



**The Rectory
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Dear Friends,

***Row, row, row the boat..... Do not
be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12.1-8)***

I have so many memories of childhood holidays spent in the South of France - I recall hours spent diving or perfecting summersaults into the salt water pool of Palm Beach, swimming in the sea or playing with my sister in our yellow inflatable canoe. When our own boys were small Billy and I would load up the car and drive to Dover late on a Friday evening to travel to Calais and then make the long journey south whilst the boys slept, listened to Harry Potter CD's or complained the journey was far too long. Moments after arrival as the boys played on the beach, swam in the pool or paddled in my old childhood canoe the journey would be forgotten. Eventually after some 30 years of service the old yellow canoe finally split along a seam and was replaced by a series of flimsy inflatables that often lasted only a matter of days.

Three years ago I bought Billy an "adult" canoe for his birthday - it travelled with us to the South of France in 2018 where a female learner driver accidentally impaled it on a rock! Last year it sailed the seas around Pembrokeshire. Since 2017 it has been repaired on a number of occasions - recently requiring two bladder transplants (think inner tubes on a bicycle). However on 4th August 2020 unable to face another long car journey we flew to Nice to stay in the quaint village of Valbonne and the boat and oars were left behind in the Rectory garage. Billy and the youngsters spent two weeks mourning its absence.



Whilst I am sorry that the new Covid restrictions mean we are under house arrest in The Rectory for 14 days our holiday was wonderful. We swam in the sea and lay on the beach reading and soaking up the sunshine in Agay, Antibes, Cannes, Cap D'ail, Dramont, Eze, Miramar, Nice, Ramatuelle, St Tropez and Theoule. Whilst we have not been able to "Eat out to help out" in the UK we certainly helped the French economy by dining out far too often; we were truly blessed by the opportunity for rest and relaxation abroad.



On Wednesday morning before we flew home the news broke that the body of a young man had been washed up on a beach in Calais. Later that day we heard that two youngsters, one who couldn't even swim, using shovels for oars had attempted to cross the channel in a flimsy inflatable and punctured it in the process. The story is heart-breaking. Today, I find myself weeping for loss of young Abdulfatah Hamdalla because in some strange way his story is part of my own. I still don't know how my father and his family reached the UK from Poland as they fled the Jewish Pogroms long ago. All I know is this, they arrived with only the clothes they were wearing. Father was either too young or too traumatised to tell the tale of his journey or the horrors left behind or why for his family's safety they changed their name to "Jonas". I have no idea how many of my relatives died in Auschwitz. I can only thank God that the British government chose to play the Good Samaritan in granting my father, his parents and his siblings Naturalisation as British Citizens.

The arrival of migrants on our shores was a moral dilemma for the UK then just as it is now. I am the child of an immigrant and will always be thankful that the Jonas five boys and girls and their parents were welcomed here to begin a new life. If we really are all God's beloved children each made in God's own image and each of equal worth, then the child born in Poland, Sudan, Iraq, Syria or a sprawling refugee camp in Calais or the West Bank is of no less worth than my children born in the UK. Only when we forget that truth can we justify turning a blind eye to the needs of others.



When Paul writes to the early church he firmly connects faith, theology and ethics. He encourages the early Christians to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” He invites them to reflect on the life of God's Christ and respond not just with their heads or in acts of worship but with their whole being. Only by giving our whole self to God, according to Paul are we offering true, reasonable and spiritual worship. He tries to explain what this means in real life saying, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect” Paul knows for himself that the gospel message has the power to transform lives and destroy hard hearted mindsets. Remember, he was the Pharisee who once upon a time persecuted the followers of Jesus. Christians are called to see all creation as if looking through God's eyes rather through the lens of our individual or national bank balances.



Paul doesn't call the church to “transform yourselves” but to “be transformed” in other words to let the love and light of Christ flood our hearts and minds. Only then will we look at the foreigner as if he's our neighbour, our son or our brother and be true to our baptism when, once upon a time, we were drowned in the waters with Christ. Transformation comes to us as a gift from God and it is this gift that enables believers to “discern what is the will of God” Paul is convinced the gospel has power to change the world because in Christ Jesus he has glimpsed the divine will for all humanity.

On holiday I enjoyed reading Tom Holland's book, “Dominion, The Making of the Western Mind”. You will know that Tom is an award-winning historian, author and broadcaster. This extraordinary book is fun to read; over nearly 600 pages Tom shows how the Christian story has shaped the Western mind whether we know it and believe it or not. Whilst Richard Dawkins may have said, “we subscribe to a pretty widespread consensus of what is right and wrong” it has not always been a given that we should believe it “nobler to suffer than to inflict suffering, or that people are all of equal value” These convictions bear witness to the transformative message of the gospel. “Dominion” tells the story of how we came to be the people we are and think the way we do. I commend it to you; it will make you laugh and it will make you cry and you will suddenly see that in the events of history, despite the shortcomings of the catholic (universal) church and the terminal decline of religiosity the story of Jesus still pervades every corner of our lives. Christian beliefs are the backbone of our justice system and our government, the gospel story has shaped the sciences and education and even the birth of secularism. Christian faith has given voice to the gay rights and the MeToo movements, it is deeply embedded within humanism and even atheism. Dominion is an erudite journey through history, theology, and the life and failings of God's people and it may just leave you wondering what it really means to be a real Christian in a world where desperate people take to the sea in rowing boat dreaming of a new heaven and a new earth whilst we in our upturned boat, the church, sing Calon Lân.

With love
Vicki
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PS whilst I shall miss being in church this Sunday and next I look forward to welcoming you to our Zoom worship at 5pm on 23rd and 30th August at 5pm