



CASTLEHILL ANGELL

FINDING A VOICE—FINDING NEW LIFE

For the first time in my role as one of the chaplains at the High School of Dundee, I was asked to lead morning Assemblies throughout Holy Week. Honestly? I was hesitant. Hesitant because, as all of you within the church know, it is not Christmas that is the busiest time of the year for clergy but rather Holy Week with its 15 plus services in the Cathedral each of which takes a fair bit of preparation. And so the temptation was to decline as politely as I could.

BUT...but as I was pondering this with the inevitable conflict of guilt at turning down an invitation (that, let's face it, is an increasingly scarce commodity in an increasingly secular world) with the 'be kind to yourself' motto that some pastoral bishops (they do exist...) espouse, I sat down to prepare for the final session of this year's Lent study group.

'Finding a Voice' based on the award-winning film 'The King's Speech' has been a course that seems to have had a real impact on those who have taken part with some even saying it has enabled them to find their voice in different aspects of their lives.

The preparation notes for the final session that I picked up in the midst of my pondering, open with the words from Ezekiel, Chapter 2, 'You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen.' Later in the year, I am due to play the part of Henry Higgins in a production of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion. At one point, Higgins says 'Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of

Milton and the Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.' This is quoted in the course notes too as the writer goes on to say that we cannot pretend otherwise than that 'traditional Christianity is in retreat in the UK... Few Christians are out there making their voices heard... There needs to be a drastic change... We need to speak the words of God to our generation. We need to stand and be counted.'

Well, if that was not the Holy Spirit telling me to get up and get out there, I don't know what is.

And so I went. But what do you say to a group of teenagers about Holy Week and Easter, most of whom have no background knowledge of the story of Jesus? Finding a voice that might just have an outside chance of saying something relevant to this group was my challenge. I have no idea whether I succeeded in that task and I shall probably never know but I had to trust in that same Spirit that had made me say 'yes' in the first place. Could I say anything useful or would I just be 'crooning like a bilious pigeon' confirming their suspicions about clergy? In the end, I decided I could not tell the story of Holy Week and Easter but use vignettes that I hope might make at least a few of them curious. It is very easy to become despondent and walk away from, or even turn against people or institutions when they do things differently from how you expect or when they fail to live up to your expectations or when the tide seems to be turning against them. The Palm Sunday cries of Hosanna so easily turned into the angry shouts of 'Crucify him'. But for those who persevere, the results can be amazing and transformational.

It was hard to watch the leader who everyone thought, with warrior strength, would overthrow the Roman occupation, get down on his hands and knees and wash his disciples' feet and then, to top it all, expect them to do the same – to be servants to one another; that to lead meant to serve. But perhaps all the good leaders down the ages have been servants. To serve those around you is perhaps the greatest sign of leadership possible. It was hard then to see that same leader be brutally nailed to a cross. It was hard for Mary and John standing at the foot of the cross on Good Friday to be told that they, Mary and John, were now family – respectively mother and son to one another because of the implication that Jesus would not be there any more. But, here at St Paul's Cathedral, I said, I have seen all of that come together – a community that has largely held together despite the cultural pressures for it not to, despite the institutional church sometimes appearing not to want it to, despite the council wanting to make us pay to come to church with its new parking charges (I didn't say that bit to them!). I have seen within this community people who see others (with whom they have no conventional familial ties), as family to support and love. I have seen people, through that love, finding new life as the people that God has created them to be but that other pressures had conspired to stifle to that point. When all of these things come together, the stone rumbles and rolls away and Christ is risen in our midst.

I saw it too last week at the school as Daniel Johnston's year group and teachers, friends and family came together to support each other through the devastating loss being experienced because of Daniel's death. It is hard to see anything good in the death of a young life full of potential in such tragic circumstances and, of course, there is nothing good in it. But from it can spring something new - a new community life of nurture and care that values each individual in a way that perhaps they did not before, something infinitely more gentle and loving than before.

This, of course, is the sort of thing that has happened down the decades of the life of our Cathedral and continues to happen today. And it was in thinking about what to say to the High School that this came home to me once again. We are the body of the risen Christ called to be Easter people in a Good Friday world. And so, even when the going is tough, we must try to keep seeing each other as family as Jesus calls us from the cross to do, we must keep washing each others' feet (metaphorically if not literally) because in so doing, we shall always find the resurrection life of the Risen Christ in our midst that calls us to 'Find a Voice' and proclaim that life and love to the world. And what a world that could be...

Wishing you all a happy and blessed Easter (with some delicious chocolate thrown in as well.)

Jeremy



WINTER'S FIELD

The earth betrays no sign of life,
as if nothing here had ever grown.
And between the iron furrows
Denies that any seed was ever sown

But then a shaft of sunlight
burns through Winter's breathe
and guides a hopeful bird to dine.
This bird has never heard of Death.

John Nicoll

(John's latest book "Mr Proudfoot At The Angel" is out now and can be brought at Waterstones or directly from John.)

If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

What do you think of, when you consider the first signs of Spring? April showers and the occasional blink of sunshine? Daffodils blowing on the verges? Lambs skipping in the fields? For the farmer, it is a bit more plain and simple than that. I asked my friend, who also comes from a farming family, what she thought was the first signs of Spring and her thoughts were the same as mine. Spreading manure on the fields! After that comes the putting up of the poly tunnels, where the fruit and vegetables are grown. Next there is the arrival of the foreign workers who pick the produce that is grown. Even the yield has changed: where once the farmer would grow four tons of strawberries to the acre, now it is forty tons to the acre. Farming has changed a lot in recent years. Once, school children picked the berries that grew round Dundee. Now it is young people from eastern Europe who bring the crop in. Some folk lament the changes in the old ways, in farming as in anything else. However, farming has to keep up with the times. The need to feed people is as important - perhaps even more so - than ever it was.

But the cycle of growth is the same and as amazing as it has always been. There is an old saying, "When March comes in like a lion, it goes out like a lamb." This March certainly did come in like a lion - the "Beast from the East"- which showed its claws and its teeth, as it brought with it freezing winds and deep snow. Yet although we were wearied of Winter hanging on, underneath the snow, the ground was slumbering and Spring was just waiting. In fact, it has been a good Winter for growing. There was no sudden frost after a mild spell, to kill off any new growth.

A fortnight after the spreading of the manure, you will see the earth start to turn green, with this year's bright new fresh growth. A few



weeks more, with some rain and the rising temperatures and hearing more from the birds and we'll experience the more familiar sights and sounds of Spring.

The miracle will happen, as it always does.

Graham Robertson



What Do You Think?

Have you noticed that Songs of Praise has been moved to an earlier and earlier time on Sundays?

It used to be a type of evening service to watch at home. Then it was shown around 4pm; then 3pm and today it was 1.55pm. We're hardly back home from a morning service! Radio 2 used to broadcast an interesting programme with hymns and some good talks. Then it was modernised and Clare Balding broadcast a less Christian programme with diverse religions and speakers from many different denominations as well as people who talked about their faith. A few weeks ago this programme was watered down even further. It's hardly like a Sunday programme at all.

What do others think? Should we be writing to voice our opinion to the BBC?

Ann Penhale.

THE FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING



It is the last of my Cathedral series and I'm working in the dark after having explored details elsewhere. I want to distil things. I've taken away the long boat of the ceiling rafters, there are no pews. I've replaced my usual butterflies with an image of a moth which I found in the street of a mountain village in Spain. It is a pink-spotted sphinx moth, floating towards the apex of the windows which are melting into less detail. Suddenly I've finished this painting on a Sunday, the Feast of Christ the King, when I realise that the windows make a crown. Everything is a metaphor. The golden altar reredos is the shape of a cottage – or even a glowing stable. Now that I write this and look again, I see two brush strokes – a Joseph and Mary bowed over where the baby would be. When I paint, something in the action takes over, until the shapes and colours sing together in a way that rings true.

Dawn Wood

JOHN WATT OBITUARY

John, one of our regulars at Soup 'n' Soul, died in the early hours of a January morning after allegedly being attacked by three teenagers who, apparently, had come from a New Year Party.

By now, John, you will know that it does not end on a dark Dundee street in the middle of winter at the hands of those who had parked their humanity at home. They, and their ilk, cannot harm you any more.

I came to know you through my time at St. Salvador's (off the Hilltown) on Sunday afternoons. You enjoyed the tea, scones and cakes as much as everyone else and, like everyone else, I think you appreciated the chance to chat to others even more.

Life had not been easy for you but you made the best of it. I never heard you complain about anything and you were always unfailingly polite. If the sign of a life worthy of note is the positive effect that it has on others, you made your mark John.

Months after I left St. Salvador's you greeted me with the broadest of smiles every time we passed in the street. Sometimes you stopped to talk. Your grace and dignity would have put many much more privileged people to shame. Perhaps your attacker/s thought you were of no value -a tin can to kick down the street for a bit of fun.

There are plenty of people in the places you used to go who can prove them wrong. I count myself one of them.

Rest In Peace John!

Thanks to Jeremy Auld, John Nicoll, Ann Penhale, Graham Robertson and Dawn Wood. Submissions for the next edition of the Angel to castlehill.angel@googlegmail.com.

