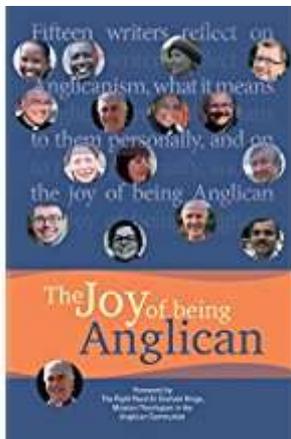


A Quiet Day at St Mary's Willingdon 20th January 2018



Bishop David Wilcox (Bishop of Dorking until 1996) invited me to lead one of their thrice-yearly Quiet Days in the beautiful village church of Willingdon just outside Eastbourne. I based it on a recently published book, 'The Joy of being Anglican' edited by Caroline Hodgson and Heather Smith, published by the Redemptorist Press.



“Two reasons for this: first, because it feels to me that our self-confidence as members of this particular church is quite eroded so that we’re left in a state of quiet desperation. Personally, I’m due to retire from full-time ministry in two years’ time and I sometimes wonder what these forty years in parish work have been all about. (There’s a very personal dimension to that which I’ll share with you – but not until the last Address!) But the second reason we might reflect together on our life as Anglicans is that this is now the middle of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. So, what do we have for the rest of the whole wider Church of God? We need to know what the good gifts we have to share are – and

then we’ll be better at recognising the gifts other churches have for us.”

In the four Addresses we thought about the joy for Anglicans that comes from celebrating special church seasons; then in laughter (we often, if not always, know not to take ourselves too seriously); with an appreciation of poetry; basing all on the Scriptures; and, lastly, through the cultivation of prayerfulness. The book itself provided other reasons for Anglicans to be joyful, but this was enough for one day.

So I concluded: “In the first Address this morning I said that these thoughts about being an Anglican, about how we can enjoy that identity and have more confidence in it than perhaps we always allow ourselves to have, I said that this had a personal dimension for me which I would share with you at the end. Well, it’s this, that after spending my entire lifetime in parish ministry I have now been accepted as a member of the Society of Friends. I’m a Quaker, and that’s where I find my spiritual basis and orientation now. It’s where I feel at home. And it wasn’t that I thought myself through to this. It’s rather that somehow over the years I became more questioning about religious belief, more open to other perspectives, yet also with a greater sense of wonder about life. Feeling oppressed by too many words and weary of the constant choreography of stylised worship – much of which seems to be quite vicarious, and on behalf of others who like to know it goes on, but are usually elsewhere themselves – so that a simple waiting on the mystery of life in silence came to feel most authentic to me. And then I realised that a Quaker is pretty much what I had become. I’m still continuing in Anglican ordained ministry, and I don’t feel the need to disown all that has been my life. Rather, I feel that Anglican faith and practice is very much an expressed faith (outwardly and in a material way, as in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, water, oil, laying on of hands), expressed and explicit, while the Quaker way is that of a practical opening (to

the fullest of reality we can know), quite simply, without outward expression but direct, unmediated and implicit. And in my heart of hearts I feel called to a deep integration of Quaker and Anglican spirituality honouring the integrity of each. Ultimately, surely, what matters is not the claiming of 'Quaker' as an identity, Anglican, and certainly not for me 'Quanglican', but being open to the mystery of God, in harmony with the ecology of the world, striving for peace and justice, and having time for other persons.

Explicit and implicit ways of faith, I feel I can move between the two, and for me it's really refreshing now to be re-envisaging in Quaker terms what is expected of me as a priest in our Anglo Catholic parish. So I've found how the Daily Office, morning and evening, can now be a marvellous steadying framework for a few moments' stillness and mindfulness. That it can be a connection with the hour's silent Meeting for Worship with my fellow Quakers (whenever that's possible) – and that Meeting for Worship, gathered in silence as together we wait on the spirit, and speak when moved to do so, that this is Holy Communion. Like one contribution in our *Quaker Faith & Practice* collection of wisdom puts it:

27.41 We would assert that the validity of worship lies not in its form but in its power, and a form of worship sincerely dependent on God, but not necessarily including the words and actions usually recognised as eucharistic, may equally serve as a channel for this power and grace. We interpret the words and actions of Jesus near the end of his life as an invitation to recall and re-enact the self-giving nature of God's love at every meal and every meeting with others, and to allow our own lives to be broken open and poured out for the life of the world. *London Yearly Meeting, 1986*

... Talking at lunchtime with some of you – about the sorry apparently diminished state of our church life, and admitting that we just really don't know what to do for the best – did remind me of the review of another book I read recently that said one positive feature of Anglican church life is its sheer resilience in hanging on as a presence in local places despite everything. And despite the way the world is there's so much to enjoy in our life together in the Church of England – as the contributors to this book remind us: from colourful seasons in which to ride the rhythms of life; poetry and laughter to help us keep perspective and balance; reliance on Scripture to listen for God, and with open minds as well as hearts; and a valuing of various ways to pray so as to wonder at the presence and activity of God. Finding joys to restore our confidence when our church life feels somewhat insecure, and which are themselves resilient, so much the more when we open up to other parts of the whole spiritual movement we all share simply as human beings. Thank God we can have that awareness!