

ADDRESSES FOR HOLY WEEK

Monday 10th April 2017

Introductory remarks

Pilgrim:
when your ship,
when your ship,
long moored in harbour,
gives you the illusion
of being a house;
when your ship
begins to put down roots
in the stagnant water by the quay;
put out to sea!
Save your boat's journeying soul,
and your own pilgrim soul,
cost what it may.

Dom Helder Camara; from *A Thousand Reasons for Living*, DLT, 1981, p40
Quoted by David Runcorn, *The Road to Growth Less Travelled*, Grove, 2008,
p5

Dom Helder Camara was a Brazilian RC Archbishop. He was an advocate of liberation theology, best remembered for preaching for a church closer to the poor and for non-violence. He is quoted as having said, "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist."

Camara's prayer/poem reminds us that Christian discipleship is a call to a certain kind of homelessness. It is to uproot from the most basic, familiar securities in a radical, fundamental way.

After all, we follow the one who *had nowhere to lay his head*
(Luke 9:58)

The early Christians knew this well enough. They were after all known as people of *the Way*. Not people of the *place* but people of the way. St Peter and St James greet the faithful in their letters as ‘aliens’, ‘exiles’ or even as ‘the dispersion’ - the scattered ones!

...when your ship
begins to put down roots
in the stagnant water by the quay;
put out to sea!

It’s a really good concept on which to reflect during Lent. So to apply Helder Camara’s words to our own situation: has the ship of our faith been ‘long-moored’ in harbour? Has the ship of faith that is this community of St David’s Exeter, begun to ‘put down roots in the stagnant water by the quay’?

Over the course of these three evenings: I’d like to share four marks of authentic spiritual growth (cf Runcorn, p13ff) that I think I see in our gospel readings for these three evenings. They are **contradictory** in that each mark runs counter to the things our culture celebrates. They are

A Way of **Loss**

A Way of **Waiting** and **Darkness** (that’s two for tomorrow!)

A Way of **Not Knowing**

So: A Way of Loss

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead...

The sisters, Mary & Martha, had previously suffered the *loss* of Lazarus, and, if the chief priests had their way, they would soon lose brother Lazarus again for *...the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well* [as well as Jesus] we read in John 12.10. And just to complete this tapestry of loss, Jesus himself anticipates the loss his own disciples will experience at his death (see v8).

Next Sunday, as we turn from the Passion to Easter joy, we shall hear Mary Magdalene's words at the garden tomb: *They have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid him.* 'Loss' is at the heart of the Easter story; Jesus is first dead and gone; then alive and present in a new and miraculous, but unpredictable, way! And in the following weeks he is more often absent than present.

Now if our expectation is that *real* faith is about presence, life, blessing and meeting — we will find it very hard to understand *loss* when it comes along. Because there is no comfortable way of being lost we tend to look for the quickest way out of it. But it needs our time and our attention. The Bible never expects faith to be a smooth process! Even in moments of deepest need and crisis God can be bafflingly elusive. David Runcorn has written that 'lament is what happens when faith and experience collide.' (op cit.) Again and again in the Psalms it is lament and protest that

lead to renewed hope. Psalms that start with bellows of pain and questioning often end with praise.

The first mark of authentic spiritual growth: **a way of loss**; a way that recognises that our message must at times be tentative, humble, exploratory and vulnerable.

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following Your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please You
does in fact please You.
And I hope that I have that desire
in all that I am doing.

And I know that if I do this,
You will lead me by the right road
although I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust You always,
though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death,
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,
and will never leave me
to face my perils alone. Amen.

Thomas Merton