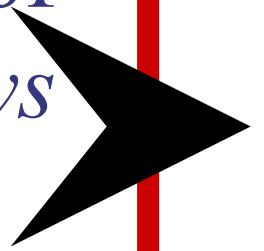


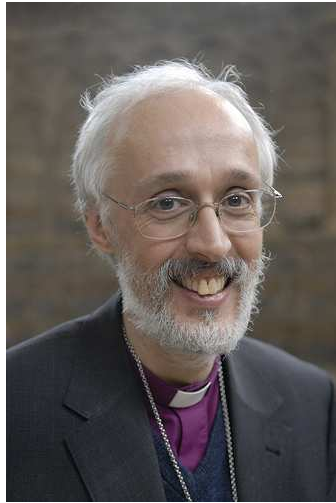
Vicar's Diary
April 2009
for the
June 2009
Issue of
Evesham Parish News





April 1st - *Bishop of Dudley's Visit*

Some real awe-and-wonder on my internet theology discussion group last evening. I've been on this group since it started in about 1994, Bishop David joined not long after, while he was still an urban vicar in Sheffield. In fact we journeyed with him on his transition from parish to purple. Bishop David still sets aside a day to be in a parish in the diocese once a month, and colleagues in the group are in wonder that a bishop can still do this.



I've been so hacked-off that the church has spent too much time talking about its own affairs in the last year, that I've designed a day that is mostly out of church, in the parish. We meet up at Prince Henry's to talk about resurrection, then off to Chadbury to Steve Jordan's to meet the Parish Council and talk about wind-farms and EU social cohesion grants.

Rita gives us morning coffee at the homeless brunch at *Caring Hands* in the Vale Christian Centre, and I get to hear her story of coming to faith, which I didn't know until +David asks her.

Helen Gray, at the Volunteer Centre, has been doing her homework and gives us hard data about the parish's social profile, and how volunteering makes more of a decisive difference in recession. Then it's lunch in Church House and St Egwin's end of term service with lots of clapping and dancing. We go back to school and come back down again with coffee in Carol's office where she shares the experience of her first term as headteacher.

Back at the Vicarage, while I'm cooking for housegroup, we kick around some of the issues that keep coming up. There's no getting away from there being different manifestations of the same question in church: to change or die. I don't think anyone seriously argues with that. It's how we find the balance between the people you have, and where the church needs to be, and

how this is managed in little time we have left.

In housegroup we replay some material from the *Saving Jesus* course, which I ran when I first arrived here, it is the session on parables.

Yvonne and the bishop have a light hearted go about whether it is intellectual or just different, and they come down on the later.

By the time I'm seeing him to the car at 8:30pm, he's done 12 hours here. Yesterday he got in late from a flight from someplace else, if I'd known that, I'd have made for a lighter day.

We haven't ducked the serious issues, and may have given them more time than they deserved, but he goes home with a sense that change is happening, but definitely a work in progress, which is about right.

April 2nd - *The Laughing Buddha*

Lunch with Steve Jordan, who is growing impatient with revisions of the Holy Week programme coming in thick and fast from the Northumbria Community. We're a long way from the things we'd hoped would be in place, but a lot of these people are not Anglicans and, we discover, provisionality is part of their culture, and we agree that we just have to go with it. The up-side is that we have the gift of 50 or more Christians who are spending Holy Week with us, leading worship, going out into the town doing interviews, getting local stories to bring into our worship. We remember previous Holy weeks, a Maundy Thursday with about 25 gathered for that service on a rainy night in Norton, and the dreary Holy Saturday rite, which had my godson bored rigid, asking me what I get out of something like that? Whatever else we're about to do with the Northumbrians, it certainly won't be any worse than what we've been doing in past years.

Palm Sunday

I've been wanting to meet Martin Neil for some time, and we natter about drums while unloading boxes from his boot into St Peter's, Bengeworth. Last week he was in North Carolina in a recording studio with some band or other, and he'll be off to the Far East when he's done with

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Martin Neil in Hyderabad

us. He has a phenomenal collection of drums from around the world, and he knows how to play them. On his website he's jamming with locals in Hyderabad, learning to play an Indian frame

drum. He, and his

wife Rebekah, have an insatiable curiosity about the people they meet through their music. It's not often that you get musicians of this calibre coming to work with you. Martin doesn't do fame, he's just here to contribute to our worship.

Later on in the service three of them lead singing and provide sound for Andy Raine dancing in St Peter's chancel.

I don't know which I loathe more, liturgical dance or happy-clappy songs, but there is something about the quality of Andy's dance which is different from the drippy, unsensual, fixed-smile, neutered versions I saw in churches in the seventies. Here is a middle-aged man being who he is: wholly embodied, and it has an integrity to it that I haven't seen before. I'm embarrassed that I feel wistful, or envious, then I set that aside and realise I am looking at something deeply spiritual, in the best sense. If you believe, as I do, that spirituality is nothing more complex than being *where* you are, and being *who* you are, then this is a profoundly spiritual liturgical offering which has grace and presence, the like of which I have rarely seen.

Monday in Holy Week

This year, we are following the Northumbrian Community daily prayer book. The complines have a definite Celtic feel and the music is folk guitar and frame drum, perfectly executed by Martin and Norman.

I love the compline service but sometimes I feel we cling to the familiar forms because we don't know what else to do. It is not that a Celtic theme is new, I worry about people who need things to always be novel. This is drawing on

another ancient tradition which we need to hear more of. Celtic spirituality is native holiness, which see the presence of God in our own landscapes and vistas. The service also speaks of hospitality, which is one of the essential parts of Christian worship which allowed it to spread in its most vibrant times.



Martin and Norman, Compline at St Andrew's, Hampton

Wednesday in Holy Week

For the last couple of days our Northumbrian guests have been out in the community interviewing folk. John Darby has been taking them to see people he knows and they've built up a really good picture of what is going on, and what the issues are. Ru Brown has set up an artist-in-residence corner in the parish church. The Northumbrians have been keen to attract different ways of praying and doing Easter. Ru has lots of broken ceramics, and is inviting people to take the pieces and make something new from them, a kind've metaphor for the power of resurrection to make beauty out of broken lives. To make beauty, to see resurrection, you have to know where your life is broken, and this is not trivial, it is a big step to take.

Pete, Catherine and I have skipped compline in St Andrew's tonight to go to forum in the town hall; for Pete it is part of gathering the Evesham story. I can tell I'm starting to belong to Evesham because I'm embarrassed my friends have to listen to trivial questions about what's going on in people's back yards. Cllr John Smith is on hand, and his knowledge of the history of various issues is good to know, but the questions don't do him justice.

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The only way we are going to move the community on is if we concentrate on the bigger issues and ask the hard questions about what holds Evesham back. We didn't do much of that tonight.

Maundy Thursday

Well, it was different. I didn't come away to-night with the same feelings I have when we've stripped the altars to Psalm 22. But we tapped into other, no less ancient, traditions of



Andy Raine prepares to leave for Stations on Meon Hill

Maundy Thursday, about footwashing, there was none of the usual press-ganging of token feet, and there was Eucharistic hospitality, a way of making fellow Christians who had travelled some way to get here welcome, which was a side to Christian liturgy we tend to lose as Anglicans.

It is reported back to me that a couple of our people are not happy with it, and I say they

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can raise it with me in person. They won't, and they haven't.

But the look on the faces of those of my people who are there tells its own story, and we have to keep that thought as we plan the future.

Good Friday

So much going on, I don't know where to be. Andy Raine has been fascinated by the Meon Hill story for months: the story which says that when the Abbey was being built, the Devil climbed to the top of Meon Hill to lob a boulder at the building works. This and other Meon Hill stories has inspired Andy to lead a stations of the cross today, which will take some time. I only met Andy on Sunday evening but already I know he won't be doing it by half-measures. By the evening Steve Jordan looks emotionally spent. "I need to write about this in the magazine," he says, "we've been through the mill, and I've experienced parts of Christian worship I have never encountered before.

I'm glad I did it, very glad, but I hope I never have to go through that again."

Back in All Saints, Catherine Askew is beginning to get some shape to the Evesham story. In the years to come we want to make some panels of transitional times in Evesham's story in a way that brings God's question into our history. Catherine lead us through the well-known stories of the Abbey. John Turner raises the question about what order the Eof vision comes, is it before the abbey, or told afterwards? These questions are familiar to any biblical scholar who has to ask, did this story



Revd Catherine Askew, recreating an Evesham time-line

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happen and inspire the events which followed, or was this story told afterwards to express the heart of subsequent events? and it's a good one to raise, and keeps the story human.

To me, it is the recent history which is compelling. Betty Gould worked in the railways when 30-40 trains a day took produce around the country, and the cuts on the railways which Dr Beeching made had a substantial effect on the local economy. The star of the day for me is Mary Brotherton. I learned a long time ago that the best stories of God do not start in university theology departments, but in the lives of ordinary people. This is why the blues is the best place to start looking for God because it is in authentic human experience. Mary stands up in the group and begins to tell her story, of what it is like to move from depending on the land to having to find alternative employment. I'm sure this tale can be told many times in Evesham families, but Mary rehearses it so well, and with such passion. Of all the things the Northumbrians are making possible for us this week, the telling of the lives of local people is one of the things we must take with us on our next chapter of the journey.

Holy Saturday

Catherine has taught us about walking the labyrinth, and a number of our people spend time on it, set out in the nave. This is what naves are for, not warehouses for pews laid out for an hour in the week. We luxuriate in the space as we walk our journeys around its twists and turns.

John and Jo Stevinson, from Winchcombe, arrive and tell the story of the Winchcombe monks who travel to Evesham Abbey before



Hampton Ferry, the last leg of the pilgrimage from Winchcombe.

travelling north to re-found the old Celtic houses of prayer damaged by Norman invasion.

Meanwhile about 25-30 of us have been up since very early to make that same journey. Clive Bostle from the Baptist Church has arranged with churches along the way to greet us and offer hospitality, and flags are presented at each stage of the journey, which will be brought to the vigil tonight.



Holy Saturday Vigil

If one event carries in it my hopes for the future it is this service. Pete and Ben have rigged up a makeshift screen on the chancel platform, and our songs and prayers are made in front of a backdrop of image which Ben has made, and video footage of the story of contemporary Evesham.

When I was with the Northumbrians last November, I said that a parish church did not work on membership but on geography, and that we needed to recover a sense of it being a sacred space where *all* of Evesham's joys and laments could be brought. And this was their response, and it was rich in being engaged with local experience and the hope of resurrection. So many of our Anglican rites honour the past traditions of Christian worship, and do it very well, but this is the first time for a long time that I have seen the local place honoured in worship and made the centre point of our prayer.

Edward Pillar preaches an intense and passionate sermon about why he has to fully stay in the space of waiting and learn the lessons it has for us. I sometimes take Edward's passion for granted, but tonight it was such the right thing to say.

Easter Day

Roy Searle is one of the founders of the Northumbria Community, he is a man at ease in his

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own skin, and has worked with Anglicans for years, so is completely at home in our Easter Day rite. It was a good sermon, a very good sermon, but what stays with me is his recital of the John gospel as performance, and Simon Peter's part spoken with a Geordie accent, be-



The Revd Roy Searle

cause Galileans were northerners, of course.

It is a packed church, not a few have returned who came to us for the first time during the Lent talks, so I'm greeting new friends in the Peace and after coffee.

I'm too tired now to take stock of what we have gained from this week. But people tell me that the use of the nave has caught their imagination, as has the music and lateral ways of thinking about worship.

But the dominant feeling is that we have hosted over 50 people from around the country whose aim was to be a source of gift and of blessing. How many times in life do we encounter people as pure gift? We saw it this Easter, but it will take a while to assimilate, and that's okay.