

Trinity 19, Sunday of 0th Week, 6 October 2024, Pusey House.  
'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind in holiness and righteousness.'  
The Principal  
Proverbs 8,1-11, Ephesians 4:17-end, Matthew 9:1-8

***AND be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.***

Today Christ is presented to us as the one who enlightens our minds and heals our souls.

Christ is the one who enables us to see clearly and to walk freely.

What a gift – how hard it can be to see clearly, how hard it can be to know what path to take. How often we struggle not against opposition or barriers on the outside, but interior obstacles, a kind of inner paralysis. Consider all the difficult decisions which we face – what course of studies do I follow, where will I live, what job am I looking for, or all the little decisions day to day which can be a burden.

Christ is the light who enables us to see more clearly and to walk more freely.

How does this happen?

***AND be renewed in the spirit of your mind***

One of the most common forms of counselling or therapy is Cognitive Behavioural therapy. CBT invites us to see that upsetting thoughts and emotions, fear or sadness, anxiety or depression, may be caused, at least in part, by false principles which we think are true. When something upsetting happens, I may find myself thinking, 'why do bad things always happen to me', 'why do I always act like this', or some version of these. CBT invites us to look at these automatic thoughts and to discover that they are untrue. We don't just insist that things should be different because that would be more convenient. Rather, when our principles are false, we come to recognize that they are false. Indeed, we can be led to discover something of the truth which can set us free.

If even a secular approach grasps the importance of false principles, it will not surprise us to hear St Paul also exhorting us to put away confusion and false principles, *AND be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

This is divine CBT, with a higher goal, the ladder which connects heaven and earth. This Goal, is not just to know some new things, even true things, but to put on Wisdom itself, to put on the Logos and Reason of God, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not dead knowledge, but living knowledge, and because it is alive, this wisdom is fused with divine and super-abundant life, with God's goodness, God's beauty. We don't just put on wisdom, we are invited to put on wisdom and righteousness. Why does that matter? University may teach the importance of learning true things, but it may be

suggested that whatever we mean by righteousness is subjective, not a question of truth, or in any case righteousness is something to be pursued somewhere else.<sup>1</sup>

St Paul tells the new Xns of Ephesus, he tells us, that the world around us, our home culture, will give us mixed messages. We need to be bi-lingual – to speak and live in the place we find ourselves, but also to learn to recognize God’s speech or logos, God’s Word. We are seeking to tell the difference between the wisdom and goodness of God in the wisdom of the world, when they overlap, when they don’t, what leads to freedom, but and what paralyses our capacity to walk freely.

Well, how do we come to see clearly and walk more freely?

St Paul puts before us here a programme of the spiritual life in three modes: purification, illumination union. In one sense they are steps, they are also intertwined cords, three steps which we are always taking over and over and together, and at the same time we are advancing upward.

***That ye put off ... the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts .***

This is repentance, purification. St Paul invites us turn away from what we know to be out of order, corrupt in us. We began here today already – *Almighty God unto all hearts are open – all hearts, my heart, open and transparent to the penetrating Spirit of the Wisdom of God. Cleanse the thoughts of these hearts.*

We then cried with the help of the choir to the Mercy and Wisdom who first cried to us: Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy. Then we always hear divine wisdom speak to us in human words, in the words of Holy Scripture. We will make this wisdom our own in the Creed, and we join our praying and loving to divine love and divine prayer in the intercessions. In the confession, we will turn away from what is corrupt, and we will turn more resolutely to the Wisdom of God. Then, we will hear the voice of Christ in absolution: rise up and walk. He speaks not just to the man on the stretcher, but to us, in some ways stuck and unable without his word to walk in the path set before us. This is purification.

The miracle of the Gospel helps us to see how purification leads to freedom.

The man’s paralysis is a sign, it pictures the consequences of sin. He represents all of us, the people Christ came to heal and to set free. Whenever we chose against divine love, whenever we turn away from divine wisdom, we lose something of our freedom of movement. Indeed, closing our eyes to divine wisdom, choosing against divine

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<sup>1</sup> Danger of course, we give up teaching righteousness, justice may become who screams the loudest.

goodness, these things can paralyse us. I hardly need to say this, we all know it, we live it.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, we seek illumination, that we might *be renewed in the spirit of our mind*; We hunger for knowledge, lots of different kinds of knowledge. The search machine of our restless minds is never satisfied, we go from one search to another. And we don't seek bits of truth, but truth itself.<sup>3</sup>

The Word and Wisdom of God cries out to us in Proverbs chapter 8 - Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.

Receiving this instruction also means recognizing what is false and paralyzing:

*...put away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not... neither give place to the devil.*

If we find ourselves giving in to all kinds of little lies to conceal our weakness or to look good, we are diminishing our capacity to think or see.

If we find ourselves wandering over regions of the internet where we know that we should not be, we are choosing paralysis over freedom.

Sin always darkens the mind and weakens the will.<sup>4</sup> There are kinds of knowing which cannot be separated from the kind of people we are, or kind of people we are becoming.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Now imagine the man's disappointment *For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?*— Don't you see, Rabbi, I'm paralyzed? It is a great thing to heal a person. But the Wisdom of God challenges us to see that it is a greater thing to be able to heal sin. It is a great thing to enable a soldier who has lost his leg to walk again, it is a greater thing to cure the sin and enlighten the ignorance which led to the war in the first place. Each of us is invited to know that freedom from sin, being clothed in Christ and living in the peace which comes with all-embracing forgiveness, is a greater gift than healing of the body.

Our Lord addresses us this morning – that we may know the power of God – He challenge us to see when our sins is hidden in the problems which appear to have another cause We often think that if we could have more information, or more motive power of some kind, all would be well. And of course, both these things are true. But the first thing, which we always need, is to turn away from sin, to root out unlove, to seek the divine light. This is the beginning of being able to walk more freely and to see more clearly. .I risk making this trivial – miracle is a sign of the forgiveness of sins for the whole world, for all people in all places, by the dying and rising of the Son of God.

<sup>3</sup> Even if, in the modern university, knowledge is split up into so many different fields and disciplines, the name 'university' still speaks to us of an all embracing wisdom or truth in which all our searches and bits of knowledge belong together.

<sup>4</sup> Some kinds of wisdom come together with righteousness, we cannot have the one without the other.

<sup>5</sup> IN the miracle we see the power of the divine Son to set us free. But don't we also see the power of a life free from sin? We usually think that Jesus miracles express his divine power. They do, but don't they also show us something of the power and freedom of movement of a life free from sin? By the work of the Spirit, we may seek something of that freedom for ourselves.

Here let us address the problem of discouragement. In a few minutes we will say the Creed together. We may say, well, I've been saying the creeds for some time, for years. I've accepted the true principles of divine cognitive behavioural therapy. I've been trying to live the Christian life. Why do I still feel stuck? Why do I still sometimes choose the same forms of paralysis?

The great spiritual guide Walter Hilton speaks to us from the 14<sup>th</sup> century:

‘Reforming of faith may be had lightly and in a short time. The second, reforming in feeling may not be so, but through lent of time and much ghostly travail’.<sup>6</sup>

We may come to believe the principles of the creed quite quickly. Our mind and thoughts may turn easily to divine truth. But our affections, what we love, how we struggle, this must be worked out in our bodies, in our affections, how we feel. It should not surprise us that we still are attracted to the wrong things, or if our will is torn in different ways. Our faith, the principles of divine truth, the power of divine life, must be worked out in our bodies, in our histories, in our lives – this is the whole of the Christian life.

While this is happening, we carry something of the paralysis with us. Our Lord tells the man, ‘Arise, take up thy bed’. This bed which we carry describes the particular burden of the cross for us. This burden may include the pains and struggles which come with slow change. The cross for us may include the consequences of sin which are still with us, even when we have been forgiven and healed. Walter Hilton has a word of encouragement for us. He describes us, those who seek to follow ‘the bidding of reason,./ **They** strive [**We strive**] and fight all day against sins and for the getting of virtues; and sometimes they be above and sometimes beneath, as wrestlers are. These men do full well’.<sup>7</sup>

We are like Walter Hilton’s wrestler, sometimes above, sometimes beneath in our conflict, but we are still above and below held in the divine embrace of the love of God. We are in Christ, walking toward Christ.

To continue the walk, to be patient with the struggle within us, we do full well.

The third step which we take with the other two, the third cord, is union. This is the union with God and with one another for which we are made – *that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

Nothing less will satisfy. The word and wisdom of God has come to be with us, not on the outside, but to be nearer to us than we are ourselves. By the Holy Spirit, the Son of God, with the Father, dwells with us and in us as the principle of our being, our

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<sup>6</sup> Hilton in Thornton, English Spirituality, p. 179

<sup>7</sup> Hilton in Thornton, p 181.

knowing, and our willing. In the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit we put on this new person. In the Holy Communion we are invited to feed on this Divine Wisdom, to receive him, to be nourished by his true and real body. This is communion and union.

In one sense, this union lies before us at the end of our pilgrimage. In another way, also true and real, we already live united with the Word and wisdom of God. We are united to our head, and to one another now, in the body of the Church, the blessed company of all faith-filled people. We already know something of the joys of this union.

In the words of the polymath, theologian, and bishop Nicholas of Cusa:

‘Eternal wisdom is [already] tasted in everything that is capable of being tasted ... [Eternal wisdom] is the beauty in everything beautiful. [The divine wisdom Jesus Christ] is the thing longed for in every longing.’<sup>8</sup>

We are not being invited to be a better processing machine, something which could be replicated by very good artificial intelligence. Rather, this invitation to be renewed in the spirit of our minds is the same invitation given by the Lord Jesus, arise, take up thy bed, walk. We are invited to put on the new man, not just information, but to be clothed and reformed by the person of the word of God. He is the new man that each of us in invited to put on. He is the new humanity, perfected, made new in the everlasting day of the Resurrection, the day whose light brightens our worship this morning. We are invited to be renewed not just in our minds, but in holiness and righteousness. This is the third step, union, not so much a step, but a divine gift of communion.

But here, I have to point out the danger of this invitation. If we think that we can seek to be good so that we can get what we want, as it were apart from God, we are treating God as an idol. It is true that seeking the goodness of God in Christ, feeding on that goodness, will change us. Christianity is not a kind of therapy where we set out own ends. We cannot use God simply to get what we want apart from God – that would be a terrible thing, and it’s dangerous.<sup>9</sup>

Where are we going? *Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house*. In this invitation, the great interpreter of the Bible, doctor of the Church, Gregory the Great, hears a description of our destination:

‘House’ says Gregory, ‘is also used to mean the dwelling-place of the heart’, ‘the place

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, 'The Layman on Wisdom', in *The Layman on Wisdom and the Mind*, trans M. L. Führer, Dovehouse Editions, Canada, p. 27. It is particularly appropriate that at the beginning of the academic year we are being invited to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. We need to listen carefully, because the invitation is one we could misunderstand very easily. (It’s a dangerous invitation – more of that later.)

<sup>9</sup> We are not in the same situation as the paralyzed man. We have been claimed by God already, we have been washed in the waters of new birth. We have risen with Christ, We have heard, over and over again, the words of absolution and a new beginning: arise, take up thy bed and walk. We are invited to choose again what God has chosen for us already. Wisdom calls out to us again this morning.

of inner wisdom'.<sup>10</sup> *'God is the place (house) of man'*. The proper *place* or house of humanity, is 'not his place in space', our house is 'the Creator Himself. God created man that he might dwell within Himself.'

The boundless and all-satisfying love of God is our destination, it is our home. Finding our home in God is not a narrowing down of our horizons, but finding our home in expansive and embracing Wisdom of God. How wonderful.<sup>11</sup>

C S Lewis echoes Gregory:

'We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it'.<sup>12</sup>

***Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.***

Here this morning, we don't just hear the word of Christ to us, we act on those words, we live them, we practice them so that we can live them, as we go out to the tasks and promises of the week. We pick up our bed and walk. We may carry some weight of

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<sup>10</sup> 'As the house of the body is a bodily habitation', so the mind builds a kind of house by the things it desires. What we desire becomes the house or the place where we live paraphrased from the 1844 translation: 'As the house of the body is a bodily habitation, so that becomes to each separate mind "its own house," whatsoever thing it is used to inhabit in desire'. (<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book08.html>)

See also M. F. Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol iv, 192-3. This gives an excerpt from Gregory the Great, 'God Man's House', from *Morals in Job*, Book VIII, paragraphs 33-5. For the 1844 translation, see <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book08.html>

For Gregory, the paralysed man is a picture of the one who has 'lost the *place* [or the house] of his soul; for wandering in darkened ways, he has gone far from the dwelling place of the true light'. What is the house to which we are sent by the healing and restoring word of Christ?

St Ambrose of Milan: 'Thee alone I follow, Lord Jesus, Who heals my wounds. For what shall separate me from the love of God, which is in Thee? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine? I am held fast as though by nails, and fettered by the bonds of charity. Remove from me, O Lord Jesus, with Thy potent sword, the corruption of my sins. Secure me in the bonds of Thy love; cut away what is corrupt in me. Come quickly and make an end of my many, my hidden and secret afflictions. Open the wound lest the evil humour spread. With Thy new washing, cleanse in me all that is stained. Hear me, you earthly men, who in your sins bring forth drunken thoughts. I have found a Physician. He dwells in heaven, and distributes His healing on earth. He alone can heal my pains Who Himself has none. He alone Who knows what is hidden, can take away the grief of my heart, the fear of my soul: Jesus Christ. Christ is grace, Christ is life, Christ is Resurrection. Amen.'

<sup>11</sup> This is what it means to be renewed in the our minds, and this is why this renewal goes along with holiness. To dwell in God means being furnished with the Goodness and Truth which belong to God. In the end nothing else will do, nothing else will satisfy, but this House which is not only built by God, but a dwelling with God and the fulness of divine life.

<sup>12</sup> From 'Meditation in a Toolshed' C. S. Lewis. See also this quotation, following, from C S Lewis which illustrates the idea of entering into the House where God dwells, from *Mere Christianity*: 'Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.'

paralysis with us, we struggle, sometimes on top, sometime below, but we still walk in Christ and toward Christ.

The daily and weekly life of worship and study in this House is an invitation to Rise up in walk. We take the steps of purification, illumination and union over and over again. In finding our home in God, we find also that all things belong to us in a new way.

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind in holiness and righteousness. Arise, take up your bed and walk.