

preferred Maclaren to Spurgeon because "He thinks more and better."

When Maclaren died he left a legacy of books which are still treasured. When Spurgeon died he left books too. In addition he left 198 churches he had planted, a theological college sending preachers all over the world, children's orphanages - all still active today. Spurgeon's vision and involvement spilled out through his preaching to make a lasting difference. Which do you think is the better preaching?

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LIVING WITH LIMINALITY

Tim Marks

This article is a sermon preached at a gathering of the Clergy Leadership Institute at Canterbury Cathedral.

I want to locate this sermon in times of confusion and uncertainty. I want to stand with you in this building which at various times has known peace and violence and faith and uselessness. I want to stand in this time when pressures to succeed are overwhelming, when the thoughtful person seems to stand on Dover Beach watching the long, melancholy withdrawing roar of the power of the religious institution to protect, encourage and resource.

Some years ago I was introduced as a counsellor to the term 'liminality' - not a word I had used before. It means a place on the margins or between two realities. The place between the tidal reach is a liminal place. Last July we, the clergy leadership group, walked barefoot across the sands and mud to Lindisfarne and stood there in the midst of the empty wasteland - the mountains one way and the sea the other, and all around the lonely cries of gull and curlew. A liminal, transitional space we occupied as modern pilgrims. Prayer and worship are liminal spaces, transitional spaces, often uncomfortable, sometimes wonderful.

Listening for God in the liminal space, the moment between thought and action is something we all have to get used to.

I have been drawn to two verses of scripture and I want to preach the gospel to you from them: "God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of love and of power and of a sound mind". (2 Tim 1.7) "I keep asking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...that you may know him better ... and the incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty power which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead". (Eph 1.16-20)

When we stand in the place of confusion and doubt and uncertainty, it is always a liminal place, a transitional spot, a place we will move on from, because of certain spiritual givens. There is a new form of overarching therapy which I suspect will become popular, called 'Human Givens'. It suggests that, if there are certain components in our lives as individuals and as a community, then we are constituted to both survive the difficulties of life and to thrive in life's joys. I want to take the idea a bit further.

Spiritual Givens

God is not and has not given us a spirit of timidity. We may be scared stiff, we may feel the challenge is more than we can cope with, but that is never the end of the story. Faith comes into its own, it rises to the occasion in liminal spaces. Let me tell you two stories.

I only had one parish ministry. I came to six villages in Cambridgeshire which were like dysfunctional families - internal feuding and an isolationism that would have been more at home with the Particular Baptists. I was despairing of making sense of it and desperately wanted to escape. I was to stay five, in the end, very productive years. A good number of people came to faith and we started a missionary congregation in addition to the parish churches. In the darkest moment, I was given a booklet by Parker Palmer. The keynote of the booklet was an incident when Palmer, an American Quaker educationalist, was being lowered over a cliff as a part of a leadership training exercise. The cliff was an overhang. Parker panicked and scrabbled and clung to the rope in bewilderment. He tried to climb back up. The instructor leaned over the cliff and yelled down to him. "Parker, if you can't get out

of it, get into it". Not a spirit of timidity then. If you can't get out of it, get into it.

The other occasion that comes to mind is a day's training some years ago run by Henry Morgan for spiritual directors. He placed about 50 postcards on the floor and we were asked to pick one up that made the most sense of our spiritual journey. Then through a series of questions, we came to the final and crucial one: "Of all the things God has said to you over the last five years, what is the sum of it? Could it be placed in a sentence?" About 85% of us said, in a variety of ways, "Don't be afraid." Not a spirit of timidity.

The place of confusion and uncertainty, of doubt and terror is a place of grace. We have to own it, before it can become that. We have to stand within the fear and anger and despair and hope, the intolerable pressures of so many for us the religious professionals to make it right again. We have to face the crushing responsibilities without the power to change things. This is where the psalmist and the prophets locate themselves: in emotional reality. Then they claim it as a place of grace, a transitional space, from which we move because we are not given a spirit of timidity.

A spirit of love.

I watched a film about the work of Benjamin Zander, the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra. He conducts with passion and fire and also teaches leadership skills. There was a section in which we saw him giving impromptu master classes to the English Youth Orchestra. The camera caught a small boy coming from the hall, clutching a violin. The child's face was shining. "What was it like?", asked the commentator. "He's wonderful, amazing", said the child. "And what makes him so good?" "He makes you believe you could do anything".

Not a spirit of timidity. I immediately grew an ambition for us all, for bishops and boards of trustees and clergy teams. When you are inspected by something like Investors in People and your team is praised to the skies and the inspector says, "Why are they so good?", the reply would be, "Because they make us believe we could do anything".

Shackleton, the explorer, had that gift. He inspired his men to outstanding feats of heroism and endurance because he believed in them, he cared about them, and he loved them. Not a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of love.

The Wesley brothers found that love and turned from controlling, arrogant and fearful clerics to preachers who became the nation's door openers to a different dimension. In the midst of the massive failure of the religious institution which had capitulated to the age of reason, they found a spirituality which transformed them. Charles Wesley spoke of his experience being like Jacob wrestling the angel in the dark by the brook.

'Tis, ' tis love thou died for me,
I hear thy whisper in my heart,
The morning breaks,
The shadows flee,
Pure universal love thou art.
To me, to all, thy mercies move,
Thy nature and thy name is love.

The love of God, a graced moment in a time of darkness and confusion. A spiritual given. Not a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of love.

We are being given a spirit of power by which I take it that Paul meant something like a moral indignation. The power to change things often comes from an inner fire which says things must be different. This comes from a change in the mental map. Stephen Covey says that for incremental change you must address yourself to attitudes and behaviours, but for quantum change you need a different world view. The power to see things differently.

Sometimes it is that recognition that makes the difference; the recognition that someone's plight has touched us, that we have to do something, that there is something to be done. I had a client with whom I worked for many months and she made some recovery from depression. She cried out on one occasion: "I'm not depressed, I'm lost. I don't know who I am". Sometimes it is a cry of heart-felt pain or a colossal disaster that helps us find the point of action that will make all the difference.

Perhaps that means a readjustment in our sense of who it is that is calling to this exposure of ministry. My mother was an admirer of Amy Carmichael, a missionary of the early part of the last century. In one of her devotional books, she wrote this couplet:
"Christ the Son of God hath sent me through the midnight lands,
Mine the mighty ordination of the nail pierced hands.
And not with a spirit of timidity, but with a spirit of power.

Finally, we are being given a sound mind, which Paul may think of as rationality, intelligence, shrewdness, wisdom. Sloppy thinking, sentimentality and mindless optimism are not gifts of the spirit. They are mental laziness. What is given to us in this transitional space is actuality, a long view which may in the end be tragic.

So far we have heard much about the warm heart, but this gift is about the cool head and it comes last of all. For if we had not the love which will not let us go and the moral indignation to change things, then reason alone might make us quail at the task that lies before us. But we are given intelligence as a precious gift, a loving gift to be used like a powerful computer, an organizer, the means to be clear about what might be done, what the cost could be.

Rudyard Kipling wrote of this gift when he said:

I have six honest serving men,
They taught me all I knew.
Their names are why and what and when
And where and how and who.

The spirit that can organize and mobilize and find a clear direction is a precious gift of God.

In this transitional space, this liminal space, these confused and difficult times, we find grace to help us in our time of need. For God is not ever giving us a spirit of timidity, but of love and of power and of a sound mind. It is a spiritual given. It is the gospel of Christ.

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JOB SPECIFICATION FOR A SENIOR MINISTER

Paul Beasley-Murray

At the beginning of this year, I found on my desk a letter for me to sign. Addressed to my leadership team, it had been written by one of my deacons. It read as follows:

“My new year resolutions are as follows: