

## SEPTEMBER 2018

Dear Friends,

### 'Farewell Reflections'

Over the last nine years my articles for this newsletter have generally commented on events or topics which have recently been in the public eye. Since however this is the last one that I shall be writing as Rector of Snodland, I hope you will forgive me if my reflections are on this occasion of a more personal nature.

The issues we face in our modern world are complex and numerous, yet as I grow older, I personally find that what really matters becomes paradoxically simpler and clearer. The sermons I preach, for example, expound different texts and address different subjects, but at the end of the day they could probably all be subsumed, in one way or another, under the simple declaration of St. John in his first epistle, 'God is love.' (1 Jn.3:8)

My father, as many of you know, was in the army and as a young boy I was fascinated by stories I heard of military heroism. They raised for me a fundamental question: 'What would I die for?' I began to find the answer when (because my parents were constantly on the move) I was sent to a boarding school. Life there could be tough, but the Bible stories we heard in the school chapel about Jesus caring for the weak, the vulnerable, or the plain 'outsider', spoke to me of how I could support my fellows struggling to cope. Jesus had the ring of truth about him, and suggested that an answer to the question, 'What would I die for?' might lie in him.

Between school and university I went out to Kenya with CMS to teach for a year in a Harambee School close to the Ugandan border. It was an opportunity to follow Jesus' way of love, but half way through, I nearly abandoned it. The people (including the family with whom I lived) were extremely poor, and when the crops failed, there was no pay for two months. I also caught malaria and ended up in a hospital (several miles walk away). I found myself questioning whether the ideals of Jesus made any sense in a world where Nature was so cruel and life so cheap. But in the midst of this crisis, some Australian missionaries took me out of the hospital to recuperate, and whilst staying with them I came to a deeper faith. I began to see in Jesus, not just a human teacher, but a unique window onto the Mind of God. My understanding was completely transformed. Where previously I had regarded God as an impersonal power (akin to 'the Force' in *Star Wars*); I now saw him as an infinite, creative, purposive, personalising Mind – my heavenly 'Father'.

Love was at the heart of the universe, at the very core of God's Being. I found strength to stay on in Kenya, and from that time on felt a growing call to full-time Christian ministry. I offered myself for ordination whilst a student at university and the rest, as they say, is history. During my 40 years as an ordained minister I have met a wonderfully diverse range of people and, through them and the various situations in which I have found myself, I have learnt more and more about the amazing, all-embracing nature of God's love which we know in Christ. It has been like an ever-expanding circle, which now for me includes quite literally *every-one* and *every-thing*. My parting prayer for us all therefore, in the words of St. Paul, is that

"being rooted and established in love, [we] may have power... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love ... that [we] may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

(Eph. 3:17-19)

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