# MARK'S MESSENGER

***The Parish Magazine of***
***St Mark's Church, Broomhill and Broomhall, Sheffield***

**February 2026**


*Suggested Donation £2 via the Giving Door, in cash or scanning the QR code*

## ST MARK'S LENT COURSE, 2026

**Exploring Social Justice:**
Critical Issues Defining our Time

In addition to providing opportunity to meet, pray and study the Bible together in small groups, this year's course will help us to explore what it means to seek justice for some of the most vulnerable members of society.

Groups will gather each week during Lent on different days, at different times, in different places, in person and online, so that as many people as possible are able to participate.

Resource packs for each week will be posted on the church website (printed copies will also be available) and can be used by anyone who is interested in the relationship between social justice and the faith-filled life.

Look out for further details at the back of church or on the website.


***MESSENGER EDITORIAL TEAM***

**Margot Fox, Frances Gray, Dez Martin, Michael Miller, Shan Rush**

**This edition was edited by Michael Miller.**


We welcome comments and suggestions and invite contributions. It should be noted that the editors cannot guarantee to publish material and wish to point out that items do not necessarily reflect their views or those of the Parochial Church Council. When sending photographs for inclusion, please ensure they are sent separately from the article as JPEGs, and are preferably of high resolution.

The next *Messenger* editor is Shan Rush. Please send copy by the beginning of May, 2026.

Cover pic: Mosaic wall icon of gold tesserae, Church of St. Sara, Belgrade.

*Photo: Michael Miller*

## LETTER FROM HOLMFIRTH

*We are indebted to Ian Wallis, Vicar of St Mark's from 2009 to 2014, for this eloquent and moving update on his and Liz's life since they left our church, and grateful that Ian has been able to rejoin the team in a new role. Editor.*

Serving as a parish priest can be a strange vocation. You usually arrive as an unknown quantity, then attempt to fulfil a largely public role during which many relationships are formed, before leaving the stage for good. This final transition can be a costly affair, especially when precipitated by adverse circumstances.

Gratitude, guilt and grief were the three emotions predominating post 12 October 2014. Gratitude for an undeservedly generous 'send-off', as well as for five years of fruitful ministry. Guilt over accepting the post in the midst of health concerns and then for those concerns to be realised. Grief on letting go of a role I held dear and on withdrawing from a community to which we belonged and where we felt valued.

Yet life drags us on. 2015 proved to be a year of operations, firstly, cardiac surgery to restore a normal heart rhythm, followed by spinal surgery to decompress the vertebrae causing sciatica. Both proved successful to a degree, so I am now able to sleep in bed and sit for reasonable periods, although I still work standing up, whilst fatigue continues to be a daily challenge.

That said, I am back teaching on the Yorkshire Ministry Course, now St Hild College, where I was Principal, and am increasingly being called on to conduct worship in the locality which keeps me on my toes! On top of that, most weeks I join the spiritual care team at the local hospice to offer support to patients and staff alike.

Writing is where fatigue proves most debilitating and equally frustrating. That said, I can usually manage two to three productive hours a day so some progress is possible, with a book draft on Jesus' healings and exorcisms well underway, plus various smaller writing projects. I've also appreciated the opportunity to continue to contribute to the life of St Mark's through participating in a monthly bible study in the vicarage (all welcome!) and serving as a trustee for *Hope for the Future*. There have also been one or two CRC events.

Liz continues to be kept busy with our small consultancy which works in the public sector – locally, regionally and nationally – to improve access

to education and training, especially for those on the margins of society. Last year proved particularly demanding with the sudden death of Sero's co-founder and principal consultant, requiring Liz to take on David's portfolio in addition to her own, whilst continuing to manage the company as she embraced the loss of a dear colleague and friend. No small undertaking. Thankfully, the pressure has eased a little in recent months, although the challenges of running a small ethically-minded business continue unabated.

As many of you will be aware, Liz and I were unable to start a family and adoption never worked out so our four-legged companions have been all the more precious to us over the years. After recovering from several bouts of serious illness, we finally lost our beloved Golden Retriever, Tess, in August 2015 by which time she had been a cherished member of the family for over 14 years. We were bereft and struggled to live with her loss until we finally acknowledged that a desire to share our home with another Golden in no way diminished our enduring affection for her or undermined the contribution she had made to our lives.

On Saturday, 20 February 2016, we collected Cari – a small auburn bundle of mischief and fur who quickly established herself as being every bit as vivacious and characterful as her predecessor. After fifteen years or so, we'd forgotten how high-octane puppies can be. Thankfully, now fully grown, Cari is beginning to settle down a little whilst continuing to flourish (and keep us well exercised).

We often recall our time at St Mark's and appreciate ongoing friendships and acquaintances. Thank you. Inevitably, we find ourselves reflecting from time to time on what could have been, before drawing strength from the knowledge that our departure created the opportunity for Sue to become the first female incumbent of St Mark's – all, indeed is harvest!

With our love and good wishes,

***Ian, Liz and Cari***

# HEALING AND WHOLENESS

Thinking Faith on the 11th January explored the question 'Healing and Wholeness: Have Faith Communities Anything to Offer?' An hour and a half of input and discussion that mixed the academic, the poetic and the personal can't be captured in a few short sentences. However, the short answer was yes, faith communities have plenty to offer. Theological understandings of wholeness include reference to 'the restoring of individuals to a place of worth within the social order' (Common Worship: Pastoral Services, 2000) and of 'integration with the environment' (A Methodist Statement on The Church and the Ministry of Healing, 1977). As such they implicitly challenge individualistic understanding of health, and highlight the importance of community. From a related but different perspective, theological notions of flourishing resonate with dynamic understandings of health that highlight the ability to adapt and to self-manage. A reminder that a person may be ill, may have infirmity or disability, but can still be whole and perhaps even flourish.

Picking up the more poetic, these words by Padraig Ó. Tuama, about the nature of prayer found resonance:

> Prayer is a small fire lit to keep cold hands warm… Prayer is not an answer, always, because not all questions can be answered. Prayer can be a rhythm that helps us make sense in times of senselessness, not offering solutions, but speaking to and from the mystery of humanity… Prayer is rhythm. Prayer is comfort. Prayer is disappointment. Prayer is words and shape and art around desperation, and delight and disappointment and desire.
>
> (Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community, 2017)

Mixing the poetic and personal, Charlotte Bryson shared these two poems, which she is happy to have reproduced here. They are written out of her experience as a GP working in an area with a high Muslim population and express a little of how she experiences the intermingling of healing, wholeness and faith communities.

He is to be called John

Nearing the last part of the day, the physician rested a moment. There was room on the couch for her to perch beside the mat on which baby lay.

Umbilical hernia soft and reducing; small grainy posset from the infants smiling mouth. " Nothing to worry about . Really common. It will get better by itself" she reassured . These words, at least, could be found without thinking. Familiar phrases of balm for an anxious mother.

And being tired in mind and body, she muddled a her for a his in this easy patter.

The patriarch now spoke up: "His name is Yahya ; John the Baptiser!"

He, whose arms had borne this grandson into the room so gently corrected the physician.

As Yahya's mother dressed him, for a peaceful moment they recalled together the names of Zechariah and Elisabeth, blessed in their old age. And beyond them to Abraham.

Friday prayers on Gower Street

On the stone steps of this old surgery
sailing above the crossroads of chaos,
threshold of key in door
I stop and breathe. I see
men's bodies close bent and hushed
On pavement carpet of cardboard. Still,

The lights are changing,
the traffic is turning.
The too large flock of pigeons
A murmuration,
A rush of wings in the air.

All of us clay bound,
In need of angels.

***Revd. Dr. Mark Newitt***

# HAVE WE GIVEN UP ON TRUTH?


Truth window in Upper Chapel Unitarian Church

On 7 December Hallvard Lillehammer, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sheffield, gave an excellent, well-attended talk in the Thinking Faith series. It was billed as “It is said we live in a post-truth era where sentiment and opinion hold sway, supported by disinformation, AI generated images, alternative facts and spin. Who or what can we trust? What are the implications for our democracy, public discourse and personal lives? What about religious or moral truth?”

As editor, I asked several present to write about the talk and, as ever at St Marks, received many thoughtful responses. Read on:

***Robin Saunders:***

This was an excellent academic analysis of the concepts of Truth, separating two important meanings of veracity (the opposite of lying) and constancy (maintaining support for an important cause). It included a number of cogent examples from politics (e.g. Donald Trump), journalism and personal relationships. He answered a wide range of questions with conviction, and gave us a stimulating evening.

***John Schofield:***

I left the evening seemingly no wiser than I started it. But now, a few days later, I think that's not true (interesting choice of word!). Some ideas have crystallised, as if my own attempt to remember Polanyi's phrase was coming to life in me: every act of knowing is an interpretation. And what I now interpret out of the session is a sense of the slipperiness of truth, that truth can be almost what you want it to be. But to counter that, the basic distinction between truth as accuracy and truth as ideal is a helpful clarification and has lodged in my brain, together with a set of questions about verification that may help me find my way through the confusing, strident voices of the world, mediated through media that are often more concerned with bullshitting, with bending facts to suit its own preconceptions, than with either accuracy or an ideal. And a basic religious question remains, rumbling on: What are the effects of the way 'truth' is used in these times on the 'verification' of the 'truth claims' of religion, except by trust, which itself in so many others areas of life, as Hallvard Lillehammer pointed out, I think, though not using this word, has been violated?

***Ian Wallis***

Thankfully, Professor Lillehammer refrained from rehearsing the plethora of theories of truth that philosophers have formulated over the years. Instead, he focused on two measures of truth: truth as accuracy and truth as ideological fidelity.

A simple example of truth as accuracy would be the ‘Guess how many sweets there are in the jar’ competition. In this case, there is a reference point independent of our opinions, namely the jar of sweets which can be emptied and counted to resolve the issue definitively.

So far so good. Another example of truth as accuracy should have been the US Presidential Election of 2020 between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. At the end of polling, both candidates claimed victory. As with the jar of sweets, there was an independent reference point to arbitrate, namely the ballot boxes.

Donald Trump and his supporters were convinced that their political regime was the rightful voice of America and that he was the divinely-appointed leader. As a consequence, even though there was verifiable evidence that, according to the legally-binding electoral system in force, Joe Biden had secured more votes, they refused to concede. Many commentators were puzzled by this. Were they delusional? Perhaps, but probably not. Much more likely they were evaluating the truthfulness of the outcome not on the basis of accuracy (who won more votes), but on ideological fidelity (whose administration they believed would be best for the country).

This episode illustrates how different measures of truth can conflict with one another and appear irreconcilable. Further complication arises where ideological claims conflict as in Ukraine, where Putin and his supporters are convinced they are defending greater Russia from the spread of Western influence, while Zelenskyy and his supporters are convinced they are defending their right to be an independent democratic state. Unlike truth claims based on accuracy, there is no objective measure or neutral perspective for evaluating, let alone reconciling, these claims. As a consequence, they are being "resolved" by the enforcement of one ideology upon adherents of another, thereby highlighting a more pragmatic, albeit morally suspect, alternative to truth seeking, namely, 'might is right'.

In response to the death toll, destruction and depravity of World War II, an almost universal consensus emerged that there must be an alternative strategy to conflict resolution. The United Nations was born. Eighty years on, for all the aspiration of its founders, I fear we are no closer to that elusive prize.

***David Price:***

Lillehammer felt it was a highly topical subject. Issues about truth were not only about Trump. They had arisen in the Brexit campaign and in the disputes about Rachel Reeves's Budget. Lillehammer drew a distinction between truth as accuracy and truth as an ideal. Accuracy was relatively straightforward. Truth as an ideal was more complex. For example, marriage aspired to be true love 'till death us do part' but this was not always fulfilled. Religious and ethical statements tended to be about an ideal.

In highly competitive or conflicted situations, lies were often told. Some resorted to 'bullshit' i.e. telling lies to get what you want. 'Spin' was presenting a biased interpretation of the facts. 'Prolepsis' occurred when what was said might become true in the future e.g. 'I am the greatest'. By contrast, Kant believed that lies were never justified even to save a life.

Today many falsehoods masquerade as truth. I think that we need to react by relentlessly exposing the falsehoods, using the analytical tools that Lillehammer suggested. Take, for example, the recent Policy Paper on asylum produced by the Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood. The paper concludes as follows:

> 'This statement also reaffirms that this country will provide refuge to those fleeing danger, provided it is controlled, safe and legal. Most importantly, it represents the position of the government **–** that only by restoring order to our borders, can we be the open, tolerant and generous country that we know ourselves to be.'

The first sentence is spin. Numerous barriers will prevent most asylum seekers from getting to Britain. The second sentence is unadulterated bullshit. It suggests that, by being intolerant and cruel to asylum seekers, we can somehow be 'open, tolerant and generous.'

*"Miss Chancellor's plan of life was not to lie, but such a plan was compatible with a kind of consideration for the truth which led her to shrink from producing it on poor occasions."* ***Henry James, The Bostonians***

***Michael Miller:***

I have been reflecting on Hallvard's talk. I have always believed that being truthful is what every decent person does; indeed I have sometimes caused myself problems by being unwilling to hide the truth. Interestingly the SHL Motivation Questionnaire shows that a highly demotivating factor for me would be working for an organisation that would cause me to override my ethical principles. Even when young I was unwilling to accept arbitrary instructions unless the reason for them was explained.

As Timothy Snyder says in *On Tyranny*, "To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticise power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle." Truth underpins trust and respect; it is very important to know that the people you deal with are not lying. However, there are different types of untruthfulness. Those based on misinformation can be corrected if the person is reasonable and open to evidence. Others can be based on unshakeable, fervently held delusional or ideological beliefs, impervious to fact or evidence; climate change deniers come to mind. Other untruths can be deliberate distortions intended to mislead the hearer. But new to me was Hallvard's categorisation as bullshit of statements made where the person is unconcerned about whether they are true or not, nor about whether you believe them; this is akin to *Vranyo*, a

Russian word meaning the type of lying where the listener knows the speaker is lying and the speaker knows the listener knows he is lying but keeps lying anyway. It is highly destructive as it abandons any respect for fact or evidence.

Concerningly, we live in an era when it is easy to disseminate untruths rapidly and globally, whether though ignorance of the facts, or for malign purposes. Some people even believe that opinion has as much legitimacy as fact. We are deluged by “information” and must work harder than ever to seek out trustworthy sources, to crosscheck and to apply Occam’s Razor. I fully support Hallvard’s vision of truth as an ideal we must cherish.

***Linda Kirk:***

Hallvard Lillehammer guided us through the obvious thickets of lying, wilful deceit and spreading fake news. We could all agree that these ways of behaving were bad, and (mostly) did harm. He steered us to accept that fact-checkable data mattered, but did not necessarily exhaust the range of 'true' understandings we needed to be able to deal with. Moreover, even good people, meaning no harm, could sometimes judge it wise to be economical with the truth, or to foreground some aspect of it, and let the rest pass in shadow. (Would you tell Mr Putin how successful last night's strikes had been?) Ian Wallis, who had made the session happen, was clearly taken with the concept of a legitimation tool-box, intellectually and morally coherent ways of sifting our own and other people's accounts of events or arguments, where full-fat total truth could not be found. Except perhaps by God, some might wonder. With the careful, rubber-gloved, hands of someone unwilling to reveal his own position, Hallvard set out the claims of Truth, as something ideal, or “idealisable” – which presents demands and rewards beyond the useful everyday truth that matches experienced reality. For several of us, the Johannine Jesus, and myth-as-Bible narrative mapped onto this huge, but non-falsifiable, version of Truth.

Hallvard tried to cheer us by pointing out the positive side of the roar of the internet: false accounts of events with many witnesses cannot be posted unchallenged for more than a few minutes. But for me the most chilling insight (duly footnoted) was that public figures cannot simply be categorised as liars or truth-tellers, whose discourse can be examined and labelled. There are those who speak 'as if', which can be as straightforward as saying something will be the case. When it comes about (as in 'everyone is frightened of illegal migrants') such a speaker feels vindicated, not just as a good predictor but as someone who 'saw' truth before others did. The wildest version of speech is that cheerfully unconcerned with truth, that of the bullshitter. Such a person says what he or she wants to, spraying ideas and allegations around with no explicit truth-reference, no sense that being caught spreading complete

untruths is shameful. It doesn't even need to be 'I feel this deeply, but can't put my hand on the evidence right now'; it can simply be 'I fancy thinking aloud; I am powerful; I find myself interesting - so pay attention'. Only rule-observing losers fail to see the fun in this. And it works.

I left relieved that nuance and complication are real, but cannot excuse head-on wilful lying. I left afraid that those whose task it is to unmask this are increasingly having their tools stolen.

***Joe Forde:***

We live in a time when, for an increasing number of people, views have become more important than news. Whereas news often relies on factual underpinning, views often do not. Indeed, in a post-modern age, views are often disparaging of the need for facts as a basis for making claims to truth, preferring a more subjective, relativist approach to explanation and meaning. For many, this has raised an important question: have we given up on truth?

Professor Lillehammer addressed this question by drawing a distinction between two types of truth. The first is what many would describe as factually (empirically) based truth claims based on observation and experimentation, of the kind that scientists make. The second is a more ideas-based approach to making truth claims, such as faith-based beliefs.

He adduced the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher who wrote about the ‘death of God’ and believed that all claims to truth, whether factually-based or faith-based, were, essentially, **aphorisms**, seeing truth not as a fixed destination but as a series of human interpretations and metaphors. For many (and I happen to be one) it resulted in a nihilistic, relativist approach to truth claims (he was the first of the ‘existentialists’!), that banished any sense of life having any meaning, purpose or moral order.

He also adduced the theologian, St Augustine of Hippo, as an example of an exponent of faith-based beliefs in truth, such as a belief that Beauty, Truth and Goodness have a transcendental source (God). For Roman Catholics (I happen to be one), believing this allows for the possibility of benchmarking human behaviour (that is, discerning the extent and nature of ‘the Fall’, or what Augustine called the difference between the ‘City of God’ and the ‘City of Man’), in ways that point beyond the material world to the divine as the source of all truth. In this way, meaning, purpose and moral order become intelligible, as well as theologically self-evident.

I enjoyed the session, and was impressed by the approach that Professor Lillehammer took, including his willingness to engage in a range of Q&A responses in ways that were informative and accessible to the non-specialist.

# CAROL SERVICE

Photos by Chris Caroe, Steel City Choristers

# WOMEN OF TROY

The cast of *Women of Troy.* You may recognise some familiar faces!

*Photo by Martin Godley.*

On 30th November The Book Theatre presented a costumed dramatic reading of Euripides, translated by **Frances Gray** — she tells me she did O-Level Greek at school. She writes:

"Hello Euripides,

Just to thank you for your contribution to the Sheffield Emergency Relief Fund For Gaza – your play *Women of Troy* raised £268 on Advent Sunday. Apparently it didn't go down too well at the premiere in 415 BC – perhaps to do with its scathing critique of the way a country can preach democracy and permit genocide? Or maybe the way female characters have the best lines – whether named war victims like the Queen, the Perfect Wife, the Beauty or the Dissident – treated like a nutcase, or the chorus who fearlessly tell them that being a refugee is even worse for ordinary women waiting to find out what happens to them, now the fighting is done. It's been a pleasure to work with you,

Your translator,

***Frances.***"

# JESUS AND ME

The traditional ‘Jesus being baptised’ as depicted in a church window, Olihuela, Alicante, Spain. *Photo: Michael Miller*

Over the years my image of Jesus has constantly changed. When I was a child, he was a fairly remote figure. What counted then was a friendly church community with a lot of fun and very little oppressive Bible stories to be learned or morality to be observed. As a student, I began to be impressed by the ‘myth of God incarnate’, debunking the literal accuracy of the gospels, but I also developed a strong ‘Holy Week spirituality’ – following the wonderful martyr to the cross.

From my theological college days onwards, I was excited by Jesus the teller of parables. Storytelling was such a powerful way of engaging people’s minds and hearts and was capable of opening up truth in a non-literal way. From Joachim Jeremias through Bernard Brandon Scott to Amy-Jill Levine, I’ve followed 20th and 21st century writing about the parables and felt constantly stimulated by Jesus teaching wisdom through story.

Of course, the twentieth century was a high point in the attempt to discover the Historical Jesus – the 'real human Jesus' underneath the gospels' different presentations. I read John Dominic Crossan, John P Meier, E P Sanders, Geza Vermes and many others. Their research presented a human Jesus deprived of his 'divine clothing' – a man wrestling with the political/religious conflicts of his day and all the more inspiring for that. This approach influenced much of my preaching.

Bringing together my love of parables and of the plain historical Jesus was a book which became a special favourite: 'Parable as Subversive Speech' by William Herzog. He applies the parables to the social inequalities and conflicts of First Century Palestine, imagining them being told to downtrodden peasants and removing most of the 'divine superstructure' the stories have traditionally been surrounded with. The stories come alive, and we can imagine Jesus as a First Century Paulo Freire, enabling the poor to understand their oppression.

The efforts to find the Historical Jesus have all proved frustrated: you just can't get completely past the New Testament's surface presentation by Christian evangelists who already believe that he is the Son of God who became human, died and rose again. But Jesus has always been seen in a multiplicity of ways, and I find I can now be glad of what was really an explosion of ideas and images that followed the experience of the resurrection, and I feel I don't need to take my pick.

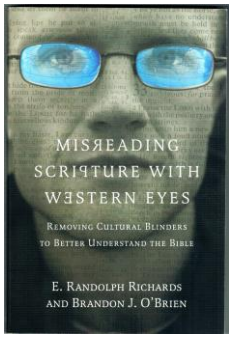
One final view which has really impressed me in the last year – the view of David Lloyd Dusenbury in his book *I Judge No-one*. He sees Jesus not so much as a political figure enmeshed in Judean political struggles, but rather as a kind of philosopher standing apart from the violence which he sees as an inevitable part of all political/religious empires – going to his death willingly but representing for ever a higher ideal and a higher reality.

***Nick Jowett***

**BOOK REVIEW: Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes.**

*Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible.*

*by* E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien (IVP, 2012)




I referenced this book in a recent sermon. I came across it as part of my theological training, and in reading it I have been impressed with the way it has encouraged me to challenge my own preconceptions, or pre-understanding, and also to help me challenge others. The cover blurb describes the book's purpose – to recognise the Western biases we bring to reading scripture. We often have a picture, reinforced by our media and cultural nativities, that Joseph and Mary travelled alone to Bethlehem, when – as the book reminds us – they were probably accompanied by a large entourage of extended family.

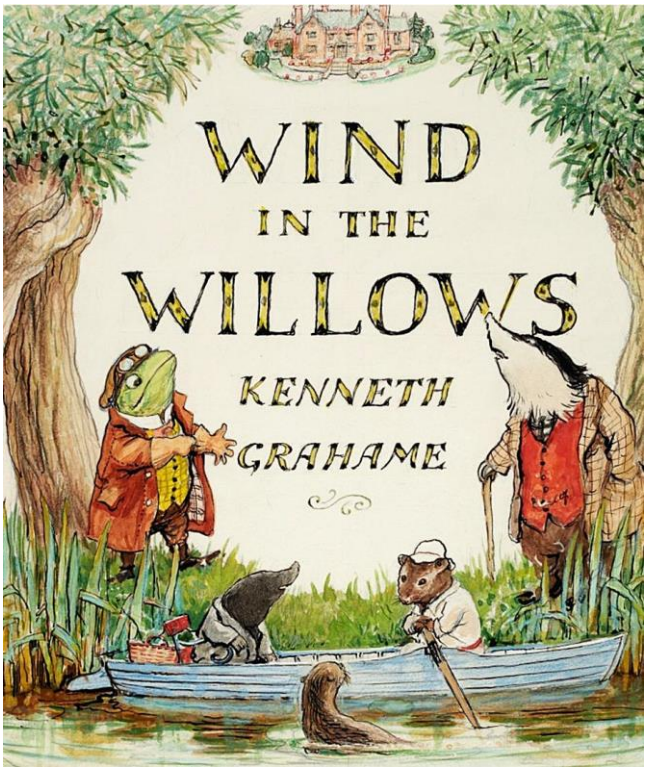
Richards and O'Brien alert us to the fact that we instinctively draw from our own cultural context to a make sense of what we are reading. One particular example they use – to illustrate how we in the West read the Bible differently from others – is the story of the Prodigal Son. Most sermons we may have heard (or delivered) over the years on this parable may have focused on the Prodigal coming to his senses at the moment when he realises he has lost everything. Yet Richards and O'Brien note that we often gloss over the reference to famine in the parable – something that non-Western readers would not do. So, if we overlook important things in the Bible, what else might we miss?

They describe nine differences between Western and non-Western cultures that we should be aware of when we interpret the Bible, grouped under three areas: cultural issues that are glaringly obvious (such as language and race/ethnicity); cultural issues that are less obvious (such as the difference between individualist and collectivist cultures, or honour and shame cultures); and cultural issues that are not obvious at all (such as virtues and vices and how they differ between cultures). What I found striking was that many of the virtues that we value in Western society – such as being efficient with our assets – are not based on scripture at all.

There are a number of examples that they use to illustrate each category, and finish the book with some advice to remove our cultural blinkers, such as recognising the value of reading the Bible with others. Overall, I found this to be a helpful book, opening our eyes sensitively to relevant issues, without creating undeserved guilt within the white Western reader.

***Jonathan Williamson***

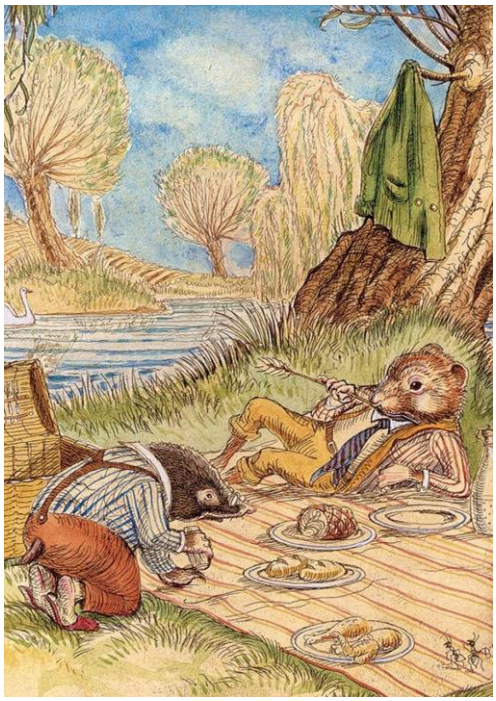
## REREADING *THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS*




I have reached the age when re-reading is revelation. I read Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* as a child in c.1960. The come-uppances of the egregious Mr Toad were fun, but I didn't warm to a whimsical, nostalgic relic. Last summer, I was stimulated to read it again by Mark Clavier, an Anglican free-spirit whose blog I follow. How much I missed first time round! The narrative is an Anglican parable. Mark Clavier puts it better than I can: 'The book communicates a theological imagination through sensibility rather than doctrine. Here, creation isn't background scenery but holy ground, where community unfolds seasonally with ritual and rhythm. Life isn't a conquest but a kind of faithful dwelling, a reverence for place, a regard for neighbourliness, and an openness to the sacred woven into the natural world'.

The riverbank is a place through which God is instinctively known. Mole is welcomed into the parish by Rat who, knowing riverine lore (theology?) lets him into the secret of living in the moment. 'Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats'. The river (Mark Clavier again) 'isn't there to be used or conquered. It's there to be known, abided with. Rat tends to the river's rhythms like a verger to liturgy: boats are kept tidy, food appears at the right moment, silence and companionship are held in balance. Mole isn't catechised – he's fed.' Hospitality is central. Mole is welcomed with a picnic. Toad ends up offering a banquet for everyone. Badger dislikes visitors but feeds them and offers beds. Rat fusses over food because its provision is an act of love.

The riverbank is stable and nourishing. This is (Clavier) ‘the Anglican imagination: not escapist or abstract, but calmly attentive to creation’s order, finding glory in the ordinary, and grace in the shape of days’. And the vision would not be complete without what threatens it – the weasels, stoats and ferrets from the Wild Wood, who overrun Toad Hall. They are sinister because they are the opposite to what the riverbank stands for. They are inhospitable vandals, they ‘break rather than bless’.



At the middle of the book is a theophany, the chapter entitled ‘The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’, and it is the one that gives the book its title. It is the Revelation in the revelation. The scene is a summer night, and Otter’s son Portly has gone missing, He can’t swim very well and one of his favourite places is by the dangerous weir. Rat and Mole go out in their boat to search for him by moonlight. Through the willows, reeds and bulrushes, they hunt. Then, Rat hears something, an intimation of something almost beyond sound: ‘“So beautiful and strange and new! Since it was to end so soon, I almost wish I had never heard it. For it has roused a longing in me that is pain, and nothing seems worthwhile but just to hear that sound once more … O Mole, the beauty of it!”’ Mole rows on, hearing nothing until it possesses him too, and he sees ‘the tears on his comrade’s cheeks, and bowed his head and understood’. Together, they make their way to an island, a transcendent space: ‘“This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me” whispers Rat in a trance. “Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him’. Looking for Portly (whom they shortly find, safe and sound), Rat and Mole experience the presence of God. Kenneth Grahame’s point, I think, is that there is an Anglican sense of revelation: something that comes within our anchored living, when we least expect it. It will transport us, if we are patient and attentive, and it will make our lives worth living.

***Mark Greengrass***

# MY REVELATION

Titian's *Tarquin and Lucrecia*

During the autumn of 1963 I was preparing for university entrance, and I was called for interview at King's College Cambridge. The interview went reasonably well as far as I recall and after it was over I had time to spare before taking the train home. I had been studying the history of art for A-level and as a rather earnest 17-year old, decided to spend the remaining time on an improving visit to the Fitzwilliam Museum.

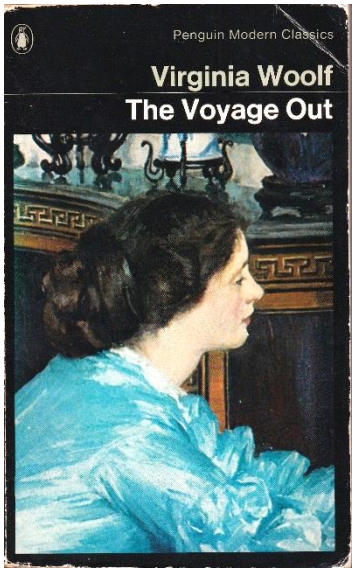
And there at the far end of a succession of galleries was a painting that literally stopped me in my tracks. I had been encouraged to study and appreciate the works of the great Venetian masters – notably Giorgione and Titian – and revelled in their use of colour to communicate nuances of character and feeling. The painting which gripped me then was one I had not seen before, Titian's Tarquin and Lucretia, which purports to show the rape of Lucretia, although the representation is in fact wholly symbolic (while Lucretia is shown naked, Tarquin is fully clothed and is improbably brandishing a dagger in his right hand). But what it does communicate is the power of male violence, the vulnerability of women and the force of unbridled aggression in a shocking way.

It is a painting that has disturbed me ever since. It is sumptuous in its colour scheme, which sets the vivid red (two different reds) of Tarquin's trousers and stockings against the sombre green of the bed curtains, and the organisation of bodies emphasises the dynamics of interaction between the two figures. But what are we to make of a painting that was commissioned by Philip II of Spain when Titian was at the height of his powers as an artist? What does it say about both artist and patron? Does it condone or glorify male violence, or does it alert us to something in human nature that cannot and should not be ignored?

It is the power of great art, not merely to please or satisfy, but to unsettle us, make us question some of the fundamentals of our existence. That Titian did – for me at least – on that memorable autumn day in 1963.

***Philip Booth***

## A REVELATION...




Aged 12 I was translated from the final term in an Australian school to the second term of a UK minor public school. There classics were paramount and I was far behind. I spent a miserable year weeping silently in the back row of the Latin class being totally unable to comprehend. Ignored by the teacher, I was given no help, and ended up repeating the year, but in the less favoured science B stream. Thus I ended up leaving school aged 19 with two poor science A levels.

Meanwhile I spent my solitary teenage years making model aircraft and reading Biggles books and those by Jules Verne, H G Wells, Ballantyne and Stevenson. One holiday our prescribed school reading was *Bleak House* which put me off Dickens for life. I remember the English master, an ex-wartime Army Captain, telling me I had a poor writing style (later in life I sold my articles to national magazines!). I was also criticised for pronouncing “lieutenant” as “loo-tenant” instead of “leff-tenant” when reading aloud, he thinking it was picked up from Hollywood films, not realising that’s how it was pronounced in Australia.

But I had a thirst for knowledge and wanted to learn, so picked up all sorts of books on our weekly family visits to Strood Library, including even Nietzsche *Thus Spake Zarathustra*! But reading Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* was a revelation. I found it a gripping description of places and characters and their inner thoughts, ending with the moving sad tragic death of the young heroine Rachel. After school I had a low level job as an office boy, then spent some months unemployed during which I did a correspondence class in A level English Literature, starting in February and gaining a grade E pass 4 months later. I took up a post as a temporary MOD clerical Officer, but the dreary tedious job drove me into being hospitalised with depression after a suicide attempt.

From there I went into an FE college, gaining an A in English Literature with distinction in the special paper and a B in Economics in a year, and thus on to do Eng Lit and Psychology at Keele University, the only one

that would accept those without O level Latin for Eng Lit. So a book can have a profound effect on a person's life.

***Michael Miller***

A 1915 review of the newly published book, *The Voyage Out.*

## NEW NOVELS.

### "THE VOYAGE OUT."

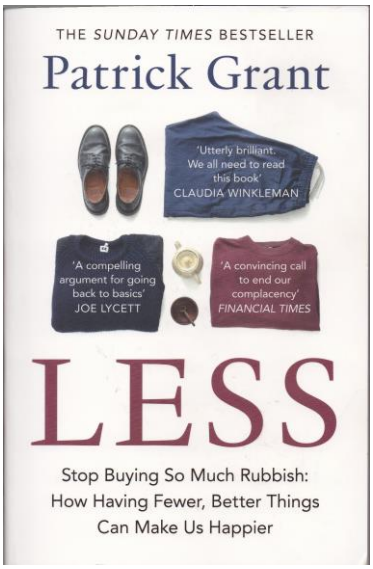
**The Voyage Out. By Virginia Woolf.** London: Duckworth and Co. Pp 458. 6s.

This is a strong and unconventional novel of a design so simple that we can imagine Mr. Henry James asking, as he did of the younger novelists generally, why a subject should be lacking. Rachel Vinrace is a girl who has been hedged by conventions is launched into a world of people who think and speak freely, and expands fearlessly among them. She loves and dies, and her brief career is half disillusion, for she has little of the easy joys of youth. Brought up in "sheltered gardens," "her mind was in the state of an intelligent man's in the reign of Queen Elizabeth," and we are shown something of her education under the influence of her friends with their floods of talk and recommendations of Ibsen, Gibben, and the rest. She has the faculty, which does not belong only to youth, of finding strangeness even in the world of familiar things, and the interest and success of this book is the penetration into certain modes of consciousness. The people are not lovable, they have not a common fund of geniality, but, though the talk may sometimes seem too consciously eccentric, they are not content with facts and habits and exteriors. They do their best to give ideas their place in the world, and most of those in this inner circle are only too ready to flout manners. Even the conversation that is reported with a satirical intention is clever, and the manner in which the able politician translates Rachel's gropings into a neat formula is good comedy. But sometimes the characters talk, or think, like lotos-eaters, and sometimes they suggest a "Dodo" of more serious intent than Mr. Benson's; their recklessness does represent some effort for freedom, some attempt to get at the essences, and not just a playing with fire. The scene shifts from shipboard to Spanish America, and there is some very good description in tune with character or circumstance. It may be a sleeping hotel or a spacious landscape, but it is related; it is not guide-book work.

Perhaps some readers will not be without the sense of redundancy, of explanation that is not always penetration, and even of a certain insolence of withdrawal from a world condemned as ponderous or meaningless. But beauty and significance come with Rachel's illness and death, and these modern lovers are justified in the depth and in the exaltation of their emotions. The phases of illness and delirium are marked with delicacy and imagination, and the changes in the man's mood show insight and sympathy. "It seemed to him as he looked back that their happiness had never been so great as his pain was now," and again, "He was alone with Rachel, and a faint reflection of the sense of relief that they used to feel when they were left alone possessed him." It is good to read, too, of a "little elderly lady.....her eyes lighting up with zeal as she imagined herself a young man in an aeroplane" — "If I was a young fellow," she said, "I should certainly qualify." And, among a thousand other things, there is St. John's jaunty manner, "which was always irritating because it made the person he talked to appear unduly clumsy and in earnest." A writer with such perceptions should be capable of great things. There is character in the book — Helen, Rachel's friend, is good if not, perhaps, a full success, — but it is difficult to give character in terms of conversation. And the events or definite projections of persons are so admirably done that we want more of them; nothing could be better in its way than the two doctors. If this be a first novel, as we believe it is, it is a very remarkable one; there is not merely promise, but accomplishment.

A.N.M. April 15, 1915

## BOOK REVIEW: *LESS* by Patrick Grant




Patrick Grant has an important lesson for us in the affluent west. In this book he shows how the rise of consumerism and the insatiable desire for new things (fostered by advertising and media promotions) creates a situation where we constantly buy cheap goods, use them for a short time and then consign them to the dustbin in order to allow us to buy something else.

In each of four topics **–** Want, Quality, Work and Less, he sets out the tenets of his thesis: e.g. in 'Want' he develops the idea that we have been trained to want more, and have become conditioned to believe that satisfying our desire to purchase more leads to happiness, whereas for him happiness comes more truly from owning less, but enjoying and cherishing things for as long as possible – repairing and reusing wherever possible. Similarly in the section headed 'Quality' he argues that if you are prepared to buy less, then you can buy better, and thus own quality items which will last.

The other two sections take these ideas further, with 'Work' covering a history of manufacturing in the UK, and the gradual change for most people from owning very little, mainly home-made or locally manufactured, to today's world where we are brain-washed into desiring and purchasing container-loads of cheap goods from overseas, leading to the demise of British manufacturing and the loss of traditional skills and satisfying jobs. Having had a varied working life himself, he intersperses the chapters with anecdotes of his experiences, which have led to his present convictions. The final section on 'Less' is a clarion call to all of us to take these ideas seriously, learning to want less, to purchase what we truly need at the best quality we can afford, to gain satisfaction from a well-made item and to enjoy it for as long as we can.

The book is a worthwhile read, although I'm sure that many at St Marks will already have reached similar views of their own accord. The writing is a bit repetitive, and it could have done with a more vigorous edit. But the message is important and one from which we can all benefit. And there is a useful appendix where companies meeting his criteria are listed, enabling you to explore some artisan businesses – in Sheffield, predictably, they seem to cluster in the cutlery trade! ***Pauline Miller***

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