

THE MESSENGER

FEBRUARY 2007

Hypocrisy is the homage which vice pays to virtue.

“Hypocrite!” is such a judgmental insult to throw at people, and in a sense hypocritical. The accusation that a person is pretending to moral virtue which he does not possess and making judgments on his fellows which he is not qualified to make is itself an assumption of moral superiority – “at least I am better than a hypocrite”, the accuser plumes himself.

But is he? Nearly 50 years ago the well-known humorist and social commentator Michael Flanders referred to “saying good-bye to mealy-mouthed hypocrisy which has served us so well for so long”. It served us well because there are standards which we ought to attain but never will. Even so, we support those standards and hope that other more moral people may manage to achieve them. To criticise someone for lying is not to claim never to have lied: it is a self-criticism as well, because it is a recognition of one's own failure.

Hypocrisy is a good thing when it means setting for ourselves and the world higher standards than we reach.

The true hypocrite condemns in others faults which he does not realise are faults in himself. This is rarer, because most people know that they are doing wrong even as they do it. Decisions to sin are deliberate in the sense that a code is *knowingly* breached. That is what the former Vicar of our neighbour parish the Church of the Ascension Paul Oestreicher meant by “On the whole the church isn't worse than the world around it. It can't pretend to be better and, when it does, other people recognise the hypocrisy of it”.

When Jesus commanded “Judge not that ye be not judged” (*Mt. 7:5*) he was urging his hearers to *notice* the planks in their own eyes before trying to remove the specks of sawdust from their brothers'. The image is ludicrous, because you could never fail to notice a plank in your eye, but you could easily not spot that you criticise in others what you allow in yourself. Jesus goes on to condemn a different kind of

hypocrisy (*Mt. 23:27ff*), of scribes and Pharisees who are “whited sepulchres”: they are outwardly righteous but within full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Every church service contains a confession which is an acknowledgement of failure to keep up to God's standard. There is also a promise to do so for the future, but it is a promise inevitably broken. Every Christian is adopting a code himself which he can not maintain for himself and the world, and to this extent they are all hypocrites.

Since Michael Flanders's remark, it has become fashionable to be “non-judgmental” and to refuse to condemn almost any behaviour. This is to ignore the second part of what Jesus said, “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

To condone what is wrong is not tolerance, but the commission of another wrong. It is better to be a sincere hypocrite, when the alternative is no standard at all.

Saint John

To many people, St John's is just the station which most of the trains by-pass, and which manages to delay all of them. Often he gets mixed up with John the Baptist, who may have been his teacher.

John the Apostle became a disciple of Jesus very early on. He and his brother James were fishermen, and they were called by Jesus during the first year of his ministry. They may also have been cousins of Jesus, since their mother Salome (not the same one as became involved with Herod Antipas and led to the death of John the Baptist) was Mary's sister. They had a successful fishing business in Capernaum in which Simon Peter and Andrew were also involved.

Saint John's name means 'God is gracious'. He is the patron of theologians, writers and typesetters

Jesus said to Simon Peter and Andrew 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men' (Mark 1: 17). All four of these first disciples being fishermen has made the fishing image so prominent that a fish became the badge of the early church.

Jesus gave to the brothers the nickname "boanerges", which means "the sons of thunder", perhaps indicating lively or even aggressive personalities (Mark 3: 17). John went on to become a member of Jesus' inmost circle, referring to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". There are several incidents which suggest that Jesus did indeed reserve a special place

for John.

On the night of the Last Supper Jesus foretold that "You will all fall away because of me this night", and specifically that Simon Peter would deny him three times "before the cock crows". Both Simon Peter and John went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where all the disciples failed Jesus by falling asleep three times whilst he prayed. After that Simon Peter does deny Jesus thrice in a single night. John, though, remains stalwart, and records that 'the disciple whom he loved' alone of the twelve stood with his own mother Salome and the three Marys (the Virgin, Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas) at the foot of the cross.

At this moment, Jesus committed his mother to John's care, and she entered his home.

On hearing of the Resurrection, Simon Peter and John raced to the empty tomb, emphasising again the poetic parallels of their stories. It was John who arrived first, and at that instant understood the scripture, that Jesus must arise from the dead.

That is the pivotal moment in John's Gospel: when he sees the folded grave-clothes he comes to full belief. It is this which makes him the first of the disciples to recognise Jesus on his appearance by the Sea of Tiberias. The disciples were fishing, but had caught nothing: Jesus told them where to drop the nets, and they come up full to bursting. The imagery

is so plain that it needs no explaining: Jesus' promise is about to be fulfilled.

The instant at the empty tomb spurred John to write his Gospel. It is written as if the reader knows the basic story; its purpose, says John, is "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20: 31).

John's objective is to make men and women believe, not just to write a history. He is the antidote to 'doubting' Thomas.

The result is a unique Gospel. The other three are called 'synoptic' because they are so united in content and style, sometimes telling the same stories in virtually the same words. John is different. The historical work has all been done, leaving him free to transmit Jesus' own voice. John's is the last Gospel to be written, some time between AD70 and AD100. It omits the parables; says little about Galilee and much about Jerusalem; concentrates on Jesus teachings, reported directly. Two startling omissions are the Sermon on the Mount and the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper: this demonstrates John's confidence that the other three Gospels

John wrote the Fourth Gospel, three letters and perhaps Revelation

have adequately covered this ground, and that he is free to make a fresh approach.

John's preoccupation is clear from his letters. They open with 'That which was from the

beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes ... we proclaim also to you' (1 John 1: 1). The same Letter gives us the powerful image that God is light; the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining; and that Christians walk in the light. The same opens his Gospel: 'The light shines in the darkness'.

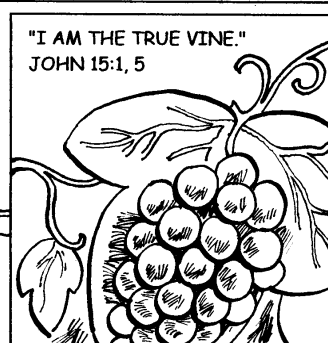
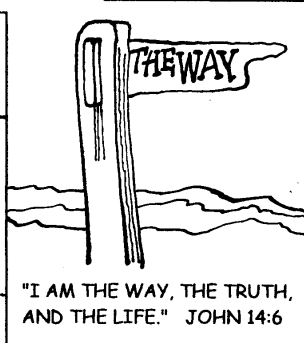
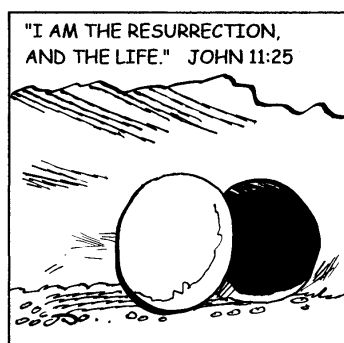
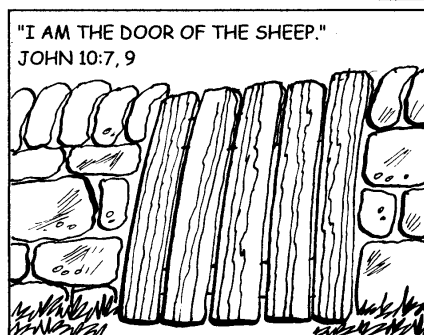
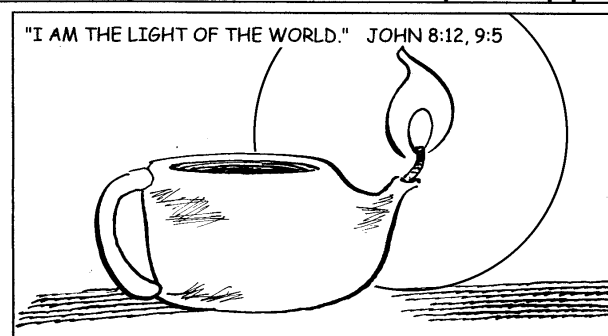
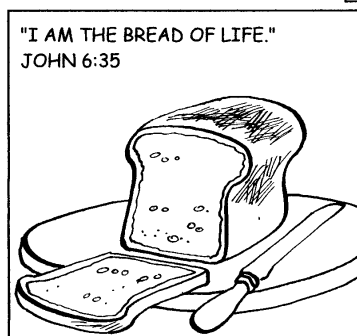
John does not identify himself by name in his Gospel, only as 'the beloved disciple' (John 21: 20): his purpose here would be frustrated by introducing his own personality.

Scholars differ over whether John the Apostle, John the Evangelist and the author of The Revelation of St John are one, two or three men, and there are stylistic grounds supporting all these possibilities. One is that John's Gospel and Revelation are the only books of the Bible which refer to Jesus as The Word.

Revelation has been subject to many interpretations, but is best viewed as a work of hope and warning, teaching that suffering is not in vain and that a judgment of God will come. It belongs to the Jewish apocalyptic tradition.

It is John who records Jesus' great "I am" images, descriptive of his ministry on earth. He also gives us the single-sentence summary of the whole Bible: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3: 16). According to Gideons

The "I am" sayings in St. John's Gospel



International, this verse has been translated into over 1,100 languages.

Saint John's day is 27th December, and for obvious reasons it gets relatively little attention these days. Early Christian art usually represents St. John with an eagle, symbolizing the heights to which he rises in the first chapter of his

Gospel. The chalice as symbolic of St. John, and is sometimes interpreted with reference to the Last Supper; or to a legend about poisoned wine; Perhaps the most natural explanation is to be found in the words of Christ to John and James 'My chalice indeed you shall drink' (Matthew 20:23).

Services in February

4th February
10.30 Worship Together
6.30 Holy Communion

11th February
10.30 Holy Communion
6.30 Evening Prayer

18th February
10.30 Morning Prayer
6.30 Holy Communion

25th February
9.00 Holy Communion
10.30 Holy Communion (with children)
6.30 Evening Prayer

A Post-Christmas Quiz by Sarah Burnard

"Is there a doctor in the House???" (Otherwise known as the St Michael's Medical Column) (Hint: You may want to *ring* a friend for the answers!)

The object of this quiz is to find out the cause of this patient's (she's called Bella) problem....

1) The Conversation...contains clues!!

Bella:-Doctor, Doctor, I've got *ringing* in my ears.....
Doctor:- Oh Dear! This is not very *appealing*...when does it occur ?
Bella:- Every Sunday morning about 10.15am
Doctor:- How long does it last ?
Bella:- About 10 minutes...

Doctor:- Where are you when this happens ?
Bella- Near Blackheath Park....(patient now looking very worried)....is it serious doctor ??
Doctor (*wringing* her hands):-Well, I'm not sure.... (and thinks "I don't want to drop a *clanger* here...I may have to give a specialist a *bell*...we certainly don't want to have a *ding-dong* (*merrily on high!*) about it").....I'll have to investigate and do some tests, although of course, *Bella*, you know that NHS care is *free*.

2) The Investigation.

The doctor is baffled- the patient seems fine – so she herself decides to do some on the spot research to try to help *Bella*. She goes to Blackheath Park at 10.15am on a Sunday morning, and finds.....

3) Can you solve the problem?

Answer these questions now!

What does the doctor hear, if anything? (Clue-if you do not know the answer to this, why not go along to Blackheath Park at 10.15am on a Sunday and see if you can hear anything that might give you a real clue?)
What is the cause of the patient's problem?

Answers in the next issue of The Messenger.

J - i - C No. 94 & 95

Walks, beds, knots, links, oxen – what joins them?

Using each of the digits 1, 3, 4 and 6 once and with only the simple mathematical signs of +, -, x and ÷, make the total 24.

Solution to No. 93
Solvers had obviously been enjoying Christmas too much to claim to claim the prize for the Christmas J-i-C. The answer is 371,599,993 video-cassettes. Will any reader who has encountered this situation please let us know how the problem was circumvented.



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St Michael's: making time for the things that matter

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