

Dear all,

As mentioned in my previous letter, I am now in the swing of things again, having returned from my 'staycation', including a couple of days in London, to see the Becket exhibition.

It's interesting how the word 'staycation' has entered the language – especially as a result of travel limitations. It's one of those words that is often misused. People might say something like "we're having a staycation this year – we're going to the Lake District". That's a holiday, not a 'staycation'. A 'staycation' is where you stay at home, and just relax, chill out, garden, go on days out etc. (So, on reflection, can I really call it a staycation if I spent a night away? Hmmm! Perhaps a hybridcation!)

I have always been fascinated by the character of Thomas Becket – a fascination I discover is shared by Sonia. I can still recall in primary school being set a task of writing a newspaper-type report on his death. Sadly, the exhibition ends this weekend, so if you have not seen it now, you will not have the chance. The exhibits included very little actually belonging to Becket, but quite a few items that were contemporary, written accounts of his death, pilgrim memorabilia etc. It ended with the 'end' of the story and the dissolution of the monastery and destruction of the tomb under Henry VIII.

Thomas wasn't quite the poor boy made good (as compared with Thomas Cromwell, who was). Rather, he was born into a well-to-do middle-class merchant family, and was educated in the Medieval version of public school and Oxbridge university. He gained employment under Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury, and rose rapidly, eventually being recommended to King Henry II to the position of Lord Chancellor. He became a boon companion of the King, and shared in 'merry japes', as well as being his reliable servant. On the vacancy of the Archbishopric, Henry saw the chance of getting the church under his control, and put Becket forward. Becket warned him that this would not be a good idea. The king, however, was adamant. And so, over the course of one weekend, Becket was ordained deacon, then priest, then consecrated Archbishop – rapid promotion if ever there was!



Something changed in Becket, almost overnight. He gave up his enjoyment of the good life (though I understand he retained a love of good wine!), wore a hair shirt under his robes, and challenged the king on almost every point pertaining to the freedom of the church – most particularly, over the 'benefit of the clergy', the right of clergy to be tried by church courts, not secular (which usually gave far more lenient sentences, especially in the case of capital crimes such as murder). It is a moot point what exactly King Henry said, whether the 4 knights misinterpreted, purposely or otherwise, and whether Henry really wanted him murdered. I have a hunch that he would have been quite pleased at first, until it all blew up in his face, and he had to do some

pretty serious U-turn and penitence for a king!

Did Becket himself engineer it so that there could be no other outcome? (I remember a church history lecturer commenting about the death of an early church leader who championed martyrdom... "He died in his sleep – it must have been a great blow to him!"). Was he just pig-headed and power-mad? Humility certainly wasn't one of his virtues! Was it a horrendous miscalculation? Or was he a brave and selfless champion of the church, speaking truth unto power, even unto death?

It is particularly apposite to consider this in the current context we are in. There are many issues that the church may be called to speak truth to power – climate change, Afghanistan, the plight of refugees, the use and misuse of money and personal influence...

Has the church got the right to speak truth to a secular world? What is the truth? And does the church itself speak from a position of moral authority? Discuss!

I believe it does, though from a position of humility, and out of love for all, especially the weak and disadvantaged. And we may not get hacked down by 4 errant knights, but we may be seriously burned on social media! We perhaps walk where angels fear to tread.

Sunday is the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity (Proper 16). The hymns will be 'Be thou my vision' [Be thou my vision - \(with lyrics\) - YouTube](#) and 'Soldiers of Chris, arise' [St. Ethelwald "Soldiers of Christ, Arise" - YouTube](#) (we may sing a different tune).

The readings for the service are Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18, Ephesians 6:10-20 and John 6:56-69. The Psalm is Psalm 45: 10-end.

Anglican chant: [Psalm 35 "Plead Thou My Cause, O Lord" - YouTube](#)

[Sons Of Korah - Psalm 35 CONTEND - YouTube](#)

There are so many possible anthems. Here are a few:

[Ego Sum Panis Vivus - YouTube](#) (William Byrd)

[Palestrina - Ego sum panis vivus - YouTube](#)

[John Blow, God is our hope and strength, Vox Luminis LIVE - YouTube](#)

[Maurice Duruflé - Tantum ergo Op.10 n°4, Quatre motets sur des thèmes grégoriens - YouTube](#)

And not forgetting this hymn which could reflect the New Testament reading:

[Onward Christian Soldiers \(with lyrics\) by St Andrew's Cathedral Choir - YouTube](#)

It has been condemned as too triumphalist... crusader mentality etc. It has been recast as 'Onward Christian Pilgrims'. You decide.

Don't forget to get involved in the *Resourcing Sustainable Church* conversation – have a chat with me about it if you would like more information, and, above all, please pray as we work through the process.

Finally, Nick Fawcett posted this prayer today, for all who suffer from arthritis. Similar could be said for anyone suffering chronic pain of any sort:

God of all,
hear our prayer for those who suffer from arthritis.
We think of the many people,
especially those who are older,
afflicted by osteoarthritis –

joints giving them constant pain,
bones aching,
their sleep disturbed,
mobility restricted
and happiness undermined.

Reach out to help.

Reach out to heal.

We think of those taking painkillers for their condition,
those finding temporary relief through steroid treatment,
those taking other forms of medication,
and those waiting for operations –
replacement hips, knees or other joints –
hoping and praying that the surgery
will give them a new lease of life,
freedom from their discomfort.

Reach out to help.

Reach out to heal.

We think of those suffering from rheumatoid arthritis,
many contracting the condition early in life
and seeing it develop with alarming speed,
bringing with it acute pain and often disabling damage –
hard to bear yet harder still to alleviate,
and with no sign yet of a cure on the horizon.

Reach out to help.

Reach out to heal.

We think of GPs and consultants,
seeking to help their patients in whatever way they can;
of surgeons conducting operations
to bring relief and mobility;
of families and friends striving
to offer practical and emotional support;
and, above all, of dedicated charities,
committed to supporting sufferers and helping
to fund research into new treatments,
so that this cruel disease, in its various forms,
may finally be defeated once and for all.

Reach out to help.

Reach out to heal.

Amen.



Stay safe.

Blessings and love

Mark