

***A Vision of Wholeness – the address given by The Right Reverend Tim Thornton, Bishop of Truro, at the Wholeness & Healing Celebration held in Truro Cathedral on 27 February 2010.***

I would like to begin by quoting three passages from *The Bible*:-

Genesis 1 v 9-13

*And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.*

Isaiah 6 v 1-8

*In the year that King Uzzi'ah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."*

The Revelation to St John the Divine 21 v 1-5

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

Today, as we gather for this very important occasion to consider the ministry of Wholeness and Healing, I want us to begin by focusing on what might be a vision of wholeness and the various elements that go to make that up. But first of all as you sit there could just consider for a moment what one thing you might rather be doing than sitting here in Truro Cathedral.

I want to talk to you for a while about being whole, and in particular to identify three strategies that I would suggest everyone might use to help them on their way to being well. I am not going to suggest particular exercises be they Canadian Air Force exercises or Pilates of some sort or other but rather three strategies that we might use and they are silence, awareness of self and building up a rule of life which for me should contain being human, quality worship which is after all a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet and the priority of prayer.

My main aim today is to talk for a little while about being human and being well. So much time is spent in churches talking about those who are not well and indeed the ministry of Wholeness and Healing is about moving people into well-ness. However it does strike me that we can make the mistake in church of rather wallowing in our sickness or not necessarily seeing our life to be about a vision of wholeness.

One of the themes of today is a recognition of the important place that the National Health Service plays in our lives. We want to say a huge thank you to all those involved in any way, shape or form within the National Health Service and especially to the Chaplaincy Team who play a large part in this day and to Martyn, their lead Chaplain who is preaching this afternoon. I am also aware that many people here work in the National Health Service and all of us know that they do a fantastic job and we are so glad it exists. Of course the whole purpose of the National Health Service is to make people better. It is interesting to notice that when you move to a new area and sign on with a doctor you don't anymore simply get five minutes or less, certainly in my experience here in Truro when I eventually do sign on, I am asked to book a double session and discuss well-being and wholeness. There are now many well-being clinics or wholeness clinics around the place, and the talk is all about various ways in which we can gain wholeness in health.

Of course, we in the Christian Church can sometimes appear to be a little precious or perhaps partial in our thinking about wholeness. After all Jesus was a human being and therefore we should be interested in the whole of life and not simply a part of it, which can sometimes be a mistake in talking about spirituality. I was privileged to meet and hear several times Michael Walker, a Baptist Minister in Cardiff who taught in the theology faculty there and sadly died all too young. He wrote a fascinating article in a book which sadly now is out of print and the article is entitled *'Human and Spiritual Development'*. He made no apologies when asked to write an article about spirituality to say that he wanted to concentrate on being human. He wrote this:

*"As soon as we begin to decontextualise spiritual experiences, whether they be prayer, worship or meditation, then we reverse the true direction of the Christian life and pass God on the way, for in Christ he plunged himself into the depths and recesses of the human experience and there revealed his glory. Christians have always had to wrestle with the temptation to run away from that truth; seeking shelter from painful or disturbingly joyous human experience in spiritual Linus-blankets that insulate us from our humanity, or looking for an escape from the necessity of being human and thus, as we see it, like eagles with broken wings. We find it hard to come to terms with a Christ who, far from spreading his arms to fly from his humanity, holds them out to be fastened to the cross. We sometimes forget that that is where we began our Christian life and that the cross provided not a way out of human experience but a way into it."*

And he goes on to write this:

*“The Christian ministry has always imposed a degree of isolation upon those who are called to share in it. That isolation can produce a type of personality in which humanity is less evident than spirituality. At its worst, we can become prima donnas, shrill rulers in our small kingdoms, unable to delegate or share responsibility, jealously holding the reins of power regardless of our ability to get the show on the road or keep it travelling in the right directions. Less threateningly, we become defensive, unable to handle what seems like criticism, covetous of that reputation for success which is held to be such a sine qua non in some church circles today. Or we hide behind our roles, whether of the priestly figure, the guru, the prophet, or the efficient administrator. Given such an environment it is probable, if I may hazard a guess, that more ministers play golf, the game for loners, than rugby football. The miracle is that many ministers do, in fact, break out of the mould, but they do so only by questioning other people’s expectations of them, or modifying or restructuring the role prepared for them by the institution.”*

*Where the role of leadership is misconceived the people who are led also suffer. An isolated leadership can foster a docile and conforming membership, that docility and conformity being elevated to the status of theological virtue. We can too often see our church members as fillers of our pews, receiver of our teaching, communicants at our altars and faithful servants of our institutions. Personal contact with them is often within the context of pastoral ministration where, again, we are the givers and they the receivers.*

*The church has to recognise that it has a ministry to the broken and inadequate and that a large proportion of its members will be drawn from them. The broken and the inadequate must not, however be conceded a tyranny that comes from weakness which would fashion the church in their own image or make it subservient to their own needs. In accepting people where they are, the church has to have a vision of bringing people to where they might be, and it needs a style of life that will match that vision. If the broken are to be made whole and the inadequate to be brought face to face with that God who summons us, as he summoned Job, to stand up and set our faces into the wind that blows from his presence, then we must set ourselves norms of wholeness and maturity.*

So how do we hold before people a vision of what we can be? How do we give to people a vision of wholeness and fulfillment and so encourage them to leave their sick beds and be well? Sometimes, sadly, it seems churches want people to remain ill, to stay in their beds.

There are of course a number of different areas to consider, but if we think of the passage from Revelation with which I started – that looks to a new Heaven and a new Earth, which have been transformed by the glory of God – and then consider where we encounter the glory of God, surely it is in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet. Do you look forward to celebrating the Eucharist and is it a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet?

I am sure that we need to have quality worship and that that is very important and within that some sense of transcendence and awe is essential. We must not be overly precious about what we do or don’t wear or a particular form of words, but surely the variety of elements that

come together will lead to quality worship. One key element is good preparation which would include prayer. So a key aspect for us of wholeness is being with God and we see that in the Eucharist. We also need to work on our relationship with God and recognise that we are with God and God is with us, we are never separated from God. We must not think of ourselves in some way as less than whole or pretend that we can live life in a partial way. A very important book in my own prayer life is „*Into the Silent Land*’ by Martin Laird.

He writes this:

*The grace of salvation, the grace of Christian wholeness that flowers in silence, dispels this illusion of separation. For when the mind is brought to stillness, and all our strategies of acquisition have dropped, a deeper truth presents itself: we are and have always been one with God and we are all one in God (Jn17:21). The marvellous world of thoughts, sensation, emotions, and inspiration, the spectacular world of creation around us, are all patterns of stunning weather on the holy mountain of God. But we are not the weather. We are the mountain. Weather is happening – delightful sunshine, dull sky, or destructive storm – this is undeniable. But if we think we are the weather happening on Mount Zion (and most of us do precisely this with our attention riveted to the video), then the fundamental truth of our union with God remains obscured and our sense of painful alienation heightened. When the mind is brought to stillness we see that we are the mountain and not the changing patterns of weather appearing on the mountain. We are the awareness in which thoughts and feelings (what we take to be ourselves) appear like so much weather on Mount Zion.*

*For a lifetime we have taken this weather as our thoughts and feelings – to be ourselves, taken ourselves to be this video to which the attention is riveted. Stillness reveals that we are the silent, vast awareness in which the video is playing. To glimpse this fundamental truth is to be liberated, to be set free from the fowler’s snare (Ps 123:7). “Whoever trusts in the Lord is like Mount Zion: Unshakeable, it stands forever” (Ps 125:1). “Mount Zion, true pole of the earth, the great King’s city” (Ps 48:2).*

He goes on later in his book to write about the importance of facing up to our fears and also the need to accept who we are as children of God.

*To the noisy mind these are all obstacles to God. But to the mind that has become silent these obstacles are vehicles of the silence of God. Eckhart reminds us again, “In fact, what used to be a hindrance now helps you most ... For in all things you notice only God.” As Simone Weil expresses it, “Every separation is a link.”*

*One of the great paradoxes of the spiritual life is that our struggles are not separate from the luminous vastness within each of us. We don’t get rid of struggle to discover this open space; nor does its discovery necessarily rid us of our struggles. The riddle of the obstacle is solved not by pushing it away or by holding on to it, but by meeting it with silence and by discovering in this meeting that sacred ground, which upholds both joy and sorrow, both struggle and freedom from struggle. When we realize this we will struggle less with our struggles and we will have solved by our own silence the riddles that guard the doorway into the silent land.*

*Most of us live much of our lives caught in the whirlwind of the stories going on in our heads. As our contemplative practice matures we are presented with opportunities to drop the story and to look straight into these thoughts and feelings that lead many of us around by a nose ring. And we see they are without substance. Without the story, they have no power. This insight is behind Mark Twain's famous line. "I'm an old man now and have had a great many problems. Most of them never happened." A lot goes on in our heads that is quite worthless. The silent mind knows that what sees the fear, the pain, the inner chaos, is free of the fear, pain, or chaos. But for the noisy mind it all becomes a huge problem.*

*Contemplation is the way out of the great self-centred psychodrama. When interior silence is discovered, compassion flows. If we deepen our inner silence, our compassion for others is deepened. We cannot pass through the doorways of silence without becoming part of God's embrace of all humanity in its suffering and joy.*

*Silence is living, dynamic, and liberating. The practice of silence nourishes vigilance, self-knowledge, letting go, and the compassionate embrace of all whom we would otherwise be quick to condemn. Gradually we realize that whatever it is in us that sees the mind games we play is itself free of all such mind games and is utterly silent, pure, vast, and free. When we realize we are the awareness and not the drama unfolding in our awareness our lives are freer, simpler, more compassionate. Fear remains frightening but we are not afraid of fear. Pain still hurts, but we are not hurt by pain.*

As he says, we need to look at fear and we need to face up to it. Silence is scary for many people, probably because we don't like ourselves very much so we don't like being faced with ourselves. An element of wholeness is about liking ourselves and part of liking ourselves is being able to laugh at ourselves. We are pretty funny as human beings and laughter can and should be a key part of people's development and growth towards wholeness. Not of course the laughter which is at people and therefore can be vicious and hostile but rather laughing with and for people. I do think there is not enough laughter or real fun in church, it seems odd to me that often people feel very abashed or timid about the idea that you and laugh or giggle in church.

Surely church should be a place both of profound silence and also profound noise? Laughter is surely the noise of Heaven. I remember, although I can't find the quote, some words from Harry Williams who wrote in a book that part of his vision of Heaven would be seeing Arius slapping Athanasius on the back and then both having a good laugh together. The former Bishop of Sheffield, Jack Nicholls, has been quoted as saying that we need more prayer and parties.

Another important book for me which is a very small book but one which I find very helpful in thinking about wholeness is „*Rule for a New Brother*“ which rather oddly is the rule from a Dutch Benedictine Community translated into English of course. It also has an introduction or a foreword by Henri Nouwen. The foreword is worth buying the book for in itself, I believe. Within it Henri Nouwen writes:

*We live in a time in which we are constantly tempted to let our fears rule our lives. More than ever our world gives us reasons to fear. We are afraid for our own inner impulses which we are not able fully to understand or control, we are afraid of the many strangers surrounding*

*us and threatening to invade our lives, we are afraid of the increasing capability of humanity to destroy itself and we are afraid of a God who can punish us with eternal damnation. The greater our fear, the less our freedom. In order to alleviate our fears we often become very active, busy and full of worries about our future, always on guard for possible dangers. Our fears also make us very self-centred since they make us live our lives as an ongoing battle for survival.*

*Jesus came to cast out our fears. He announced a God of perfect love in whom no fear can exist. He himself and all his messengers, whether angels or apostles, say constantly: „Do not be afraid.’ But it is far from easy not to let the many real fears make us deaf and blind to the God of perfect love. The news of every day, the concrete emergencies of our own daily life and our own inner self-doubt make us often fearful before we are fully aware of it ourselves.*

*What we truly need is a safe space to dwell, to take off our heavy armour and let the perfect love of God touch us, heal us and guide us from the land of fear to the land of God.*

I would like to quote some passages from this rule to give you a flavour of what it says. I find this use of language both new, helpful and thought provoking.

### **Following Jesus**

*Following Jesus*

*does not mean slavishly copying His life.*

*It means making His choice of life your own starting from your own potential*

*and in the place where you find yourself.*

*It means living for the values*

*for which Jesus lived*

*and died.*

*It means following the path He took*

*and seeing things as He saw them.*

*If there is anything in which this life, this way, can be expressed, in which God has revealed Himself most clearly, it is the reality of love.*

*You are someone*

*only in as far as you are love,*

*and only what has turned to love in your life will be preserved.*

*What love is*

*you can learn from Jesus.*

*He is the one who has loved most.*

*He will teach you to put the centre of yourself outside.*

*For no one has greater love than one who dies for friends.*

*He will also teach you  
to be unlimited space for others,  
invitation and openness:  
„Come to me,  
all who are weary and over-burdened  
and I will give you rest.’*

*So be converted to love every day.  
Change all your energies,  
all your potential,  
into selfless gifts for the other person.  
Then you yourself will be changed from within  
and through you  
God’s Kingdom will break into the world.*

*You are called to follow Jesus closely.  
With Him you will take the road  
up to Jerusalem,  
the city of suffering and glorification.  
With Him you will give everything  
that the Kingdom may come.*

*On this road you are called  
to be least of all and not master,  
to carry others’ burdens  
and not lay your own on them,  
to give freedom instead of taking it,  
to grow poor in order to make others rich,  
to take the cross upon yourself  
thus bringing joy to others,  
to die in order that others may live.  
this is the mystery of the gospel  
and there is no purpose in endless talk about it.  
Be silent – for it will be true and genuine  
only if you practice it.*

*So keep Jesus Christ before your eyes.  
Don’t hesitate to go anywhere He leads you;  
don’t stay where you are and don’t look back,  
but look forward with eagerness  
to what lies ahead.*

Surely that is part of a vision of wholeness, in another section of prayer there are these words.

*The Lord Jesus Himself will teach you  
how you should pray.  
He is the creative Word*

*which you may receive in the  
silence of your heart  
and the fruitful soil of your life.  
Listen attentively to what He will say;  
be swift to carry out  
what He will ask of you.  
You have been promised His Spirit  
who will bear your poor little efforts  
before the throne of grace  
and into the intimacy of the living God.*

*Your prayer is therefore not so much a duty  
as a privilege;  
a gift rather than a problem  
or the result of your own efforts.  
So don't tire yourself out  
looking for beautiful thoughts or words,  
but stay attentive before God  
in humility and expectation,  
in desire and purity of heart,  
full of joy and hope.  
Your prayer will take countless forms  
because it is the echo of your life,  
and a reflection of the inexhaustible light  
in which God dwells.*

*Sometimes you will taste and see how good the Lord is.  
Be glad then, and give Him all honour,  
because His goodness to you has no measure.  
Sometimes you will be dry and joyless  
like parched land or an empty well.  
But your thirst and helplessness  
will be your best prayer  
if you accept them with patience  
and embrace them lovingly.  
Sometimes your prayer will be an experience  
of the infinite distance that separates  
you from God;  
sometimes your being and His fullness  
will flow into each other.*

*Sometimes you will be able to pray  
only with your body and hands and eyes;  
sometimes your prayer will move beyond words and images;  
sometimes you will be able to leave  
everything behind you  
to concentrate on God and His Word.  
Sometimes you will be able to do nothing else*

*but take your whole life and everything in you  
and bring them before God.  
Every hour has its own possibilities  
of genuine prayer.*

*Don't be afraid to set apart  
a considerable time for your prayer every day.  
It is your vocation.  
Your zeal for the Kingdom of God  
and your availability for all your companions  
will grow all the greater for it.  
Remember that prayer is more powerful  
than anything you can achieve by your actions.  
And the Lord says there are evils  
that can only be cast out  
by prayer and fasting.*

*So set yourself again and again  
on the way of prayer.  
Never wait till you feel the need for it.  
Often enough, if you only make a new start,  
God will bring it to a good end.  
Make use of a method when you need it.  
Learn from your companions  
and study how the saints of God have prayed.*

*As you pray in community  
you will discover the wide horizon  
of each prayer.  
Rejoice to meet your companions  
in the presence of the Lord,  
and to look with them to the Father of all light.  
Let yourself be carried by the rhythm of prayer  
in the peace and joy of a new world.  
Let yourself be healed of the wounds  
you suffer every day  
by the saving praise of God.*

*Let yourself be renewed  
in your faith, hope and love  
by the Word that comes to you.  
Don't let yourself be distracted by accidentals.  
Try to understand God's Word  
even in the mouth of a bad reader.  
Don't be irritated  
by the one who sings off-key.  
The forms are only important to the extent  
that you know how to see through them.*

*Don't pray so that the world may admire you,  
nor to draw others eyes.*

*Pray so that God may be glorified  
and His name praised.*

*Unite yourself with the unceasing prayer  
of the church on earth and in heaven.*

*Know that through your mouth and heart  
all of creation is proclaiming the glory of God  
and groaning for its redemption in the Lord.*

*In this way your life will be fed with prayer  
and full of this search for God.*

*You will be able to give without  
counting the cost,*

*and accomplish God's will every day.*

*You will dedicate yourself heart and soul  
to the battle against the powers of evil*

*and you will work*

*with joy and indestructible hope*

*for the new humanity*

*for which Jesus gave His life and blood.*

*Prayer and work*

*and not whole without each other.*

Is your glass half empty or half full? I have spent time suggesting that we, as church, ought to have a vision of wholeness to set before people. Why would people come to church if all they hear us talk about are the difficulties and problems or the troubles and grumbles and grouses?

Lent of course is a season when we focus on sin and sinfulness but we must be aware lest we only and always give the impression that our glasses are half empty. At a time when the world is talking about well-being and getting fit, surely we ought to put before people a vision of wholeness. I would suggest within that vision of wholeness for any Christian there ought to be three key elements. They are silence, self awareness and the need to build up a rule of life which should contain some focus on what it means to be human – which means the ability both to laugh and to cry, the need for regular quality worship; and as always, the priority of prayer.

+Tim

27<sup>th</sup> February 2010

