

Now God comes to thee...

A sermon preached at his Installation, by Joe Hawes

'It has sometimes been said that if someone came up to you in the street and whispered; 'they've found out; run!', nine out of ten of us would.' Rowan Williams at his enthronement in 2003.

It's a description of what is known as 'Impostor Syndrome', a deeply held suspicion that all our achievements have happened through luck or fraud.

So, if I tell you that I am still, waiting for someone to come running down the nave shouting 'it's all been a terrible mistake; it was never meant to be you!... You'll grasp something of what I am feeling today.

That's why the story of Jacob in the Old Testament helps me. Jacob, whose words upon waking from his dream with God's promise to be with him forever, are the words for the Introit for today's service, and I am very grateful to Jonathan Wikeley from All Saints Fulham, who composed it for today.

I love Jacob, he's a bad boy, and as bad boys often do, he gets his comeuppance, and God comes to meet him in his hour of need.

Remember the story? Jacob cheats his brother out of his birth right, steals his dying father's blessing and goes on the run from his brother's murderous rage. Jacob is a liar, a thief and a cheat, and I love him. His personality shines through the pages of Genesis. He ducks and dives his way through life and wears his heart on his sleeve. He meets Rachel, the woman he is to marry, he falls in love on the spot and bursts into tears. He must work seven years to earn her hand, and on his wedding night the trickster is tricked by his father in law who slips her elder sister into bed with him (and I don't think they just cuddled!) so he has to work another seven years to earn Rachel. He's a fantastic sinner, a runaway and very human. He lives fully, and the glorious bit? God loves him. Not in the disapproving, head shaking way religious people reserve for the badly behaved, but with what feels like delight, God's suppressed laughter, a soft spot for the bad boy.

I'm not nearly interesting enough to be a bad boy in the mould of Jacob, (*Although others may disagree*). What Jacob's story gives me, gives all of us, is the reassurance that we are loved, sought out and found. Loved as we are and for who we are. God's laughter comes from a heart which sees and knows and loves us and is not the slightest bit taken in by our attempts to fool him. Not, by endless sacrifices, trying to climb up to God on a pile of good deeds, but by the honesty and vulnerability of allowing ourselves to be known and loved, being open to grace that help us stop running, helps me and all of us, to get beyond the feeling of being an unworthy imposter, and get on and do the job to which we have been called. To be human beings fully alive and to help others to be also. Not despite our humanity but because of it. We need space to do this.

A cathedral building testifies to spaciousness. Poetry in stone, soaring arches and tower. How do we think about ourselves, our town, our diocese and county? True spaciousness makes space for others, Jesus tells the disciples in the Gospel, he is

leaving them physically, so that they can get on with the job of loving each other, making space for the Spirit to blow through the closed doors of fear and bereavement, offering them something new and exciting and different.

Amid the wonderful excitement about today, I've noticed a slight sense of worry around the cathedral. Worry about not having "enough": money, resources, young families? Might making space help us to trust God a bit more, help us to turn outwards from our worries and fears? Open ourselves to the opportunity of newness and space for more good things to happen.

So, the Dean's Vision? His Ladder from heaven? A Cathedral must make space for the diocese it serves, its town and county, and to do so with a sense of the privilege of having been called, to be the creative, Holy, and inclusive space, for all it serves.

Already We've experienced it. Christopher and I have been overwhelmed by the warmth of welcome you have shown us, from the hundreds of cards and notes, offers of food, invitations, assurances of prayers and the warmth of your welcome. We have been truly staggered by your generosity, the space you have made for both of us here. From Bishop Martin and the Bishops Council; civic representatives of the county, to the staff in Pilgrim's Kitchen. We can proclaim with Jacob, "The Lord is truly here".

Your generosity reflects the spacious generosity of God. With generosity we will find blessing, a blessing which grows from a heart, enlarged by what it has learned, and received, and shared. A blessing for which an insecure, and febrile society, longs for.

A blessing which will help us to grow in confidence to, proclaim a faith which is neither strident nor exclusive, but quietly, persistently and beautifully, tells us that we are all imposters, who have been sought out and found, loved, and brought home.

"For He comes to us, comes to us as the Noonday sun, to illuminate all our shadows.." as our final anthem, setting words by John Donne, another bad boy who after turbulent years of loving, fighting and fleeing, found in bereavement, the spaciousness of God's love. (Composed by James Thomas, Director of Music here, to whom also my thanks,)

Now is his season. Your heart, this place, the community we build together in Suffolk, is the occasion for his radiance. If we can make space, if we can but believe it, this building, standing to his glory, will continue to warm all who come, *"wintred and frozen, clouded and eclipsed, damped and benumbed"*

God comes to you, as the Noonday sun, asking you nothing more than you turn up. God will irradiate your being with healing grace. Everything you experience, your most alienated, most broken, sorrowful, failing circumstances, invites his mercies and all times are his seasons.

God Will fill the space we offer to him. Our Humanity, our heart, our Cathedral, our county, our nation and our world, can be filled with healing hope and love.

Amen, may it be so.