

2 Corinthians chapter 4 v13 to chapter 5 v 1

Tough times!

The past year has, for most of us been unsurpassed in its challenges and, as we look back, I guess we shall all find that our memories of the pandemic contain at least some measure of sorrow. To be sure there have been consolations but we can't avoid the shocking number of people who have died; we can't avoid the shocking number of people whose livelihood has disappeared, and we can't avoid the shocking wounds that the pandemic has inflicted on those who care for our health. Deaths from Covid 19 continue to rise; the virus still stalks the world, and it will continue to do so.

That wasn't a very cheery first paragraph was it? It does contain much that is true though doesn't it? There is much that is discouraging; much that still daunts us, and all that must be faced.

In his second letter to the Christians in Corinth Paul wrote in similar terms of the troubles facing them: we are afflicted in every way, he says, oppressed, persecuted, struck down. The Gospel we have is veiled and the treasure we have is in clay jars. There was much to daunt the Corinthian Christians and even the things that should have encouraged them were sometimes invisible and were always fragile.

But, Paul turns all that on its head and he encourages the Corinthians to see even the challenges as sources of hope. If the Gospel is veiled it is only because some people are wilful in their blindness; eyes can, and will, be opened. If we sometimes feel as fragile as clay pots that is simply in order to remind us that ultimately it's not our strength that matters, but God's, and he is far from fragile. Oppression and persecution and perplexity are a daily challenge to the Corinthians but Paul reminds them none of these things have led to despair or destruction and, most importantly, none have led, or ever could lead, God to forsake his Church.



Paul's climax to this chapter is to be found in the few verses that form today's New Testament reading. As always, Paul's encouragement and good news is rooted in the resurrection. Remember, he says, that God raised Christ from the dead. That's what we believe and that's what we tell people. God will raise us into his presence too and so our lives are infused with thanksgiving. There is nothing that characterises the Christian life as much as thankfulness. The things that strike

us down are really tough, but we do not lose heart because our attention is fixed firmly on God who loves us and raises us into his presence. We fix our attention on him when we pray and when we join together to worship, and we continue to give thanks to him every day; we shall still speak of his goodness to those around us and we shall still care in His name for those in need. "So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16)

HYMN REFLECTION FOR 6th JUNE from Malcolm Sturgess



The Royal School of Church Music (whose HQ is in the Theological College in The Close) has designated today as Church Music Sunday. This is not World Music Day, which is on June 21st. The RSCM "**call on all churches to unite**

in celebrating the role of music in worship and in giving thanks to all those who minister through music". There are countless references to music in the Bible, from Exodus XV to James V. I believe there are a lot of people today who go to church, especially cathedrals, primarily for the music. We give thanks for Ian and William and everybody else who contributes to the musical side of worship here in Harnham.

The words of the hymn below were written by the great James Montgomery, whose career we have detailed before in these Reflections. They are simple, straightforward, comprehensive, and need no introduction, so let us, appropriately, turn to the tune, which has some interesting facts behind it.

The hymn is sung to several tunes, but the most popular by far is *Northampton*, by Charles King (1687 - 1748). Who? He was on the staff at St. Paul's Cathedral, designated a "the serviceable man" by the Vicar. In December 1707 the Organist, the great Jeremiah Clarke, shot himself in the head because of "a violent and hopeless passion for a very beautiful lady of a rank superior to his own" - in fact, one of his pupils. Dr. Croft became organist, but the serviceable Mr. King, aged 20, became Master of the Choristers for the next 41 years. They included Jonathan Battishill, William Boyce and Dr. Maurice Green, so he did well. *Northampton* is a very singable, swaggering tune, which can take going pretty fast. The whole hymn is fun.

Songs of praise the Angels sang,
Heaven with Alleluias rang,
When creation was begun,
When God spake, and it was done.

And will man alone be dumb
Till that glorious kingdom come?
No, the Church delights to raise
Psalms and hymns and songs of praise.

Songs of praise awoke the morn
When the Prince of peace was born;
Songs of praise arose when he
Captive led captivity.

Saints below, with heart and voice,
Still in songs of praise rejoice;
Learning here, by faith and love,
Songs of praise to sing above.

Heaven and earth must pass away,
Songs of praise shall crown that day;
God will make new heavens and earth,
Songs of praise shall hail their birth.

Hymns of glory, songs of praise,
Father, unto thee we raise;
Jesu, glory unto thee,
Ever with the spirit be.