



# Chaplains Blog March 2017



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The idea of this blog is to try and keep some contact with as many of the Readers in the Diocese as possible. With well over a hundred readers spread from Saltash to Sennen and from Bude to St Keverne it is a tricky task to get to know you as chaplain but that does not mean you are not prayed for.

This month I have had some lengthy chats with readers about problems with incumbents, church wardens, their faith, their health, the health of someone they are caring for and their own evolving vocation. Do contact me if you would value a chat – or some prayers or both! I have met over tea, coffee and a cracking good pint of beer at the Penventon Hotel – all equally acceptable! I am happy to travel to you or to meet half way.

I will be available to chat to all day at the Readers' Day in Bodmin – please do introduce yourself – and if we have already met test me on whether I remember your name: It will be on the tip of my tongue.

Please do keep Joy Gunter [joy.lowenna@talktalk.net](mailto:joy.lowenna@talktalk.net), who runs the Readers' prayer circle, informed of Readers or their families in need of prayer.

## Bible Study

Acts 20: 4–12 – oh dear I must have been in a strange mood I am afraid! I read this and laughed and then felt a pang of guilt but it brought to mind some incredibly dull and lengthy sermons mostly with irrelevant rugby illustrations or tales of the Ffestiniog Railway. A reminder to keep my own sermons on task!

## Quiet Day

I am pleased to be able to tell you that the Venerable Patrick Evans will be our quiet day leader on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July. He has been recommended by Bishop Chris so I was delighted when Patrick agreed to come and lead us. If you booked with the old date please send me an email to confirm your booking. There will be a limit of 20 participants so it will be first come first served!



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I am quite glad that the quiet day has been moved from June because the selection day for next intake of Readers in Training is on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> and on the 17<sup>th</sup> there is an extra 'Day School' for the current Readers in Training on planning worship.

## **Of Church Services and My Desire for a Palatable Muesli! Reflections on my Lenten travels**

Church services are like breakfast cereal and I rather like good muesli. It should have substance, chewy bits, sweet bits and bits you discover between your teeth later in the day! Yes I know that the bits of nut that get stuck can be irritating and the same is sometimes true of the stuff that happens in a service but the alternative is spiritual Ready Brek, that oat based slimy sweetness served so that one does not have to think about chewing. I think that is true of some services where the congregation are sung at rather than being led in song, where choruses are repeated endlessly and where prayer and silence take a back seat in the main service. They serve up an easy-to-digest faith package that does not encourage thoughtful chewing. Though..... I may be wrong and someone might like to enlighten me. ☺ (I know some hate emoticons but sometimes it seems to add meaning!)

I did not get ReadyBrek on my Lenten expedition to the local Baptist church in my quest to visit the other churches in the town over the coming weeks and months when I have a gap. There follows the reflection on that service which I shared with my Rector and with the Baptist Church.

RBC is actually the closest church to my house so I only had to wander down the hill. Now you might think that after entering so many churches to preach and lead worship that just going to another church would be easy but getting out of my comfort zone is surprisingly stressful for me so I offered up a prayer as I wandered down the hill! I was being looked after, however, as I walked under the viaduct and met an ex pupil (Phil) to whom I had taught guitar and much more back in the early 80s at Stithians School so it was good to go in chatting to someone. I was then surrounded by kids, mostly from Pennoweth who wanted to chat which was great and I was suddenly in my element. As I made my way upstairs there were polite good mornings but also friendly greetings from people I know quite well who seemed pleased to have me in their service! One comment was, "it is different every week you might want to come more regularly!"

As the service began I had to reprimand myself sternly for being pedantic about prayer words, e.g. listening to how many times 'Lord' was fitted into a sentence rather than the meaning (too much time spent filling in evaluation forms – and leading courses on intercessory prayer – gets to be a habit!).

I knew all the hymns / worship songs ☺ which was a huge relief because I do find a great joy in singing and they were all designed for a congregation to sing together. I have a particular fondness for the "I trust in you alone" version of psalm 23. The musicians (the worship team) were very competent and led rather than performed with



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a good balance of hymns that had been obviously carefully and prayerfully selected. Super!

A lad in his 20s was being baptised in the sea later and gave his testimony..... something I don't think we do enough of – with the exception of our last confirmation candidate! He certainly seemed to enjoy his time with the ear of the congregation and did not seem to want it to end – I could sense the elders wondering how to move it along a little and offered up a prayer for them. Having been homeless at some point, mixed up in New Age stuff and a drug user, his focus was on battling the powers of darkness and duly 5 minutes from the end of his piece a number of motorbikes stopped outside the church revving engines and beeping horns for much much longer than it takes the lights to change.... it certainly made the congregation think! I suspect the riders would have been surprised at the positive effect they may have had in illustrating the testimony!

Communion was very different from even the most informal experiences I have had before but I felt welcome to participate. The sharing of bread where we broke a bit off a loaf seemed to have more spiritual significance for me than the individual stainless steel thimble sized cups of 'wine' that I think must have been some sort of sweetened juice. The symbolism in breaking bread together was very uplifting and I had a great sense of joining with all Christians who were breaking bread today.

Marc preached an interesting and quite powerful sermon based around Nehemiah which struck some chords for me about faith and fear especially when put in the context of thinking about Lez's hip replacement on Thursday. And of course his emphasis on the power of prayer had me nodding in agreement as it is currently a pet theme in my own preaching. I was a little envious of the time he had; it would be lovely to have half an hour occasionally to dig into the readings and really get to the heart of things. Thankfully Carn Brea Methodist Church will give me free reign when I go there is a fortnight to lead them! (Do not covet thy neighbour's allowed sermon length?)

After singing psalm 23 there was – wonderfully – a few minutes of silent prayer; very different from the Industrial estate Engine House Church experience. That silent prayer was, for me, quite moving at that point and much needed.

Following the service more chats with ex-pupils and families and then with a couple of parents from Pennoweth whose daughter Stephanie I know from nursery and it was Stephanie's beaming smile that carried me home up the hill.

I was glad I went and I was engaged and involved in the worship all the way through, which I hate to say is a bit unusual for me unless I am actually actively involved in the service in playing, preaching or teaching, especially as it was a very long service but the comfortable seats helped!

It was busy, friendly and welcoming and I am sure my travels will take me back there one day; RBC is not only a family but also very much part of the wider family of Christians in our town shining the light of prayer and worship across the age groups



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and doing wonderful work. Thank you to the team. Thank you too to the congregation and especially the Parker family who I know will be praying for us later in the week.

It was very good for me to go and pray for their church leaders and the town on their home turf (as it were) and I will have a think about where to venture next. (I do find the getting out of the comfort zone rather hard!)

## **The Diocesan Website – a Guide for Bluffers**

As a general rule it is better to use Google or another major search engine than the search bar on the website front page. For example, 'Truro diocese confidence in the gospel' as a Google search will yield a direct link to the pdf file!

'Truro Diocese safeguarding training sessions' in Google brings up a few ads first but there's not far to scroll before you find the relevant page. The same search on the Truro Diocese website will be fruitless at the moment if you want the latest training course dates.

The key box on the front page for browsing, but only if you have time to kill, is right at the bottom in the middle. Hidden there you will find the information area.

Click on All Users and a veritable plethora of headings in alphabetical order appears. Try clicking the Readers/more information button and then let me know what you think of the content. :)

From the front page under 'Faith' you will spot 'is God calling you' and the Reader ministry page is bright and inviting. Have a look and suggest it to someone!

## **Radicalisation Safeguarding and PREVENT**

Probably not your favourite topic but one of particular importance for all of those of us working with vulnerable people or if we are concerned about radical groups from animal rights protesters to suicide bombers. There is some free training which is well worth 25 minutes of your time available at:

<http://course.ncalt.com/ChannelGeneralAwareness>

Those of us who follow Social Media will be well aware of the constant stream of reposts of material from Britain First and other far right groups. I tend to leave a note suggesting that the re-poster should look through the page of the site they are copying and see if it actually represents their views. Most often it does not and they are shocked when they see other activity from the group. The work of Britain First, English Defence League and so on seems as radicalising as Daesh / ISIS.

## **A Litany of Reconciliation**

From the Community of the Cross of Nails – Growing together in hope:



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*The Litany was written in 1958 and focuses on the seven deadly sins. It reminds that when we pray about the problems of the world around us, we need to begin by acknowledging the roots of those problems in our own hearts. The Litany is prayed at noon each weekday in Coventry Cathedral. On Fridays, we pray the Litany in the ruins of the old Cathedral and are joined in prayer at that time by many of our partners around the world.*

## **THE COVENTRY LITANY OF RECONCILIATION**

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,

FATHER FORGIVE

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,

FATHER FORGIVE

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,

FATHER FORGIVE

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

FATHER FORGIVE

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,

FATHER FORGIVE

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,

FATHER FORGIVE

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

FATHER FORGIVE

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

## **Something to think about:**

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>

## **The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus**

### CHAPTER V – THE MANNERS OF THE CHRISTIANS

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a



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common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

**From "Unapologetic" by Francis Spufford**

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/31/trouble-with-atheists-defence-of-faith>

Take the well-known slogan on the atheist bus in London. I know, I know, that's an utterance by the hardcore hobbyists of unbelief, but in this particular case they're pretty much stating the ordinary wisdom of everyday disbelief. The atheist bus says: "There's probably no God. So stop worrying and enjoy your life." All right: which word here is the questionable one, the aggressive one, the one that parts company with recognisable human experience so fast it doesn't even have time to wave goodbye? It isn't "probably". New Atheists aren't claiming anything outrageous when they say that there probably isn't a God. In fact they aren't claiming anything substantial at all, because, really, how would they know? It's as much of a guess for them as it is for me. No, the word that offends against realism here is "enjoy". I'm sorry – enjoy your life? I'm not making some kind of neo-puritan objection to enjoyment. Enjoyment is lovely. Enjoyment is great. The more enjoyment the better. But enjoyment is one emotion. To say that life is to be enjoyed (just enjoyed) is like saying that mountains should only have summits, or that all colours should be purple, or that all plays should be by Shakespeare. This really is a bizarre category error.

But not necessarily an innocent one. Not necessarily a piece of fluffy pretending that does no harm. The implication of the bus slogan is that enjoyment would be your natural state if you weren't being "worried" by us believers and our hellfire preaching. Take away the malignant threat of God-talk, and you would revert to continuous pleasure, under cloudless skies. What's so wrong with this, apart from it being total bollocks? Well, in the first place, that it buys a bill of goods, sight unseen, from modern marketing. Given that human life isn't and can't be made up of enjoyment, it is in effect accepting a picture of human life in which those pieces of living where easy enjoyment is more likely become the only pieces that are visible. If you based your knowledge of the human species exclusively on adverts, you'd think that the normal condition of humanity was to be a good-looking single person between 20 and 35, with excellent muscle-definition and/or an excellent figure, and a large disposable income. And you'd think the same thing if you got your information exclusively from the atheist bus, with the minor difference, in this case, that the man from the Gold Blend couple has a tiny wrinkle of concern on his handsome forehead, caused by the troublesome thought of



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God's possible existence: a wrinkle about to be removed by one magic application of Reason™.