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Dr Helen Reid considers the call to abide with...



“Why is the Church so involved in the world of Education?”

The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs argues education is core to the Church’s mission.

Poem: One Beautiful Idea.
Abide with Me: Comics that reflect on a family’s struggle with dementia.
Permission to be Sad: Lawrence Cockrill looks at Michael Rosen’s Sad Book.



“Why is the Church so involved in the world of Education?”

As Area Bishop and Chair of the Board of Education of the Church of England Diocese of Leeds, I am quite frequently asked this question, or something very similar to it. I find the form in which the question is asked to be very revealing, as it tells me a good deal about the assumptions of the person who is asking.

Let me tell you a little about how I try to answer this question, when it is asked by someone who is a lay member of one of our churches or a member of the clergy, or even a member of the diocesan staff. In these cases, the subtext of the question is usually “Why is the Diocese spending so much money on Education?”

Just to be clear, the Church of England Diocese of Leeds will spend around £1.1 million on the work of the Diocesan Board of Education in 2018. That is a lot of money, though in proportion to the overall budget of around £25 million, it is actually just a little over 4%. So let’s take it from there:

The primary task of the Diocese of Leeds, as I understand it, is to enable the work of the Church of England in the Diocese to flourish and grow. Our Diocesan Vision has three elements – **Confident Christians, Growing Churches, Transforming Communities** and the work of the Diocesan Board of Education contributes to the fulfilment of each of these goals – and has the potential to help the Diocese to do so even more fruitfully.

One of our biggest challenges faced by many of our churches is that the vast majority of our congregations, are for the most part small and elderly, with very few children, young people and families attending regularly. But our 242 church schools currently educate around 64,000 children and young people – vastly more than we see in our churches week by week. Within each of these schools, high quality religious education is offered, at the heart of which is clear teaching about the Christian faith, including through the newly launched and much praised ‘Understanding Christianity’ project, as well as about other faiths. This is not about proselytising, but it does prepare

the ground for these children to be able to make informed choices about faith, as and when they are ready to do so, thereby contributing both directly and indirectly to the Diocese's goal of nurturing **Confident Christians**.

Where parishes and clergy are making the most of the links they have with both church and community schools, there are huge opportunities to lead collective worship, set up visits to churches and to play a part in engaging with the whole school community – including children, parents and staff. We would like to see these links strengthened and developed. There is ample evidence that, where this happens, links with schools can become (even more than they are already) a major means of contributing to **Growing Churches**, especially among the children, young people and families who are so often missing from our congregations.

Our 242 church schools currently educate around 64,000 children and young people – vastly more than we see in our churches week by week.

But evangelism and church growth are not our primary goals when it comes to our work in Education. The Church of England's engagement with education is rooted above all in our commitment to the well-being of all human beings and to the flourishing of the communities in which we live. In a time of increasing polarisation in politics and of rising negativity towards people of different races and faiths, church schools can help to foster positive attitudes of respect towards people of different traditions and communities. In many parts of this Diocese, people of other faiths choose to send their children to our church schools, precisely because they feel their faith and traditions will be respected and valued. In this way, among many others, church schools can contribute to community cohesion and mutual understanding.

Church schools, whether in rural North Yorkshire or inner city Leeds, make a huge contribution both to individual lives and to their wider communities. They are perhaps the biggest single demonstration of the Church's commitment to **Transforming Communities** across our Diocese and nation – and of our refusal to retreat into being solely a

religious club concerned with our own survival.

Above all, therefore, the work of the Diocesan Board of Education should not be seen as an inconvenient drain on the resources of the Diocese, but as a key part of strengthening our ability to fulfil our core goals – **Confident Christians, Growing Churches, Transforming Communities**.

The real problem is when people conceive the mission of the Church and the Diocese in overly narrow terms as being about filling the pews in our churches on a Sunday morning. In the end, such a narrow approach runs the risk of becoming counter-productive...

Those of us involved in the field of education in this or any other Diocese, whether teachers, parents or clergy, need to go on making the case for the importance of supporting this work as a vital part of the overall mission of the Diocese. And we need to do all we can to help local clergy and churches to play their part in supporting the life of our schools (whether church or community schools) because of the vital role they play in the lives of our children and of whole communities.

I am only too aware of the financial challenges that this and other Dioceses are facing in the next few years. But it is also my belief that the work of the Diocesan Board of Education in supporting our schools is absolutely vital at the end of the day both for the health and growth of our churches and as a huge part of our contribution to the common good of the communities we serve across this diocese.

The real problem is when people conceive the mission of the Church and the Diocese in overly narrow terms as being about filling the pews in our churches on a Sunday morning. In the end, such a narrow approach runs the risk of becoming counter-productive, by cutting the Church off from its role at the heart of our communities – most especially through its work in education.

The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs is Bishop of Huddersfield and Chair of the Board of Education of the Church of England Diocese of Leeds.

What are you waiting for? Abide With Me.

By Dr Helen Reid

On Easter Sunday, he clasped my hand tightly and proclaimed clearly,

“He rose!”

This might be someone describing a regular Easter occurrence, one that happens all over the country. But this is Revd Bob Shaw describing a meeting with his friend with advanced dementia, who is a retired clergyman. On no other visit, before or since, has his friend spoken a single word. But spontaneously this day, he declared resurrection hope and witnessed to a life time of faithful service. A moment of great blessing for Bob, and of clarity and hope for his friend.

All of us have spent time being expectant in the sense of waiting for clarity of thought to come on a particular matter. We might either consciously chew over the subject in our minds, or choose to distract ourselves from focussing on it directly. Sometimes we worry that we are wasting time doing nothing, or are fearful that the process of clearing our mind won't work this time, or won't work for a deadline we have to meet.

Ian Adams writes about this from a poet's perspective...

ONE BEAUTIFUL IDEA by Ian Adams

For weeks I had sat by the pool till late each night, the practice of a poet's faith
return each day to the source of it all
but nothing moved as darkness fell.

Tonight I watched again as the sun set behind the trees, and in the shadows' rise and light's slow cease, the dance of hatching flies, and this clear moment I saw – or sensed

one beautiful idea, sharp from the sea beyond belief if I'd not seen her leap sleek from the deep peat pool, silver goddess and of wise earth's gifts it's said, the oldest.

I'd begun to think her gone forever, a story we had caught and caged, and then ignored but she was here sign of earth's resilient life and grace for the practice of this poet's faith.

At times of nothingness or emptiness, he continues his poet's practice of expectantly waiting for 'one beautiful idea'. He is writing about allowing the process of openness and awareness to take the time it takes, acknowledging that it cannot be forced.

Swinton, when writing about the accompanying of people with dementia, alludes to a similar process. Spending time regularly in the presence of a friend with dementia, is the essence of a friendship which is soul to soul. When you are with a person who might not speak or acknowledge you, you are seeking only to be present with them. You are not doing nothing, you are both sharing the sacrament of the present moment.

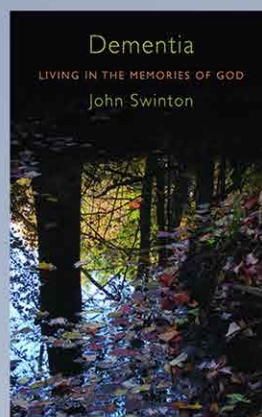
This is not an easy thing to do in a society where we value time as a commodity and believe that we need to be busy, be achieving, and making the most of every moment. This calls us to be counter cultural, and as Hauerwas writes

When there is not a lot to do other than to be present, you find out...what it means to be a friend of time.

The call to being counter cultural comes from God who stands outside time; time being part of God's creation and one that God is not bound by. As part of creation, time is fallen and it has become a commodity, so time needs redeeming. God who stands out of time is redeeming time by filling each moment with meaning.

So we are to be present expectantly as friends of time when we are with people with dementia. People with dementia may find that song, dance or ritual can unlock memories or emotions, however temporary that may be. Such 'moments out of the fog' can be described in medical terms as procedural memory. But a faith which describes us as embodied souls suggests that this isn't enough of an explanation. This springing to life is a moment of communication and delight, and its meaning is in the shared moment. Acts of presence and worship become places of reconnection

with God and others. Time is redeemed, it is imbued with meaning.



At Oakwood Church Book Club, when I was reflecting on my reading of John Swinton's book on 'Dementia: Living in the Memories of God', I said that while I had learnt a lot about a practical theology of dementia, my overall sense was that I had essentially been learning about God and discipleship.

The approach in Swinton's book resonates with the writing of Rowan Williams on discipleship which he describes as a 'state of being'. Williams comments on the importance of 'staying' and 'abiding' in the Gospel of John. The first actions of the first disciples (John 1: 36-39) on meeting Jesus, is to ask a question, to follow him, and to stay the day. Later in the gospel, this act of 'staying' is most clearly emphasised in Jesus' teaching on 'abide with me' and 'abide in my love' (John 15. 4, 9).

This is likened to being an experienced birdwatcher who spends so much time being still and watching to be sure of catching a momentary sight of a rare bird.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this; Love each other as I have loved you.'

The traditional practice of staying with the teacher was to learn by listening, looking and waiting. It required the student to be expectant and to be ready to be changed. This is likened to being an experienced birdwatcher who spends so much time being still and watching to be sure of catching a momentary sight of a rare bird.

In Christian discipleship, the 'sightings of a rare bird' are the critical moments when things join up and you see a hint of the overwhelming big picture that is being uncovered for you, as God reveals God's self.

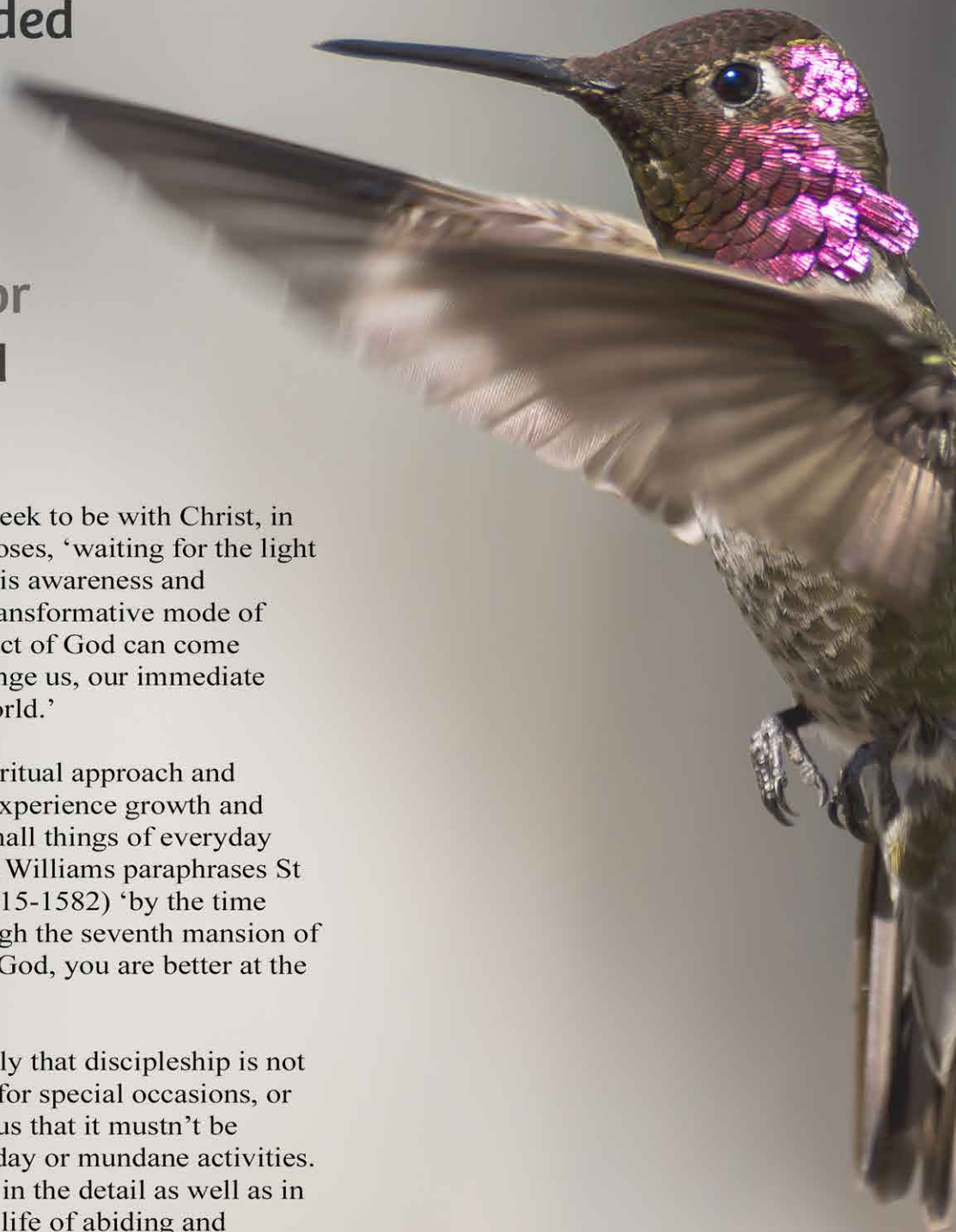
Williams teaches that in our modern lives, our patient and expectant 'staying' is to watch the world, to listen for the Word to come alive in Scripture, and, in the Sacraments, to ask the Spirit to make connections come alive. In everyday life, we are to be expectant in our relationships with each other and ask 'What is Christ giving me in this person?' This is a gospel shaped way to approach one another, believing that Jesus calls us to community. Abiding with Jesus means being in the company of the people whose company Jesus seeks, that is, those who are:

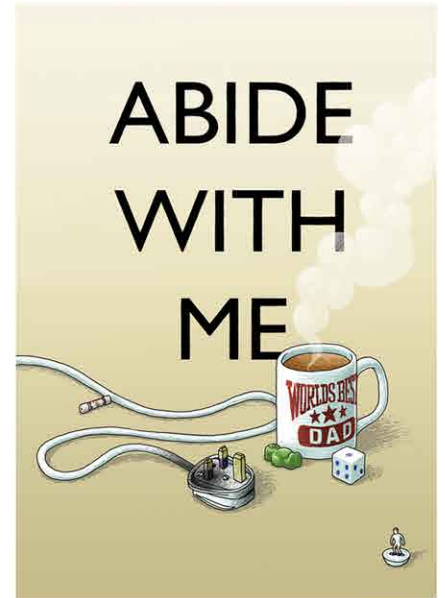
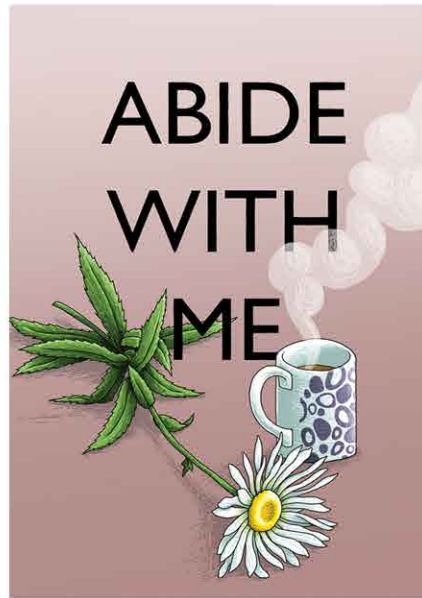
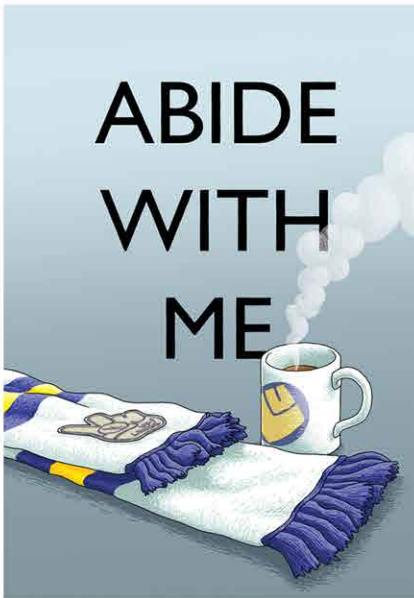
Excluded
Disreputable
Wretched
Self-hating
Poor
Diseased

So as disciples, we seek to be with Christ, in the company he chooses, 'waiting for the light to break through. This awareness and openness can be a transformative mode of living in which the act of God can come through so as to change us, our immediate environment, our world.'

And through this spiritual approach and dedication, we can experience growth and enrichment in the small things of everyday life. To describe this Williams paraphrases St Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) 'by the time you have been through the seventh mansion of spiritual union with God, you are better at the washing up.'

This points out clearly that discipleship is not an activity reserved for special occasions, or something so precious that it mustn't be wasted on the everyday or mundane activities. It is a life lived well in the detail as well as in the bigger picture, a life of abiding and remaining.

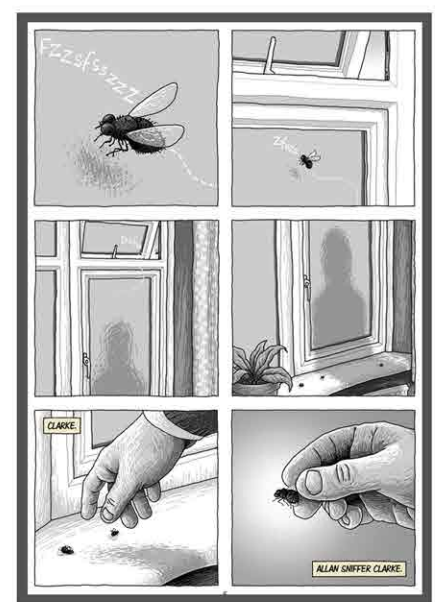
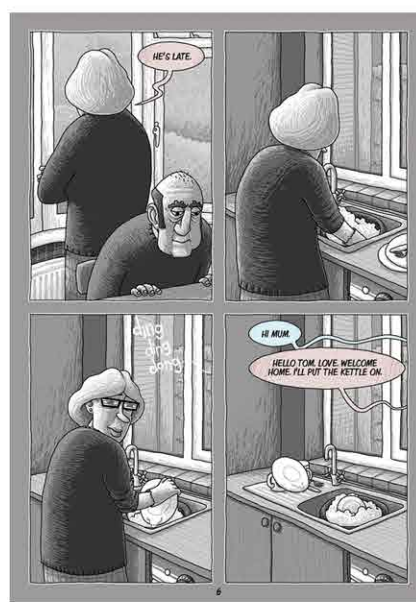




‘Abide with Me’ is the name Si Smith chose for his set of three comics exploring themes of old age, memory loss, family and community life and the search for meaning. The three comics show different perspectives of the same story and events. If you start by reading from the son’s perspective (blue cover), then the mum’s perspective (pink cover) and then the dad’s perspective (yellow cover), you build the full picture most easily.

The different front covers all hint at what sustains the people in this family. There are symbols of nature, identity, an individual’s skills and interests, LUFC and being faithful through the ups and downs, and sharing cups of tea. They share some of these things in common, and some are unique to the individual. They are one family, one story, but three perspectives.

The different perspectives are highlighted in different aspects of the story. For example at the time when the son arrives at his parents’ home for a visit.

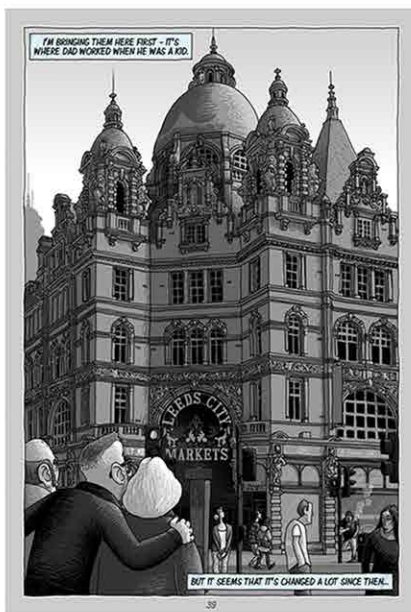
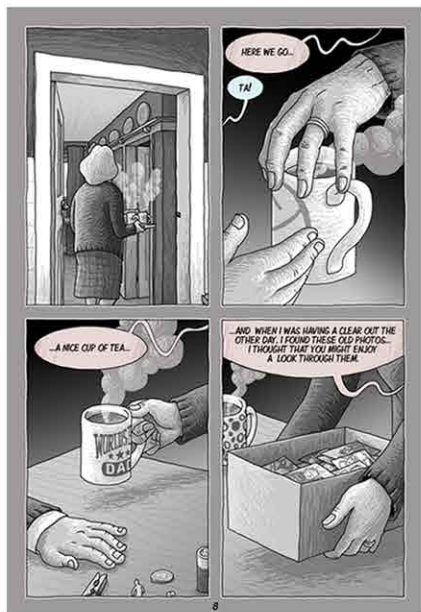


In the son’s comic, we see him arriving and being welcomed by his mum with his dad watching through the window. In a parallel to this, in the Mum’s comic, we hear her anxiety waiting for him to come and then her welcome. In the dad’s comic, we see he isn’t watching his son come in but rather, he is watching a fly at the window.

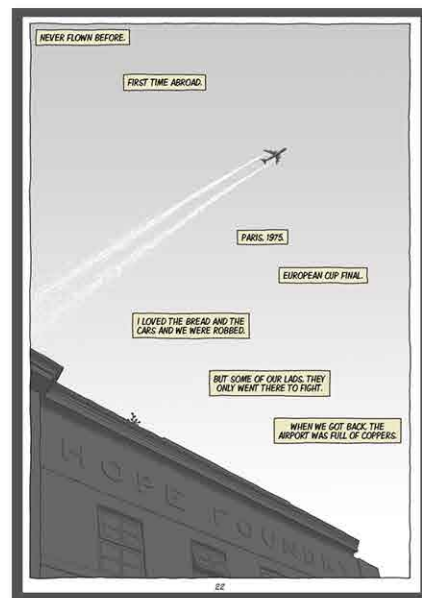
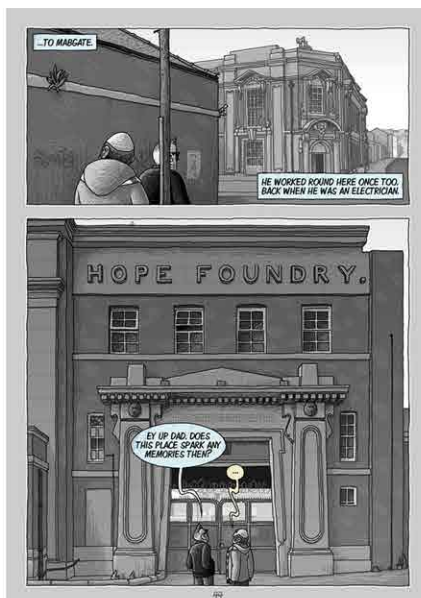
The three characters each have a different approach to sharing memories too.

Mum tries to share her memories with the others through looking at photos. Sometimes her son is interested in remembering different aspects of family life that she would rather not be remembering at that time. But the sharing of memories is clearly important.

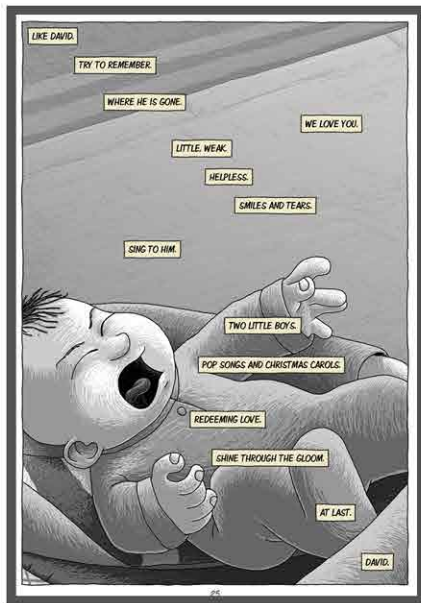
The son tries to share memories with the others through visiting the city centre. In her responses, the mum shows it is not just memory loss that makes memories difficult – you can feel an out of date stranger in a once familiar place even when you have no problems remembering.



When father and son are outside the foundry, the son has a sense of failure that it is not triggering the response he hoped for, but in the dad's comic, we see he is interested in something different. Watching the plane flying overhead is inspiring memories, but not ones that he can share.



Each of the three Abide With Me comics has a different perspective on a moment of clarity where there is joy in relationship and truth.

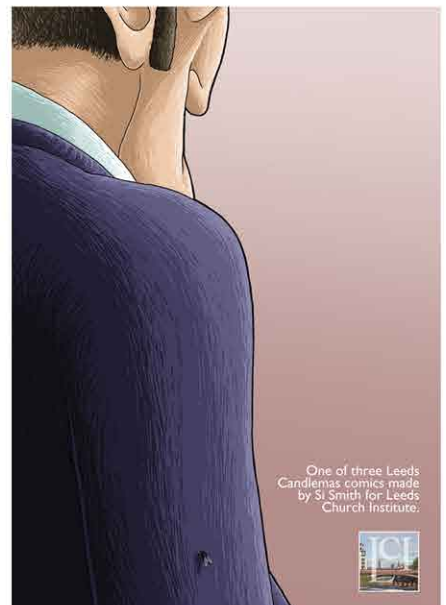
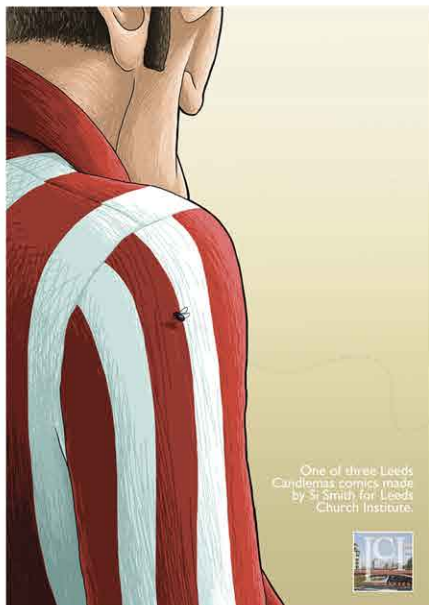
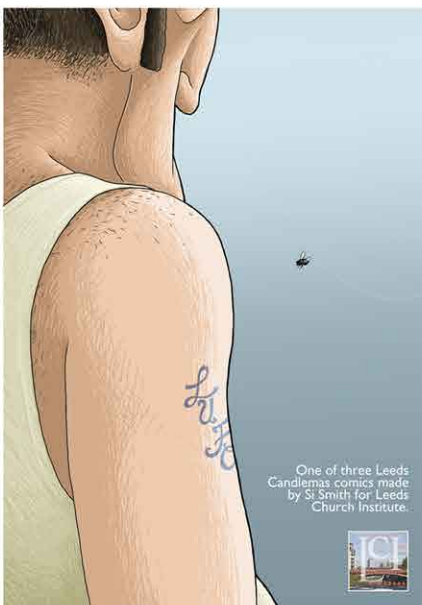


The mum has her moment of hope and clarity when walking and talking with a friend in some public gardens; The dad has a moment of clarity and joy when he remembers his son David who he loved so much and who died. The son has his moment of clarity as he realises there is no fix to this ‘problem’, he feels hope stemming from shared love and being together.

So in Leeds, where time is precious, and we so often feel we are too busy and have no time. How can we be countercultural and be friends of time, abiding with one another in the presence of Christ? As Rowan Williams urges ‘We have all got to grow into a mature stillness, a poise and an openness to others and the world.’

Ian Adams (2014) Unfurling Canterbury Press
Si Smith (2018) Abide With Me Leeds Church Institute
John Swinton (2012, 2017) Dementia. Living in the Memories of God SPCK
Rowan Williams (2016) Being Disciples. Essentials of Christian Life SPCK

And with thanks to co-reflectors at Oakwood Book Club, Lunchtime Conversations and Cake, Coffee and Conversation at LCI



Wild City Retreats: If there is a shadow, there is light

By Shaeron Caton Rose. Installation artist and retreat facilitator

Our January retreat, held at Meanwood Valley Farm, was based around the festival of Candlemas.

Traditionally this is when the story of the presentation of Christ at the temple is told and when candles are brought into church, lit and taken away to bring light into the household. The feast also has pagan roots; at this time of year, Brigid the goddess (and later saint) was welcomed into the house as a first sign of spring with the lighting of candles. In the Christian story, two older people, Simeon and Anna, have been waiting for the Christ for many years and finally see their hopes for a better future come before them in the shape of a small child. The biblical passage holds the famous Nunc Dimittis “Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; to be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel”. It is interesting to note that this quote is used in evensong and so in some places like monastic communities, is said every day. Perhaps it offers a way of letting go, living a day at a time - a sort of mindfulness, being here in the now.

Creativity allows this frame of mind; there is a sense of getting lost in the process, which for me is one of the advantages of using ‘arty’ activities as part of our wild city retreats. Often it is only when we look at what we have made, be it a piece of art, a song, poem, script; do we see the meaning, and often it takes another person to draw out other or complementary meanings. An exercise I often employ on retreat is to invite people to reflect in this

way by looking at each other’s work and responding to it without even knowing the original intention. The result is often incredibly significant. In the same way Simeon and Anna saw the meaning of the Christ child, in a manner that ‘amazed’ the parents, who couldn’t see the full potential even though they had been part of the nativity experience.

At this time of year, we start to see the first tiny signs of spring: snowdrops, and buds forming, but we are not clear of the cold weather yet. Everything is still ‘in process’: seeds are germinating but we can’t see the shoots yet. Waiting for revelation is hard, it often involves not knowing, perhaps being lost in some way. LCI’s recent focus on dementia highlights the powerlessness we might feel when we are in such a state of stasis and yet as people of faith we have hope that there is meaning behind all things. Built on an understanding that if there is a shadow, there is light, even a small light such as a candle; that every person has intrinsic worth which is so much more than what we initially assume - an old man and woman can see visions, a baby can be salvation, the cycle of the seasons returns again and again.

Recommended reading:

The Little Book of Unknowing Jennifer Kavanagh
The Cloud of Unknowing Anonymous

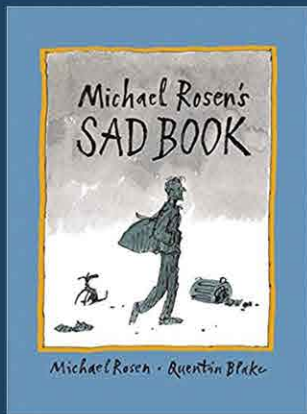


Permission to be Sad

Lawrence Cockrill looks at Michael Rosen's Sad Book.

Each year at LCI we choose a book to send to primary schools in Leeds. Towards the end of last year, as part of our remembrance theme we sent out 250 copies of Michael Rosen's Sad Book.

The Sad Book is a book for children, illustrated by Quentin Blake, about grief. In it Rosen shares about his own sadness at the loss of his son at the age of 18 due to meningitis.



In spite of the book's childish style, with silly sound effects and Quentin Blake's beautiful illustrations, the subject matter is surprisingly mature. But as those of us who have worked in education in Leeds will know, there are many children who carry grief and sadness as heavy as any adult.

The simplicity of the book makes Rosen's honesty all the more stark as he talks about the loss of his son and the sadness that it brings.

Quentin Blake's illustrations carry much of the emotion of the book, starting with a brightly coloured, smiling drawing of the author under which is written "This is me being sad". From here the illustrations become dark and grey as Rosen talks about his true feelings, the colours returning as he remembers his son, only to fade again as those memories remind of just how much he has lost.

Along the way Rosen subtly lets the reader know that they are not alone in their feelings, that it's okay to be angry or scared, and shares some of his strategies for coping with his loss. The ending is inconclusive and melancholy, reflecting that grief isn't something that can be cured, but the message is clear, it's okay to not be okay.

A similar topic came up at one of our 'Lunchtime Conversations' where Revd Tom Lusty discussed 'Death's Gift' by Nicholas Peter Harvey. In 'Death's Gift' Harvey looks at grief in the context of the death and resurrection of Jesus as it is experienced through his followers, suggesting that the trauma of Jesus' death is not deleted by his resurrection. The experience of resurrection brings joy, but it is

always accompanied by grief.

Like Rosen, Harvey's writing is influenced by his own experience of grief, in this case the suicide of a close friend while he was at Downside Abbey.

Sadness is often treated as something that has to be fixed. Something that needs to be 'got over'. Perhaps less because of its effect on the person experiencing grief, and more because it is not socially acceptable to be sad. We generally try to avoid sadness but, as Rosen puts it, "Sadness comes along and finds you".

While looking at 'Death's Gift' we talked about the five stages of grief. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. A secular model, which can be useful, not so much as a prescribed process, each stage being ticked off when it is completed, but as common threads that unite individual experiences. They are a reminder that grief is normal, not something to be approached as a personal failing or a sickness that needs to be treated. These feelings are not wrong. They're not right either, they just are. Persistently.

In the Bible, when Jesus weeps for Lazarus, in spite of Lazarus' impending resurrection, it is presented without comment or interpretation. Two words, a single verse, a statement of fact. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Similarly, when Jesus gives his disciples the great commission, it simply says that "some doubted" (Matthew 28:17). It's not a judgement, it's just an acknowledgement. Perhaps a sign that the grief of Jesus' death is still present. A confusing reversal of the normal moments of denial and acceptance.

While the resurrection element doesn't erase grief it can reframe it. In Death's Gift, Harvey is more hopeful than Rosen, reflecting that joy can be present even in grief. Jesus' weeping for Lazarus is followed by the joy of his return, the Disciple's doubt is followed by his declaration "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age".

So how should we approach those who are grieving?

Lawrence Cockrill is the Media and Events Coordinator at the Leeds Church Institute.

Leeds Church Institute is delighted to invite you to meet and hear from James Alison, theologian and priest. British born and a global citizen, James Alison is a travelling teacher, lecturer and retreat leader. Alison is celebrated for his firm but gentle insistence on addressing current church teaching on human sexuality with the question, "Yes, but is it true?"

He brings to this question, a deep understanding of the work of philosopher and literary critic Rene Girard which exposes violence hidden at the heart of culture; and he illuminates our understanding of the good news in Christ as the Forgiving Victim.

In written word and lectures, Alison offers a vital freshness in his interpretations of scripture, delightful word play, even some surprises and new connections. It has been said of Alison, "Far from beleaguered or rancorous, he is a gay Catholic voice speaking out of unsentimental love for the church."

You really shouldn't miss this opportunity to hear from and meet James Alison when he is in Leeds. Come to one or both of the events at All Hallows' Church, Hyde Park on 21st April 2018.

Public Lecture

Christ Crucified – the power of God & the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-24)

What it is like on the inside of this as a LGBT person?

Lecture starts at 4pm.

There will be a time of 'Q and A' after the lecture when we can reflect on ourselves, our church communities, and our society. We can take this opportunity to look together at the range of debates, policies and practices, and unconscious bias in our shared life of faith.

God's (very queer!) power and wisdom on show

Afternoon tea and informal discussion

Tea from 5pm with James Alison, facilitated by Revd Heston Groenewald.

This will be a time to share from our own experiences, hopes and fears, and reflect on what is good and true in our lives together.

These events are free, but spaces are limited so please book ahead by emailing events@leedschurchinstitute.org, calling 0113 391 7928 or search Eventbrite for 'James Alison in Leeds'.



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