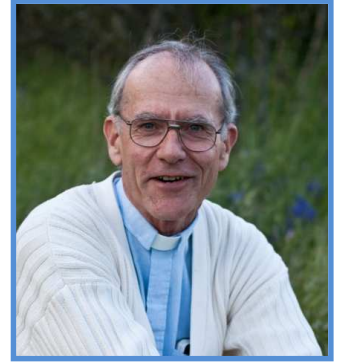


From the Rector's Desk

It is an amazing thing to serve the living God.

You may recognize that as a strongly edited version of Hebrews 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." I like my version better.

For some I think the Christian religion is experienced something like a train ride: you get on at a station, pay the fare (baptism/confirmation) and occasional zone tickets (Sunday morning Collection) and the train just keeps rolling along in the capable (you hope) hands of the engineer (Jesus? God?) and the conductor (the local pastor). You hope that the train doesn't go off the track (like some other Christian trains have done, whether they be splinter groups or congregations hurt by abuse or schism.) Generally there isn't a lot to do; you can visit other cars, and sometimes you take your turn with a bit of maintenance or clean-up. You hope your compartment mates (members of your local church) are pleasant to be with, but if they are not, you can always move to another compartment. The engine, of course, is somewhere up ahead (The Bishop? The Diocesan Office? The Archbishop of Canterbury?) but us lowly passengers don't need to worry about that too much. Another similar image is that of ship, with a crew dedicated to reaching that final destination of the Kingdom of Heaven, a ship traversing often storm-tossed waves and uncharted territories. We even call part of our church the nave (from the same root word that gives us navy)!



But more recently I have seen how these images suggest a far too passive role for the baptized. What image would I choose instead? I think the Church is more like a choir or an orchestra, offering to God and to the community the best performance possible of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which can be in any number of variations on the theme of "Serving God's World." Not only does the church practice this theme in the rehearsal hall (the local Church), but we have music studios (study groups, home groups etc) where new members learn to play their own particular instrument (use their own particular gifts). We also do busking (evangelism) where we play our best solo tunes out there on the street, hoping to make someone's day a little more healed. The one thing that distinguishes us from other 'choirs' is that constant theme: Serving God's World.

One of the reasons I like this image is that my experience of being in choirs and orchestras has shown me how music always has two reasons for its existence. It exists for the musicians to play. It is sheer joy for me to take part in a rehearsal, to be involved in the production of the music itself. That part is like going to Church. There is something that happens with God and the worshippers, that is beautiful and exciting and lovely, just right there on a Sunday morning. But more importantly, the Choir also exists for audiences out there who can be lifted up by the choir's performance. Yes, even without a performance, there is value in going to the rehearsal; but the real goal is the performance that takes place outside the rehearsal room, in front of the world.

And to me that sums up the Church: the rehearsal times have great value in their own right. Sunday mornings in Church are meant to be beautiful and exciting and lovely for the worshippers, and we strive to sing the song of the Composer (God) in tune and with wonderful harmony. But the piece wasn't written for rehearsal only. The gospel was written to be performed, broadcast, given its true life, out in God's world. And serving God, by serving God's people, is a cause for excitement, and for thanksgiving.

Whether we think of it as evangelism, or outreach, or servant ministry, our best moments are when we sing the song of God's love and forgiveness and healing, in the world outside our walls.

- Peter