



Trinity 2017 Edition 3

# REUA CH

renewing spirit



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## From the Editor- *Train whistle blowing makes a sleepy noise*



‘Train whistle blowing’...spills out of my Church as one of the community choir groups joyfully practices the 1968 Seekers’ hit ‘*Morningtown Ride*’. It’s a train song I have sung countless times with children, using it in many concerts when I worked as a primary school teacher. The rendition brought to mind the numerous occasions I have taught lessons to children and to

trainee teachers at Manchester Metropolitan University using WH Auden’s classic poem ‘*The Nightmail*’ and Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1885 poem ‘*From a Railway Carriage*’. Each poem with its distinct syntax evokes the rhythm of a steam train’s movements and each begs to be performed.

There are many wonderful train stories too that I have used for various classroom projects such as the ever popular ‘*Railway Children*’, the delightful environmental picture book ‘*Oi Get Off Our Train!*’ and for smaller children, despite the pervasiveness of Peppa Pig, Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends still enthral. As a child, my Sunday treat was the teatime cartoon ‘*Ivor the Engine*’- a steam train lovingly steered by driver Jones-the-Steam through the valleys of Wales (which I have just re-watched on youtube as I write!).

Trains seem to capture the romantic and creative imagination. As an adult there’s many a glorious train-inspired song to enjoy and while away the hours... Gladys Knights ‘*Midnight Train to Georgia*’, Chris Rea’s ‘*Steam Train Blues*’, Muddy Waters’ ‘*All Aboard*’, REM’s ‘*Driver 8*’, Glinka’s ‘*Train Song*’ and Duke Ellington’s fantastic ‘*Take the A Train*’... And everywhere I look presently are billboards for the book and film, ‘*The Girl on the Train*’.



Many a clergyman has a love of trains (Thomas the Tank Engine’s author being an example) ... I’m not one... but I have undertaken with pleasure and delight some of the world’s great train journeys including the India-Pacific train across the Nullabor, the

Queenslander down Australia's eastern coast, the TGV across France and the Harry Potter-esque night train from Edinburgh to London. But what I do like about trains (and train stations) is that in the one place are a group of random people, some going, some returning, some meeting for a first time, some in distress, some in great joy and expectation, many following routine. It's a kind of liminal experience...the place of the priest.

Curiously, I love being on the London underground. I like the one or two minute sprints between stations, being frozen in a moment of time inside the carriage with the most extraordinary array of people; people filled with endless motivations and reasons for being there, all hurtling forwards... all spending two minutes of eternity together. In this space is the intersection of hope, regret, safety and danger, routine and new possibility, pasts and futures.

The first thing I generally hear when I wake up in the morning is the pendolino train whizzing to and fro from the north to London. My first prayer of the day is nearly always for them ... the people on the train...for who they are, whether they are going-leaving or returning- for their days ahead. And I find it a precious prayer. I think it is important that I pray for those people, who are most likely strangers but could be people known to me, traversing the edge of my parish as the train hurtles them on into their day.

Life too can be like a train journey... on which we are all passengers...travelling onwards with random people, some stopping on the train with us a long time; others getting off after shorter periods; some even getting back on our train of life further down the track and travelling with us once more. Many things flash by quickly... other parts of our journey slower. Sometimes the train will speed through tunnels and it will be dark and we need to trust the driver and those around us until the light appears again. As in Auden's or Stevenson's poem, we are called to revel in all that goes by. We should especially delight in those with whom we travel and who give their moments in eternity to us just as we give our slice of eternity to them... whether friend or stranger.



Of course it's rare we know the precise time and station we ourselves will get off. When that moment comes, we know it is both a moment of goodbye and a moment of welcome as so often trains and stations are. As Christians, we can be confident that the God who travels with us, is simultaneously waiting for us. When we disembark the train of life we know that the one that loves us most is there ready to take us on a new journey, on the train ride of heaven.

The array of articles, poems and reports in this edition of RUACH journal all have a theme of travel in some way or another- whether it be as an actor between theatres or the journey into the imagination and film, the journeys of the Biblical Jonah, to Afghanistan, the far East or journeying into friendship in Columbia, the heavy steps into the Garden of Gethsemane or the spiritual journey of a retreat day. Our contributing Bishops remind us of the Spirit of God in all things and that our Christian journey is, in part, learning to open our eyes to the awe and wonder of our God and our hearts to the promptings of God's renewing Spirit. In this journey our contributors remind us that despite struggle and despite the journey not always being clear, our God travels with us and holds us securely. So let us journey on in sync with the heartbeat of God. Our most sincere thanks go to all our contributors and for being a conduit of blessing for all our readers.

Wherever you travel this summer, may God hold you safely in the palm of his hand.

### **Anglican Prayer for Travellers**

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel [in particular \*\*\*]; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them in safety to their journey's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*The Lord will keep watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time and forever.*

*Psalm 121:8,*



*"If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there Your hand will guide me."*

*Psalm 139*

# Thoughts on ‘The Return of the Prodigal Son’

By Dr Trevor James - Honorary Reader at Whittington, Weeford and Hints and Reader at St Michael’s Lichfield.

On recent Study Course I attended, participants were asked to think of an occasion when they had heard a passage from scripture that had had a particular impact on them; and they were then invited to identify that passage and what their response was to it.

In one sense one would expect Christians to feel that much of the New Testament had had an impact on them, along with significant portions of the Old Testament as well. How then were we to identify a specific passage? Various passages presented themselves to me – the occasion when the aged Abraham recognises that there is only one God; the faithfulness of Job; the tribulations of Jeremiah; the challenges to Jonah. My final choice was for me, inevitably, the parable of the Prodigal Son. It has always been a highly significant passage for me, with the certainty that the errant child would be welcomed back into his family; and from my years in the Sunday School I understood that this story was, in effect, a way to represent to me the fact that God’s boundless love would always be available to the repentant sinner.

However, about a dozen years ago I was introduced to Henri Nouwen’s book The Return of the Prodigal Son: a Story of Homecoming [1992]. Nouwen approached this parable through an extended meditative reflection on Rembrandt’s painting ‘The Return of the Prodigal Son’. Nouwen had been drawn to Rembrandt’s representation of the prodigal son. The original is in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. Nouwen sat by the painting for several days, watching and observing how its portrayal was affected by the shifting effect of light and darkness.

In 2013 I was privileged to see Rembrandt’s original at The Hermitage. Nouwen does emphasise that the detail in the original is so much more vivid than in the best photographic representation – additional faces are apparent in the darkness behind the central images, the facial expressions of the Father and the Older Son have more meaning, the variation between the hands of the Father [one rough and firm, the other tender] and the shoelessness of the left foot of the Prodigal Son, they are all more apparent.

Rembrandt has provided a visual commentary and interpretation of the return of the Prodigal Son and this enabled Henri Nouwen to explore his thoughts and feelings about this immensely powerful story. In essence he is guiding us to realise that, rather than just celebrate the return of the prodigal, this painting

guides us into a full understanding that we are all at risk of being the irritated Older Son, when, in reality, we know that we have experienced the immense blessings of never leaving our Lord's side. Equally, in some senses, we need to become the 'Father' figure, in a position to offer boundless love and acceptance. Nouwen also believes that the juxtaposition of strong and tender hands on the image of the Father is a clear message that the central figure, in effect, has womanly as well as manly traits, in the way that the Prodigal is drawn into a loving embrace.

Rembrandt's painting provided a visually powerful interpretation of Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son and Nouwen has skillfully extended that interpretation. On this occasion an internationally acclaimed artist and a prominent theologian have combined to offer an extended understanding of Jesus' parable message. Our challenge is to recognise that, through His teaching in parables, Jesus is always inviting us to be reflective and to identify the fullest possible meaning in what He offers us.



# Coming Home

By Margaret Shoemark

Lord Jesus, I'm coming back to you,  
I've been gone too long, and strayed too far,  
So often, you have seemed far away  
Hidden from my sight  
And yet with hindsight  
It is I who was far off  
I, who hid away, you were always near,  
Waiting, waiting, just a prayer away.  
Not willing to give the commitment you ask of me,  
Revelling in the freedom to choose my own path,  
To enjoy the 'pleasures' of the world.  
And yet, my soul was empty, unfulfilled.  
Moments of pleasure soon faded  
And yet I yearned for something more.  
Then a vague remembrance of peace and joy I once knew  
And something stirred deep in my heart  
And I hungered for you once more.  
A distant voice echoed from the past,  
"Will you come and follow me,  
if I but call you name."  
And now I reply,  
"Yes, yes Lord Jesus,  
I am ready,  
take my hand, lead me on."



# The Wind Bloweth Where it Listeth: The Spirit of God Present With Us

*By Bishop Mikael Mogren , Bishop of The Diocese of Västerås in Sweden*

In 1059, the French theologian Berengar of Tours (999-1088) was called to the Synod of Rome, and forced to make a confession of faith, in which he had to assert

*‘that the bread and wine placed on the altar are, after consecration, not only a sacrament but also the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; that they are truly and physically handled and broken by the priest, not just sacramentally, and are ground by the teeth of the faithful.’*



What caused the Synod to prod him into such a crude statement of the medieval understanding of Mass was that he had earlier advocated a less literalist view of Christ's presence in the wine and bread of the Eucharist. And the anxiety provoked by Berengar was not to die down – the Reformation tore deep holes in the fabric of Eucharistic theology, and debates have raged until today about how to understand the idea that the Divine is actually, palpably present in the Eucharist. It has sparked anxiety, and a plethora of answers, because at the heart of it, it concerns whether we can at all point to anyone place and say with confidence that *ecce!*; here, just here, is God.

The Bible, too, is rife with this conflict. The temple stands in Jerusalem, and God lives in it. It is easy to overlook this very robust sense of Divine presence in the life of Israel. At the same time, king Solomon prays, at the dedication of the temple: “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot

contain you, how much less this temple I have built!”

(1 Kings 8: 27)

The pages of the Bible are marked by this awareness that God's presence is powerful, and that we need to have ways of experiencing it fully, but it is also keenly aware that there is no such thing as an easy way of demarcating where God is. God is not available on tap. There is the Temple and there is the Tabernacle, both stable focal points of Divine presence. But there is also the *ruach*, a very different



way of understanding how God is present in our lives. Nathan MacDonald writes that over time, this Hebrew term came to be one of the preferred way to speak about God's presence. He notes that while this word is usually translated as “spirit”, 'both “spirit” and [*ruach*] have a broad semantic range which are not identical with one another.' (MacDonald, 2013. 98) *Ruach* can also mean, in the natural world, a wind, and in living beings, their breath and so their life. These come together when the

wind is described as God's breath (see Exod. 15:8-10). This *ruach* fills the world – like the air – but also blows through it in strong gusts, inspiring prophets and working in creation. While in the Temple the dependence and steadfastness of God's presence was emphasised, through the language of *ruach*, God's transformative, self-chosen participation in the life of Israel was highlighted.



These poles are very much present even today, in the life of the Christian church. While how we understand Divine presence, both as Jews and as Christians, has evolved considerably, at least in our own Christian communities, we have our own poles reflecting the biblical ones. We need the stable promise of God's presence in Mass, but we also need the ministry of the charismatic life of the church, where God is let



in to do what God wants to do with us, to surprise us and blow us away. If we lose sight of how God can break out of our boxes, if we think that the spirit can be contained as a function of the bureaucracy of the church, then we will dull ourselves to its whispered suggestions in our lives. But equally, if we lose that palpable sense of being able to meet God every single Sunday in the bread and wine, in the flesh, and blood, then we lose our trust in God's promise to be with us in a way that we can rely on. The two go together, and intermingle, and are both needed in the life of those trying to live the life of faith, charity, and “overflowing with the hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 15:13)



**Sources**MacDonald, “The Spirit of YHWH: An Overlooked Conceptualization of Divine Presence in the Persian Period”, in MacDonald, Nathan & Izaak J. de Hulster; 2013. *Divine Presence and Absence in Exilic and Post-Exilic Judaism*. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 2. Reihe. 61. Mohr Siebeck. 97- 117

# The John Young Reading Room

## Shallowford House 11 February 2017

**By Nicola Woodhouse**

It was a truly wonderful gathering, when Bishop Michael of Lichfield attended Shallowford House Retreat & Conference Centre to dedicate the John Young Reading Room.

The Reading Room is newly furnished, comfortable and attractive, not only full of books but also a wall of Sheila Young's so varied paintings.



The books now housed here have integrated the late Rev Dr John Young's personal library, and Shallowford's own reference books - all to assist trainee clergy and laity on courses here, and from Queen's College Birmingham.

We enjoyed reminiscing with trustees, supporters and long standing friends (formerly held together by The John Young Foundation) then sat down to a delicious cream tea, as only Shallowford catering team can produce.

The afternoon also illustrated the diverse uses of this lovely calm, old building, for while we were there at least one other group used part of the building, and a third group arrived for their residential course.

*John Young was a Psychiatrist and an Anglican Priest After taking early retirement from the NHS in 1987 he was awarded a Research Fellowship at Queen's College, Birmingham. The following year he became Director of the Churches Council for Health and Healing. He travelled widely and did much to promote and encourage the Christian Healing Ministry. He saw the need to regionalise for this largely London based organisation and opened an area centre in Stafford where he was known and respected in both medical and church communities. The John Young Foundation was established after his early death in 1991 to continue in some measure what he had begun in the new centre. The Foundation closed in 2016 after 25 years.*

## I Thirst - From Dust to Glory - A Quiet Day for Lent

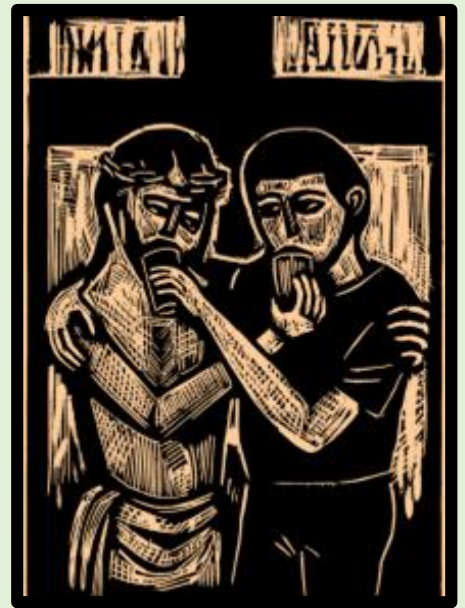
*By Roger McLellan. Sadly, after submitting this article Roger was taken ill and died not long afterwards in hospital. He worshipped at Lichfield Methodist Church. He was a strong supporter of The John Young Foundation and also of RUACH and will be much missed.*

I am pleased to share just a few touching points experienced during the Quiet Day led by Fr Jason Phillips and since over the first days of Lent. Early on in the day, having chosen a small stone at random from the selection offered, I noted that, as a fragment of “dust” I had been created with a visible fault line, but sensed that, in God’s hands, this might be no loss, but rather a hidden strength, forged from the centre of the earth since the beginning of time. Called in life out of apparent darkness towards the light of destiny – a destiny to accept God’s will for me to live out with love, honesty and integrity – and to journey with Jesus towards eternity with Him.



Looking back at the helpful, pre-retreat notes, asking the question: “Why are you coming on this retreat day? How will you listen to God?” – a Quiet Day in Lent offers us an opportunity to reflect on our life’s journey towards the light of our destiny, to pause deliberately to listen again, in precious moments of stillness, and to allow God to speak into the depths of our being. The on-going challenge is to listen, look and accompany Jesus through the journey of His Passion, and on to share the new life He died to secure for us. I have asked again: “Why did you give your life for me, Lord? - for the forgiveness of my sins and to bring me to God - it has been said that our purpose here on earth is to search for you, Lord – but the amazing surprise is that you came to find us – and to find me! – such Love!”

At the time of writing I am part way through ecumenical group studies based on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book: "Dethroning Mammon", bringing home questions about what matters most. The kind of issues regarding money and time we face every day do not appear to bear comparison with the agonies Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethsemane, but do call for a response from each one of us. The Lord's answer to Martha, who objected to Mary sitting listening at His feet, was to remind her of the perspective we so easily lose when we sense that we are too busy to stop and



listen (Luke 10.38-42) – it can never be a waste of time to devote our undivided attention to Jesus. Was it a waste of money, as Judas suggested, for Mary to lavish precious perfume with which to anoint Jesus, ahead of His sacrifice of Himself for us? (John 12.1-7) Archbishop Justin draws from this the priority of worship as the key to life's perspective and values: "It (worship) requires from us an attitude that looks to God, not for a result but as the object of our entire adoration".

The opportunity of a Quiet Day enables us to "see" as well as "hear" Jesus, our God with us, across unrushed moments of stillness, yet in shared fellowship with others on our life's journey together. This undivided devotion of time is our act of worship in the company of Jesus as He approaches the fulfilment of His destiny on earth for us – and is indeed a moving experience. With God's good grace, I



hope to continue my endeavours to respond to the tenacity of God's love, in renewed commitment to service and to my relationships.

Another question arising from the pre-retreat notes was "Who are you?" Meeting Jesus has provided the answer, in my case as with so many answers, unexpectedly, but thankfully within God's destiny. For me, introduced many years ago by a previously unknown friend, and now enjoying the friendship of Jesus myself, in whose

amazing grace I now live reconciled to God, my true and great Father. Amen.

# Some Thoughts About Dust

*By Wing Commander Rowena Broome who worships at St Giles Church, Whittington and at DMS Whittington Garrison Church*



There's something so powerful about dust, the way it clings, the way it finds its way into places you thought were empty, sometimes all it takes is a shake and there it is again hanging in the air in front of you to breathe in and consume yet it consumes you back.

The Holy Spirit in an almost tangible form perhaps. Able to hold on to you and find a way to stick to you, never letting go.

We all become dust, not just when we die but in the air around us, leaving traces of ourselves wherever we go. What can our traces of ourselves look? How do we feel towards those that are left when we move on?

After returning from Afghanistan I found traces of dust for months and even years. A fine, talcum-powder-like dust that had provided comfort, grounding, frustration and irritation, protection and a connection to something real and present. God was real and present to me there, not in a way that needed formal worship or even prayers out loud but when I was crouched behind a concrete wall or lying tight up to a barrier made from giant bags of sand and dust themselves. Physically holding me and becoming really known to me.

God found me and became known to me fully out there at the foot of the Kandahar mountains. Vulnerable and covered in the Holy Spirit I was able to trust, to love and to find real confirmation.



Now when I plant flowers with my daughter in the garden, or brush off the dirt after my son has fallen over in the mud, I know that that dust lingers and surrounds us and I pray that the dust we leave behind us is felt and breathed like that spirit form surrounding us and lingers to make us feel safe, known, comforted and love.

**"Even until your old age, I am the one, and I'll carry you  
even until your grey hairs come. It is I who have  
created, and I who will carry, and it is I who will bear  
and save." (Isaiah 46:4)**



## Gethsemane and Beyond

***By Gill Hollis, Parish Reader of the Anglican Parishes of Whittington, Weeford and Hints. The poem arose from the Lent retreat day.***

Gethsemane – darkness

The beauty of the garden culled by the agony of the Son of God.

In dim despair the disciples sleep

While my Lord wrestles on into the night.

He grovels in the dust, the dirt, on the earth;

The weight of sorrow bearing down

Upon His exhausted shoulders.

Fear surrounds, presses, overwhelms.

‘This cup is too great.

What you ask is too hard.

I am afraid.

I cannot... I cannot... I cannot...’

Silence.

No reply to the agonised prayer.

Clouds cover the moon.

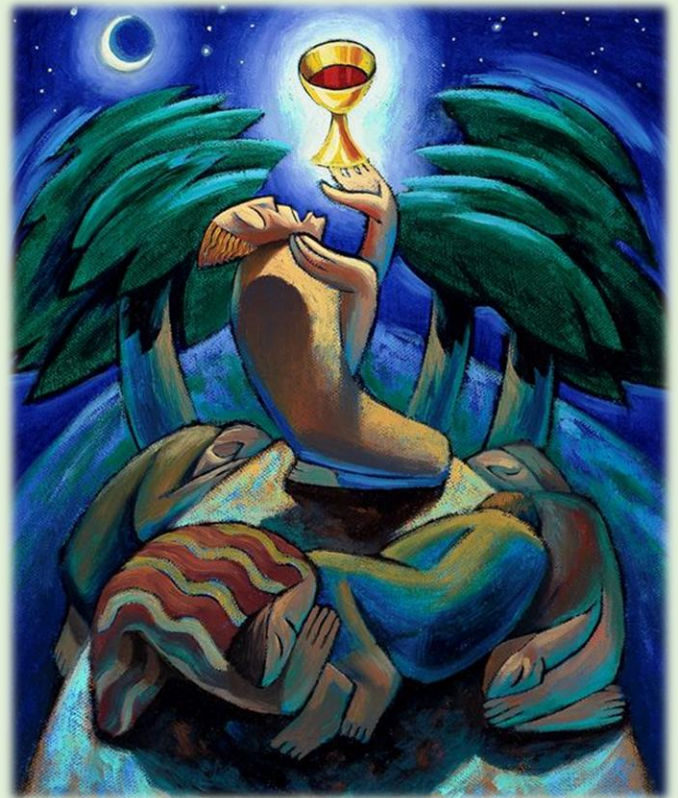
Clouds cover His mind.

And still the disciples sleep on

overcome by confusion

frustrated at their helplessness.

One last shout, desperate, anguished:



'Father...' 'Father!' 'Father?'

The flowers beneath Him mock the destruction of His body,

Their beauty in harsh contrast to His tears and His blood.

'Your will is more than I can bear.

Your cup of suffering is too bitter, too harsh, to drink.

Father, HELP ME!!'

The wind stirs the olive trees.

The leaves rustle their reply.

The Spirit blows through His will:

'You can.

For you are LOVE.

We are LOVE.

LOVE wins.

Always.'

His body writhes, shivers, shudders.

With one last gasp:

'Yet not what I want... but Thy will be done.'

Dawn paints the sky.

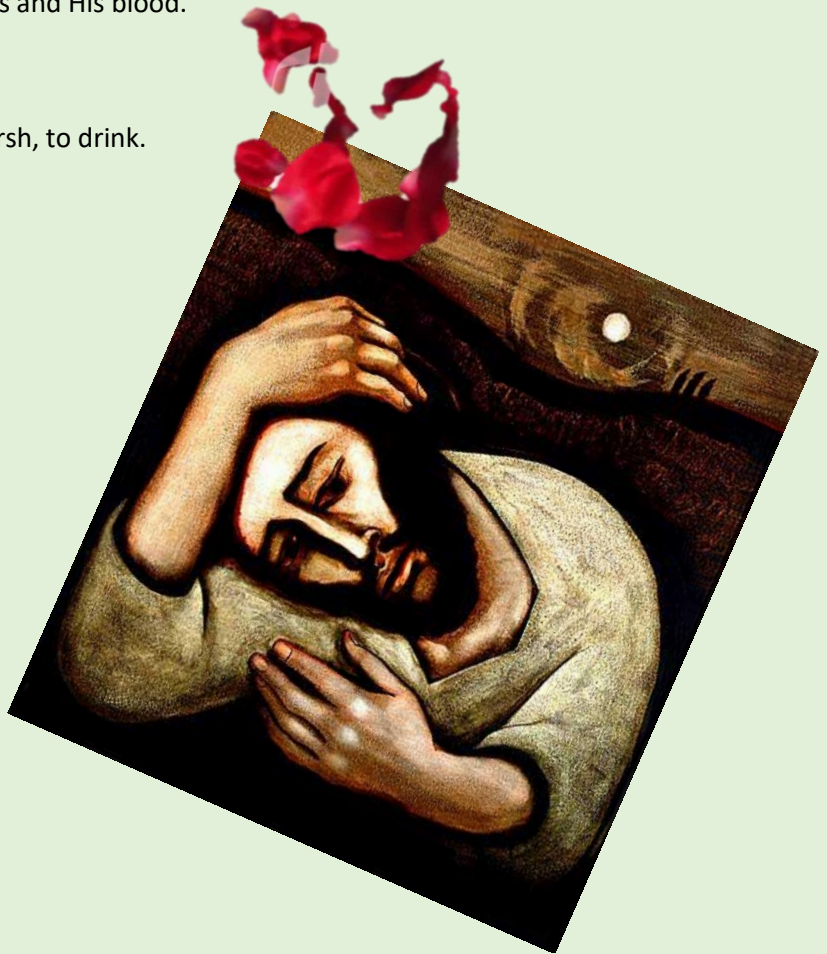
A moment of calm.

And then come the soldiers.

And as you hang

The wounds of love

Flow down



Towards your troubled world.

And as you hang

Your cries of pain

Reach our deafened ears.

And as you hang

Your words of forgiveness

Stir our starving hearts.

And as you hang

Your thirst

Quenches our parched and weary souls.

And as you breathe your last

Our hearts are quickened and stirred.

And as you die,

As you are wrenched from your loving Father's grasp,

The curtain is torn

And we are free.

Free to run back

Into our Father's open arms.

Free to breathe again the beauty of His love.

Free from the dust of our shame and our sin.

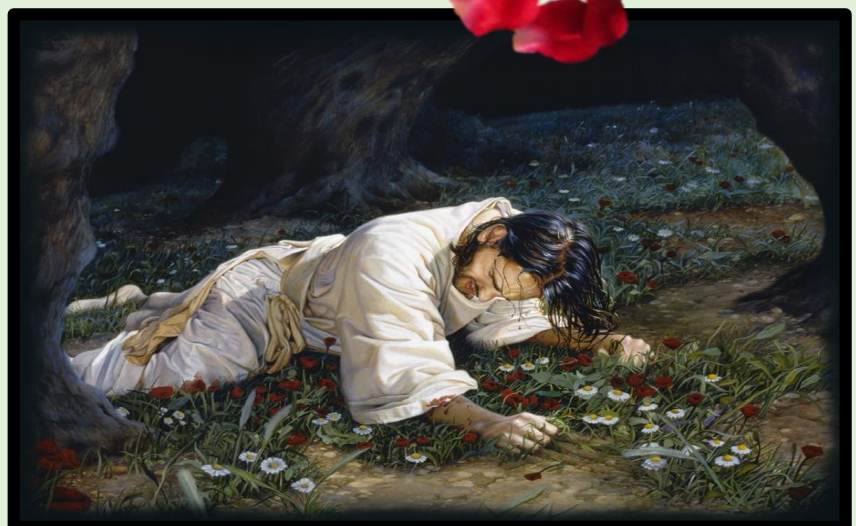
Freed to live.

Freed to love.

Your life is finished

So that ours

May begin.



# ST MARYS ABBEY, COLWICH.

## RETREAT FRIDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2017 Report

By Jayne Thorneycroft

So looking forward to my return to Colwich Abbey as I drive up the path... it feels like heaven... peaceful and tranquil... arrived in time to attend morning Eucharist in the chapel with the nuns.

Our day is a little different as we are using the dining area plus a room adjacent which worked fine today as not so many people attended. The day was wonderfully planned by Reverend Dr Jason Phillips... taking us from Ash Wednesday all the way through Lent in detail having three reflection times where you were allowed to take your thoughts to the end of the earth.

Nothing seems too much trouble for the nuns they allowed us to join in with them in the Midday Office service in the chapel. They had prepared soup for us to partake in to go with our own sandwiches. With our afternoon tea we were spoilt again by the nuns with homemade jam tarts.

The whole experience of the day makes me feel how paradise would be.

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*"Dance is meditation in movement, a walking into silence where every movement becomes prayer."*

# Tell Me It's Not True

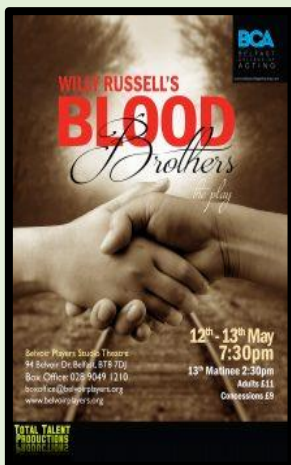
**Bishop Geoff Annas, Bishop of Stafford and Theatre Chaplain**

*'Tell Me It's Not True'* is the evocative and memorable closing number of the musical *'Blood Brothers'*.

I have seen this show so many times over the years and never once has that finale failed to bring people to their feet with genuinely thunderous applause for the cast at the end of an amazing evening of entertainment. The audience leaves the theatre chatting with excitement about what they have just seen and about the performers.



The cast themselves are on a 'high' – physically and emotionally drained (especially if it has been a matinee day), after giving their all to an incredibly demanding show but also buzzing with the reception they have just received. Somehow they have to wind down as they go back to their digs or hotel room. Separated from family and friends and many miles away from their home (if indeed they can still afford to keep one), living out of suitcases in unfamiliar surroundings, their fellow members of the company become their touring 'family' and the theatres they visit are their 'homes' for a week or so.



If it is a Saturday night, it is likely that they will have to pack when they get back to their digs as they are moving on – often to the other end of the country. By the time the audience are getting into their cars in the carpark, lighting, scenery and sound systems are already being dismantled and endless crates are being packed with costumes and wigs - and everything is being loaded into large lorries – a process that often means the back stage crew are working through the night.

Then, less than 24 hours later everything is unpacked and set up and the whole process begins again in a different venue as a new audience arrives eager with

anticipation and the Company gears itself up to give another ‘performance of a life time’

Although my main ministry is as Bishop of Stafford, for over 20 years I have volunteered as a Theatre Chaplain – and am at present Chaplain at The Regent Theatre in Stoke on Trent. A great privilege but also a ministry that has given me a tremendous admiration for theatre folk - on stage, back stage and the Front of House staff who make us feel so welcome when we go to see a show. Their sheer professionalism and energy and commitment – often for very low financial reward – and their overwhelming desire for the audience to enjoy their experience of theatre is truly inspirational and has certainly taught me a lot about the welcome we offer in our churches and the attention we give to enabling worship to be a positive experience.

The Actors’ Church Union was founded in 1889 in recognition that those involved in theatre had very hard and demanding jobs that often meant working anti-social hours and prevented them from getting to Church. So the Church went to them by offering the support of Chaplains who visited them in the theatre.

The days of the local vicar inviting the whole repertory company for Sunday afternoon tea in the vicarage garden are long past – and a former key function of the Chaplain in helping to find local digs for those on tour is now pretty much obsolete in these days of information technology.

But the need for a listening ear and the opportunity to have a confidential chat with a friendly person who is not actually part of the management yet knows enough about how theatre ‘works’ to understand, is still as great. Theatre Chaplains are there to serve rather than proselytize – to support rather than to convert. They are there for all people



involved with every aspect of the performing arts – offering practical and pastoral caring and an opportunity to discuss spirituality as well as pray with and for those connected with the theatre and entertainment industry – of all faiths and none.

A recent resurgence has seen the Actors' Church Union emerge with a new name – Theatre Chaplaincy UK ([www.theatrechaplaincyuk.com](http://www.theatrechaplaincyuk.com)) and an increasing number of new Chaplains to meet the demands of theatre managers who are asking for them, especially in London's West End. Theatre Chaplaincy UK (TCUK) is based in St Paul's Church Covent Garden – for many years known as 'the Actors' Church' because of its proximity to the London theatres and also because of the many memorials to actors and theatre people from the past hundred years that adorn its walls. It regularly holds memorial services (or 'Celebrations') for people who work in theatre. TCUK itself holds a Summer Eucharist and Garden Party, a Celebration Evening in the Autumn and an Annual Carol Service. In addition, it holds an Annual Lecture which this year is taking the form of a panel and audience discussion about mental health issues within the profession.



The Panel will be Dr Deborah Charnock (British Association for Performing Arts Medicine); Annamarie Lewis Thomas (Principal of the Musical Theatre Academy), Stephen Fry (actor, presenter and author) and myself.

This discussion is timely as fierce competition for work adds to the pressures and anxiety in a world that can all too easily become a place of 'escape' from reality.



The recent trend towards having five minutes of fame through TV 'talent' shows raises a lot of people's hopes that they will be 'discovered' and enjoy all that (they think) comes with being famous. But to keep producing top performances time and time again with every aspect of one's life under scrutiny by social media is a living hell for most people.

We tend to forget that those who on the stage have the ability to make us laugh or cry are facing the same issues as us in their own lives. I remember an actor who was given the news that his mother was terminally ill just before he went on the stage to perform. That evening he gave his usual brilliant performance – what the audience did not know was that whenever he was not actually in a scene on stage he was in his dressing room, crumpled up in floods of tears, being comforted by a Theatre Chaplain.

Playing the same role over a long period of time can also have a negative impact. I think of an actor who had been playing the iconic role of Jean Valjohn in *Les Miserables* telling me that he was going to have to stop because he was blurring this character with his own personality and never knew when he was off stage whether he was still being his stage character or true to himself.

Of course we all play different roles throughout our lives on the world's 'stage'. Jesus had the un-nerving ability to see through the 'acting' of those people he encountered and to touch their real selves. He reached out to people like Zacchaeus and spoke to the person rather than the player. Jesus accepted and welcomed people as they were rather than the person that others, or even they themselves, thought them to be.

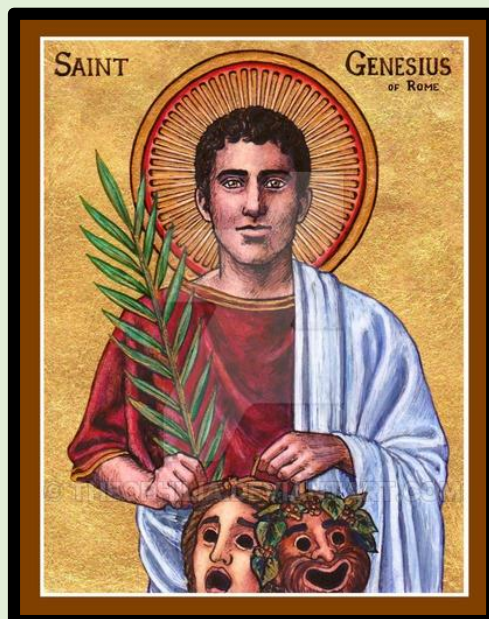
Such honesty is a necessary pre – requisite of a spiritual life. If we cannot be honest before God, then we do not have a firm spiritual foundation. It is good that increasingly those responsible for training people in the theatrical world are recognising the need to teach them to look after not only their voices and their bodies but also their spiritual and mental well-being.

Part of the role of the Theatre Chaplain is to take a person back to themselves and listen to their views and their problems and their joys – all expressed in their way rather than that of the character they portray or their back stage role (the issues are certainly not confined to those we actually see on stage but apply also to those who work with them as technicians and managers and those 'front of house' constantly trying to please the paying audience).

The pressures are enormous and it is good that through the work of Theatre Chaplains, the Church is there playing its part alongside other agencies in helping ensure that the 'show' does go on and encourage people to 'Tell' what IS true!

*Prayer is at the heart of Theatre Chaplaincy and the following is a prayer written by TCUK:*

Creator God, source of all life  
from you comes the inspiration and the talent  
to create.  
Encourage those who seek through the  
performing arts  
to portray faithfully the struggles, hopes, tears  
and laughter  
of life's journey.  
Inspire them by your Spirit;  
give them humility in success and  
hidden reserves when the going is tough.  
Bless all who work in the sacred spaces of  
stage and studio, that their craft may be a  
source of  
healing, hope and unity in our broken world.  
Amen



# Fellowship for Parish Evangelism Conference 2017

***By Mo Trudel   Mo worships at the Church of St Mary-the-Virgin, Uttoxeter***

It came and went so fast! Every year since I first attended as a guest, it's the first diary date I put in the new diary - I wouldn't miss it.

Why? after all there are many conferences and events we all enjoy during the year in varying degrees, but if I was in advertising I would say FPE reaches the parts other conferences don't reach! During the year, we know we are expected by the team, they are praying for us, for the agenda, for the speakers. God is expecting us too. We arrive therefore safe to relax and enter in to whatever is on offer.

Different feel this year, I had brought a guest, our new Rector and Vicar of Uttoxeter. I think she said yes without really knowing what she was letting herself in for! Her feedback to me, best conference I have ever attended and she has been round the Anglican block a bit in the nicest way - experienced and passionate about reaching people for Christ. Margaret and I left feeling ready for the year ahead.



Highlights- Well of course Chas and Dave not be missed [thanks Dave and Mick] ably accompanied by classical musicians who graciously followed the lead guitars.

Great teaching from Sandra Millar with a national perspective and local interpretation of Life Events - our church used her resources the following Saturday for Christening/Baptism prep for our team.

Each session was opened with a video clip from George, I am very grateful for the diet coke one as it really showed me any kind of liquid can be used to cross someone! Nothing to do with the Italian priest at all..... every clip was a hoot and this undercurrent of being joyful together is a vital part of what happens when we come together, we enjoy each other's company and feel among "our own". George's team gave us a fab session on what was available to us by way of resources framed against the statistics of Talking Jesus. The gospel is not in the reach of so many and here was the evidence of how and what we might do about that.

Market place is an inspirational yearly highlight- we hear from each other, encouraged by just how innovative God is and how he uses all of us from so many walks of life with many different giftings. The in-between times are also so precious, in the bar, over food, walking together, seeing friendships rekindled, new friendships made.

Most important for all of us is our time to break bread together and to be prayed for. Then as we are sent out to be salt and light from the depths of Derbyshire to the rest of the UK we carry John's blessing in English and Welsh and the holy language of love and forgiveness Jesus has given us. Can't wait for 2018! Thanks Team FPE for all you do for us.

## Going to the movies with Harry Potter and Noah



The Revd Patrick Comerford is a priest in the Diocese of Limerick and Killaloe in the Church of Ireland and a former lecturer in the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. He is canon precentor at Saint Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, Saint Flannan's Cathedral, Killaloe and Saint Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert,

Two of the movies nominated for Oscars this year offer interesting opportunities to explore and debate spiritual values. *Loving* was nominated for 'Best Actress' (Ruth Negga), and *Silence*, directed by Martin Scorsese, was nominated for 'Best Cinematography.' *Loving* tells the story of Richard and Mildred Loving, the plaintiffs in the 1967 US Supreme Court decision *Loving v Virginia*, which invalidated Virginia's so-called anti-miscegenation laws.



Many of the people who defended laws against marriages like this in the US, South Africa, and many other places, invoked arguments that found Biblical justification. So *Loving* is a movie that talks about the values of love and marriage, but also asks who should be married, and asks deep questions about when it is right to disobey the law and how we should disobey unjust laws.

*Silence*, starring Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver, Liam Neeson, Tadanobu Asano and Ciarán Hinds, is an historical drama based on the 1966 novel by Shūsaku Endō. It is set in Nagasaki, and tells the story of two 17th century Jesuit missionaries who travel from Portugal to Japan in search of their missing mentor.

Scorsese's movie examines the conflict between adhering to one's sacred vows and traditional beliefs and doing the right thing, the prudent thing, the moral thing, on a very pragmatic level, in order to save lives and restore personal dignity. It asks questions about mission and whether we made Christianity captive to European culture, it asks questions about interfaith relations and the values of other faiths, and it invites us to reflect on what risks we would take and what lengths we would go to for our faith.

There are asides too that I find engaging, such as one priest's fascination with the face of Christ, which he visualises in the form seen in El Greco's painting, *La Verónica*, in turn based on a traditional Greek icon now in the Ajuda National

Palace, Lisbon, and the only El Greco painting in Portugal.

Writing in *Rolling Stone*, Peter Travers says *Silence* offers ‘frustratingly few answers but all the right questions,’ and that it is among Scorsese’s ‘most spiritually moving films to date.’

When I was a student on a fellowship in Japan in 1979, I knew a journalist from Thailand who was a fellow student and who displayed a great familiarity with the Bible. When I asked him about his Biblical awareness, he told me everything he knew he had learned from movies. He then proceeded to list off *The Ten Commandments*, *The Robe*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* ... and *Ben Hur* and *Spartacus*.

*Exodus*, the epic movie launched about three years ago has yet to take the place of Cecil B De Mille’s *Ten Commandments* in our collective, cultural consciousness.



The epic *Noah* (2014) was supposedly based on the story of Noah and the Ark. One reviewer called the flood scenes ‘a bit too Cecil B Demented for me’ and wondered at the sophistication of antediluvian orthodontists given there are so many white-toothed characters. I found it interesting to note that production was put on hold in 2012 while Hurricane Sandy hit New York with heavy rain and flooding.

Archbishop Justin Welby called *Noah* ‘interesting and thought-provoking’ and ‘impressive’ after Russell Crowe visited him at Lambeth Palace to discuss ‘faith and spirituality.’ Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, a leading Orthodox rabbi, described *Noah* as ‘a valuable film, especially for our times.’ Indeed, Darren Aronofsky said he worked in ‘the tradition of Jewish Midrash’ to create ‘a story that tries to explicate Noah’s relationship with God and God’s relationship with the world as it has become.’ The name of Noah’s wife, Naamah, does not appear in the Bible, and Aronofsky derives it from the traditions of the Midrash.

This movie makes no specific mention of God. But then, of course, neither does the Book of Esther. Tom Price of the Oxford Centre for Apologetics, says *Noah* asks perceptive questions: ‘Is there a God? Has God spoken?’

What is it with human nature – are we good deep down, or is there something broken about us?’

Tom Price made a very valid observation about movies in a comment in the *Church Times*: ‘Ten years ago, most Christians’ reaction to cinema was generally much more negative and cynical. They were either asking for censorship, or judging the film project for having too much sex. Now I’m seeing audiences all over the UK wanting to engage with the stories, the characters, and the question.’

The movie *Calvary* (2014) is an Irish-made black comedy in which Brendan Gleeson plays Father James Lavelle. He is a good priest intent on making the world a better place, but he is continually shocked and saddened by the spiteful and confrontational inhabitants of his small town. One day, his life is threatened during confession, and the forces of darkness begin to close in around him.

*Gravity* (2013), starring Sandra Bullock and George Clooney, is a story about two astronauts involved in the mid-orbit destruction of a space shuttle and their attempt to return to Earth. Some commentators have noted religious themes in this movie, suggesting there is ‘a dimension of reality that lies beyond what technology can master or access, the reality of God.’

*The Passion of the Christ* (2004) was a box-office success, grossing more than \$370 million in the US, and it became the highest-grossing non-English language film ever. As we left the cinema, my then-teenage sons were not so much shocked as stunned. They noticed too how everyone left the cinema in silence.

The success and attention of the movie raises many questions:

- How do we convey and proclaim the message of Christ?
- Are we using means that are out-dated, not speaking to people, who are truly willing to listen and to learn?
- Where did we get the idea that no-one would come to church after confirmation age?
- Where did we get the idea that no-one would come to church and sit in the dark in uncomfortable chairs?
- Where did we get the idea that no-one would hear the Gospel story and still come out wanting to tell others and to share the experience?

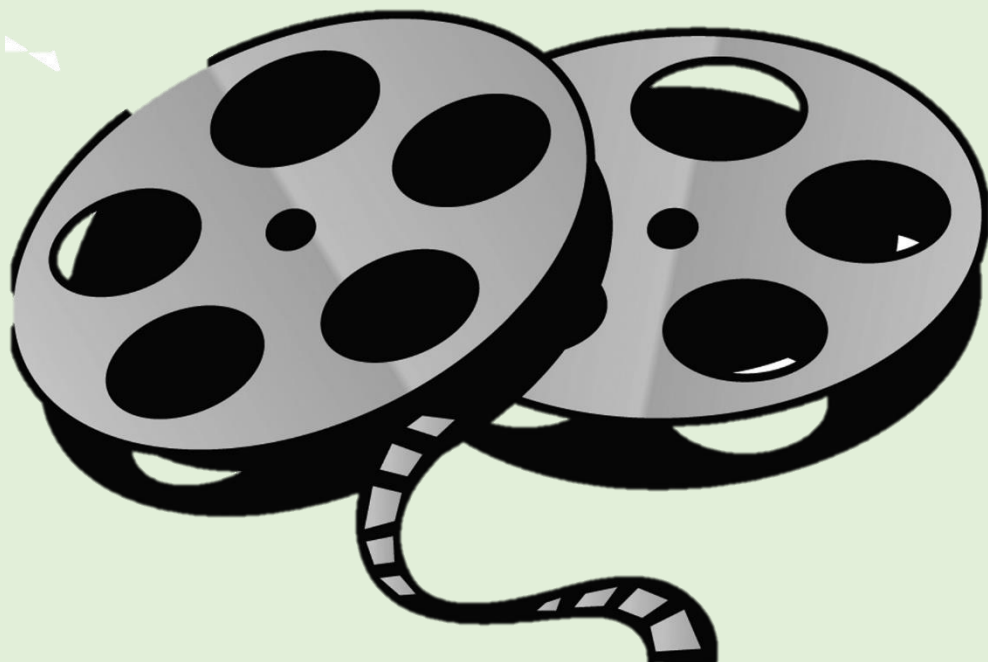
*The Mission* (1986), starring Robert de Niro and Jeremy Irons, was as the No 1 movie on the *Church Times* list of the Top 50 Religious Films. This movie provides us with:

- Challenging images of the Church,
- Questions about the role of the Church in political issues,
- different models of the Church,
- a variety of models of ministry,
- different models of mission,
- a way of discussing the Church's engagement with social justice issues,
- an introduction to the relevance of liberation theology today.

But the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* movies also convey spiritual truths to many never reached by the Churches because they tell us:

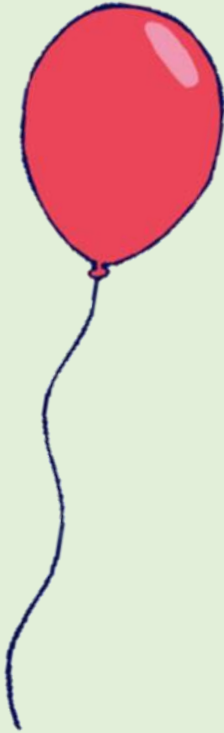
- The importance of protecting the innocence of children.
- That those who possess power and authority (including parent-figures and religious leaders) are not always right, and don't always possess a monopoly on truth and wisdom.
- That religious power and authority can be misused.
- That beauty and goodness are not always to be equated.
- That the ugly are not bad because we see them as ugly.
- That simple people can be wise.
- That life is a journey, and a pilgrimage.
- That we must continue to hope and believe that, in the end, good will triumph over evil.

Indeed, they tell us that movies need not have an obviously religious theme to reach and challenge the spiritual core of cinemagoers.



# ANGELINA'S MITE

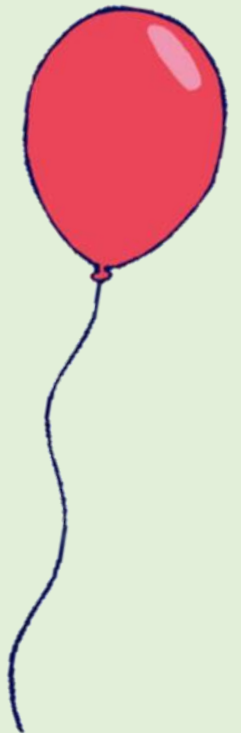
By Anna Cooke, who worships at St John-the-Baptist Church, Stowe-by-Chartley



Anxiously pushing her scooter  
in an alien land,  
the energy of her twenty months  
concentrated on balancing.  
On the steps of the edificio,  
a small girl with a red balloon  
watched her mother scrub granite steps.

Bella asked, "Say hello little girl?"  
"Say hola," I said, as moving together  
they stared with primeval grace,  
in a moment beyond speech.  
As I guided her back towards the Park,  
we were silently followed.

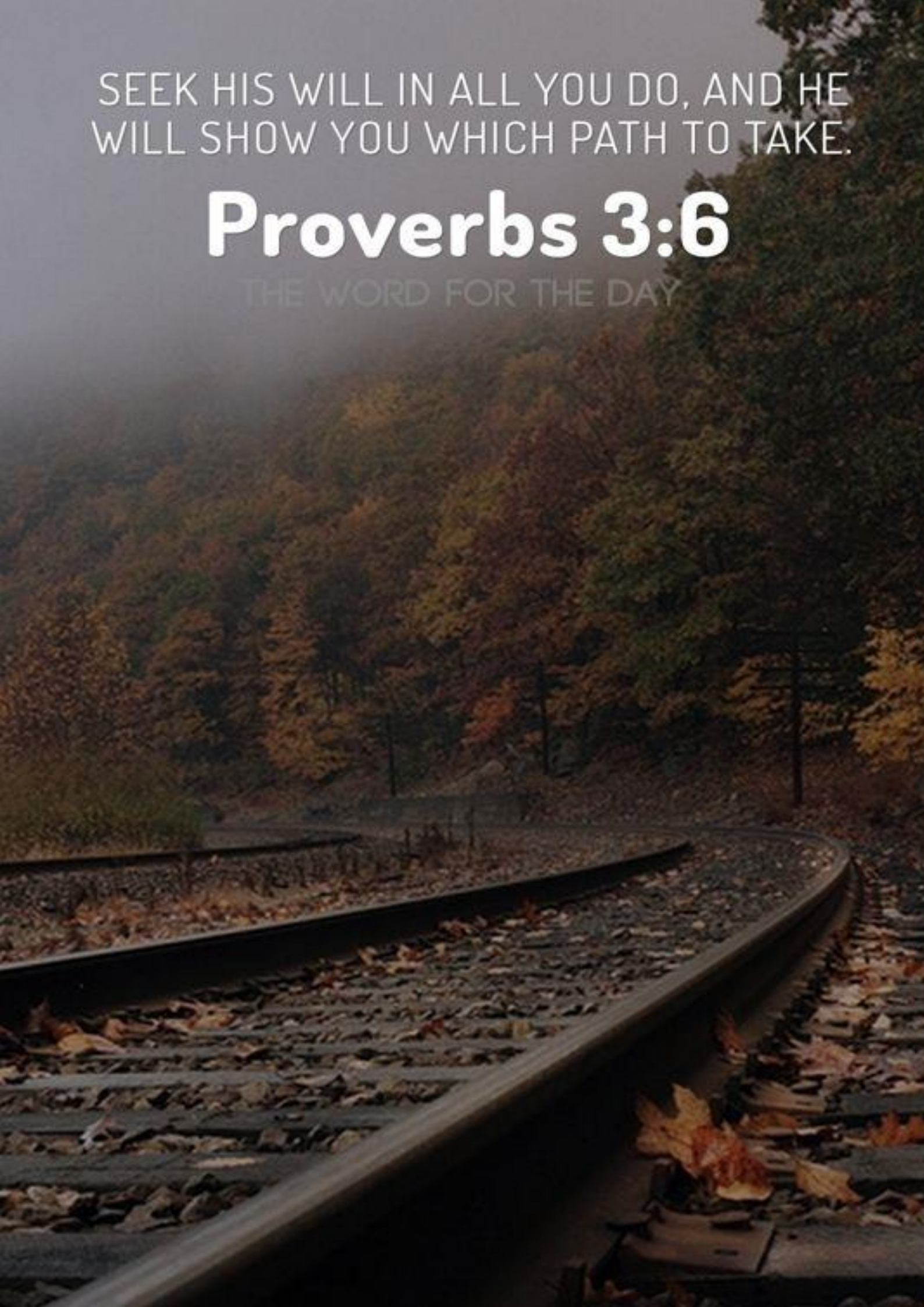
The child held her balloon towards Bella.  
I shook my head. Her Mother nodded.  
The gift was given with Grace  
and solemnly accepted.  
Strangers in a strange land, made welcome.  
Gracious Señor (God).



SEEK HIS WILL IN ALL YOU DO, AND HE  
WILL SHOW YOU WHICH PATH TO TAKE.

# Proverbs 3:6

THE WORD FOR THE DAY





## Rain Down

By Pat Marsh

Rain Down  
wild  
untamed  
unstoppable Spirit  
forgive us our resistance  
to your touch  
shake us  
and remake us,  
transform us  
and compel us,  
release in us  
the power of God  
on earth  
touch us  
with the fire of Pentecost  
rattle our complacency,  
free us from our doubting,  
cure us  
of our blindness  
to your power  
storm into our lives  
have your wild  
unstoppable way  
free us  
to be truly Spirit-led  
Spirit of God  
burst open our hearts  
and let the flames  
rain down

©

# The Book of Jonah and its Relevance for Today.

By Derek Pamment- Anglican Ordinand at the Queen's Foundation

The book of Jonah is presented as the writings of a minor prophet. It is probably one of the better-known books of the Hebrew Bible and it is a favourite of school teachers and children's workers. But although so well known it is almost certainly not so well understood. Unlike the books of the other minor prophets this one uniquely tells the story of the prophet and not of the prophecy, there are just five words of prophecy in the book. In fact, it is not the words of the prophet that are the real relevance but the deeds, actions and behaviours of Jonah. It is this that creates the enchantingly prophetic and provocative nature of this book and gives it in my analysis, absolute relevance for today.




*Was it the Whale who swallowed Jonah or the people of Nineveh who swallowed the Whale?*

The answer of course is neither but the narrative and the images that are evoked have great relevance for today's society. This is a book about God's grace, about boundaries and enemies and about the universality of salvation.



There are so many aspects of the story that raise more questions than we can answer. Was it a big fish, a sea monster or a whale, why did Jonah go the other way, did he really feel he could escape from God. When he took the second chance he admitted that he was afraid of looking stupid, can't we all relate to that. The big fish has often been portrayed as a whale but there is much more in the original text than meets the initial readers eye. Another



twist in the hidden depths of this book. On the first mention the term is translated as big fish and is male in gender but this word changes to a female gender in subsequent mentions providing a new insight to the impact of the story. Jonah was essentially imprisoned in the womb of the fish only to be spat out in an act of being born again in preparation for his calling.

This fascinating book has been reviewed by so many critics and whatever critical methods we apply Jonah has swallowed up his critics like the fish swallowed up Jonah. The name Jonah is translated as Dove and there are clues to links with the story of Noah, other Hebrew bible stories include Elijah, Jeremiah and the Book of Joel. It is very difficult to say whether and in what way if at all these sources influenced the author of Jonah or were indeed influenced by it. There are however several links with the New Testament synoptic gospels of Matthew and Luke and reflections and similarities to the life of Jesus himself.

It is easy to discount the story because of its incredulous nature but it is this aspect that draws me into the story and cements its relevance for today. Certainly, without the mystique and the miraculous in this story there would be little grounds for faith and belief in the message for today. The account by Ambrose Wilson whereby an individual was swallowed by a large sperm whale and was recovered alive from the stomach of the whale 3 days later, was recorded in the Princeton Theological Review of 1927. With God, nothing is impossible.

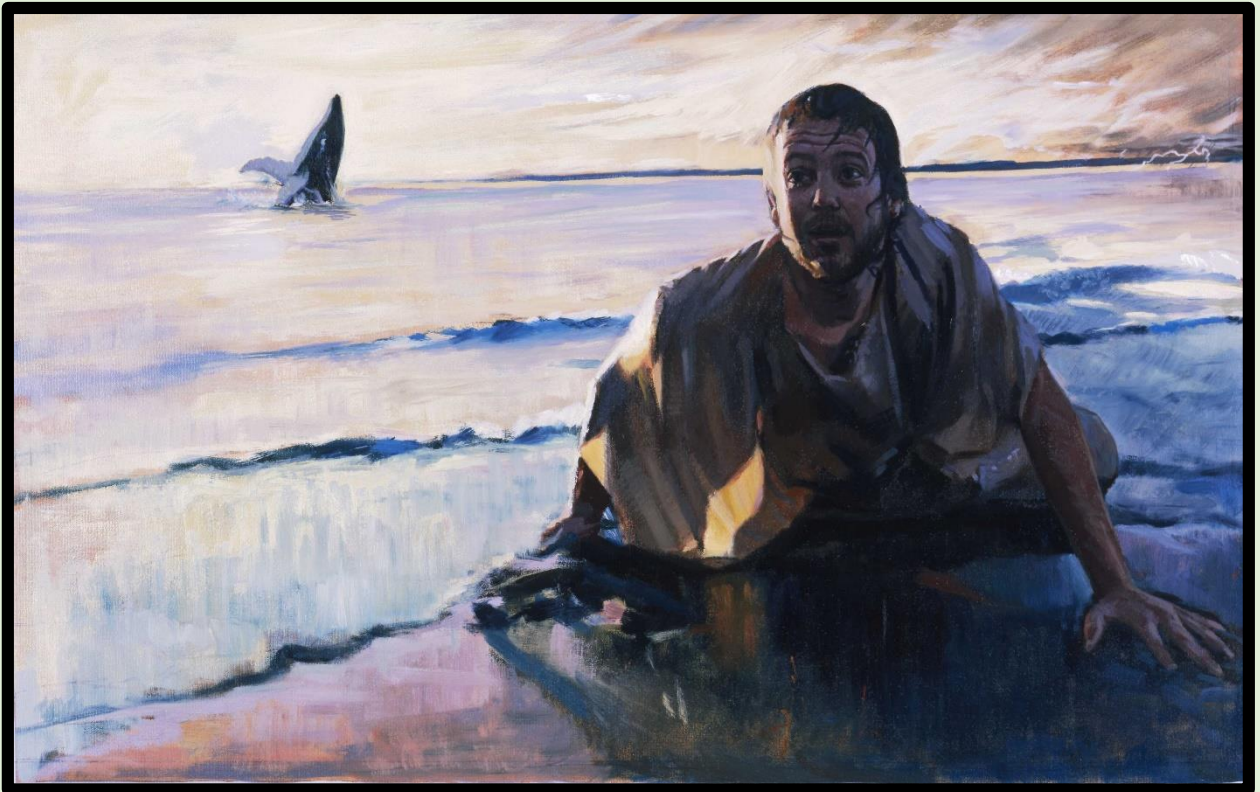
It is the engaging nature of the narrative and its familiarity that makes it so unique as a text that has spoken to Christians throughout the ages. It poses a whole range of questions to us and to the church,

- Would we do any better- Why are we reluctant- How do we view our neighbours and foreigners at our borders – a real parody here with the impact of Brexit and some of the emerging attitudes- What do we find difficult in our own calling?

The inclusion of the thanksgiving psalm or prayer is also interesting as the style of writing again takes a turn in this remarkable book. It raises questions as to why it is there, was it a later addition and most certainly it was penned and included by a different author. To remove it would remove the symmetry between the two halves of the story but its inclusion just adds to the mystery of this book, a book that is so hard to pin down whatever aspect of literary criticism we use.

Today, people are searching more than ever for a spiritual connection. There is a growth in spirituality and the recent election results of both Brexit and the USA

presidency show that something new is required. People are searching for a new connectivity.



Yet if we look at the mention of Jonah in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 12:39-40 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

*39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth".*

It is clear to me that the only way we will find that connectivity is through God and through the message of the Cross. The church needs to respond in new and different ways if it is to succeed in its mission. It is our calling to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom and it is one of the 5 marks of mission. Jonah had remarkable success in bringing people to repentance and into a saved relationship despite his reluctance.

I know that this has resonance with my own formation and reminds me of the reading of Richard Rohr's book, *'Falling Upwards'*. We must be prepared to leave some things behind and in Jonah's case that was his will to live the ultimate

sacrifice that we see embodied in the New Testament Gospels.

The book uniquely speaks to us today about a God of grace and forgiveness. A God concerned with borders and with evangelism who can get the job done with or without us but like with Jonah, God chooses to work through His church. His people.

It speaks of social justice and of peace and encourages us to love our enemies and our neighbours. We must remember that God did not make these people our enemies, we did. This fascinating, complex and almost elusive book was written before the start of Christianity we see a man called by God willing to give up his life for others but with a remarkable ministry. It sounds familiar.

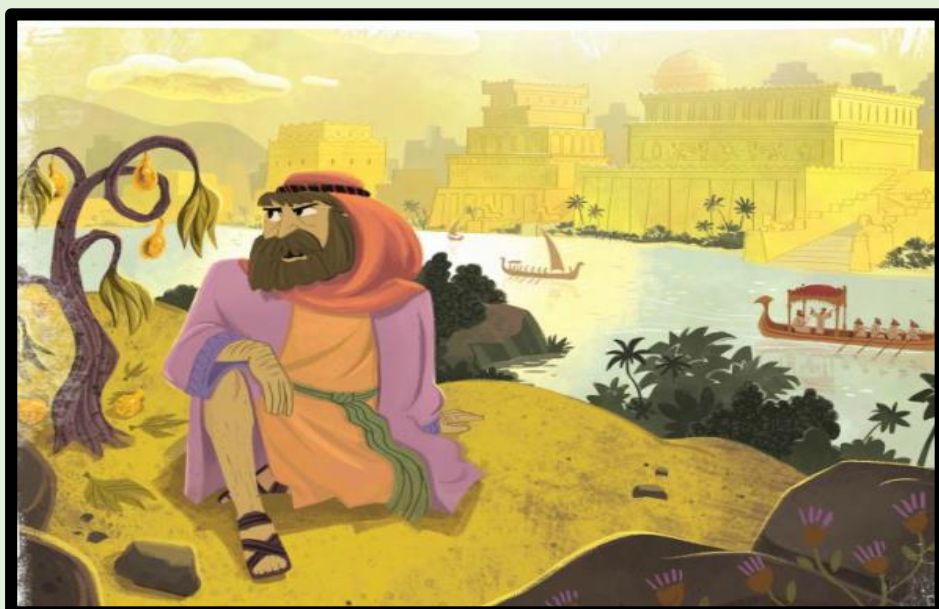
Both as individuals and as a Church we must not avoid God and his call for us, but we should use the story of Jonah to inspire, invigorate and resource us. In the words of Greg Haslam,

*‘We simply don’t know what Jonah was. But he is no longer our concern. It is you and I who are in God’s spotlight now.’*

What more pertinent a message could there be than to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord our God. (Micah 6.8). Our prayer today is that we must not be reluctant prophets. The book leaves us with a direct question from God in verse 11,

*‘And should I not be concerned?’*

Thank you, God, and thank you Jonah.



With your STRENGTH,  
I will do my BEST.  
With your LOVE  
my spirit will soar with JOY.  
With your GRACE, I will have FUN!

When people watch me dance, they will see  
what a great work you've done and praise YOU.

Thank you for loving me just as I am.



# The Rabbi and The Bishop in Conversation

Whittington Church, Lichfield with Ruach



The building was alive with enthusiasm and anticipation as over ninety people gathered to hear Rabbi Mark Solomon and Bishop Michael Ipgrave of Lichfield speak on the imperative of interfaith engagement and with one another on topical issues of life and faith. The event was skilfully facilitated on the night by The Revd Julia Baldwin, then local chaplain to The Archbishop of Canterbury. The

aim of the event was to raise the profile of the Council for Christians and Jews of which St Giles Church Whittington supports and parish priest Dr Jason Phillips is a member. Dr Phillips is also a contributor to CCJ's national journal 'Common Ground.' People from across the Diocese of Lichfield gathered along with members from across the diversity Christian traditions, Catholics, Methodist, Pentecostal and Baptists joining Jewish friends from across the region.

The event commenced with quick fire personal questions to each of the panellists giving a personal edge to the encounter and allowing both the joy and zeal of the speakers to flood out. This led into an engaging presentation by Bishop Michael on the significance and need of Jewish-Christian dialogue and the benefits not only to these two great world faiths in so doing but in modelling and developing understanding in our society at large. The inspirational Rabbi Mark followed using his recent experience of modelling a Seder meal to a Christian community. He continued the theme of respect and



understanding, opening up where the faiths diverge as well as highlighting themes that are central to each such as liberation, justice and trust.

Revd Julia took questions from the floor on a range of topics from those gathered including biblical interpretation, the need for honouring and protecting the Sabbath in each tradition, about peace and the Nation of Israel, about the salvation imperative in each faith and human sexuality. Each speaker brought both personal and faith perspectives to each area of exploration and illustrated nuances that showed at the core of each faith was a love for humanity in all its diversity.



Following the evening Bishop Michael, who chairs The Council for Christians and Jews nationally said,

***"This was a good and engaging conversation, reminding me of how much Jews and Christians have in common with one another. We have been particularly aware of that this year, when Passover and Easter so close to one another."***



I TELL YOU THE TRUTH  
if you have faith  
as small as a mustard seed,  
you can say to this mountain,  
'Move from here to there,'  
and it WILL move  
NOTHING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU

Matthew 17:20



### A Prayer of Julian of Norwich

In you, Father all-mighty,  
we have our preservation and our bliss.  
In you, Christ, we have our restoring and our saving.  
You are our mother, brother, and Saviour.  
In you, our Lord the Holy Spirit,  
is marvellous and plenteous grace.  
You are our clothing;  
for love you wrap us and embrace us.  
You are our maker, our lover,  
our keeper.  
Teach us to believe that by your grace all shall be well,  
and all shall be well,  
and all manner of things shall be well.  
Amen

### Psalm 94:17-19

Unless the LORD had given me help,  
I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death.  
When I said, "My foot is slipping," your love, O LORD,  
supported me.  
When anxiety was great within me,  
your consolation brought joy to my soul.'

B.M. Boyle

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and  
of good courage, do not be afraid, nor be dismayed,  
for the LORD your GOD is with you wherever you go."

**Joshua 1:9**



## Awe and Wonder

***By Bishop Lee Rayfield- Bishop of Swindon***

As the Church calendar moves to the season known as 'ordinary time' Bishop Lee invites us to make it an opportunity for awe and wonder rather than the mundane.

As a boy I was fascinated with space travel. Perhaps it was growing up during the so-called 'space-race' when the USSR competed with the USA to send a human into space or land a man on the moon. Although the Soviets won the initial stage with the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin they were soon eclipsed by the Americans, 12 of whom stepped onto the lunar surface.

My reading material reflected this fascination as I went through a series of library books with such gripping titles as Mission to Mercury, Voyage to Venus and Journey to Jupiter. At around that time, it must have been in the second half of junior school, I was introduced to the concept of infinity. The universe itself was presented as infinite and I can remember lying in bed thinking about the vastness of space and finding myself feeling afraid, pulling the bed covers over me as if that would make a difference!

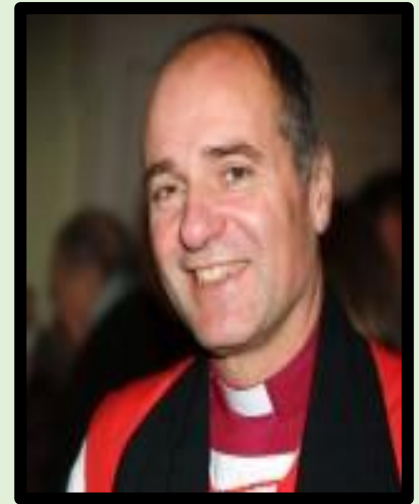
Scientists do not now regard our universe as infinite, though the notion of 'multiverses' – the theory there may be an infinite number of other possible universes – keeps the thought alive. Yet even if our universe may have bounds, its immensity is truly overwhelming and intimidating. In God in the Lab, Dr Ruth Bancewicz endeavours to help readers get a sense of its scale by describing the



earth as a peppercorn sitting 26 paces away from a melon, which is the sun. Mars is a pinhead situated a further 14 paces away with Jupiter represented as a chestnut 95 paces from Mars. Pluto is a grain of sand almost a kilometre from the sun, while the cloud of space-dust which marks the limit of our solar system is 3200 miles away. The nearest star, Proxima Centauri, is another 3200 miles beyond. According to this scale, if the sun were a melon in

London, the next closest star would be in Chicago. Isn't this jaw dropping?

The illustration comes in a chapter entitled 'Awe' and this probably best describes what I experienced as a boy and still feel now, though more maturely. When the astronomer Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell was asked how she keeps such huge scales



in her head she said that she didn't – she used mathematical shorthand. It was impossible to sustain that sense of magnitude in the day to day routine.

Given that God the Holy Trinity is, as one prayer puts it, 'the source and foundation of time and space, matter and energy, life and consciousness', awe ought to be a natural and expected dimension of Christian life and worship.

That is the testimony of the scriptures where awe, astonishment, being reduced to silence, and falling to the ground accompany encounters with the living God. A question every Christian might ask themselves is this, "When did I last experience a sense of awe – of reverent fear – because I caught a glimpse of the transcendent majesty of God?" Though these moments are a gift, and cannot be conjured or manipulated, each of us can make opportunities for them to happen, while those who lead worship can either assist or hinder such encounters.



In her book *Everyday God* Dr Paula Gooder explores how ordinary life can be tinged with awe, wonder and the extraordinary for followers of Christ. It does, however, involve choosing. Jesus used to tell parables as a means of helping them to wrestle with and engage with the choices they were being invited to make. In that spirit I am going to leave you with 'The Bright Field', a piece by R S Thomas, which Dr Gooder placed at the beginning of her exploration. I invite you to spend some time with it, perhaps over several days, asking the Holy Spirit to make it a place of encounter with God. First published <http://www.bristol.anglican.org/2015/bishops-letter-awe-and-wonder/>



## The Bright Field

*I have seen the sun break through  
to illuminate a small field  
for a while, and gone my way  
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl  
of great price, the one field that had  
treasure in it. I realise now  
that I must give all that I have  
to possess it. Life is not hurrying  
onto a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning  
aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

R S Thomas



# MISSION TO INDONESIA 2017

*by Ian Harris who worships at Bushbury Church. Ian is a regular participant at RUACH retreats and first ventured to Indonesia following discernment at a retreat called 'Footsteps from the Stable'*



Following last year's visit to the churches and bible schools in Indonesia by the rector of St Mary's church Bushbury, his wife and myself we were invited back this year. So in January this year a team of five from St Marys church led by the rector left for Jakarta on the Island of Java. The plan was to visit the main Anglican church (All Saints) and the bible school to run a study course on 1 Peter a letter which Peter wrote to the persecuted church, a letter that Christians in Indonesia would relate to.

After spending four days in Jakarta we left for Bandung where we ministered at three church communities St John's, St Peter's and St Paul's and again ran the course on 1 Peter at the bible school there.

While we were ministering in the churches in Bandung we were requested to fly to West Timor to visit a newly formed church community and to pray over and bless a piece of land the church had purchased. The vision for this land is to build a clinic and skills school in order to provide the local community with health care and to teach them a trade so they can support their families.





On Timor we visited the Christian community and Church a converted garage in the village of Niki Niki

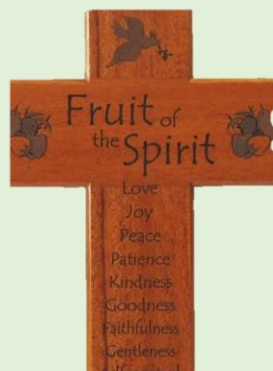
After celebrating Holy Communion, we spent a wonderful time of ministry for the sick of the village the Lord blessed us mightily! Later that day we drove to the edge of the jungle to the piece of land to be prayed for. During our time of prayer and worship around the

site we read and reflected on Psalm 85 which we had received from the Lord in our prayer time in preparation for our visit to Timor. Ps 85 v: 11 – 13 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven v:12 the Lord will indeed give what is good and our land will yield its harvest v:13 righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

Early next morning we returned to Kupang to catch a flight to begin our journey home. The whole mission was a humbling experience and a privilege to be able to visit our Christian brothers and sisters to support and encourage them as they struggle to grow facing hostility in an environment of which more than 90% of the population is Muslim.

I have personally grown in faith from the experience and continue to trust in the Lord for further opportunities to serve.

*The scarves the team are wearing in the photograph were presented to us by the head man of the village signifying that we are made honorary members of their village.*



*Deuteronomy 31:6*

*"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified ..., for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*

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*We would be immensely grateful.*



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## An Irish blessing

May the road rise to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your side,  
May the sun shine warm upon your face,  
The rain falls soft upon your fields,  
And, until we meet again,  
May GOD holds you  
in the palm of His hands.  
Amen.