

St Andrew's on The Terrace Sunday 15 April 2018 Easter 3

Readings for the Gathering

Hebrew Bible

Psalm 4

May I find an answer when I call / relief from my distress; mercy too

when you are on your beds, / search your hearts and be silent/ offer sacrifices and trust.

May light shine on us. / and our hearts be filled with joy when their grain and new wine abound.
In peace I will lie down and sleep, / for I dwell in safety.

Contemporary reading

Introductory thoughts on a moot rhythm of life

by Gareth Powell <http://www.klisia.net/blog/mootrhythm.pdf>

At the heart of a rhythm of life is the desire to know and to follow Christ wherever you are. For us, as moot, that means in the busy city of London, with all the many and various challenges that presents. In this busy city it is easy to see our Christian spirituality as a part of our life, a Sunday affair. However, as a community, living this rhythm helps us to see God in every moment of life, and to hear the voice of the Spirit beckoning us to come and follow in the footsteps of where God already is at work, beckoning us to join in. In that sense it is also a call to mission, in bringing the good news to this broken and fragmented world. Living a rhythm helps us as a community to allow people to shift from being consumers of church, or spiritual tourists, into being pilgrims, and partakers in the body of Christ. It also allows people to easily journey with us, so they can belong without necessarily believing –in that way we become a fluid community with the rhythm as our centre.

As a community we have been inspired by those great Saints that have gone before us: St Benedict and St Francis, whose visions for Christian community are the foundation of the monasticism movement, and the great wanderers Aiden and Cuthbert, reminders to us that a life spent pilgrimaging towards God is also a life spent pilgrimaging with those around, both inside the cloister and outside it, for we journey together not in isolation. It would be easy for us to get bogged down by the enormous amount of detail that we could go into in writing a rhythm of life, but this is a danger that we want to avoid. A rhythm of life should be exactly that, a rhythm, not a full concerto with every instrument written up, but rather the background beat that keeps everything else in order, that calls things back on track when they deviate, that reminds us of the type of music we are wanting to play, or perhaps more accurately, what type of lifestyles we are wanting to lead. Simplicity is the key, the rhythms of life that have worked, and continue to work are those that are easily understood and grasped, this does not mean they are simplistic. The simplicity means that it is far easier to work them into everyday life, as they are easy to memorise. Most rhythms can be reduced to just a few words, behind which lie the core ideas and hopes of the community.

Reflection for the Gathering

The church needs to periodically shrug off the constrictions which accumulate over time as an organism or an organisation grows. More growth can only occur if surrounding frameworks change and grow themselves.

What then IS the carapace which serves as the churches' exoskeleton and might, in time, restrict new growth?

The reason I'm talking about this immediately post Easter is that I see ourselves in similar times to those in which the disciples found themselves after that Passover weekend which would become the first Easter.

Their carapace had been ripped off. The death of their dreams and hopes with the death of their leader, left them vulnerable and naked, asking what they would do now?

The final scene in the movie *Mary Magdalene* catches the dilemma which faces us now. Mary argues for a kingdom which is invisible – the Kingdom which is within us all, which we grow by our growth in compassion and sense of justice, by our willingness to work for the inclusion of all. It is the mustard seed which falls into the ground and is tended by the farmer.

Peter argues for a company of warriors which grows stronger and stronger and confronts the powers of the time. The scriptwriters with their 20/20 hindsight of all that Peter's ministry would become, subtly make it clear that this is the birth moment of what would become, with Constantine's assistance, Christendom. I could extrapolate further, also knowing some of the history which followed this moment. We could stretch a point and say that Peter is arguing for orthodoxy – right thinking and Mary for orthopraxy – right action. Could we say on the one hand imperial gospel, on the other, original gospel?

The world since has followed 2000 years of defining the church by what it taught and thought. Doctrines and creeds brought with them requirements for moral action and charitable work, but the thing which supremely defined which branch of Christianity you belonged to, was what you believed – with the inevitable result. At the Great Schism of 1054 and the Great Reformation of 1517, how beliefs differed played the primary part in what carapace got shrugged off by whom.

What you believe and how rightly or correctly you believe is now up for grabs. Not only beliefs in the supernatural are questioned by many but also styles of church government and their rules about who is in and who is out and why. Orthodoxy is not an 'in' word for many in this iconoclastic age. Many find it more and more difficult to say a creed written in the first millennium when so much has been discovered since their composition.

If orthodoxy is suspect, then where do we turn – or, as the front cover of the order of service puts it – “how then shall we live?” That is the key word – live'. Orthopraxy is the maintaining of right praxis, the living of an authentic life, the maintaining of a just and compassionate world view and of taking action in line with that world view. It is akin to the argument made by Mary Magdalene at the end of the movie bearing her name.

In 2013 Roger and I were fortunate to spend time in England on study leave. My focus was studying the relatively new movement called Fresh Expressions. Wellingtonians have also studied this movement and attended overseas conferences on the topic. I wanted to see some Fresh Expressions in action and to see what made them 'tick'. They of course turned out to be as diverse as the regular denominational churches are and always have been! From a relatively short-term Gothic Eucharist in Cambridge to a café based community in Poole to a small Methodist chapel converted into a children's playground, to a multi-congregational non-denominational church in Washington DC to the Moot community in London, England, each had their unique starting point, unique clientele and unique focus.

This is the point of Fresh Expressions. Mainly springing up out of Anglican networks, Fresh expressions are intended to be church in context.¹ Look at the context, Michael Moynagh² would say and see what is happening there. Strike up conversations with those who, with you, go to the local gym or leisure centre, or drop their children off at the same school or work in the city. See how God is

¹ *Church for Every Context: An introduction to Theology and Practice* by Michael Moynagh with Philip Harrold.

² Revd Dr Michael Moynagh works for Fresh Expressions as Director of network development and Consultant on theology and practice. Revd Dr Michael Moynagh, based at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, works for Fresh Expressions as Director of network development and Consultant on theology and practice. He is responsible for facilitating the development of networks of individuals leading fresh expressions of church, as well as drawing together and reflecting on all that is being learnt about fresh expressions of church. He also has a watching brief on theological education and research.

already working there among them. Join in intentionally after listening carefully and attentively to what is going on. Ask questions and follow the leads which turn up.

Within the diversity of Fresh Expressions, there is a particular strand common to several ventures. It springs from the Anglican tradition with its appreciation of saints and of the value of a contemplative life. The strand is called neo-monasticism. It reaches back into the ancient past for practices which can be re-engaged with and so enhance and refresh the church's future. Sometimes people call it ancient-future church

Like the ancient monasteries which developed a Rule of Life to guide their members, several kinds of Fresh Expressions are developing what they call Rhythms of Life – relatively simple statements of the values and attitudes and practices they wish to prioritise in their individual lives and in their life as a community.

There is then no need to devise a mutually agreeable list of beliefs or propositions. Instead, the corporate agreement is to a list of attitudes and concepts – or as Moot terms them, 'virtues', 'postures' and 'practices'. In their annual affirmation service – which is pictured in the order of service just after the reflection title – these three concepts are affirmed by each who want to be active participants in the community. The other photograph shows the entrance end of the Gothic style Wren designed church. It has a café called 'host' open all week to workers in the City of London.

One of the wise ones which Moot quotes as their inspiration is Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said: *The restoration of the church will surely come only from a new kind of monasticism which will have nothing in common with the old but a life of uncompromising adherence to the Sermon on the Mount in imitation of Christ.*³ Bonhoeffer said that in 1935, it's only taken 80 years for us to get the message!

The expectations on someone operating at participant level in Moot are not slight. The word 'uncompromising' is part of the framework of expectations. Yet, the position one takes within the community is self-determined and egalitarian. Order within the community would, one assume, be protected by the kinds of commitment people have made – (routinely made each year in front of the Bishop or archdeacon in this case, they carry clout these commitments). The kinds of commitment people have made are to be hospitable, present, accepting, creative, to achieve balance and to be accountable. If these commitments are authentically lived out, then the community as a whole achieves an atmosphere which reflects those virtues.

For those who wish to move from the exploring space at Mott to the participating space, the expectations are that

This will involve being part of a mini-moot once a month, attending a week day or sunday evening service, co-curating an act of worship, having a spiritual director, attending monthly community council meetings, developing a healthy prayer and meditation life, a healthy missional life, and participating and contributing to the life of the community. For those wanting to deconstruct reconstruct we run a monthly weekday lunchtime and evening Living the Questions Group.⁴

You can hear within this a weekly rhythm, a monthly rhythm, a daily rhythm...

Consider what rhythms exist already in your life – meal times, personal grooming routines, a weekly rhythm of attending this Gathering, perhaps a weekly or monthly commitment to this community of another type. Some of you attend other spirituality groups like a study group, a post-faith or post-church group perhaps.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1935.

⁴ <http://www.moot.uk.net/about/rhythm-of-life/the-three-spaces-of-belonging/>

For the bible reading today I chose the selected verses from Psalm 4 as they suggest some elements of a rhythm: “when you are on your beds,” and “search your hearts” and “be silent”, or, “offer sacrifices” and hearts being “filled with joy when their grain and new wine abound,” suggesting the rhythm of communion and “in peace I will lie down and sleep for I dwell in safety” reminding us of the importance of an end of day ritual, however simple.

What rhythm do you pay attention to for your own personal growth? A once weekly attendance here (however brilliant the preacher!) is not enough to keep your soul from starving.

Part of the point of rhythm is not what you do and when, but also the mix of practices. Do you only have community and corporate spiritual rhythms, or in your life is there a corporate rhythm mixed with personal rhythms of spiritual practice?

If you no longer say grace before a meal because you don’t think you need to thank a paternalistic God in heaven, how **do** you take time to feel and express gratitude for the opportunity to eat three times a day? If you no longer follow a daily Quiet Time prescribed by your church, what routine of quietness and stillness have you substituted for those moment of forced recollection? Maybe you now read a lot on spiritual or theological topics, but how much of that reading satisfies the head while leaving the heart cold and hungry? The weekly rhythm of Sabbath has been obliterated by our trading practices as a society, so when do you now take your weekly Sabbath rest?

The *form* of spiritual practices may need to change, but not necessarily their frequency and purpose. We all always need times of rest, relaxation and reflection and we all need them regularly.

If anyone was interested in working together to frame up some ideas for their own use, discussing this and workshopping some ideas, that might benefit a small group for a while. I’d be happy to facilitate the conversation while learning for myself. In this case, in the end, the choice of how much or how little you commit yourself to would be yours.

Moot is not the only neo-monastic community springing up.⁵ You can read more if you are interested and there are communities in Wellington which pick up something of this flavour of growing a new carapace in doing church.

Whether you join a group temporarily or think this through for yourself, take the idea of a rhythm of life seriously. If you are not convinced you need any kind of this spiritual stuff, remember there are health as well as spiritual benefits to interspersing times of reflection and stillness with all our activity and noise.

Remember too, the life and vitality of this community, will be only as strong as the degree to which its members participate in the Rhythm of Life.

The call to neo-monastic practice needs to arise from within.

Listen carefully to see if it is arising in you.

Susan Jones 027 321 4870 04 909 9612 minister@standrews.org.nz www.standrews.org.nz

⁵ Cray, Graham; [Mobsby, Ian](#); Kennedy, Aaron, eds. (2010). *New Monasticism as Fresh Expressions of Church*. Canterbury Press. [ISBN 978-1-84825-044-4](#).