

THE MESSENGER

JULY & AUGUST 2007

Bearing False Witness

Believe me, we all tell lies.

There is of course a well-trodden argument about “white lies” like the effusive thanks to your host for a ghastly evening or general’s withholding battle plans, but those are situations where we tacitly consent to be lied to and it is a social convention that truth is not expected.

Setting aside those cases, what about when we do want and expect the truth?

Truth matters to everyone, and especially to Christians. Anyone who has read Jonathan Aitken’s books *Pride and Perjury* and *Porridge and Passion* will find them filled with this theme, and may also come to the ironic conclusion that the politician convicted of lying is the only one whose word they would accept.

The Ninth Commandment is “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20: 16). Some believe that this relates only to giving evidence in court, but many that it goes much further and means more than simply telling the truth. As Paul write to Timothy, “if I am delayed, you will know how

people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth “ (1 Tim. 3: 15) and so it governs the whole of life. To a Christian, “witness” means demonstration to the world of one’s beliefs by ones life. Christianity is a religion about practice more than precept, and relationships more than solitary holiness, about community more than individual. This is why the Commandments are concerned with social living. Coveting your neighbour’s goods, for example, is socially corrosive.

So is lying. The more general becomes the habit if falsehood, the more difficult it is to run our everyday lives because of the uncertainty it introduces into our decisions. Truth, by contrast, is a valuable commodity. When Edmund Burke wrote of ‘economy’ with the truth – the quotation unwisely used by the Cabinet Secretary Sir Robert Armstrong when giving evidence in Australia during the Spycatcher case – he meant it in the 18th Century sense of ‘to make the best use of’ rather than ‘use sparingly’.

If truth is valuable, the truism of politics has become that falsehood is more valuable. The whole ethos of *In The Thick Of It*, the faux fly-on-the-wall political

comedy, is that the most desirable possibly commodity is getting people to believe what is false. That is exactly what Satan loves, as “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8: 44). He will try to rob men of the truth (1 Tim. 6: 15)

Even non-believers swear oaths in court by Almighty God, because He is a God of truth (Isaiah 65:16). We are taught that “no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through him the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God”. (2 Cor. 1: 20)

The habits of falsehood and equivocation are bearing the falsest possible kind of witness: they are bearing witness to evil. Far better to “have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor. 4: 2)

Every lie which every one of us tells damages society generally. Every time we mislead another person, a little victory is scored by the devil. Him we truly need to be defeated

Angels again

You meet angels all the time – the problem is, that you do not recognise them.

Angels are the messengers of God, and God sends messages not just by heavenly hosts announcing momentous events to shepherds, but also by little messages to individual people. Sometimes God will whisper in your ear, and if you are not listening you will miss it.

Psalm 103 explains what angels do: 'The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.' Twice it repeats that angels do the will of God and obey him. Every person on earth can do the same, if he or she chooses.

The full name of our parish church is Saint Michael and All Angels, and we try to concentrate on the role of an angel. Not the swan-winged, long-robed, menthol-cigarette angel of the pre-Raphaelites, but the reality of those who talk to us quietly with God's voice.

There are two mighty dreams in the Bible featuring angels, one at each end. In Genesis 28: 10-17, the patriarch Jacob is on a journey from Beersheba to Haran. Beersheba's name means 'Well of the Oath', and is still a major city of Israel; Haran's location is less certain, perhaps in modern Syria, but it was traditionally the home of Abraham. So both cities are of symbolic importance.

When Jacob slept he dreamt of a stairway or ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven. Up and down went angels. There was a regular two-way

traffic, so we might expect to see and meet angels on earth. When he awoke, Jacob said 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.' He realised that heaven and earth are not remote and unconnected places, but are forever joined. Jacob also realised 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it': God is present amongst us all the time.

At the other end of the Bible comes Revelation. Its author is John of Patmos, who may be the same as John the Apostle – he says 'I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos' and says that he is an eye-witness of the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1: 2, 9). It is a book very hard to interpret, so much so that some have thought that John was either ill or drugged. Yet once one accepts that it is a book of signs and poetic truth, it is easier to understand. John says (12: 7ff) that 'And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven ... Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.'

The first stage is that Satan is hurled down to earth, there to seek to frustrate God's purpose by tempting mankind towards sin.

That hurling down is the antithesis of the stairway of which Jacob dreamed. There can be no equal commerce between heaven and those who have rebelled against God, Satan and his angels. The gulf which was caused by Satan's

fall is the same one which was bridged by the death of Jesus, restoring to mankind direct communication with heaven.

His victory is only ever temporary, because Satan and his angels are overcome through the blood of the Lamb. Put another way, when people resist sin and embrace God's will the Devil suffers a defeat. The greatest and final defeat which he suffered was when God sent his Son Jesus into the world to die, because that was an act of such love that it was impossible for the Devil to corrupt it or overcome it.

This is the second stage of Satan's destruction: having descended to earth, he is again overcome but this time by ordinary men and women and not by the angels of heaven. The weapons, however, are the same: the doing of God's bidding and the obeying His word..

When we concentrate on such a vast theme, we may lose sight of the thousands of ways in which God communicates with us every day. He does so every time we are offered a choice between doing good or evil. The offers come from the people that we meet in every day life: not the grand or important people, maybe not even very likeable people, but still each of them a chance to do good. To that extent each of them is an angel, a messenger. And when we respond, so are we.

The Collect (special prayer) for St Michael and All Angels starts 'O everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and mortals in a wonderful order ...'.

You meet angels all the time – the problem is, that you do not recognise them. Sometimes they are in the mirror.

And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses....[†]

John Bartram

St Michael's, not needing help from any of its Angels on this occasion, easily beat St John's by 46 runs in their inaugural cricket match on a balmy summer Sunday afternoon in Greenwich Park on June 10.

Led by a determined and unbeaten 30 from captain Richard King, St Michael's reached 129 for 7 in its allotted 35 overs, pushing the run rate along after the drinks break following a slow start. The first three batsmen went for 17 to St John's opening bowler Ian Ridgewell whose tidy length was enough to bring rewards. Then came the recovery with a stand of 52 between King and the self proclaimed "Naughty Clergyman" Tex Dunstan who compiled a tidy 26 despite limping with a bruised foot. Low and uneven bounce made batting difficult for most of the others. Richard Godden picked up a couple of wickets with interesting left arm slow deliveries, some of which seemed to approach the Great Umpire in the Sky. 11 year old Daniel King looked stylish and promising but extras remained the next biggest scorer with 25. St Michael's total could have been even bigger with better running between the wickets and if the umpires had not been over generous to the bowlers in not signalling wides. For a time it seemed we might even have been at Old Trafford watching the misplaced efforts of England's Harmison and Plunkett, although at a slightly slower pace.

A good-sized, colourful crowd then eased themselves up from the grass to enjoy a superb tea served elegantly by the ladies of the Tea Committee under the gazebo, an effort that more than outclassed the performance of the Ambridge cricket ladies, as Archers fans will

recognise.

St John's started badly with James O'Keefe taking three quick wickets and they then collapsed dramatically to 25 for 8 as Joe Watkins demolished the middle order with two double wicket maidens in his first two overs. England's declared objective of ramming home any advantage had obviously not seeped down as far as the St Michael's captain who immediately took Watkins off, allowing the opposition to add a further 58 runs for the last two wickets, mainly due to the efforts of Charles Cave, an elegant 12-year old batsman who compiled an undefeated 37 in St John's total of

83 and was presented with the match ball afterwards.

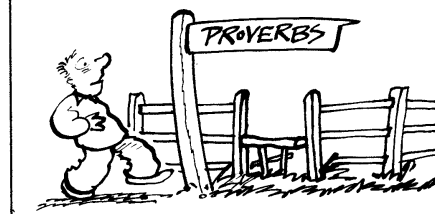
Obviously suffused with the Christian spirit of a highly entertaining occasion, Richard King quite rightly abandoned the chance to enforce a crushing victory and opted instead to extend the match to 6.40pm by letting all his team have a bowl apart from himself and the wicketkeeper. But it only delayed the inevitable and St John's then vowed to exact revenge in a return match next year.

† Isaiah 44: 4

Picture Proverbs

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IS A COLLECTION OF 'WISE' SAYINGS FROM THE HEART OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE FOLLOWING PROVERBS ARE ALL FROM CHAPTER 25. DO THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO TEACH US TODAY?



14. LIKE CLOUDS AND WIND WITHOUT RAIN IS A PERSON WHO BOASTS OF GIFTS HE DOES NOT GIVE.



16. IF YOU FIND HONEY, EAT JUST ENOUGH - TOO MUCH OF IT, AND YOU WILL BE SICK.



17. SELDOM SET FOOT IN YOUR NEIGHBOUR'S HOUSE - TOO MUCH OF YOU, AND HE WILL HATE YOU.



SERVICES IN JULY AND AUGUST

Sunday Morning Service is at 10:30, and it will be Worship Together on 1st July and 5th August. Evening Service is at 6:30pm.

PICNIC & CONCERT

Back by popular demand following the huge success of 2006:

Proms in Blackheath Park: A Summer Recital.

Sat 7th July 2007

at St Michael's Church

Bring and enjoy a picnic on the church lawn at 6pm.

The Programme begins at 7.30pm. and will include songs from Chicago, Evita and West Side Story as well as extracts from Carmen (Bizet), Lakme (Delibes), and the Magic Flute. We also have classical guitar music including The Miller's Dance by Manuel de Falla and a suite by J S Bach. The Dam Busters March will be played on the church organ and the evening will conclude in traditional manner with Rule Britannia.

Do come-it promises to be a very enjoyable evening!

ST MICHAEL'S HOLIDAY CLUB

Holiday Club, the 'Green Scene', at St Michael's is from July 26 to 29. Bookings are now open. Contact the Parish Office or Leah Philbrick for details

CHRISTIAN AID

The amount counted on Monday 21 May was £2774.71 (plus Fiji¢1, US¢2, ¥100, Lire50, €2, 1 button and 1½ curtain hooks). With later further donations including a 'round-up', the total came to £3003.00. In addition, because of GiftAid, we shall be able to reclaim tax of £461.66. The grand total is therefore £3464.66. Thank you very much to all the distributors, collectors and contributors.



...it's a security camera. I got the idea from a Salford traffic warden....

Have you no words? Ah, think again,
Words flow apace when you complain;
And fill your fellow-creature's ear

With the sad tale of all your care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
To heaven in supplication sent;
Your cheerful song would oftener be
'Hear what the Lord has done for me!'

William Cowper

Solutions to J - i - C 102-104

No other first of the month will be the same day of the week as June 1st, whether in leap- or non-leap years.

Eight, eat. effervescent, eye, emphatic and ewer are in alphabetical order of their initial sounds.

Othello, the SDP, a wartime monarch, an up-and-coming monarch, trees planted by order of Napoleon, an execrable poet, our neighbour parish and a short shirt all suggest DLR stations: Cyprus, Limehouse, King George V, Prince Regent, Poplar, Shadwell, All Saints, Cutty Sark

L'Envoi

Daphne Clifton will be taking over as Editor with the next issue, so the quality will be improving. Her contact details are below.



One last time for the anonymous correspondence who liked it so much:
ANTIDISESTABLISHMENTARIA
NISM

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

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