

Anglican Church Southern Queensland Northern/Southern Region Clergy Conferences – August 2019

During August 2019, clergy from the Diocese of Brisbane met in Noosa for their annual Clergy Conference. The conference centred around a series of conversations between the Revd Dr Sam Wells and Mr Scott Stephens. Over five sessions they explored the pattern of the eucharistic liturgy, modelling “good conversation” and sharing stories. The conversations were “repeated” for Southern and Northern Region conferences, and as they were unscripted were different each time. The transcripts are from the Northern Region Conference, the second time Sam and Scott had sat down together.

Session 1 - Gathering

Sam:

I'm really thrilled to be with you all, but also very much to be with Scott. I've known Scott virtually for quite a long time. I don't know how long, 12 years or something and the reason I'm so excited to have a chance to meet Scott last week and this week is because he, I think more than anybody else, hosts a public theological conversation.

As many of you will know, Scott runs the ABC religion website, he also does it live in terms of radio programs and interviewing people. But what that does is bring together people to have exactly the sorts of conversations that Bishop Jeremy said we all need to have. And if you believe as I do, that in eternity we will be with God, with one another and with the creation forever and there will be no social problems, there will just be what the hymn "Jerusalem the Golden" calls "social joys". There will be no working parties to inquire into terrible wrongs of the past and there will be no working parties to dig up the graveyard and make sure everything's pristine, for the visit of the Bishop.

Because all of that will have been dealt with and there will be cake. Then actually conversation is all there will be. So what Scott is modelling now is what we'll all need to get used to forever. So, it's hard to think of a more important job than that. And that's why I'm pleased to be with Scott.

Scott:

Well, I think I can do that one better. Thank you Sam. Sam saved my life in a Parish. I was, for a very brief and unhappy time, I was a lay minister. I won't say where or with whom. You know that part of your past you never want to talk about? This is mine... No further history will be recorded on... I'll pay people to... Anyway, and I do what all people who are trying to serve faithfully in a parish do. I stressed, endlessly about the actual people that I had, and the actual work that needed to be done. And I thought this just doesn't work, it just doesn't work. The people are not up to the task, I'm not up to the task. They're not the right people for this place, I'm not the right person for this place, I'm screwed. And I came across a book called, "God's companions". Which was your second book, I believe after...

Sam:

"Transforming Faiths into Destiny."

Scott:

"Transforming faiths into destiny." The book that he wrote on the theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. It's a book called "God's companions," which takes the structure, and the logic of Christian worship not as something that is simply developed over time, but as something that is both theologically and ethically normative. In other words, the way that we worship, the steps that we go through when we gather, this tells us something fundamental about the nature of faithful Christian discipleship. And there's one particular line that I come across, and I can say without exaggeration, it saved by life. "God has given us everything we need to be Christ's faithful followers." And for me that just shifted. It's one of those moments where you begin seeing the world differently. Instead of thinking this is what needs to be done, how on earth are these people, how on earth am I up to it? It instead was, this is what God has given us in this place, in this time, what does it mean then for faithful discipleship? What does it mean to be a faithful church with these people, in this place and at this time? It changed everything for me.

I'd heard of Sam before, because I know the work of Stanley Hauerwas quite well, but from that moment on I became an addict. Because not only is Sam one of the finest Christian ethicists in the world, but as you'll hear in the coming days, he is also a preacher it seems to me, virtually without peer. The way that he runs together deep theological reflection with endlessly surprising... I don't even want to call them anecdotes. Whatever it is that the philosopher Hegel does, when he pulls an example out of the world of opera or out of the realm of the history of development of philosophy and holds it up and says everything is here. That's what Sam does with pastoral experience. Everything is... You can see everything about faithful discipleship, everything about Christian ministry in this one moment.

So when Jeremy and John extended the invitation to be in conversation with Sam for a week, I'm, "Are you kidding? This is ridiculous." So, it's a great pleasure. Sam of course is the Vicar of St Martin in the Fields and visiting professor of Christian ethics, I believe still, at Kings College. Before that he was dean of Duke Chapel and research professor of Christian ethics at Divinity School. And it seems to me, one of the few people in the world of Christian ethics and theology that are absolutely mandatory to read. If you don't read him you just won't be saved, it's just... Is that all right?

Sam:

That's a lot to live up to.

Scott:

Okay, there you go.

Sam:

I want you to imagine that you've got 10 minutes to live, and you're surrounded by the most important people in your life. And you know you love each other, you don't have to do all that. You just have to leave with those people, what they need to remember you by. That is of course the situation of the last supper and Jesus answers that question in two words. Eat together. Do this, because... and he doesn't say this, but I'm going to say it. Because when you eat together, in order to eat together you need to do all the things, you need to be my body. So, if you think about what eating together involves for most of us. It requires going shopping, requires taking time to cook, requires clearing up afterwards, it requires all the things that make a relationship. And that's why the only advice I ever give to couples getting married is the same advice that Jesus gave to the

disciples. You should eat together, because if you eat together you have to do all the things that marriage requires.

For Christians eating together means coming together in one place at the same time. It means recognizing how far we've fallen short of what God calls us to be. It means in words and in song, celebrating our common heritage. It means reading afresh the story of Gods dealings with us. It means hearing those words of our story directed at our present moment. It means proclaiming our common faith. It means playing back to God all the areas where we feel we can't do it on our own. It means looking each other in the eye and being reconciled before we come to the table. It means bringing forward the fruits of our labours. It means, over those fruits, retelling again the story of how God has transformed us. It means making sure everybody gets to receive those fruits, so that we've all brought our differentness to the table and receive back the same. It means giving thanks for everything that God has done in our lives, particularly in the forgoing actions. It means receiving God's blessing, and it means being sent out to love and serve.

So every time we eat together, eating together means rediscovering who we are as the body of Christ and being resourced to offer that body as a gesture of communion for the whole world. My conviction and the reason why Scott and I have structured these sessions along five parts of the Eucharist, that's to say we're going to talk about "**gathering**" today and "**hearing**" later and "**responding**" tomorrow and then "**sharing**" and then finally "**being sent**" - is that in giving us the Eucharist, God has given us in Christ, everything we need to be disciples and ministers and missionaries. To be the church.

And we're going to explore together now, over a series of conversations with responses from yourselves towards the end of each session, how that is the case. But just to focus the issue in relation to the marketplace that we've heard so eloquently, articulated half an hour ago. I believe there is one, the marketplace, the world, has one fundamental heresy, that if you like, embraces all the others. And that is that God is not enough. One thing that Scott and I talked a bit about last week is the degree to which the church actually shares that heresy. So, what do we in practice feel about God? We feel that there is not enough information, there's not enough intelligence, there's not enough resources, there's not enough revelation. These are the things we get cross about. There's not enough peace. But fundamentally at the bottom of all of those concerns is that there's not enough God.

And what our story tells us over and over again, in our story, performed in our liturgy, reminds us over and over again is that actually the opposite is the problem. There's actually too much God. And we have developed strong resistances to receiving the "too much" that is God. So strong, because we're frightened of being overwhelmed and losing our identity that worked so hard to establish. And our resistances, our defences have grown so strong that we are now in a position that we cannot find ways to receive the gifts God is giving us. And so, we experience our life as scarcity. Whereas God is constantly pumping out abundance and we are constantly receiving scarcity and if we've experienced life as scarcity it's because we find ourselves incapable of receiving the gifts that God is giving us and of recognizing the places where those gifts are coming from.

So to cite for example the first miracle in John's gospel at Cana. We have a situation where there is good wine, where the wine runs short, where the wine runs out and then there is too much wine. And what we're being given is the shape of the whole bible. Where there is goodness, where there is God's blessing, where there is an experience about blessing running short than in the post exilic

period there's an experience of the wine running out and then Jesus is describing himself as the one that brings super abundant wine. And then if you look at the feeding of the 5000, we have a story that comes in five stages. Stage one is there is not enough. Stage two is where the disciples bring what little there seems to be to Jesus. Stage four is where the disciples distribute everything and more to the assembled company. Stage five is where there is far too much left over. Stage three, the crucial stage in the middle, is where Jesus turns the not enough into the too much, does what only God can do.

And that story actually gives us a model for ministry and mission. So, the situation of the world is stage one, it's not enough. Ministry is bringing to God the far more abundant gifts than originally seem to be apparent. Mission, stage four, is distributing far and wide, the too much that God has revealed to us in Christ. And the gospel is number five, there is far too much and we don't know what to do with it all. And so, when the church encounters the marketplace... the marketplace is the place where the fact that there isn't enough is commodified. The marketplace is the place where you have 5000 pairs of shoes and you're convinced that, that's not enough, because you can't live with yourself unless you have this particular trainer. Marketplace is all about there's not enough. And the gospel is all about there's too much.

So what I'm interested to discuss with Scott, what he wants to talk about is his own business, but what I'm interested to talk to Scott about is how through the gospel, through Christ and the holy spirit, but particularly through our liturgy, through our gathering to worship together we move from scarcity to abundance. Because I believe that is the most fundamental way in which we are always in danger of becoming world as church. Once we start to use the language of scarcity as if God wasn't enough and too much.

And you don't need me to give you examples of how scarcity pervades our strategic plans and our anxiety about size of congregations and about congregational giving and about evangelism and about pretty much everything else what we're talking about next four days. It's everywhere and it's everywhere in the discussion about climate change. And it's everywhere in the discussion about justice, in terms of Australia and its history. It's all scarcity versus abundance. It's all the anxiety that if there's enough for some, there won't be enough for everybody. That's what I see as the pervading sin that goes through the world interactions and the pervading sin that goes, sadly, too much through the church.

Scott:

One of the things that I find so interesting is taking exactly the same object and speaking it in different languages. Sam's language is sort of... is shot through with the language of scarcity and abundance. I guess what I'd like to do is an opening gambit though, is to just twist that ever so slightly, to analyse the same thing, but with slightly different terms and see if this reveals or if it conceals anything.

Probably one of the first things to point out though, when you say that it's the language of scarcity that runs through church politics. Another way of saying that, it seems to me, is that we no longer know how to use the term sacrifice. I mean it's been one of the open secrets in Australian politics for ever, that since really the end of Bob Hawke's first term, Australian politicians cannot talk in terms of one group of people missing out on anything. You can't go to an election and say that anybody is going to be worse off in any way. Everybody always is going to have more than they had before or else the electoral pitch just doesn't work.

Now to some extent we can say that, that's just extremely superficial politics. To my mind, better way of saying that is that we simply don't know how to talk in terms of sacrifice. Sacrifice that we willingly receive. We as in those who have because of. The slings and arrows of fortune, because of the run of history, because of past acts of extraordinary violence, because of current acts of astonishing injustice. We, that is who have been the recipients of far too much, we are simply incapable of seeing any loss of what we have, as being anything other than a loss to who we are. The act of sacrifice can't be a blessing. Which I think any reading of scripture says, it is. Any act of giving, of self-giving, is in fact a form of blessing that we receive. But we simply can't talk that language. We don't know what sacrifice means anymore. Which means that always it has to be a matter of, well you're really not going to miss out or this group of people that we all really hate anyway, they're going to miss out on enough for all of us.

So a big part of this for me is to simply recover the language of sacrifice in the way that we... in the way we talk together. There's something else though here, which I find curious. Can I just confess to you all? I hate the language of marketplace. I hate the language of marketplace. I don't think it works, I think it's maybe slightly better than "public square", but not much. Marketplace has the idea of people living together in a kind of benign and inoffensive co-mingling around common objects of relative value.

One of the forms of too muchness that we are living with, I think, at the moment is simply too much information. Our lives are saturated with words, with stories, with images from around the world. And instead of that too muchness of information giving us an incredibly humble way of looking at the world. Instead of it tempering our judgment, to the extent to which we are able to say, that person is right, and that person is wrong, maybe tempering that just a little bit. Giving us a little bit more humility in the way that we judge and adjudicate. Instead, do you notice that what has accompanied our saturation of information is a world that has become even simpler than it was before.

One of our reflex mechanisms for dealing with the too muchness of the information of the world, is that now our view of the world is become overtly conspiratorial or it's even become Manichean. There are the forces of good and the forces of evil. Which means that our sole task is to make sure that we're on the right side and we give no quarter to those who are on the other side. I find this extraordinary, that instead of an incredibly complex view of the world leading to a complex view of the world, instead our understanding of the world has become extraordinarily simplistic. It's become almost adolescent in the way that we divide ourselves up into our appropriate tribes.

And for that reason, I think far better than a marketplace, it's nicer for us to think of ourselves as inhabiting a bazaar. A bazaar. There's a lot of motion and bustle, there is a constant hawking of goods, there's very little about that hawking of goods that's not aggressive. Would you agree with me on that? A lot of it is, "have a look at this". But instead of it simply being consumerist, you didn't know that you needed that until I offered it to you. You notice that each one of these goods becomes a new boundary marker. It becomes a way of identifying what tribe I belong to. What side of the Manichean divide I fall down on.

In other words, we live in a marketplace where we're always trying to align ourselves or mark out for ourselves what side we're on. So that each act of listening, turning to this booth and listening to what the person has to say, that's not just an invitation to engage in a conversation, it's an

invitation to take up arms against all the other sellers. And this I think is one of the really terrible, terrible things that's happened to us. We, the church, think that we need to just set up our stall and make our sales pitch and say that you didn't know that you need these spiritual goods until I offered them to you. And that we just need to make sure that there's sufficient legislation, there's sufficient social tolerance to make sure that we have that little spot to be able to make our pitch.

Whereas instead, pardon my French, but the entire atmosphere is so idolatrous. It's so debauched that the very act of setting up a stall, I think is already conceding too much. It's already giving too much, it's always thinking that we have just... It's always thinking that we have just another sales pitch, just another argument, just another thing that can be offered, that can rub shoulders with all these other things. If we're to take what Sam has laid out seriously and I do take it seriously, in a world of scarcity, if the church is to live in this vision of abundance then what that means I think, is learning to speak a radically different language in whatever world it is that we think that we inhabit.

So let me try to say something very, very briefly about what that means and then we can get the conversation going. The church can't have enemies. I just think it's as simple as that. Whatever it is that we are doing, when we make our pitch, it's not getting people to come over onto our side. Whatever it is that we're doing, it's not drawing another line in the sand and asking people to come over and join us against them. Because if God has given us gifts and if those gifts never look like what we expected, if those gifts aren't the gifts that we thought that we wanted in order to fulfil our agenda or carry out our program. These gifts are always more diverse, these gifts are invariably rather more uncooperative. These gifts are seemingly weaker than what we thought we needed. In other words, these gifts are people. And they're people that don't line up easily with what we thought we wanted to do and what argument we thought we wanted to make and what ideological battle we thought we wanted to win. And what influence we thought we wanted to gain.

If the gift that God gives us is an astonishing diverse group of people that don't line up easily behind a party platform or behind an ideological agenda, then what it means is the first thing that we are giving is the command to learn to live peaceably with people that once we might have thought were enemies, but now we see have in fact been given to us as essential for doing whatever it is that we are meant to be doing with the world. And that's why I just don't buy that we need to be more persuasive, we need to get out there with everybody else and get people onto our side. The whole image of the marketplace, of the bazaar, it's not appropriate for the church, because the church doesn't want converts in that sense. The church doesn't want allies in that sense. The church wants to transform the way that we see one another. So that we are able to live in a world entirely without enemies and instead with people who, whereas we once thought that they were enemies or we once thought they were obstacles to be overcome, we now see them as incarnations of whatever it is that God has sent for us as what we need to be faithful.

Sam:

Okay, I want to put a bit of infrastructure underneath that, because I think that's... While, I agree with it, I think it's taking two or three steps on. And so, to provide some hinterland for that, I'd like to just do a little bit of narrative. What is the gospel? To me the gospel is two things that leads to a third. We are prisoners of our past for two reasons, because of our bitterness about what's being done to us, and our guilt about what we've done. And so, the past becomes a prison. We are terrified of the future, because it confronts us with our human limitation and ultimately it has the prospect, in death, of our obliteration.

What Christ brings us is the forgiveness of sins, which turns the past from a prison into a gift. And everlasting life, which turns the future from a panic into glory. And only in the light of having the anxiety about the past, and the fear of the future taken off the table can we actually live in the present. Because if we are obsessed with either, trying to, as you put it, sort of hire someone to cleanse our internet record or whatever it is about, it becomes a symbol of our fear about the past or if we're trying to have ourselves put in formaldehyde so that somebody in the future will bring us back to life when they've worked out how to do that, we can't concentrate on living our life in the present tense.

So the present is a present, a gift, that is made to those whose past and whose future have been healed and open out. So, if you like, the two words that crystallize that are heritage and destiny. And this is where it keys in with what you've just been saying Scott, because if the past is a threat, then it's not basically the three things the past is for Christians, which is creation and covenant and Christ. Those are roughly the three words that cover everything we need to know about the past. Covenant meaning the old testament as well. I think you know about the other two.

And together we can call those heritage. So, everything that has gone wrong in the past, that we lament, regret, through the forgiveness of sins, can become heritage, can be healed and turned into a storehouse of potential wisdom and learning. And everything that we're very anxious about the future, whether it's climate change or our grandchildren's mental health, is turned by the gift of everlasting life from panic to destiny. And so if we're living with heritage and destiny all the things, as you've described, that might have been threats, become gifts.

That's what being a Christian is, and as church we are living in the present tense between the heritage of creation, covenant, and Christ and the destiny of eternal life with God, with one another, with the redeemed creation. And I think with that infrastructure you can make sense of what you've just said about not having enemies, because enemies are the threat, they're the ones that seem likely to take away everything that's of value. But these two benefits of Christ's passion, as John Calvin calls them, forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, dismantles all threats just like that, really. Obviously it takes longer to work out in people's lives and experiences, but that is the gospel, that which dismantles what threatens us and returns it as a gift.

So I think you need that little bit of infrastructure to make sense of the idea of having no enemies.

Scott:

I think that's right. Let me just double down on it though, not to be obstinate, although if the boot fits, I suppose. Let me just go back to this... we have an information saturated world and yet our view of the world is getting incredibly simple or simplified or even conspiratorial. I think in the same way, the way that the church thinks about its appeal to this thing called public or its role as an advocate in the public. I think this has also had a similar effect that the public, whatever this is... And I don't think it exists, but if the public does exist, it's Facebook and I don't want to live in a world where the public is Facebook, that's another conversation, for another session.

But if the church is meant to have some kind of voice in public, unfortunately what that means is because of public, the public is a zero sum game. There are people who agree with this, people who disagree with this. Then it means that the way in which the public is increasingly structured is in terms of friends and enemies. Those who are on our side, those who are not, or those with whom we

can have conversation and those we cannot. And I think that's... Already that's becoming really problematic for two reasons, on two grounds. One is it means that conversations have an agenda and that agenda is, will I persuade you or, just to be far more blunt, will you agree with me. The other reason that I think it's really problematic, is that it already, even though we talk in terms of conversation and I hope this isn't what we're modelling here, but already very often in terms of conversation is the taking of turns of giving relatively articulate monologues, to see... it's usually not the other person, it's whoever it is that's listening, which side they tend to tip down on.

In other words the conversations themselves are already sales pitches, rather than moments of, as Paul described it, "acts of giving and receiving". Acts of listening in other words, where you suspended virtually everything that can be suspended and you simply incline yourself towards the other person, which I take to be an act of profound selflessness, act of profound nonviolence. But if this idea that the gathering that has been given to the church, the idea that people come together in a place, actual people not virtual people, actual people not avatars, in a particular place at a particular time, not in some vague virtual or online space or some imaginary idea of the public. If it's actual people, giving in a particular place, in a particular time, then what this gathering demands of us, I think, is these people have been given to me as gifts.

What does God want for me to learn from them? What do they have to teach me? And although it sounds initially kind of self centred, "they're there for my sake". In fact, the act of self emptying that goes into that kind of presumption, when you enter the gathering of the church, "what is God trying to teach me through that?" That I think is an act of theological sacrifice almost from the very beginning, because what it's saying is that the word of God is more powerful in their mouths and in their hearts than in my conviction.

So I think this... it's a way, I suppose of understanding the idea of Christian gathering, but turning it inside out. These people that I wouldn't ordinarily associate with have been given to me as gifts. What does God want to teach me? There's a problem. Our churches have either modelled modern sectarianism or our churches provide the blueprint for modern sectarianism or our churches have perfected the idea of self-selecting either class or ideological or theologically homogeneous gatherings. Our churches are becoming increasingly non-diverse. So, we gather in other words with people that we don't think we need to learn anything from, because they already believe what we believe. And this I think... You talked about the heresy of scarcity, this for me is the great heresy that the church is also plunged into, which is the heresy of unitary congregations. Local gatherings where there's nowhere near the sufficient diversity for people really to be changed and challenged with what does God want to teach me.

Sam:

And if we feel powerless in the face of those social forces... it just strikes me, two scriptural encounters give us everything we need. Again I want to keep sort of being a broken record on that, because it is such a challenge to the imagination and when that insight, that you described as being very help to you, first came to me, it had the same effect on me as it had on you. That's why you write books really, to share these insights. And the two encounters that seem pertinent are first of all, Jesus's encounter with the woman with the haemorrhages. And leaving aside the gynaecological dimensions of that, which I don't think we'll go into great detail now. What that story is saying is that purity is infectious, and defilement is not. And that is completely contrary to the notion of gathering that's worried there might be somebody who's infiltrated this community with wrong-headed ideas or who is "one of them". Because it has a confidence to say that if it's the truth, it will

be infectious.

And then the second encounter is Jesus's encounter with the Syrophenician woman, which as far as I understand it is the only gospel encounter where Jesus changes his mind. And changing his mind turns out to be a good thing. The fear is that God's mind is set, (I'm not going to name some of the controversial areas, suggest that scripture has spoken), God's mind is set, and we have to get in line. Here in just one comment "even the dogs", it feels like Jesus is realizing that his mission is significantly greater than even he previously appreciated and it's a gentile woman talking about dogs that achieves that. That's the gift of the stranger, a gift even to God, not just to us.

So we do well to recognize that even Jesus was enriched by the gift of the gentile person, "marginalized" whatever contemporary language we want to wrap around it. So maybe God is sending us angels in the same way, and those aren't angels that are going to poison us and those aren't angels that are going to deviate us from right thinking. They're actually going to renew us in our mission and in our wonder of the love of God.

Scott:

When Al Gore was in town a couple months ago, we had a little sort of side event about the church and climate change. One of the things that has long struck me and increasingly concerns me is the language of emergency that is flowing through so much public discourse. We don't have time to disagree with one another well. So, we can only have friends or enemies. Some of the churches' language surrounding mission in the past has been along precisely those lines. We don't have time to develop a nonviolent Christian culture well. Therefore, there can only be friends or enemies. And if we've mentioned two heresies, one being the heresy of scarcity, the other being the heresy of sort of division if you like or friends and enemies, being fundamental or the homogeneity of the church.

I think the third is, God hasn't given us enough time to do whatever it is that we are called to do in our place, well. Therefore, we have to ram it through, therefore we have to turn up the pressure on the disagreement, therefore we have to reduce things to zero sum game. But I think if the logic and the language of worship tells us anything, God has given us the time to do this well, rather than just get the right outcome.

Session 2 - Hearing

Scott:

So, what we're doing is we're taking turns. So, each one of us sets the initial agenda that the other person responds to, within this framework that we've been describing of the logic or the development of Christian worship. Can I just say already, far from last week simply being a dress rehearsal... We've swapped places. So, he's now the good cop, and I'm being forced to be the angry cop... So, we flipped the dice. Which side do you want to agree with this time?

So, we've talked about gathering. And one of the things that I hope maybe we can provoke a little bit of discussion among us about is just what it is that makes Christian gathering different. The gathering that we call church... What is it about that gathering that is necessarily different theologically, socially, ethically... And I suppose one of the things we've already flagged is the extent to which our gatherings tend to look an awful lot like gatherings that happen elsewhere. Our language tends to sound an awful lot like the language that we hear elsewhere.

If there's one thing though that marks out Christian gathering as Christian, it seems to me it's based upon, or it's a gathering around a particular conception of truth. Of truth... Let me have a crack at something. I haven't run this past Sam, and I've got no idea what he's going to think of this. So, it may not work. You can tell me if it doesn't.

Hannah Arendt, a wonderful German Jewish philosopher who has probably shaped more of my thinking than I care to admit... In the late 1960s, beginning 1968, then getting her best expression in the early 1970s, she lamented the disappearance of what she described as "public spaces". So, you could think of these as monuments, the work of human hands if you like. Not exactly Babel, but probably pretty close. So, things that humans have made, clearings that we've marked out where we can gather together. She said, "What are these places, these monuments we make and that around which we gather? What are these things?" And she said that ultimately, what they necessarily are, are so many tables around which humans can gather... Tables around which we gather.

Because, she said, one of the remarkable things around a table is, a table holds you together, right? You're sitting around something. The thing that you're sitting around isn't about you, but it exerts a kind of moral gravitational pull on you. It creates a common focal point. It allows you, especially if there's food in the middle of that table, it allows you to negotiate certain differences because of the things that you have in common. You may not want to address those things you have in common, the food, the dishes, where they came from, whether you like it or not, but it's there nonetheless... The table, the food, its physical presence amongst us, she says, helps incline the hearts of the various people around that table towards one another.

So, she said, public spaces, these monuments, these things that we gather around, these places that we gather within... these are like so many tables that we've created to incline the hearts of neighbours toward one another, so they can discover things about one another, about themselves, and then orient themselves together towards some common action. She says, what happens when the table gets removed? She had this graphic image of a great hand coming down and whipping the table away, and the immediate sense of disorientation that you feel when the table is gone. "Oh my God, I'm with these other people. What do we have to talk about?" All there are, then, are the differences among us.

And she says that as soon as you whip the table away, all you then have is sheer difference. There's

nothing that inclines your hearts towards one another. And she says, one of two things then happen. One is that you simply disperse. The differences become too profound and you disperse, maybe looking for a new table or something, maybe just enjoy the solitude of your living room. And that, she says, is the second thing. You find trinkets around which you privately gather and worship. I actually love this idea of privately gathering around a single object that only you like... The difference between a communal table versus a trinket that I like, that I might invite other people to see, but it's basically mine.

This is an image that I'll confess, I find myself thinking about all the time. We live in a world, I think, fundamentally without tables, without things that are sufficiently common around which we can gather... Things that are sufficiently hospitable and welcoming, that we can discover things in one another and through one another without being completely aware that we're doing it. In other words, it exerts just that little bit of gravitational pull on us to keep us together. It gives us enough nice little distractions so that we don't realise just the extent to which we're coming to know other people.

I'm sure you will have all, at a wedding maybe, sat at a table with those huge ornate flower things in the middle. That's a vile table, isn't it? Because it's got this great ostentatious thing in the middle that precludes really any discussion, eye to eye contact.

It seems to me that this image of the table... We're going to come to Eucharist a little bit later.

And I don't want to be obvious, but I think this image of the table... This is the Christian conception of truth. We've come to the point, I think, where truth is a weapon that we array against others, or truth is a defense mechanism against which we withstand the attacks of others. Whereas most fundamentally, and believe it or not, Hannah Arendt even wrote precisely this... "Truth is a language in common." Which is why it's so disorienting, it's so horrible when the place where you should be able to expect certain things that are shared in common... something like social truth or civic truth, becomes so corrupt and so cluttered that nobody has a way of finding their footing. Sometimes we refer to this these days as fake news or alternative truth.

I don't want to go so much down that path, but it's more the idea that truth is something that you use to bludgeon another person. Truth is something that you use to mark the differences out with another person, rather than truth being something around which people can gather, that gives those people a common language with which they can speak and understand one another. And that's why I think there are these three fundamental acts that Christians engage in when we gather together, and these are the things that mark out the nature of Christian truth. One is the Prayer of Humble Access. "Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are..."

Sam:

It's the Collect for Purity... It's all right, that's what I'm here for.

Scott:

The Prayer of Humble Access is what occurs just before communion... which isn't too bad, but anyway... So, one is the Collect for Purity, which is a willingness to be known, a willingness to be confronted with the truth about ourselves. If you want to know what being willing to know the truth about our souls looks like, I think you can take two great images. One is the image of the huge, hulking lion in the Narnia Chronicles where, after Edmund has done yet another stupid thing and

tries to justify himself before Aslan, and Aslan simply remains silent, and Edmund tries to justify himself... Or later in The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe, Peter tries to justify himself, and Aslan simply says, "Really?" "Well, no. Not exactly."

Being prepared to know the truth about oneself without alibi, without justification, knowing that as I come to worship, I am known. And I'm not simply known by the veil of ignorance that I try to drape in front of myself, I'm not simply known by the image that I've manicured and perfected that I want to present to others, the carefully cultivated form of self-deception in other words, that forms an essential part of social relations today. So, one is the preparedness to be known. But then the other aspect is the being known that comes then through the act of confession. We discussed last week... I actually don't know if Sam agrees with this or not. I have grave theological and moral concerns about the way we practice confession. I think anonymous confession in the silence of our hearts, without ever speaking that to another human being... I think that keeps sin exactly where it's supposed to be. Namely, thriving in the dark.

There is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued, compellingly, I think, in both "Discipleship" and in "Life together"... There is no act of self-mortification more effective, more definitive, than one Christian coming to another, saying, "Here's who I am. Here's what I've done," without alibi, without justification... "This is what I've done. Will you speak the word of Christ to me and forgive me?" That I think is the muscle, if you like, of the preparedness to be known, without alibi, without justification, in the withered light of the forgiveness of another. And that then brings us to the final form, if you like, of Christian truth, which is then being told a story that doesn't exactly have you at the centre of it.

There's this line from Simone Weil that I just love, where she says, "Two plus two is four is a great moral statement, because that's truth, and it has nothing to do with you." There's something profoundly humbling about confronting something, being confronted by something, that doesn't have my ego at the centre of it. A story, a whirlwind that whips you out into it, that unsettles you, even as it hands back to you something profound about what your life then might mean as the result.

So then, these three moments then of Christian truth... This table that we gather around at the beginning of worship, which is the willingness to be known. In other words, to have the truth told about oneself, both in the form of the Collect for purity or in the form of confession, and then the willingness to be caught up in something that includes so much more than just me, my ego. That catches me up in relationships that then, through its great circular pull, drives me into the need of, the reliance upon one another, before we then have that moment of, finally, the communion of coming together at the Lord's supper.

This is a radically different way of understanding Christian truth, but it's one, like I said last time, cuts diagonally across the way in which we've come to weaponize truth, as a way of marking us off, of us versus our opponents. Does that do anything for you, Sam?

Sam:

I want to push you a little bit about the trinkets, because I'm not quite sure what... Well, let me play that back as I hear it. Once upon a time, the church believed there was a table, and it took for granted, because society took for granted, that only certain people got to eat at that table. In fact, it created a story by which the only people who got to really holy were the priests, the monks and the nuns, but it was clear in society who ate at the table, because they literally owned a table and

nobody else did. While after the reformation that changed in significant ways, the class structure of it didn't change all that much. Once universities were created, only a certain number of people went to those universities, and obviously the racial nature of that in Australia is known to everybody here...

And then, we had something that we broadly, in the Western world, call the '60s. And the '60s was all sorts of things, but perhaps above all, it was the problematizing of who got to be at the table. The recognition, whether on race or sex grounds or other grounds, people had implicitly or explicitly been excluded from the table... And it's not meant to be patronizing to say that a lot of people are still in the '60s. That's to say, for them, often for very understandable reasons, the "who gets to sit at the table" question obliterates almost every other question. If we call those Chapter One and Chapter Two for the sake of simplicity, I would suggest we're now in Chapter Three, and Chapter Three could be characterized as a bus stop between Chapters One and Two.

The danger about the church talking about "the" table... The problem isn't the word table, the problem is the word "the". I always say, in Christian ethics, the two most controversial words are "the" and "we". So, let's stick with "the" for now. As soon as Christians talk about the table, it sounds like Chapter One. It sounds exclusive, basically, on whatever grounds, whether that's class or race or gender, or whatever are the grounds. I think there are two approaches, and I'm not clear in my own mind which is the right approach... There's the approach that might look, in the way in the Arendt characterization is a bit like the trinket approach... That's to say, the church recognizes the problematic nature of claiming the big table. Because, for example, in the UK, it's associated with bishops being the House of Lords, and the queen being the Head of the Church... the whole package. And I appreciate that's a completely different context in this country, but privilege is always at the back of the conversations.

If the church renounces the idea of the big table and then recognizes it is inevitably going to have little tables. But that the truth is that... Christ is made present even at the little tables. In other words, we didn't have to have a big table. The Last Supper, it's not recorded how big the table was. Humility (Philippians 2) is the way, as much as the big round table. So, one approach is to say, we'll just recognize we're a little table, and we're not making any claims to be the big table. There's always that slight fear though, when you're doing that, is relativism or pluralism in a negative sense. That we're saying, "Well, the Hindus have their table and the Muslims have their table, and the humanists have their table and we have our little table, and just leave us alone." So, you end up getting into what I regard as stupid fights about whether nurses can wear crosses when they're in hospitals, which there have been too many of in the UK, which treats us like an interest group and a lobby group, I think is the phrase to use.

That's what I worry about with the little table approach. We actually lose our claim to truth. We just assert our identity. The other option is to say, "There is a big table, but it behooves Christians when they're at the big table to talk in a very different tone of voice than the one they've adopted." So, to just give an illustration of this, my pastoral experience is, when you go to someone's home and you ask them, in a suitably trusting context, "Tell me when you felt close to God." What they don't say is... "When my boy was in the rugby team and they got through to the semi-finals, and he was on the wing and they passed it to him. Seconds were ticking away and he dived over in the corner, I knew the Lord was on my side!" They actually never say that. They say, "I was by my mother's bedside in intensive care in the emergency room, and the doctors said that she'd be gone in half an hour. And yet, I felt her hand twitch, and my sister was beside me and she started singing "I Need Thee Every Hour", and I joined in, and I'm telling you my mother smiled. And then she squeezed

my hand one last time, and then she was gone. And I've never felt God with me so much as I felt then."

But that's what people say every time. There's never, "And he dived over in the last seconds..." You never get that. You always get, "And there was that peace that I never believed that losing my mother would give me so much..." That's what they always say, and that's the tone of voice that makes us reflect that the Old Testament was written in Babylon at the time of greatest suffering, when they'd lost everything, king and land and temple... And yet, they felt closer to God in that time of deprivation than they ever had in the time of abundance. And that's the tone of voice... And if we say as Christians, the continuous thread is that Israel was closest to God in Babylon, the early disciples realized at some stage, the Gospels aren't entirely clear, that they'd never been closer to God than when they saw Christ on the cross. Which of course a lot of them hadn't seen, because they'd run away. But that was the moment of us being closest to God.

And I think you'll find that you can be closest to God in the same moments... If we're saying that at the big table, then maybe we have right still to use the word "the", and still to talk about a table. So, a lot of me is interested in the trinket, and in this little table... I wonder if that's giving up too much, and that we should actually be more concerned about our tone of voice, and whether it's the tone of voice that we learn when we say the Collect for Purity, now re-designated as the Prayer of Humble Access... And when our confession to the assembly at the Kyrie reflects an intimate confession, as you described it movingly, to one another in another setting... That if we have done those kinds of things, those are the things that teach us the tone of voice, which is the only tone of voice where it's legitimate to use the word "the".

Scott:

So interesting to me... I would never have thought of this being a conversation about the big table versus the little tables. But instead, it's the idea of truth, I suppose, being relational, versus truth being possessional or possessive. And when you described tone of voice, I think that's precisely, in many respects, the point. This is something I suppose I've learned more than anybody from James Baldwin. How is it that the church could confess what it believed, decade after decade, century after century, knowing full well that it at the same time was living in active contempt of the truth about itself, and about the extent to which its forms of privilege have been paid with the price of another race's flesh?

One of the things that Baldwin insisted upon again and again, and I think absolutely rightly so, is that any practice of confession, any opening oneself up to a story bigger than ourselves, has necessarily got to mean the renunciation of something that one had, up to that moment, felt absolutely certain about, felt absolutely sure about. That might be of my own self-righteous, that might be of my own apprehension of the truth, that might be of my own grasp of my place within this particular story. When you say tone of voice, there is a tone, of course, which is an invitation to reproof, to being maybe not reprimanded, in the way that you've rightly done me, but is an invitation for somebody else to say, "You've just said the way that you see the world. I see it differently. Can you find a place for me within your view of the world? Can I find a place for you?"

Now for me, that's about form, even more than it is about content. That's about tone, even more than it is about substance.

Sam:

Yeah, and I think that goes back to what you were saying earlier, we were both saying a little bit in

the last session, about whether you see that other person as an angel sent from God to you. And you touched at the very end about whether that's actually a selfish way to look at things, and I think it's actually a fundamental way to look at things. So, there's a line, and we talked about this last week... There's a line that... Feuerbach, Ludwig Feuerbach, who to me is the greatest critic of Christianity, talks about how Christians make of God the distinction between them and those that they want to despise. And God becomes the label that they put on their jackets, if you like, or like a Boy Scout putting a badge on a sleeve, to show that they're better than everybody else. God becomes instrumentalized in the cause of us actually making ourselves superior.

And so, the journey from there to say, "I believe that God is sending me everything that I need, I can only receive that everything if I receive you". There's an enormous gap, an enormous journey... but that's the journey I think most congregations need to make, because I can think of the most wonderful church I've served as vicar... and even in that most wonderful church, I think Feuerbach's criticism was still true. It was a housing estate, housing project. I don't know the name you use for public housing here... was the inside of the parish, and the outer perimeter of the parish were the private houses. And because of the way education was constructed in England until about 1970, the people in the private houses had, on the whole, been to the grammar school, and the people in the council houses had been to the secondary modern school.

And the single problem about the little church that I came to serve, that never had a congregation much bigger than 15 adults, was that the people who had been to the grammar school and lived in the private houses came to the church, and thought that coming to church was the outward and visible sign of the inner truth that they were better than the other people. So, funnily enough, the people on the inside of the community didn't come... but I wonder why. And that changed under my visionary leadership, because it just became problematized. Some people started to buy the council housing, the dynamics started to change a little bit... but it was still a problem that God had been instrumentalized in that cause.

So, I guess that's what I mean about tone of voice, that it needs to come from a place of humility. It's much more attractive to hear somebody witness by saying, "I was an addict and this was what saved me," than to say, "After I'd won my fourth Olympic gold medal, I realized Christianity was the belief that affirmed my magnificence." But the danger is, the person who feels their route out of addiction has to be normative for everybody else. That's the only way that that goes wrong.

Scott:

Let's shift things onto Scripture for a moment.

Sam:

Oh, I forgot that.

Scott:

Because there is a difference... When I'm saying this is a particular vision of Christian truth, I'm not trying to necessarily lump the opening of oneself up to be known, the confessing of one's sins, and then hearing of Scriptures, to say that they're all the same thing. But there does come that moment in Scripture reading, if we're doing it well, in the hearing of Scripture read and preached... If we're doing it well, there comes that moment... (You talked before about the instrumentalization of God). There comes that moment, if we're doing it well, where I have no idea if God's on my side or not.

One of the ways that we pay careful attention to the texture of Scripture to the way in which the words run, the way in which the genre works, is by noticing those moments of what could only be called... Can we call it this? Radical inter-canonical disagreement.

You talked before about the Syro-phoenecian woman, and Jesus changing his mind. That's what we have to say when we read that, not that this is some careful rhetorical ruse where Jesus was trying to draw out the hidden pearls or whatever, or that this was... You know what we all do when we've been... "Yes, I knew that that was the Collect for Purity, I just misspoke." You know that moment where we try to claim something we already knew, when we've been shown up as not knowing what we were talking about? Just think though about what happens in the Book of Job, for instance, where Job's friends are orthodox, Deuteronomic theologians, and the judgment that they give on Job is drawn directly... I mean this quite literally, directly from Deuteronomy 28, and God says they're wrong.

Or think, as we're going to hear this week, about the Book of Ruth, where the very person who is the embodiment of God's steadfast love and grace to the House of Naomi is herself one of the accursed Moabites, whom Deuteronomy says are accursed. There must come necessarily that moment, if we are to subject ourself to the truth of scripture, where that truth may well not be on my side. Or, it may well not be truth that's in my favor, or it may be something that needs me to go someplace, to recognize someone, or to expose myself to something that I've ruled out in advance. So, I'm wondering I guess, about the relationship between truth and unsettling, truth and surprise, within the very practice of scriptural reading and hearing, and the practice of preaching.

Sam:

Yeah. This isn't meant to be a humorous aside, but it is actually a humorous aside... I'm thinking that you immediately put me in touch with my least favorite things people say to you at the door when they're leaving. So, this was particularly the case when I was Dean of University Chapel, and parents would come for parents weekend, and I would preach a sermon. And of course, that would be the one Sunday when the child or the student went to the chapel.

And the parent on the outside would say, "Dean Wills, that was just what Julie needed to hear." And after a couple years, I gained a bit more confidence in the role and felt able to say, "Actually, I was talking to you." But the, "That was just what Julie needed to hear," line was, again, the instrumentalization, but that's what bothered me so deeply about it. So, that would be my response to that. And the practice of preparing to preach should be an experience of hearing the arrow of Scripture. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" "Get out from under that." That's a painful line to preach on, because the preacher is always preaching to themselves.

There are two what I find universal rules about preaching, and there are probably many and between us, we'd have a lot of fun creating others, but the two that seem relevant to this are... Number one, when the preacher is preaching to his or herself... "What are you doing here, Elijah?" when you've been in the parish for 42 years, you can absolutely guarantee that every single member of the congregation is so self-absorbed, they don't realize that the preacher is preaching to themselves. That's one of the great rules of preaching, so don't worry about doing it because no one will notice. And the number two thing, which again, goes to the parents weekend, is that I would guarantee that every single person here has preached a sermon to the 17 year old Sarah who is beginning to think that church is a bit boring and is still tagging along dutifully, but you happen to know goes to the Hillsong Congregation with her friends along the road, or whatever it is. And you think it's pretty certain she's going to settle there, if she's going anywhere at all. You think maybe

you should be grateful...

And so, one Sunday you prepare the humdinger sermon that will finally persuade Sarah that Christianity is cool and that, more importantly, you're cool. And that you completely get it, and that she should come and trudge her way through the liturgy with everybody else and enjoy it. And you can be... This is the second rule of preaching. You can 100% guarantee that Sarah won't be there that Sunday. So preaching to one individual is always wrong... not on principle grounds, but just on practical grounds, because the rules are she never comes that day. And the person who's thinking about leaving their wife doesn't come that day, on the day that you preach that incredibly moving sermon about marriage.

So, all of which is saying... the word is alive and active and sharper than a two-edged sword, and all those kind of things that we say in an entirely cliched way to each other... But we think that we are preaching to the nations, but we do all need to be converted every Sunday, and that includes the preacher. You all know all this, but...

While you've got the microphone, tell us a little bit more about the truth of Christianity in what you've already said you don't like, the marketplace, particularly of other faiths. I guess it's easier for you to talk about this and it's more appropriate for you to talk about this than me. Before the missionaries came, was the Gospel in Australia? Those sort of questions.

Scott:

Wow! Let me begin differently. Six years ago, my then 13, 14 year old daughter... My wife and I discovered the worst way, that as a highly motivated, driven young woman who had unrelenting standards for herself and very little regard for what other people thought about her... Put those things together, and that puts her in psychological ground zero for anorexia nervosa. We went through a hellish, hellish period of her own self-purification, which ended up being a form of self-destruction. We were doing our best to help, and all of a sudden, she collapsed at school. We took her to the hospital, which very quickly admitted her to the psychiatric ward.

I was with Sharni that evening. It would have been about 2:30, nearly 3:00 in the morning. I couldn't sleep. She was sleeping fitfully, and my phone buzzed, and the wife of my dearest friend, who knew nothing about this... He's a Muslim, she's a Muslim convert. She was Baptist, converted to Islam three years before meeting him. There was a message from her. "I just woke up. I knew I had to pray for you and your family. I hope everything's okay."

Theologically, I don't have much way of making sense of that. But what struck me is that immediately, theologically, that I had no interest in making sense of that. Rowan Williams has this idea that I'll confess helps me in particular environments in which I have to work, which is, there are things obviously about Christianity that have influenced me and shaped me deeply... There is a language that I want to use in the way that I talk to people, that I hope is hospitable, that I hope is also open to reproof, without pulling out the big guns of revelation or whatever.

But there's an idea in Rowan Williams' more recent work that I've found personally transformative, and that is the idea not of comparative religions or of inter-religious dialogue, but of comparative holiness. When you are with another person, and you eat with them and you pray with them, and you open your life to theirs to be reproved, to be instructed... What of God do you unavoidably see in them? What of God speaks to you without dilution, without alibi, without qualification? What in that impels you then to say, "Where did you get that from? How did you learn that? What taught

you that? What practices allowed you to know God the way that you do? How can I know that as well? Where did these things come from? Is there something in common in the way that we can see the world?"

There's a great Jewish theologian at the University of Virginia who I know named Peter Oakes. He's got this wonderful, wonderful argument. It makes no sense asking, "Do Christians and Muslims and Jews worship the same God?" "Because" he says, "in the end, Christians and Christians don't worship the same God." Anybody who has worshipped with another Christian, to say that we are... But when you pray with a Muslim, when you read Scripture with... In other words, not generally but particularly... when you find you can pray together and eat together and know God together, you discover something in one another that's impossible to generalize about. In answer to your particular question, I have no idea. I have no idea. I have no idea if the Gospel was here in advance. I have no idea what relationship there was with the Creator of the universe in advance. What I do know is that there is an unavoidable, irreducible call to humble ourselves, and to be addressed anew by the word of God in the invitation of First Nations people, that Christians avoid to the point of idolatry.

To that extent this is where I always prefer Aristotle over Plato. I would far prefer the truth then to be known in the warp, the woof, the immediacy of the relationships, rather than speculating of what came before. Is that a okay act of avoidance?

Sam:

I think my next project, as far as a writing project's concerned, is likely to be about the theology of the Holy Spirit, that hasn't already sub-contracted that to the Charismatics. You know how we think, "Mary, well, she's a Catholic, isn't she?" We all know the Virgin Mary's a catholic. And we all know that the Holy Spirit's really a Pentecostal. And so, people from the part of the church largely represented in this room tend to be pretty inarticulate about the Holy Spirit.

And I think there's something that's not just a matter of manners and speech about that. Luther says Jesus is God, and so can be anywhere, and so, can perfectly well be in the bread and the wine, and therefore believes in the real presence. Calvin says Jesus is fully human, so can only be in one place at a time, so is in heaven, and so is not in the bread and the wine. But the Holy Spirit, who is not fully human but is God, can make Christ present in the bread and the wine. So, in receiving the bread and wine, we're not receiving Jesus but we're receiving his benefits, forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, so it's kind of as good as.

So, I think if we take Calvin's understanding of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit can be in places where Christ isn't explicitly present. And we can have an understanding of the working of God in places where that's not immediately recognizable, but if we'd been there at the time, we'd have thought that was kingdom-like. So, I'm not disagreeing with your thoughtful avoidance, but I'm just trying to provide a bit of orthodox Christian language to say things that I think a lot of people in this room would really want to say, but sound like they're deviating from truth, if you like. And I think the Holy Spirit is just neglected... You'd think, how could we possibly neglect the third person of the trinity? But I think we do, and we do it partly for good reasons. Because we want to talk about Jesus... Fair enough, and rightly or wrongly, we (clergy) tend to collude with the laity's more inarticulate collapsing of God, and what we would call God the Father or the first person, into the same thing.

And so, for both those reasons, we tend to neglect talking about the Holy Spirit. And then for some

of us... Of course, I completely rule myself out of this, we're so terrified by what Charismatics do with the Holy Spirit, we want to run 100 miles from that. This isn't a problem for me, you understand, but I do know some people like that. So, for those three reasons, we don't talk enough about the Holy Spirit. But I think partly we don't talk enough about the Holy Spirit, because we're slightly inarticulate about being able to understand how God would work outside of church.

Session 3 - Responding

Scott:

So, just to wrap up the last of the parts of yesterday's session.

I agree that there is very, very little... you remember that Sam said yesterday, "There are two incredibly dangerous words in Christian ethics. One is "the", and the other is "we." I agree entirely, that there is very little, philosophically, theologically, ethically, to redeem, "the". This is one of the reasons I always prefer Aristotle over Plato. I always prefer particularities over universalities. That's another conversation for another day. You don't need me to talk about that.

I'm worried though that "we" got given a bad name yesterday. And I think that a little something needs to be said in its favour, especially in our time. I'm entirely in agreement that "we" can be in a preeminent form, of passive aggression or aggressive aggression. It can be a way of forcing or enforcing a degree of conformity and normality without the hard work of conciliation or reconciliation. I agree with that entirely. I also agree that we can slide over the necessary diversity that one would need to have in a background in order for the best kind of conversations, the best sort of negotiations to take place. And again, we can say something about who the people who are "in" are, and what you then have to do in order to get to this position. Both of those things are given.

But I've noticed something, over the last eight years in particular, that I think ought to scare the living daylights out of us. And that's the extent to which we have become remarkably, and I do mean "we" as participants in something like a shared public culture. And I do mean "we", as those of us who are participants in the hard work of Christian ministry and life in discipleship (the world). We have become incredibly inarticulate in defining and explaining and articulating, what's wrong with this moment in which we live. You'll notice for instance, there's a vague sense I think, that something's going wrong in the shared political project called democracy.

But if you press anybody about what that in fact might be, very, very quickly, it comes up with this or that bad actor, who has perverted the entire thing. And if we can just get rid of this or that bad actor, then everything can go back to normal or healthier, proper footing. That bad actor's usually named someone like Trump, Mark Zuckerberg, Rupert Murdoch and Vladimir Putin. Or it might be Nigel Farage or Boris Johnson, or it might be whoever it was that was spearheading or masterminding the Brexit. Whatever it is, it's this or that bad actor that has made things go wrong. We need to expunge our common life of that bad actor and then things more or less, get back to normal.

Where I think we have become incredibly inarticulate, is in voicing our sense of proper complicity, the extent to which we are part of whatever problem it is that we care to name. I don't mean a kind of generalized guilt in a generally guilty world. The kind of guilt that all we often talk about when we're talking about say, environmental degradation. It's kind of vague sense of guilt that simmers away in the back of the head to articulate in order to keep your head up the polite company. I mean, the we, that is born out of the reality of our actions in the world, and here's what I think is really important distinction needs to be made. Especially as Christians, especially given the way that we practice things like confession. We have made an idol I think, out of good intention. We've made an idol out of good intention.

"I didn't mean to hurt you. What I was trying to say was..." "I didn't mean to offend you. What I was

trying to express was..." "If that offended you," this is the worst. This is the worst. "If that offended you" and that actually is the worst that there's an "if" and that's right up there with "we" and "the". "If that offends you. I'm sorry. But what I was trying to say was..." I come from a branch of moral philosophy that thinks that intention doesn't matter really one bit. If my actions had an effect upon you, that shrivelled your life, that demeaned you, that caused you to be exposed, or injured, that made the world in which you live a place that is suddenly hostile and contemptuous. If my action did that, that action was guilty. I am guilty and there's no alibi that scrubs that away, there are only amends. There's only doing better. Whatever intention there was that lay behind that, in the end, doesn't matter one bit. It's the reality of the actions in the world and the effects that they have on people that determines whether culpability or not, is there.

And so when we use language like "we", when it comes, for instance, to paying proper regard to the voice of the First Nations of this land. When it comes to, acknowledging culpability in the massive and ever widening degree of inequality and inequity in the modern world. When it comes to the extent to which we are culpable in the pollution of the moral environment in which people speak and live, where they are heard and are spoken to. Then I think it doesn't matter what we were meant to do, or the extent to which we feel actually guilty, if by our actions and if by our reaping the rewards of the actions of previous generations. If we had done something to cause the world in which others live, to be inhospitable to them, and to make the opportunities they have to hear the grace and mercy of God, less possible. Then I think that there's a degree of culpability there, that is importantly named, when we say words like "we".

And so there's where I think, for all the bad effects that it can have, acknowledging in a full throated sense, "We" are the problem. "I'm part of the problem." Not in some kind of vague sense, but in a very real way that I am benefiting from something that has made your life worse. There is a degree of culpability there that I think is very, very important not just to acknowledge, but to work into the way that we pray together, in the way that we proclaim together, and dare I say in the way that we use the word we together.

Sam:

It so happens that we are now going on to responding, which is creed and intercessions and peace, which you could transpose quite neatly as faith and hope and love, the three ways in which we respond to the gospel and the sermon preached. Quite quickly, you can realize that when we move into that part of the service, we use one word before all others, "we". Because it's the first word of the creed, so Scott's teed me up quite nicely there. So that's the appropriate place of "we". "We" that recognizes where the body of Christ and subsumes the "I".

I don't come from this generation, but there was a generation that used to get very outspoken about which parts of the creed it couldn't say.

The point about the creed is that we say it and the people that are struggling are carried by the people who are saying it partly. Knowing that they'll probably be in different positions in perhaps 20 years' time, possibly even 20 minutes. So, the two crucial words in the creed are the first word and the last word. First word is "we"; we've spoken briefly about that. The last one is "Amen". And that is a challenge to all forms of truth and discovery, that are in the end a prayer. We say the creed in the service... In a sense, as a way of channelling the fact that we've heard the gospel, we've repented of our sins, we've heard the gospel. And now we're turning towards the table. And these are the convictions with which we're going to come towards the table, but they're not convictions designed to exclude, that convictions in the end designed to praise.

And then I'll talk to you a little bit more about the intercessions. So, let's just imagine you've all worked in different working environments, and I can imagine you could draw up your perfect colleague. But this would be my perfect colleague. The perfect colleague that says, "You do what you do. You go out as soccer coaches say, "Go out and express yourself on the park." "You go and do what you're good at. You do it to the best of your ability for as long as you can. And I'll do the rest." I haven't found a colleague quite like that. But what a colleague we have in Jesus. Because that's actually what God says to us. "You do in good faith, everything that you can do, and I'll do the rest." And the time when we rediscover that is the intercessions.

Now, you and I think, that people come to church to hear us preach. Well, I've got news for you. People do come to church to sing. But they really come to church to pray. So even though the intercessions may not be the most important part of the service for you, they probably are for more than 50% of the people that come. And whether Norma is mentioned in the intercessions or not is absolutely crucial, to people who come. If Norma is missed off, that's a sign that the pastor has been so obsessed with getting the semi-colons right in the sermon, that the pastor's forgotten to do their job this week. It really matters whether Norma is mentioned in the prayers, to most of the people that come... And the intercessions are a moral event.

I'm going to challenge you now. I want you to, when you go away from this place, back into the darkness I want you to have a conversation with someone in the seven days after you leave here. It's a conversation, ideally with someone from a different social location to yourself. But you can practice on somebody who likes you... who may or may not be somebody who lives with you. Because people who live with you don't always like you. But you can practice on someone but don't have the real conversation with somebody. And the conversation goes like this. You start it off, in fact you do all the introducing. You first of all say, "Tell me about the ways in which you're rich." And then you say, "Tell me about the ways in which you're poor." And then you say, "Let me tell you about the ways in which I'm poor." And then you say, "Let me tell you about the ways in which I'm rich."

That's a conversation that transforms the identity of both parties, particularly if it's had in somewhere like a soup kitchen, where the assumption is that you are the all provider, and the other person is the basket of need. I recommend you have that conversation sometime in the next seven days. But I recommend you that conversation with God every day. "Tell me about ways in which you're rich", is what we call praise. "Tell me about the ways in which you're poor", is what we call confession. "Let me tell you about the ways in which I'm poor", that's what we call intercession. "Let me tell you about the ways in which I'm rich", is what we call thanksgiving. So, have that conversation with somebody else in the next seven days and that conversation with God, every day.

And I want to focus particularly for a few moments on what intercession is and what it isn't. But actually, the liturgy tells us what it isn't. It isn't confession. "O Lord, our government has yet again passed migration laws that shame this nation. Amen." That's not an intercession. Neither is it, a sermon. "O Lord, when will you come down and speak to the legislators of this nation, that they may introduce a clause in the upcoming legislation that will cater for people of all backgrounds and dispositions that they may be more like this congregation in all its magnificence." Again, that's not really an intercession. It's not the sermon. It's not even making up for the shortcomings of the sermon, however tempting that might be. And it's not the prayer of the Great Thanksgiving.

It's true that thanksgiving is too absent in our liturgies. We have a great thanksgiving and we have a

thanksgiving after communion prayer, but both of them aren't quite what we want a thanksgiving prayer to be. Which is two things, one is, "It's actually been a great week, I had my first grandchild. And I want to celebrate." There isn't so obvious place in the liturgy where we do that. Which is kind of a shame, because these are some of the best things in life that we're not bringing into our worship. And thanksgiving also should be, a recognition of intercession sort of turns out as we hoped. And we don't have a place in the liturgy where we do that either. Anyway, that's for the Liturgical Commissions of the world to unite and solve. And solve they it will. But in lots of Roman numeral paragraphs, that take a long time to vote through Synod. So, don't hold out too much hope.

So there are various things that intercessions are not. But intercessions are the chief occasion, unless your sermons are especially eloquent, where people discover the difference between what God does and what they do. If you think about it, the very two things that really matters to Christians. One is how is God working in the world? And the other is, what am I supposed to do about it? And actually, the intercessions are the time when you discover the difference between those two. Because when you're preparing intercessions, or when you're trying to pray intercessions prayed by other people, and actually the first one's easy, then you're making exactly those distinctions. And I don't know if this has been your practice or this is your liturgical formation at seminary, but I strongly recommend to you the Shape of The Collect. The collect just now known as the prayer of Humble Access.

But in my day used to be called the Collect for Purity. But the Collect for Purity is simply, a Collect. And all the Collect in the prayer book takes the same shape. And I'll go through it because, it was not something anyone ever went through with me, in my theological training. It took me a long time into the ministry to appreciate it. You start off with an address to God, and that's pretty significant because you're naming God. And you finish, with a recognition of how this prayer comes to take effect, either through Jesus Christ our Lord or in a more Trinitarian manner. But the business end of the collect is the three bits in between. That the second line of the Collect is amplifying, the God that you've named in the first section, "To whom all hearts be open and all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden."

When you're praying in front of the congregation, and there has been a drastic loss of life... "God of mercy, whose son Jesus wept to his friend Lazarus."... It's just sharpening in on what aspect of the many aspects of God we're actually appealing to. And then, the line that does all the work, the third line. That line has to contain an imperative verb. "We pray for Hong Kong" does not contain an imperative verb. What would an answer to that prayer look like? I have no idea and neither has God. What are you asking God to do? And it's actually in finding the verbs and that third line that you do the moral work.

"Bring success to the protesters that they may overturn the regime on Hong Kong and overturn the Chinese regime" is certainly an imperative verb but as we've found in the last decade or so, all over the world, overturning the regime is not the answer to most countries' problems.

It's a lot more complicated than that if you live in Egypt, or Tunisia, or a host of countries, like Syria, for example. Be careful what you pray for. So that's where you're doing the actual work. So, what is that verb that we're looking for with Hong Kong? That's really hard. Keep at it until you find that verb. And if you're leading prayers for a congregation, your choice of that word could be the most significant word spoken in the whole service, particularly if you're living in Hong Kong, right now.

And then the fourth line... I mean there could be several third lines, you can have multiple petitions of the same. But they've all got to have an imperative verb. Otherwise, it's not clear what God answering that prayer could possibly look like. You've got to pray a prayer that you could be disappointed that God hasn't answered in the way you wanted. "We pray for Hong Kong" is not a prayer that you could be disappointed at God not answering. And then not all Collects have a fourth line, they sometimes jump straight to the fifth line. But the fourth line is, often a "that we may be" kind of line. So, I'm trying to do this from memory now, the collect it for purity-

What's the fourth line? The collect for purity...

"That we may perfectly love thee."

"That we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name." So, the thing about the fourth line is, you've got to work out what an answer to that prayer might actually look like, Which can be even harder than the third line. "That those who rise up in protest throughout the world may know, that you are with them," is a half decent fourth line for Hong Kong right now. It doesn't do all the work that's needed, you need to work a bit harder than that. It can, like the Collect for Purity be about us. But the danger in leading in intercessions, as I've noticed over the years of ministry is, it's too often about us. It shouldn't really be about us, occasionally you can say as... I think it was Gandhi who is most often attributed to the saying, "That we may become the answer to another's prayer." And that's a legitimate thing.

But if you think of all the needs of the world, the chances of us becoming an answer to all of those prayers... that's a big "to do" list for our week. I think Narcissus might have had a view on that. So, assume that it's not is my guidance for line four. But do include a line four because it's cheating not to. You can get away with it but in a sense it's the other half of the imperative verb, that's in line three. And I'm not saying that the Collect is the only way to intercede. I'm just saying that if you or somebody you know very well is in the habit of anodyne obsessions that say, "We pray for peace. We pray for all the stuff that's so complicated out there will stop being so complicated and everyone will be happy."

If your prayer sounded suspiciously like that, then I recommend the discipline of a Collect for about 10 or 15 years. Until you can leave the undercarriage behind and trust yourself to do that work in a more poetic or life transforming way. I have not yet got to the point where I've lost the undercarriage. I still need the structure, that five-old structure, because it gives me everything I need. And it reminds me every day of what it's my job to do, and how God does the rest and not to get the two mixed up. And rightly or wrongly, my role in transforming Hong Kong right now is probably not all that great. So, for the fourth line to say, "That I may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy holy name," doesn't seem an adequate fourth line for Hong Kong, right now? And we needed something a little bit more China based than that.

And it just forces you. And it's annoying. Because you say, "I can't really think of a line four." Think of a line four! And stay with it until you do. And then make yourself compose intercessions spontaneously in front of other people, at morning or something and get better at it. And if there is a long pause before line four comes out so be it. You're learning. You're shaping your mind to be the mind of Christ. So, the intercessions do give us everything we need to go down the line that Scott quoted at the beginning of the first session yesterday. They make us into real Christians, not in the way that the creed does. By saying, this is the faith with the church deal with it, but by actually

separating very significant things. So, it helps us separate suffering from evil. Evil is something that only God in Christ deals with. Suffering is something that's suitable for the intercessions. It helps us separate what we need from what we want.

Sometimes in the process of praying for what we want to be in the intercessions, we realize it's not something that we actually need. "Generous God, who, in the feeding of the 5,000 and gave the disciples and the gathered people 12 baskets leftover, give me an extra-large SUV, that I may visit to the far corners of my parish, and that people may glorify Your holy name. Amen." There's a slight problem with line three. But it's not so far away from the prayers that we often pray. But sometimes surrounded by that and the worthiness of the second and the fourth line makes us go back and ask questions about that third line, whether a medium sized SUV will be absolutely adequate. So, praying shapes our moral character, shapes our habits, it shapes our expectations of God. But but it also expands our desires.

So, in May this year I was in the Netherlands and I was at what's technically called an absurdly long healing service. I don't know if that's the technical name listed in the prayer book for what you have in Australia. But this was an absurdly long service. I looked at it and I talked to the person presiding and said this is going to take three and a half hours mate, I'm telling you... It took three and a half hours. So, I was full of righteous self-congratulation, mixed with exhaustion. Anyway, we paired off and in twos, we prayed for people. And it's not appropriate to go into the details of what each person shared but it doesn't take huge imagination.

When a couple came forward, just the two of them, with tears in their eyes, and talked about what the last 10 years had been for them. And after five minutes of listening to these two, I looked at my colleague, and we were both... I could see it her eyes. And she said it, but she said the words that were in my mouth, which is. "We need to pray for a miracle." We both knew it... Just on a gut level. We just knew that these incredibly faithful two people needed their longings to be embraced by the church and brought to the throne of grace. And it wasn't our responsibility how God answered that prayer. But what we mustn't do is somehow protect God by holding back. And so again, I'll probably will never know what will happen to them but schooling our desires it's not just about reducing them to what's realistic in terms of growing democracy in the Arab world.

It's also expanding our desires to say, "This couple have done absolutely everything that anyone could possibly do, God it's time that you do the rest. Do it. We're sitting here, we're waiting for you. I don't understand why you're not doing it. It doesn't make any sense. Their coming to us in tears saying, 'it doesn't make any sense.'" We're saying, "It doesn't make any sense sunshine. You're right. We're endorsing what you're feeling and we're going to pray the four of us together." So anyway, that's the power of intercession. It's not just about being realistic. It's also about being theological.

I'm not going to say much about peace because I think I've had my time. But just to say there's one priest that I know that puts the chasuble on the altar, at the beginning of the service. And then leads the service wearing an alb and stole, gets to the peace and then says. "Can we celebrate the peace in such a way that it's appropriate to go on and celebrate communion? Or are we as a community, needing to leave our gift at the altar and go and deal with some things." It's a challenging way to lead worship. I've not actually known him not put the chasuble on. But just the question. If you did it every Sunday people will get a bit tired of it. But I don't imagine there's anyone here has ever experienced conflict in their church.

But in England, we do have things like that. And you can just imagine occasions when that gesture

to say, "Let's just read those few words on the Sermon on the Mount again, it does say, "if you're bringing your gift to the altar..." We seem to take some words of the scripture extremely literally. But we don't seem to take all words extremely literally. Why don't we take those ones literally today? And then you do the teacher, "I'm staying behind school afterwards so it's no skin off my nose to stay." Particularly if you're sitting in silence until somebody fesses up or whatever teachers like to say. And you can do that. Let's sit down for a minute together in silence and see if we're actually ready to receive what God has to give to us. And if you think we're not ready, come and have a word with me. And we'll keep sitting here till we can sort this out. Anyway, that's just one challenge about the peace.

Scott:

I think I'd like to put a pin in that for the next session. If you don't mind, I want to take one step back and hopefully to bring Jo into this as well. And I'd like to do it by way of a novel that I want to talk a little bit about, later and tomorrow. But I've been living with to, probably to abnormal extent to over the last eight months and that's E.M. Foster's novel Howard's End. There's one moment that I love, where Ruth Wilcox, who is a saintly, saintly figure in the book who has a sense of things that is... The only word that I could find is saintly. She has a sense of things, but she hasn't got the words. She has a love for a particular place in the world, a house called Howards End.

And she meets a young woman named Margaret Schlegel, who has no sense of the world, but she is virtuosic with her words. Her words are right. She's almost like an Eden like character. She sees something and has the word for it. So, she's impoverished in her experience of the world, but she's rich in her gift with language. And at one point, Ruth Wilcox asks Margaret Schlegel, "Come to Howard's End with me. I want to show you the house, I want to show you the meadow, I want to show you the witch-elm, I want to show you the inside, the outside, I want to show you the pigs' teeth that have been embedded in the bark, I want to show you... I want you to give me the words. Describe to me what you see.

This wonderful thing never happens. But this prospect of gift given. "I'll show you what I see. You give me the words that I need." And what she's asking for is a gift from Margaret Schlegel. You give me the words, so that I can experience this place I love more fully more richly. Sam you just offered I think one of the most beautiful descriptions of the word, "work" that is bound up in faithful worship. People bringing "this is what I see." This is the world that we both experienced. Give me the words, I don't have the words to know then what to do with this next. But if we were to take seriously what Jo was just saying to us, was showing us in Ruth. If the vulnerability of God is something that we need to take seriously within our worship. If the example of figures like Naomi, and Job, and Jeremiah, and about 40% of the Psalms is something we need to take seriously. It's that what it means for God to be vulnerable is that we can talk back.

God can be spoken to and God can be spoken to in language that is far less effete than the kind of language we usually bring to bear. So, when you just gave the example of, "They've been waiting too long. Why haven't you done...? This makes sense." In other words, let me get to the point, where are our words for lament in the structure of Christian worship? When lament seems to me to accurately characterize a great deal of the lives in which we live. And lament is where we tend to find ourselves least articulate, not because the feelings are mushy, but because they're often simply too sharp. And there's no way of then turning that into something that we can actually get our arms around.

So it's a double-barrelled question, (a) where is the lament in the way we worship? Secondly, where

is the language that we then should be drawing on as a way of giving people "this is the world that you see what. Let me give your gift back to you." Maybe some of the words that you will be able to use. Jo, I don't know if you want to start.

Bishop Jo Bailey Wells:

Most of all, I think they're in the Psalms. And we need to use the Psalms in worship. And I can't speak for you guys but in classic Church of England churches, even at a Eucharist, you will get a maximum of two readings on an average Sunday in an average church, and not at St Martin-in-the-Fields, I'm sure.

Sam:

There is no average Sunday at St. Martin's.

Bishop Jo:

I do think Israel's hymn book, over half the Psalms are Psalms of lament. Some of them are individual, some of them are communal. That says to me, we should be praying like the book of psalms, that is our model. That is what our hymn book should look like, that is what our prayer book should look like. We should learn to do it individually and we need to learn to do so communally. If we're doing it communally, it will, sometimes it will be 9/11, where we're all in the same place. But more often than not, Nora will be weeping while Fred is rejoicing. And we've got to learn to be with one another and approach God together with all of that mess.

I don't know what hymn book you use but some of the classic hymnbooks are not that great at sharing emotion, because it wasn't the sort of proper British thing to do in the Victorian era or whatever. But I have to say, I think I'm not a huge fan of many contemporary choruses. But I do think, among contemporary courses, perhaps very recently, the last 10 years, there has been a much stronger move to move into the minor key and express pain. Actually, there was a beautiful one we began with yesterday "Beauty for brokenness." And I think some of the choruses do, but again, they can be overused and then they become manipulative and quite tricky, but it seems to me we have to learn to sing in the minor key together where there isn't a resolution at the end.

Sam:

Yeah, actually, Graham Kendrick is a much mocked contemporary songwriter, but he does do (I think he did compose, beauty for brokenness)... And you may know his song, "Who can sound the depths of sorrow". I might be wrong in this, so forgive me if I'm wrong, but I believe I'm right in saying that "Who can sound the depths of sorrow" is actually about abortion. And I think Kendrick is both being wise enough not to make that enormously widely known. And also, within the song itself, not to be in legislating or guilt inducing mode, simply in lament mode. And that's the strength of that particular song, I think is that it doesn't do what contemporary society and the church tends to do about abortion, which is to go straight into judgment and legislation mode. Those kind of things, it just says this is these are situations of great sadness and nobody wishes them and leaves the rest to God, which seems to be an admirable model for all of us.

I'm just thinking in terms of what Jo says... as in all things, I completely agree with Jo... but I think it does beg the question of whether between the old and the new testament readings is the right place for the Psalm. And I think if you understand it as Jo has described it, Lament probably belongs in one of two places in a service. It probably belongs side by side with the confession at the very beginning. Or it belongs, at the end, as a way of saying, with humility, "We have seen the glory of God, we have shared in the glory of God, and yet it still hurts." And that would be the other

place to put it. But I think this is a place for the expertise of the minister on the ground.

There are churches, among which I count my own, where the majority of the congregation come to worship after the worship has already started. This is not on the account of the visionary leadership provided by the senior clergy, but it happens at anyway. It's not the only church, I've been where that happens. But there are churches where people come to church sometime before, that the stated service time. And just as it's quite common in churches to offer prayers for healing, or something for people to stay afterwards, in a situation like that, where people come early, you might be able to offer prayers of Lament during the 20 minutes before the formal service starts. Because actually, that's when people are hurting the most, when they've got the dissonance between the week they've had, and what they anticipate to be the very superficial service that they're about to enter into and the fear that it's not going to connect. And just as in good group process, things I'm sure you've worked with in terms of how to do a good Bible study, you want everybody in the room to have spoken in the first 10 minutes otherwise, you fear that there was a volcano inside them that's waiting to burst out. I guess, if you want an example of what happens when you don't do that, you just have to speak of a Synod meeting. That was a joke, by the way. But when people are sat on their hands for two minutes, then that's when they do stand up to speak, what they say is often rather aggressive. But in the same way, if you can create a way before worship, or before worship of the whole begins, where people can express that sense of lament. And lament is, just to be clear about it theologically, it's stating the wonder and the mystery and the glory of God, and the horror and the grief and the loss of our present circumstances and calling on God to close the gap between the two. That's what lament is.

And you would want worship to do that. But to do that, it's got to get to God. And sometimes it's very difficult for the diversity of the guts in the building to be represented in the liturgy precisely. So, it does require your imagination as clergy on the ground to work out how to best express it. But lament and thanksgiving are the two things that I think are significantly missing. And while we praise Cranmer for many things, he didn't get everything, right.

Question:

I'd just like to make a comment. I wonder whether the fact that in Australian culture there's this tendency to say, "She'll be right, mate." It just shuts down any attempt to lament, it's almost like people don't want to listen to the sad story... They just want to, "She'll be right mate." And that closes the conversation. I just wonder about that...

Sam:

Yeah, I think of physical posture when you say that. I think of the moments when the Gospel say, "Jesus sat down." So "Jesus sat down" is a way of saying something the opposite of what you've just said. Jesus says, "Okay, this is worth a lot of time." And it seems to me the incarnation is, "Jesus sat down". Jesus sat down for 30 years with us before any ministry in the conventional sense began. And yeah, we need in our worship and in our pastoral care to sit down in that way. And not to remain standing up in a way that basically dismisses the other person's pain. Because it doesn't fit the story or because we our heart isn't big enough to hear it.

Scott:

Or because the solution... the extent to which I can do something about it isn't apparent. And so that if you like is kicking the can a bit further down the road. Here's where there's a category that Sam has introduced that I've just found immensely, immensely helpful. And that's the difference between doing something for somebody and doing something with somebody or simply to close the gap all

together, and simply "being with". A dear friend of mine, the story that I told yesterday, about something happening with my daughter. A good friend of mine happened to get in touch the following day, "How are you?" "Terrible, frankly." And I was about midway through my first sentence. "Oh, oh oh." And hung up. He's not a bad friend.

He was actually honest. He'd no idea what to say, and even less, what to do. And so, he did the honest thing, and hung up the phone. I didn't take offense to it. But it strikes me that is a great deal, especially those of us who try to help too much. The ability simply to sit and simply to be, in the hopes that something may well emerge by holding these two things together. That it seems to me is precisely what is being ruled out by "It will work out. It will be okay."

Question:

Sam I'd really appreciate it, if you could go through quickly, again, those five things from the Collect for Purity, just so I can them into my head and get the notes down again...

Sam:

Okay, so number one is the address to God. And as you'll have seen from going through it, I tend to... if I'm writing intercessions, I'll tend not to write that name of God until I've written the rest, because I'm trying to work out what... am I addressing generous God? Merciful God? God of wonder and glory? They're different. So, because it comes first, that doesn't mean that you compose that first. And second is what we already have seen of God, and what God has already done, usually in Christ. So "merciful God, who in Jesus grieved for his friend, Lazarus." would be a typical second one.

Then the third line is the one that starts with the imperative verb and actually says what we want God to do... "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, and transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace." And then the fourth line, if there is one, and I encourage, that there should be. There are a number of Collects in the book, that don't have one. The fourth line then describes the change in the world or ourselves that you wish the action to bring about. And then the last line is how actually in the heart of God this happens. For me, "Through Jesus Christ, our Lord," is usually enough, but the Collects tend to move in a more trinitarian direction. But that's not really the issue, I think the important thing is to get lines three and four right.

Just one tail piece on this. And I mention this just because number of people said they found this helpful. I think in terms of three kinds of intercessions. And I guess I've articulated this most fully in relation to a friend of mine who had just been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Which as many people will know, offers you a sort of a 10% chance of lasting more than a year. So, I think of three prayers... there's the prayer of incarnation, where line three says, "Be with Richard and those who are his companions, that they may know Your presence, etc." There's the prayer of Resurrection, which is the "Lift this cancer from the pancreas of Richard, strengthen the hands of the doctors that they may bring healing, and that within days, he may walk from the hospital, a healthy man."

And many people in this room may have some misgivings about that. Second prayer, though, as I hope I demonstrated in the story of the healing service in the Netherlands, I think there is a place for it. But the prayer that I would most usually say is what I call the prayer of Transfiguration, which is "Make for Richard and his family this time, the most intense and alive moments of his life where he sees love and faith and truth like never before. May he look back on this time, whether he lives long or short, as the time when he truly walked with You and soar into Your heart that even as his body

aches and his family grieve. He may sing with joy for knowing he is Your child." That's the prayer of Transfiguration and in situations of crisis, to be honest I tend to go for that third one.

Session 4 - Sharing

Sam:

Okay. Self-promotion, if you'll allow that for a couple of moments. This is footnotes to the last session. So, the general structure of the five-fold shape of the Eucharist is in a book called "God's Companions" that I wrote 13 years ago, that Scott kindly referred to having read, probably about the time it came out. So, the book isn't just about the five-fold parts of the Eucharist, it's also about how God gives us everything we need on a number of other levels. I wrote a book called "Crafting Prayers for Public Worship", which was published about five years ago, that talks about intercessions along the lines that I talked about in the last session. So, if you want more on that, "Crafting Prayers for Public Worship" is the place to find it.

And then, the four-fold distinction between working for, working with, being with, and being for, that Scott alluded to, is something I've spent a lot of the last 10 years writing about, fully in a book called "The Nazareth Manifesto". Perhaps more succinctly, and in a couple of books called "Incarnational Ministry" and "Incarnational Mission". The theological dimensions of that as far as the atonement is concerned is worked out in a book called "Hanging by a Thread". So, the book I'd like you to read is "Nazareth Manifesto". But if you want shorter versions, they are available. So that's just a little bit of a footnote to say, this is where you can find that stuff. And I can certainly put it in a highlights package and email it to Bishop Jeremy or one of the conference organizers, if you want to find any of those things in more detail.

Scott:

Just continue in the spirit of self-promotion, not me but him. I have two full time roles in the ABC - I love both. The one that keeps me awake at night, and quite literally, I've worked on this late night is, I edit the ABC religion ethics website. If you go to abc.net.au/religion, you'll see there on the homepage, a very fine piece by Sam, on the nature of identity and the mission of the church. It's the text of the lecture that he delivered at the university divinity in Melbourne last week, it really is something. I mean, it really is something. It's one of the best things that I published, and there are links to some of his books at the bottom as well. So, we're just promoting all around.

We are with "peace" and the Eucharist. I want to frame this in a particular way, though, that I hope is helpful. And is not simply self-serving. An idea that's been dancing around the edges of what Sam and I've been talking about for the last two days... And, it's something that's come up in some of the questions that have been asked, is the extent to which the church is complicit, in the peculiar malaise in which we find ourselves. The extent to which the church has provided a model, for instance of sectarian disagreement, or what's sometimes called say, zero-sum disagreement. Or even Manichean disagreement. There's light, and there's darkness, there's good, and there's evil, and all that matters is which side we're on.

But I think we need to be awfully attentive, to the various temptations that lay all around us, that may sound like moments of where we're being asked to rise to a particular challenge. So, for instance, to take something that's very much in the news at the moment, you can imagine, after Israel Folau out sent out his second Instagram exhortation that the following people are going to hell. And he was probably reprimanded for that third time by Rugby Australia. You can imagine the number of people that immediately gathered around him saying, "Don't you realize that your witness is on the line?"

Don't you realize that you are in the fiery furnace here? Don't you realize that this is your Stephen

moment, where you can stand up and be counted? That seems to me to be catastrophic advice on every conceivable level, because it's conflating Jesus with something else. But it seems to me that there are all sorts of moments where the church has been lured into moments of moral seriousness, and what we believe to be moral seriousness, of taking a stand on the right side. Planting our flag on the right ground, of fighting the good fight with the right comrades against the right enemy.

And it seems to me that almost all of those temptations are catastrophic for us. And even worse, than that are catastrophic for the world. Because it means that we are then buying and fully to precisely to what it is that is wrong by identifying the wrong threats, the wrong enemies. So, let me hold out a thread to you, that I think is unravelled by, addressed in the Eucharist, and in the passing of the peace. For the last 18 months, I've been working on a book on contempt. Melbourne University Press asked me to write a book about an idea that was big enough to devote a book to, that maybe people aren't talking about enough. And for me, there was no contender. It's contempt.

Let me give you a very brief potted summary and try to explain why I think this is important. There are three kinds of contempt that I think are worthy of our attention. There are three variations of contempt... I suspect they all have a particular thing in common. What these three kinds of contempt are; the first can be called patriarchal contempt, or you could call it bureaucratic contempt. Or you could even call it the contempt of the one-way mirror. "We know more about you, than you can know about us". "I know what's good for you." "Listen to the advice that I have to give you." "I know what you really want", or "I know what it is that you're really trying to say beyond your feeble or seemingly righteous words." So, for instance, when Megan Davis, Professor of Law at University of South Wales who's one of the framers of the Uluru statement from the heart.

When she wrote that the Turnbull Government expressed an irredeemable contempt for the voices of the First Nations, this is what she's referring to. "We are happy to do things for you." "We are happy to legislate on your behalf. But you have nothing to say that we need to hear." This is the contempt of the one-way mirror. Going back to Howard's End. When Henry Wilcox is sitting at table with Margaret Schlegel, and asks, "What wine She wants to drink, and she says, "Oh, no, what you really want is the grio. That's the patriarchal contempt. Or the contempt, "I know what you really want even if you don't."

There's another form of contempt, which I think is also really disturbing. And that I think is best called visceral contempt.

It's the contempt of a body to another body. It's the contempt that stopped races from swimming in the same pools, or from drinking from the same fountains. It's the visceral recoil, to same sex attraction, or same sex relationship. It's the recoil of one body from another, that is afraid of ever being too close, of sharing the same space. And if I can put it this way, of even sharing the same future together. The only future that we can have, we can have to the extent to become more like me, effectively. So, this is contempt that can be motivated by a degree of compassion. It's a form of contempt that's even facilitated by looking at pictures of poverty, or war-torn areas, from the safe distance of your mobile phone.

It's contempt that's facilitated by what could be called a moral prophylactic, there's a safe distance between us. I can be motivated by your plight. I can retweet or even write or raise money on behalf of your plight. Just don't ask me to sit down at a table with you. So, this is a kind of visceral contempt, the contempt of bodies. It's a form of racial contempt. It could be a form of sexual content as well.

The final form of contempt, I think, is the most insidious. It's the most attractive to us. And that's moral contempt. It's a contempt that judges another person as being under a degree of moral sin. "You are wrong. You have nothing to say that I need to hear. There is nothing that you have, that could possibly teach me anything."

"Before you write, what it is that you're going to write, I know what it is that you're going to say. Even if you seem to be saying something different from what I think you're going say, I know your agenda behind it." Does any of this sound familiar? You may be saying something that I find completely inoffensive that I could actually rally around, but I know where you're coming from. So moral contempt is, you are under moral judgement. You have nothing to say that I need to hear. So, you need to be "no platformed". You need to be exiled from public space. Or you need to be confined to the tribe of those who are already convinced by what it is that you have to say. But you have nothing to say to me.

I think that final form of contempt is based on, it's predicated on, a form of moral judgment that is corrosive. It's a form moral judgment that says, once you have been censured, there is nothing more that we have to say to one another. It's sharp to the degree to which we were having this debate when a member of Donald Trump's administration, Sarah Sanders went to a restaurant and was turfed out by its owners. Whether it's okay to deny someone food service, because of what it is that they belong to, what it is they facilitate. I found that particular debate, not just on every conceivable level. Not that there aren't moments of what we might call church discipline, where there's a party and the way, but that the purpose of the party and the ways always are coming back together again.

And I don't know how that coming back together again happens, if there isn't some kind of meaningful contact among us. So, these forms of contempt, they're all given a moral tinge, aren't they? Men simply know better than women, because they are more worldly, they have more lived practical experience. It's not really inherent superiority, but it's the fruits of generation after generation of accumulated knowledge of good experience. That would be the moral tinge, if you like, to patriarchy. We simply know more than you do, so, we should be able to advise. That's the moral tinge, the moral claim of patriarchy. Visceral contempt is very rarely simply about one body's bad reaction to another body. It's because this race is better or that race is innately perverted. The final contempt though, this moral contempt... It's morality, if you like is all on the surface. But it's predicated on moral corruption. Which is this idea that moral judgment is about marking off one side as right, and one side as wrong. Rather than mapping the conditions within which those two sides can come back together again. It's that last one I think, that the church has plunged into. The church has been guilty of all of them, and in space. It's that last one I think, the church is really plunged into. The way that we self-select our congregations. The way that we ensure that we worship with the likeminded, and we practice then, forms of every day ecclesial contempt, for that congregation that we actively choose not to worship at when we drive past. They might be in our local parish, but God help us if we will ever darken that particular door.

I think here's where the practice of sharing the peace, the touch, the look, the possibility of real contact without force, or that at least opens up, that it makes the occasion to us. You and I would have all seen moments of real fracture between people, and as long as they stay out of contact with one another, that fracture is able to stay alive. But it takes just the slightest inclination of one towards another; a joke, sharing of some reminiscence, a slight lowering of the guard, a slight inclination of one body towards another. That's sometimes all that it takes for there to be the opportunity for real reconciliation between people. And then, of course, this image, the practice of

us all coming back to the common table, us all sharing of one bread, as all gathering together around the same cup.

And then, what I think is perhaps the most profound liturgical moment of all, where the priest takes into her own body, all that's been left over in that cup, all the forms of contamination and contempt, that we revile from. The priest takes all those moments of visceral disdain that we still practice, gathers them together, and ingests them into her own body. Seems to me that these three moments, the listening together to the common word and the common prayers, the saying together of the common creed, the being addressed together, through the prayers of intercession and in the thanksgiving, the gathering together around the one bread, the final ingestion of all that's left over by the priest.

All three of these, I think are signing or striking death forms, against this culture of undisguised contempt, that we think is being a form of moral seriousness or a form of moral witness to which we're called. And here's where the culture of the church, as a culture that ought to be allergic to contempt, that ought to be warring against, in the tone that we use with one another, and the words that we speak, to the practices that we engage in. All of these things are designed up, to map out the various paths, to create the various opportunities through which, we can come back together again.... A body, into which others are invited, are welcomed, as gifts not simply as burdens, or as enemies in disguise.

So this is where I think that, this practice at the high point of our worship, could not be more important for addressing, and I think for answering, what I take to be perhaps the greatest threat that the church sees today, mainly seeing enemies at precisely the point where we ought to see gifts and friends.

Sam:

Thank you. I'm not going to expand on what you've said, because I think you said it beautifully. And, that third point, I think, speaks so much to our difficulty in speaking to one another. And the paradox, it's often pointed out, but it seems worth repeating that, the internet, which its founders surely must have imagined, would have left 1000 flowers bloom and enabled all kinds of voices to be raised, and the kind of democratic way, this has actually made communication harder in lots of levels.

I remember, in my last job, when I was at Duke University Chapel, gathering my 25 or so staff together for a special meeting, and saying we're going to talk to each other about emails. And, I didn't exactly set 10 Commandments, but I basically said, "If you've sent an email, which when you see a reply from the person, it makes you a little bit nervous opening it, you've sent the wrong email." But also, all my staff worked within 05 yards radius of each other. There was absolutely no excuse, if they had something difficult to say, for getting up and walking over and saying it. To me, the most dangerous button on the computer is the CC button, because you feel your choice words are so outstanding, and not to be wasted on the recipient alone, they need to be sent to the president of the university, or the bishop, or the church wardens, or whoever it is who will feel the choiceness of your anger, and the quality of your put down.

And it's the CC button that humiliates the recipient, much more than the content to the words themselves. So, we're all learning a new etiquette, and new kind of conversation, and it's early days for a lot of people, a lot of us to work out. And then, how you conduct yourself on a message board or, on a blog site, is a whole other, who you think you're talking to. Anyway, I guess, in talking

about intercession just now, outlining a sense of how prayer schools our speech, schools our desire, hopefully we're speaking into that a little bit. Just want to highlight maybe a couple of things about this part of the service, we're talking about from the offertory procession to the prayer of thanksgiving up to communion now, and everything that goes in between.

I guess, to highlight what's going on, in that process. And to me, it's a modelling of a whole society. So, in very simple terms, we are in the offertory procession, which I hope's a very Anglican thing to concentrate on. But we're all bringing on our differences. There's much reflection on the fruit of the vine and work of human hands and so on. And the ordinariness of the bread and the celebration of the wine, and you'll all be familiar with all that kind of thing. But I like churches that bring up the intersections with the offertory procession, so that we bring up our vulnerability and our weakness as well as the cream of what we've produced. We bring God our true selves in the offertory procession, rather than just the nice bits.

But what's happening, is we're bringing our different pieces together, and we're receiving back the same. And that's a model of society. We all get the same amount of bread, and it's enough. And having a larger piece of bread wouldn't bring us more in communion. You remember the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, where the question is, who should get the most... and it seems a very unjust parable, if you read it as a parable, about how many hours you've worked. However, sort of Augustinian or rather Pelagian you are, unless you read it as a parable about forgiveness, in which just how much forgiveness do you want, forgiveness is enough for each of us.

And, if you think about the bread at the Eucharist as the same, having a whole priest size wafer, does not make you more forgiven, and more given the gift of eternal life, than having just a crumb, because you are the side person or the steward, and they started running short of bread, and they all had to break them up at the last minute, and you just get a little bit... It's enough. So, there's a model of society going on there. And, I think we need to build on that. If you think about the nativity scene, the creche as the Americans call it. The little, wooden figures with the shed, and so on that we have in churches during Advent and for the 12 Days of Christmas. What you can see there is a reunion. You can see, it's a reunion of man and woman. It's a reunion of kings and working people. So, there's a class thing going on there. It's a reunion of heaven, and earth. It's a reunion of God and humanity in the Christ child. And you see every Eucharist the same way. Everything that's in the Eucharist, is giving us what its proper purpose is. So, the proper purpose of bread, is to be in the Eucharist. That's what bread is for. That's what the Bible was created for. That's what wine is made for. It finds its true fulfillment. So, all our questions about having a couple of drinks after the meal is that, am I verging on, getting a bit dependent on it. And, it's all in the sense, all those questions are answered. In the wine of the Eucharist is enough for us. That's where it finds its true purpose.

What's the purpose of money? The purpose of money is to be brought forward to the table at the offertory procession. We find the purpose of all things in that moment. And that's, again, what I mean by how the Eucharist gives us everything we need. Just like in the intercessions, we find the meaning of words. So, we find the meaning of material things at the altar. And again, in the offertory procession, we have that opportunity to bring forward... When I was in a university setting, I, or my staff, I was fortunate to have in those days, would write to a different part a of the university each week saying, "Would the engineering department want to bring forward a symbol of itself and mention a particular person in the faculty who's had a bereavement or something in the prayers this week? And, and bring forward a symbol of the department and place it on the altar?"

And, there's nothing to stop any one of us with our wider community, dividing that community into

52 sections, or leave out Christmas and Easter, so maybe 50 sections, and say maybe there's 50 shops in my Parish, I'm going to write to those 50 shops. And sure, 10 of them will write back saying, "I'm disgusted that you're imposing your religion on me." But the other 40, will be really touched that you've noticed that they're there, and they're making an honest living and trying to contribute to the community. And will be glad to send a symbol. And sure, it's not that advertising for them. But it's all brought into worship. So, those are all sort of opportunities you have, in seeing that people things find their true end in the eucharist.

And then, just a quick word on the Lord's Prayer. To me, the Lord's Prayer is a huge statement of enough. Everything I've said about intercession can be collapsed into the words, "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth". Because, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, is pretty much what we're praying in intercessions. Particularly, thy kingdom come. If you think about intercessions, every intercession is asking, is like an heir asking for a bringing forward of the inheritance, to now, rather than having to wait for it. You could say that interceding teaches us patience, and improvement, and perseverance. Those are the three virtues that we learn in intercession. And we learn those in saying the first section of the Lord's Prayer. But I particularly want to draw attention to the three middle parts of the Lord's Prayer; give us, forgive us, and deliver us.

Give us, is everything we need for the present. Forgive us, is everything we're concerned about the past. Deliver us, is everything that we're worried about the future. There's a whole transformation, there's a whole sort of distillation of everything we want from God into those three lines. It's almost like a sort of six-word, gospel. And, that's all the prayer we need really. Give us everything we need for the present. Forgive us everything that's gone wrong or been done to us, we've done in the past, and deliver us from everything we're frightened of in the future. And we say that just a moment before we receive, more than we could possibly want. Which isn't just food for today, but it is forgiveness of the past, and it is the gift of eternal life. So, if you like those three lines of the Lord's Prayer, are the Eucharist. And then, we say them in prayer, and then we receive communion.

Scott:

Let's just pick up then on communion itself. Because I actually love the image of various departments making their offering, various businesses making their offering, because what it then points out, those things that we all thought were simply transactions, "I give something that you want, money, you give me something I want ,services." But these are not in fact transactions at all. But these are the various material things that we then use to remind us of the extent to which we are absolutely in need of one another. And that the things that we use ... Pardon me, for this may seem completely irrelevant. Two of the greatest pieces I think, of, it's not even journalism, I don't know what it is. Is it press criticism? Is it moral philosophy? I don't know.

Walt Whitman, one of my top two or three favourite poets, wrote two articles. He was a junior journalist. And so, as he moved out of being a journalist, he continued to write result newspaper.

In 1857, and the beginning of 1858, if I remember. He wrote two articles about the importance of the laying of the transatlantic cable. "Who was this going to help? Almost nobody. It's not going to enrich those who aren't already enriched. Those for whom the stock market matters, it's going to matter to them. Those who want to get the shipping lanes clear, what are they in store for at the

other end, it's going to give them bit of information, those who want to follow the goings on of the royal family, it'll bring news of some princess more quickly to them. It's not going to materially help anybody." And yet, he says this is an event of profound spiritual significance. Because he says, "Here this cable that runs between the great old foes, inclines the hearts of these two nations towards one another. And no matter what happens, you have this material promise that runs among them. That this is the bond that will never be broken. This is a relationship that we can never now forget, because we can see it. This is the materialization of the spiritual bond between us."

All these services that we engage in, the money that we exchange, what are these things? These are the materialization of the reality, of the bonds of absolute need, and mutual dependence that are true even though invisible. And yet, because of the transactional way in which we live, and because of the way that we fetishize independence, autonomy, self-reliance, we forget constantly, the extent to which you are a gift to me, and I need you. And God help me, if I can then be a gift to you, in your moment of need. And, that's why I think I love the language of Eucharist. I love even more the language of communion.

Because of the remembrance, the reminder that it gives us. That at the heart, at the etymological heart of the words, communion, communication, community, is this idea of, this MUN, this something shared among us. That as we circulate it, as we share it, as we all bring it forward and can see it, and as we all take from it, we remember that we need one another. At exactly the moment, when we are most tempted to indulge in practices of immunity. Immunity - you don't need me, and I sure as hell don't need you. I might have a commitment to you, but that commitment lasts only insofar as I continue to choose it. I may be indebted to you, but that indebtedness only lasts until the moment that I choose that debt to have been paid in full. Immunity, in other words is, you have no abiding claim over my intention, my words, my life, my food, my money. Which turns all moments of hospitality into something that I am simply getting out of the goodness of my heart, rather than something over which you have a prior divine claim upon.

So, this idea of bringing the things together, and then mixing them together, of bringing these all to the altar, and then mixing them together with the signs, the materialization of God's grace. For me, this is a profound reminder of just the extent to which we live in constant need of one another. We gather together as gifts to one another, which means that all of our moments of transaction aren't in fact transaction at all. But these are moments of if you like, high liturgical significance, the things that we pass, the things that we share, the food that we eat, are but reminders that I am in constant need. I don't know if that helps?

Sam:

Yeah, it certainly does. It pushes me to reflect on the two parts of the liturgy that we haven't spoken about in relation to this part, which is to say, the fraction and the invitation. And, of course, these are open to huge numbers of interpretations. So, I'm just going to offer one for each.

To think of the breaking of the bread as the crucifixion. If you like, this is to take a very conventional view of the atonement. This is God's anger, and God's love, in God's heart being broken into. And then to think of the invitation as being Pentecost. That's the time when the fruit of the death and resurrection is distributed with the nation's for Mable and Ronnie, if they're the only two people there, they have to stand in for the nations. But we take them to be enough.

And I guess, again, it's part of what I'm trying to describe, about how the Eucharist gives us

everything that we need. It embodies our doctrine. And the challenge of seeing the fraction as the crucifixion is, twofold morally. First of all, do we believe that the crucifixion is enough? Do we actually feel that in the words of Isaiah, our penalty is paid? And then secondly, do we feel that the fraction represents the last sacrifice? And therefore, the sacrifice that we call our sons and daughters to in war is a contradiction of our conviction that Christ has already made that sacrifice? So, that's just an illustration of how the theology becomes ethics, through liturgy.

And then, as far as the idea of the invitation as Pentecost is concerned. Well, we touched on this yesterday, I think, in talking about the feeding of the five thousand. That's the moment of, or section 4 that story, where the job of the disciples is to go and take food to everybody. That's the wind and fire of Pentecost. Again, liturgically, embodied, it is clearly embodied in the dismissal. But it's very specifically embodied in the words of the invitation.

And I don't know the Australian prayer well enough, but the Book of Common Prayer, 1662, has such an incredibly individual notion of making my communion, which still adheres at different points in our contemporary liturgies, which I think is really problematic. In a sense, the church/world distinction is never more painful, than at the invitation, where you know that not everybody will be receiving, even though Christ died, and the body was broken that everybody may receive life. And we go on and on about how painful it is to go to a Catholic mass and not be able to receive. I think that's all I've ever done frankly. Because, I think it neglects how much we receive in the course of the whole service together. If you are gluten intolerant, and there is no gluten free bread at a communion, you're quite used to not receiving. But somehow, we get on and on about how painful it is not to receive at a Catholic mass even though many of our number experience that all the time. So, you just have to find other ways to receive.

But it's still nonetheless, that moment of distribution is a moment of the pain, that it seems either the world has chosen not to receive, or that there are people who are not receiving because they're in dispute with the church, and they left this congregation went off in a huff, and that's the sadness. Or, there are people who the church has alienated through its own fault, or not seen that they were held in contempt. So again, that's how the theology of Pentecost and the Liturgy of invitation, and the ethics of inclusion or mission, however you want to call it, they all interweave.

Question:

I'm interested in the idea of open and closed or easy and difficult in terms of who's invited or who's welcome. And, at different times we've made decisions about who can receive communion or not. We tend to say, you at least have to be baptized. But I'm interested to think of it about that space. So, if my Muslim friend turns up for worship, and comes forward and holds his hand out at communion, what do we do in that space? So, that sense of, where are the boundaries? Are the boundaries?

Sam:

Well, for me, that's not too difficult. In the sense that if somebody holds their hand forward for communion, you cannot refuse to give communion. If somebody says, I want not just to receive the body of Christ, but to become part of the body of Christ, then it might be appropriate to invite them for a period of Catechesis to withhold from communion, just like a traditional period of fasting in Lent to prepare themselves for receiving communion again, after their confirmation... baptism or confirmation. But I can't believe anyone in this room, if somebody holds their hands forward for communion, even if they are Sarah Huckabee Sanders could find a way not to. It's not ours to

withhold in the end. If they are eating and drinking condemnation on themselves, that's their responsibility.

We need to know that they're mindful of that, which means that at a later stage we might point out that baptism or confirmation might be a very good idea if they want to be part of the body, and not just to receive the body. I mean, that part comes from serving in a church where probably 25% of the people in the congregation every Sunday are visitors or occasional drop-ins. And so, you simply have to get used to responding to strangers. You have to expect that's normal.

Scott:

So much of what we do around communion, is based on the idea of these being sacred objects that mustn't be treated commonly, mustn't be wasted. So, the drinking of the wine at the end, I know why we do that. I know, I remember vividly the gasp of horror that I first heard when a child dropped a wafer carelessly on the ground. Now, I'm not saying these things should be treated with contempt or held in contempt. But I keep coming back to Jesus's drawing on, this is 2 Samuel 6, where, no. Must have been early in 2 Samuel 6, where David and his men, go in to the holy place, and eat of the bread of the presence, from which it is not lawful for any but the high priest to eat.

And yet, the food there found its truest meaning, by precisely nourishing David. The food exists in order to be eaten, not to exist in a state of purity, which says something about purity itself, which is that as we said yesterday, purity is infectious. Holiness cannot be defiled. Holiness redeems that which we thought to be defiled. So, it takes, I think, tremendous liturgical and theological work, to take these things that we do in the name of purity, less they be defiled or be consumed unworthily and to twist them slightly, I suppose on their axis, to be something that's instead about giving life rather than with holding it.

Sam:

Yeah, I mean, thank you for that. The hard part of presiding at worship is to be hundred percent emotionally and theologically present. So that you're not wondering whether England's last two batsmen will see out the over. I mean, that's the hardest, take it from me, that's hard... Or whether Andy Murray will win the fourth set and take it to a fifth by the time you finish-

Scott:

Questions that have never crossed my mind.

Sam:

Which is why you are holy, and I fall short. But everybody here has been in the situation where somebody's taking the chalice, and they've got a wobbly hand, and they've spilled some either on themselves, or on the floor... I'm never quite sure which is better.

Everyone here has had the chance when it comes to the announcements after communion to say, "A couple of you might have noticed that the chalice was spilled, and I'm sure for many of you, for me, it's actually quite distressing and particularly for the person that this happened to. But, let's remember that what we're remembering, in remembrance, is the throwing down of Christ's body on the floor, and the spilling of Christ's blood amongst those who are unworthy. So, in some ways this has been more of a communion today than most of the communions we've shared. You've got that chance to do that. And just like I was saying, yesterday, your congregations will see who you really are, by how you respond when someone has a heart attack on the front row.

And whether you respond with compassion and love, and recognizing that action can become part of the worship, then likewise, if something goes wrong ... Again, it's not a show, we're not doing this to look good in front of people, we're doing this to enter the heart of God. God has created these opportunities. And then, if we then try, and cover that up and say, "Nothing to see. Nothing to see just drive on, I'm driving." If we actually say that, we're missing the gift that we've been given.

Question:

How does the church discern what causes it should take on? Let's just take the example of Hong Kong. Which side are we on, and which side is God on in regard to some of the social issues that affect us? And how should we respond to that?

Sam:

I'm going to do Hong Kong, and Scott's going to do the rest of the world. Well, at St Martin's we're very privileged we've had a Chinese congregation for 25 years. Yes, it's complex, because we have both a mandarin congregation and Cantonese congregation. They don't get on liturgically, they don't get on politically, but we still insist on calling them the Chinese congregation. But what that means is that, in practical terms, I wrote a prayer for Hong Kong when this stuff was just a few days old. Not because I had the genius to do it, because somebody asked me to. One of the Chinese students asked me to do it. That's now being distributed both in London and Hong Kong, and I guess on the internet. Other people have had a chance to use it if they found it helpful. But that's not been enough, we've had to introduce vigils... moments of quiet at the beginning of acts of worship.

I don't know what my congregation did last Sunday, but I certainly hope they would have begun with 20 seconds of silence before the service in solidarity. We're basically asking God to be very close to our brothers and sisters, in the churches in Hong Kong, first of all. This is the catastrophic mistake that most of the church makes in relation to the State of Israel today. There are a lot of Christians living in Israel. We should be upholding and supporting them. A lot of them are Palestinians. Not all. You know, it's actually a bit more complicated than just taking sides.

We've got to offer prayers and support, that recognize that there are many Christians in China. There are many Christians in Hong Kong, it's a minority, but the Anglicans tend to be pretty cosy with Beijing. The Baptists, and the Free Churches tend to be pretty much at the forefront of the marches. And people will have heard that some choruses have been used and become theme tunes. That hasn't been because of the Anglicans. So, we certainly need to stand alongside fellow Christians, first and foremost and take the lead from that.

The rest of the world... Like Syria. Go on, please Syria, go on.

Scott:

One of the first and worst effects that the emergence of the mass-produced press brought into the world. The popular press, not just newsletters for political parties or shipping news. But, newspapers for everybody read, is it put people in the state of knowing about far more than they could ever reasonably morally respond to. They would come to know about far more of the world, and in more detail, (this would be sort of 1837 through to about 1858), than their moral reach could ever get their arms to or around. And yet you read about something that affects you, and you want to do something about it. And that's when the newspapers invented that great cancer, from which we've never quite recovered. The opinion section.

So what the opinion section does, is it says, "This is what's going on in the world. Don't know what to think about it? We give you that too." "This is what's going on in the world. You want to talk about it intelligently tonight over dinner with your friends, we'll give you that as well." I'm not making this specific. Gustav Flaubert writes precisely about this both in Madame Bovary, and in his wonderful little posthumously collected "dictionary of received ideas". Do you want to know the proper use of the newspaper? He says, it's not to get information. It's to lay out on your coffee table before you have company coming around, at the most intelligent page, not the stuff you are really reading. It's about marking out those sections, you can then commit to memory. So, you can sound incredibly intelligent when you talk about it later.

In other words, it's at this time, that having an opinion became a moral thing to do. Can I say that again? It's around this time that having an opinion about something that you can't do anything about became a moral thing to do. We need to be liberated from having opinions. We need to be liberated from having an opinion, about all sorts of different things. Because, we've come to think that having that opinion, and having that strongly, is a moral act in and of itself. Being on the right side, backing the right party, when that's not going to do anything for anybody. It's a moral thing to do, to back the right side to be on the right side of this particular conflict.

We need to be liberated from having an opinion. What we need to be given instead, are the right words, to be able to hold those warring parties together, and hope for some form of justice, and peace that we ourselves can't see. Me having a strong opinion about what that outcome should be isn't going to bring about the outcome. It's a great way of selling papers. It's a wonderful way of creating viral Facebook posts. But it's not going to do anything concrete for anybody. So, I guess, what I'm trying to get at, is why do we need to get involved in these conflicts in the first place? What is that going to do, apart from enlisting Christ on one side of an argument or another? And here I suppose is where I want to go back, to rather use extraordinarily words of advice of someone like John Paul the second, to Benedict the 16th.

It's not the church's responsibility to be a lobby group. That's not what we're called to be. And by being a lobby group, we defile the gospel. And John Paul the second's notion that what the church does, in its message of death and resurrection, of reconciliation and peace, is it cuts diagonally across the lines of division.

Syria is immensely complex. It cannot be understood without understanding the decades of financial backing, that specific mosques and that certain sheiks have received from the Ministry of Religious Endowments. A series of endowments that have enabled mosques to effectively become the mouthpiece of the state. Effectively, the state ventriloquising Allah. This is what happens in Egypt, as well. The extent to which that very process of political idolatry is then being fought back against by a very diverse group of Muslims, some militarily, some violently, many theologically.

That, Islam has to get its voice back. I mean, these are, it seems to me, quite fundamental things that we hear about, and week can begin to understand precisely, because the church has been precisely co-opted in so many places around the world, as effectively being the mouthpiece of the establishment, of the state, of a particular class, of a particular race, God help us. So, I guess what I want to push back. First of all, I want to stress the importance of recognizing the complexity. Hong Kong is massively complex... I mean, this has fully as much to do with housing crises, housing affordability crises, as it does with certain resentment or suspicions towards immigrants from the

mainland, fully as much as it has to do with the kind of patriarchal contempt that I was talking about before, "We'll tell you what we want you to tell us. Or, if we want your opinion, we'll give it to you."

It's not a business, it seems to me. And in fact, it runs counter to our theological charge to simply weigh in or have a strong opinion. The purpose, if you like, if the church has one, in intervening in public debate, it's by tracing out, by holding up in those paths, whereby warring parties may well find a way back together again. And any strident rhetoric that we engage in, as a way of either planting our flag in the ground or convincing those who we want already to be on our side. That's killing if you like, the very possibility that we should most ardently be working for, praying for. Which is that, the dividing wall between us will be broken down.

Sam:

Just a personal comment. I've spoken up as a theologian, and a pastor for the last couple of days, but just as a human being, I guess, for a moment I endorse everything that Scott said, from his much great experience than mine. But there have been a couple of times in my life, when I've been very close to the centre of a story that's held the top of the front page for days. And, what I'm taking away from those two experiences is, just by accident, just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, not through myself being an agent in that story particularly. I've learned just how inaccurate is the best media's accounts of those stories. And, therefore, to try to keep that sense of scepticism when I'm reading a story that's quite quickly a goodies verses baddies story.

And just having been at the centre of a couple of stories where it was very difficult to work out who the goodies and of the baddies were. And also, where I've known information that would have completely changed the story but was not in a position to speak it publicly. And I've known the people at the centre of the story from whom I had that information, who have had to live with headlines saying certain things, which were simply untrue. And yet they weren't in a position for various reasons to disclose the truth. And so, just my concluding thought on that, Gabrielle Marcel talks about the difference between a problem and a mystery. That a problem is something that you can fix, like a plumber fixes a pipe. Whereas a mystery is something you can only enter, you've never seen before.

A plumber's seen a 1000 tap before. But when you enter a mystery, it's the first and only time that you ever will. And inevitably, when we have too much information, too many new stories, we want to treat everyone as a problem to be fixed. There's one person I'm on a board with, who begins every meeting by saying, "What's the problem we're trying to fix here." And I think that so many kinds of wrong from the first sentence of the meeting. But, accountancy firms and so on, encourage people to think like that. But the things that we're dealing with, are mysteries and not problems, nine times out of 10. Mental health problems, a marriage that gets into difficulty, bringing up a child with autism. These are not problems that can be fixed. These are mysteries to be entered. And my experience of being very close to the centre of a couple of these big stories is just, the prayer that will give me the grace to recognize that the people behind these stories, that they're in a mystery that needs entering, rather than the problems that needs fixing.

Session 5 - Being Sent

Sam:

And so, we come to the dismissal... Again, to me the dismissal is saying, "go and make the world a Eucharist." So, in other words, go and make the whole... everything that we've learned together in the last 48 hours... do in the world.

There was a church where I used to serve, which had a picture of a puppy dog with a tennis ball just by the entrance, to remind everybody that when the person who said the dismissal, said the dismissal, they figuratively threw the tennis ball into the community. And then it was the job, a week later, of the congregation to bring that tennis ball back with whoever had caught it. Like at a wedding where you throw the bouquet. And wherever it landed, whatever the issues of the community, where it landed, that becomes a beginning. So, the next Sunday's Eucharist begins the moment that the tennis ball is thrown, and the dog sets off.

That's all I'm going to say about those two parts, of the service. The parts I'm more interested in are the one that we most neglect, and the one that we exclude.

The one that we most neglect is the announcements. Now, people who have the announcements at all points in the service. The worst liturgical place to have the announcements is everywhere. I'm sure you've all been to services like that.

Why are the announcements problematic? For one simple reason. Because the whole of the rest of the service, you are talking to the people for God, or talking to God for the people. So, in the sermon, you're talking to the people for God. In the Eucharistic prayer, you are talking to God for the people. In the absolution you are talking to the people for God, etc. Every point in there you're doing one of those two roles. That's the priestly role. That's what priests do. They talk to the people for God and they talk to God for the people. That's what they're there for.

In the announcements, you're not doing either of those things. It's the one point in the service where you're helping the people talk to each other. You're facilitating community, which is in fact what you spend most of the rest of the week doing. But liturgically, it's an anomaly and we don't train ourselves for that anomaly. And so, we usually do it incredibly badly.

One of the ways we do it incredibly badly is that we begin writing our sermon at seven o'clock on a Saturday night and we're still writing it at 7 o'clock on a Sunday morning. Which means we give it a good 12 hours of work, which is pretty impressive. But we never begin writing our announcements at all. We just take a couple of scraps of paper handed to us from the person organizing the event during the week and then we look at the notice sheet if there's a printed notice sheet.

Now, in a technological age, there is really no need for any announcements. The things that have come in before, can go out on a regular Friday email to your congregation, if you have one. If you don't, I highly recommend it. The things that come in too late, if they're important could go out in a special announcement later that Sunday afternoon. There's no need for announcements. But you try taking them out of the service.

However, the person that has stayed up all night writing this 12-hour sermon, has almost always done zero preparation for announcements. Which means all the good that's done in the sermon, is unravelled in the announcements by the casual, unsuccessfully humorous, or neglectful, mistaken

way that the junior priest of the cathedral forgets that the cathedral has 13 choirs but refers to one choir by the name of another choir. Or by the way there's two events planned for Friday night, and only one of them gets announced. And the people who are about to set up and spent the last year preparing for the other one, feel mortally wounded. Or by the way somebody uses the wrong terminology for a disadvantaged group in the community and shows that they can use the right terminology when it's written in front of them. But actually in casual speech, it's all betrayed in the announcements.

So announcements actually, can do untold good. I remember in one church, about six months after I came to the church, a group of young girls, 13 or so, kept coming knocking on the door saying, can we bring our music machines and dance in the church... it was this old contemporary building with the floor like this... on Saturday afternoons? And I thought, what a wonderful thing to do. But of course, I thought two things. Number one, it's one of the few times I get to see my beloved. And number two, you try putting one man in his 30s, with a group of 13-year-old girls in the current climate, and you've got a tinder box. So, I wasn't going to do it.

So I took the risk in the announcements of saying to the congregation, this the situation. I didn't give quite the explanation I've given to you. Just that there's a group of girls that want to dance in the church on Saturday afternoons, is there anybody who could sit with them? And an 86-year-old woman put her hand up and said, I don't do much on Saturday afternoons, I could do it.

And that sudden emergence of an 86-year-old youth worker, galvanized the congregation, to make them realize that if she could, why couldn't they. So that's the power of the announcements. So, don't get me wrong, I believe in announcements. I'm not saying they should be in the creed, but I do believe in announcements, in the power of announcements. But they require a lot of care. Which I don't frankly know almost any person who would give them the care they deserve.

And they also provide a way, and I've talked to you a little bit about it yesterday I think, about if the communion wine has been spilled, if someone's had a heart attack... they give you a chance to filter what's happened in the service, or what's coming up in the week, in the light of the gospel. So, they are genuinely part of the sending out, as I understand.

Okay, so that's the three parts that we're kind of used to. Now the part that we neglect. And that is, where in our Eucharist do we obey Christ's central command at the Last Supper, the command to wash feet? It's there, for those who like their Bible literal, and I believe there are some such people in Australia.

Why don't we obey Christ's central command? "If I have washed your feet, you too must wash one another's feet." What part of that don't you understand? And where should it come in the service? Well, precisely where it comes at the Last Supper, after you've had communion.

The table, is clearly the banqueting table of heaven. The robe is Jesus's divinity. He takes off his robe, he puts on the towel, he comes down, if you like, from heaven. He does all the things in the first half of John 13, that he does in the gospels. He gets into big arguments, he teaches, he sets an example, he reproaches Peter, He brings about transformation to the disciples. He asks them to come and follow him and do the same as him. And then what does he do? He takes off the towel, and he puts on his robe of majesty, and he returns to the table.

That is the most succinct form of the kenosis of Christ outside Philippians 2 that we get in the

whole Bible. It's all there for us. But for whatever reason we choose not to actually follow in his footsteps on a Sunday. Why is that? Well, I've got a theory about this, and it's not just about how dirty our feet are.

The theory is this, there's a gospel that we'd like to believe, and the gospel we'd like to believe is, that we all do our best. Our life continues as normal, we kind of attach our Christian faith to ourselves, a little bit like a Post-it note on top of a sheet of paper. You know, it's a little yellow note, it's a reminder from time to time that there is a God and that creation is a wonderful thing, and we didn't do it ourselves, and we didn't bring ourselves into the world. That sometimes when we mess up, we can be given a second chance, and there's a prospect of life hereafter. It's like a little Post-it note on top of our sheets of paper that remind us of some good stuff.

And in order to give something back, and I choose my words advisedly, we do a bit of reading with the children who find it difficult, or the adult learning centre. Or the migrant centre, we do a bit of teaching English, or we help out at the night shelter. Or we do a bit of work in the soup kitchen. We give something back. And what do we call it? We call it "servant ministry". Because we remember that Jesus took off his robe, and he put on the towel, and he knelt down. And just for an hour a week, the least we can do is a bit of servant ministry.

The trouble about servant ministry is it inoculates us to the gospel. The gospel in fact, is that in just the chapter before Mary, in John chapter 12, washes Jesus's feet. And what is she doing? If we're not sure we just need to look at the parallel passage in Luke or the parallel passage in Mark. She is preparing Jesus to die. And Jesus commends her for it. In all three gospels.

Foot-washing is a re-enactment of our baptism. But whereas baptism takes us from death to life, foot-washing prepares us to die. Foot-washing is a reminder as often as we do it, that we can expect to die tomorrow, just as Jesus did. And we can expect to die tomorrow because the convictions of our faith are such that they put us in the front line of the battle that takes place between good and evil.

And so we don't really want to do foot-washing, because we don't really want to be prepared to die. We don't really want to be in the front line. Otherwise we end up like Absalom did in our reading this morning.

That's why I think we don't do foot-washing. It's not being bourgeois and not wanting to take out shoes off and it's smelly, and untidy, and maybe getting the lay people involved, which would be a little bit risky. It's because we don't want to be prepared to die. We don't really want to think about that. The whole point of the Post-it note was that we don't have to worry about that. That's one of the benefits of his passion, we don't have to worry about dying.

That's the point of being a Christian, it's one of the benefits. And so, we create this notion of servant ministry. Which is really doing what we would have done but just in a slightly nicer way. And with an hour a week of service. That's not what foot-washing is about.

Foot-washing is a reminder just after the Eucharist and before we leave the building of our baptism. But it's a reminder that a baptism prepares us in the way that the foot-washing prepared Jesus to face the music tomorrow.

So there's a few thoughts about the four things, the blessing and dismissal, which can feel a bit

familiar. The announcements, which I think need an awful lot more care than they usually get. And foot-washing, whose absence from our worship says a lot of what needs to be said about how we've lost our way.

Scott:

I wasn't expecting this at all. But it's wonderful. I think I want to press you on the political, the ethical, and the theological implications a bit further.

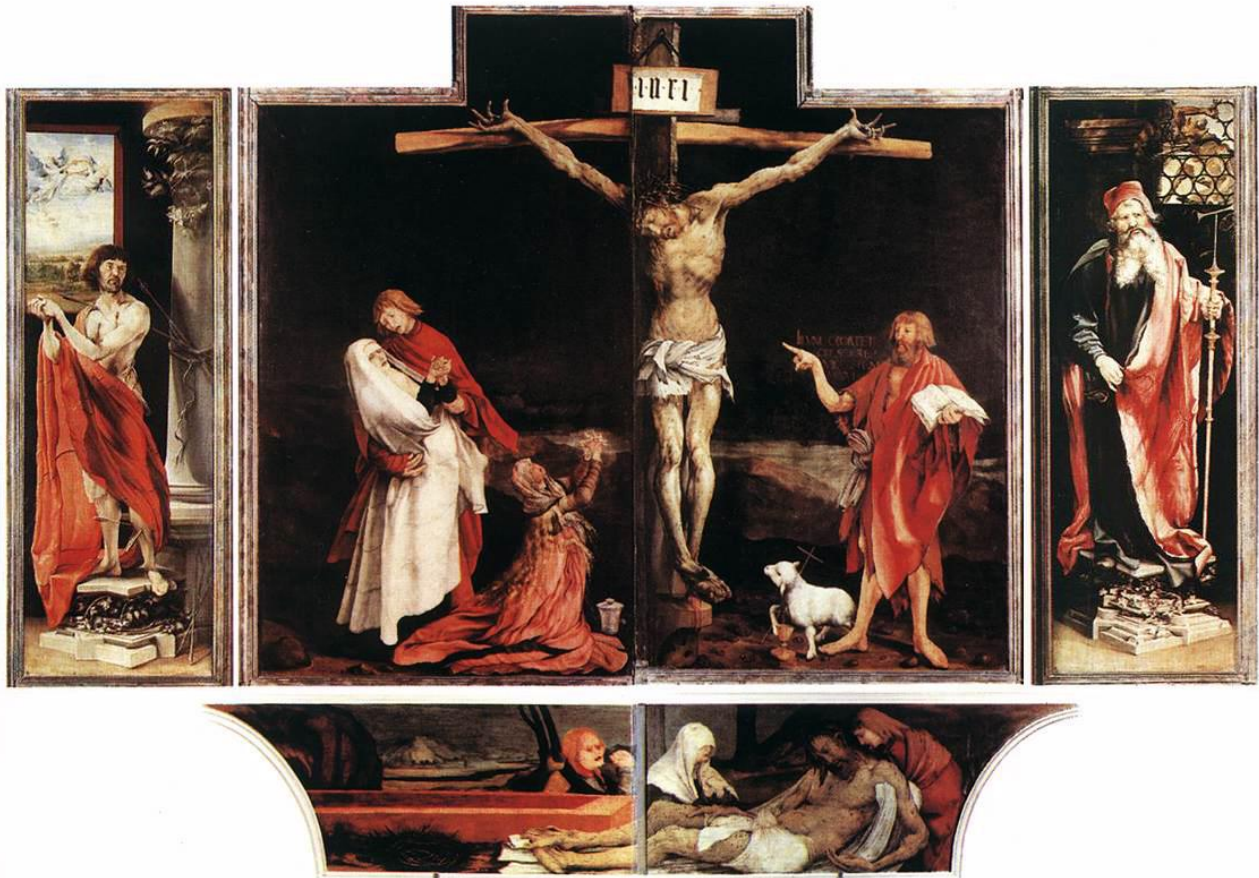
One of the things that we are given these days, as a cheap, moral thing to do... and I think the term inoculation is exactly right, you do something as a substitute for the thing you should be doing. And the thing that you do as a substitute for the thing you should be doing, is the thing that gives you the feeling that you did something good. Whereas its effect on you is almost entirely corrosive. At best, it inoculates you against what you should be doing.

One of the moral things that we are given to do these days is to look at confronting photographs. To look at confronting images. This may seem like a long bow to draw, but stick with me for a moment. We are awash in images. Ever since the end of the Vietnam war and with the explosion of images. It wasn't that long ago that you knew the difference between a good newspaper and a bad newspaper, by the number of images that they printed. Bad newspapers had lots. Good newspapers had virtually none. Eli Belloc(?) referred to bad newspapers as newspapers whose front page looked like an orgy of headlines and photographs. Look at any news website in the world and there you have it.

But something took place in the late 60s and early 70s where suddenly looking at confronting images became a moral thing to do. It made you slightly uncomfortable or it gave a profound or profoundly complicated issue overseas a human face. Just think about some of the now historic photos that really did accelerate the end of the Vietnam War. A little girl running from a fire. Bodies burnt. I'm not saying these are morally neutral. They did something to give a faceless conflict a human face and to that extent I think they're very important. But now images are promiscuous. They're just everywhere.

Social media distribution services that were about the distribution of texts now are all about the distribution of images. I mean Twitter... I mean the instructions that were given by our over-lords in media companies is if you just have words in a Tweet you're not doing it right. It needs to have something there, preferably something that's moving to get people to look at something more. So, our lives are all awash with images. But we've given images a moral value.

So if it's hard to look at, if there's that little bit of pain that's involved or discomfort then you know that you've probably done something morally good. And then you even have exhibitions in places like the UN, with morally serious-sounding titles, "Like atrocities in Syria. Do not look away." With 37 images of carnage. Looking becomes a moral thing to do.



I think there's a technical theological term for that, and I think it's BS. Because contrast that then with the Isenheim Altarpiece of Matthias Grünewald. Most of you would know it. This hideous image of an oversized Christ. His body drooping over a cross. The body is so big, it's disproportionate to all of the figures in the altarpiece. If you have your phones with you, just look it up. The body is disproportionately big. Its limbs hang down so much so that the cross beam... I don't know really any other piece of either reformation or post reformation or pre-reformation art that does quite this... The cross beam is bent, so heavy are Jesus's arms. Jesus's hands are turned up almost against the gravitational pull. That's the representation of the pain. The pain that's so great. Whereas everything else in the painting is bending down. Jesus's head, even his head, it's almost like it's in a noose. Whereas his hands are up, the cross beam is down, the skin is flecked with green, it's gangrenous.

One of the ways we've been taught, especially those of us who have read Karl Barth, one of the ways we've been taught to read this is this is the great moment of divine judgment, where the extent of Christ's sufferings for us are represented in almost painful, painful detail. The fact that this was painted for a monastic hospital, is that it is then supposed to be a kind of form of encouragement, "you are going through something terrible, but look at Christ! He was going through something even worse. However bad your sufferings are, take comfort in just the extent to which Christ shared in your sufferings. In your sufferings you are coming closer to Christ."

Then you follow the logic of the painting. Everything about it, like I said, kind of except for Christ's hands, everything about it, points you down. There's the flow of blood from Christ's side that points you down. There's Mary Magdalene to the side of Jesus. She has a similarly coloured red sash around her that also points you down. The figures there at the bottom of the cross, they are there, conspicuously small, drawing your eyes down. Jesus's head, points you down.

And it all points you down towards the predella, the painting at the base of the crucifix, the further painting. Where the same gargantuan, oversized body of Jesus with the same, green flecks around the pock marks on his skin. This same Jesus is being cradled by John, and by Mary. They're still similarly small. Jesus's body is still similarly big. Jesus's body is still similarly repulsive. I mean, really, it's designed to be repulsive. You're supposed to feel that kind of visceral withdrawal from it.

And then you sort of begin putting a few things together. Like the fact that on both side pieces of the altarpiece, you have John the Baptist pointing at Jesus. And then you have St Anthony, the patron saint of the monastery, the only figure in the entire painting looking directly at those gathered in front of the altarpiece.

You begin putting a few things together, the Order of St Anthony were the order of medical care, they were physicians. One of the things that they're famous for is, especially the monastery in Isenheim, was giving succour, giving care, and tender attention to those who had contracted a quite literally deadly skin inflammation, later called St Anthony's Fire. Jesus, if you like, is portrayed as having contracted this same disease.

And I often think it's just like us, to look at something like that, and to see, my sufferings are bad, Jesus's were bad, in this I draw close to Jesus's suffering. That's if you like the, don't look away. But that's not the point. The point is, St Anthony over on the side, looking directly at you. The point is the logic of the painting drawing you down towards this moment where instead of Jesus being "there", Jesus's oversized body is being cradled "here". In other words, the point of the image isn't to find identification in Jesus. The point of the image is to identify yourself with John and with Mary at the base. Realizing that the very people whom you are caring for, they are Christ.

In drawing near to their pockmarked, diseased bodies, there you are drawing closer to Christ. You couldn't have, it seems to me, a more shocking repudiation of the logic of images that we use today. You're supposed to feel that little tinge of grief, of guilt, of disturbance at what's being portrayed. You're supposed to feel maybe something better about yourself. This is how I take your description of servanthood. You're supposed to feel a little bit better about yourself because you get a little bit inconvenienced by doing what you do. Whereas the point of any image worth its moral salt, is to draw you close to the bodies that are portrayed in it. This is what holy art does. It doesn't stick you in this process of contemplation. What holy art does is it draws you closer to the actual bodies that it depicts, that it portrays.

I guess here's what I'm wondering... I take entirely what you're saying about foot-washing. But given the fact that we are allergic to one another's skin, given the fact that the very logic of our culture is that the only skin that you can find attractive is that skin which has similarly been sanitized like the skin in the photographs that we would look at. In other words, skin that's had unnecessary hair removed, skin that's been adorned self-consciously with body art, and with ink, skin that is not human in that sense, but skin that is plastic, if you like. Just to the extent that my skin is my self-creation. My skin is under my control.

What foot-washing does is it puts you in contact with bodies, that the users, the bearers of those bodies have no control of. In other words, it brings us uncomfortably close to the very objects of our service precisely by breaking down all of those layers of sterility. All the sanitized processes that we insist are there in advance before we can be of service. It brings us in contact or impels us to be in contact with people in their sheer humanity and out of our control. I'm not saying this is

excluded from what you were describing, but I'm wondering, what you're describing surely goes even further than just a reminder of our baptism, and a confrontation of our mortality.

Sam:

Yeah. I'm not going to argue greatly with that. I guess the reason I make the distinction was that having been the vicar that on Maundy Thursday morning finds himself ringing around members of the congregation trying to get at least 12, and getting a series of passive-aggressive responses that suggest that I might be a bit late for the service so I can't commit myself. Or this kind of thing. So, somewhat evasive. I've actually got my granddaughter with me so on this occasion she'll be nervous if I'm not sitting with her. These kinds of things, all of which are saying, I don't fancy it.

I wanted to draw out the theological dimensions in relation to baptism that aren't often drawn out about foot-washing when we tend to think of it simply in terms of getting our hands wet and dirty. But I'm not disagreeing with anything you said.

Say a bit more about political and social and... There was at least one more adjective that sounded tasty in there, in terms of going out into the world.

Scott:

I guess for me, I'm pretty sure morals is the last one. But I guess for me... just about everything, especially the tail end of the liturgy, is all about creating the connections, within which, people can simply be with one another without agenda. Can be with one another without agenda. I had to do a series of lectures a few years ago on the extent to which the media poses a threat to the moral life. People wanted me to talk about media and ethics. And I thought that's just too stupid, because the two have nothing to do with one another. Instead our media environment is itself a threat, I think, to our ability to live morally, intelligently, and well. And one of the first things that I suppose I confronted is at exactly the moment when human rights discourse was first beginning to get a lot of purchase in western societies, it was at exactly the moment that the role of the media in holding political parties, political orders, politicians, to account, was also beginning to be prominent. In other words, the media weren't just the people who told you stuff that you needed to know but they became political actors in and of themselves. I'm thinking about the early 1970s. Any of you who know anything about history know what's going on in the early 1970s, and the political scandals and presidential impeachments.

So suddenly the media go from just being the umpires of our democratic order to being big political players, who have something serious morally to say. So, to some extent you've got people like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein kind of flexing their muscle and showing how media figures could be celebrities. But then at exactly the same time you have a number of magazines and newspapers who are themselves trying to do what we would call now, public-interest, or public-service reporting. So, telling the stories that aren't being told. One of the first big stories that wasn't being told was the story of a new civic group, a new group of people that were unheard of in a previous era... And that is the drug-addicted, homeless, (read: black, urban, poor.) And so, Newsweek devoted six issues to telling a series of stories about the black, drug-addicted, urban poor. Part of it, I think, was a kind of Victorian freak show, whether or not they intended it, whatever their intentions were, part of was, "oh my God, really?" I mean there were images, horrific stories... everything. Part of it was meant to be, "surely we can do better than this, surely we can do better than this." That was the extent of the moral question... surely, we can do better than this. Surely in the 1970s we can do better than this.

The effect was different, the effect was, "these people" and "us readers", don't exist in the same moral universe. This might have been reporting from Mars. The purpose was to draw attention. The effect was to create a kind of immunity between us and them. "Oh, oh, isn't that horrible. Isn't that horrible." "Yes, someone really should do something about that." The notion that the purpose of this might be a window through which we are then invited to pass, or to create awareness of neighbours with whom we are then invited to share our lives, our food, our money, our time... That was the very thing that I think was being ruled out. And I guess this is why then, the practices of the Eucharist, the sharing of the food, the image of the priest at the end taking the swill at the bottom of the cup and ingesting it into themselves, the sacramental touch and gaze that we have in the passing of the peace, which surely is supposed to have the same effect on us that the sharing of the bread is supposed to have on our food. If we have shared together this food in this way, how much more do we share our bounty with others? How much more do we turn our tables into Eucharistic tables?

Surely that's meant that the touch that we give one another, and the peace, is supposed to have the same sacramental quality. If we touch across lines, across class, across races, in this way, how much more are we then compelled, to share our bodies with others? And what would the need for this not to be with agenda, there's no clear sense what my coming in contact with another body like this, sharing food with another person like this, sharing time with another person like this, it's in no way clear to me what that's going to look like. What kind of community is that going to give rise to? To what extent does it this going to create a demand on my time that I have no way of quantifying in advance? How do I know the end? How do I know when we've had enough of one another? How do I know, to go back to one of the great problems in the 20th century moral philosophy, how do I know when the demand that my neighbour exerts on me has been fulfilled? How do I know when it's enough? (The other person's demand upon me.)

None of those things are clear when you end being in the situation without agenda, without "telos" in the sense of, I know when a nice little bow has been put on the top. Seems to me that when we are sent then, out into the world, we are called to be with one another, to connect with one another, in a way that cannot be quantified. In a way whose end point, apart from it all being for the glory of God, is in no way known. Whose contact, whose physical demand upon me can in no way be quantified or made safe in advance?

I suppose it seems to me that just at the moment when the liturgy comes to an end, we are left least in control of what demands might be placed on our body, on our time. I like the image of the ball being thrown out, and us running after it and in no way knowing where it's going to land or what it's going to look like for us to catch it. But there has to then, it seems to me, be this sense that accompanies it, that whatever I am then being called to do, whoever it is I'm then being expected to find and discover the presence of Christ, whatever imperfect, smelly, irritating, annoying disputation and disputationist? Whatever contrary body... disputant, there you go. Whatever ornery bastard, I'm... is that right? Disputant. Ornery bastard works too. Wherever it is that I'm supposed to find the presence of Christ, I don't know what that's going to look like, I don't know where that's going to end up. But I do know that wherever the presence of Christ is, it's to be found in the presence of that other person.

Sam:

Yeah, I think, four kinds of scenarios come to mind in terms of, the dismissal, we're being sent out to live and work to God's praise and glory. I think of four things, if you like, for you to keep in your congregants' minds as they depart. So, number one is their normal life, if they're people that have normal lives... their regular routine. Number two is the interruption to their routine, that they are

desperate to resist. I'm reading a novel right now about a person who, in the opening scene of the book, runs over a foreign migrant in the middle of the night, and drives away because he knows he'll lose his job if he's proved to be guilty of manslaughter. He also knows he will lose his job if he's driven away from the scene of the crime, and the whole novel is about the catastrophe that unravels from either of those decisions.

So that's an extreme version, but it's recognizing the interruption to our life, this is the second one, comes and as Jo was saying at the end of her remarks in the last session leaning into that interruption, rather than trying to run away and escape it. And then the third one is the neighbour we meet in our regular life. And then the fourth one is the neighbour we go out of our way to meet because of what we've discovered in the gospel.

And then it seems our lives are really a balance of those four kinds of encounters. The Joel Osteen gospel is equipping us, to be the best you. In other words, to concentrate on the first of those four and maximize it, make it impervious from the second and possibly the third. "Nothing can touch you if you've done this right amount of exercise, and if you are thinking positively" and all that kind of stuff. So clearly, it's not just about the first. And there's a bit about the Book of Common Prayer in its spirituality, it's really about the first Create and make in us pure and upright hearts." That's one, I guess. But that's not enough on its own. So just in terms of helping shape the imaginations of our congregants it's sometimes helpful to say, well here are the four things you should be thinking about. You should be expecting number two, you should be expecting interruption to your life. And in a sense the way we improvise on those unexpected events a bit like, it seems to be a repeated theme of the week, like the person who has a heart attack on row 4, it's how we respond to those unexpected things that show whether the work at number one has done any good or not.

Then of course there is, as Jo says and I've heard her say, in the last few days, you know, it's not about you. It's the number three, it's recognizing that our lives are there to meet Christ and face a friend and stranger. That's where the real encounter happens, "being with" as I've put it on other occasions. And then that fourth one. And that's the good of the pornography of images that you've vividly described in terms of my life, or Aylan Kurdi, lying on the beach of a Greek Island... the iconic... overused word... picture of the man standing in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square, which seems very relevant this week.

Those graphic images, the good of those is they can move you to number four, to actually see the neighbour beyond, and work out what standing with that neighbour actually entails. So those are four... and while I've got the microphone, just in terms of transitioning to the world, another group of five on this occasion that we talked about last week and seems worth mentioning here, is in terms of breaking down the way we talk about world. One of my concerns is that when we do become articulate about talking about church, and that's been our main thrust of this week, we can become very inarticulate in talking about world.

But just to give a bit of nuance to world, I understand world to mean roughly five things. That's to say, seekers, the lapsed, those with no professed faith, those of other faiths, and the hostile. And when we talk about, "oh, people these days, they don't know the stories of the Bible."... I don't suppose you've ever heard someone say that. I think I've heard someone say that more or less every day in church circles. Well, that's not applying to the lapsed, it's too sweeping a statement about the world. The lapsed are probably lapsed for very good reasons in lots of cases, that's we tend to forget. We think it's because they're lazy. But often it's because some youth worker's taken them behind the bike sheds and they'll never go near a church again.

So that's just to nuance the notion of world, that the world we go out into is made up of people going in different directions. Seekers are people who are very eager to hear more of the story, we've just to make sure we're communicating it in the right language. The lapsed are usually the hurt, not the lazy. Those who don't profess faith, they may not know the stories of the Bible, but then the disciples didn't know the stories of the Bible before Jesus taught them the stories of the Bible. So, there's nothing wrong with being of no professed faith. You can go in all kinds of directions. They're the really interesting group in some ways.

Those of other faiths, well, you can have a huge fight about whether we should regard them as objects of conversion, but in my experience if you're doing your job with the first three, you haven't got much time leftover, so it becomes a bit of a non-question. It's another way of delaying having to address the first three. And likewise, number five, number five are very often actually versions of number two. They're just very angry lapsed, in my experience most of them are. And so a little bit of humility and gentleness and non-defensive truth-telling is the best we can do with number five.

We've just got time for just a little bit of Q&A.

Question:

I was interested in what you were saying about the blessing in the context of how important the blessing was in the Temple with the Aaronic blessing at the end of the worship service... would you like to speak more about the blessing being sort of irrelevant?

Sam:

The time that I'm most aware of blessings is at a wedding. Where you have two blessing, you have the blessing for the couple, and you have the blessing for the congregation. And it's a reminder that actually... it's a cliché but I'll say it again because it's increasingly relevant, you the priest, and the church, don't marry the couple. They marry each other. So, all that a service does is offer prayers and blessing, it doesn't marry people, they do the marrying. So, blessing. You then have to say, "well, is that it?"

But actually if blessing is holding them in the... Well, let me do the kind of thing that my neighbour does here and just say, stay with me on this. Let me do a little exercise with you that I do when I start giving talks, well not here, but in other settings.

Put your right hand in front of you, and you're looking at the hands of God the father that made the world. And then you're looking right into the centre of that palm and you're looking at the hands of the one who gave his life for us. Particularly looking at the centre of that palm, and where that giving of life was most painful.

And then you look at the hand a third time, and you see the hands of the holy spirit, which are the hands that you're looking at right now. Those are the hands of God. The three, and the one hand of God. Now if a blessing is to take the experience of looking at your hand like that, and then to turn the hand upside hand and put it on somebody's head and say, all of those things are yours. And I'm going to push a little bit hard, like clergy do when they're giving a blessing at the altar rail. It's a good way of finding out if it's a wig or not. And affirm that blessing on somebody. Then the words like, "is that it?" Don't really apply. What could be more wonderful? What could feel more like being touched by God than that.

So I'm not saying the blessing is nothing to worry our pretty little heads about, I'm just saying logically and liturgically, if you have taken into your body the body of Christ and the blood of Christ, you think you've done all of that, so it's a bit of an anomaly. But given that it's there, it's not going anywhere in our lifetimes most likely, let's enjoy it. And the kind of way I think about enjoying it, and you could apply this to other parts of the service, but just to provoke people's attentions for a while... this doesn't really apply to Australia, well it may do in a way that I'm not aware of, but it certainly applied when Jo and I lived in the States, where Christians would stand up and put their hand on their heart and sing the national anthem.

I used to them, why don't you do that for the creed? Why don't you do that for the Lord's prayer? Why don't you do that for the blessing? It's just a question. What you seem to be saying is that your loyalty to the flag is greater than your loyalty to the Holy Trinity, and the church. That's what your body is telling me, your gestures are telling me. So just as a provocation, maybe on July the 4th each year you could invite the congregation to come to the blessing, to stand up and put their hand on their heart as they are blessed. And then in a sense, go out in Abrahamic fashion, and realize the reason you've been blessed is in order to a blessing to the nations. That's the point of blessing.

Scott:

Sorry, so just very quickly. Is this solved... not solved. When the blessing was that which was extended to the congregation which did not receive the Eucharist, the point is the blessing has a sacramental quality to it, is this solved to an extent by a blessing which say, refers to and locates the presence of God in the bellies of those who go?

So for instance I'm just thinking the wording of the Aaronic blessing. We have this very strange idea about the universality of the presence of God in the Hebrew Bible, when everything about the Hebrew Bible is against that. Israel has to go to Sinai, because that's where the presence of God is. The pillar of cloud in the fire, it says quite explicitly, Melech Elohim is that which is in it. The messenger of God is that which is leading them. Israel has to go and create a containment unit in the form of the tabernacle, so that the presence will go away from the mountain with them. The tabernacle has three sections to mirror the three sections of Sinai, the base, the middle portion, and then the top, where only Moses can go.

So everything about, especially those first four books of the Hebrew Bible, is about the presence of God being able to be with God's people, and then to be portable away from the mountain. So how important then is it for the Aaronic blessing to say, his face to shine upon you? Peniel Elohim is the term for the presence of God, it's the face of God. So surely what the blessing is, isn't a, hope everything goes well for you. It is, may the presence of God go ahead of you, and lead you. May the presence of God go out in you as your own tabernacle, and be gracious unto you.

So blessing then would only make sense in the... especially if we take the Aaronic blessing and give it the full gravity that it has, it must then be a reference to the extent to which each person who then leaves that gathering is their own tabernacle. Is bearing with them, the presence... That seems to me to be the only way of giving that blessing the sacramental gravity that it would be due. I don't know if that helps.

Sam:

I think textual scholars now believe that the Aaronic blessing was written by John Rutter.

Session 6 - Final Plenary Session

Sam:

When Sally my new associate vicar started about four months ago, she rather wonderfully went around and spoke to about 20 or 30 people and said, "What has been your most memorable experience at St. Martin in the Fields?" Obviously, it was, all over the shop, people's answers. But the one that appeared more often than any other, people remembered that on the occasion of my 21st anniversary of ordination as a priest, at the end of the service, I said, "I don't come from a tradition where you come into the church and when you are aware of the body of Christ in the old, where you genuflect towards the reserved sacrament as the body of Christ. I come from a tradition of the church where we understand the church to be the body of Christ." So, I genuflected towards the congregation. And what people found challenging, about that was that we can mostly think about people we regard as saints and as temples of the living God, to use Paul's language. "Do you not realize we are God's temple?" We find that really challenging if it's ourselves. Albeit ourselves collectively. But the idea that you are the bearers of, particularly after receiving communion, in other words, it's still warm inside you, you are the bearers of body of Christ. And therefore, it's appropriate for somebody, if they're worshipping the living God to genuflect towards you. That left an impression. It's just something I offered to you as an absolute last resort. When would it be appropriate to do? I wonder if it's a good thing to do, if you celebrate the Feast of All Saints, as a sort of visual sermon.

I said I was going to give you a little exercise to do with someone nice and the person you were sitting next to in the last session. So here it is. You remember a couple of sessions ago I talked about for four forms of conversation. "Tell us about the ways in which you're rich. Tell us about the ways in which you're poor. Let me tell you about the ways in which I'm poor. Let me tell you about the ways in which I'm rich." I'd like you to do that with a person next to you with only 30 seconds for each section. So, tell me about the thing in the sessions and the Bible studies in the last three days that stood out for you. Tell me about something that just hasn't really worked for you and you may want to ask a question about or query or push back on. Then reverse it with the next the person next to you. Does that make sense?

I'm holding the microphone and I've got a stopwatch and I can do it in 30 seconds....

Question:

Some of the stuff that I picked up from Monday and yesterday is that when we are in the marketplace, we get to play in the sand pit together and we're called to play nice and not offend and not hurt. It's a very simplified precis of some of the stuff I think I heard. Where when we are playing nice does the prophetic come in? "Thus, says the Lord." When somebody else is a person of non-faith or those others... Where do we have to stand up and say, "I can play nice up to this point, but from here on what God says guides me."

Sam:

Okay. Prophet, Priest and King. For too much of the church's history, it's led with King and so it's genuine work of prophet and priest has got obscured. As is often quoted "to the one with a hammer in their pocket, everything looks like a nail." If you've got executive authority, the temptation to use that executive authority to sort out a difficult problem is almost irresistible. When we face someone different from ourselves, we can say they are kind of the same really, often in a rather patronizing way. They just haven't got it yet. Or we can ignore them, or we can destroy them.

And what Scott was saying at the end of the last session about how the Eucharist prepares us to be immense diversity and difference without changing our identity... The body of Christ, but not needing to force the other person to be the same as us... Seems to me to be the right mixture of prophetic and priestly. I think of priestly, as the ministry of building up the church, of speaking to God for the people, speaking to the people for God, the practices of the church. The prophetic work is pointing to the priestly work and saying, "Well, if you want to resolve these intractable issues, you need a community of character. You need something like priestly work."

Once we take on kingly authority and become the magistrate, become the person that actually sorts the problem, then the game changes and it ends up undermining our priestly and prophetic ministry.

Bishop Jo:

I would query the premise of your question. You're suggesting to me that playing nice means you're sugary, you're smiling all the time. "Playing fair" to me, is to establish a relationship of trust that is sufficient then to give permission to be a truth teller. As long as that's done in love, and probably needs a bit of charm or a bit of humour or a bit of something self-effacing in order that others can hear what you may be saying that's challenging, then it seems to me incumbent on a real relationship that it includes that. I think I found ways of doing that just with the odd link. You know, I do a lot of clergy MDRs, Ministerial Development Reviews. I don't how would you do that with each other here or whatever.

But I often ask, "How challenging would you like this meeting to be?" So, it's inviting them to say, "I'm in a really fragile place. Don't push me over the edge," or to say, "I'd love you to challenge me because I'm stuck." Yeah? Now, is that playing fair, is that playing nice? I don't know. You might need to clarify your question, but it just seems to me that to take someone seriously, which is to love them deeply, it involves telling the truth as I see it. Even though I'm fallible and may have it completely wrong. And if that's hard to hear, I'm willing to be unpopular. But it seems to me vital. Otherwise it's sugar.

Scott:

That's, that's beautifully said.

Let me just add two very brief things. I mentioned last week I've come to despise the term "political theology". Political theology is just a way of trying to dress up ill-informed people saying rude things about politicians and governments, and asking why politicians and governments can't be more like priests and church and to do it in a way that seems to be theologically informed. It's cheap. It's one of the cheapest forms of contemporary Christian rhetoric, I think. The other term that I have come to just despise to be perfectly Frank is "prophetic". Because it assumes two things. One is, once I've said it, I myself cannot be reproved. In other words, it draws a line with the possibility of answerability for what it is that I just said. I know that's not what you're saying.

The other thing that's the term prophetic has come to mean is its theological sanction for being an asshole. And sometimes that's all it is. Anyone who has had a significant disagreement with someone you love and there's two things about that disagreement... Firstly, that disagreement is the first time that you probably really saw this other person because once somebody has brought who they are to bear in a moment of moral confrontation, you know them. You know what makes them work. You know what fires their passions. You also know in that moment of disagreement, that

there's probably something that you can say that will help you win the argument and you will lose everything else. When you pull your punch at that point, what is that? Is it compromising? Is it being mealy mouthed? Is it being weak on your convictions? No, it's at that moment that you realize something matters more here than winning. That thing that matters more is the end of everything.

And so the way that you then conduct yourself in the conversation, it's bringing the thing that matters most to you up to that moment. It's trying to say, "at this moment, what is demanded of me in order to achieve that which matters more than anything else". Which is this relationship with this person being as close as possible reflection to the relationship that I'm going to have with this person in all eternity. What at this moment is demanded for that to become realized in this particular exchange? That doesn't mean being nice. When Jo said it's reading the moment, she's exactly right. It's creating the standing to be able to say what needs to be said at the moment where what needs to be said, needs to be said.

The example that I keep coming back to is E.M. Forster's novel, Howard's End, where two completely different people, Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox get married. She knows what he is like. He's a colonialist, he's a chauvinist, he's a bigot, he's got a good heart, whatever the hell that means, but in other words, he's not a villain. He's not a knave. But, there's an awful lot wrong with him. She marries him knowing what he is like, but also with no agenda to change him. She rules that out initially to go into a marriage thinking, "I'm marrying this person in the hopes that he'll become what I want him to be." She calls that a form of relational idolatry. I think it's very nice and persuasive "to turn it into an idol to myself," she says.

In other words, there comes a moment towards the end of the book, it's one of the most painful moments I think, to read in all of literature, where he indulges in a moment of shameless, irresponsible, indefensible, moral hypocrisy. Everything that's most wrong with him comes to the surface at this moment. He renders himself inarticulate. Such is his hypocrisy. And she says to him, "You are muddled. You are criminally muddled. You've been coddled all your life, you contemptible man." And she says to him exactly what needs to be said. It renders him speechless. I mean, quite literally, speechless. But everything in the novel, up to that point, every compromise, every moment of tact, every moment of self forgetting and generosity, every moment of belief in the best, everything leads up to that point.

Now, I don't regard that as being nice if you can really stick it in when it needs to be, but that's how relationships that matter more than winning work. It's reading the moment wisely so that when the moment comes, that which needs to be said is able to be said and then once it's said, you simply have to say, "What do you think?"

"Thus, says the Lord." Doesn't allow the other person to say, "Let me tell you what I think."

Sam:

I don't know how much I expect everyone to know about British political history, but Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister from '79 to '91. Or was it 1990? Thereabouts. During that time, she had I think three labor opposition leaders, but Neil Kinnock was the leader for most of that period. There was a lot of people, myself as a young person included, who thought most of what she did was deeply problematic. Neil Kinnock stood up in the House of Commons twice a week at Prime Minister's questions and told the world, if they didn't already know, that what she was doing was deeply problematic. Jeffery Howe was her chancellor and foreign secretary at different times for the

whole of the period from '79 to 1990 when he stood up and said, "This isn't working, Margaret." It was over for Margaret Thatcher.

To use the language that I like to use, that came because he'd been with her all the way through. He saw the best in her, saw what she was good for Britain, and actually even someone like myself can recognize there was some things that she did in retrospect, I didn't feel like it at the time, that needed to happen. But because he'd been with her for all that time, his prophetic word counted for everything. If the church models itself on Neil Kinnock and constantly rent a voice is up twice a week complaining about what anybody in leadership is ever doing. It's basically saying we don't understand leadership and everything that a leader does is wrong. Or it's saying we're not interested in anything unless you make us the leader. It's the only two things it's kind of saying. If it is with, and walks with, leaders for a long, long time, then finally when it does stand up and say something prophetic, it deserves to be heard and it's likely to be a transformative intervention.

Question:

I love the Anglican liturgy and a service is just one of the best experiences. I can do as many as I can because it is about meeting God and the journey and the process. I can't say that that's necessarily the attitude held these days about the liturgy in community. Where does the liturgy play in us trying to get people into the church and connect with people? What you've told us, I think for many of us is just adding to what we already believe about liturgy and what we want to give out in our liturgy, but we're not really the ones that need to hear it. It's the people in the pews that need to understand the liturgy and to hear this journey and meaning of the deeper purpose of our liturgy. I've talked after a service to someone about some things that we do in the liturgy and why we do it and the words that we use. And someone has said, "You know, it'd be really great during the service, maybe during the sermon you explain the liturgy." And I'm sort of conflicted because, for me, the sermon is about the word, not the liturgy. Therefore, I find myself in a position "of how do I educate or bring the beauty of the liturgy to those who it has lost that sense, for those who come into not understanding it?" If I had a sermon series on the service and people who need to hear it would not necessarily come to hear it. How do you bring your community and honour the Eucharist in that way? Does my question make sense?

Sam:

Just to talk about something I did talk about last week that. One of the thing that's never let me down is an exercise I've done in I think all the different parishes I've served, with a small group, and that is to get about eight people around a table like you all are doing now, to put a chart with all their names down column one and then to have four other columns. The first column is, each person tells the others about their favourite point in the liturgy. Column two is, each person tries to encapsulate what that moment is. Let's imagine the favourite moment of sharing that piece and column two would say something like reconciliation or touch or something like that. Then column three is, where do you get that in the rest of the week?

I had a bus driver in my first parish for whom column one was when he swung the thurible. Column two was mystery. Column three was on the terraces of Newcastle United. Column four is, what does that show you about God? For him to continue with him, it was mystery, it was the smoke, it was Newcastle United and it was God, as an infinite circle whose centre is everywhere and who's circumference is nowhere. That's more or less what he was saying, but it's a free translation.

I've never found this has let me down. People will say, "I like the hymns they represent joy and self-

expression." Where'd you get that in the rest of the week? "I sing in the shower." What does that show you about God? "The glory of God is a human being fully alive."

I just recommend that as a very simple thing that can take 40 minutes, that can be transformative and can turn your... Rather than liturgy is something that you've got fabulous expertise in, to a depth and degree that they could never possibly aspire to, it turns them into evangelists to each other about how they have seen the face of God through the ordinary practices that they do together on Sunday morning.

Question:

What about the person who says, "I come to church, I've done my time, and the best part is getting out of there afterward." What do we do with them?

Sam:

Let's do that one together? I mean, what would be the second column, what would the columns say? I'd like to say it would say something like empowered. I've been sent, I've been filled up with my petrol and I'm good to go. Something like that. So, column three, where do you get that and the rest of the week? Well, that would be a very interesting answer. Of course, it could be Friday at 5:00 o'clock when I clock off for the weekend. That would be a slightly depressing answer. Having eaten a meal might be another moment. I would like to think that my clergy would have that feeling at 10:45 on a Monday when we've all checked in with each other. We know what's gone on the last week, we reviewed services and pastoral care and everything. That's what I feel at 10:45. Okay, the week begins now.

What does that show you about God? God equips God's servants for the work of ministry. Matthew 28, "Go out to all the world." I think that's a legitimate answer. I mean, it may not be the answer we want. We may say "when people are so lost in the Eucharistic prayer that they are dizzy with the angels", but not everyone's going to say that.

Question:

Our community practice has been when it comes to that, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." And then go, "let's just sit down and reflect now. What are we going to do this week to love and serve the Lord? From the message today from how the Holy Spirit's been speaking to us." Instead of just racing out the door.

Bishop Jo:

I was just going to offer a couple of practical things in terms of teaching people about liturgy. Two things. Actually, I've seen Sam do this best of all. At a family service or wherever it's possible, just pause and explain the Eucharist as you go along and let kids gather around the table and ask what's going on or whatever. But equally, I've seen it done routinely on the order of service in writing. So, there's a whole other column to the left of the liturgy that explains in far more eloquent theological terms, why we do it and what it means, where it comes from, what it's about. That doesn't take up any time in the service, but they can take it home with them or they can read it if they're distracted in the service and it just pops up once a month.

Question:

Another comment on that, is use the children stuff from catechesis of The Good Shepherd which is a teaching form for teaching children about the Eucharist. Why not have in the place of the sermon

one Sunday, the catechesis for the Eucharist.

Sam:

Yeah, I agree with that 100% apart from the part I don't agree with, which is "it's always in place of a sermon, isn't it?" Why is the sermon the first thing to always get Jettisoned? Yeah. I'm a bit nervous of that. Think about what else it could be in place of. I still remember the day that the heating failed at my first church and my training incumbent and I recognized we had to make it snappy. This was in England and it was December, it was really, really cold. And everybody said, "Well, why not just leave out the sermon?" I thought, well that's really telling me something really, really important, but I didn't want to hear.

Question:

Please say something about that use of technology in regard to the liturgy. Is there a line, is there a boundary?

Bishop Jo:

Sam knows nothing about technology. And if you even suggest putting a screen in a neighbourhood projector in a building from 1726 in Trafalgar Square, you get your head bitten off. So, I'm going to answer that one. Sorry. I would say probably half of our churches in the diocese of Guildford have installed screens, overhead projectors, some in more subtle ways than others. The longer they waited, the better it gets. You know, they retract and disappear. And that's just great as far as I'm concerned. But I think the simple one-word answer to using PowerPoint instead of hymnbooks or prayer books, is that it has to be done really well. Otherwise it holds a congregation up for ransom. I cannot stand it when the person who is operating the PowerPoint is in effect leading the service because they are preventing...

The other thing is, it's hard enough for us to listen. I think we've lost the skills of listening and paying attention together with our ears. I don't think it's the same doing it with our eyes. Hear the word of the Lord. I think we mustn't fall prey to putting everything on a PowerPoint screen just as actually being buried in a book, I don't think is the answer for everything too. I think liturgy has to be a live event and so we have to get more creative at making sure there are surprises in it for all the senses that keep us on our toes. PowerPoint can be just another way of putting people to sleep.

Scott:

Can I just say quickly? There's no single thing... Firstly, everything that Jo says, I think that's absolutely right. Neither fetishizing the open book nor being blasé about the presence of screens. Nothing has killed whatever value there was in public articulacy or the discipline of public rhetoric as efficiently, as mercilessly, as demonically, as PowerPoint. At conferences everywhere, people don't present papers, they put up a PowerPoint and they speak to the PowerPoint. "Oh, I'd really love to read you that, I didn't really write a paper. I just spoke to the PowerPoint." It is destroying us. It's destroying our capacity to speak well publicly, but it's also, I think Jo's absolutely right, it's done something, I fear, irretrievable to our capacity to listen in public and to be attentive in public.

In my parish, we have our hymns and the various parts of the liturgy are on the screen. At this stage, it's still minimal. If it doesn't have to be on the screen, it's not on the screen. If it's something that people are going to respond to, then it's up on the screen. I do fear constantly, the disciplines that are involved, and I don't mean in a kind of hidden masterly way, but just the disciplines that are involved in taking and picking up the audio cues, you can hear in someone's inflection, you can

hear what's being said. Just picking up the bits that that's for me to lean into. I don't think you have to be overly didactic about it. You certainly don't have to be sort of hectoring about it.

We are losing so many spaces where there's just one line of stimulus that are coming in at one particular time instead of multiple points of distraction. It just seems to me that we ought to protect this a little bit more than we are, rather than assuming that because it's got to go into the PowerPoint that's going to kind of end up constricting just what it is that we're able to communicate.

Sam:

Actually, I don't have a problem with PowerPoint to the extent that it makes us one body in a way that us all looking at our individual texts makes us individuals. And so, the PowerPoint can have the effect of drawing us together as one. But liturgy for me really begins when the words stop. It's about building up a kind of a repertoire, within your congregation, of actions more than words. Most of us can recite the prayer of humble access if it is, "Almighty God to whom all hearts are open." It's great to have that embodied in us.

So, then that's a good thing. But it should train us to improvise spontaneously. So, to give two examples of this. One, in my first parish in the Easter season, we would put the paschal candle in the middle of the aisle at the front, kind of where a preacher might stand. We had to put a carpet in when we introduced a nave altar. And one Sunday the candle started to self-destruct, as it can around about Easter six. For the paschal candle, particularly when you've got a daily Eucharist in your tradition, by the time you get to about sixth week of Easter, it can all go badly wrong with the paschal candle. And this was starting to happen sometime around the middle of the service. Of course, the clergy couldn't get up and do anything about it because they were the clergy. And the lay people felt totally just embarrassed because nowhere in the order of service did it say somebody would now spontaneously stand up and deal with the candle.

The house proud were noticing the mess it was making on the carpet, and they we're not quite sure this was the glorious celebration of the resurrection that the candle was supposed to represent. So, eventually, somebody who had been part of that congregation a long time, stood up and did the decent thing, even though it was in the middle of the creed or something like that, but it was already getting out of control. Again, that to me is the problem of the PowerPoint or the book that you get bound by what's in the book and you lose your humanity.

So to give a more positive illustration, I can remember a parish away day of about 15, 20 people. It was actually outdoors. I presided a communion, we were sitting in a big circle. And then without really knowing what I was doing, I went and gave communion to a person sitting opposite me because it was a person that I'd had some difficulties with and I felt rather than pass the parcel, I just wanted to give communion to her. So that created a problem for her. Who was she supposed to give communion to?

Well by the power of the Holy Spirit, she gave communion to somebody else elsewhere in the circle. I got up and then gave the, the wine to her and the person elsewhere in the circle with the bread got up and gave communion to somebody opposite her. Then what happened was this marvellous kind of criss-cross effect of one of those sorts of games with wool that produces some sort of curve. It was one of the most beautiful liturgical things I've ever seen. It happened completely spontaneously out of people who completely trusted one another, assumed the Holy

Spirit was at work, knew this was communion and on some level knew that there was somebody there that they needed to give communion to that day.

That's what you're hoping for in a liturgically formed community. The bad version of this a paschal candle. But the good version is the rediscovery of how communion and peace can be formed into one movement.

Question:

I was very much taken by the comment about John chapter 13 and Philippians 2:2 the two great kenotic statements. And I was thinking when you were speaking about the washing of the feet. I had a vague memory that some Seventh Day Adventists actually do that. I can't recall for me the way I got that information. But I'd be interested in your response to this comment, we often say the fourth gospel that the Eucharistic teachings in chapter six the feeding of 5,000. But to what extent would you say that the washing of the feet is a Eucharistic teaching in the sense of our Lord Jesus is coming to serve the people of God so they may serve humanity.

Sam:

I think I'm going to need to ask you to clarify but I've come across the foot washing Baptists. I don't know if they get confused with Seventh Day Adventists sometimes, but there is a whole breed particularly in America of foot washing Baptists. Say a bit more about being a Eucharistic practice in the sense that?

Question:

Given that John's gospel being the latest, presumably of the four, has no direct institution of Eucharistic teaching. So, there's a veiling of the mystery as it were. And it seems to me, and I don't know how unique it is, but it seems to me the washing of feet could very well be a Eucharistic teaching.

Sam:

So in other words, actually an integral part of the eucharist?

Question:

Yeah, the integral part. So, it's really saying that, I suppose the other way of saying it's the great Anglican heresy or it seems to be Pelagianism, being a nice person sort of attitude without needing the grace of God. It seems to me that our Lord is saying to us we need to be served in order to serve, to allow Christ to wash our feet, Eucharistically. I was wondering if that's an idea that perhaps you may comment on.

Sam:

I think it's very helpful and I'm not going to say more about it because you've expressed it very well. The way that I'd gloss on it would to say, I think it offers a transformation in our understanding of mission because mission is traditionally described as this ghastly choice. Stop me if you've heard this one before. You're going through a desert and you see a starving man and you have a choice about whether to give him a Bible or a loaf of bread. Is this familiar territory to you? When I was an undergraduate, this question seemed to be asked on almost daily basis. It begged all sorts of questions about what you were doing in the desert, why you happen to have these two items rather than any others. And particularly why there was no choice of giving both, for example. You have to hang onto one, obviously.

Anyway, that is the complete caricature of what we think mission might be. But what no one ever questioned was that everything that could possibly be wanted, the Bible and the loaf of bread, we had, and the starving man was defined by his deficit. He had absolutely nothing to give us. That seems to me the basic problem with that illustration for all its other problems. I don't know how many times you've been walking through a desert with just a Bible and... The situation doesn't arise naturally as often as people seem to suggest it did. But through the whole lifetime I've had since undergraduate days, it's never actually arisen for me. It's not proved all that helpful.

But if we see you must let your feet be washed, if you see the face of Christ in a stranger, then you'll always ask in your mission, how is this person going to wash my feet? Not selfishly, because you're lazy or can't go to wash your own feet or so you think the world is there to serve you, but because we can't flourish as human beings unless we are active. And that includes serving. So, our work in mission is to release people's bodies and release people's voices not simply to impose upon them our Bible or our loaf of bread or our agenda.

Question:

One of the comments I really enjoyed was when you spoke about sitting down, and that was connected to the comment about the shepherd placing his staff in the ground and I think you said that the incarnate God sat down for 30 years before he began his work. I guess I hear the invitation, almost begging, of our indigenous brothers and sisters saying, "Please come and sit down." And I guess that one of the challenges for many of us is knowing how long do we sit down in a parish and be present to that community? It's always a temptation after five years to disappear somewhere else... I'd like you to explore a bit more that notion of sitting down and also at the same time holding on to that staff which allows the sheep to trust us. Do we just shut up for most of that time or something?

Sam:

Okay. Just a quick version of this.

So, four categories "working for" where I have all the assets, you have all the deficits and I upscale myself to a maximum degree, at least a master's degree and then spend the rest of my life doing things for you.

"Working with", more like community organizing where we all sit around the table, the business community, the homeless community, the local non-profits, the church. You sit down and we all bring our stakes to the table and we solve a problem together.

"Being with" where you simply sit down with the disadvantaged with a First Nations person and can just talk about the software, talk about the Aussie rules. We can talk about whatever is under the sun that's worth talking about.

"Being for" where you set up your blog site and you tell everybody they use the wrong language about this and that it's time that something was done, but it's always for somebody else to do the doing.

Jesus spent 1% of his ministry in Jerusalem working for us, saving us from our sins. 9% of his ministry in Galilee, building a social movement, empowering the disciples, 90% sitting down in

Nazareth being with us, give or take a few weeks in Egypt and one visit to Jerusalem. Of course, God had never run an incarnation before, so, if God didn't know how to do it, we have to feel sorry for God in that respect. We're pretty experienced in this now. And so, we realize that the percentages are 100% opposite. We realize that it's all about "working for" us showing the world how knowledgeable and how skilled we are and disposing our scale upon the unwary world. There isn't really time to do "being with". That's relegated to 1%. Of course, life's too short, isn't it? We haven't got eternity.

The thing is in heaven, there'll be no problems to fix, everything will be sorted, we'll have to learn how to be with one another. So why don't we actually model that now and show the world that we believe that the fixing, such as it is, has been done by somebody on our behalf. That is official Christian faith. That is a whole transformation of the way we understand ministry or mission. And you've described what needs to happen in this country. It's not for me to say, but you put it in your own words, that "being with" is actually the way to incarnate our convictions about the incarnate God.

Scott:

There's a philosophy that many of you would be familiar with, probably more for his non philosophical writing, Raymond Gaita who is a very dear friend. I'm writing a book about his philosophy at the moment. We were speaking at his house a few months ago about just why it is that the prospect of a First Nations voice to Parliament is so terrifying. Irrationally, terrifying. Like my fear of heights... I'll tell you what he said. I'll tell you how I translate it and how Sam taught me something very important about this. He said, "Because what truly listening to First Nations would mean, is that what we mean by Australia may well be different at the end of it."

Reconciliation has most often meant in this country how we bring them in. Whereas what the politics of truly listening would mean is "we might not know who we are by the end of it". That's kind of how I understand "being with" in these terms. It's the difference between teleology and eschatology. Teleology means there is something that we are working towards. There is an agenda that we are all serving together. Eschatology would be something far more like my tenaciously remaining with one another, while whatever it is that God might have in store for us rushes up to meet us. This is being with, without agenda, on the presumption that whatever we are by the end of it, is unforeseeable to us now. The obligation that we have is to remain together. Not listlessly but not entirely pointlessly either.

There is a point, we just don't know what that is yet and we are hoping that the presence of God in this other person, the presence of God, the word of God in the mouth of this other person will reveal it somewhere along the way. I've just jumbled up a bit of philosophical and theological stuff together, but I've found that immensely helpful. What it seems to me, many of us who are fundamentally uncomfortable about a pointless human interaction are scared of, is that we're going to run out of the reason for being together. And that is exactly why it's so important to be together in the hopes that the reason will emerge from being.

Question:

How do we take an assets-based understanding of community into mission and ministry around us rather than imposing that on people?

Sam:

It's very challenging. I wish I had the sort of two sentence answer saying, "Look at the magnificence of my ministry, and just copy me." But I can't say that. It's a wonderfully suggestive question. I was engaged with one of you over the break in a conversation about what you do when your church is social outreach has got to the stage where it's got so extensive that it's become professionalized and secularized that it has sort of detached itself from your congregation. Over the last weekend I was in Melbourne having a day conference with people from the Uniting Church talking about the organization called UnitingCare and how since the 70s, that's kind of floated off.

Now, I know this is not a problem that affects any Anglicans anywhere at all. You have no issues like this because Anglicare is completely different from UnitingCare and no such thing ever happens. I've learned that. I really respect that. I think it's astonishing what you've done. To an outsider.

So, my counsel in that situation is rather than to do what I was tempted to do when I came to St. Martins which was to claw back these wonderful programs that got too detached from the ministry of the church. What I realized after about a year of trying to explore how to do that was that it was just seen as a power grab. That these organizations were very skilled at what you might call the procedural methods of doing that kind of work, but were terribly insecure about that overall ideology and were frightened of a person like myself being able to find some language which would outflank them, and then suddenly they'd wake up a year later and they'd find there were suddenly part of St. Martin's again and they'd lost their integrity and control about authenticity.

So, I gave up trying to do that and said, "Despite all this wonderful social programming, we've got a whole bunch of issues on our doorstep that still need addressing. There don't seem to be any shortage to go around. There's an abundance of those. So why don't we just grow a new ministry from within the congregation and address those but intentionally try to spend time not replicating the mistakes of the more programmed, more secular, more professionalized things?" And one of the things that has gone wrong with the professionalized things is precisely they've got very professionalized. When I came to St. Martin's there was only one person left volunteering in the homeless centre. Because of corporate social responsibility, all of the accountancy and the banking firms that gave 30,000 pounds a year to the homeless centre, did so with a tag. And the tag on it was, their senior staff could volunteer at the homeless centre and therefore it looked fantastic on their number of hours volunteered on our annual report.

It was this total juggernaut of the way things have gone was unstoppable. It was no point trying to fight it. We just had to create another ministry. We created a thing called Sunday International Group, which deals with asylum seekers on a Sunday afternoon, two and a half hours. And that is about 45 asylum seekers that come to that each Sunday afternoon. And it's a with not a for. They can wash their clothes, they can have a shower, but really, it's about sitting down and getting to know people. I'll come to that. It's about 45 volunteers just emerged from the congregation where we just had one before. 44 new ones have emerged who were dying to do this kind... Because not everybody comes to St. Martin's for the music. Some people come because of its reputation for social care. Which was a bit of a lie eight years ago. Just the one person volunteering in the homeless centre. It was based on a slightly false image.

It's not a lie anymore because those people have come out and they spend quite a lot of time reflecting on what they're doing in just the kind of ways that we've talked about. What we haven't done is what you're challenging me to do. And I'll go back and do with them this year, which is to

reflect Eucharistically and liturgically on what they're doing. I think that would be fantastic. We just haven't done it and that's very challenging to me now. But we have reflected on what I've just described about the difference of "being with" and "working for" and this assumption that your job is there to fix people's lives.

So just to give two very quick illustrations, one is of a man called Charles who went for a walk with the Sunday International Group, in the countryside. I don't know if it was sunny or not because I wasn't there, but he was an asylum seeker like everybody else. But there was a sheep struggling in the field that everybody in the group, the walking group, saw. But he did something nobody else did. He jumped over the fence ran to the farmer, stuck his hand up the insides of the sheep, in a way I won't go into the details of right now, and five minutes later, out came a little lamb. And the farmer looked at him and just sort of wonderment saying, "How on earth did you do that?" He said, "Well, it was breech birth, it was quite straight forward actually."

The farmer said, "But how'd you do it?" He said, "Well, I'm a doctor. I may have left Senegal because I was gay, and I couldn't stay there anymore. But I'm trained as a doctor. Actually, a breech birth is pretty straight forward if you know what you're doing. And a sheep isn't that different from the rest of us?" But the reason I'm telling that story is that everyone assumes that what asylum seekers need are sandwiches, and possibly a bit of healthcare and a lawyer. What he needed was people to get to know him and trust him well enough that they could write references for him to commend him to the national Health Services to do what he should be doing.

The other thing that's emerged out of that is our cricket team. Because lots of these asylum seekers come from India or Pakistan and Afghanistan.

When I came to St. Martin's, our cricket team, the batting wasn't too bad, but the bowling was pretty poor because we all sort of middle aged and paunchy. So, we were defeated by St. Mary's, Wimbledon and the other churches that we played against. Fortunately, it wasn't two innings. The effect of course of the asylum seekers group is that these guys are now playing in cricket team. So, we don't say, "Do you need a nurse?" We say, "We need a wicket keeper." St. Mary's approached us last summer and said they weren't sure they could play against us if Adnan opened the bowling for us. Just imagine, as a takeaway from this week, the transformation that comes from one church saying to another, because you have asylum seekers at the heart of your life, you're too good for us and we're not sure we can compete with you any longer.

And that's the transformation that that group has brought. If we try to claw back the work from the Connections St. Martins and reclaim the governance of that organization, we would have been angst ridden and fighting and all sorts of... Where would it have got us? We've left that aside and just let a new ministry grow out of this conviction about "being with", which is now being shared by that whole community of volunteers and the fruits are just coming out on a weekly basis.

The Revd Dr Sam Wells has been Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields since 2012. He has served as a parish priest for 20 years – 10 of those in urban priority areas. He also spent 7 years in North Carolina, where he was Dean of Duke University Chapel.

Sam is also Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at King's College, and a member of the Multi-Stakeholder Council that advises the G20 meetings. He is a regular contributor to Thought for the Day on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. He has published 30 books, including works on Christian ethics, ministry, liturgy, and preaching. Sam is married to Jo Wells, who is Bishop of Dorking. They have two children.

Scott Stephens is Editor of the ABC's Religion and Ethics website, and specialist commentator on religion and ethics for ABC radio and television. He presented two series of the critically acclaimed "Life's Big Questions" program for Compass on ABC1, and has been guest presenter of Conversations with Richard Fidler on ABC local radio. Before coming to the ABC, Scott taught theology, ethics and Semitic studies for many years.

He has published widely on moral philosophy, theology and political theory, and is currently writing a book on whether public ethics can survive in a media age. He is editing a further two volumes: on theological ethics and social order, and on political Islam and the collapse of the Arab Spring.

He has spoken at dozens of international conferences on issues ranging from theology and aesthetics through to education and mental health. He has also co-edited and translated the selected works of the philosopher and cultural critic, Slavoj Žižek, which was named by The Guardian one of its 'Books of the Year' in 2007.