

Lent 2006 – Looking back

This is a summary of the Lent Group which met on Mondays during March/April 2006

General

A total of 10 people attended over the five weeks but the numbers attending any one session varied from 6 to 8. The leader of the sessions was Brian Bainbridge who also wrote this report.

The prepared material was very useful and stimulated active discussion which meant that the sessions were relatively easy to prepare for and to run. The excerpts from the Messiah were useful although I shortened some arias and played the next aria for others. I introduced the arias with a comment on the source and context of the texts used, which proved to be very interesting and useful.

Comments on the individual Sessions

Week 1 Forgiveness

The power of forgiveness and the necessity for it were well recognised, and the destructive power of revenge or condemnation was seen as the reverse of this. Forgiveness without repentance was seen as unsatisfactory particularly if the person forgiven did not recognise that they had done anything wrong. Very often people who are wronged want an apology and recognition that they have been wronged, or failing this then they want justice. Repentance has involved restitution in the past. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and similar attempts elsewhere in Africa and Europe were seen as a very useful way of coming to terms with appalling situations of loss and grief. The aim was to get people to admit wrong and to seek forgiveness rather than to achieve justice or restitution.

Week 2 Priorities

Church of England

Should provide spiritual leadership for members of the Church;

Spread the Gospel (Good news) throughout the Church and the World;

Be active in caring for the Poor and needy (e.g. Make Poverty History);

Influence political decision-making affecting the material and spiritual well being of people in the Church and throughout the World;

Work towards the recognition of diversity in the Christian Church and work towards identifying the commonly agreed message;

Work towards tolerance between faith groups and search for shared solutions to world problems;

Work towards modernisation of the Church without the loss of fundamental truths.

Holy Cross Church

Spiritual development of all members of the Church, including children;

Providing a focus for Christian worship and witness in the local community;

Initiate a programme for Outreach and charitable giving in the Parish, the local community and the world;



Provide a focus for social activities, pastoral work, bereavement counselling, educational and links between the schools and the Church, youth work and involving teenagers;

Organise financial support for funding the church buildings, the Common Fund, the daily running costs, charitable giving and the Clergy;

Provide a welcome to newcomers to the Church and to the community; Raise funds by Stewardship;

Organise fund raising and social activities such as coffee

mornings, bring and buy sales, fairs, barbecues, treasure hunts, concerts, quizzes, social evenings etc. Enable the Church to develop spiritually without being over burdened by the financing of the Building and Plant.

Self

Develop a practical and realistic knowledge of God;

Better co-existence with God;

Improve our knowledge of the Gospel and the Word of God;

Outreach into the community to witness the Good News (e.g. Good Friday procession, Palm Sunday, social activities, Greenford carnival, Fairs, service to the community);

Give money and time to Charities in the Local Area and further afield;

Support and help to organise spiritual and social activities in the Parish by volunteering.

Week 3 Money and the Church

As you might expect, this session was very lively even in the absence of Malcolm! It was decided that churches needed to have enough money to run the buildings and activities, and then for there to be an excess so that others could be helped. In the past the church was very rich and built huge Cathedrals and monasteries. Henry VIII recognised how rich the church was and dissolved the Monasteries, while Luther drew attention to the wealth of the Church which had been achieved by selling indulgences. At Holy Cross, where there was no excess, charity giving tended to be from specific activities like concerts, the pantomime etc. Obviously giving by church members should really be increased, and 5% and 10% tithes were mentioned but obviously not often achieved at Holy Cross. Failing increased giving, money should be saved e.g. heating bills are now excessive and it was essential that heat loss from the New Church should be minimised by urgently designing an efficient heat break at the entrance and also by secondary glazing and insulation. Cathedrals have managed to do this why can't Holy Cross? There was also a need for a transparent door so that people walking in Ferrymead Gardens can see into the church. Other possible ways of saving heating bills were a false ceiling or a redesign of the inside of the new Church (recognised as being very difficult due to planning and other constraints).

We should help the less fortunate wherever possible but it was recognised that there were problems in helping people who gambled, were alcoholics or drug addicts. These people needed help with a cure, which was a more important long-term aim than temporary help with material needs.

Children e.g. with HIV/AIDS obviously needed help whatever their situation as this could not be their fault. In the UK, there has been a problem with patients who needed NHS treatment for say lung cancer when they continued to smoke.

Charity giving was seen as problematical when money was siphoned off by political leaders rather than reaching the people who needed it. It was better to give the money to Non Governmental Organisations and charities rather than to governments.

Week Four Dark Forces

The group had enjoyed Suzanne Streckmann's sermon. Evil was seen to stem both from intolerance with its roots in religion, politics and tribal differences. Land grabs, shortage of water, tribal and racial jealousy could all result in warfare, genocide or long-term conflict. Good people could help to prevent situations getting worse e.g. Ghandi had a major impact by peaceful protests. Violence has been said to be neutral and long-term ideas are considered to be more important. The Vikings destroyed the monks on Iona but the church has survived and reoccupied the island. However in opposition to this idea, violence has almost destroyed complete cultures or races e.g. aborigines in Australia, native Indians in N America. Ordinary people did try to stop the Nazis but several assassination attempts failed. Apathy or cowardice can be a major dark force ("For evil to triumph over good, it is only necessary for the good to do nothing"). The evils of pollution, litter, misuse of earth's resources were discussed at length and possible solutions suggested.

There was a brief discussion on the reflection for Monday 27th March concerning the importance of our dark side. Recognition of our dark side could lead to a greater tolerance of evil in other people. Tolerance was seen as the ultimate answer to many of the racial and religious problems of the present day. Our dark side can result in destructive forces of anger and resentment although it could be argued that anger may be necessary to actually do something active to oppose evil or change things for the better.

Week five Death and sacrifice of life

The discussion revolved round giving up one's life to save others. Most people agreed that it is natural to risk you life to save your own child but it might be different if there were a certainty of death. There were only two situations, which the group agreed on was for the greater good of mankind. These were dying to make sure that Hitler or Sadam Hussein was assassinated. There was some sympathy for suicide bombers who had nothing more to lose and felt that there was nothing else they could do to rescue their situation e.g. in Palestine where all their family have been killed, and land and house taken away. There was however a big difference between sacrificing your own life to save others and killing yourself to kill others.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The Monday Lent Group was lively and well attended. The group appeared to appreciate the chance to meet socially without the pressure at the end of Sunday Services (perhaps there is a need for coffee mornings, bring and buy sales etc. in addition to the Tuesday tea club and Wednesday lunches?) The notes prepared in the boxes were stimulating and there was no problem in finding topics to talk about. Most people took an active part in the discussion and it was a pleasure to be involved with some very interesting sessions.

