

The Christian Community

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

Forest Row Congregation

Newsletter for Sunday, 28th June, 2020

What is happening at The Christian Community?

The church is now open for private prayer, Tuesday – Friday 10am-noon. Please check the noticeboard and online for more details. From 4th July onwards, we will be able to open the church again. We will give details in next week's newsletter about the measures we need to take to make this possible.

The priests are celebrating the Act of Consecration of Man at 9am on Thursdays and Fridays and 10am on Sundays. Please join us in spirit.

The priests are available by phone or email for pastoral conversations or to give advice about where to find practical help.

The Festival of John the Baptist

Luke Barr

We are just having the hottest days of the year so far as St. John's Tide comes round. The days are warm and glorious. The Spring is fully gone and Summer shows itself in its powerful splendour. It is almost overwhelming. The warmth draws us out; we want to soak it up and be in it. We feel more relaxed perhaps. Wearing shorts, sandals and loose shirt is a quite different experience to donning a suit and tie! We feel more outside ourselves.

The heat at Midday is attractive - but ultimately, too much. And soon, we feel our shoulders or face becoming too hot. And we retire indoors or into the shade to re-establish our right body warmth.

John the Baptist: was he like that Midday heat? Did we feel drawn to him, and yet burned by his intensity at the same time? Was this what humanity needed?

The descriptions of John the Baptist in the Gospels are brief and intense. It must have been extraordinary to know this man! You didn't simply meet him. You didn't just make his acquaintance. He burned - and you were under his spell. Austere like the desert, generous like the sun. You wanted to run a mile if you saw him, but more than this, you wanted to sit at his feet, and worship him. God in camel's hair; a ragged Jehovah in the desert devastation. Like moths to the flame, we returned again and again to him.

Even the philandering Herod was fascinated by this man, and feared his godliness.

"He was a lamp, burning and shining. And for a while, even you were willing to rejoice in this light." (John 5:35). Such are the words attributed by Evangelist John to Jesus concerning Baptist John.

John is something like a guru. A personality so charismatic, and yet so exacting. He attracted and repelled us at once.

There is something about that charismatic warmth and light that John emanated, like the sun in its ascendancy, that drew people to him. And yet, at some point, the heat of the sun becomes too

intense; the heat of John becomes too intense. At the height of his powers, he is taken from the people, it seems without offering resistance. He is arrested, and eventually executed.

It is almost as if the sun stops shining - like a momentary eclipse. The birds stop singing, the world becomes dark. Everything feels strange and without orientation.

It was at this moment, when the guru-like figure of John disappears, that Jesus emerges, and starts preaching and even baptising. Was he merely continuing the work? Was he filling the abyss left by John's absence in a world bereft of John's light, which felt dark, strange and daunting? Did the people feel like they had lost their head, when John lost his?

The emergence of Jesus is actually the end of the external leader, the end of the charismatic spiritual authority. The sun of the old world with its mystery hierophants and sages has gone. John is the last of them. That sun is setting, and we can see the sinking of its glory. Invisibly however, a new day is dawning, a new sun will rise. The sun of the 'Christ in us'. We would no longer need to 'rejoice in the shining of an external lamp' because the light would now be in us.

John was like what was called in meditative circles, 'the guardian of the threshold'. He stood at the threshold to another world, and by his moral weight held back those who were not worthy to take one step further toward it. Only after one has learnt from the Guardian of the threshold to encounter one's own authentic being, could one step further. And there one met something greater. It was called the 'greater guardian'. One could also call it the Christ in us.

There is still much in our modern world which feels like the old world that John still inhabited. There are abundant Herods, many empires vying for patches of land. There are plenty of John like figures, promising the quick route to heaven on earth, with their own brand of baptism. But John himself announced that that time had come to an end, like the sun that has reached its zenith at this solstice time of year. Reliance on external authority had no spiritual path ahead. It led to a spiritual desert.

John's task - the festival's task - is to remind us that the zenith of the old world has long been reached and cannot continue so. The new world wishes to emerge, the world of 'Christ in us'.

Finding the Thoughts beyond the Thoughts

Tom Ravetz

When we are confronted with a mistake that we have made, we may fall into one of two extremes. We may feel so crushed by shame about what we have done that we can hardly move forward. A good way of experiencing the other extreme is to imagine that someone has offended us and they either don't apologise, or their apology seems insincere. We may then

feel that our friend has not allowed the reality of their mistake to pierce them sufficiently. We are right to mistrust the glib apologies of politicians or corporations: neurological research confirms that we only learn when we allow something to affect us in our feelings.

I was once walking upstairs with a home-made dark berry smoothie. I was thinking about something else and I slipped, and the purple drink went all over our beige stair carpet. This was an opportunity to experience the extremes. I felt bitter regret about my

The church will be opening again soon. This means that the rooms will start to be used for various groups and meetings. After speaking with Luke, I would like to offer to coordinate this. I will collate everything in a plan with all the rooms where everybody can see what is happening when, so that we can make the best use of our spaces.

I will gather all the events, groups and meetings which take place, both regularly and as one-off events, in a plan that gives the overview. The plan will be printed out for the noticeboard and will also be available on our website.

Please let me know of any requests to use the rooms: phone me on 0049 151 59468857 or via email: katharina@baitermusik.de

Katharina Baiter

stupidity. Then, I felt motivated to tackle an exciting new project: Operation Carpet Clean-Up. Spending too long on the regret would have meant that the juice would have soaked deep into the carpet. Nevertheless, it was important to feel it, because from then on I checked myself before setting off upstairs with a tray full of drinks, just to make sure that I was fully present.

In the world of Hebrew thought, repentance combines the qualities of regret and of 'turning', in the sense of a reorientation of life towards God. *Metanoia* – the word for repentance used in the Greek New Testament – brings in the element of thinking. A very literal translation would be 'find the thoughts beyond the ones you've had already'.

This new quality of repentance stems from the fact that our actions are guided by our thoughts. We form mental pictures of outcomes we desire – whether that be an image of myself eating an ice-cream, which motivates me to go to the ice-cream van, or a project to establish a congregation in a new city. When we make a plan about how to achieve these aims, we see mental pictures of the intermediate stages. When things go wrong, we may need to adjust our mental pictures. I thought it was a good idea to carry a tray whilst thinking about something else: the mess on the stair-carpet was a powerful corrective.

The bitterness of regret gives rise to the motive to reconsider our assumptions; the will to change arises from our new knowledge.

One of the best-loved bible stories about repentance is the parable of the lost or prodigal son. In the middle of the story, the

young man has to recognise that his idea of a good time has brought him to a standstill. The famine all around him is a reflection of a famine within him. The Greek text describes the moments after this realisation in the most graphic terms:

Then he went into himself. He said 'How many servants does my father have... I will go to my father and say ... Make me one of your servants.' (Luke 15:17)

First, he feels hunger; then comes the 'turning'; then the new thought in the form of the moving speech which he imagines making to his father. He has given up his mental picture of what makes a good life: before the turning, he thought it was a good idea to party long and hard, using up the inheritance that he had asked for before his time. Now, he wants to serve.

In the form of priestly pastoral counselling offered in The Christian Community, the conversations with a priest can culminate in a Sacramental Consultation, a special conversation that ends with a verse. This verse describes a pathway of practical *metanoia*. To begin with, we are to learn to make an offering of our thoughts. Even if we are not faced with some outer crisis, it can be liberating to put our assumptions in question, even for a moment. Then we are to receive a new impulse for our lives from above. The verse then speaks of a new relationship to ourselves, to our fellow human beings and to God. We will experience peace; our lives will become loving service to God and others. The verse helps us to find the new orientation in life that Saint John preached: Find the thoughts beyond the thoughts! Change your ways!

Supporting us

The Christian Community is funded by contributions by members and friends. In this time of crisis, when the priests' work is needed more than ever, we are facing a fall in our income through reduced collections and fundraising events.

If you are able, please consider taking out a standing order or increasing your existing one.