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Self sacrifice and martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel:

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ

At this time of Our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection, our minds may dwell also on others who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of truth, truth spoken to power, or in defence of the poor, weak and voiceless.

Our own Christian commitment relies on the strength and the words given to us by the Holy Spirit, to speak up, [or the stones will cry out!] and stand for principles that might often put us into conflict with those who would seek to silence us.

One such is commemorated, celebrated indeed, on April 9th - the death or martyrdom - certainly assassination of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, hanged in a Nazi jail. His papers written in prison have been an inspiration of faith to perceptive Christians ever since. Wisdom and erudition for our ongoing faith today. I include some quotations from his writings, that you may care, at this meditative time, to ponder upon and use for prayer and for witness to others whom you meet and seek to steer onto the path Our Saviour taught us to follow.

"Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. ...

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

One might not immediately think of anything Adolf Hitler did could be an inspiration, more of a warning to us all. From the badness of some people in our society and history, we see a reflection of the goodness of Our Master, Jesus Christ, which can turn our own lives and thinking towards higher principles and motivation.

Hermann Gruner put it like this: 'The time is fulfilled for the German people of Hitler. It is because of Hitler that Christ, God, the helper and Redeemer, has become effective among us. Hitler is the way of the Spirit and the will of God for the German people to enter the Church of Christ.' Another Pastor chose to put it like this: 'Christ has come to us through Adolph Hitler.' How so? How could this be?

So despondent had been the German people After the defeat, pain and catastrophe of WWI and the resulting economic depression and devaluation which followed, a charismatic leader was sought who could restore the confidence and fortunes of a punished people. Hitler to some appeared to be the nation's answer to prayer. Was this the Messiah figure raised up to restore his people? The various assortment of Messiah figures in Judaism's history claimed to be coming at a crucial point in history to do just that - but all, it seemed proved to be fraudulent claimants. Could the preacher from Nazareth and the Galilee be any different? the leaders at the time thought not and thought that by extinguishing his life on earth the whole thing would be forgotten within months or even years. How wrong they proved to be!

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was determined not only to declaim this widely held German view of their day and to oppose, even to destroy Hitler by exposure of his deeper intent against the Jewish population and other minority groups and influences, or even assassination.

A pacifist, this brought him into diametric opposition to the elected regime.

Born into an aristocratic family, his mother was daughter of a preacher at the Court of Kaiser Wilhelm II; his father a notable neurologist and professor of psychiatry at Berlin University. The eight children were raised in a fairly liberal and only nominally religious tradition, encouraged to read widely and study the arts. Being an able pianist, Dietrich could have headed for a musical career, but at age fourteen he announced his intention to become a Pastor and theologian, to some surprise from parents and other relatives.

Born in 1906 and being executed in 1945, only a month or so before the end of the Third Reich and Hitler's ultimate and seemingly long overdue final termination, his Letters and Papers from Prison were published, to due acclaim, in 1951. Graduating from Uni in 1927 aged 21, he spent time in Spain as an assistant Pastor to a German ex-pat population, and a year in USA at NY Theological Seminary and returned to teach in Berlin Uni.

Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, his anti-Semitic rhetoric developing swiftly as President, opposing theologians Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller and 'our hero', all of whom declared: 'We repudiate the false teaching that the church can and must recognize yet other happenings and powers, personalities and truths as divine revelation alongside this one Word of God'.

Bonhoeffer had now written 'The Cost of Discipleship' [1937], a call to more faithful obedience to Christ and rebuking comfortable Christianity: 'Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.' Until now he was pacifist, trying to oppose the Nazis through religious action and moral persuasion, but he now affiliated with the secret service, as a double agent, being a traveller to several European church conferences, but supposedly collecting information for the service about places he visited, but actually helping Jews to escape persecution. He also became part of an assassination plot against Hitler's life - how amazing such plots all failed and the Fuhrer survived, glorying in his seeming deliverance of the gods, very Wagnerian. Declining the opportunity to move to safety in USA he declared his Christian duty to remain in Germany to live through this tyranny, ready to rebuild after Hitler's departure. It nearly worked out. From Tegel prison to Buchenwald and to the Rossenburger extermination camp and hanged there with six others so close to the end of the war.

The in his last days, came his reflections on the nature of Christian action in history.

'God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross," he wrote. "He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. God's word makes quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.

The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help.'

He declared, 'To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man—not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us. It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life.'

So at this time of meditation, renewal and re-strengthening our faith, through the recall and re-visiting of Our Lord's Passion, may I invite you to take each of the following quotes in turn, ponder it, consider it in terms of your own life and Christian practice, and re-commit yourself to your Lord, your faith, your Church and your World.

May it be so, for His Name's sake. AMEN.

Silence in the face of evil is evil itself.

Your life as a Christian should make non-believers question their disbelief in God.

Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.

Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will.

The person who's in love with their vision of community will destroy community. But the person who loves the people around them will create community everywhere they go.

Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear rather than too much. Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power.

Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now. Christian should take a stronger stand in favor of the weak rather than considering first the possible right of the strong.

Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.

May God in His mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may He lead us to Himself.

There is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so. One must simply hold out and endure it. At first that sounds very hard, but at the same time it is also a great comfort. For to the extent the emptiness truly remains unfilled one remains connected to the other person through it. It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness.

God in no way fills it but much more leaves it precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve -- even in pain -- the authentic relationship.

Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life. To raise the question whether we are here concerned already with a human being or not is merely to confuse the issue. The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder.

We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.

The biggest mistake you can make in your life is to be always afraid of making a mistake.

Fr. Ed OSJ

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THANKFULNESS

+David, OSJ Wales

We say 'Thank you' for birthday and Christmas presents, but how many times can we truly say we have given heartfelt thanks to God?

† We should be thankful that we can be consistent in our Christian ways by helping others in our everyday life.

† Never forgetting our 'Thanks' when we say our Grace before a meal.

† We must allow ourselves time to pray with thanks for the good example and fellowship of other Christians.

† Saying our thanks when we sing the hymn 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' for the wonderful things God created.

Psalms 100 is a wonderful psalm of thanks.

Ephesians 5: 19-20 says 'Speak to one another with Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. Sing and make music to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ' AMEN

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THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS FOR OUR FAMILY

+David, OSJ Wales

2 John 5: 'And so I ask you . . . Let us love one another.'

Lord God, in our families, help us to live together as Christians should.

We need your help. So often, we fail.

Help us in our relationships as husbands, as wives, as parents, as children, and in our extended families.

We need your forgiveness. So often we fail.

Help us to be patient with one another and show the same grace we show to complete strangers.

Help us when we are tempted to give up and give in.

Help us to remember how others had patience in dealing with us, and to remember their care and perseverance.

Help us to be slow to take offence, to show ourselves mature and strong in being willing to find and maintain peace.

Save us from reliving past events and keeping alive past wrongs, from re-opening the wounds of past hurts.

Help us to close the door on past mistakes and offences, slights and bitterness, even as we ask you to forgive us our offences against you, as we forgive those who have offended against us.

May the undeserved love of the Father, the constant love of the Lord Jesus and the fellowship of the Spirit be with us and our families, now and always. Amen

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THE SACRAMENT OF WORK

+David OSJ Wales

WORK was never meant to be a curse. Almighty God intended it to be a blessing.

Honest work can only be a blessing in so far as it is undertaken in the spirit of happiness. Naturally, much work is arduous on account of the trying conditions under which it is done, but many jobs are tackled in a feverish spirit of restlessness or rebelliousness.

When work is approached in the spirit, all the interest naturally vanishes. There will never be any pleasure in work if the worker looks upon it as something he must merely do for money. Work is a necessity of life, and the sooner we realise it happier we shall be. Can anybody imagine a world of loafers! Or others who just refuse to work!

One of the beauties of family life is the work done by every member in the home. The idler in the home is always the disturber of the peace, the bone of contention, and the biggest grumbler.

The creative worker is usually happier at his work than the mechanical worker.

This is because he is making things that are the invention of his own brains.

Those whose work lies along a groove are apt to grow so tired of the monotony that they often rebel against their lot. One's sympathy goes out to those whose work is monotonous.

The saddest person of our acquaintance must surely be the one who will not work; because idleness is ruinous to spiritual health. It is almost impossible to overcome in life's battle when spiritual life is impaired. It is then that the soul ultimately grows diseased and a spirit of gloomy discontent takes hold on life.

Each man is given his job, not to grumble at, but to make the best of, so that life might not be spasmodic or irregular, but one complete whole.

Perhaps Jesus knew nothing about the reason for His early training as a carpenter, but God gave Him His work to do, and it was faithfully done.

To us it may seem strange that One who was to be the Saviour of the world should spend so many years doing ordinary manual labour. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. He can see to the end of the road; we can only see as far as the next corner. He knows the type of work most suited to our character, and if only we do what is given to us in a spirit of willing service, that work will never be drudgery.

The wisest man is he who takes work as a gift from God and thanks Him for it.
Amen

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TAKING ONE STEP AT A TIME

+David OSJ Wales

Luke 5:1-11

The patience of Jesus Christ is a wonder to behold. When He entered Peter's boat, He knew just what He would do. But He had to deal with Peter a step at a time. Just as He must deal with us. Note Christ's commands to Peter.

Thrust out a little. Here Christ was asking for the fishing boat, and he converted it into a pulpit for preaching. It is likely that Peter sat in the boat with some impatience, wondering how long the sermon would last!

Sometimes God moves us into trying situations just to get us to listen to His voice.

Peter was a captive listener, he had nowhere else to go!

Launch out into the deep. This second command demanded more faith on Peter's part, and it's no wonder that he in essence argued, "We've been fishing all night! It's not likely we'll catch fish at this hour!" But the Lord knew what He was doing. Peter had given Him the boat; now Jesus wanted the fishing nets.

And when Peter obeyed, God blessed them with a record catch!

Follow me! This was the supreme command, the one for which the first two were but preparation. Peter had thrust out a little and launched out into the deep; but now he had to "sell out" and give all to Christ. It was not enough to give Him the fishing boat and the fishing nets; Peter had to give Him the fisherman!

Jesus deals with us a step at a time, a command at a time, always leading to a supreme hour of faith and decision. If we obey Him in the little things of life, we will be ready when that "follow me!" sounds in our souls. Let Jesus lead you and use you a step at a time. Amen

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BELIEVING WHO WE ARE

+David OSJ Wales

What sort of person do we believe we are?

A prince acts like a prince because he believes he is a prince. This results from being told from birth that he is royalty and at some early point he accepted it and acts accordingly.

When a girl is often told by her peers she is beautiful, she will act with confidence and self-worth if she believes it. The opposite is also true; a person can think they are 'nothing' because they have believed the negative comments. Sadly, if they believe they're nothing, they act like it and often allow people to treat them accordingly.

What is our mindset?

Who do we believe we are?

As Christians, we are born again as joint heirs into the Royal Family of God. We are something uniquely special because of Christ's efficacious work on the Cross on our behalf. (Rom 8:16-17, Phil 3:20).

What does this mean? We are told we are divine royalty but most of us act like we don't believe it. We go through life filled with worry, feeling unloved and believing we are nothing important. We need to change our mindset. At the point we truly start believing we are sons and daughters of God we will also act accordingly.

We will have self-worth because we believe we are treasured and someone of eternal importance. John 16:27 states: "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and believed I came forth from God."

We will have an unshakable confidence amidst the battles of life because we believe that all-powerful God will always be with us. Hebrews 13:5 states: For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

We will speak boldly knowing our Heavenly Father will vindicate us if necessary.

Romans 8:31 states: If God is for us, who can be against us?

We will be graceful and generous because our Heavenly Father governs all the laws of nature and owns the riches of the universe. Psalm 68:19 states: Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation!

Finally, when we truly believe we are Spiritual Royalty and joint heirs with our Lord Jesus, the result will be the mindset of joy and inner peace. Isaiah 26:3 states 'You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.'

As Christians, we need to honour the work Christ did for us on the cross and start truly believing (and living like) we are beloved members of the Royal family of God.

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Good News

1 Corinthians 15:22

'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.'

For God so loved a world undone,
With all its sons and daughters,
He gave His well-beloved Son,
Who by His passion bought us.

For as in Adam all are dead,
Because of their connection;
So all in Christ the risen Head,
Shall live by resurrection.

The Lord commends His perfect love,
Toward a world of sinners;
He came as signalled by a dove,
To live His life within us.

As many as receive the Lord,
To them are given power;
The Spirit has been fully poured,
And works at every hour.

Except a man is born again,
By Spirit and by water,
He cannot see Messiah's reign,
Announced in every quarter.

I am the bread of life, He said
To those who stood around Him;
The all-sufficient Fountainhead,
For sinners who have found Him.

The Spirit and the bride say, Come,
To all within their hearing;
For Christ is our eternal home,
And Judgment Day is nearing.

Maurice Dyson.

Mark 12 v 1 - 14: The Parable of the Tenants

12 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat up, others they killed.

⁶ "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

⁷ "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

⁹ "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

¹¹ the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"

¹² Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Some parables are 'prophetic' and this is one of those.

It comes as no surprise either as Jesus is on an unavoidable collision course with the religious authorities. This is a conflict that can only have one outcome and both sides know it.

The Roman authorities show little interest in Jesus so long as he does not become the focus of civil unrest. Even when tried, there is little to interest Pilate when it comes to the accusations made against Jesus. Pilate sees through the religious politics and washes his hands of the whole construct.

So what is it this parable really about?

It's simple about who owns 'the church', an argument that is still going on today, and this particular parable is just as important and relevant as it was when Jesus spoke it. I know because I am a priest and it applies to me.

On the face of it it's a very concise summary of the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It takes us back to the moment of creation when God created the Earth for His people, placed them under his protection (the wall) that they may be fruitful (wine press) and flourish, and provision that they may be watched over and guarded (watch tower).

So far so good, but God apparently had other projects and things to do so he sought to let others run the vineyard on His behalf by mutual and voluntary agreement. The tenants symbolise the temple priesthood.

These tenants were then entrusted with God's handiwork and soon found it was very profitable and lucrative. They soon objected to the terms and conditions of their contract with owner and sought to take the vineyard for themselves. After all, it was them that were doing all the hard work so why should the owner benefit with a share of their hard worked crops.

When the owner found he was not receiving his rightful dues, he sent various servants (the prophets) to secure what was his. As the Old Testament shows, they were not received well, were beaten up or even killed because of the owner's demands they fulfil their obligations. But still the tenants resisted, often with great violence.

As a last resort and hoping the tenants would give due respect and honour their obligations, the owner sent his son.

Instead the tenants decided that as the owner's son was heir to the vineyard, they should kill him and the vineyard would be theirs.

And that is what they did.

But the owner of the vineyard would not let such an act go without punishment and the tenants be evicted and worse (see verse 9).

So the course was set and recognised by both Jesus and the high priests at the temple. Jesus knew it would end in his death, and since the high priests could not have put Jesus to death themselves (as they had no power to do this under Roman law) it would be down to the Romans.

That meant crucifixion after trumped up civil charges (insurrection, treason, etc.), anything that would ensure his death.

But Jesus was popular with the crowds so timing was everything. Now was not the moment. The chief priests would have to suffer this rather public humiliation they received in the temple precincts at Jesus hands and lick their own wounds in private. Yes, Jesus spoke against them and they didn't like it.

They must have thought they had got away with when Jesus was crucified outside the city walls and his body left to hang there (see verse 8 for significance), until the veil to the holy of holies in the temple was torn asunder (Mark 15 v 8). No longer was the holy of holies closed to the secret functions of the designated high priest but was open for all to see and access. Quite simply the old order was over and a new one begun. No more secrets, everything revealed.

Historically, by 70 AD the old tenants were well and truly evicted and dealt with in the fall of Jerusalem and the temple destroyed. God picks his own time when all the avenues for reconciliation have been explored and ignored.

So what is the message in this parable for 'the church' today?

Remember those words of Jesus about 'freedom'? (John 8 v 36). From the moment of Paul's conversion, 'the church' has sought to put its people back into bondage with increasing forms of denominational discord, rigid canon and tradition, rules and regulations, and the like. 'Faith in God' has been slowly but forcibly changed into 'believe in the organization'.

God has been gradually usurped by the very organizations put there to protect His interests. They have taken ownership in all but lip service.

God's authority has been consistently undermined by countless committees, convocations and synods, slowly hacking away at biblical truths for the sake of personal justification, pleasure and gain rather than the good of the Christian (and greater) community.

The effect of this has culminated in chaos and we now find ourselves at a point where the law of the land and some often non-believing but rather vocal sections of society are beginning to dictate what 'the church' should believe and teach, rather than 'the church' setting the standards (of faith) for society.

The most recent causes, or so it seems, has been the conflict caused by legislated individual freedoms of choice (gender, sexual preferencing and so on) and one of the staples of society, marriage and subsequent to that, divorce.

It appears that what is good for the individual is of much greater importance and significance than for the benefit of society, something that is a vote winner when it comes to being re-elected.

Even 'the church' has been sucked into this change of emphasis. Gender, sexuality, chastity, heterosexual marriage, fidelity, are just some of the foundational building blocks of a biblically based society that are increasingly under attack from even within 'the church' itself in an attempt to 'be more relevant in a changing society' and supposedly put more bums on emptying pew seats. I may be at fault here but I confess my contempt for such an attitude has yet to find any boundaries as to contain it.

(Putting it bluntly, softening God's law will not solve emptying churches. It will only make matters worse. Reducing standards just destroys or undermines any remaining believable credibility/integrity 'the church' may still have.)

Even the two great commandments, 'love God....' and 'love your neighbour....' only seem to be applicable if they are personally convenient or are of personal benefit. Self is apparently more important than society.

Gone is the idea that we have faith responsibilities to God and to others, and that our expression of that faith is one of a self-supporting community.

So what has become of the first fruits of the harvest that are due to God?

Increasingly society is not about 'community' but about 'me' the individual, my 'needs', my 'desires', my 'goals', my way of doing things. When it's all about me, what has God got to do with anything? I owe Him nothing. I am what I am in spite of His infrequent interruptions/total absence/exclusion in my life.

My point of contact with others is mostly through my phone (safe) rather than face to face (unsafe). Because of this I don't do confrontational unless it's from a position of digital isolation on social media.

The phone and social media is the secret to my security. It is my mother, my advisor, the arms that enfold me, the arms that reject me, my lover, the thing that justifies my existence and is my worst critic or even enemy. I both love it and fear it, and although I can switch it off, I do not trust what it is saying to the world behind my back. I cannot function in life without it. *

But thanks to Woke and Cancel Culture, I don't have to put up with any comment, teaching or criticism contrary to my own views, and if I do have to come face-to-face with it, I know that I am entitled to receive counselling, medication and time off for the personal stress caused, and can demand a safe space where such inappropriate people and their intimidating beliefs and apparent prejudices are excluded. They have no right to question me or what I believe. I am cossetted and protected from real life.

I have the right to only hear what I want to hear, and for all other opinions and objections to be silenced, cancelled or 'disinvited', to protect my mental health and perceived sense of self security and self-worth.

My 'friends' are those who agree with me on everything, my enemies are those who do not. My 'friends' know that my 'human rights' are much more important than anyone else's and cancel theirs out.

Fleeting 'likes' on Facebook are a much more important indicator to me of my popularity and worth than the real and obvious truth about myself. When things don't go my way, I have the right to project or re-invent myself in any way I wish without the need to justify or explain myself.

'The truth' is nothing to do with what you believe or is factually provable, but is whatever I choose to say is 'true', even if it is a baseless and blatant fiction.

The fact is I'd rather live a lie providing I can be whatever I want, just so long as it makes me 'feel happier' or look great in the eyes of others. I believe and trust in my self-image, and hate my real self as it fails to meet my expectations. 'I' am the centre of my world, and everyone else takes second place. I have successfully parodied the two great commands and usurped God for my own ends. My world with its self-appointed god and worshipping congregation of one is my creation, and yet there is no peace or rest..... and I cannot save myself however hard I try. The empty and lonely echoes ring across the digital universe - 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' There is no reply.

So 'self' has largely become the new God on the block, and even, it seems, in 'church' it is making its presence felt. You might ask yourself why and how this has happened? Just where was the watchman in the vineyard watch tower?

The teachings of Jesus remain a real and present danger to those who worship 'self', and the only way to deal with this threat is to silence Jesus again. And if he can't be silenced then his followers must be silenced. And if they can't be silenced then 'the church' must be silenced, even from within.

So it appears when it comes to it, unless someone stands against these attacks on 'the church' or 'the faith', it will fall into the hands of the enemy. 'The church' will only be as strong as any person who is prepared to watch over it, defend it and speak out on its behalf.

A failure to speak out is a contradiction of the two great commandments, and makes each one of us part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Sadly, this reminds me of the crowd in front of Pilate (see Mark 15):

⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested.

⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted.

¹⁴ *“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.*

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵ *Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.*

Perhaps if there had been more to shout Jesus' cause..... Even just one might have changed things, but we will never know.

The fact is that Jesus was a marked man and some other means would have been found to end his life.

Why is it that power always seems to outweigh innocence?

But the blatant fact is that that when it came to passing judgement on Jesus, it was contrived and manipulated, if you like 'a media exercise', and power was exerted to get a particular outcome and result. Justice and fairness had nothing to do with the outcome.

The innocent were sacrificed instead of the guilty. Why did no one speak out?

I hope Barabbas did something with his life now he had been given a second chance. These don't always come to those who deserve them, let alone those who perhaps don't.

The warnings of the parable of the vineyard still apply today and we as individual Christians cannot afford to ignore them. So what possibly are the lessons?

‘The church’ is not ours to do with as we wish. We all hold it in trust for God. We hold ‘the church’ in trust for one another too - it is a real living community.

We also hold ‘the church’ in trust for our children and for future generations. Any cockups or lapses on our part can cause lasting and irreparable damage.

God has expectations of us and we are expected to meet our obligations to Him. The first fruits He is due are the fruits of the Spirit in the husbandry of the gifts, talents and skills He has entrusted to each of us uniquely.

Although we may benefit from them incidentally, they are given for the greater good of the Christian community and as an example to the world.

They, like the vineyard, are not ours to do with as we wish and we never ‘own’ them. They are held in trust. So what about ‘the rent’?

If we choose to ignore our obligations to God, there will be a price to pay.

‘The church’ will pass into the hands of others if we fail in our duties.

‘Self’ and selfishness has no place in ‘the church’. These go directly against the nature and principles of the great commandments. Personal fulfilment, a sense of belonging, achievement and place, all come through serving others and God, not self.

To be silent where there is injustice and a turning away from our scriptural heritage is to be complicit in guilt.

We may offend others with our words or actions and then face persecution of one kind or another, but this is of little consequence when faced with the prospect of eternal judgement and separation from God and all that is His.

Lastly, we must have strength of faith and fortitude when it comes to society wanting to dictate what can and cannot be taught in 'the church'.

Both politicians and the media manipulate and drive much of this in reality, but that is not to say they are the only groups and individuals with 'agendas'.

As an example, the BBC is self-admittedly pro-LGBT but the amount of air time it gives seems unrepresentatively disproportionate.

This has contributed to a huge over-estimation by the general public that the LGBT community is far greater in number than it is really is. The facts** quoted by the ONS (Office for National Statistics) puts the lesbian and gay population at 1.6% of the total population with an additional 1.1% claiming to be bisexual.

The media also promotes the idea that there is huge support for same-sex marriage amongst all the LGBT communities, but the ONS found only 7.6% of LGBT people (this number representing just 0.2% of the total population) are in same-sex marriages.

In this matter it begs the question as to just why 'churches' are letting themselves be pressured into promoting 'inclusiveness' in the form of sacramental/liturgical same sex union blessings and same sex marriage services when the bible is quite clear on the matter.

The facts and the hype just don't add up. The dangers are clear and this is what happens when the churches are guided by public opinion, politicians and the media, instead of by God and the bible.

In the end, Bible truths are not negotiable and we must not be compromised when it comes to Christian belief and practice. These are rules and limits set by God and the bible and are handed in trust from one generation to another.

They cannot be rejected, tampered with, changed, amended or abandoned without great personal, social and spiritual consequence, and our responsibility is to pass them on whole and intact to future generations as part of the on-going first fruits process we are all involved in.

So the parable of the vineyard speaks to us at two levels - as both individuals and as a Christian community.

This relationship between the individual and the Christian community is a simultaneous and symbiotic one where what happens to one impacts on the other, and is one which doesn't exempt any of us from shared responsibility, the very basis of which is 'love God....' and 'love your neighbour....'. You can't have one without the other. This is why 'self-focus' is so dangerous.

The fact is that if we are the people of faith we claim to be, our lives will never be truly our own if we are to be the people God hopes we shall become, even trusts us and empowers us to become.

And not without good reason.

It's up to us but 'the rent' will soon be due and we shall be called to account.

I just hope we won't be found lacking when we see our present circumstances and condition through God's eyes rather than through our own.

I admit that I am not entirely confident we will have fulfilled all that is required of us as part of 'the church' when the time of reckoning comes.

My concern will not be out of fear of retribution but the simple fact I will have let God down by not doing my best for Him and those He loves so dearly.

So will we have been good tenants?

If not, do you think God might accept a promise and an I.O.U?

No?

I didn't think so either.

+lan

***** impressions based on 'I-Gen' by Jean M Twenge, PhD – a detailed, well researched report on how social media is damaging our children's lives and damaging society.

****** **Table 1: Most people in the UK identify as heterosexual or straight.**

Sexual orientation, UK, 2015 to 2019 (national population percentage)

Sexual orientation	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Heterosexual or straight	95.2	95.0	95.0	94.6	93.7
Gay or lesbian	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.6
Bisexual	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.1
Other	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.7
Do not know or refuse	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.5	3.0

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the protracted situation regarding Covid we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for all members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if the cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister because they are unavailable or because they are self-isolating.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Suggested forms of approved service are available (with instructions) to download from our website downloads page:

1. Self-administered Communion

2. Last Rites (Emergency Measures)

Regular services at St Leonard's remain temporarily suspended until repair and redecoration is completed.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle,
Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ (UK) Services, 2022.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services usually take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

Regular services will restart when repainting and repairs have been completed but the chapel remains open for private prayer.

2nd January, 2022	16th January, 2022
6th February, 2022	20th February, 2022
6th March, 2022	20th March, 2022
3rd April, 2022	17th April, 2022
1st May, 2022	15th May, 2022
5th June, 2022	19th June, 2022
3rd July, 2022	17th July, 2022
7th August, 2022	21st August, 2022
4th September, 2022	18th September, 2022
2nd October, 2022	16th October, 2022
6th November, 2022	20th November, 2022
4th December, 2022	18th December, 2022

We use a non-alcoholic communion wine so children may take part. There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect. All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday:	7th November 10.35 a.m.	TBC
Midnight Mass:	24th December 11.20 p.m.	TBC