

End the Week with CME - May 30, 2008

30th May 2008

Welcome to End the Week with CME! This weekly email is sent automatically to Clergy and Readers in the diocese (if you don't want to receive it, please send an email to CovEW-unsubscribe@lists.covlec.org) but anyone is welcome to subscribe to the list, and we are especially keen to pass it on to any interested lay people, especially those who may have responsibility for preaching. To subscribe they simply need to email CovEW-subscribe@lists.covlec.org.

Coming Up

Women Bishops - but what kind?

A study day for women and men. 10am - 3pm, Monday 9 June 2008 at Offa House.

Legislation for the ordination of women bishops will come before the General Synod in the near future. It is a timely moment to ask what we expect of bishops in general, and what we think women bishops might bring to the role. What kind of leadership is appropriate for the church of the future?

The day will be chaired by Katrina Scott (Diocesan Adviser for Women's Ministry), and there will be input from Rosie Ward (Leadership Development Adviser, CPAS). Cost: £30 (including lunch). Grants for half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through sarah.palmer@covcofe.org.

Future of the Church of England

Tuesday 10 June, 7.30pm at St Nicholas Church, Kenilworth.

The Deaneries of Coventry South and Kenilworth have invited Canon Dr Christina Baxter, Lay Chair of General Synod, to give her thoughts on the future of the Church of England. Christina has been in post since 1995, and has also been a member of Archbishops' Council and its Finance Committee since 1999. She has been a member of the Women Bishops Working Party since 2003.

If you would like further details, please contact Audrey Hobley at hobley78@tiscali.co.uk.

Annual Regional Training Partnership (RTP) Forum

Saturday 14 June, 10am - 3pm, at Droitwich Spa Methodist Church. (Lunch is included.)

This year's West Midland Regional Training Partnership Forum, will look at approaches to theological reflection and will be led by Professor Stephen Pattison from Birmingham and the Revd Judith Thompson from Worcester. For more information about the day, please contact Jenny Harris at jenny.harris@birmingham.anglican.org or on 0121 426 0437.

Subverting the Empire: Romans Disarmed

Blah . . . is a series of conversations on mission, worship, church and Christianity in today's rapidly changing culture.

CMS have planned a 2008 'blah tour', and have invited Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat over from Canada to present it. "Romans Disarmed" will take place in Birmingham on Tuesday 17 June, 10am until 4pm at Birmingham Cathedral.

For more information, or to book online, go to www.blahonline.net.

Ministry Where You Work?

Sunday 13 July 2008, 2 - 5pm at St John's Church Centre, Westward Heath.

An invitation to all Readers, OLMs and NSMs in the Coventry Diocese. Come and discuss:

- Could you have a ministry at work?
- How might God be calling you to expand your ministry?
- An opportunity to explore possibilities beyond your parish role.

If you would like to attend, or find out more information, contact Felicity Smith (chair of the Coventry Ministers in Secular Employment group) on 01926 492452 or at felicity@fandi.me.uk.

Unity in Diversity: celebrating the breadth of Reader Ministry

The Central Readers' Council National Conference will be held Friday 12 - Sunday 14 September 2008 at the University of North Wales, Bangor.

The keynote speaker will be Canon Dr Christina Baxter CBE, and the Principal of St Johns College, Nottingham will be leading an exploration of 1 Corinthians 12. There will also be a number of seminars, led by Readers who are involved in different aspects of ministry outside the church, such as prisons, hospices, bereavement, education etc.

A core part of the weekend will be worship and fellowship, and throughout the weekend there will be an exhibition of various resources relevant to Reader Ministry.

Cost: £170 per head if you book before 30 June / £180 per head for bookings after 30 June.

For more information, contact Heidi Cartledge at hcartledge@fightingclose.freeserve.co.uk or on 01926 641751. If you are planning to attend, or have already booked, please let Chris Haines (Warden of Readers) know at chris@haines.uk.com or on 01788 576279.

www.readers.cofe.anglican.org

Notes on the Gospel Readings for Trinity 3 (Sunday June 8, 2008) Matthew 9. 9-13, 18-26

Mercy, not Sacrifice

Alfred Hitchcock used to appear in his own films in a fleeting glimpse. He might be a man buying a newspaper or stepping off a bus, turning a corner or walking out of shot. But in any of his films, you'll find him tucked away somewhere, adding his own personal signature to his work. Matthew's gospel contains a similar cameo appearance by its author in 9.9-13 (see the note below on Matthew's authorship of the gospel). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this appearance touches on a theme at the very heart of the gospel. 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' might be the subtitle for Matthew's gospel. Jesus says to the Pharisees that they must go and learn what the phrase means, for 'I have come not to call the righteous but sinners' (Matt. 9.13).

In the upside-down world of Jesus' kingdom, sinners may be closer to the righteousness that God wants than the so-called righteous people. Righteousness is a key word in Matt. 5.10, 20; 6.1 (often translated 'piety'), 33, and the question in debate throughout Matthew's gospel is: what is true righteousness? In Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees about what is lawful, or righteous, Jesus twice uses the quotation about mercy not sacrifice from Hosea 6.6 (Matt. 9.13; 12.7). Clearly the Pharisees' understanding is at fault. They do not truly

understand the kind of righteousness that matters to God.

Getting to grips with what this means can best be done by turning back to the early pages of Matthew's gospel, where the central character is Joseph. In one telling phrase, Matthew says Joseph was 'righteous' (Matt. 1.19). What justifies this description? When Joseph found that Mary was pregnant, and knew that it was not by him, 'being just and not wanting to make an example of her, he decided to divorce her without any fuss' (Matt. 1.19). In other words, Joseph decided to break his betrothal to Mary and divorce her in accordance with the commandment to 'purge the evil from amongst you' (Deut. 22.21). But he did not interpret the law literally (which would have entailed returning Mary to her father's doorstep where she would have been stoned). Instead he resolved to take the merciful route of ending the marriage quietly. Of course the story ends differently because Joseph has a dream which persuades him not to divorce Mary, but this preliminary part of it is crucial because it establishes what kind of man Joseph is.

In other words, true righteousness involves acting in accordance with the character of God, rather than by applying the letter of the Law. That is to say, showing compassion rather than demanding your rights - very much the message of the earlier passage from the Sermon on the Mount about not insisting on an eye for an eye (Matt. 5.38-end). Mary Hinkle notes that 'Righteous observance of the Law is expressed in merciful action toward the neighbour', a radical redefinition of the Law.

The conflict with the Pharisees in Matthew 9.9-13 comes about because of Jesus' call to Matthew the tax-collector himself. He was the test-case to whom the Pharisees objected. What was wrong with him?

Tax collection was not a job for shrinking violets. As Thomas Schmidt delicately points out, 'an occupation which depends for success on suspicion, intrusion, harassment and force tends not to attract the most pleasant personalities.' ('Taxes' in J.B.Green et al. (eds) Dictionary of the Jesus and the Gospels (IVP 1992) p.806.) Yet this group had been prominent amongst those who came to John the Baptist for repentance and baptism. Jesus, like John, included tax-collectors amongst the covenant people of Israel and did not suggest that they look for another job (see Matt. 21.32). A major accusation against Jesus was that he routinely ate with 'tax-collectors and sinners' (Matt. 9.9-10; 11.19).

Tax collectors were often bracketed with 'sinners' because they were a representative group of those who did not keep the Law strictly. The term sinner was not necessarily in origin a pejorative term and was routinely used to describe gentiles, for example (see Matt 5.46-7; 18.17, also Gal. 2.15). However, by the first century it had become an insult, what James D.G.Dunn calls 'a dismissive "boo-word" which evolved into a means of 'warn[ing] off members of the in-group against conduct outside the boundaries which defined the group' (J.D.G.Dunn Jesus Remembered (Eerdmans 2003) p.530). The issue was not so much the actual Law itself as a strict Pharisaic interpretation of the Law. The Law did not prohibit plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath, for example, but the Pharisees did so because they labelled any such effort as work and a violation of the spirit if not the actual letter of the Law (see Matt. 12.1-8). On this strict interpretation therefore Jesus' disciples too were classed as 'sinners'. Dunn concludes that 'They were "sinners"...only from a sectarian viewpoint and only as judged by the sectarians' interpretation of the law.' Tax collectors fitted neatly into this category, and their general unpopularity undoubtedly made labelling them as sinners a shrewd move, and equally undoubtedly many of them lived up to the label and used their position to extort and cheat. They were extreme sinners. An honest tax collector was like a 'good' Samaritan - a contradiction in terms.

But taxes were not bad in themselves, and someone had to collect them. The Temple, for instance, could only run because of the tax to support it. Jesus' association with tax-collectors, to the extent of including one

within the Twelve (Matt. 9.9), showed very clearly that they should not be automatically written off as sinners by those who interpreted the Law too strictly. They could have a place in God's Kingdom.

For most people it was probably impossible to imagine that these worst of 'sinners' could be part of the Kingdom. But the barrier was one of imagination, not reality, and had to be challenged primarily by actions, not words. So Jesus, taunting his righteous, strictly law-observing opponents, said 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are ahead of you on the way into the Kingdom of God' (Matt. 21.31). If the grace of God might be at work amongst tax collectors and prostitutes, who then could be beyond the pale of God's Kingdom? They might be righteous too, if righteousness was defined in terms of mercy - showing God's compassion - rather than sacrifice - obeying the Law to the letter without showing care for others.

This passage has often been seen as Matthew's own 'signature', his Hitchcock-like appearance in his own work. And no wonder. For the themes it explores mattered deeply to him not just as a gospel-writer, but as a person too.

Note: Matthew's authorship

Traditionally the author of this gospel was Matthew, one of the twelve disciples, also known as Levi and identified as a tax-collector (Mark 2.14; Matt. 9.9; 10.3). We know nothing of Matthew after the crucifixion. But the identification of a gospel with him, while beyond proof, is quite possible. First of all there seems no reason why it was linked with Matthew and not one of the more prominent disciples unless he did actually have some connection with it. Second, recent research suggests that as well as a significant body of oral material about Jesus it is quite likely that there may have been some simple written records of his sayings too.

Tax-collectors were amongst the relatively few who had to be able to write, and Alan Millard suggests that 'To imagine some of them opening note-books they carried for their day-to-day business...and jotting down a few of the striking sayings they had heard...is quite feasible' (Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) p.223). Third, since tax collectors had to be able to order and keep track of complex accounts and records in a way that would be quite beyond the previous experience of fishermen, for example, it may be that Matthew's role within the group of disciples was to keep some sort of record of Jesus' prophetic words just as Judas' task was to manage the common purse which the group kept (John 12.6). A similar role had been performed for the prophet Jeremiah by Baruch, who wrote down his master's words (e.g. Jer. 36.4).

These pieces of circumstantial evidence point to the disciple after whom the gospel is named. This is not to say that Matthew the tax collector wrote the gospel as we now have it, simply to suggest that the sources behind it may well go back directly to the apostolic circle as the early church believed.

And Finally...

An old one but a good one....

I am writing in response to your request for additional information. In block number three of the accident reporting form, I put "poor planning" as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more and I trust that the following details are sufficient:

I am a bricklayer by trade. On the day of the accident, I was working alone on the roof of a new six-story building. When I completed my work, I discovered that I had about 500 pounds of bricks left over. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand I decided to lower them in a barrel by using a pulley, which fortunately was attached to the side of the building at the sixth floor.

Securing the rope at the ground level, I went up to the roof, swung the barrel out and loaded the bricks into it. Then I went back to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to insure a slow descent of the 500 pounds of bricks. You will note in block number 11 of the accident reporting form that I weigh 135 pounds. Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rather rapid rate up the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel coming down. This explains the fractured scull and broken collarbone. Slowed only slightly, I continued my rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley. Fortunately, by this time I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold tightly to the rope in spite of my pain.

At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground - and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed approximately 50 pounds. I refer you again to my weight in block number 11. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building.

In the vicinity of the third floor, I met the barrel coming up. This accounts for the two fractured ankles and lacerations of my legs and lower body. The encounter with the barrel, slowed me enough to lessen my injuries when I fell onto the pile of bricks and fortunately, only three vertebrae were cracked. I am sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the bricks in pain, unable to move, and watching the barrel six stories above - I again lost my presence of mind.

I let go of the rope!

That's all folks!

Richard

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