



Chaplain's Blog November 2018 r1



In this blog

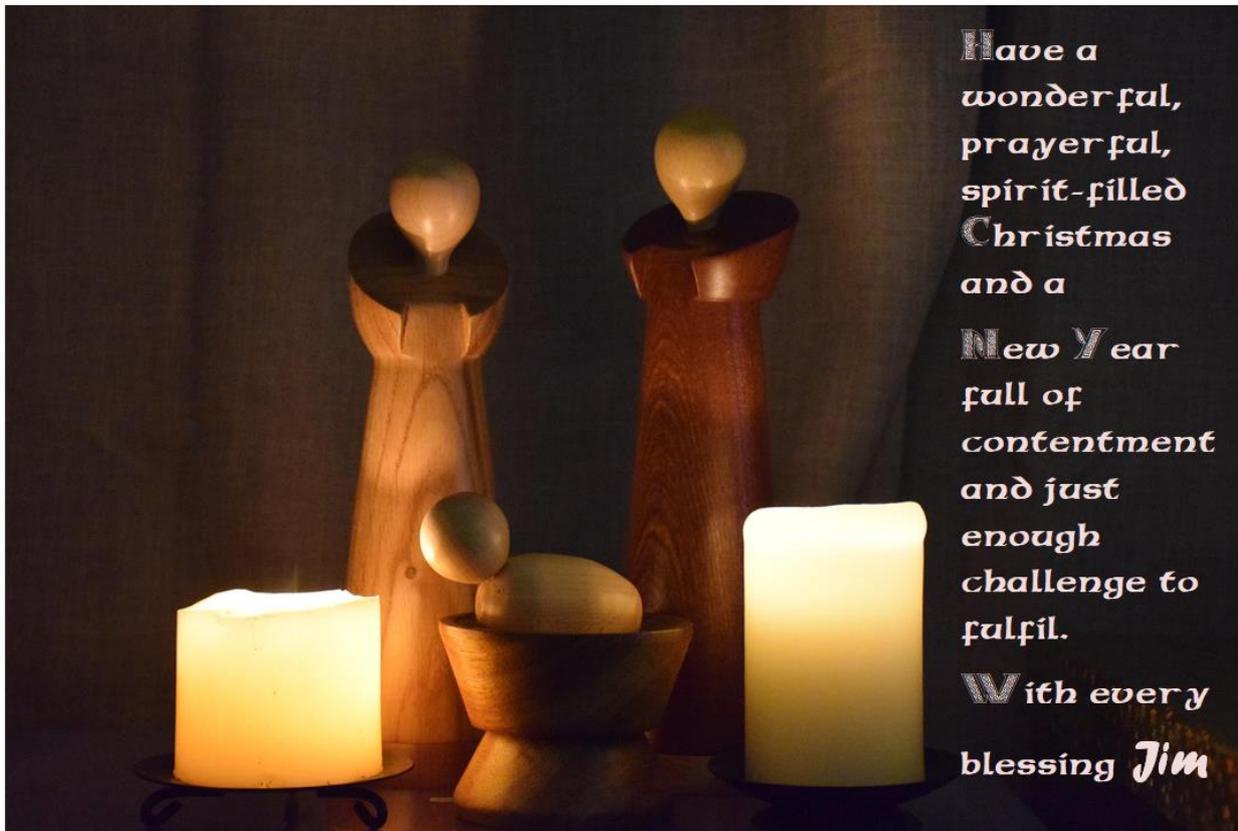
- A link to Bishop Philip's message on YouTube.
- Thoughts and Reflections- from the Quiet Day for Advent.
- Spiritual Direction
- A reminder of The Richard Rohr daily meditations – this one on death and resurrection- worth a read and then subscribing!
- Interesting links to resources and mildly entertaining things
- Comments from Readers about the blog and the Chaplaincy from the annual survey



Driving home – a Youtube message for Christmas from Bishop Philip.

<https://youtu.be/69u0vdAq628>

And a message from me.....



10am - 2nd Monday Chaplain's coffee and conversation at the Penventon Hotel still goes on. Currently three blokes conversing on topics from ballet to theology. A time of respite! Do come and join Martin, Don and me at the PV on January 14th but you may need a crowbar to get a word in edgeways! ☺ Humorous anecdoted abound!



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Thoughts and Reflections: The Reader's Quiet Day- Advent.

Firstly a thankyou to Rev Jane Horton who led the day – there was a lot of very positive feedback! Secondly a thankyou to all those who came to take part and to ensure the day happened. Lastly thanks to the staff at Epiphany house who always make sure that we are welcome and looked after. The day has already been booked for next year- Saturday 7th December 2019.

As chaplain, it was a moving and prayerful experience but interestingly not through Jane's meditation (which I only really experienced for a few minutes) but in the next room which had been set aside for conversations. I didn't know how many people would want to come and talk, if any, so I was quite prepared to use the time to write my sermon for Beacon Methodist Church for the following day; however I soon found myself in the middle of a series of profound and humbling encounters.

The hymn verse that comes into my head quite often when preparing services and in listening to others is from "Brother Sister let me serve you" and it is not *that* line! It's the one that says, "pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too." I'll explain.....

When I first took on the role of Chaplain or three years ago I wondered what use I could possibly be and wondered if anyone would ever use the chaplaincy when they all had their own priests spiritual directors or soul friends. But it seems the Chaplaincy is a needed role and it has been my joy and privilege to listen, to pray and even sometimes to help practically in mediation & communication.

When speaking to Readers who are in the midst of crisis, tricky times or finding it difficult because of their own health or a family member the most common emotion they seem to have is the fear of letting others down, guilt at not being there or failing to be the strong, happy role model for Christian life! For those in ministry it is (sometimes?) very difficult to accept that we ourselves need to take a breath and let others help and support us – let us have the grace to let them be our servants too.

My encounters have impacted hugely upon my prayer life which has lengthened considerably and, almost inevitably, has had to become rather more disciplined which has to be a good thing.

Reader Garth caught up with me at the Reader's committee and shared with great joy how the support of prayer in his church had helped improve his health. Although the chaplain's prayers may be efficacious I am reminded that there is huge power when we all pray together. So I ask your prayers now and in the coming year for the readers for whom I pray at least daily:

- Three readers (that I know of) who are caring for spouses/partners with dementia and several others who are caring for people with serious or terminal illness.



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- A number of readers receiving various sorts of cancer treatment, others awaiting test results and others facing surgery.
- Readers suffering stress, anxiety and depression. Readers feeling pressured in their parishes and unhappy that they are too great a burden feeling that they are of little use.
- Readers and others wrestling with faith and asking seriously if they are meant to be where they are and doing what they are doing. Those wrestling with vocation.

And if you still have time, spare a prayer for chaplain.

Spiritual direction

I found myself back at epiphany house every other Wednesday having completed the ecumenical spiritual direction course last year but this time helping out the leaders. Is a very different experience indeed, especially now that I can put the lives of the desert fathers (and mothers) and the teaching of those such as Francis, Benedict and Ignatius into the context of real conversations.

I can thoroughly recommend the course for Readers who might feel a vocation for a ministry that is not quite so active and relies more on listening skills and prayer especially as the need for spiritual direction has increased hugely as people search for depth in their lives of faith.

Ironically, I am currently without a director or between directors and praying for one to appear ☺ If you're not experienced direction you may not realise that you are not stuck with one director forever or with one type of direction.

The new cohort of spiritual director trainees is a fascinating group spanning the breadth of views in the Christian Church which makes for some wonderfully thought-provoking discussion. It includes a Reader, an ordinand and a priest among the wider group.





[Click here to Sign Up for Richard Rohr updates to your mailbox! →](#)

Richard Rohr Meditation *Week Forty-seven*

Death and Resurrection

The Abyss of Grief Monday, November 19, 2018

My friend and brilliant translator of many mystics, Mirabai Starr, who lives nearby in Taos, New Mexico, has encountered numerous deaths and losses, each cultivating in her a deeper spiritual practice and longing for God. But the death of her fourteen-year-old daughter, Jenny, in a car crash was “an avalanche,” Starr writes, “annihilating everything in its path”:

Suddenly, the sacred fire I have been chasing all my life engulfed me. I was plunged into the abyss, instantaneously dropped into the vast stillness and pulsing silence at which all my favourite mystics hint. So shattered I could not see my own hand in front of my face, I was suspended in the invisible arms of a Love I had only dreamed of. Immolated, I found myself resting in fire. Drowning, I surrendered, and discovered I could breathe under water.

So this was the state of profound suchness I had been searching for during all those years of contemplative practice. This was the holy longing the saints had been talking about in poems that had broken my heart again and again. This was the sacred emptiness that put that small smile on the face of the great sages. And I hated it. I didn't want vastness of being. I wanted my baby back.

But I discovered that there was nowhere to hide when radical sorrow unravelled the fabric of my life. I could rage against the terrible unknown—and I did, for I am human and have this vulnerable body, passionate heart, and complicated mind—or I could turn toward the cup, bow to the Cupbearer, and say, “Yes.”

I didn't do it right away, nor was I able to sustain it when I did manage a breath of surrender. But gradually I learned to soften into the pain and yield to my suffering. In the process, compassion for all suffering beings began unexpectedly to swell in my heart. I became acutely aware of my connectedness to mothers everywhere who had lost children, who were, at this very moment, hearing the impossible news that their child



had died. . . .

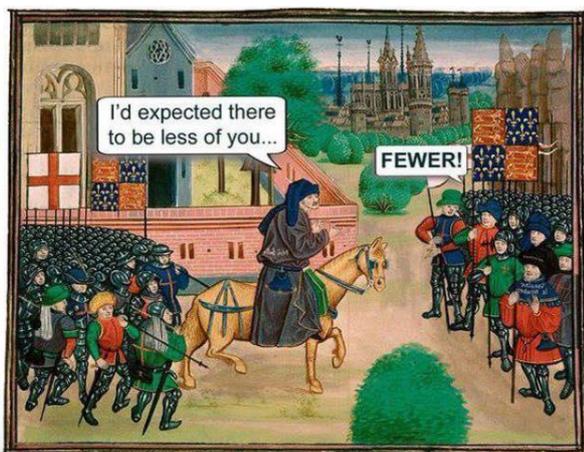
Grief strips us. According to the mystics, this is good news. Because it is only when we are naked that we can have union with the Beloved. We can cultivate spiritual disciplines designed to dismantle our identity so that we have hope of merging with the Divine. Or someone we love very much may die, and we may find ourselves catapulted into the emptiness we had been striving for. Even as we cry out in the anguish of loss, the boundless love of the Holy One comes pouring into the shattered container of our hearts. This replenishing of our emptiness is a mystery, it is grace, and it is built into the human condition.

Few among us would ever opt for the narrow gate of grief, even if it were guaranteed to lead us to God. But if our most profound losses—the death of a loved one, the ending of a marriage or a career, catastrophic disease or alienation from community—bring us to our knees before that threshold, we might as well enter. The Beloved might be waiting in the next room.

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Interesting links to resouces and mildly entertaining things

Confession: in the many drafts of this blog I lost the collection of links including a good one for a website of resources from Claire. A resources blog to follow in the new year!



The Pedants' Revolt



Comments from Readers about the blog and the Chaplaincy from the annual survey:

Section 5

5A Chaplain's Blog

- 41 Readers reported that sometimes they read the Blog
- 45 reported that they always read the Blog
- 4 reported that they never read (3 don't have computers)
- 2 that they usually did
- 1 said not very often
- 1 said did not know there was one.

Comments made by individual Readers:

always. This is an excellent thing. Jim's choice of materials and the way he presents them are always apt, and are helpful for understanding what is going on elsewhere in the diocese. And it gives me ideas.

Never: we have no computer or other equipment in our house so I cannot read 'Blogs'. Besides our monthly day as Chaplain in the Cathedral, we also keep in touch by letter, Exmas cards, phone calls and occasional visits to around 50 households of single/couples/families across UK and abroad, to whom we have been in leadership or teaching capacity or who are extended family, from past parishes where we have worked etc. and we are beginning to get quite a few new such relationships in Cornwall since retirement.

- always: Jim is always a very interesting and timely read, he is doing a great service to all Readers.
- always; it is always very interesting and gives food for thought
- always. A really good way to keep people connected and always interesting with unusual stories and prayer resources.
- always – and very excellent it is too. Thank you Jim
- always – from my point of view a vital communication tool
- always – I find them interesting and helpful
- sometimes – I receive a lot of emails and would prefer to just have important information sent to me.
- always - I tend to scan read each Blog
- always – I enjoy the blog as well as thought provoking, it helps me to know a bit more about what is going on in the Diocese and so feel a bit more connected.
- always. This is a very helpful way of keeping up to date with Reader ministry in Cornwall, albeit in a different context from mine. It can also be a source of inspiration, different approaches and all things spiritual. The challenges to my pattern of thought can be most illuminating.



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- Not very often. To be honest I feel that a Chaplain is in a way unnecessary in a caring ministry, but on the other hand a focus for prayer for members of our ministry certainly is. A monthly prayer list?
- Always – I find the context very useful.
- always: enjoy its wide ranging nature coupled with careful attention to 'home matters'
- sometimes. I always look at it but only read it in full when time permits.
- Always: I always enjoy Jim's blogs. He is not afraid to be provocative and challenging and he covers some interesting topics. A bit eccentric sometimes but I'm all for that.
- sometimes. I always look at the headings, but rarely go further
- sometimes – Good to have this – thanks Jim
- sometimes: I forget to check my computer – my friends always ring and chat – like me – preferring it to email so I read it irregularly
- always: encouraging and helpful
- always – its informative and keeps us in touch and often makes me laugh
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