

Thought for the Week: "Ecclesiasticus

43:11-26 - a way to live life."

¹¹Look at the rainbow, and praise Him who made it; it is exceedingly beautiful in its brightness.
¹²It encircles the sky with its glorious arc; the hands of the Most High have stretched it out.
¹³By His command He sends the driving snow and speeds the lightnings of His judgement.
¹⁴Therefore the storehouses are opened, and the clouds fly out like birds.
¹⁵In His majesty He gives the clouds their strength, and the hailstones are broken in pieces.
^{17a}The voice of His thunder rebukes the earth;
¹⁶when He appears, the mountains shake.
At His will the south wind blows;
^{17b}so do the storm from the north and the whirlwind. He scatters the snow like birds flying down, and its descent is like locusts alighting.
¹⁸The eye is dazzled by the beauty of its whiteness, and the mind is amazed as it falls.
¹⁹He pours frost over the earth like salt, and icicles form like pointed thorns.
²⁰The cold north wind blows, and ice freezes on the water; it settles on every pool of water, and the water puts it on like a breastplate.
²¹He consumes the mountains and burns up the wilderness, and withers the tender grass like fire.
²²A mist quickly heals all things; the falling dew gives refreshment from the heat.
²³By His plan He stilled the deep and planted islands in it.
²⁴Those who sail the sea tell of its dangers, and we marvel at what we hear.
²⁵In it are strange and marvellous creatures, all kinds of living things, and huge sea-monsters.
²⁶Because of Him each of His messengers succeeds, and by His Word all things hold together.

Many, the world over, will have turned to watch or hear the funeral service of Prince Philip yesterday (Saturday 17th Apr). During a very moving service, full of dignity as well as solemnity, one reading stood out for many people and captured their imaginations, a reading from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, read by the Dean of Windsor, David Conner (printed out in the NRSV translation above), and chosen by Prince Philip himself, like so much of the rest of the service. The Book of Ecclesiasticus forms part of the Apocrypha, that is works of scripture that do not form part of the canonical Bible, however Ecclesiasticus is included in the Roman Catholic tradition.



In the context of Prince Philip's life, the choice of the reading from Ecclesiasticus speaks about his love of creation, its power and force, and many of the closing lines (verse 24 following) speak also about a life at sea where, due no doubt to the greater vulnerability, creation takes on an almost "larger than life" character. Talk to any sailor - naval, merchant, RNLI, or recreational, at a dinner table or down the pub and tales of "the weather encountered while at sea" take up much of the conversation. There is a closeness and relationship between those who sail on the sea and the weather. You know, quite literally, your life and safety can depend on it. The author of the reading, writing some 2200 years ago, captures this extremely well and goes further, to attribute all the force of the weather, both good and ill, on land as well as sea, to God the Creator, "by His Word," he says, "all things hold together (Ecclesiasticus 43:26).

If we take this reading, and the picture it therefore creates, and apply it as a metaphor to life and to faith, there are insights worth pondering. The first is, "you have to be willing to be 'in' it, to truly understand and to grow."

We can watch many programmes on our television screens about creation, David Attenborough's magnificent programmes, "Country File," and even watch many sailing videos (yes, there are a considerable number of self-made documentaries on the internet these days – a particularly good series, in my view, is by Patrick Laine, a retired French fighter pilot who sails solo between the Azores and up as far as around Iceland. He is based out of La Rochelle). But, however many of these programmes we watch, and however good they are, and many are extremely good, they are not the same as putting our own individual 'foot out of the door' so to speak, and experience nature at first hand for ourselves. It may seem a very 'domesticated' short walk, in comparison to the adventures of those mentioned above, simply 'round the block' or to venture out into the 'back garden' but, whatever the weather, come rain come shine, cold or hot, still or blowing a gale, there is nothing like it being immersed in it – it is engaged with and valued first-hand, by experience.

The same is eminently true with faith. We can read, know, and listen to sermons online 'til we become "armchair 'experts,'" both with regard to Church and to faith, but it is not until we willingly venture out of our metaphorical "front doors" for ourselves in terms of prayer and in terms of immersing ourselves in seeking to build a 'relationship' with our God that we will discover what it means to also feel "His touch upon our face," just like feeling the "touch" of the weather.

Our 'journeys' of faith may not be as adventurous as some, but it is a most wonderful and incredible thing that God wishes to have such a meaningful relationship, one on one, in the first person, with every living person and the whole of His creation, whether we be Prince or pauper.

But, and this is where the "Landrover" comes in, we need to be willing to let go of our comfort zones and even our safety, and be willing to get ourselves 'out there.' This is a second insight, and one that is particularly a challenge for twentieth and twenty first century Western Christianity.

I don't know which car you might 'picture' in your mind if I were to ask you first to describe the Church, and second to describe the car you thought would best enable your personal faith journey? Some may archetypally choose a Morris Minor, others a car of comfort – BMW, Aston Martin, or even a sports car. Few, I would suggest would immediately turn to the good old, near "bullet proof" Landrover. But, even amongst 4x4 enthusiasts, the Landrover has stood the test of time, as it has amongst farmers and 'country' people alike. It can withstand a battering, it's able to cope with many different types of terrain and all weathers, it keeps going almost no matter what and, to those who have grown to become familiar with them, there is something tremendously endearing, such that Landrovers, these days, are becoming quite 'collector's items' – hence perhaps why Prince Philip chose a modified military green Landrover to carry his coffin to the Church yesterday amongst all the pomp and dignity that such an occasion offered.

What would a "Landrover" description of faith, as a mode of spiritual 'transport,' look like, both individually and as a community, both as a people of today and of the future?

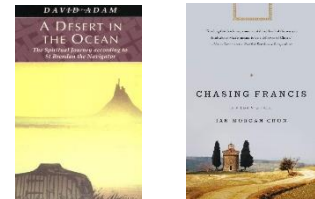
This question may not be as absurd as it first sounds. A faith that is able to cope with the disappointments as well as the ‘successes’ of life, community and prayer, a faith that can traverse many genres and many ‘terrains’ and be willing to keep going no matter what whatever the ‘weather.’ A faith that has a rugged beauty about it, and perhaps, most importantly of all, a faith that becomes a ‘familiar’ friend because of the many explorations, scrapes, and adventures it has shared with you and brought us through as a Church.

Out, in the ‘country’ a ‘Landrover’ faith may just be the best possible choice if we were trying to think what would best equip us to journey with a God who perhaps was much more like Ecclesiasticus ch 43 than we at first would like to conceive.

Maybe, at this point, it would be good to read again Ecclesiasticus ch43, and if you do so, maybe just take a moment to allow God to show you just the first steps, the first insights of what an adventure both of life and faith like this might look like.

Have a good week.

Matt Thomson



P.S. If you would something stirring within you that you would like to engage in an ‘adventure’ of faith in this sort of vein, you are in good company. As well as s many of the great characters of Scripture, there is also the whole Celtic tradition, and in amongst so many books about Celtic faith and spirituality, perhaps, in this regard, a book to recommend is David Adam’s “Desert in the Ocean” – the story of St Brendan the Navigator (from the 8th cent). Second, would be the great Francis of Assisi, a really good “way-in” book would be “Chasing Francis” by Iain Cron – the story of one person’s journey away from comfort and security to a whole new understanding and meeting with God. And there are many more.

‘Physical’ Church worship will begin again as from Sunday 25th April:

Following a meeting of the Joint Leadership Team on Wednesday, both Church Councils have decided that they wish to begin “physical” worship again, alongside and integrated with “online” worship, in what we call **“Hybrid Church,”** as from **Sunday 25th April.**



The service on the 25th will be in Congresbury, and then it will alternate, week by week, with Banwell, as it did before. Those from each community, and those who have joined during this time “online” are very welcome to attend either ‘physical’ Church for worship subject to all the previous COVID rules:

- Everyone must wear a Facemask, sanitise their hands, and be willing to undertake “test and trace.”
- People will need to be willing to sit in their ‘bubbles,’ up to a maximum of six in a bubble, and to keep a two-metre distance from other bubbles.
- Sadly, at present there still cannot be any singing by the congregation when we are in the Church building.
- Communion is taken in the form of “bread only.”
- Obviously, if you are aware of having been in contact with a case of COVID, or are showing any symptoms, please refrain from physically attending Church and seek medical attention if needed.
- Finally, after the service, we kindly ask people to leave promptly in your bubbles to keep social interaction to a minimum.

The Wardens and others are very aware that ‘returning’ to ‘physical’ Church will be a great blessing for some, and of considerable concern for others. It is simply there as part of our offering as a Church community – we will continue with “online Church” as an integrated aspect to our physical worship, and we will continue with Church@Home link groups, Pew News and the offer of Home Communion which is open and available to all.

To find out more about any of these or to discuss any concerns please give me a ring or speak to one of the Wardens in either Church.

Matt Thomson.

Home Communion:

Just to say, although we visited many people over the Easter period with a very simple Home Communion (often on the doorstep, and in the form of bread only) we are conscious that there may well be others out there for whom this may be either something that would be a good ‘bridge’ and ‘way in’ to physical Church either for the first time or for the first time in a long time.



If you would like to discuss this further or would like to arrange for a Home Communion, then please give either myself or Lisa Stannard a ring (Lisa kindly arranges all the visits).

Matt Thomson 07970 140 064

Lisa Stannard (New Creation Mobile) 07983 2001054, or New Creation Church Office 01934 833126 – both numbers have answer machines and we will get back to you.

I, or a colleague, would then physically visit you, respecting all appropriate COVID guidelines, and be flexible enough to be guided by what most helps you and enables you to feel it is a special time and one in which you feel safe.

Matt Thomson

Discipleship and Journeying with God:

The BIG NEWS is that the next season (Season Two) of “The Chosen” was released on Easter Day.

The worldwide ‘crowdfunded’ project has now reached over 125 million people with episodes 2 and 3 of Season Two now released.



If you would like to watch “The Chosen” in your own time it can be obtained for free, either via YouTube (simply type in “The Chosen”) or via an App, which can be downloaded to your Smartphone or Tablet.

And, if you would like to join a “Home Group” that will be looking at the end of Series One and then Series Two, there is a group that meets online on a Monday evening.

The Group will begin again THIS Monday evening (Monday 19th April at 7.30pm)

PLEASE contact Kirsty Bowles (Lay Pioneer Minister) email:

kirsty.bowles@newcreationchurches.org.uk or **07871 513151** to get the code for the Zoom meeting to join in (needed for Safeguarding purposes).

Matt Thomson