

End the Week with CME - March 5, 2010

5th Mar 2010

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.

CME Events Coming Up this year

March 16, 2010 - 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 day will be led by Carol Clarke, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

10am-3pm at St James, Fletchamstead. This training is free. Please 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.

Please note that there are only a couple of places left on the daytime session, so if you wish to book a place, please let us know as soon as possible.

May 26, 2010 - 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 day will be led by Carol Clarke, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

10am-3pm at St George's, Rugby. This training is free. Please 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.

July 15, 2010 - 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 day will be led by Carol Clarke, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser.

10am-3pm at Red Hill Christian Centre. This training is free. Please book through cme@covcofe.org.

Bishop's Certificate in Discipleship

These are the BCD modules that are coming up before the summer. If you know anyone who might be interested in any of these, please pass the details on. Full details about the Bishop's Certificate can be found at <http://www.coventry.anglican.org/ministry/training/>. Places on any of the modules can be booked by emailing cme@covcofe.org.

Mission in Today's Culture

This module is for anyone who is looking for help and encouragement in leading their church into growth and is led by Revd David Banbury (Director of Mission & Faith Development at Holy Trinity, Stratford).

11 Mar, 18 Mar, 25 Mar & 22 Apr, 29 Apr, 6 May 2010 (Thursdays) 7.30 - 9.30pm at Stratford-upon-Avon, Holy Trinity.

Where Do I Fit? Finding Your Place in God's World

This module tries to answer the questions: 'Where do I fit in?' 'How has God gifted me?', and 'What might God be calling me to in the future?' and is led by Susan Mileham (Vocation Advisers' Team Leader) and Revd John Parker (Vocation Adviser & Team Vicar, Rugby Team Ministry).

4 May, 11 May, 18 May & 8 Jun, 15 Jun, 22 June 2010 (Tuesdays) 7.30 - 9.30pm at Leamington Spa, St Mark.

Unlocking the Story of Your Church

Whether your church is a historic building or quite recently built, this module will help you to understand the history which has made the building what it is today, and also help you to tell its story, as well as the story of the people who have worshipped in it. The module is led by Richard Cooke and Helen McGowan (Divine Inspiration).

8 May & 10 Jul 2010 (Saturdays) 9.30am - 3.30pm at Tredington, St Gregory.

Learning to Preach

This module is suitable for anyone who feels a call to make a contribution to the work of their church through occasional preaching and is led by Revd Dr Richard Cooke.

10 May, 17 May, 24 May & 14 Jun, 21 Jun, 28 Jun 2010 (Mondays) 7.30 - 9.30pm at CPAS, Athena Drive, Tachbrook Park, Warwick CV34 6NG.

Other events

‘Wisdom from Warwick’ - Lent addresses 2010

7th March (Lent 3) **God, Philosophy & The Human Genome** Dr Sue Chetwynd

14th March (Lent 4) **Theology of Life? Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide** The Revd Mark Bratton

21st March (Lent 5) **Richard Beauchamp: ‘Tomb thoughts from abroad’** Prof Julian Gardner

28th March (Palm Sunday) **Wisdom from Warwick: Links & Loose-ends?** The Revd Dr Vaughan Roberts

All 6.30pm at the Collegiate Parish Church of St Mary. Each Address is part of a service of Choral Evensong and is followed by coffee and an opportunity to question the speaker.

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/>

Notes on the Gospel Readings for Sunday 14 March (Lent 4) Luke 15. 1-3, 11b-end

Rembrandt and the Prodigal

Some years ago, in the parish where I was vicar, we decided to devote our evening services during Lent to looking at Henri Nouwen’s little book, *The Return of the Prodigal* (Doubleday 1994). Nouwen’s book, a sustained meditation on the Rembrandt painting of the same name, is widely-known enough to need no further introduction. But during our six-week pursuit of the themes picked out by Nouwen a strange thing happened. I had managed to get hold of a reproduction of the painting which was pretty much the size of the original which hangs in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. Each week as we gathered beneath this image the words we used (whether Henri Nouwen’s or our own) began to dry up and we spent more and more time in silence just looking, attentively, at the painting. Nouwen pointed us to some details, like the way the father’s right hand and arm seem to have been withered by a stroke, and as we grew to know the painting intimately we saw other details which the kind of brief glance we might normally give it might miss. The prodigal son’s almost disintegrated sandals, for instance, reflect the reason why the father in the parable calls for new ones (v.22).

The Return of the Prodigal introduced me to Rembrandt the biblical interpreter. Rembrandt lived in Calvinist Holland in the seventeenth century and fell foul of the religious authorities on more than one occasion – in 1654 he was prosecuted for ‘notorious living’ because he was not married to the woman he lived with. He was also a famous painter with an unerring eye for the market, and in such a pious society paintings on biblical subjects were in high demand, hence the profusion of them which Rembrandt produced. Yet Rembrandt also, as an earnest student of humanity, could not resist the dramatic potential of biblical stories. In the process he found himself drawn, whether wittingly or not, into interpreting the stories he was illustrating.

His first attempt at the parable of the prodigal dates from around 1635 and is a self-portrait with Saskia, his wife, also known as The Prodigal Son with a Whore. (It can be seen at <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/rembrandt/self/prodigal-son.jpg>.) Sketches made in preparation for the painting make clear that Rembrandt was pretty familiar with the ‘wine women and song’ who tempted the younger son, though the text itself does not say that this was how the prodigal spent his inheritance, specifying only ‘uncontrolled’ or ‘chaotic’ living (v.13); it is the elder son who makes the accusation (v.30 – George Caird notes that ‘he had no more evidence for the harlots than his imagination and bad temper could supply’, Saint Luke, Penguin 1963, p.183). This is ‘Act One’ of the drama of the prodigal. The shocking declaration that, in effect, he wished his father dead by claiming ahead of time the inheritance which would be due to him, followed by the descent into penury ending up amongst the pigs, than which no worse fate could be imagined by any devout Jew of Jesus’ time. Rembrandt’s painting suggests that he had fun on the way, but the equivocal severity of the woman in the painting, identified both as a whore and as the painter’s wife, is a sermon in itself. Posing as she does, Saskia’s expression (presumably directed by Rembrandt himself) implies that the dissolute life brings no lasting satisfaction but is vanity, as indeed the prodigal in the story finds out. Rembrandt had a way of placing himself in paintings which drew attention to an ‘everyman’ quality about the artist’s identity. Most shockingly it is used in his The Elevation of the Cross (c.1633), where amidst a crucifixion scene peopled by characters in eastern costume Rembrandt himself appears at the very centre of the painting, in painter’s garb and manhandling the cross of Christ upright. (It can be seen at

<http://www.garyschwartzarthistorian.nl/ul/cms/fck-uploaded/images/Rembrandt%20core%20drawings/Br548Elevation>

.) It is a device which brings the moment startling out of the comfortable distance of the past into the utter immediacy of the present. As Rembrandt crucifies Christ the viewer becomes uncomfortably aware of his or her own responsibility for the cross. Similarly, the painter's dissolution in the guise of the prodigal, under the cool gaze of his own wife, suggests the capacity for chaos that lurks inside all of us.

Act Two of the parable is the return of the son. We have two Rembrandt representations of this. One is contemporary with the Self-Portrait and the Elevation, an etching of 1636 rather than a painting, but as a result far more widely known in its time when it was mass-produced and available at the cost of a few pennies to virtually all who wanted a copy to hang on their walls. (It can be seen at <http://www.artgallery.sbc.edu/images/rembrandt.jpg>.) In a way that would be re-worked in his final and unfinished Return of the Prodigal, the son collapses on his knees in front of a father who has left his house and come into the street to meet the lost child. Figures look on from the house (one looms disconcertingly from a hastily opened window). The prodigal's stick lies precariously on the step, ready to roll off as if just dropped. And this is clearly a street scene, where the father is unconcerned about how he looks, heedless of his dignity, accurately reflecting the text where Jesus tells of a father who runs out to meet his son (v.20). The etching catches the dynamic collision of energy between father and son, as the son collapses or falls to his knees, and the elderly and frail father bends down to raise him up, substituting for the fallen stick.

Rembrandt's final painting of the same scene has, by contrast to the dynamic and fluid movement of the etching made three decades earlier, a stillness and a peace about it. (it can be seen at <http://cafechurchleeds.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/rembrandt-return-of-the-prodigal-son1.jpg>.) Simon Schama comments on this painting that 'Rembrandt's prodigal has been broken by his journey from transgression to atonement. The soles of his feet are lacerated and pierced, so that we understand that he has hobbled painfully home towards atonement. His finery hangs in pathetic rags from his emaciated frame. His head is shorn like a penitent's as he kneels in contrition.' This painting, unlike the etching which is its predecessor seems to open another avenue of interpretation, a further unexpected layer within the parable. For the homecoming so tenderly depicted seems to extend beyond the human level and somehow to speak of the homecoming of another son who went into a far country and was swallowed up in the chaos of life. Schama continues, 'We can scarcely make out his features, so lightly has the artist drawn them, but we see enough to know this prodigal for Everyman, for the child who has taken the sins of the world on his shoulders. The father, mantled in red, his brow shining with consummate peace, places his hands on those shoulders as if to lift the burden of his trespasses from them with his paternal blessing. But the gesture...is also an act of resurrection, a transformation of death into life' (Rembrandt's Eyes Allen Lane, 1999, p.685). This could just as well be the homecoming of the son of God, returning to the heart of the father. And in his homecoming, bruised, battered, scarred and wounded by the journey, our own humanity is redeemed and welcomed into the Godhead himself.

Like the reading a few weeks ago, with its heart-breaking cry to Jerusalem, 'yet you would not' (Luke 13.34) this parable speaks of a deep compassion in the heart of God which is almost beyond our comprehension, though we see glimpses and echoes of it in our own experiences of parental love (which is of course why this passage is appointed for Mothering Sunday). Luke's Gospel invites us to journey with Jesus in the way of the cross, to find beyond it the loving and forgiving peace of God, just as the prodigal son in the parable finds that

in the end it is not he who is the most profligate and reckless member of the family. His father outdoes him in the end.

And Finally...

One morning a farmer woke up to find that all his cows were frozen solid. A woman came along and told him she would soon sort it out. She walked about breathing on each animal in turn, and as she did so, they revived.

That evening the farmer was telling the story in the pub. The barman said; "I know who that woman was... Thora Hird."

That's all, folks!

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