodies. But that's a long story.

Church Crawl in West Gloucestershire

Saturday 13th May saw a diverse group of Pevsner and OS map-clutchers load into a Four Towns & Vale Link Community Transport minibus and set off northwards up the M5. Liz Badman had selected and researched four stunning and very different churches for us to visit and had managed to lay on guides, tea and coffee at strategic points.

Our first stop was All Saints Selsley, perched on the escarpment south of Stroud and with panoramic views of the local industrial estate in one direction, but beautiful pastoral scenes in all the others. The church was constructed from local stone in the 1860s, to a design by GF Bodley and financed by Samuel Marling, owner of local textile mills, philanthropist and MP. What is remarkable about the church is that it has not evolved structurally or fitment-wise. It is, restoration and repairs excepted, untouched by 20th or 21st century alterations. The craftsmanship in the church is exceptional, with metalwork, stone and wood carving and glass all designed by Morris and Co. The Marling family no longer lives locally, but Samuel and several scions are walled up in the crypt.

Following a quick expedition up the hill behind the church to Selsley Common for a quick look at the view from a long barrow on the edge, we set off round Gloucester and across the Severn to Kempeley in the Forest of Dean. Here is St Mary's, a perfect Norman church, built

in the early 12th century with the original roof timbers still in place. According to the dendrochronology lab at Queen's University Belfast the timber used to construct the west door is from oaks felled between 1114 and 1141. A series of remarkable frescoes in the chancel is of a similar age. The paintings in the nave are probably 14th century and are in tempera. Both sets were saved for our age by the reformation when they were whitewashed over, only being rediscovered in the early 20th century. The church is no longer in regular use and is the care of English Heritage, the village now being located a mile or so away on higher ground and served by an Arts and Crafts church dedicated to St Edward. The area, beautiful as it was under a lowering May sky, sent slight shivers down the spines of those who realised that Fred West had grown up locally and buried some of his victims very close by.

Traversing deep single-track lanes with few passing places we arrived at Holy Innocents Highnam and parked beside the village hall, part of a series of ornate estate buildings and close to the cricket pitch where play was in progress. A gravel track led through to the church and once through the door and with the lights on we were treated to a revelation of Oxford Movement exotica constructed at the behest of Thomas Gambier Parry, the owner of neighbouring Highnam Court, in memory of his wife Isabella and three small children who had all died of tuberculosis. No expense had been spared, vast sums of money having been made in previous generations in the East India Company. Henry Woodyer, a friend of Thomas from his school days at Eton was the architect and some of the finest craftsmen of the time designed and executed the fittings. Thomas' youngest son of his marriage to Isabella, born 12 days before her death, was Hubert, an unsuccessful and reluctant insurance underwriter who became the composer and musician who we know from Repton the usual tune to *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*, the setting for Blake's *Jerusalem* and the 1902 coronation *I Was Glad*. Sated by wall paintings, floor tiles, marble bust, candelabras, reredos and radiator covers all of great splendour we journeyed southwards in search of tea and our final church.

The last stop of the day was back along the road south in Berkeley where, having rather startled a troop of quiet, respectable lycra-clad cyclists in the teashop, we staggered to St Mary's, bloated by excessive cakeage. The east window in the church is a memorial to Edward Jenner, son of a vicar of Berkeley and a pioneer of the science of immunology. The west door is scarred by musket holes and hatchet gouges from the Civil War.

It was an excellent day out with the countryside at its best, the weather kind and the itinerary so well chosen to please all tastes from Norman solidity to overblown Victorian. Thanks to Liz Badman and David Flemington for arranging and driving respectively. We hope that they are plotting another improving excursion for the autumn.

Mary Benton

Fair Trade Communion Wine

For a number of years All Saints has purchased Fair Trade Communion Wine, however I doubt if we give any consideration of where it is produced.

The following is an extract from the newsletter recently received from the supplier.

"We are delighted to report that we recently shipped the 300,000th bottle of Fair Trade communion wine since we started the project back in January 2008. With more churches

joining every day, this means that a real ongoing benefit has been achieved for the 350 workers at the 13 farms at Stellar Organic Fair Trade winery in South Africa.

Ever since The Stellar Winery was founded in 2000, they've been refining their ideas on how to create a healthy business that is environmentally, socially and ethically responsible.

Their aim is to make a significant difference to the part of South Africa in which they work and live. This means impacting positively on the lives of the people who work at Stellar so that they in turn impact positively on their families and the communities in which they live.

One of the projects founded by the Stellar Winery is a Community Feeding Project based in the town of Klaver which lies 10km to the south-east of Stellar Winery and is firmly in the catchment area of the winery.

Klaver is home to a large number of under-resourced families. The children benefit from feeding schemes run by the local schools during term time, but ensuring that at-risk children are properly fed during the holidays has been a problem.

Since 2011, Stellar Foundation has managed a meal-a -day feeding project during school holidays, combined with activities that keep them occupied and in a safe space for at least part of everyday.

Started by the Foundation's Irene Dell with a little money and a lot of hope, the Holiday Feeding Project has become a fixture which has reduced child-perpetrated crime in the town and forged bonds with the community.

We have seen to over 30,000 full tummies since the start of this project. That's a lot of good food served up with a hefty dollop of love. We have a group of volunteers doing the cooking, wonderful support from local business and often host volunteers who come to organise activities for the children"

So the next time the wine is offered at the Altar and the priest speaks the words" we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands" we can say thank you for the work of those human hands, working with nature and changing lives.

Dear Friend-in-Christ,

I suspect that the author of this Open Letter will not be recognised by the more recent congregation of All Saints', Clifton, but will be very familiar with the more long-standing worshippers.

For over two decades (from late 1989 until early 2011) I was privileged to worship at All Saints', Clifton. During that time, I participated in most of the jobs undertaken by the laity- including the 'soup-run', Sidesman, Adminstrant and Server, PPC member and eventually Head Server for quite a few years. To this day, I appreciate what All Saints' taught me and hopefully I'm a better human-being for the experience!

As you will know, the lay worshippers at All Saints' have always been encouraged to contribute to the wider world. As part of that- during my time at the parish church- one of our then-Church Wardens was a former Labour City Councillor, one of our congregation was a Liberal Democrat councillor and I was elected as a Conservative councillor. The politics did

not matter one jot, but it was a demonstration of our joint commitment to the city and the people we aimed to serve.

Remarkably (especially to me!), May 2017 represents 25 years since I was first elected to Bristol City Council to represent the same seat (Bishopsworth), where I live. I am planning a fully-choral concelebrated Sung Mass to mark my Silver Jubilee on Saturday 10th June 2017, at 12.00 noon, at St Gerald Majella's Church, 69 Talbot Road, Knowle, Bristol, and wanted to cordially invite members of the church I so felt at home for 21 years to attend as guests. (Traditional liturgists- including Chris Verity- need not worry that I am belatedly 'dumbing-down' since in reality it is a Solemn Mass, but my non-church friends and Council colleagues are unlikely to know actually what a 'Solemn Mass' entails).

Obviously, people are welcome to just turn-up on Saturday 10th June. However, it would be helpful to know rough numbers, so if you'll able email me on cllr.richard.eddy@bristol.gov.uk or telephone me on 0117-9646455. (You would expect someone who jointly-organised services during the Easter Triduum at All Saints' to be a bit of a 'control-freak!').

Finally, since my original plans were hatched, we now know there will be a 'little thing' called a General Election two days before. For activists such as myself the Sung Mass should prove a welcome relief; for long-suffering voters a chance to unwind after an arduous election campaign.

Richard Eddy