

**(If you only have time to read one reflection, read the one in bold.)**

17<sup>th</sup> Feb

**A change has begun, pp. 1-3**

A clearer vision, pp. 4-6

*These reflections set the scene for lent as they look ahead to the resurrection and give us a challenge for the next few weeks.*

Questions:

- Do you identify with the image of Mary and her possible feelings in ‘A change has begun’?
- What do you think he means by “already the foundations have been laid” (p. 2)? Do you identify with this?
- What do you find most helpful in ‘A change has begun’?
- Do you think the pictures he uses are good images for lent in ‘A clearer vision’?
- What sorts of things are being cleared away during lent? Do you have any experiences of this?

24<sup>th</sup> Feb

**A steady solidarity, pp. 23-26**

Online Communion, pp. 36-39

*Both these reflections speak about appreciating and doing the small things we can accomplish in this disruptive period.*

Notes:

- Rowan Williams mentioned obscure characters in Luke’s Gospel (p. 24) because Luke wrote both the Gospel and Acts.
- Check out Matthias’s brief story in Acts 1:12-26. Rowan Williams’s reflection comes from questioning why Luke would have mentioned Matthias at all if he played such a miniscule role (he doesn’t even speak!).
- In ‘Online Communion’, “sacrament” and “sacramental” is theological language referring to the main rites we celebrate and receive together in Christian community, such as the Eucharist and Baptism. Sacraments are often considered among the most important aspects of Christianity’s public and communal life. Therefore the contrast is between the church celebrating the Eucharist communally in public view, as something given by God for the world’s health, and now being

forced to isolate, meaning we cannot share this essential public ministry.

- “Spiritual communion” (p. 38) refers to sharing life and Jesus’s death and resurrection together even when we can’t do it physically and materially, such as through the Eucharist. So it can describe celebrating the Eucharist online rather than in person.

Questions:

- Do you find the contrast between (Judas,) Matthias and Paul helpful in ‘A steady solidarity’?
- Do you resonate with his reflection on the casual dismissiveness towards ‘those who just turn up in trust’ (pp. 24-25)?
- Do you think it’s easy to find “heroism in the daily routine” (p. 26)?
- In ‘Online Communion’, he describes closing our doors as actually shining a light on neglected aspects of public ministry. Have you considered this before?
- What lesson has he learned through sharing “spiritual communion” on a Sunday (pp. 38-39)? Do you find this helpful?

3<sup>rd</sup> March

**At the still centre, pp. 27-29**

To be born again, pp. 70-73

*These are paired because, as we look through and learn from the example of Mary, we can explore humility and openness to God.*

Questions:

- In ‘At the still centre’, what point do you think he is making by contrasting the Apostles and Mary in the icon of Jesus’s Ascension (pp. 27-28)?
- Do you recognise this “pool of still water” (p. 28; also p. 29)?
- Is Mary’s openness to God a helpful example during lockdown?
- In ‘To be born again’, what do you think the Eastern icon of Mary’s Dormition means for us (p. 71)?
- What do you think about his thought that the purpose of life is “to become simple again”?
- Do you think ‘To be born again’ helps us to understand ‘At the still centre’?

10<sup>th</sup> March

**We are not God, pp. 30-32**

Keep yourselves from idols, pp. 33-35

*These reflections focus on the theme of not reducing God to our desires; rather we should be open to God's life for us.*

Questions:

- In 'We are not God', what do you think he means by Jesus being communicated in a chaotic, new, world-wide community?
- Do you agree with what he says about the work of the Holy Spirit (pp. 31-32)?
- Do you resonate with his comment that moments of mortality can be moments of grace (pp. 31-32)?
- In 'Keep yourselves from idols', do you find the contrast between the waterfall and idols helpful?
- In what way do you think the examples on pp. 34-35 are idolatrous?

17<sup>th</sup> March

The problem with statues, pp. 40-43

**Second nature, pp. 44-46**

*From different angles, these two reflect on our life as an ever-changing story and the importance of recognising this, discussing how we might build up our story in Christ.*

Notes:

- Many of us may be unfamiliar with Eastern Christianity's icons. Have a quick search online at some of them. See if you agree with Rowan Williams's assertion that they contain a sense of mobility that statues lack.
- Rowan Williams makes use of Romans 12:2. After thinking through the reflections, go and read Romans 12:2 onwards. Does his reflection help you read the Romans passage better?
- Today's reflections are best read together because both they describe how we relate to people and history either statically or with mobility. In other words, are these relations absolute, perhaps meaning our impressions of people or interactions with them are never open to change? Or are they responsive, open to listening and understanding different stories and perspectives? Being attuned to other people, as Christ is "eternally" (p. 45), may mean more readily setting aside our engrained ideas in order to give other people genuine space to think and speak.

Questions:

- In 'The problem with statues', what do you think about his contrast between statues and stories?
- Do you find his comment about icons guiding our thoughts towards a wider, moving reality helpful?
- What does 'constantly re-telling' the story mean (p. 43)? Do you like this? What might this mean for our stories?
- In 'Second nature': Have you thought about the way our habits and perspectives change in our story before?
- Do you agree with the sentence beginning "Transformation is the process..." (p. 45)?

24<sup>th</sup> March

Transfiguration, pp. 66-69

*This reflection leads us into the cross, recognising our need for Jesus and what we might find when he hangs there.*

Notes:

- You can read about the transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13 and Luke 9:28-36.

Questions:

- What do you think the sentence beginning "And we will probably then either put..." (p. 67) means? Is this true of other harmful behaviour?
- What do you think about his commentary on sin as choice not necessity (pp. 67-68)?
- What did the transfiguration mean for the cross? Do you agree?
- "They knew that humanity could be the face worn by God." (p. 68) What does this mean to you?
- "And whatever terrors, crimes and catastrophes might follow, nothing could extinguish that eternal light." (p. 68) Does this help you understand the cross and face tragedies?

31<sup>st</sup> March – Day before Maundy Thursday  
Staying Put, pp. 7-9

*This reflection challenges us to think on the events of Maundy Thursday and to consider the kind of love Jesus displays during Passion Week.*

Notes:

- You can find Jesus's words "love one another as I have loved you" in John 13:34.

Going Deeper:

- We have already encountered the term 'sacraments' as the main Christian rites, such as the Eucharist and Baptism (see 24<sup>th</sup> Feb). In today's reflection Rowan Williams makes use of 'sacramental theology', where the physical things we share (e.g. bread, water, words) can simultaneously point us to and deliver to us God's special presence and grace through the power of the Holy Spirit in the world. They are material and spiritual just as Jesus is human and divine. Hence, on p. 8, he describes Jesus's presence as truly and mysteriously "*there*" in the bread and wine. Different Christian strands disagree about the reality of this theology, so your opinions on his reflection might vary here!
- Being "Eucharistic signs" (p. 9) refers to living out what the Eucharist represents. So what's going on in the Eucharist should be going on in our lives. For instance, being Eucharistic is not just believing the Eucharist is about healing and reconciliation, not just thinking it in church on a Sunday when we drink wine, but living out reconciliation every day with other Christians who may have hurt us. Then we become signs of what God is doing in the Eucharist, and the Eucharist on a Sunday becomes a real part of and celebration of God's reconciliation in our lives.

Questions:

- (Using your imagination and Rowan Williams's brief reflection, p. 7), what did Jesus's love face and overcome?
- Do you resonate with and recognise this love that goes to extremes to bring healing and encouragement in others?
- What do you think about love as staying put? (The first full paragraph on p. 8)
- Is Rowan Williams's discussion on the Eucharist helpful (pp. 8-9)? Does it impact your understanding of how to share the Eucharist with each other and "adore his presence" (p. 9)?

- Does this reflection open up Maundy Thursday to you and make what we do together in church on Maundy Thursday (when we can be there!) more vivid?

7<sup>th</sup> April – Wednesday after Easter  
**All times belong to him, pp. 10-12**  
 Life beyond Lockdown, pp. 19-22

*These are paired because they both take up the theme of transformation and new life, seeds of hope and new possibilities.*

Notes:

- In ‘Life beyond lockdown’, Rowan Williams is making use of a so-called ‘theology of atonement’ (which just means theology of ‘why Jesus died and rose again’) that sees his death and resurrection as battling and beating forces of evil and death. So his victory can usher in a new way, the new creation.
- “The Spirit once again hovering over chaos to bring an ordered world to light” is a reference to Genesis 1:2. Here the world is an unlovely chaotic mess of water and darkness, unable to support life or flourishing. So God orders the world into light and dark, earth and water etc.. Likewise, he says, Christ’s victory offers order to the wasteland and abundant flourishing – the new creation.

Questions:

- One year on from when he wrote ‘All times belong to him’, do you identify with the situations on p. 1?
- What does he say the risen Jesus means in our lives (especially p. 11 paragraph 2)?
- What do you think he means by “there is nowhere and no-when that is simply ‘waste’” (p. 11)? Do you resonate with this?
- In ‘Life beyond lockdown’, how do you feel about the comparison between Jesus energising the disciples to new things after he rose from death and what’s going on now?
- What do you think about the final paragraph (pp. 21-22)? Do you feel ready for this?