



Chaplain's Blog 12-2017.1



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2017 is almost done and with it my second year as chaplain.

The best part of being chaplain this year has been talking to readers up and down the length and breadth of the diocese. I have travelled between Penzance and St Mellion, and from St Just to Wadebridge and chatted to readers by email, telephone and face to face about reader ministry in general or things personal to the individual. It has been both a joy and a privilege to share those conversations and to be able to focus my prayers. More of that in the reflection.

The quiet day this year was a great blessing and I have already booked a date for next year - **Saturday November 24th** so you can expect nagging emails asking you to book and put the date in your diaries.

You will have guessed from all the emails that there is a **consultation about the appointment of a new bishop** shortly! I have already spoken to a number of readers about it and I have put their collective *unedited* wisdom below. Please do make your contribution!



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Collected thoughts about the appointment of a new Bishop.

- Communion by extension. Many churches already have no HC for weeks on end and I can see that situation getting worse as time goes by - I suppose it depends on where you view that Sacrament?!
- Someone who will listen to the people with a sensitive ear, find out where we are and then lead us on
- Our Bishop would be about, obviously, love for others. I frequently feel that the 'church' is closer to the Scribes and Pharisees than Jesus. We often give the impression of being introspective rather than outward looking.
- I happen to believe that caring for others in the widest sense is a way of getting closer to God and developing a stronger relationship with Him than all the Bible study and prayer you can muster.
- A middle of the road Bishop who is full of infectious enthusiasm is to my mind the best way forward, but as I shall be hanging up my scarf in the not too distant future I will not be greatly affected. I appreciate that this is not the incisive input you are seeking but just the off the cuff ramblings of a man of faith.

.... so a Bishop with a heart for all the people in a broad church, not too evangelical who does not get too hung up on the politics of gender / sexuality but focuses on the really important issues of our time....

- An awareness of Cornishness; pastoral; people-person, not necessarily an academic theologian - in fact may be better if he/she is not.
- If you are allowed to say it - a female could be great.
- Also, a supportive spouse might be an excellent idea for all the obvious and right reasons.

Reflections – but first my retelling of a story I first heard at Riverside Church in Looe.

There was once a community of monks living in a monastery somewhere out in the countryside. At one time it had been thriving with a reputation for hospitality and service which had little to do with the fine wines they had been able to sell to sustain them. But times had been hard and their number had dwindled through illness, the vines withered with neglect and holes appeared in the slates and the abbot feared that they would have to close and that the remaining handful of brothers would be dispersed far and wide to new places.

Attached to their buildings was a small retreat hut that would be occupied occasionally by those seeking solitude and contemplation and surprisingly one of them was a Rabbi from a nearby town who would arrive for ten days or so once a year. The abbot had befriended the rabbi and was pleased when he heard his friend had come for his annual sojourn. He unlocked the cupboard in his office, took out one of the remaining few bottles of the fine vintage for which they were known and went to see him.

The rabbi listened to the woes of the abbot and the problems which seemed to heap upon problems in a precarious mountain while he sipped at the rich red wine. When the abbot had lapsed into a thoughtful silence staring into his own glass the rabbi smiled enigmatically and without comment on the problems, or trying to provide solutions merely said, "I have no solutions but I will come with you to the evening meal."



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The abbot, had not been expecting answers- it was a lonely job being the head of the place and was grateful for the opportunity to pour out his troubles. They went into the refectory together and after grace had been said; instead of the normal Bible reading the Rabbi addressed the brothers.

"Now as you know I have been coming here for a number of years and you may have wondered why, a rabbi might choose a Christian monastery. Well..... ", he smiled and paused, "I am not going to tell you but I will give you a piece of information, something of vital importance..... "

The brothers sat watching with interest at what they might be told.

"The messiah resides among you in this place." he said quietly and with that he sat down and picked up his spoon.

The brothers looked at each other and frowned, their thoughts almost audible! Surely not brother Cedric from the gardens- everything he touched seemed to die and go mouldy and his hands were filthy. What of Brother Cynric, the cook whose girth was testimony to where most of the food went- surely not him. The abbot was a possibility but then again they knew he kept the keys to the wine store and was not past seeking comfort in a glass when times were hard.

They looked at each other quizzically!

Over the weeks and months that followed a new respect and care began to flourish in the place and guests were once more welcome. Children played in the old orchard and had picnics with their parents by the stream and the retreat room was in constant demand, so much so that another had to be added. Then their numbers grew too with younger brothers who reinvigorated the vines and cleaned the press and vats and slowly but surely the monastery became known for its care and love for its welcome and spirituality.

"It was as if the brothers expected the messiah in each guest, in each visitor and in each other..." mused one of the rabbi's own flock over a meal after he had visited too.

*_*_*_*

Mercifully, I have managed to escape much carol singing this year as we have travelled through advent but 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' wormed its way into my ear last week and with it, the lines "*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today*"

A few weeks ago the Gospel of the day had two perplexed groups questioning Jesus about when they had served him or not served Him and we told that whatever they had done for the least of others they did for Him.

In the hymn "Bother Sister Let me Serve you" we ask if we "may have the grace to let you be my servant too."

As readers, we are doers and thinkers, servers and helpers but take a deep breath and this Christmas (and in the coming year) let us remember the Christ that is born in us, that when others help us they are serving Christ and give thanks for that.

In those conversations I mentioned at the beginning of the blog, the common thread was the power of prayer, how those in adversity felt the power in others praying for them. I paraphrase one response, "I was standing in the kitchen a few days before my operation and suddenly I felt uplifted, enfolded in the prayers of others and I was able to go forward with hope."



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This year I feel truly blessed with the emails in response to the blogs, the conversations and that I have been privileged to serve but also I am eternally grateful for the prayers and generous thoughts that have held me even when at my most melancholic. As we pray, “enter in and be born in us today” let us cast aside our troubles, our cynicism, our fears and look forward to serving and being served in a brand new year.

Happy Christmas

Jim

*‘You’ve all met, I hope, at least one or two older people who are still working to improve the world. They continue to do their little piece, and they don’t get cynical and discouraged when they don’t see immediate results. If that’s not the Presence of God within us, I don’t know what the Presence of God might be. It’s a hope from nowhere. It’s a love beyond me. It’s a faith in me from Someone Else. Someone is believing in me and through me and for me and with me and often it seems—in spite of me. Such people are rather indestructible’. **Richard Rohr***



“So Joseph, what is the postcode for Bethlehem?”