

CITYtheology

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“When a British arms company, BAE Systems, and the British government are supplying the means for Saudi Arabia to bring about a hell on earth in Yemen, how can anyone argue that a Christian, or anyone interested in justice, peace, love, grace, does not have the authority to stop the means by which this hell is being brought about?”

Revd. Dan Woodhouse, asks if it's ever justified to physically damage property in the pursuit of justice.

From Addict to Intern

James Hossein reflects on a journey from wilderness and addiction to light and leadership .

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Turning Tables, Freeing Doves

In 2015 Leeds Church Institute put together a project called **Passion4Leeds**, where we explored what Jesus' life might look like in 20th Century Leeds. As part of the project we asked Methodist Minister **Revd. Dan Woodhouse** to pose as our Jesus for some Instagram style photos, including one of Jesus being arrested. In January of this year life imitated art when Dan was arrested, along with Quaker Sam Walton, for attempting to disarm warplanes bound for Saudi Arabia at the BAE Systems site in Warton. We asked Dan what drove him to take such actions.

To many our actions may seem to have come out of nowhere; much like a meteor suddenly blazing and burning out in the sky. However, like our space rock there was a long journey to reach this point. One that is often not considered. It is this journey that makes the action make sense and to me feel normal and imperative, despite, at times, overwhelming anxiousness.

I have campaigned for many years against the inherent, and government complicit, injustices of the arms trade. Most of this pursuit has been spent through more conventional means; meeting with other campaigners, talking to MPs, signing petitions, marching and so on.

At the heart of this has been my faith as a Christian, the example of Christ, and the Prophets who walked the earth before Him. Scripture teaches us to peacefully resist evil, to speak truth to power; always looking to, and usually on behalf of, those who have no voice.

This time the voiceless, or covered screams, are found in Yemen and the vicious, repressive killers are the UK's most valued customer; Saudi Arabia and its coalition.

The official target of the Saudi led, BAE Systems built, aerial bombing campaign were and are rebels. However, it is being widely reported that many, possibly even more, civilian targets, including mosques, schools, hospitals, transport infrastructure and markets, are being hit, often repeatedly.

Despite the rising death toll the government of the UK continues to court Saudi, even sending high ranking royals over to seal more arms deals. The campaign to stop UK weapons sales continues **without success.**

The EU parliament, in the wake of UN criticism, votes to suspend all arms sales to Saudi Arabia, **without success.** ⁽¹⁾

Humanitarian organisations working in Yemen present evidence of war crimes and demand arms sales cease, **without success.**

Independent lawyers deem UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia to be breaking UK, EU and international law

and MPs speak out demanding weapons sales stop, **without success.**

All around people cry out for justice, without success.

Simply put, the Government of the UK is complicit in war crimes and will not listen to reason, justice or even law. (2)

Some will question if it's ever acceptable to physically damage property which is not our own. "Surely we should give to Caesar what is Caesar's", implying that Jesus expects his followers to always follow the law of the land. In answer, I have a few thoughts.

First, Jesus was in a position where people were looking to trap him, so I do wonder, with the addition of "give to God what is God's", if the answer given was designed to avoid the trap whilst also daring us to ask a further question. The question being, what does Caesar have authority over that God does not?

I believe we can all agree that a major purpose of a Christian is to bring heaven to earth. We pray for it every time we pray in the manner in which Jesus taught his disciples. When we read the words of Christ, when referring to the kingdom of heaven or God, he is always talking of the here and now and not some far off place in which we might one day reside.

When a British arms company, BAE Systems, and the British government are supplying the means for Saudi Arabia to bring about a hell on earth, in Yemen how can anyone argue that a Christian, or anyone interested in justice, peace, love, grace, does not have the authority to stop the means by which this hell is being brought about?

There is even legal precedence for this. Under UK Law, a person is allowed to use reasonable force to stop a crime. There is overwhelming evidence that the activities that BAE Systems and the UK government are involved in, with regards to weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, are criminal. What's more, this is not the first time this has happened at BAE Warton. 21 years before our action activists broke in and disarmed planes due for war crimes in Indonesia. The group were tried and acquitted.

There is also theological precedent. John 2 records the controversial actions of Jesus in the temple. Where Jesus makes a whip, drives animals out and turns over the tables of the money changers. Without context this seems like criminal damage and beyond the bounds of any peaceful activist. However, there is institutional injustice rife at the temple, the centre of the Jewish community.

The market was located in the place where female Jews and all gentiles were permitted to worship. So, in the immediate, the majority of the population were being prevented from encountering God at the temple.

However, this isn't all, the market was beyond the normal buying and selling of goods, but instead designed to fleece the worshipers from start to end. It was custom to bring animals to the temple for sacrifice. However, on arrival the priests would deem the animals not good enough for sacrifice and so direct people to buy from the approved temple market, where animals would be sold at a premium, and then, only temple coins could be used, which the money changers would exchange, but at extortionate rates.

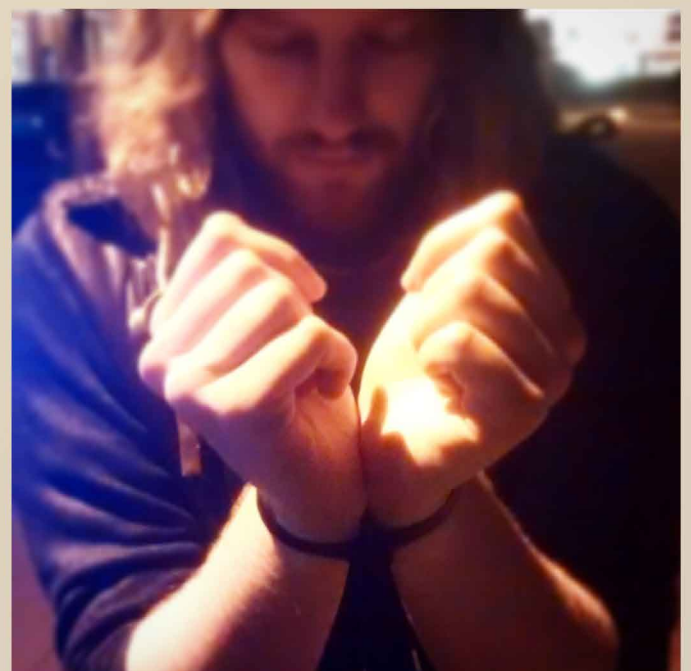
It is this scene that Jesus finds. Interestingly, Jesus is a Jewish Rabbi and clearly has an open dialogue with other religious leaders, even if this is often strained. So, though this is to some degree conjecture, if Jesus could have ended this practice through conventional means I believe he would have done. However, with no other means left to him, Jesus physically ends the injustice in the temple.

So it is for this, that I found myself with my friend Sam, ready to physically stifle at least some of the UK complicit Saudi atrocities.

Though, sadly my regret is that we were stopped at the final door and it will be my lasting memory, whilst waiting with security, thinking of the lives we didn't directly save that night.

(1) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/eu-parliament-votes-for-embargo-on-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia>

(2) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/16/third-of-saudi-air-strikes-on-yemen-have-hit-civilian-sites-data-shows>





From Addict to Intern

James Hossein on exploring leadership when you come from outside of the Church's cultural norm.

I grew up as part of quite a poor family in South Manchester. My mum was an alcoholic, and would spend most of the family's money on drink. Neither of my parents worked, apart from the occasional cash in hand jobs that my dad would find.

When I was 10 my mum committed suicide. Then my dad moved his new girlfriend in who was a heroin addict. My house went from being filled with alcoholics to crack and heroin addicts. There were people coming round regularly to sell her drugs, and we would constantly be on the phone to crisis teams from mental health.

I went from being a well behaved young lad to one who was quite angry. I was getting sent home from school, I was fighting and I started stealing. I stole from everyone, even my own family. It was at this point my dad started getting tired of me. I had quite a big fight with one of my brothers, and he kicked me out, leaving me to fend for myself on the streets.

I moved into a youth hostel in Manchester and got introduced to harder drugs. Pills, coke, speed, I thought I was just enjoying myself, but really I was just trying to escape. Eventually it just got too much.

Somehow I managed to get a place on a university course, in East London, but I used the bursaries and loans to fund my habit. I was there for 8 months, before I moved to Leeds and did the same thing there.

Now I was homeless in Leeds, and I was a physical and emotional wreck.

I managed to get a place in Halifax, but had to walk there from Leeds with all the bags that I had. It took me six and a half hours, crying most of the way. When I arrived I sat, looked up to the ceiling, and just started sobbing.

I did not have a belief or faith in God, and I did not address it as a prayer, but in essence that is what it was, I cried out, "Help I can't do anymore."

I went to a foodbank in Halifax, and on the tick list where they ask do you want pasta, rice, tea or coffee, one of the options was prayer, so I ticked that, and they prayed with me and told me about a Church called Saturday Gathering. I went along that evening, only for something to eat really, but they started telling me about this man who died on a cross, the nativity stories that I heard growing up, that he had power for me. They started telling me all these words like 'love' and 'forgiveness' that I can have, things I

wanted, so with the capacity that I had, the best way I knew how I set to follow Jesus.

It looked messy at times, three steps forward, twenty back, and this went on for a long time. I had expected a Damascus road experience, when in reality I would have to fight for my faith.

In 2014, my pastor took me to a rehab called Teen Challenge. They put in some key disciplines and did some good study there and I had a real and powerful encounter with God, but it brought up a lot of pain from my childhood and I started to prod and think about these scars, trying to deal with it. I just upped and left.

I moved to Lancashire and started going to church on a Sunday, but there was no real substance to my faith. I had met God, but I was not equipped to follow him.

I had just done four months clean in Teen Challenge, but now I started to slip back into old patterns, starting with the weed and the coke. One of my friends came and stayed with me, bringing with him some of his friends. They were big lads, and they put a cannabis farm in my house. 72 plants, probably worth about 50 grand.

At the same time my vicar wanted me to go through some sort of Church of England training and I had to confess, "Look, there's a big cannabis farm in my house", and he said, "If you love Jesus, and if you want to live for him, you're going to have to leave, you'll have to give up everything and go". So I did. I gave up everything. I was literally left with the clothes on my back, and a change of clothes in my bag.

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I managed to get into an emergency hostel, but it was not safe for me in Manchester, partly because I had reported the people I was living with to the police, but also because of my own drug use.

So I came to Leeds where I found Lighthouse, a fresh expression of church which reaches out to vulnerable members of society, and met the mission priest, Rev. Jon Swales. I went up to him and said, "I don't want to, but I feel God's calling me to be a leader of some sorts. I've given up everything, there's no more old friends, there's no links to the past, I need to live for God now". Jon, being a decent theologian, and having a platform for me to grow in leadership just poured out into me.

Since then I have started doing an internship with St George's Church, I have become one of the pastors at Lighthouse and I am exploring ordination.

Part of the process of moving into leadership, for me, was having to step out from being one of the people that accesses a service, to leading it. Things like not smoking helped with that, just setting yourself apart. You get a bit of stick for it, but you have to set your stall out from day one as 'I'm for God, I'm not one of the boys'.

Integrity is something I have had to practice and use in leadership, when I have tried to follow Jesus, and I have not had integrity, it has not worked. When I was shown that it brought me, not just to a place of discipleship, but leadership.

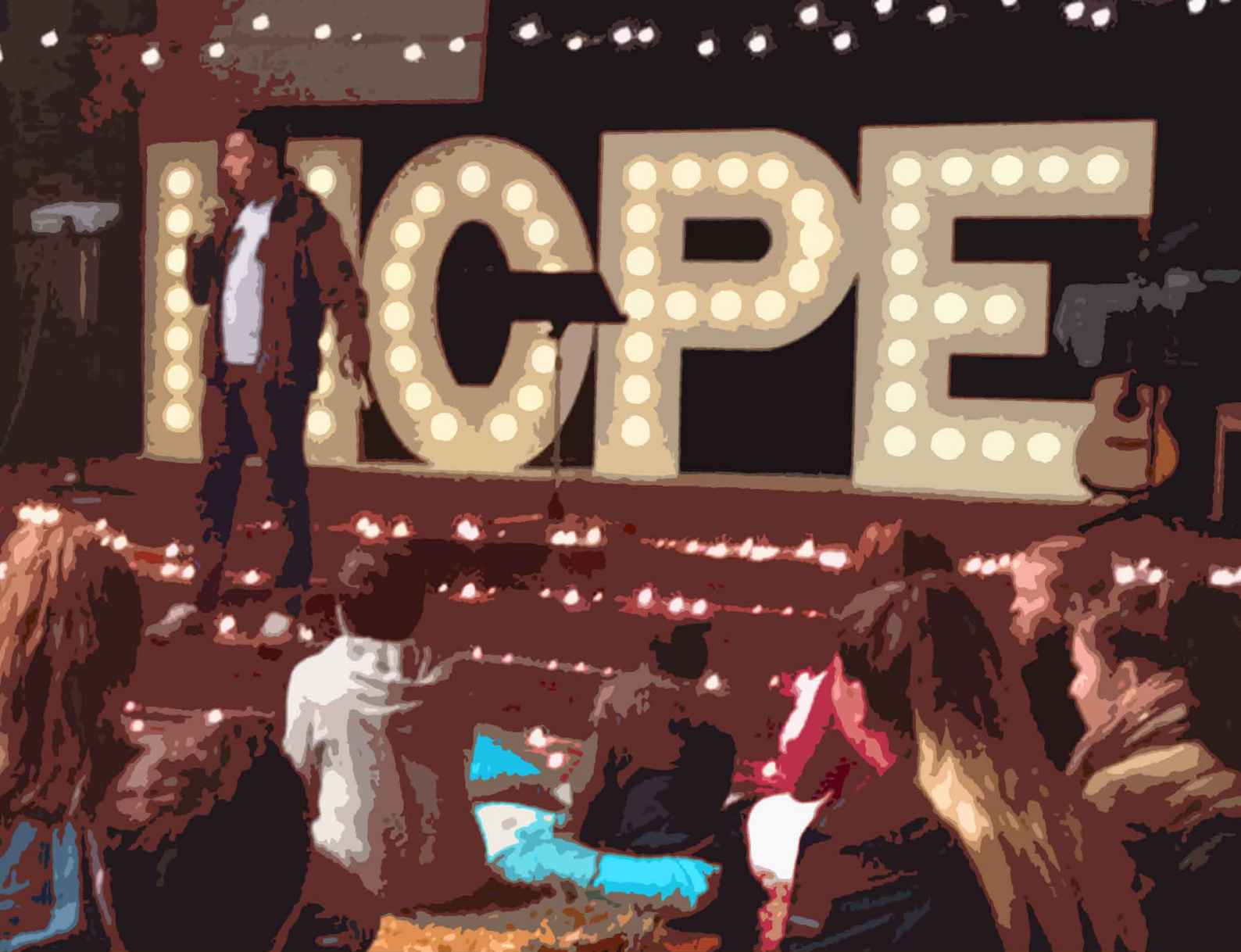
One of the big things that has been a struggle is how middle class, not just St George's is, but the Church of England as a whole, and I have really had to work to overcome that barrier. A lot of people doing the internship are from student backgrounds, for them lighthouse is cross culture, whereas for me that is my stomping ground. I recently preached at an Anglican church in Hyde Park and for me that is the more difficult place to be because I feel there are barriers in relating to people. It is like we speak a different

language. A lot of the barriers I feel might be on my side, because I am more aware of my inadequacies, like my lack of education or the way I dress. Sometimes I come to prayer meetings in joggers. They like it that I am being myself, but it can create a barrier. I don't know if sometimes, part of being working class is that there seems to be a pride to it. It is like patriotism, we are very proud of our roots. I maybe play up to that a little bit, because it is really easy to forget where you have come from and who you are, but also I realise it can hold me back in church leadership.

Another struggle is around relapse thoughts. Whenever I get thoughts to go back into my old life or I need pastoral support I feel, sometimes, they do not always understand or relate to what I am going through.

One of the things that has helped is having one on one support from different clergy. I am being mentored by four different people, but I am just trying to gain as much as I can. I think having a life of rejection and being marginalised, making sure that I am included is something that has been done well. Instead of saying 'Just go and preach at lighthouse, just go and serve there', which I love, they have actually said, 'let's make him versatile to both worlds'. Things like that





have made me think there is more to me than my testimony. I am not just being given a shot to tick a criteria box or to get some funding but I actually see that people want to invest in me.

But I also bring some strengths to ministry. My testimony is definitely one of them. In reality middle class people are just as broken as the rest of us, but I feel like I am more willing to be vulnerable with my brokenness than a lot of people in my church. A lot of people here want to achieve and be competitive with each other, whereas I can come and admit my flaws. I am not trying to achieve anything, I am just grateful to be at the table. So, I think, there is a humility to my leadership.

I also think it can help that I never had some of the Sunday school teachings that others had. They can be great, but, they can also hinder you in learning new ideas and new theology. I do not have any theological baggage holding me back, I can approach the text as an adult.

Jon has been giving me Bible studies and even though I have not had the best education, I have been hungry for it. Anything you lack in intellect can be made up for in enthusiasm and interest in the topic. My lack of education has mainly been because of opportunity and environment, so anything that I am missing, I can make

up for. I have come to the church, I have poured out my heart and said, 'can you fill this with opportunity and knowledge', and they have been more than glad to do it.

I used to think the reason that there were not many people like me in the church was because they were not wanted, but now I am finding that if more people from our background were willing to step up, there are people willing to pour into you.

James Hossein is now an intern at St George's Church, one of the pastors at Lighthouse West Yorkshire, and exploring ordination. He has been clean for 18 months.

Lighthouse West Yorkshire is a fresh expression of church and registered Leeds-based charity which reaches out to those who are battered and bruised by the storms of life. Many have multiple and complex needs, including homelessness, addiction issues, criminal backgrounds, poverty and crisis in mental health. Their Sunday Service is from 12:30pm until 2:30pm in St George's Crypt.

Rev. Jon Swales is Lighthouse Mission Priest and also teaches OT at St Hild, Leeds School of Theology.



How To Disappear Completely...

Simon Smith is an illustrator and artist based in Leeds and 'How to Disappear Completely' is a comic that was written for Lent and for Leeds. We sat down to ask him a few questions.



How did you initially get into illustration?

I've always drawn, my dad was a painter, my grandad painted, my brother was a graphic designer, so it's kind of in the genes and it was always what I've done. I took a foundation course and studied illustration at Art College. I taught for about five and a half years and then went back to it. So it was a very straightforward typical route into illustration really.

Tell us about the comic.

I'm reluctant to say too much about it because I quite like people to come to it and find what they think it's about. Sometimes, when an artist talks about their work it creates an orthodox, official version. What I think is interesting is when people read it or see it and then come back to me and tell me what they've found in it, stuff that I didn't realise was there. I quite like that it has a life beyond what I think it is about.

Music plays a big part in the story, what influenced the choice of songs?

I'm a music obsessive, so I listen to music all the time while I'm working, I soundtrack my life with songs and lyrics, I've even got a 'songs to play at my funeral' folder on my iTunes at home; I'm going to have a really long funeral. So music was always going to be a really important part of this, and because the character is on his own in the Leeds wilderness, the thing that he takes with him is his music. This music is like his Canon; it's the stuff that he is meditating on and that is influencing him.

They're all British songs, because Britishness is one of the

little themes and as I was working on it, these were the songs that shuffled their way to the front, but, that playlist has changed and still is changing for me, 'City Song' by Homecut, for example, should be on there.

How did you find the process of putting together 'How to disappear completely'?

It was a bit like method acting, I loved it because most of the time, what I do is commission work that's got a quick turnover and deadlines and the briefs are quite tight. Whereas this started with an idea and then went 'let's see where this can go'. It was lovely to have that freedom and have the time to get lost in it and go around in circles, as one of the songs says, but it was also frustrating at times because you wonder if you're ever going to finish. I had some critical friends who helped me when I needed to be shoved over a hump in the road. So I had a whale of a time, it was a properly creative process.

If you could disappear, where would you go?

I guess the pat answer would be to disappear to a tropical island and have a paradise experience, but I'm not sure I could do that. I'd need to go where I could do something and create. One of my things when thinking about Christ in the wilderness is 'what do you do when you're not where you are?' The whole point of the wilderness is that it's a place of nothingness, so what do you do to occupy your time? In the comic he goes and he creates; furiously and obsessively. My family would say I do that all the time, disappearing into my office and creating stuff. I think the idea of disappearing is quite interesting in itself. In the book one of the big things was realising that if you want to disappear you've got to delete your Facebook account. In the comic that's a big moment.

What are your influences?

Stanley Spencer is a big influence for me, in terms of his subject matter and the way he painted and drew. He was an English artist, a medical orderly in the First World War, and an amazing draughtsman. He did some amazing work based on his experience in the First World War, which is in a chapel in the Sandham Memorial Chapel at Burghclere. Then in the Second World War he was commissioned to do paintings of the shipyards on the Clyde and they're just phenomenal. He had a very clear, but off the wall Christian faith and a kind of monastic belief in the sacredness of everyday acts, so his paintings of

Clyde shipyards are amazing because they're like holy relics, they're just beautiful things.

His work was like an obsession for him. His personal life fell apart because he was so driven to do this thing. So there's a chiming for me in the story of Christ in the wilderness because in the biblical version it talks about him being driven into the wilderness. The character in the comic says, "It's what I'm built to do", (a Dexy's Midnight Runners reference), and I kind of think, this is what I do, this is it and if I wasn't doing it, I'd be thinking about doing it. That makes it sound like I'm in a beautiful place and everything's wonderful and I wake up every day and do what I'm meant to do, and it isn't always like that, but there is an element of that in what I do.

Do you have any advice for a young person who was thinking of getting into illustration?

Yes, draw all the time. Draw everything, every day and don't get too caught up in what it looks like, just draw for the love of it. Practice and fail miserably, enjoy the practice of it and enjoy that you can fail and it doesn't matter. Don't worry about having an identifiable style too quickly, just enjoy the process of playing with it.

How to Disappear Completely: A comic for Leeds and for Lent is available through Leeds Church Institute's website LCILeeds.org



Seeking God Outside The Camp

Lawrence Cockrill reflects on the Hook Lecture.

For the 2016 Hook Lecture (originally planned to take place last November), Lord Bhikhu Parekh discussed the role that religion plays in today's multicultural society.

One moment that stood out to me personally was the idea of the Church, in this case the Church of England, the state Church, being an older brother to other faith groups.

The recognition being that Christianity does have a privileged position in British society, both through its history and through its place within the establishment, and rather than separate Church and state, or disregard that history it should be the responsibility of the Church to use that position to speak on behalf of all faiths.

This idea didn't initially sit easily with me. Should the Church not be advocating on behalf of Christians and Christian values? Should the Church not be allowed to express some level of self-interest?

But I was also reminded of a story from the book of Joshua. As Joshua was approaching Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."

Joshua 5:13-14, New International Version.

Or to put it in another context:

"I am not altogether on anybody's side, because nobody is altogether on my side, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them"

Treebeard, The Two Towers by J. R. R. Tolkien.

We often enter these debates assuming that God is on our side. We see the Kingdom of God lying somewhere within the Church, and so to seek the Kingdom of God means, or at least includes, protecting and representing the Church.

With this view of the Kingdom of God to act as a representative of all faiths would be a compromise of the Church's mission. Diluting the call of the Kingdom with voices from outside the Kingdom.

But this view of the Kingdom doesn't mesh well with the Joshua story. Here we have the leader of Israel, God's chosen people, following God's

instruction and he encounters someone who is a physical manifestation of God's Kingdom, and goes "So you're on my side, right?" to which the angel replies, "Not necessarily."

What if God's side lies somewhere outside of us? What if the Kingdom of God is something that we have to continue to seek to align ourselves with? What if God is inviting us to seek him in the wilderness, outside of any camp but his own and to seek to care for the things that he cares for?

So, how do we, in the language of Treebeard, care for the woods as God cares for them? Where do we find the plants of God's forest?

Towards the end of the story of Jonah, the prophet finds himself sitting on a hill watching over the repentant city of Ninevah (in what is modern day Iraq), complaining to God about his grace and compassion to these people who clearly don't deserve it. "Why would you choose their side?" he might be asking.

In response God provides a plant, something to give Jonah some shade from the scorching desert sun. Then God sends a worm to eat away at the tree until it is destroyed. Jonah is furious.

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

Jonah 4:9-11, New International Version.

Clearly the Ninevites were also are part of God's wood.

Returning to Lord Parekh's idea of the Church being an older brother to other faiths, is it possible that in seeking to speak on behalf of other faiths, as well as our own, we may hear God's voice more clearly and deeply outside of our own camp? Could it be that we can only, fully, care for the things that God cares for when we look outside of our own interests to the needs of the stranger?

If you missed the Hook Lecture or what to listen to it again you can find it on LCILeeds.org or by searching for LCI Leeds in your podcast app of choice.

Half Way There! Leeds Country Way Pilgrimage continues

by Pippa Woodhams



Leeds Country Way Pilgrimage triumphantly reached the half way mark in February, having walked thirty-six miles in monthly instalments, since our Horsforth start back in September.

Walking together through the landscape is one way we can slow down and become ready to receive from both the physicality and the metaphors present in the natural world around us. We've watched the passing of autumn, winter and spring, battled storm Angus and storm Doris, and enjoyed brilliant sun at the least expected times of year.



This is a new reflective challenge to sense how city connects with its surrounding countryside: muck heaps, TV studios, industrial farms, motorways, sightings of buildings from Roman remains to cathedrals and communications towers.

Some sections of the city inspire thoughts about our hospitals and healing, others education or the many aspects of housing need over the centuries. Our most recent walk criss-crossed the motorway junction of the M1 and M62. At other times the sheer beauty of the natural world took our breath away, memorably the stunning extent of St Aidan's nature reserve and its wildlife.



The meaning of the word "companion" comes from "those with whom you share bread". It's the friendship we've enjoyed, the stories of saints, fellow-travellers and local histories, which fill the memory. We've found friendly pubs, unexpected cafes and corners for refreshment. Thanks to Tom Lusty for his gallant leadership and chocolate, and to all the interesting people who are taking part or chatting with us on the way.



If you are someone fortunately able to enjoy walking, I'd thoroughly recommend the Leeds Country Way (google it for routes and transport links). The route gives unique perspectives on our city, is giving much food for thought, and has introduced us to many new parts of Leeds. Read LCI blogs to keep up with our latest insights. We still have the route through Woodkirk, Gildersome, Cockersdale, Pudsey, Calverley and back to Horsforth yet to discover: please come and join us, on monthly Wednesdays. Contact LCI for dates and connection details.

Abbie Palmer reflects on wilderness and training for ordination

Do we ever think of wilderness as wild? Or does it seem more vacant? For me, singing "40 days and 40 night, thou wast fasting in the wild" gave me an image of Jesus in an empty desert. No other living creatures. No vegetation. No wind or rain or movement. Just Jesus and a spiritual, ethereal devil.

Last year I attended the LCI study day titled Jesus and Wild Nature, led by Noel Moules. Reflecting on that day transformed my mental image of Jesus in the wilderness. No longer was the landscape passive. It was full of wolves and weather and movement. No longer a passive Jesus. Instead, an image of real struggle both within and without.

Wilderness is about being out of your comfort zone. But when Jesus returned from the wilderness, it was not to

the life he knew. He continued to new places, to constant journeying. In a way, Jesus is in a new wilderness. **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”** (Matthew 8:20). He then finds his comfort zone, his home, in time away, alone with his Father. It is almost a reversal, where the wilderness of his lent retreat becomes his place of solace.

When I began my ordination training it was a step into a form of wilderness. From the comfort zone of paid employed work, in the community of the university where I had worked for 12 years I stepped into something completely different. Ways of thinking were challenged. The move from a focus on doing to being. Okay, the city and some of the people were familiar. But the sense of self was not.

What are we when what we do is stripped away? This sense of wilderness is often faced by those with serious health conditions. I think of a friend with Myalgic Encephalopathy (ME) for whom the more she does, the worse her symptoms become. She is having to find ways to curb her enthusiasms and balance doing with being.

In my new context, I am still able to do, but am being encouraged to do less and reflect more. It has been transformative. That is what the wilderness experience does. It transforms. For good or ill. You lose your certainties: self-definition, worldview, what is important. That is the space in which we are vulnerable enough to be transformed.

But it is challenging. Temptations to seek lost power are all around. The temptation to find quick solutions. Jesus demonstrated the alternative. I believe that time in the wilderness prepared him. The wilderness showed him where his strength lay. My wilderness has taken me into new experiences, new ways of thinking, new connections with God. I have been tempted to retreat, to fall back, to fall away. With the help of reflection, prayer and study, I have begun to find that strength beyond myself and am learning to trust it.



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Email: events@leedschurchinstitute.org

Phone: 0113 391 7928

Address: 20 New Market Street, Leeds, LS1 6DG

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