

Sermon: The Light of Thy Truth...

I really thought Parish Clerk Rupert might have been arrested this morning. I mean, did you hear the words of the Collect he read? *Almighty God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth.* Rupert, you are accused of committing a serious crime, and I expect any minute the appearance of the Thought Police. For that Collect actually assumes that there is some difference between truth and error. That some things are right and others wrong. That there is the light of the truth and the darkness of lies. If you said *Amen* at the end of that Collect, then I'm afraid you're as guilty as Rupert. You are hereby charged with the following offences:

That you did wilfully and with intelligence aforethought state that some things are true but other things are false. That you did callously discriminate and allege that there be some who hold notions which are in error. You are therefore guilty of the under-mentioned crimes: elitism, for thinking that you know better than some others; incitement to religious hatred, because you infer that there are false beliefs; narrow minded sectarianism, for daring to state that the Christian faith is true – with the implication that other beliefs are not. You are also guilty of antiquarianism, medievalism and obscurantism and of giving offence to atheists by denying that their beliefs are valid. Moreover, if you're all guilty to these charges, I plead guilty with you.

For there is *the light of God's truth.* And it is what we stand for. But what is God's truth? It's there in the Creed of course. But God's truth is more than statements. It's more than what can be *said.* It's more than can be *thought.* So what is this truth? You have heard a lot of talk from me recently about the primacy of *being* over *thinking* – because thinking has to be *about* something. And that all the somethings there are – all being – owes its being to God. So the truth is to rejoice in the being that God has given you.

You've also heard me banging on quite a bit about the greatness of the Pope recently. So let me say a word for the evangelicals for a change. (I more than half expected to hear a loud *Amen* here from another Parish Clerk). The evangelical preachers say you must give your life to Christ. And this means something. It means that you must accept that your whole being is a gift from God and that the purpose and end of your whole life must either be rooted in God and always tend towards God – or else it is going nowhere. Without God, we're finished. There is literally nothing to us. You can express and explain this in the old tub-thumping language of salvation or damnation if you like – and there's no harm in that. No harm at all talking about heaven and hell, glory or eternal death. Because that's what it amounts to. With God we *are* and without God we *are not*

But before we get to heaven or hell beyond the grave, there is a life here and now. And in this life we have the choice of whether to belong to God, to tend towards him, to be grafted, rooted, built in him - or to do something else. To turn to God is the light of his truth, which is life. To turn away is error and it is death, nothing. So the choice is truth or error: being or nothing.

Just let's be completely practical here. Some sermons are so spiritually refined that they're of no earthly use. Let's ask just *how* we give ourselves to God and will to find our being in him. How do we do it? What's it like?

Since we've got the choir here and you've all been singing hymns, let's see if a musical example is any help. If someone gives himself to music, what does that entail? It involves accepting the total reality of music and being *into it* as they say. The musical learner learns musical notation, key signatures, the notes on the staff, rests, modulations, the principles of harmony, cadences, augmented and diminished chords, ternary form, tonal progressions, dominant, subdominant, tonic, supertonic – the lot. And the musical learner really applies himself practically. At scales, graded exercises, the theory notebook, the art of fugue, five finger exercises, breathing exercises – the whole thing.

Notice what the musician does not do. He doesn't stick his tuning fork back in his bottom drawer and say, *I wonder if there actually is such a thing as C-major? Or, You know, when I come to think of it, I don't really believe in crotchets. I even have my doubts about church organs...*

Now the reward for all this music-learning and piano practice, scales and *arpeggios* is that you become a musical being. This is wonderful, for it means that you can appreciate something of what music is. You can *produce* some music. And the glorious blessing which this brings is that you really feel you are part of music. And this feeling is not a delusion, not a confidence trick. It is real because the experience of music making is real. As Eliot says *You are the music while the music lasts*.

Perhaps the greatest single achievement of the musician, whether she is a performer or a composer, is in a way to be someone who orders time. Think of the delicious ambiguity *beats time*. It is the musician who escapes clock time by transcending it. For the competent musician fifty minutes isn't just any old fifty minutes of drab duration. Fifty minutes is the length of, say Beethoven's *Fifth*. And those fifty minutes are ordered in that symphony in a way that uses time marvellously. You might even say it is music which best teaches us what time is. Not clock time, but quality time. You hear a piece by Bach, Purcell or Mozart and you think, *Ah yes, that's what time is FOR!*

All the lovely blessings, happinesses and satisfactions I have mentioned come about because the musician gives himself to music. Now something like this happens when we give ourselves to God. The musician learns to become rooted in music, or you might say to wallow in it, to splash around in it with delight and confidence – because he's *in his element*. He couldn't do music before he gave himself to music. And you can't do God until you give yourself to God.

This goes beyond saying you believe certain things about God to be true. It's more than reciting the Creed. It's not holding in your mind propositions about God and making a conjecture as to whether they're true. Giving yourself to God is not just *thinking* about God. It is *being towards* God. As the musician is *being towards* music.

You just go. It is the reorientation of your whole being. Repentance means *turning round in the opposite direction*. *Being towards* God. As the great Charles Sisson said,

It's like giving yourself up to the police. You offer your being for God to work on, to do as he likes with. You don't introspect. You don't ponder whether God exists any more than the musician doubts the existence of B-flat. You take God's being for granted and play around in it – as the composer might play around in a succession of keys.

And like the young musical learner who finds he can make a stab at the little minuet in G attributed to Beethoven, if you turn your *being towards* God you will find little intimations of godliness. And the wonder of it is that while you are *being towards* God, the being of God comes to meet and enfold you in all his loveliness. You're not going to face a stern judge or an inquisition. If you turn – if you turn your little *being towards* God, God will come running to meet you like the father of the prodigal son who *seeth him afar off*. He will be near you, closer than you could imagine – as he was with the two apostles on the walk to Emmaus – and they didn't even know.

Be towards God. Do it now. And God will enfold you in the fullness of his being, which is love:

*And already your desire and your will
They will be turned like a wheel, all at one speed,
By the love which moves the sun and the other stars.*