

Finding Fulfilment

Dear Friends,

This will be my last letter to you, as I am retiring from my role as your priest at the end of August. It has been a privilege to serve you for what has been almost sixteen years. I shall leave with many happy memories of my time with you.

I have to acknowledge, however, that there are far fewer of us attending worship services at Crowland Abbey than there were sixteen years ago. Looking at the situation from this angle, it is easy to be pessimistic about the future of the Christian faith in our town, especially as most of those who attend Sunday worship in Crowland, be they Anglican or Methodist, are quite mature in age.

But I do not believe we should be downhearted. God is still with us, and God's ways are not our ways. The Church is not going to die in this part of the world. It may change shape, but it will not die.

I base this on our Christian belief that God has created us in order that we might come to know God. I think that is what Genesis tells us when it says that we were created in God's image (Genesis 1: 27). Being created in God's image does not mean that we look like God, but that we have been created to be in spiritual communion with God. The French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, put it another way when he wrote that we humans have been created with a God-shaped hole in our hearts. In other words, there is a part of us that yearns for spiritual comfort and fulfilment, comfort and fulfilment that we can only get from God. Saint Augustine said the same thing when he wrote of our hearts' being restless until they find their rest in God.

The problem is that many people today search for this fulfilment in the wrong places. It is our job as Christians to help them find the fulfilment that only God can give. To do this I think we need to convince the community that we are ready to listen respectfully to the spiritual questions of folk who are outside the Church but are wanting to talk about what gives meaning and purpose to life. I think there are many such folk out there. Our task is to show them that we Christians are here to be available to them and listen to them without seeking to cram religion down their throats. None in our Methodist or Anglican congregations would think of cramming religion down anyone's throat. But sadly I think the Church suffers from the stereotype that this will be the case for anyone who dares to walk in the church door. So please know, you who are not part of the Church but would like to talk about faith, that you will be welcomed with sympathy if you come to one of our services or contact one of our church leaders. And if you are not yet ready to attend a service, come along to the Abbey on 24 September for the Crowland Community Fair, where you can informally meet not only people who belong to Crowland's many community organizations, but Christians as well.

In closing I would like to thank all of you in our church congregations and in the wider community for making me welcome during these years of my ministry. I have no doubt that you will extend the same welcome to the Revd. Mark Williams and the other Anglican ministers who will be serving you in the years to come.

God bless you all.

Charles Brown