



Scottish Episcopal Church

THE DIOCESE OF ARGYLL & THE ISLES

Diocesan Conference

2020

Praying our Vision

The Rev'd Dr Sam Wells

Scottish Association for Marine Science, Dunstaffnage

Tuesday March 3rd 2020

Diocesan Mission Enablers

Dr Chris Brett & Dr Ros Brett



Scottish Episcopal Church

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Speaker

The Rev'd Dr Sam Wells has been Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields since 2012. He has served as a parish priest for 20 years – 10 of those in urban priority areas. He also spent 7 years in North Carolina, where he was Dean of Duke University Chapel.

Sam is also Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at King's College, and a member of the Multi-Stakeholder Council that advises the G20 meetings. He is a regular contributor to Thought for the Day on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. He has published 30 books, including works on Christian ethics, ministry, liturgy, and preaching.

Sam is married to Jo Wells, who is Bishop of Dorking. They have two children.

Praying our Vision

Programme

9.30am	Arrivals and coffee
10am – 11.15am	Worship
	Talk 1
11.15am – 11.45am	Coffee
11.45am – 1pm	Talk 2
1pm – 1.45pm	Lunch
1.45pm – 3pm	Talk 3
3pm – 3.30pm	Drawing it all together
3.30pm	Coffee and tea available at the end.

The Diocesan Synod Eucharist

follows at 5.30pm

in St John's Cathedral, Oban.

*followed by drinks & canapés in the Narthex
and the*

Diocesan Dinner

7.15pm for 7.30pm

Argyllshire Gathering Halls, Oban.



Praying our Vision

Sam Wells

Talk One

1. God's eternal purpose
 - a. Why is there something rather than nothing?
 - b. Why are we entrusted with God's identity?
 - c. What is this all about?
2. Four kinds of relationship
 - a. Working for
 - b. Working with
 - c. Being with
 - d. Being for
3. Eight dimensions of being with
 - a. Presence
 - b. Attention
 - c. Mystery
 - d. Delight
 - e. Participation
 - f. Partnership
 - g. Enjoyment
 - h. Glory
4. Five kinds of context
 - a. With God
 - b. With ourselves
 - c. With one another
 - d. With the world
 - e. With creation
5. Being with God
 - a. Overcoming isolation – Genesis 3-4
 - b. Overaccepting distraction
 - c. 'Tis mystery all: 'Tis mercy all
 - d. Thomas Traherne
 - e. Scripture as participation
 - f. Transfiguration
 - g. Being enjoyed
 - h. Exalting and humbling



Talk Two

1. Being with ourselves
 - a. Survival, well-being, flourishing
 - b. Self-loathing – accepting limitation and repenting of sin
 - c. Distressing, deathly, dull – and distraction
 - d. Enjoying yourself
2. Being with one another
 - a. Gathering, breaking bread, marking
 - b. Eucharist as church in miniature
 - c. Self, skills, Spirit
3. Being with the world
 - a. Seekers, lapsed, no professed faith, other faiths, hostile
 - b. Neighbours, organisations, institutions, government, excluded



Talk Three

1. Being with creation
 - a. Silent Spring – catastrophe, cause, idealists/pragmatists, soul
 - b. Not a problem – sovereignty vs ladder, luxury, limitation
 - c. The real problem
2. Praying our Vision – a fivefold shape
 - a. Address to God (make sure it represents the breadth and depth of who God is)
 - b. Reference to what God has done, e.g. as highlighted in readings or hymns
 - c. Direct request for God to do something – to bring about change or be present:
intercessions are specific requests (not ‘we pray for Syria’ but ‘guide the imaginations and hands of those gathering for the peace talks,’ or ‘be close to children growing up without parents in the midst of civil war’)
 - d. Description of what you want life to be like after God has acted (‘that your children in Eastern Ghouta may have food and be free from bombs and fear’)
 - e. Invitation to respond
(best to use the regular one so people aren’t searching for an order of service)
3. Telling words and pitfalls
 - a. ‘May’ is often a sign that the addressee has changed from God to the congregation e.g. ‘may we always be mindful of...’
 - b. ‘We’ is best avoided unless it is absolutely certain that you are speaking for every single person present, including visitors; meanwhile make sure you never use a ‘they’ when it could well be an ‘us,’ e.g. asylum-seekers
 - c. Remember God already knows so don’t provide too much detail
 - d. Never assume everyone watches TV e.g. ‘the pictures we’ve seen of...’
 - e. ‘We pray for’ can be a sign that you’ve lost the focus on a specific outcome
 - f. Use gentle language e.g. not ‘abuse’ but ‘those whose persecutor is within their own home’



Reading

The sheer wonder of the created world yields limitless delight. In two famous poems William Wordsworth captures the way the created world moves the soul. Wandering ‘lonely as a cloud’ he sees ‘a crowd, A host, of golden daffodils... Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.’ He takes these as a synecdoche for all of creation, since they are ‘Continuous as the stars that shine And twinkle on the milky way.’ But the important thing is that they are having their own celebration, independent of him: ‘Ten thousand saw I at a glance, Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.’ There’s a whole chorus of created joy going on: ‘The waves beside them danced; but they Out-did the sparkling waves in glee.’ He paused little at the time, yet it proves the sight has changed him for good, for in moments of solitude they flash upon his inward eye: ‘And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils.’ (‘I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud’)

A similar experience characterizes a slightly different notion of being with the creation. In his poem ‘Tintern Abbey’ Wordsworth returns to a place of beauty last seen five years before, and once again sees ‘These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs With a sweet inland murmur.’ (‘Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798’) But he is much more aware of the affect such views have on his soul. The cliffs ‘Which on a wild secluded scene impress Thoughts of more deep seclusion.’ Even though he has long been away, Wordsworth has continued to dwell on these remembered images, and in weary and lonely moments has been stirred by ‘sensations sweet, Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart, And passing even into my purer mind With tranquil restoration.’ To these remembrances he attributes two further capacities: first, feelings ‘Of unremembered pleasure’ such that come from true virtue, what he calls ‘His little, nameless, unremembered acts Of kindness and of love’; and second, ‘that blessed mood’ which lightens the burden of the soul, and ‘with an eye made quiet by the power Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, We see into the life of things.’ Wordsworth equates this wondrous seeing with the anticipation of eternal life, for at such moments, he says, ‘we are laid asleep In body, and become a living soul.’

What Wordsworth gives us here is texture for boundless delight. Wordsworth’s delight in creation is truly enjoyment and exaltation in it for its own sake; but he also explores how the memory of that delight comforts him in his loneliness, even his fear of death, ennobles his mundane experience, inspires and animates his gestures of generosity, and gives him an insight into the life eternal, when he will perpetually have that sense of joy and ability to ‘see into the life of things.’ Such is a more detailed account of the nature of delight. And such is a helpful account of what it means to offer the prayer of delight in a way that goes beyond the awesome wonder that considers all the works God’s hand has made, beyond also the forest glades and the birds singing sweetly in the trees, and reaches the formation of the moral imagination. Wordsworth paradoxically articulates the character of wordless joy, and gives us the shape of what it means to be with the creation and pray with delight.



Thomas Traherne is the great prophet of delight. He points out that ingratitude is amongst the worst sins of all.

To have blessings and to prize them is to be in Heaven; to have them and not to prize them is to be in Hell ... : To prize blessings while we have them is to enjoy them, and the effect thereof is contentation, pleasure, thanksgiving, happiness. To prize them when they are gone, envy, covetousness, repining, ingratitude, vexation, misery. But ... to ... have blessings and not to prize them is ... worse than to be in Hell. It is more vicious, and more irrational.

(Thomas Traherne, 'Centuries of Meditations' 1:47 in *Selected Poems and Prose* (London: Penguin 1991). Further references to particular paragraphs in the text.)

How then should we practice gratitude and embody delight? This is Traherne's favorite subject. 'Your enjoyment of the world is never right,' he says, 'till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys: having such a reverend esteem of all, as if you were among the Angels.' (1.28) He goes on, 'You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres ...' (1.29) Traherne prescribes what qualities are required to be a person who can so take delight and give thanks in all things: he says, 'You never enjoy the World aright, till you see all things in it so perfectly yours, that you cannot desire them any other way: and till you are convinced that all things serve you best in their proper places. ... you must have Glorious Principles implanted in your nature; a clear eye able to see afar off, a great and generous heart, apt to enjoy at any distance: a good and liberal Soul prone to delight in the felicity of all, and an infinite delight to be their Treasure.' (1.38) And this is not simply about appreciating the creation around us. It is about one another and the ways of God. He goes on, 'Your enjoyment is never right, till you esteem every Soul so great a treasure as our Saviour doth: and that the laws of God are sweeter than the honey and honeycomb because they command you to love them all in such perfect manner. ... God commandeth you to love all like Him, because He would have you to be His Son, all them to be your riches, you to be glorious before them, and all the creatures in serving them to be your treasures, while you are His delight, like Him in beauty, and the darling of His bosom.' (1.39)



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SCOTTISH CHARITY NUMBER: SC005375