

When I began writing this I'd just come in from church last Sunday – Remembrance Sunday. It was a weekend off and so I wasn't in the Cathedral as I'd normally have been but staying with a friend in Sheffield. The church is one which identifies itself as part of the Inclusive Church network and the new notice board outside the church on a main road into Sheffield city centre boldly proclaims 'we welcome all people'.

The church has been reordered in the last decade so it's now a building fit for purpose, the worship space reduced in size to suit the congregation, proper lighting, good sound, flexible seating and the rest of the nave and the other parts of the building no longer required for worship have been turned into a mixture of rooms large and small for use by different groups.

There's nothing so unusual about any of this – in fact it's a familiar story across our churches – large often Victorian churches and chapels reordered to give the space for worship that we need and the space for the other mission activities in which we engage – and very often, not always, but very often that work has been really successful.

So there was nothing unusual about this inner city urban estate church and there was nothing remarkable about the worship. They had a good organist – a student from the University who was reading music and was excellent (on second thoughts that probably is unusual); the children were in church for the act of remembrance, we were singing from one of the many Kevin Mayhew hymn books that are on the market, there was a good home-made liturgy booklet for the Eucharist and the standard notice sheet with pleas for stuff for the forthcoming Christmas Fair and a notice about the parish film club (that did sound excellent – watching 'The King's Speech' one Sunday evening together and then meeting the following Sunday to talk about it).

There was nothing unusual but I loved it.

Now I have at this stage to come out and declare that I love going to church. My job as Precentor of Southwark Cathedral for the last 12 years has been perfect for me – like a kid in a toy shop. I've always been like that; always loved going to church, always loved worshipping. For some reason I got it at an early age. I hated Sunday School and pleaded with my mum to be allowed to go to the High Mass instead. Sunday School seemed dreary to me by comparison with the bells and smells and the colour and the drama and the magic of the liturgy. The best way to achieve the escape from the clutches of Sunday School was to join the choir and so at 7 that was what I did and I never looked back – certainly not to Sunday School. And of course I didn't know what was going on in the church – but it didn't matter. I soon learnt – learnt through the liturgy what faith was about, who Jesus is, what it means to be a Christian, all those things that Sunday School would have taught me, but in a much more real way, in a way that was caught up with what it means to encounter the living God, to meet the divine in the place where you are.

The late and much missed Dean of Southwark, Colin Slee, present at the founding of Inclusive Church, used to call me a mass-junkie because when anyone in the Chapter said that they could no longer take a service and who could cover for them, my hand was up immediately. Like a child eager to get on stage at a panto I'm always eager to get out there and to worship and lead worship – because I suppose not only is it where I really feel that I encounter God but where I also feel that the church is most itself and most living out its vocation.

But back to Sheffield and that unremarkable Remembrance Sunday service which I so enjoyed. There was nothing remarkable but what was so wonderful was that what was said on the notice board outside – the business of everyone being welcomed – was being lived out, expressed,

celebrated in the liturgy. It really did feel inclusive; it really did feel as though a community had come together in all of its diversity.

The children planted poppies in a little garden in front of the altar and read parts of poems written during conflicts; an elderly woman who'd served in the WRAFs lead the intercessions – beautifully; a mixture of people brought up the offertory, helped us to communion; and in the notices a young woman born in Zimbabwe but now living here told us about a gathering in that church the previous day of 50 young Zimbabweans from across the country who were together to meet and worship and what a fantastic time they'd had and how generous the congregation had been in letting them use the church.

And as we come towards the end of this Conference in which we've been thinking together about our ministry in relation to the gospel my question to myself and to you is how much, in unremarkable ways, our worship reflects who we are and the inclusive gospel we seek to proclaim.

Monday is my day off and so I usually head up to the West End to do some shopping and this is a great time of course for heading along Oxford Street or Regent Street or Piccadilly to do some window shopping and that's particularly lovely as Christmas approaches and the big stores have their windows decked out with a Christmas theme.

Fortnum's is my favourite of course – camp as a matter of course, beautiful and magical – and you can usually still see something of what they sell – sugared almonds, lovely puddings and cakes and jellied fruits all for the season.

Worship is our shop window and it too has to say who we are, what we're about, what we believe in. People coming to join us in worship should know something, maybe a lot, of what we believe, what we stand for as a church, as a community of believers by being there with us in the services that we offer. And I really do wonder what messages we give to people when they come to worship with us and whether that's the message that we hope we give, the message we intend to give.

And if we are inclusive churches, is our liturgy inclusive and if so what makes for inclusive liturgy?

A few years ago I was invited to go north of the river into the Diocese of London and to a parish in the East End to act as their liturgical adviser. The priest knew me, the congregation didn't and so I made use of this anonymity by going to their main Eucharist one Sunday morning in lay clothes. Dog collars, as those of us who wear them know only too well, demand a particular response – I didn't want that. I wanted people just to see a rather ordinary 50 year old man arriving at church.

It was fascinating. From the lack of welcome onwards it was not a good experience. And it wasn't just the congregation and in fact not really the congregation because one of the most difficult things was for me to have to tell the parish priest that it was his style of leadership, of presidency which was really setting the tone. In a desire to be a proper 'catholic' he in many ways set a barrier between the sanctuary and the nave, a cold tone which had chilled the warmth out of the congregation. And he was and is a good priest with the best of intentions and he took my comments as positively as he could – it's not easy when someone tells you that it's your fault – and the whole congregation began to change what they were doing and how they were doing it. After 2 years of working I think that things were better – though by then of course I too was inculturated into their way of doing and seeing things.

So we need fresh eyes cast on how we live as a worshipping community, fresh eyes to see whether we're as inclusive as we claim to be. Only those fresh eyes can tell us whether the shop window does justice to what we have to sell, what we have to give to the people who come through the doors of our churches to encounter the living God whose deep desire it is that they're there, that they're included at the meal, seated at the table.

The title that I was given for this session was 'Worship and the Gospel'. The two are inextricably bound of course for in the general sense of the word it's from the liturgy, from the work of the people of God that the good news of God for all people is proclaimed. Within the liturgy itself it's the reading of the Gospel that is the fulcrum, is at the heart of what we do. But when we read the gospels themselves Jesus says very little about worship.

Although there are a few references to Jesus worshipping in the synagogue, reading the scriptures, going to the temple, that's it. The rest of the gospels are about what happens on the road, away from the established places of worship, away from the conventional way of being the people of God, beyond the rules, breaking, bending them. So much of what Jesus does is when he's on the move, talking to people as he walks, finding people on the footpaths, by the side of the road. The expectation that we have that we'll encounter our Living Lord in church is bizarre when in reality we are more likely to encounter our Living Lord in the place where he's most at home, outside, on the road.

That may be why catholics like me love doing things on the street! In my parish in Leeds the greatest events in the year were when we took religion out of the church and into the streets. Like the wonderful opening of that film *East is East* with the outdoor procession and the crowds, this was the easiest place in which to meet people with the things of God.

And it isn't just catholics who can do this. One parish in Southwark has a week of worship in a tent on the local park each year, another has a wayside pulpit built onto their church on the Brixton Road. But you have to have confidence to get out there.

But I have three passages which I want to share with you and which I think have important things to say to us about how we re-imagine worship from an inclusive perspective.

This first event, dinner at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7.36-50) is of course not an occasion of worship at all but one of the many meals to which Jesus was invited and what a scandalous one it turned out to be. This wonderful painting by Peter Paul Rubens captures the scene for us with all its outrage and confusion.



There's something slightly reminiscent of pictures of the last supper but it couldn't be more different. They're all seated around a table with its table cloth but Jesus is in the foreground and not

the host, instead his host, Simon the Pharisee, is sat opposite, and between them is the unnamed woman – typically Rubenesque in style – embracing, loving, caressing, kissing Jesus' foot.

And the rest of the guests look both grotesque and scandalised. One of them alongside Jesus is holding the cloth to his mouth appearing as though he's going to be sick – the sight and the intervention of the woman has been so terrible.

In the background the servants – a truly inclusive group - are looking on in wonder. There's a young man, a girl and someone clearly of African heritage. They're so different from the people at the table.

The challenge to Simon made by Jesus is around how he was made to feel wanted.

*[Simon], 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.'* (vv44-47)

It was the unwelcome woman, the source of the scandal who really understood what the true response should be and it was she now seated between the two teachers who was in fact doing the teaching, showing by her actions how we should respond. And the group at the back are looking on to see whether what she does will make any difference.

The way in which those who arrived in our churches in the Windrush period of immigration were frozen out is well documented. Though they were sisters and brothers within the Communion we didn't recognise them as such when they arrived in our pews.

It was a scandalous period of our church life and I hope and pray that we learnt from it. But I suspect not. Simon is not so far from the way in which welcome is coped with in many of our churches.

At Southwark Cathedral - like many other places - over the years we've tried to put a lot of emphasis on the quality of welcome. It was one of the things I didn't find in that East End church who did think of themselves as friendly. But that first moment of encounter of the person, especially the newcomer arriving at church and being led into the worship experience with us, that's where good things can happen or bad.

And the other is, knowing who's there. That is a particular problem with large congregations. I would like to celebrate for once small congregations. I know that we're all meant to be thinking big and I don't want you to go away and tell people that I don't believe in growing churches – I do – but big churches easily lose what small churches have in abundance – people know each other, or they should!

At Southwark Cathedral we had a marvellous experience this year which really helped us to begin to understand who was worshipping with us. We put quite a lot of energy into the celebration of the King James Version of the Bible. The reason for that is Bishop Lancelot Andrewes is buried alongside the high altar.

As an aside had I been writing this before last Friday I would have waxed on about how he was the General Editor of the process of translation and how wonderful the language is and how much we owe him, blah, blah, blah. But then Dr Peter McCullough came to deliver a lecture to the College of Canons last Friday evening and managed to demythologise the whole thing – from a position of deep respect for the learned Prelate of course. One fascinating thing he said and which Archbishop Rowan also referred to in his sermon at Westminster Abbey this week, was that he thought that

Andrewes would be horrified that we'd spent a year celebrating a 400 year old translation as he wouldn't have celebrated that fact at all, thinking that translation was an ongoing project to make the scriptures ever relevant.

Anyway, one of the things that we did between Pentecost and Christ the King has been to invite members of the congregation whose first language is not English to read one of the readings at the Choral Eucharist in their own language. There was an amazing response and we've heard the scriptures read in so many languages. But we've also discovered just who is out there, just who we're worshipping with and the level of diversity – a great deal of which is not always obvious. And I think for those who've read there's been a great sense of confidence giving, that they've been valued for their heritage and they read with real strength and real pride – and it cost us nothing and gave us so much as an inclusive community at worship.

But back to the picture.

What's so amazing about the way in which Rubens depicts the scene is the way in which those who are sitting at the table have a completely different response to Jesus than the women intruding into their gathering. They're looking with amazement, disgust, bafflement or even disinterest whilst she is in this attitude of generous love responding to the reality of Jesus which they have been unable to see. The woman at the centre of the picture teaches us about what only a truly inclusive gathering around every table with Jesus can give.

It's the insights which she brings and that gathering behind the seated figures that we need in worship, the presence of people which challenge our usual ways of doing things, of being. And that's hard to accept at times and there's always resistance but worship which reflects the meals at which Jesus is present needs to reflect the reality of his encounters with people.

That brings me to my second story and my second rather provocative picture.



Perhaps one of the most challenging meetings that we read about in the gospels comes in St John's Gospel and is the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4.5-42).

It's an amazing story, so rich in meaning, so deep in its significance for the way in which we deal with people. But it isn't the meeting in general that I wanted to mention. Instead it was the distraction in the conversation which interests me in the context of what we're thinking about.

As you'll remember, the conversation, which was unconventional from its very beginning – why was this solitary man talking to this solitary woman in the heat of the day – had been first about water, then living water and then turned to her private life and her own story in which Jesus revealed himself to the woman to be something of a prophet.

In an effort to move the conversation on the woman all of a sudden as if from nowhere turns on the issue that separated the Jews and the Samaritans – the place of Jerusalem in the worship of the people.

*The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'* (4.19-24)



In a gospel short on material about how to worship it seems to me that there's something important about this injunction which Jesus gives to us. And if we're thinking about how signing up to an inclusive vision of what being church means then these two things – spirit and truth must be central to how we worship.

The first injunction that we should worship in spirit flows from the fact that Jesus says God is spirit. The worship that we offer therefore we have to offer in a way which is true to the nature of God. And so I want to suggest to you that worship worth its name must reflect the very nature of God.

That English word worship helps us to understand this. The word means, as you well know, giving worth to God. Evelyn Underhill described it as 'the response that conscious beings make to their creator'. We worship the one we know in a way that gives worth, true value, to the one that we know who knows us and loves us and out of that love created us.

And couple this with truth and bring into it the vision that we share for the nature of the truth, then the worship that we offer if it is to be true to the gospel and true to the spirit, the nature, the reality of God has to be true to who we are as a community.

One of the great things about being in South London is the wonderful diversity that is reflected in all our congregations. But our worship doesn't always reflect that diversity, doesn't reflect the nature of God as we see it incarnated before and among us. I was a member of a working party on inculturation of worship established by Bishop Tom Butler and when we went out to discover what was going on we found wonderfully exciting examples of congregations learning together from each other about ways in which to worship and we discovered congregations that hadn't thought of doing this or hadn't dared to do this.

And I have to admit to you that it's something with which we struggle at the Cathedral. How do we maintain that Cathedral tradition, the great choral tradition and be responsive and reflective of the people we are and the nature of the God who has created us as we are? It takes imagination but it also demands that we listen to each other and hear the stories of how we worship, authentically, truthfully.

There was something very dangerous about the encounter at the well and that's perhaps the most exciting thing about the story. The woman came out at the heat of the day to collect water so that she didn't have to meet the other women. Perhaps they shunned her because of her rather unconventional lifestyle. Jesus shouldn't have talked to a woman on her own, it broke all the conventions of the day. He shouldn't have been in the Samaritan territory, he shouldn't have been having anything to do with a Samaritan, but he did. If they'd been found together it would have been a scandal and indeed when the disciples came back they were shocked and if you notice never speak to the woman, it's as if she doesn't exist for them.

But look at the final verses of this passage

*Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' (28-29)*

She managed to get over her fear of her neighbours and evangelises them and then the final few verses

*Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.' (39-42)*

The risk produced a wonderful mission opportunity, an amazing story of evangelism and of freeing up. Because the spirit and truth were both there in the encounter so much flowed from it for the rest of the community.

Honest congregations who recognise who they are, who are prepared to run the risk of being open with each other will worship differently. When we recognise that we're not just black and white, male and female, but gay, lesbian, bi-sexual as well as straight, when we recognise our different physical abilities, mental health, skills, histories, similarities and differences, when the rich are as generous as the poor and when we embrace and celebrate all of this then the worship we offer will reflect the nature of the God who made us as we are and loves us as we are and in that divine nature holds all of our difference and diversity, who is inclusive in that divine nature. That for me is worship in spirit and in truth, truthful about who we are in a manner that reflects the nature of the God whom we worship and to whom we offer true worth.

And then of course what we offer has to be up to the mark – the very best and that means that part of what we mean by reflecting the nature of God and our nature, individual and corporate is about the quality of the worship that we offer. But you might want to ask me about that?

I want to move to my final picture. It's Caravaggio's depiction of the Supper at Emmaus.



When I was a kid my grandma, a great fan of Royal Doulton figurines – she was something of a Hyacinth Bucket – had on her mantelpiece an ornament called 'A fishermen's tale', two old guys sitting on a bench bragging about their catches and their arms were opened out to describe the size of the fish. Looking at this picture always reminds me of that. The old guy on the right looks like he's telling Jesus how big his catch was.

I also want to say that I disagree with one of the fundamental elements that Caravaggio describes in his painting. There's no woman around this table and I think that this is scripturally wrong.

The story of Emmaus is in Luke's Gospel (Luke 24.13-35). Luke mentions these two people walking away from Jerusalem on the day of resurrection. They were escaping all that had been going on and seeking refuge in a village some distance away – perhaps where they lived. We learn that one of them is named Cleopas. Now that is a name we recognise because in St John's account of the passion we're told that standing at the foot of the cross were

*'[Jesus'] mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19.25)*

So I believe that what we have in this story is a couple – Cleopas and Mary – who've been right there in the thick of it – actual witnesses of the death of Jesus, brave souls from the foot of the cross – making their way home and as any couple talking through the everything that they've seen over the last three days. They're no casual bystanders, not people on the edge, but known by Jesus – his aunt and uncle - known by the disciples, known by Mary – almost as if they were part of the family.

And therefore it becomes even more surprising if that's the case that they haven't put two and two together. That when this stranger joins them – and why they don't recognise him if they know him so well – is another question – he has to draw out from the scriptures the connections with their experience.

I'd love to go on Desert Island Discs – it'd be a great challenge to choose those 8 records and then have the difficult job of selecting only one to remain with me. You can play the same game with

scriptural texts. If there was one passage which I could not live without what would it be? For me the answer is this account of the journey to Emmaus. This for me is the gospel within the gospel. There's so much in it but principally that Eucharistic shape that sets this encounter almost in the context of worship.

The important things to note are that the encounter with Jesus begins with a breaking of the word, the unfolding of the word as the disciples later describe it. The stranger opens up for these two disciples the word of God. They travel with Jesus and listen as things become clear to them. It's similar to what Philip does for the Ethiopian Eunuch when he meets him on the road to Gaza in that story from the Acts of the Apostles.

That encounter led to the sacrament of baptism. The encounter on the road to Emmaus led to broken bread at a table – what we recognise as the sacrament of the Eucharist. The night was drawing on and it was the time to stop travelling and begin eating. So the stranger is persuaded to stay with the disciples at their house.

And the guest becomes the host as he takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks and shares it. And as he does so they realise that this is no stranger but Jesus.

And this is where our picture comes in and where the final things that I'd want to say about worship and the gospel are to be found.

The first thing I would notice is the rapt attention of those around Jesus. This would have been the same on the road as they listened to him break open the scriptures for them. Even though they were intimate friends, relatives, even though they'd been there, they hadn't put two and two together. Now teaching is not the primary purpose of worship but it's there in the mix. When we gather together and hear the word of God there has to be that business of making connections, of someone breaking open that word for today, with intelligence, with insight, applying the word to the situations in which we find ourselves.

One of the things that our critics say of 'liberals' is that we disregard the scriptures and bring no rigour to our study of them. I think they're wrong but if there is even a scintilla of truth in what they say we have to address that. The word of God is as central to inclusive worship as it is to any other kind of worship and real engagement with scripture is real engagement with Jesus the living word of God and that's what we want in the communities of which we're part. And just because we've been there and are intimate in the organisation and the shape of our community doesn't mean we can give up making the connections. After all this Mary at the foot of the cross, alongside the Mother of Jesus, had not made the connection with the suffering servant of the scriptures.

So there's that intense engagement with Jesus that we see in this picture and then the hand of Christ pointing out of the picture but almost in a gesture of blessing. You'll know that bishops tend to give a three-fingered blessing as opposed to priests who're not supposed to. The three fingers represent the trinity.

So the hand of Jesus stretched across the table, three fingers extended, perhaps denotes his divine nature and the blessing he brings. But even more so the blessing with which he sends us.

The final verses of the Emmaus story are so important. Having realised the presence of Jesus with them as bread is broken, they then leave.

*That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (vv 33-35)*

Remember it was dark, this was a country road, there were bandits and wild animals around. They could have waited until it was lighter and safer. But no – their mission was too urgent for that – they had to make Christ known. Caravaggio's Jesus is sending them out and sending us out from the table into the streets, with an urgent proclamation – 'The Lord has risen indeed' – and for everyone out there – an inclusive resurrection of an inclusive Christ for an inclusive world.

Worship brings us into Church and sends us out into the world, it involves a welcome to all who arrive, it involves encountering the very spirit of God as we encounter the truth of who we are, it's about making the connections between the Word and our lives, it's about sharing broken word and broken bread and knowing that in each of them Jesus is present; it's about going out with urgency into the dark and dangerous places of the world with the light of the resurrected Christ and the Easter proclamation. And it's about one other thing.

Every time someone is licensed for ministry in the Church of England they have to make the Declaration of Assent. In that declaration there's the most important phrase about the faith we celebrate in worship

*'which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation'*

Every time we meet we're a fresh expression of church, a new gathering, a new celebration of who we are as church. I remind people of the truth of this always. No two acts of worship are ever the same and they reflect who we are now, today, within a context of tradition and looking to the future reality of God.

We do our duty when we keep our worship fresh, when we keep our worship inclusive, when the light of the gospel shines through word and action for this generation and all who want to know Jesus.

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