

End the Week with CME - September 25, 2009

25th Sep 2009

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.

Bishop's Certificate in Discipleship 2009-2010 Programme

The new BCD programme can be found at <http://www.coventry.anglican.org/ministry/training/> as well as our general leaflet, FAQs and a registration form if you wish to register to complete the full certificate.

There's a whole range of exciting modules available for lay people. You will soon be able to download and print leaflets and booking forms for the individual modules, but in the meantime you can book by emailing cme@covcofe.org.

If you have any queries about the BCD, please email Sarah Palmer at cme@covcofe.org.

CME Events Coming Up

Special Offer available – book three CME courses and we will invoice you for only two of them. This offer only applies until 2 November so please act now!

Safeguarding Children and Young People

This training will be based on the new Diocesan Guidelines and will cover all aspects of safeguarding, including types and indicators of abuse, how sex offenders operate, what to do if a disclosure is made, making a referral to Children's Social Care, ex-offenders in the Church, safe recruitment, Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguarding Authority. The training days will be led by Carol Clarke, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

Monday 19 October, 10am-3pm at St Margaret's Chapter House, Whitnash

Tuesday 17 November, 10am-3pm at St Peter's Church Centre, Wellesbourne

Thursday 10 December, 10am-3pm at Holy Trinity, Attleborough

Please note that this training is free - our apologies for the error in the last edition of ETW. Please book through cme@covcofe.org.

November 25, 2009 - Handling the Past

How can we understand the role of historic churches as a positive mission opportunity rather than a negative burden? On this study day we shall look at Victorian strategy for mission, the situation we're in today, and share some ideas about the future.

An historic churches study day with Richard Cooke, Helen McGowan and Claire Strachan. Wednesday 25 November at St John the Baptist, Berkswell, 10am-3pm. Cost: £40 (including lunch). Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

February 1, 2010 - Reconciliation

A study day on the theme of Reconciliation with Canon David Porter (Coventry Cathedral). Monday 1 February at Red Hill Christian Centre, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: £40 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £17.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

February 25, 2010 - Mercy-Shaped Ministry

'Since it is by God's mercy we have this ministry we do not lose heart'. 2 Cor 4.

Ministry is demanding and costly but Paul insists its source is God's mercy before all else. A day reflecting on what it means to live by the mercy of God and exploring what a mercy-shaped church might look like.

Through the day there will be input, prayer, personal space and shared discussion time.

Thursday 25 February at Offa House, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: £40 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £17.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

April 22, 2010 - Seeking the Angel of the Church

'To the angel of the church write...'

Churches and communities, like individuals, have their own character and spirit. The reason long term transformation is often missing is because the spirit has not been named and ministered to. Based on the work of Walter Wink, a day exploring the name and character and 'angel' of our communities and how to minister to them.

Thursday 22 April at Red Hill Christian Centre, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: £40 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £17.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

April 27, 2010 - Learning from Luke

A Bible Reflection day with Paula Gooder and Richard Cooke. Tuesday 27 April at Offa House, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: £40 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £17.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

July 6, 2010 - Spanish Mystics

A Spirituality Reflection Day with Ruth Tuschling, Tuesday 6 July at Offa House, 10am-3pm with an abbreviated repeat from 7.30-9.30pm. Cost: £40 (including lunch) for the daytime course, £17.50 (including coffee and cakes) for the evening. Grants of half the cost are available for clergy and Readers. Book through cme@covcofe.org.

Other Events Coming Up

Clergy Study Day: Monday 2nd November

Bishop Christopher and Bishop John look forward to welcoming all clergy at the Clergy Study Day on Monday 2nd November, 9.30am-3.30pm at the Ricoh Arena. More details will be mailed shortly, but meanwhile please reserve the date!!

Diocesan Board of Education Continuing Professional Development Opportunities

29th September 2009 - **Introducing the new SIAS Toolkit**

9.00am-1.30pm (including lunch) at Red Hill Christian Centre, Snitterfield, Stratford upon Avon CV37 0PQ

3rd November 2009 - **Transforming Collective Worship: A little light liturgy for pupils**

9.30am-3.30pm at Red Hill Christian Centre, Snitterfield, Stratford upon Avon CV37 0PQ

10th November 2009 - **Being a Governor in a Church School – An Introductory Session - Exploring the Roles and Responsibilities of Governors in Church Schools**

7-9.00pm at Clifton upon Dunsmore CofE Primary School, Main Street, Clifton, Rugby CV23 0BT

To book: contact Joanne Evans on 02476 521250 or email joanne.evans@covcofe.org. A full list of the courses can be downloaded from <http://www.covdioc.org.uk/courses%20and%20conferences.htm>

Rites on the Way Together

Thursday 15 October 2009 at Birmingham Cathedral, 10.30am - 3.00pm (registration and coffee from 9.45am). Speakers will be Revd Rhiannon Jones (Rector of Fulbourn and the Wilbrahams) and Revd Dr Tim Stratford (Team Rector, Kirkby Team Ministry).

This is a day celebrating loving relationships - betrothals, weddings, renewal of vows and "blessing" civil marriages. It will explore how churches can organise themselves and offer the liturgical, pastoral and practical means to meet these needs and opportunities.

The cost of the day, which does not include lunch, will be £15 (£12 for affiliate members of Praxis). For full details, including how to book, go to http://www.praxismidlands.org.uk/next_event.html

For details of all the events coming up, which have been advertised in recent editions of End the Week, please go to <http://www.coventry.anglican.org/ministry/learning/trainingstudy/>

Book Review

Growing Women Leaders, Rosie Ward

BRF (The Bible Reading Fellowship) 2008, ISBN-13: 978-1841015750

I am thrilled to be able to recommend this book, not only does it meet an urgent need, but it is well done and very user friendly. The book addresses the issues about women's leadership rather than ordination from an evangelical perspective; personally I would like to put it into the hands of every university Christian Union in the country. Ward takes a tour through the biblical and historical story of women's leadership. Some issues and stories will be familiar to many but this book does not labour any one point and there is plenty of new material to ponder on. Crucially all the issues are dealt with in one book which is easy to read. She also looks at methods of approaching and enabling women in leadership but it is for me the first section on justifying women as leaders where Ward speaks with a clear and compelling voice.

Reviewed by Naomi Nixon

Notes on the Gospel Readings for Sunday 4 October (Trinity 17) Mark 10. 2-16

Marriage and Divorce

I remember the evening very well. It was about 13 years ago, after an evening service. I had a small group of adults in the Vicarage study for their weekly session of confirmation preparation. I had asked them the previous week to see if they could read the whole of Mark's gospel. As usual when I ask people to do this they came back excited and challenged, buzzing with the encounter with Jesus they had had. They were struck by how different he seemed in the flesh-and-blood pages of this gospel from the meek and mild character of popular belief.

But after a little time of discussion one of them, a young man who had literally knocked on the door one night asking to talk, said 'It was great until I reached chapter 10.' All round the room heads nodded. Furiously wracking my brains to remember what on earth chapter 10 was about and failing miserably, I immediately said, 'Ah. And what was it about chapter 10 exactly that caused a problem?' 'Well,' he said, 'it says that divorce is wrong. And I'm divorced.' And one by one around the room every person said 'So am I.' Suddenly I realised why, a couple of weeks before when we had looked at sin and forgiveness, the atmosphere in the room when we prayed had seemed so electric. Now it felt leaden. The excitement they had had about Jesus a few minutes earlier seemed to have evaporated as they questioned what Jesus meant in this 'hard saying': 'Whoever divorces his wife, and marries another, commits adultery with her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery' (Mark 10.11-12). Was there a place for them after all in the Christian Church? Four years later I sat in the same place as them after my wife left.

So how are we to understand this passage, and those like it? (Matt.19.1-12 offers a fuller version of Jesus' words, which may be older than Mark's; see also Matt. 5.32 and Luke 16.18.) Within the trajectory of Mark's gospel it is part of the escalating conflict with the Pharisees, who delight in posing questions that will catch Jesus out (v.2). As carefully as an opposition politician stalking a prime minister in election year, the Pharisees hold Jesus' every syllable up to scrutiny. In other words Jesus is in some sense already on trial here, so he must tread carefully in what he says.

The big debate of the day lay between the rabbis Hillel and Shammai. These great Jewish teachers, a few decades older than Jesus (both died around 20AD), took contrasting positions on a number of issues, but particularly on divorce. Their teaching revolved around the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24.1, the passage referred to in v.4. Hillel, famously liberal in his interpretation of the Law, allowed divorce for men on 'any and every ground', enacted simply by handing over a certificate of cause which required no proof and was presented to no court. (This is the kind of 'quiet divorce' which Joseph considered giving to Mary, Matt. 1.19.) Shammai, like Jesus a builder and carpenter but unlike Jesus a very irascible man with a short fuse, took the opposite hard-line view. He taught that the only grounds for divorce for a man were sexual misconduct (Deut. 24.1) or for a woman a husband's failure to provide 'food, clothing or marital rights' (Ex. 20.10-11). The debate is a complex one but it boiled down to an easy option which required no evidence or a very hard one which required a great deal of it. The Pharisees' trap for Jesus lay in encouraging Jesus to jump one way or the other. Hillel's liberal option was very popular (for obvious reasons); Shammai's was the Pharisees' preferred approach. Whichever side Jesus came down on, one group would be offended.

As ever, Jesus neatly sidesteps the question. 'What did Moses command you?' (v.3). They respond with the hard-line answer approved by Shammai (v.4) but Jesus attacks them for their hardness of heart (v.5), which was the reason for Moses' command. Hardness of heart means stubbornness, implying that divorce ought to lie at the end of a process of habitual infidelity, not gleefully seized upon at the first legal opportunity once the

grounds were in existence.

The focus in their society has shifted from the purpose of marriage, a reflection of God's loving provision of companionship (vv.6-9), to either a superficial and cavalier approach where marriages can be dissolved overnight or a rigorous legal wrangle about proof of infidelity or neglect. When the disciples, understandably puzzled, ask him more, Jesus responds with what seems to be an absolute prohibition on divorce, since adultery is expressly forbidden in the ten commandments (vv.11-12). There seems little room for manoeuvre here. Jesus is, in private, even more strict than Shammai.

Seen in another way, however, Jesus is moving the debate away from divorce to a reflection on the purpose and meaning of marriage. Marriage in the ancient world was primarily a business contract to produce children and gather and consolidate wealth. Love and companionship were rare and occasional guests at a wedding feast, and yet as Jesus points out by quoting Genesis 1.27 and 2.24, according to the creation stories marriage was intended by the creator to be a way of keeping human beings from being alone. The idea of 'one flesh' poses a provocative vision of partnership verging on equality. And, interestingly, Jesus' words on divorce treat it equally from a male and female point of view. Christian marriage sets a higher standard than traditional Jewish marriage, but also offers a higher ideal of fulfilment and love for both partners.

And yet where does that leave my confirmation group and me, unable to live up to these standards not because of our own desire but because of those we were once married to?

The early Church, in the wake of Jesus, grappled with the question. We see Paul doing so in 1 Cor.7, where he comments that a deserted man or woman 'is not bound' or 'enslaved' (1 Cor. 7.15). Matthew 19.9 adds the crucial qualifier to Mark 10.11, 'except for infidelity'. The message is clear that the high standard of Jesus' teaching is to be upheld as far as possible but in some cases it cannot be. As Morna Hooker wisely comments. 'it seems that [Jesus'] aim may have been to shock men [sic] out of the complacency which led them to congratulate themselves on keeping the Law, while they condemned those who ignored its niceties...Since hardness of heart (and human weakness) continues, even within the Christian community, it seems that the possibility of divorce must also continue, but always with the recognition that it is necessary because of human failure, and never (as in certain Jewish circles in the first century) as an automatic right' (The Gospel According to St Mark A.&C. Black 1991, p.237). This is where Mark 10 questions our own society with its too-easy acceptance that the answer to unhappiness is to change partners and that such a change will lead to fulfilment. It also reminds us that all roads to forgiveness should be explored before a marriage comes to an end.

Yet there is something important in the realism of Moses' teaching. Where there is systematic violence, for example, marriage vows have been broken and often cannot be mended. Sometimes a marriage does come to an end. It will always be painful when it does so. But that is not the moment to berate people with the ideal of Christian marriage which Jesus sets before us, it is the time to sit with them in their loss. The 'hard saying' of Jesus is not meant, I believe, for those within the Church who struggle with the fact of being divorced against their own will. For them the words which conclude this passage are more appropriate: let them (us) come, like children who are dependent and vulnerable, offering nothing except their (our) own inadequacy and shortcomings, aware that only by the grace of God's Kingdom can we ever be worthy to be held in the arms of Jesus and blessed by him (v.15). For, as we saw a fortnight ago, the children stand for all those who have no-one else to turn to, the vulnerable who are specially close to God's heart.

There are excellent resources available on David Instone-Brewer's website at

<http://www.divorce-remarriage.com/>. His book *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church* (Paternoster Press, 2003) is a brilliant combination of biblical scholarship and pastoral care, which I highly recommend.

And Finally...

At a wedding the bride's grandparents, who had just celebrated 50 years of marriage, were asked by the vicar what advice they would give to the couple.

Grandmother said "The three most important words in a marriage are, 'You're probably right.'".

Everyone looked at Grandfather.

He said "You know, she's probably right."

That's all, folks!

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