

# The Preacher



**THE GREATEST  
VISUAL AID IS.....  
YOU!**



## Editorial

A particularly prescient little girl once announced to her mother that she would like my job because it meant that she could 'stand at the front of church and talk a lot'. Presumably I had done something to give her that impression, although I'm sure the same could not be said of you! We are not compulsive and undisciplined speakers, but rather our words are measured out like precious grams of gold on an assayer's scales – neither too many nor too few. Since speech itself is a gift of God, we do not wish to take it for granted. That, at least, is the way we would like to *think* of our preaching. The trouble is, all too often, we take a grape-shot approach from the pulpit – spraying our pellets of shot far and wide in the hopes that one of them will hit something.

for preaching and the centre of gravity in our readings of Scripture. There are some interesting insights from Palmer Becker here about the Anabaptist tradition. Early Anabaptists often worked alongside their congregation during the week, and chose their topics accordingly. Not only that, but their view of God both in and beyond scripture affected their reading of the Bible. At the other end there are questions about the tone and stance of our delivery. Margaret Withers sounds a timely reminder about the value of occasional services and urges us to do our homework before the visitors come through the door. Every sermon begins in the heart, progresses through the knees into the mind, and then finds its way through ears to heart once again.

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Every preacher in every denomination occasionally has an 'off-day', where the sermon falls far short of their expectations or those of the congregation. However, when this happens and our only response is to shrug our shoulders and laugh it off, something vital has been lost. After all, the Apostle Paul sets gospel preachers on a footing with the great prophets of old as those who 'bring good news' (Romans 10 v.15).

If our preaching is intended to be an agent of fundamental change, then a rigorous discipline must be applied to every aspect of it – from topic selection and background reading through to gesture and microphone technique. No stone should be left unturned under which the creepy-crawlies of sloppy practice can find a hiding place. Some of these will be 'backstage', rather than 'front-of-house', where the congregation can find them – but they must still be rooted out. This is one of the reasons why the College of Preachers, and *The Preacher*, exist – to promote excellence and urge us on in its pursuit.

In the articles which follow you will find numerous probing questions to help with that pursuit. At one end of the scale there are questions about how we select our topics

Our new Chair, Bishop Stephen Cottrell sets out his stall with the kind of mischievous provocation which makes all his writing such a delight. He reminds us that the 'microphone ensures that people can hear you, but not that they will listen' for starters! He goes on to say that the preacher is the sermon's greatest visual aid and that 'length is irrelevant'. For more of these gems, you will have to read on.

In one sense, communication is getting easier with each passing day. The streamlining of technology means that we can accurately communicate more information over longer distances for less money than we have ever done before. However, more communication is not necessarily better communication. Preachers, as crafters and deliverers of words to a live audience, need to set the standard here. We need to demonstrate quality and depth in a world where the value of communication is often measured by quantity and speed. People should be looking to us to see what real communication is all about.

Can they do so, I wonder? Or do they gaze at us, like the little girl above, and simply wonder why we talk a lot?

**Richard Littledale**

**The College of Preachers exists to promote good preaching, and to support preachers, ordained and lay, in their calling to give voice to the Word.**

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## Preaching Seminar: reflective practice



**By Ian Paul**

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**Every time I embark on teaching about preaching, I am very conscious that it is not something that can be learnt overnight.**

Having been speaking and preaching for 30 years, I am still learning new things, if not every week, certainly most months. I say this to my students not to discourage, but to encourage them: 'If you feel at the end of this course you still don't know everything about preaching, that is fine. Neither do I!'

But this raises an important question about what we are trying to do in teaching preaching. My focus is threefold. Firstly, I want students to think through a theology of preaching – and in particular, why preach at all. I am curious that lots of courses on preaching seem to jump over this, and focus on practical issues straight away. But thinking through why we are doing this unlocks many keys to what we are doing and how we go about it. Secondly, I do want to focus on practical issues and the development of skills. Thirdly, I always want to address issues of reflective practice. I want students to adopt habits of thinking, preparation and reflection which will enable them to grow into excellent preachers over the coming years.

To encourage this, at St John's we assess students on their preaching in a particular context, then on their reflection on that experience of preaching, and do this under five headings – arising from the conviction that the central task of preaching is to close the gap between the word of Scripture and the world of the hearers, in order that God might speak afresh through what we, the preachers, say. (Incidentally, I believe that this is true of all 'preaching', that is, all proclamation in any form of the good news of what God has done in Christ, not just the formal kind from a pulpit on a Sunday). In encouraging such reflection, I also share

my own reflection on my own preaching, so students can see this kind of process modelled. Here is the text of a sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:29-34 that I preached recently as part of a series on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. This is followed by an account of the preparation and evaluation of the sermon.

### Sermon on 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

What do you hope for? In a time of election, we ask the question: what do we hope for our nation? And for *[the parents of the child being baptised]* what do you hope for young *Joshua*?

On the radio this week someone commented: 'George Clooney is the perfect human being. He is kind, and generous, and forgiving – he is everything you would ever want to be – and he is good looking too!' We look to celebrities, footballers, pop stars... because we have this nagging question, what do we hope for for our lives?

In this letter, Paul has been asking a whole range of questions about life. Now he draws it all together and says that the key that unlocks all these is one thing: Jesus' resurrection. Paul focuses on three key questions.

### Purpose

The first question is the question of **purpose**. 'If the dead are not raised, why are people baptised for them?' At first this is a puzzling comment. But the most likely explanation is that it means 'those who are baptised *for the sake of the dead*', those who have seen Christians die, and have come to faith themselves and been baptised. They have seen in others the new purpose that the risen Jesus has given, a purpose that even transcends death.

I recently attended the memorial service for the mother of a good friend of mine, and there was a great crowd at the service, and testimony after testimony of the sense of purpose she had had in her life, both in her living and in her dying.

Paul himself lived with this extraordinary sense of purpose, one that came in his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus Road, as pure gift. I found fresh purpose too, when I discovered the risen Jesus through seeing a sense of purpose in other Christians. And Jesus himself had this extraordinary sense of purpose about what he was called to do. Faced with the cult of celebrity, when the disciples told him 'Everyone is looking for you – they want your autograph (or the equivalent!)' he is able to turn away, say no, and continue to walk the path God has set before him.

### Courage

The second is the question of **courage**. 'We face death every day.' Paul was a man of tremendous courage – he was beaten with rods, stoned to death, and had to escape out of a window in a city wall from people who were chasing him to kill him. Most of us don't face life-threatening danger – though we are fascinated by people who do. On TV yesterday, a soldier who had been injured said: 'I know the dangers, but I cannot wait to get back to Afghanistan.' In a programme about the siege of the Iranian embassy of 1980, one of the hostages who survived said: 'Everyone should have the chance, once in their life, to have their courage tested. I did, and I failed.'

Most of us won't face such situations – but we need courage to live our lives day-by-day: courage to do the honest thing in the workplace; courage to say the right thing when it isn't going to be popular; or the

courage simply to face any situation not of our choosing.

Jesus faced his own death courageously. In Gethsemane, every fibre of his being recoils from what he is going to suffer – and yet ‘not my will, but yours be done.’ And this was just a climax of a life-time of courage. And he makes that courage available to us.

### Integrity

Thirdly, Paul points to the question of **integrity**. ‘Don’t be deceived: bad company corrupts good character.’ We have teenagers in our house so we know all about peer pressure. The challenge for them every day is: am I going to be true to myself, or am I going to be pressed into being something else by the things that those around me expect.

The challenge for us is: Are we going to show the same face in public as in private? When Gordon Brown met Gillian Duffy, and he said one thing to her face, and in the car (with the microphone on) something quite different.

Jesus teaches that it is not the things on the outside that count – what other people see of you – but all the things on inside that matter, the things that only God sees, most of the time – though they often come out under pressure.

### Resurrection power

The great news is that the resurrection life of Jesus can form these things in us – give a sense of **purpose**, give us **courage**, give us **integrity**, so we can become the person God wants us to be. That’s what those first disciples found at the tomb. The young man, John, outrunning Peter, discovered purpose that endured to the end of his life. Mary, broken, weeping at the tomb, becomes a courageous messenger of good news. And Peter, who said one thing to Jesus, and quite another in the courtyard, was restored to an integrity of life.

So perhaps George Clooney is not the person we should look to, but rather Andrea Jaeger. She was, in the 1980s, the most talented tennis player of her generation. She earned millions of dollars in prize money, and reached number two in the world. After an

injury she reflected on her life, turned her back on tennis, and is now a Dominican nun.

When asked: ‘What do you want to be remembered for?’ she answered: ‘Why would I want to be remembered?’ She had discovered that resurrection life of Jesus, and in it discovered a profound sense of purpose. She had found the courage to give away everything she had. And she had found the integrity to say: ‘Look, it is not about me, it is about enjoying God and loving others.’

This resurrection life transformed John, Peter and Mary. It transformed Andrea Jaeger. It can transform us again today.

## Preparation and evaluation of the sermon

### Use of the Bible

My initial reading highlighted three issues in this short passage, introduced by two questions and an imperative: ‘Why are they baptised?’ (v29), ‘Why are we in danger?’ (v30) and ‘Sober up!’ (v34 – this idea as an imperative is clear in the Greek text, though less clear in some English translations). The three things seem relatively unrelated, but suggest three distinct areas of application.

The chapter can be divided into three main sections of *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* (as set out by Ron Boyd Macmillan in *Explosive Preaching*), or more finely, according to the four Latin rhetorical categories (Anthony Thiselton’s NIGTC *First Epistle to the Corinthians*).

I was also struck by the way that this chapter forms an integrating climax to the whole letter (Thiselton citing Barth) and that for Paul, resurrection life is sheer gift (Thiselton citing Moltmann). I was also aware of the climax of the chapter (all things unified in Christ) as a unifying climax to the letter, since unity (in diversity) is a repeated theme.

The ‘baptism for the dead’ has been very controversial and obscure, but I was convinced by Thiselton that it is ‘for the sake of’ the dead, that is, out of conviction arising from seeing Christians die with purpose and assurance in the light of the resurrection.’

All three issues appeared to be alluded to by Paul in very brief terms, and it seemed natural to fill these in from elsewhere in Paul, where he picks up on these themes in similar terms. For example, on the second point, his dangers and troubles are amplified in several parts of 2 Corinthians, and the language about ceasing to sin has echoes in Romans, especially in chapter six.

I was convinced by Thiselton’s exposition of ‘bad company’ (v33) as ‘the wrong in-groups’, connecting it with the idea of peer pressure, and hence the issue of integrity. Thiselton also connects this appeal with the language of Jesus’ teaching in Mark 7 about hypocrisy and integrity.

Throughout thinking, I was conscious of the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus to the life of the Church. I noted a quotation from Prior: ‘When Jesus was raised from the dead the Church was raised from the dead.’

### Context

St Nic’s is a city-centre church with a largely eclectic congregation. It has a significant history as a church with a teaching ministry, although it has had a more chequered time over the last 15 years, prior to the appointment of the current rector three years ago, when attendance started to grow again. The sermon was preached for two services: the 9.00 am which has a more traditional and largely older congregation; and the 10.30 am which is more informal and geared towards families. The context at 10.30 was going to be complex, since not only was it a service of Holy Communion, but included an infant baptism, with a number of non-churched families and visitors attending.

Because of this, at the 10.30 particularly, I wanted to make clear the link between baptism and hope. I also wanted to include an apologetic for Scripture – I wanted to handle the difficult elements in the text so as to make clear that it relates to contemporary issues. Alongside this, I did not want to underplay the significance of the text for those who were already Christians.

In line with our preaching course, I wanted to have a ‘theocentric’ rather than ‘anthropocentric’ focus see (Sidney

Greidanus in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* – concentrating on what God has done for us, more than on what we need to do, with our action simply a response to God's grace.

Because of all these factors, it felt important to start with a focus on life's questions, to which Scripture offers convincing answers. The timing of the sermon was tested at 9.00 am and shaped considerations for my delivery at the second service at 10.30.

### Illustrations

Illustrations form an important bridge in connecting contemporary experience with issues the text addresses. Rather than develop a 'bank' of illustrations, my preferred approach is to be aware of the issues I want to speak to early, and then look for illustrations current at the time of preaching. I started with the example of George Clooney, described in a radio broadcast earlier that week as an ideal of human living, and related that to our desire for personal maturity and cultural ideals within the context of celebrity culture.

I had attended the memorial service for the mother of a friend and former colleague recently, and this provided a personal experience to draw on.

Illustrations about courage, highlighting our fascination with the subject: one from television the previous day; the other, from memory, about a man whose courage had been tested and found wanting in the famous siege of the Iranian embassy in London. I also mentioned the courage of a colleague looking after her terminally ill mother, without having thought of this in the preparation. This range of examples suggested different ways in which the issue of facing life with courage might 'bite' for different individuals.

I include the example of Gordon Brown's encounter with Gillian Duffy (when he left his microphone on and unwittingly broadcast what he really thought of her), since it was arguably the dominant news story of the week, and the structure of the story (what is private being made public) has strong structural affinities with several of Jesus' teachings on the subject of integrity.

The story of Andrea Jaeger, a top professional tennis player who became a nun, is one I have thought about several times, but not used previously. When asked in an interview what she would like to be remembered for, she replied 'Why would I need to be remembered?' which was the most challenging response to the question I have ever heard.

The theme of most of these illustrations either concerned personal experience that most contemporary Britons could identify with, or borrowed from high-profile media experience. I was careful to explain the Iranian embassy siege story (briefly) as this was the one story younger people might not be familiar with.

I concluded with a video exploring purpose in life and the importance of leaving a legacy; it is something I saw many years ago, and had been looking for an opportunity to use.

### Structure

I started the sermon inductively with human experience, which gives implicit rather than explicit authority to Scripture, following the approach of Bill Hybels at Willow Creek to build in an implicit apologetic for the relevance of Scripture.

I also planned to both start and end with the illustrations relating to celebrities (George Clooney, Andrea Jaeger) and within that beginning and ending points connecting with the centrality of resurrection – the key to 1 Corinthians. It also becomes key to answering the human questions presented in the video, providing a double 'inclusio' for the listener.

Within this, I had the threefold structure suggested by the shape of the passage: what Paul is talking about, why it matters to us and the life of Jesus as providing Paul's answer and ours. Through the whole sermon, I wanted to include movement from *logos*, through *ethos* to *pathos* – key factual content, but presented as persuasive argument, concluding with the emotive nature of the video – which echoed Paul's own approach in the whole chapter. It was appropriate to offer a reinforcement of the three points, with the three characters in the gospel reading for the day: John's sense

of purpose; Mary's courageous witness; Peter's restoration of integrity.

Overall, my use of facts, arguments, illustrations, stories, images and video was designed to provide lots of 'entry points' into the content of the sermon for different learning styles and personalities.

### Personal involvement

During my preparation I had a strong sense of spiritual struggle, and was aware of the need to be invitational. Many of the issues I was exploring had been wrestled with personally and I needed to engage with these as well as, with the three themes in the text.

I invited some informal feedback from one or two members of the 9.00 am congregation in case there were things that I could improve on in the second service. Overall I received positive comments, particular about the application of the issues to daily living.

I think I hit on some good rhetorical phrases (such as 'Jesus refused to be drawn by the thrill of celebrity') and it might have been better to have scripted them. I spontaneously made the reflection on Jesus' life fuller on the day.

### Conclusion

There are a number of issues to reflect on in preparation for preaching! I would not expect those early in their preaching life to reflect at such depth, but would encourage all preachers to be aware of the issues in these different categories. My own experience is that my capacity to consider a wide range of issues had grown as I have habitually reflected in these different areas.



## Preaching for Year A: July to September 2011

By **Duncan Macpherson**

Features Editor and Roman Catholic Deacon in the Westminster Diocese

### Voicing the Word and closing the gap

As often happens, my introduction to 'Voicing the Word' takes its starting points from the wisdom of contributors to the article sections of *The Preacher*. Palmer Becker in his *Preaching in the Anabaptist-Mennonite Tradition* reminds us that 'a particular understanding of God, the Scriptures and the needs of people make a major difference in the way a sermon is preached' and that 'effective sermons need to be rooted in a ... Christ-centered interpretation of Scripture, in texts that speak to the felt needs of a particular congregation, and in a conviction that runs deep in the soul.'

Meanwhile Ian Paul in his *Preaching School: Reflective Practice* engages in a rhetorical criticism of his chosen text of 1 Corinthians 15:29-34, identifying the three classic elements of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*. This analysis can also be used in examining the way in which Saint Augustine argues that preachers should seek to 'teach, delight and persuade'. Each preacher has a particular *ethos* coming from a particular Christian tradition and is possessed of a unique human personality. Each employs *pathos*, establishing an emotional appeal to the hearers and *logos*, the reasoned content of the message.

Ian argues that the 'task of preaching is to close the gap between the word of Scripture and the world of the hearers, in order that God might speak afresh through what we, the preachers, say'. Examples from the sermons and homilies that follow in this section illustrate preaching which offers Christ-centred interpretations of Scripture that are effective in closing this gap.

### An ethos of conviction

Thus URC minister, Mark Fisher (10 July) closes the gap between the rural first-century Palestine of the Parable of the Sower and 'the felt needs' of his particular suburban, mainly retired and affluent, twenty-first century congregation as he deploys effective illustrations. To this end

he draws a deep personal conviction from his own *ethos* – clearly one that 'runs deep in the soul' of the preacher – a conviction of the generosity of God, bringing it alive to the modern mind and imagination.

### Being present with the people

Anglican priest, Roger Spiller (3 July, on Matthew 11:25-30) closes the gap with honest doubt by sharing his understanding of the mystery of God that resists the cheap certainties of biblical literalism which too often pass for strong faith. Instead, he places himself alongside his congregation (*pathos*) 'speaking on behalf of all who are hanging on to a belief in God by their fingernails' and closes 'the gap between the word of Scripture and the world of the hearers with the assurance that 'encountering God's hiddenness is the beginning of knowing God...' and that 'if we dare to be present in the people and places where he has pledged to make himself known, and enlist with his "little ones" in the patient training of the eyes and ears and prepare to endure the long toil of watching and waiting, we will be ready to recognise him when he chooses to appear.'

### The Word calling to repentance

As one might expect from the *ethos* of a Jesuit and an academic, Dominic Robinson is strong on *logos* in his homily on the Parable of the Darnel in Matthew 13 (17 July). However, he is not neglectful of *pathos*, exploring everyday disappointments to engage the imagination of the congregation and to lead them gently to examination of conscience and to repentance.

### Bridging the culture gap

Engagement with the imagination of a congregation requires an understanding of the culture and the subcultures of the time and place in which the preacher is called to preach and this involves familiarity both with the high culture of the intellectual world as well as with popular culture. This is a daunting challenge, but one to which Barry Overend is more than equal.

Preaching to his Anglican congregation on the parable of the Pearl of Great Price (24 July, Matthew 13:44-52), he uses a poem of R.S Thomas and a story in the *Daily Mirror* with equal facility. From a different Anglican tradition, Brett Ward, preaching on the vocation of Mary on the Feast of the Assumption (14 August), offers illustrations from the popular lyrics of Abba as well as references to the 'soaring musical settings of the Magnificat' at Choral Evensong to lead on the radical *logos* of its message.

In the parables of Jesus, the illustrations are drawn from the familiar and the everyday. So too, Liz Shercliff, an Anglican preacher new to this journal, in her sermon on the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21, 14 August) introduces the theme of identity with images of store loyalty cards and imitation of celebrities. Salvationist, Jim Bryden, employs the same theme of identity for his introduction to a sermon on Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16 (21 August). Adapting to a Scottish audience, Jim turns to the poems of Robbie Burns, himself a poet whose appeal famously transcends categories of high and low culture.

Meanwhile, Terry Tastard, preaching the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16, 18 September) to his London Catholic congregation, explores modern themes of belonging and unemployment that lead successfully on to an inclusive message that 'what God gives us is exactly that: it is God's gift'.

The ability to preach effectively is also 'God's gift' but, as our sermon writers demonstrate, preaching can always be improved by a disciplined focus on the *logos* of a 'Christ-centered interpretation of Scripture', the *pathos* of understanding 'the needs of people' and the *ethos* of 'a conviction that runs deep in the soul'. Only thus can we begin to 'close the gap' so that 'God might speak afresh through what we, the preachers, say.'

**Sunday 3 July 2011***Proper 9***Stalking the hidden God***Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30***By Roger Spiller***Director of Ordinands, Coventry Diocese*

**Context:** *Parish Eucharist in a traditional town congregation of mixed, well-informed people, many of whom are struggling with, and ready to work at, their faith.*

**Aim:** *To open up some avenues for engaging with the fact of the silence, hiddenness and unknowability of God referred to in the text and pertinent to the faith struggles people are encountering within as well as outside the Church.*

'God, where are you? I wish you would talk to me. God. It isn't just me. There's a general feeling. This is what people are saying in the parish. They want to know where you are. The joke wears thin... You never say anything... I tell you, it's this perpetual absence – yes – this not being here... it's just beginning to get some of us down'. So bemoans the Reverend Lionel Espy in David Hare's play, *Racing Demon*, speaking on behalf of all who are hanging on to a belief in God by their fingernails.

**God's silence and our deafness**

It's not God's silence but our deafness, we say, that is the source of our predicament. Jesus compares his generation with people who can hear alright, but who are like contrary children who stamp their feet and grimace their stubborn refusal to respond to the music. Our generation, it's often suggested, has lost the capacity even to listen. We've come to expect that what is really real must be immediately accessible, instantly communicable, able to assert itself above the cacophony of sounds that invade our lives.

Listening for God, we tell ourselves, demands the patient, prolonged attentiveness of the radio astronomer or code breaker who pore over familiar signals for days, weeks, months and sometimes years, in the hope of hearing the revelatory source that will unlock everything else. It may involve wearing our knees out in the hope of a word from the Lord.

Perhaps sight is a more reliable faculty for detecting God than sound. After all, we affirm that God is everywhere. But no.

Jesus reminds us of that long tradition in Scripture in which God is hidden. Perhaps, again, the problem of God's absence lies in our failure to recognise him rather than his propensity to hide? Jesus tells us that God is hidden from the wise and intelligent; he isn't accessible to those who are successful at finding things by their own strength.

If God is present, he is present sacramentally, mediated through holy lives, prison visiting, foot washing, hospitality, sacred Scripture, bread and wine; but that's hard for those of us who've come to expect our experiences to be direct, immediate, instant, unmediated. It turns out that, contrary to received wisdom, it is the 'little ones', with eyes and ears for openness and wonderment who are the ones to whom God reveals himself. The 'little ones' are not infants. As the gospel writer makes clear elsewhere, they are the 'young disciples'. They see and hear because they have been formed in the company of Jesus to recognise his voice and to see his face in the faces of others.

**The little ones**

But we still have to reckon with the possibility that the silence and hiddenness of God may be on God's side and not just on ours. We know people who are open to the possibility of God and pursue God with a conviction that shames us and yet who meet only impenetrable absence and silence. God is, after all, solely responsible for making himself known. As Pascal reminds us: 'Any religion which does not say that God is hidden is not true.'

As much as we try to unlock the mystery of his being, we discover that the door can only be opened on the inside. His self revealing is inscrutable. It can seem arbitrary, discriminatory. As our gospel declares, the Son has the choice to reveal the Father to whomsoever he will.

**The silence of God**

We try to speculate on the reasons for God's silence and hiddenness and discern what divine purpose it may serve. Is God the patient lover, wanting to seduce us, waiting longingly for us to make the next move and by his hiding bringing us out of hiding and causing us to declare our love? Is his elusiveness the way that our freedom can be safeguarded? Might we not otherwise be overwhelmed or consumed by the luminosity of his presence? Yes, but this game of hide-and-seek often backfires, as the Reverend Espy implies. We can lose patience and

abandon the quest without ever discovering God's hiding place. We can burn our eyes out like some intrepid bird-watcher and miss the rumour that the Bird of Heaven has been sighted.

We perhaps only dare to speak about the silent, absent, hidden, God because we believe that God will nevertheless reveal himself and bring rest to our troubled minds. But we have yet to reckon with a deepening of the mystery. The Father is not merely hidden: we are told that he is also unknowable. And the Son, whom we've learnt to think of as a familiar friend and brother, is himself unknowable. He is the stranger on the shore, the speaker of riddles, the one who is silent before his accusers, the one who eludes those who attempt to nail down his identity.

Yet it is he whose vocation is to reveal the Father. And the Father he reveals is the one who is never more clearly known than when he is hidden in the mystery of a man's suffering and crucifixion one dark Friday afternoon.

Our knowledge of the unknowable God chastens the shrill assurances that suggest that he can be called to appear at our command. Encountering God's hiddenness is the beginning of knowing God. His silence is the form in which he addresses us. And if we dare to be present in the people and places where he has pledged to make himself known, and enlist with his 'little ones' in the patient training of the eyes and ears and prepare to endure the long toil of watching and waiting, we will be ready to recognise him when he chooses to appear.