

End the Week with CME - November 20, 2009

20th Nov 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.

For Prayer

Brian Regan is home and recovering after a heart attack and operation. He writes: "all this gives me a new meaning to the words 'Sacred Heart'. I shall never miss the feast again. Our hearts are so sacred and without them, we go straight back to Jesus the most Sacred Heart. May God bless all the NHS team for their dedication and patience. They, without doubt, saved my life and gave me a new opportunity to serve Christ."

Please pray for him and Maureen and the people of St Oswald's Tile Hill at this time.

Multi-parish benefice day - Through a strange land: leading the rural church into the future

14 January 2010. 10am - 4pm at the King's Centre, Oxford.

The rural church is caught between maintaining church as it used to be and seeking to imagine what it might become. The purpose of this conference is to:

- Acknowledge that the task is tough
- Recognise where the rural church has come from
- Think with daring and imagination about the journey ahead
- Share encouraging stories
- Inspire the rural church with hope, as God's people

The cost for the day is £40 (including lunch). Clergy and Readers can claim the full cost from their CME grant.

For more details, or to book a place, please contact Ruth Wagstaffe at ruth.wagstaffe@covcofe.org or on 024 7652 1326.

CME Events Coming Up

December 10, 2009 - Safeguarding Children and Young People

10am-3pm at Holy Trinity, Attleborough.

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 day will be led by Carol Clarke, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

This training is **free**. Please 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.

A study day with David Runcorn, 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.

A study day with David Runcorn, 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

Preaching and Teaching about Science and Religion - a discussion group

The Darwin 150 celebrations this year, and the continuing activity of few well known 'public figures' have combined to bring publicity to the interaction between science and religion. There have been strong views expressed from both sides of the (assumed) divide, promoting standpoints of either strict biblical or strict scientific infallibility. Preachers and Teachers in the churches are faced with the need to respond to the concerns raised whilst taking in to account the scientific and theological backgrounds of their congregations.

The purpose of establishing this discussion group is to allow for the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources, so that those who 'labour in the vineyard' are enabled to learn from one another and so aid the understanding of those for whom they 'preach and teach'

The first meeting is on Thursday 26th November 2009 at 7.00 p.m at The Queen's Foundation, Somerset

Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2QH

If you would like to attend, please contact Revd. Dr Adam Hood at hooda@queens.ac.uk or John Parkin at john.parkin@blueyonder.co.uk

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/>

Reminder - Special Book Offer ends December 1

My SCM Core Text: New Testament came out recently. It's an introduction to the New Testament, and some bits will be familiar to regular End the Week readers! It offers a fresh perspective for those who have been studying the NT for a long time as well as those who are just beginning, and is, I hope, readable and easy to follow. It provides a way in to some of the latest thinking about the New Testament and Jesus himself. The flyer and contents list can be seen at <http://www.coventry.anglican.org/ministry/learning/resources/> (scroll down to the 7th & 8th resources in the list).

An Online preview of the text is now available at www.books.google.co.uk – search for 'SCM Core Text Cooke New Testament' and you'll find it!

The RRP is £24.99 but by passing on the author discount I can offer you a copy for £17.50 (a saving of £3.74 on the Amazon price!). To reserve a copy please email Sarah.Palmer@CovCofE.org and we'll let you know when the copies arrive to be collected from the Cathedral and Diocesan Offices, or make alternative arrangements.

Notes on the Gospel Readings for Sunday 29 November (Advent 1) Luke 21. 25-36

Where are we going?

Long before Advent the Christmas decorations are in the shops and Christmas music fills the loudspeakers as you trundle your trolley round Tesco's. Sometimes it feels like we're on an everlasting merry-go-round. Here we are, doing the same as we did last year, and the year before that, and the year before that, too...

These feelings beg the question of purpose, both for each of us as individuals and also for the wider world. Are we going anywhere? Or do we simply go round like hamsters on a huge wheel, gradually declining?

In the ancient world decline from a Golden Age was the default position. For most Romans, for example, the great days lay in the past, before the ambition of Julius Caesar ended the Republic and created an empire which was ruthlessly ruled by Augustus and his successors. In this sense there was a profound pessimism about most well-educated Romans. They saw nothing in the future to look forward to.

For us the situation is more complex. For centuries Western society has been in thrall to the idea of progress, that gradually things 'can only get better' (to coin a phrase). This has been our default position, and you see it in assumptions about the value of economic development, for example, and the unquestioned acceptance that African countries will wish to emulate European ones. But at the same time, especially in the last year or so, real and well-grounded fears have begun to grip us. Maybe our economic prosperity has come about by, in effect, spending the capital. The depletion of the planet's natural resources may mean that time is running out and that the bill for the last half-century is finally due for payment. Those born in Britain in 1948 were, apparently, the golden generation. Free education (to the end of university for those who made it), free health care, booming property prices, golden handshakes, and early retirement on a good pension with long life expectancy: these are advantages their grandchildren can only dream of. For them perhaps the idea of a past Golden Age may make sense. Perhaps, rather like the Romans, we'll look back to the Welfare State Britain of 1950-2000 as the best years there ever were. And in this situation the siren voices of Richard Dawkins and others sing their beguiling but depressing songs: there is no purpose, we are hamsters on the wheel of fate, the world has come together by co-incidence, its intricate mechanism designed by natural processes, like a watchmaker who is blind.

Luke's Gospel, of which we begin a year-long exploration today, speaks more directly to this situation than any of the other three. For purpose, direction and hope are fundamental to Luke's understanding of the life of Jesus as the centre-point of God's action in the world. And his gospel was written for precisely the sort of upper-class Roman, Theophilus (Luke 1.3) who would have been brought up with a pessimistic world-view.

Luke 21.25-36 might seem at first sight an unpromising location from which to begin our journey through this Gospel. It is part of a larger section of Jesus' apocalyptic teaching in the Temple in the week before the crucifixion which is largely borrowed from Mark's equivalent section (Luke 21.5-36; Mark 13.1-33), Luke makes a few cuts and additions. In particular it looks as if he is writing after the destruction of the Temple in 70, since his version of Jesus' prediction of this event seems influenced by what actually happened, where Mark is more general in what he records, suggesting that he wrote before 70 (compare Luke 20.20-2; Mark 13.14-20). The destruction of Jerusalem was a cataclysmic event which deeply questioned the Jewish understanding of God as the power behind history, the one who was taking his people not back to a golden past but on to a future of promise, foretold in the great prophets like Isaiah (especially Isaiah 40-66). For some, like Luke's near-contemporary Josephus, the Roman narrative of pessimism became the more compelling one as the Temple was destroyed.

Luke, who had more sources at his disposal than the other Gospel-writers, found from somewhere another saying of Jesus that neither Mark nor Matthew seem to have known: 'Watch yourselves carefully so that your hearts are not weighed down with loose-living, drunkenness and the concerns of daily life, and the day catches you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who inhabit the earth. Look out, praying all the time that you may escape the things which are about to occur and be able to stand in front of the Son of Man' (Luke 21.36, see also Eph.6.18). This, like much of the rest of the passage, is an affirmation of hope in apparently hopeless times. It is strengthened by its context in Luke's Gospel, which delights in drawing attention to the reversals of fortune which God habitually and unexpectedly brings about (see, for example, the barren Elizabeth's conception of John, Mary the virgin's conception of Jesus, Luke 1.24-38; the revelation of the birth of Jesus to poor shepherds in the fields, Luke 2.8-18; the astonishing wisdom of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, Luke 2.47). Despite appearances, despite even the destruction of Jerusalem which many must have expected to herald the return of Jesus, Luke in his Gospel encourages his readers to hold on and keep hopeful. His story stretches further than his fellow gospel-writers, taking up

where the Old Testament left off and extending the story beyond Jesus' ascension in to the story of the Church.

In their fascinating Theological and Scientific Commentary on Darwin's Origin of Species, Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett suggest that

God has a purpose for nature that scientists cannot see within nature. We do not expect a research scientist looking through the lenses of random variation and natural selection to perceive a grand design in nature or an inherent purpose toward which all things are moving....[S]ome systems in nature exhibit characteristics of design. The eye, for example, is designed for seeing. Yet local design in complex systems does not in itself give evidence of a single grand design for the totality of the created universe. As Christians, we believe the entire created universe has a purpose, a divinely appointed purpose. To discern that purpose we will need to rely on a special revelation from God.

They go on to assert that 'God's new creation provides the purpose for the present creation' and quote Gen. 1.31; Rev. 21.1 and 1 Cor. 13.12, concluding that 'Because science cannot shine light on the new creation promised by the Bible, we can apprehend it only in faith and trust' (Abingdon Press 2008, pp.77-78).

The purpose of God to renew the earth and bring in his Kingdom was fundamental to Jesus' vision. Luke sets the hope in its widest context, pointing back to the Old Testament prophecies and forward to the work of the Holy Spirit in the early Church. On its own the evidence he produces is not enough to prove God's purpose. It is not meant to. Rather it offers hints and glimpses of the presence and purpose of God, and a faith that we are not running round a giant hamster-wheel, but part, slowly and surely, of the coming of God to his world that Jesus has promised will be.

And Finally...

The following have all appeared in church magazines:

1. Next weekend's 'Fasting & Prayer Conference' in Whitby includes all meals.
2. Sunday morning sermon: 'Jesus walks on the Water'.
Sunday evening sermon: 'Searching for Jesus.'
3. Don't let worry kill you off - let the Church help.
4. For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
5. At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be 'What Is Hell?' Come early and listen to our choir practice.
6. Eight new choir robes are currently needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.
7. The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.
8. Potluck supper Sunday at 5pm - prayer and medication to follow.
9. The 'Low Self Esteem Support Group' will meet Thursday at 7pm. Please use the back door.
10. The school drama group will be presenting Shakespeare's Hamlet in the Church hall on Friday at 7pm. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

With thanks to Norma Warham for these.

That's all, folks!

Richard

Richard Cooke

Coventry CME Richard.Cooke@CovCofE.org