

Lies, damned lies and statistics may be the very stuff of political spin - and at the end of the party conference season we've certainly heard some whoppers; but I lay some figures before you today in the light of the reading from Genesis and from Mark's Gospel - and I want us to think seriously about them as they affect us all.

In 1990 we had 30 weddings at St. James'. In 2000 we had 11. Between 40-50% of all marriages in England and Wales end in divorce within 15 years. The divorce rate in England and Wales is among the highest in the EU. 30% of all children living in married couple families experience divorce before they are aged 16. Less than 60% of all under 16 year olds live in married couple families, 40% with their biological mother and father. 40% of all marriages in England and Wales involve people marrying for at least a second time. In 1965 5% of couples marrying lived together before marriage. In 1995 over 75% of couples marrying lived together before marriage. Divorce rates are now static and are expected to fall in the next ten years, but only because fewer and fewer people are marrying.

But how do we relate to the reality of relationships, some positive, some negative which come our way among family, friends or colleagues? The Church of England has always taught, in a very Anglican way, through what is said in worship, that *"Marriage is a gift of God in creation and a means of His grace, a holy mystery in which man and woman become one flesh"*, and in the vows that marriage is *"for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death us do part"*.

We are saying thereby that marriage is more than a legal contract of cohabitation between two individuals, that in fact marriage points further, that it can reflect the covenant between God and humankind. Covenanted human love points beyond itself to the permanent covenant of love and fidelity God has made to humanity - shown from the stories of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Delight, through Noah's rainbow, the prophets and given fulfilment in the life of Jesus.

But there are two things I want to add immediately. First, marriage is not the only expression of love which points beyond itself - indeed I would want to add that every expression of love points to the love of God for creation, every expression of love which is genuinely generous, seeking nothing in return, which is forgiving and liberating, points beyond itself. And second, I don't accept that every marriage, because it is a formal marriage, automatically points beyond itself to the generous, forgiving, liberating love of God for creation. We all know, have seen, have perhaps been involved with marriages where there is no generosity, no forgiveness, no liberation, where partners to the marriage are destroying each other and where divorce is the best, or least worst, outcome. And the Church of England, while affirming the permanency of marriage does also indeed recognise that in some cases, where people were once married, they are no longer married. The Church of England accepts

divorce as a reality.

10% of all Church marriages involve a partner who has already been married and divorced; in the Methodist and URC over 60% of marriages involve a divorced partner. Are we flying in the face of Jesus' commands? I think not. I know there are some indissolubists around - that is those who see black and white, marriage is right and divorce and, more particularly, remarriage is always wrong. But while respecting that, I disagree.

In every human relationship there is success and failure, there is responsibility and fault to be acknowledged before God. In every human relationship, where there is honesty and openness to the searching work of the Holy Spirit in all conscience, the Church's duty and privilege is surely not to condemn but to assure people of forgiveness and acceptance in Christ - as in Christ's dealing with the woman in adultery.

So too the hard words of Jesus in Mark - "*Anyone who divorces and marries again commits adultery*" - are not, I believe, law in the sense of rules to be obeyed, but in a theoretical framework are rather shock tactics for the hard of heart. For this encounter begins with Pharisees attempting to test Jesus by tricking him into commenting on the Law of Moses about divorce. But Jesus refuses to be cornered or put into a box. Jesus didn't talk about the law - he lived its fulfilment - he lived, breathed, spoke, acted out, was betrayed for and eventually died for God's rule, God's kingdom, which, as the Resurrection shows, cannot be destroyed. Jesus doesn't give a theoretical answer to the question the Pharisees have asked in order to trap him - rather his answer is his life, a life reflecting God's image, - a life lived with generosity, forgiving, liberating love - which acknowledges reality. Yes, the reality of failure of both repentance and forgiveness.

In that light, I feel strongly that it is the spirit of the law and not its letter, which alone is of true value. My feeling is in the word of the ancient hymn for Maundy Thursday. It says in Latin "*Ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est*". "*Wherever there is love and charity, God is present*".

We can't assume - as experience proves - that all marriages do grow in real love and charity. Nor can we assume that all relationships outside marriage are, per se, less likely to be suffused with God's love and charity. But as I listen to couples in marriage preparation, listen to those for whom marriage has been wonderful, listen to those for whom marriage has been a disaster, listen to those in relationships other than marriage - it is those words which return to my mind again and again - "*Wherever love and charity abound, there God is present*", for they echo Christ's life of love for God and neighbour. And that alone is our Christian calling.

Brian Leathard

Taken from the Sermon - Sunday 8th October 2000

ADVENT WEEKEND PROGRAMME

Saturday 2nd December 10.30am • **Christingle Workshop** for all ages in the hall
to 12 noon • **Annual leaf sweep and gutter clean** - volunteers please turn up suitably attired!

Sunday 3rd December 9.30am • **Advent Sunday** - Christingle service
6.30pm • **Music for Advent** with Chris Hodges' *Apocalypse Singers*

A Story for Those Less Than Perfect

This story was told to a study group which I was attending. The narrator was a little apologetic, thinking the story might be a bit simple for his audience. We all liked it but I pass it on with the same apology to readers.

A water carrier trudged every day from his village to a well some distance away. He carried two big water jars on a yoke across his shoulders, one hanging on either side. He filled the jars, and carried them back to his village. One jar was strong and sound; when the carrier got back it was still full of water. But the other jar was flawed and a lot of water leaked from it on the way back. This being a story, the jars were very conscious of their qualities. The sound jar was quite pleased with itself and the good job it was doing. The flawed jar was sad at its own imperfection, and this being a story, said so to the carrier. "Why don't you get a new jar since I waste so much of the water you carry? You should throw me away. " The carrier said: "When I carry you back from the well tomorrow, look on either side of the path." So the flawed jar looked; on the far side the ground was dry and bare. But on its own side there was a carpet of grass and flowers.

Dick Wilde

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR!

Does your neighbour receive a copy of *The Spire*?

If not, why not take them one!

There are always spare copies at the back of the church.

Please help yourself and spread the word.

LEARNING AS WE GROW OLDER

an extract from *The Spirituality of Ageing* by
Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

What do elderly people and nations have in common with one another? It's an interesting and unusual question which is posed in this positive pamphlet about ageing.

The answer is the past. The past is with us in two ways - either we have been shaped by events that have occurred or the past is with us in unresolved problems we still carry with us like unwanted baggage.

Without reconciling the past, it's impossible to come to terms with the future. This is something which gradually dawns upon us as we mature and perhaps become just a little wiser. Memories of the past sometimes come flooding back when we see a particular person, watch a programme on television or read a certain book and if that means being confronted with an unresolved problem, we should use the opportunity to face it and sort it out. Metropolitan Anthony suggests that what we should do is to say to ourselves "If I am the person who did it, it's not the past, it is my present and it must be resolved one way or another". He takes the view that when this happens, we should re-live the situation, going through each part, stage by stage, and then ask ourselves "Would I have done the same as I did 40, 50 or 70 years ago?" If the answer is "If I was in that situation again, I wouldn't have done that and I'm sorry I did" then the problem is resolved. The idea of dying to one's past in one way or another is something very real.

As we get older we find it so difficult to accept there are things we can't do as we used to! We might try it but we realise that at 70, we can't be what we were at 30 or 40!! The French writer, Victor Hugo said "We must realise that there is a time to be a flame, but there is also a time to be a light! To be a light, a gentle, peaceful, steady light that shines in the darkness, may be useful, more precious to those people who surround us than if we remain a scorching flame". In old age, we can't stir energy that forces people into action but we can radiate serenity and peace.

What worries many people is coming to a period of our lives when we can't determine events - a time when we have to be passive and receive whatever comes. What we can all do is to reflect on what we can do within our capabilities and we can discover something else: the importance of being: of being someone's parent, or grandparent, or friend - that is something which never changes and no one else can take our place. As we grow older we often become dependent. How many times have you heard someone say: "I don't want to be a burden to others"? People are never a burden if they are loved. Those who love us have the joy and privilege of looking with tenderness and concern after someone whom they have loved all their lives and perhaps it also gives them the opportunity to repay all that the person has done for them.

If we are dependent, however, we must make it easy for those to care for us by learning to accept what we are given graciously and joyfully. That is an art which we don't always possess and which we need to learn.

“What gift can ever repay God's gift to me?” says the Psalmist. “I raise the cup of freedom as I call on God's name! . . . I bring a gift of thanks, as I call on your name”. We must learn at all ages to receive with gratitude, to receive in such a way that the giving becomes a joy for the giver and which adds new depth to our relationships one with the other.

Metropolitan Anthony is Head of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchal Church in Great Britain and Ireland. This extract is compiled from a booklet entitled "The Spirituality of Ageing", price £2, obtainable from the Christian Council on Ageing, Epworth House, Stuart Street, Derby, DE1 2EQ.

THE BAPTISMAL PARTY

On Sunday 24th September at 3.30pm about 50 people gathered for the annual party held for recently baptised children, their parents and godparents. It was a good turnout, considering the rain. This year the proceedings took place in the church rather than the hall, which I felt made for a cosy atmosphere and gave more opportunities for people to talk to each other - a point to be considered for next year's arrangements.

People and children explored the church and found their baptisms recorded in the Baptism Register. St. James' people were on hand to chat and answer questions. Then we all got to know each other further over a sumptuous tea provided by many members of the congregation. It was a lovely way to spend a Sunday afternoon - thank you to all who helped.

Debbie Nunn

STIR UP SUNDAY!

It is no coincidence that Stewardship Sunday is held on the Sunday before Advent, traditionally known as Stir Up Sunday! The post communion collect for the day is

*Stir up, O Lord
the wills of your faithful people;
that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works,
may by you be plenteously rewarded;
through Jesus Christ our Lord*

YOUR CHANCE TO MAKE GORDON PAY!

It's that time of year again. Budgets are being set and the **26th November** is 'Stir Up' Sunday when Christians are asked to consider their financial support for the church and it's work. You may like to consider the following:

- It costs about £75,000 a year to run the parish of St. James's - that is over £200 a day. Like all other organisations we must pay salaries, pensions, heating, lighting, general maintenance and a multitude of other expenses.
- 75% of this money is provided by around 120 members of our Stewardship scheme - that is people who give a regular amount every week/month/year.
- This regular giving enables the PCC to plan ahead with confidence and provide resources and facilities for all sections St. James's church and the wider community.

Is this the year you could join Stewardship? Whatever contribution you can make, large or small, will be welcomed.

The new Gift Aid scheme which has replaced covenants is simpler, more flexible, with no need to make a formal commitment in order for St. James to reclaim the tax on your gifts. However you want to give, using the convenience of a bank standing order, regular giving via the envelope scheme or occasional giving as and when it suits you, St. James can reclaim the tax on all your gifts if you provide us with a few details.

If you have not done so already, please complete a Gift Aid declaration form. Forms will be available at the back of the church on **Stewardship Sunday the 26th November** when members of the Stewardship Committee will be on hand to answer your questions. Reclaimed tax is a valuable source of support for St. James'.

With your help we can ensure maximum support from the Chancellor!

If you require further information please contact Brian Leathard (the Vicar) on 8979 2069 or Carol Bailey (Stewardship Committee Chair) on 8979 0633.



OUR PAGE

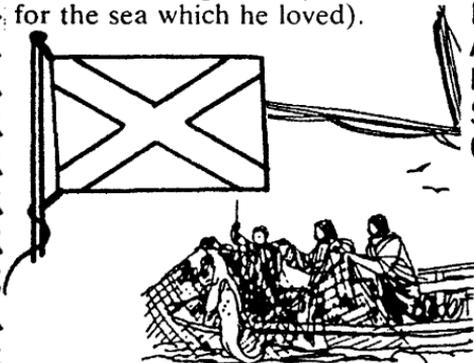


ST ANDREW'S DAY — NOVEMBER 30TH

Andrew, the brother of Simon called Peter, was one of the twelve apostles who followed Jesus. By trade he was a fisherman, working his boat from Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. After meeting Jesus he and his brother gave up fishing to become disciples. After Jesus' death he travelled widely, going as far as Russia.

He was taken prisoner for being a Christian and condemned to death by crucifixion. Legend says that he believed he was too unworthy to die as Jesus died, so he was crucified on a diagonal cross. This type of cross is known as St Andrew's cross.

St Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland and his cross is the Scottish flag which is a white cross on a blue background (the blue is for the sea which he loved).



DO BE CAREFUL ON BONFIRE NIGHT

*November 5th has come and gone
But thoughts of it still linger
I held a banger in my hand —
Has anybody seen my finger?*

If you are having fireworks at home on November 5th do be very careful and follow the Firework Code. It is much safer and more fun to go to a properly organised display.

FIREWORK WORDSEARCH

Can you find all these things to do with Bonfire Night? The words go everyway; up, down, forwards, backwards and diagonally.

V	T	R	E	C	U	A	S	G	N	I	Y	L	F
O	T	O	U	C	H	P	A	P	E	R	J	C	O
L	F	M	B	W	H	E	E	L	A	O	N	A	U
C	O	A	S	A	O	C	F	R	T	R	V	O	N
A	U	N	P	E	N	K	U	O	C	M	K	X	T
R	N	C	A	L	E	G	S	M	H	A	H	S	A
E	T	A	R	K	U	T	E	A	E	T	T	C	I
L	N	N	R	Y	S	R	E	R	S	C	E	U	N
K	I	D	S	F	I	J	H	N	S	H	K	O	S
R	G	L	U	F	H	C	C	C	A	E	C	R	T
A	H	E	N	B	O	X	R	N	D	S	O	E	P
P	V	O	L	C	A	N	O	L	E	H	R	P	A
S	B	X	O	B	N	I	T	C	T	H	G	I	N
C	A	T	H	E	R	I	N	E	W	H	E	E	L

bangers, bonfire, catherine wheel, fountains, firework, fuse, gey, matches, night, rocket, roman candle, sparkler, sparks, tin, box, torch, touchpaper, volcano.



THE MILLENNIUM BAZAAR

Come along to the Millennium Bazaar for fun and bargains
on Saturday 18th November in the Church and the Hall
between 10.30am and 1.30pm.
Coffee and light lunches will be available.

There will be a wide variety of stalls, including

- * gifts
- * china and glass
- * crafts
- * dried flower baskets
- * candles and pot pourri
- * toys
- * plants
- * cakes
- * home made preserves
- * tombola and raffle with splendid prizes!

There are labelled boxes in church NOW for any contributions that you are able to make for the stalls. Cakes, plants etc can be brought to the Hall on Friday 17th November between 6~8pm or on Saturday morning between 9~10am.

With your help we look forward to a happy and successful Millennium Bazaar.

Wendy Baker

LONDON DIOCESAN / ALMA LINK

In November, we are collecting spectacles for re-use in Angola through our Alma link. Please bring them to church or contact Elizabeth Wilmot on 8977 9434. All will be very useful.



Our annual Baptismal tea party, held on the afternoon of 24th September, was a very successful, well attended and happy occasion. (see Debbie Nunn's report elsewhere in this edition).

On 1st October we celebrated Harvest in a beautifully decorated church, thanks to Coryn Robinson and her team. Gifts of dry goods were taken to the Twickenham Refugee Welcome Centre. They will also receive the collection that day and the proceeds of the sale of some flower arrangements which amounted to £300.

Our heartiest congratulations to Susannah and Charles Nettleton on the birth of their son William, a brother for Olivia, Isobel and Henry. Our love and best wishes to the whole family.

Suzanne Nunn, who will be acting as their nanny during her gap year, will have her hands full!

We remember in our prayers our candidates for confirmation at St. Mary's on Sunday 5th November. They are Rob and Tracy Upton and Charlotte Burns. Please try to support them at the service which is being held at 6.30pm. We hope the Guy Fawkes celebrations don't drown them out!

We are pleased to report that Betty Redman, Margaret Bramall and Rose Frier are all recovering well from successful cataract operations. Our best wishes for their continued recovery.

Less happily, Sylvia Border is unwell and is being cared for at home by her sister Peg. We pray that they are both sustained and comforted at this trying time. Also a prayer for the speedy recovery of Lewis Barrett, in hospital.

Thilaka, Ramani, Brian and Anusha thank all those who have prayed for, remembered and supported them during John's illness and death. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

THE PARISH CHRISTMAS CARD

This year we intend to have one giant St. James's Christmas card in church. Everyone will be very welcome to sign it in order to wish a Happy and Peaceful Christmas to every other member of our Parish. The card will be available from Advent Sunday.

So please do not bring personal Christmas cards to church for others to pick up. So many remain long after Christmas that they lose their significance. Instead, join in signing the Parish Christmas Card for all parishioners.

FROM THE SEPTEMBER REGISTERS

Baptisms

- 3 Eleanor Clara Keech }
Georgia Natalia Keech } 6 Edward Road
Benjamin Henry Thorne, 156 Buckland Way, Worcester Park
- 17 Ethan Charles Henry Lester, 14 Fenton Avenue, Staines
Rhese James Anthony Andrew Marshall }
Aidan Patrick Francis John Marshall } 43 Cardinal's Walk
Max Aaron Pinchen, 25 Bloxham Crescent, Hampton

Weddings

- 9 Richard Fisher and Karen Evans
16 Ryan Clifford and Nicole Docker
Andrew Morphitis and Michele Robins
23 Stephen Morris and Helen Butwell

Funerals

- 4 Bill Young, 8 Oxford Road, Teddington 69
26 Vida Clout, 12 Fitzwygram Close 86
27 Gwendoline Ward, 75A Uxbridge Road 76
28 Zdzislaw Grzybowski, 49 Pigeon Lane
Grace Winford, 1 Roy House, Roy Grove 83

DATES TO NOTE IN NOVEMBER

- 1 **All Saints' Day** - remember in your prayers our neighbouring parish of All Saints
- 2 **All Souls' Day**
8pm Parish Communion to remember the Faithful Departed with the *Apocalypse Singers* helping to lead worship
- 5 6.30pm **Confirmation Service** at St. Mary's, Hampton
- 6 William Temple, Archbishop, 1944
- 12 9.30am Parish Communion followed by Prayers at the War Memorial in the Church for **Remembrance Sunday**
- 15 7.30pm Women's Forum Speaker Meeting.- Church Hall
- 18 10.30am **Millennium Bazaar** - Church and Hall
- 26 'Stir up Sunday' - Stewardship Sunday
- 29 Day of Intercession for the Missionary Work of the Church
- 30 8.00pm Meeting of the PCC - Church Hall
Andrew the Apostle