

Renewing Rhyme

Poems from the Clergy Conference, July 2014

The Revd Pip Martin (St James', Alderholt), a member of the Conference Planning Group, explains

With the letter that welcomed delegates to the 2014 Clergy Conference we included this invitation:

'...for most clergy words are an important tool, but sometimes our use of words needs renewing... So we invite everyone to take a moment during the Clergy Conference to compose something that may come under the very loose heading of 'poem.' It can be a limerick, haiku or a poem with a clear meter or free verse. It may rhyme, or not. It may be serious, or funny, or a bit of both. It can be religious or secular. It can be anonymous or named: all we ask is that it is YOURS, your response to some aspect of this strange phenomenon, the Clergy Conference. There will be a box for submissions and we would like to share some of them during the conference...'

A cardboard box was duly placed in the reception area and the first evening yielded two submissions, and the following day a couple more. They were rather good but I really didn't know how to use them. They were too long to print in the daily newssheet. We thought of displaying them on-screen among the tweets before plenary sessions – but a poem needs more space and more time than such a slot provided.

Eventually I ventured to read one to the assembly at the start of day three and immediately was struck by the positive response (notwithstanding one colleague's asking me if it was ok to be a Christian and hate poetry!) and then by the increased number of other submissions. I then read other poems morning and evening that were equally appreciated, and one that was handed to me on the final morning provided a delightful, and profound, prelude to Bishop Nick's blessing at the close of the Eucharist.

These poems were not polished and edited. They were fresh-forged and of the moment. All were hand-written, often on the back of conference papers, AA route-planner directions or a page torn from a diary. Something is lost in their being typed (especially where I struggled to read the hand-writing...) but I wanted to share them with a wider audience in this way.

Thank you to all who contributed these poems. Each of them conveys a unique and personal, but generously shared, perspective on the conference and its theme of 'God Renewing Hope.'

Spirit of Jazz (inspired by the jazz poem included in David Ford's presentation)

Saxophone streams
weaving magic thru staves of
undulating beauty.
Pursed lips, red cheeks,
blown in wild abandon.
Here is jazz in all its glory:
bold, unthinking, revelatory.
Rhythmically supportive, but beautifully
self-indulgent,
a witches' brew with Miles and Charlie
conjuring spells in brass,
moving, swaying, creating melodies in
irresponsible rhyme.
Confounding lies, opening eyes
to the way,
to the truth,
to the life.
The jazz blows where it wills
and no one knows where it comes from
and where it is going.

Family reunion

Under Derbyshire skies
the family gathers.
Black sheep, golden-ones,
Shiny coated new ones.
Chummy, chatty ones,
Shadow souls and networkers.
Burden-carriers
Flame-ablazers
Flame-flickerers
Chirpy-breakfasters
Noddingoffers
Seen and heard it all beforers
Bar propper-uppers
Early-to-bedders
Wish-I-wasn't-herers
Wish he or she wasn't herers
Relief God is here
Relief God hears us
Above all,
Hopers.

Tessa Mann

Clergy Conference

In reflection mused our Bishop Nicholas,
My clergy colleagues are ridiculous,
I don't want to Holt'am
But I do need to jolt'em.
Runcorn says ordain'em at Michaelmas.

Mark Windsor

Face to face

We learn who we are from the moment of
our birth face to face.

We grow, communicate, meet with others,
share conversation face to face.

We see, look, observe another, their past and their future, sitting, drawing, in the present
face to face.

But God we cannot see, God is mystery.

We hear the noisy cries from scripture, cries for justice still.

For us may be no answers nor even questions vulnerable.

But we live under mercy, knowing, trusting,
there is a time beyond when we will

see God's glory
face to face.

Jane Culliford

Under the mercy

Ushered in, shepherded, unwillingly skirted

Now breathing through

Do not lose heart

Edge towards

Raw, powerful, merciful hope. Set down

The lamented gaps in

Hearing or hoping, rather twist,

Engage with God's adagio.

Mercy invited, leads the dance, unexpected

Encounters revealing through vulnerable cracks the

Reality of glory.

Cresting a moment

You catch it.

Barbara Meardon

Untitled

Mirroring the lubricating energy of the Holy Spirit

Emitting from the hidden cracks

Rays of gentle strains of mercy

Crying for my turning

Yearning for me to brush his cheek with mine.

Anon.

Hope more

Humankind has achieved a first;
there are more displaced than ever before.

Humankind refined slavery;
the chains replaced by trafficking
far more.

Kind humankind work out carefully,
prayerfully, strategically, for far
more hope.

Tim West

Presence

In the silence of eternity a
Presence made itself known to me.

I am the truth, I am knowledge
and I will show you all things.
You are blind now
but it will not always be so.
Do not strive to see, you have not the power.
It is I who will grant you sight.

In the darkness of my prison a thought
came to me:
I am freedom; I am the breaker of chains
and you shall be set free.
You are bound now
but it will not always be so.
Do not fight on your own for you are too weak.
It is I who will be your strength.

In the roar of a rising sun I heard a voice,
I am the dawn, I am the morning light
and I will come quickly.
You are in darkness now
but it will not always be so.
Do not seek after me for I am not to be found.
It is I who will come to you.

Tony Gilbert

Conference 2014

Is God Renewing Hope
in clergy?
a clutch of depressed primadonnas
delusionedly hopeful that puny efforts
'matter a hill of
beans in this crazy world...'

our gathering of cock-eyed optimists
lack the beauty of
'a finished new creation.'

But – this is hope indeed...

cracked pots may be healed with
the slip of grace and love
rendered useful in vulnerability
for there is nothing more hopeful
than a vessel broken

and restored.

In receipt of mercy
the flaws,
chips,
crackpot personalities
wounded histories
unconfessed weaknesses
become the very core of hope:
vessels of the Holy, though un-whole.

Then bloom those risky friendships
forged in bosom-lying closeness
to the earth-child God
who excludes none.

Then can our Diocesan ice-cream parlour strapline
shout
(beneath the clergy crest)

One bite – one hope,
the limpid love of God's Original.

Maria Shepherdson

Earth Odyssey

What is God?
A cry in the street,
a way struck in the wilderness
raising voices of those who've forgotten
the journey they must make
from the place they mistake
for home

Where is God?
A tomb carved in rock,
a body unwound in grief
seeking that place of meeting
in the embrace of a friend
and a bosom that mends
in love.

Who is God?
A face scored in earth,
a voice that converses
and eyes that can see
what we cannot bear,
just a heart that tears
in hope.

Bob Kenway

Earth (from Bishop James Jones' Talk)

Clod of Earth, water bound,
Particles sewn together.
Life enabler.

Earth child, Son of the one
Hewn from the earth,
Life giver.

Earth, Kingdom created,
Myriad voices weaving
Life, truth, hope.

Cynthia Buttimer

Untitled

If I sought my own courage to cope
I'd have need of a strong microscope;
It's not my own will,
Or talents, or skill,
But God's mercy and grace that give hope.

Sue – or perhaps Joe?!

“God Renewing Hope”

I. (Before the conference)

The mouth speaks, the fingers type,
“out of the fullness of the heart”

Whose heart's revealed here?
Is it an individual's or a group's?

Who is the God who's spoken of?
“God of Creation”? “God of the particle”? Who?

And why “renewing hope”, unless there's been
A loss of hope in someone? If so, who?

Has the writer lost hope, assumed it in others,
Or have statistics to prove this hopelessness?

Whose hope, then, needs renewing?
Is it ours? Or God's? For I am sure

(and now you see my heart) that God has
every reason to abandon hope in us

And yet, God brings us here, hopeful
And hopeless.... And therein lies my hope....

II (As we approach the end of the conference)

Post-Petertide

Living stones,
extracted,
at some cost,
from many buildings

transported miles
to be together
for restoration,
renovation, renewal.

How it happened
I don't know:
water from the "Rock"?
"Word", like the rain?
Spirit outpoured?

Somehow we feel
washed down,
cleaned up,
refreshed, alive again.

We head back
to the 'place from which we started'
to see it in a new way,
to return to your building....

Jonathan Foster

A Struggle

O God, it's tough.
I've had enough
when people move the post!
I long to hear
the call that's clear
that we will love you most.

It makes me sad
when good's called bad,
and in the name of God;
when wrong is cool
and "human rights" rule

while truth gets lost in fog.

O Lord I pray
for help today
to walk the Jesus road.
To honour him,
rejecting sin,
and live as God has showed.

Let mercy flow
and goodness grow
As I come close to you.
That all may see
God's purity,
and righteous mercy too.

*A struggling child of God trying to help
others*

Going Home (read before the blessing during the concluding Eucharist)

Return to the indispensable me.
Umpteen inbox and flashing answer phone sighs.
Return to subsiding piles of 'stuff'
washed up on the study shores,
spilling over into the corridor
between work and life.
Being tripped over by dogs and others
or, carefully circumnavigated
until it gets so invasive it becomes reality.
The Island of Norm – a place of safety
and soul danger.
The City of Busy, where stuff whispers
to us in addictive tones, that
'we are it'
A lostness as deep as prodigal pig shit.

AND YET.... A whisper as faint as
the wind through feathers,
as easily missed and precious as an open
smile on a bus full of strangers.
Or a kettle being filled, or heating
coming on on a cold afternoon -
Reminds me of home.
As I put the key in the lock, hopefully.
Entering the Kingdom as if it is new
territory.

Welcome home.

Tessa Mann