

Trinity 2 - 10th June 2018

I often have difficulty in getting into the minds of those anonymous people who compile the Lectionary of readings for the Church of England. The general idea is to arrange for readings to be read through the year which are relevant to the time of year and the particular events in the Church year being celebrated – Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity etc; at the same time, over a period of three years to enable followers of the readings to hear most of the Bible read aloud; and also, at the same time, to provide readings, particularly for each Sunday, which will provide a connection between them in order to channel our thoughts towards some pre-selected theme. It's a huge and daunting task and I do not envy those who are appointed to take it on.

I do, however, often wonder what was going through the minds of the compilers as they put some of the sequences together. Today is a good example. Why start that Genesis reading in the middle of a story the whole of which needs to be heard if listeners who may not themselves be familiar with it are to make any sense of it all? Indeed, if it were to be read as it stands, it begins with "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden..." - who are 'they'? And what possible link can there be between God walking about in the garden and taking Adam and Eve to task for their disobedience and that extract in 2 Corinthians from Paul's musings about resurrection and grace and trying not to lose heart? And how does that link up with the hostility of the scribes in the Mark reading and Jesus' family getting uptight about his goings on?

As Church of England preachers, we are encouraged to find the link between the readings and preach on the theme that lies behind them. I have tried. I've tried quite hard and could have come up with several ingenious and highly improbable links that would have been an insult to the intelligence of those who have the misfortune to listen.

I gave up.

As I read them through several times, though, it was one particular train of thought that stood out and wouldn't go away. It almost certainly has to do with my age and current everyday life experience that I just couldn't get out of my mind those words of Paul – "Even though our outer nature is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed day by day,"

There is no doubt at-all that my outer nature is wasting away! I can still get down to fork the weeds out of the rose bed, but it somehow gets more and more difficult to get up again. I know exactly where I last put my glasses, but I cannot understand why they are not there now. I can get up the stairs reasonably easily to look for them but when I get into the bedroom I can't for the life of me remember why I've gone there anyway.

Oh yes, if Paul is referring to my physical body when he talks of my 'outer nature', which I think he is, then I fully agree with him that it is quite clearly and frustratingly wasting away. Scientifically I understand that it has been doing that from the moment I was physically born, but it's only in comparatively recent years that I have become so noticeably aware of it.

I used the word 'frustratingly' earlier because the frustrating thing is that at the same time as my 'outer nature' is wasting away my 'inner nature' is being renewed each day. I don't know if it's the same for you but my 'inner nature' just won't lie down! It still thinks it's a teenager or a young 20's or a mature but excitingly active mid-forties. My 'inner nature' seems to be getting more animated. As a teenager I tended to see things as good or bad, black or white. As I 'matured' I realized that things are much more shades of grey rather than black or white. Now what I find is that my inner nature is getting more outspoken about my convictions and beliefs just at the same time as my outer nature is running out of the energy to do something about it!

(It's going to be quite a challenge to both my inner and outer natures - and to yourselves as audience – that in the next play I will be having to become a middle-aged mid-50's aspiring headteacher! The inner nature is perfectly happy with that but someone's going to have to do some daunting background work to make sure that my 'outer nature' doesn't provide such a contrast that you find yourselves quite unable to suspend disbelief. Getting in and out of different beds is going to be an interesting challenge which my ever-renewed 'inner nature' will enjoy.)

So, what is the message; what am I trying to convey?

Basically, what I'm trying to say is that all this is a reminder to me that whatever may be happening to the outer shell which is currently housing the ever-changing me, that 'me' has an eternal, immortal element to it that keeps it being renewed. However much that outer nature of mine is moving towards decay and non-existence, the inner nature is heading towards resurrection and ever-renewed life.

Just before Paul annoyingly reminded me and all his readers that our outer nature is wasting away he had been confidently and reassuringly telling us that "the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus". As he went on to say, "we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal".

It occurs to me that we usually tend to think of the word 'eternal' as having a future tense. But by definition 'eternal' is past, present and future. If our inner nature has such an eternal element to it, presumably we arrived in our outer shells already having had pre-surrection life, though in what form I have no idea.

Let's not bother too much, however, about past or future. Let's all just bask in and enjoy that constant renewing which is present, at work in us here and now, presumably the work of the Holy Spirit. Pray that the inner nature may stay young and renewed day by day, no matter what may be happening to the outer nature. Let other people worry about that on our behalf.

Brian Hibberd