



CHELMSFORD
CATHEDRAL

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Dear friends and colleagues across the Cathedral Community,

"Look what they make you give"
Clive Owen in the Bourne Identity.

Talking recently with a priest colleague as he approached retirement, he smiled with some sadness and said "look what they make you give!" The line is a famous quote from a film we both knew well - the 2002 thriller, "The Bourne Identity". In the film they are the dying words of a hired assassin, played by Clive Owen. It is a moment of extraordinary pathos.

"Look what they make you give".

I know I'm writing this just as I slowly emerge from having Covid and at the end of a very long academic year, longing for holiday, which (Covid-allowing) starts in a few days. The depletion of the last two and a half years I can still feel physically in my body, just as I see it and hear it in the lives and stories of others.

And I've just surprised myself. It's Friday morning - my day off normally, but I have been off work with Covid since Monday. I put on one of my favourite pieces of modern classical music - Max Richter's extraordinary "On the Nature of Daylight" - and found myself weeping uncontrollably. I do weep easily and often (mostly while driving though I've never quite worked that one out!) and Richter's music is famous for its emotional charge. But these tears, this weeping felt vast and untypical.

I felt confronted with damage - the damage we do to one another, do to ourselves, do to the earth. Damage in the big narratives and in our very day to day personal experience. How deeply hurt I get by casual unkindness, but in the same way how guilty I can be of the same behaviours. And the cost of living in such damaging structures - a society which chooses to tolerate catastrophic damage to the poor and vulnerable without recognising - in New Testament terms at least - that this damages all of us. Poverty harms life. Not just other people's. And work contexts where people are already deeply anxious. Across all sorts of jobs and professions I see people re-thinking their futures. Look what they make you give.

And I guess I'm weeping for the last two and a half years, for the waste and the pain and the death and the damage. I'm still pretty sure that we are only just beginning to see the long-term impacts of the pandemic - be that in our mental health, our physical well-being, our sense of self, and perhaps most significantly in our relationships, our capacity to love and to trust. We all living with limited bandwidth. Maybe we need to recognise that Covid and everything that goes with it has damaged our capacity to feel. Certainly I experience a lot of rough edges these days, a lot of unhealed wounds.

And I think that's where the tears come in. We don't live in a culture where people find it easy to cry in public. I regret that because it means we don't get much practice. When we really need to cry, we find we are often embarrassed because we don't really know how.

The Bible is full of weeping, especially in the Psalms. But maybe the most important and poignant example is the moment after the arrest of Jesus and just after Peter has denied him three times: "The Lord turned and looked at Peter..... then Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22.61-63). The tears of Peter turn out to be the turning point. He has to face himself as he really is, and what he recognises is that he is deeply broken, shipwrecked. And the tears - like a kind of baptism - are the sign that there is a way back; that a new journey has begun.

Most of the time we are frightened of tears because tears make us vulnerable. But precisely because they make us vulnerable, they open up in us the capacity to love, and to recognise that in the ugly mess that we are, we are yet utterly loved. Again and again in the Gospels Jesus meets us and he doesn't judge us. He simply loves us.

Peter is again the person to go to here. In John 21 he finds himself after breakfast sitting on the beach with Jesus. He has let Jesus down in the most comprehensive way. Betrayed him. But Jesus isn't angry; doesn't judge. He looks at Peter with great love and simply asks: Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?

Weeping isn't bad. It's just painful because it reveals to us who we are with all our inadequacy and all our need. And that - our dynamic admission of our own poverty - is all the Lord needs to get to work on the rough stuff of our humanity. Tears open the door.

With my thanks and best wishes.

Nicholas

