

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

13th January 2021

I wonder what comes to mind if I ask you to think of images associated with Christ? Maybe it's from one of the 'I am' sayings in St John's Gospel, such as the Good Shepherd or the True Vine. It's perhaps unlikely to be the Plough at least until last Sunday when our Plough Sunday service ended with a hymn which began,

*'O Christ who holds the open gate,
O Christ who drives the furrow straight,
O Christ, the plough, ...'*

The words come from a long narrative poem by John Masefield called 'The Everlasting Mercy'. In it he recounts at length the dissolute life of the central character, Saul Kane. Kane's life is marked by lies, deception, immorality, violence and drunkenness. Towards the end of the poem though, Kane is converted to Christianity. As he watches a man ploughing with his team of horses, he realises that the ploughman is working in harmony with God. He decides to do likewise in contrast to his previous way of life and realises that as he is doing so:

*'Christ would be ploughing in my heart,
Through rest-harrow and bitter roots,
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits.'*

Towards the end of the poem, Kane notes that this is a universal need but that Christ, the Ploughman, needs to be asked to start working:

*'And in men's hearts in many lands
A spiritual ploughman stands
Forever waiting, waiting now'*



The image of Christ as a plough is an unusual one. However I think it is very much in keeping with Jesus' own practice of using agricultural images and examples in his teaching and parables, and well worth exploring. Traditionally the process of ploughing gets rid of the old rubbish accumulated on the soil, opens the soil up and renders it fit to receive fresh seed. Our lives are probably, indeed hopefully, not as unsavoury as that of the character in Masefield's poem but they probably are not perfect either. Maybe we need a bit of a spiritual clear-out. Using the image of the plough we can invite Jesus, who 'stand forever waiting, waiting now', to cut through the solid soil of our old way of being. However unlike actual ploughing where the rubbish is buried deeper, the accumulated 'rubbish', the things we'd like to put behind us, isn't just turned over but cleared away by God's forgiveness. Then as we open our hearts to God, like clean soil ready to receive seed, his grace and mercy make it possible for us to grow in knowledge and love of him and, like Masefield's ploughman, live and work in harmony with him.

You might like to use this prayer / poem by Sister Anne Lawson this week.

Turning the sod

Sharp plough glinting in the sun
turning dull bare earth
preparation for a new start
a nourishing seedbed
new beginnings
new life
new growth

Holy Spirit, sharp ploughshare for our hearts
turn the dull bare earth of our lives
preparation for new starts
nourish us with your word
prepare us for
new beginnings
new life
new growth

*(from 'Winter' edited by Ruth Burgess and
published by Wild Goose Publications)*

With my love and prayers

Camilla

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