Sermons for the Christian Year

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SERMONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

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6th July 2003: Trinity 3

STRENGTH, WEAKNESS, POWER AND GRACE

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2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10; 2 Corinthians 12:2–10; Mark 6:1–13

In his novel *The Feat of the Goat*, the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa describes the demise of a dictator. The dictator in question was General Trujillo, who with his henchmen ruled the small Caribbean state of the Dominican Republic for over thirty years until his assassination in 1961. The novel follows the story of Urania Cabral, who as a girl had been abused by Trujillo at the connivance of her own father to seek preferment with the dictator. A shocking account, yet a graphic illustration of strength, weakness and the abuse of power. Yet Urania as a woman proves to be the strong one, not the dead tyrant.

Society often depicts particular notions of strength as an asset. On a human level, the quest for physical fitness has become one of the most popular activities in the developed world. Gym memberships continue to increase; athletes are admired. Paradoxically, work has become increasing sedentary and obesity more prevalent (whilst malnutrition is far from being banished from sub-Saharan Africa). But where, if anywhere, in this quest for human strength are to be found an understanding of God and the Christ-like standards of reconciliation, forgiveness and justice? The temptation is to see strength in some humans rather than in God.

Some forms of strength can be malignant. Abuses of power, authority and status have caused appalling harm and suffering. Trujillo may not be as well known as Hitler, but tyrants and dictators have invariably favoured military strength over social care for the vulnerable, with Nazi Germany even murdering the handicapped in a state-sponsored programme of euthanasia. Then there is the sinister world of terrorism. The contrast with the words of Jesus could not be more marked: 'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth' (Matt. 5:5, AV).

Today's readings feature strength, weakness, power and grace. We are tempted to think of King David and St Paul as being powerful, strong figures. Yet the readings emphasize their crucial dependence on God's grace.

The Old Testament reading from 2 Samuel describes how David became king over Israel, then seven years later over Judah too. He moved from Hebron to establish his capital at Jerusalem, expelling the Jebusites in the process. Verse 10 states 'And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.'

Jerusalem was previously associated with neither Israel nor Judah. Being located in the centre of King David's newly united realm, it was in many ways the ideal location for his capital. A new city was constructed; it is tempting to draw comparisons with the planned capital cities such as Washington DC, Canberra and Brasilia.

Yet Jerusalem has also been the focus of conflict for much of its history. Modern Jerusalem has also witnessed atrocities which have caused an appalling loss of life and grievous human suffering. The Old Testament account is understandably written from King David's stance, yet what became of the disposed Jebusites? The Psalmist's prayer for the peace of Jerusalem remains all too pertinent to dozens of centuries later. David's conquest of the city of Jerusalem has to be seen in its theological context, yet what are the repercussions of our actions? Is it too easy to subjugate the grace of God to personal ambition? Whose strength are we admiring?

Now let us turn to 2 Corinthians. Here we read of Paul's vision of strength coming through God's grace. The Lord said to Paul 'My grace is

sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'

In verse 7, Paul tells the reader that he suffers from a physical ailment. The Authorized Version translates this as a 'thorn in the flesh'. Paul's ailment remains a mystery. Whatever it was, it was certainly an irritant and, at worse, a condition leading Paul to fear for the future of his ministry. Three times Paul asks God to remove the ailment, yet three times the prayer appears to go unanswered.

Unanswered prayer can be hard to take. Unanswered prayer can lead to loss of faith. Yet Paul's seemingly unanswered prayer leads him to discern God's purpose. The fact that Paul felt the need to pray three times over the same issue can be interpreted (albeit unfairly) as a lack of confidence in God's ability to answer prayer – how many times have we been tempted repeatedly to pray over the same issue, as if endless repetition were a way to guarantee a positive outcome? But it is easy for the person without chronic pain to underestimate a condition such as arthritis. Paul deserves sympathy and understanding; as modern medicine continues to advance, perhaps we increasingly fail to comprehend the sheer practicality of God's grace through the emphasis in Christ's ministry on healing the sick.

Paul found an answer to his prayer. The answer came not in the removal of the 'thorn in the flesh', but an awareness of the all-sufficient, sustaining grace of God. No mere stoicism, such grace allowed Paul to cope with his condition.

We can probably think of people who have endured loss, hurt or pain, yet still overcome their obstacles. Vargas Llosa's novel portrays an extreme example. Another extreme example can be found closer to home. The reaction of Gordon Wilson to the death of his daughter in the 1987 Remembrance Sunday bomb in Enniskillen touched the nation. In his anguish and vulnerability, few failed to discern a grace and strength manifesting itself from Christian faith. Faith is our response to God's grace. The theoretical strength of the terrorist to instil fear through having a supposed power over life and death was shown to be bankrupt in face of divine grace. No one can guess how they might respond if placed in a situation as dreadful as Gordon Wilson, yet the sufficiency of Christ's grace was amply demonstrated.

Turning finally to the reading from Mark's Gospel, we see the rejection of Jesus' ministry by the people of Nazareth. Despite the working of miracles, perhaps the sheer familiarity of Jesus to his neighbours in Nazareth prevented them from discerning his true nature. Do we take what we regard as familiar for granted? The Authorized Version of the Bible famously translates the reaction of Jesus, 'A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.' It is perhaps easier to discern strength and power in an aloof, idealized figure. Once more, we are tempted to see strength in some humans rather than in God.

In the second part of the gospel reading, we see Jesus sending out the apostles to do missionary work. In human terms they seem very ill-equipped, with no money and no bread. Yet with God's grace nothing is impossible.

François de Sales wrote, 'Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength'. The power of divine grace shows that perceived human notions of strength are illusory. In realizing the paradoxical nature of strength and weakness we must look to the cross. A condemned Jesus, weak in human terms, becomes the risen Christ – strong to save.

13th July: Trinity 4

THE EXAMPLE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

By the Revd Dr Chris Knights
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Mark 6:14–29

I have now been in this trade for just over fourteen years. It was at the end of June 1989 that I was ordained Deacon and started in professional ordained ministry in the Church of England.

Over that eleven years I have performed many more baptisms than I can remember. I *can* still recall the very first Baptism I conducted, which was at the daughter Church of the Parish where I was curate, in September 1989. I just hope that I don't end up like John the Baptizer, or John the Baptist, who also performed more baptisms than he could remember, and who ended up imprisoned by Herod and was eventually executed, which was what we've just heard about in the Gospel reading.

'Herod' is one of those names that still conjures up in many people a vision of evil and wickedness, in the same way as names like Judas, Pontius Pilate, the Sheriff of Nottingham, Stalin and Adolf Hitler do. The Herod we have just heard about is not the same Herod who was around at the time of the birth of Jesus, the Herod who – so the story goes – ordered the murder of all infant boys in Bethlehem in an attempt to get rid of the infant messiah, Jesus.

The Herod we've heard about today was a son of that Herod – but he was obviously quite as mean and vicious as his father! He also seems to have been a bit dim – fancy promising your wife's daughter half your kingdom simply because you were so delighted with her first-century version of the birthday strippergram!

Or perhaps it was Herodias' daughter Salome who was the dim one – fancy asking for the head of a mad prophet on a dish when you could have had half of your step-father's possessions! Think about it – which would *you* have chosen?!

Then again, Salome may not have been so dim after all, for this Herod was, in fact, not a king at all and had no kingdom. Indeed, when he later asked the Romans – who were occupying Palestine – for the title King, they banished him to Gaul for his cheek!

This story of the beheading of John the Baptist seems to portray evil and wickedness triumphing over good. Certainly, the failure of Herod's guests to protest at what Herod, Herodias and Salome had cooked up between them really illustrates the saying: 'All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.'

The story seems to be also about what happens when someone gives in to temptation – Herod gave in, and John paid the price. And it is certainly true that, sadly, we can suffer as the result of other people's sins. But I think, at heart, the story is really about Christian courage, and the obligation that Christians and the Church have to speak out boldly against evil and wickedness in the world, whatever the cost in personal terms.

That kind of boldness is part of the cutting edge of the Gospel – a cutting edge that seems to have become blunted in early twenty-first century Britain, where being a churchperson is generally seen as a comfortable and cosy and private option, and to pass comment on someone else's lifestyle or on government policy is seen as unwarranted interfering in personal liberty or in political matters – which the Church should keep out of!

But that's not an angle St John the Baptist would have gone along with. Nor would Janani Luwum or Oscar Romero. Janani Luwum was Archbishop of Uganda during the days of Idi Amin, and he vociferously spoke out against the evils of Amin's dictatorship. Oscar Romero was Archbishop of San Salvador in Central America in the late 1970s, and he too spoke out against the evil and corruption in society. And surely they were both right to do so! And if it was right in Uganda, and right in Central America, why not right here in the UK?

And, like John the Baptist, Janani Luwum and Oscar Romero were both murdered – Luwum certainly at Amin's instigation, Romero possibly on government orders. Which reminds us that being a baptized Christian, being a true disciple, is actually counter-cultural. It goes against the norms and values of society. It means obeying God rather than men. It means serving a higher power. It means risking opposition, ridicule, harassment, imprisonment, persecution and even death: all for the sake of Jesus Christ.

And that offers us, 'Naught for our comfort', to use some words of Archbishop Trevor Huddleston – another outspoken critic of the evils of society, this time in Apartheid South Africa, who spoke out from his deeply-held Christian faith, *Naught for your comfort.*

Or, at least, it offers naught for our comfort if our perspective is just this-worldly.

But Christianity is *not* just about this life! If it were, we would of people be the most to be pitied. For the *Good News* is that if we are faithful or courageous in *this* life, whatever the opposition may do to us, God has for us the crown of life in the *next* life. 'Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life,' says the Lord in the Book of Revelation.

I started out by saying that I hoped I didn't end up like John the Baptist. But I was wrong to have said it. For I *do* want to end up like John the Baptist, in that I want to receive the Crown of Life from the Lord, just as John the Baptist did.

And that means that I have to be like John the Baptist, and to be faithful – faithful even to the point of death, if need be – to be 'Faithful, true and bold', to quote the hymn 'For all the Saints' – and boldly to 'resist corruption and vice', so that I may 'receive

with him the unfading crown of glory', from our Lord Jesus Christ, to quote from one of the prayers for one of the Feasts of John the Baptist.

And what about you? Do you too want that Crown of Life God has for you? Then be faithful, too, even to the point of death, boldly resisting corruption and vice.

> Almighty God,
> who called your servant John the Baptist
> to be the forerunner of your Son in birth and death:
> strengthen us by your grace
> that, as he suffered for the truth,
> so we may boldly resist corruption and vice
> and receive with him the unfading crown of glory;
> through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
> who is alive and reigns with you,
> in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
> one God, now and for ever.

20th July: Trinity 5

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

By The Editor

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1–14a; Ephesians 2:11–22; Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

Text: Psalm 127:1 'Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.'

There is much talk these days about the future of the church; much agonizing about its numerical decline, its apparent loss of influence in society, and its alleged loss of confidence in itself. Some paint a Domesday scenario: by 2050 no churches will be left! When Rowan Williams' appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury was announced, a typical comment was: 'He's going to have a tough job!' Many remedies are offered. The Church must be more efficient, better organized. Its top-heavy bureaucracy must be 'downsized'. It must deploy human resources more effectively, both at local and national levels. And no doubt, these and other suggestions are worthy of consideration. But I'm not going to discuss them here, apart from offering one comment. The debate about the Church seems to be conducted in very human terms – as if, literally, the Church was only a human institution dependent on human effort, human policy, human wisdom. And then I think of our text:

> 'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain' (REB).

I know! I know! This could be the point where the preacher leaves reality behind and takes refuge in pietism; or, as some would put it, 'transcendental irresponsibility'! I recognize the danger. I do not intend to work on the basis of the parody of a well-known hymn:

> Sit down, O men of God.
> His Kingdom He will bring
> Whenever He desireth it.
> You cannot do a thing!

I'm not saying that new initiatives, human planning and dedication are unimportant. But I think our text has something even more important to say to us: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.'

I. Today's Old Testament lesson tells of David's brash attempt to build a house for the Lord. Powerful and successful, David had built a fine palace for himself and now proposed to build a temple for God, a house for the Ark of the Covenant. Nathan the prophet originally agreed, but then discovered that God thought otherwise. There was something topsy-turvey about the king building a house for God. Ultimate power rests with God, not the king. It is the Lord who will build up the house of David. And, through his prophet, God reminded David of the story of the people's salvation from slavery and of God's shepherding of them across the desert. And never once did he ask them to build a house of cedar for him!

In truth, when the Temple was eventually built – not by David but by his successors – it was as much a symbol of the ruler's power and prestige as it was a centre of Israel's worship. And when the nation fell, the Temple fell also. Even in its life-time, prophets attacked it for the false religion it engendered. Jeremiah thundered:

> You steal, you murder, you commit adultery and perjury, you burn sacrifices to Ba'al, and you run after other gods whom you have not known; will you then come and stand before me in this house that bears my name, and say 'We are safe'? Safe, you think, to indulge in all these abominations! (Jer. 7:8–10, REB)

Jesus repeated the prophet's protest when he drove the moneychangers from the Temple. Instead of a

house of prayer for all the nations, 'you have made it a robbers' cave' (Mark 11:17, REB).

But, one might object, the problems of the Jerusalem Temple are far removed from most of us today. We are concerned about the Christian Church and its future. Agreed! Yet the history of the Church contains disgraceful episodes, for which repentance is the only option. It is all the more important, therefore, that in thinking about the re-building of the Church, we are not simply perpetuating the mistakes or formulae of the past. 'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.'

II. Briefly, three indications from our readings today: First, from 2 Samuel we note the importance of preserving the story of salvation. In the Old Testament, this is above all the story of how God saved his people from slavery and the privations of the wilderness and gave them a new future. They must be true to *that* story, not the story of the all-conquering king. Jesus lived out the story of salvation in his life and ministry. *That* is the central story for us. His story must so inform our lives that it becomes *our* story.

Second, from Mark's Gospel we learn of the needs of the crowds – like sheep without a shepherd, thronging Jesus even when he was trying to escape their attentions for a while. But in the midst of these upheavals, there is the story of the feeding of the multitudes. This story, which on the face of it is a kind of unimaginable miracle, is an acted parable of God's gifts and of his grace. The crowds are hungry, with a spiritual as well as a physical hunger. Christ shares with them the bread of life; and his gifts, expressing God's goodness and grace, are super-abundant – more than we can ask or think: hence the baskets of surplus food. The Church also has at its heart an unimaginable miracle: the Christ who shares himself with us in worship and sacrament. Today, the Church is called to embody and reflect this outreaching, life-transforming grace – the love and forgiveness of God, the resources of the Spirit.

Finally, there is a passage in Ephesians that complements this message: God had built a new temple through Christ, but it did not consist of stone or cedar wood. It consisted of people.

> You are ... fellow citizens with God's people, members of God's household. You are built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple to the Lord. (Eph. 2:19–21, REB)

The Lord has built the house, and assuredly he can rebuild it today. But such a project needs more than human skills, planning and wisdom. It presupposes a community, of faith, modelled on Christ's ministry and reflecting his grace, and thus fitted to be God's household. Such a community is eternal, living by the will and strength of God. He is its Rock, and the gates of Hell cannot prevail against it.

27th July 2003: Trinity 6

AN ACCESSIBLE GOD

By the Revd John D. Searle, BA, BD
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Ephesians 3:11–21

Dr Daniel T. Niles, past President of the WCC and founder of the E. Asia Christian Council, was once asked, 'How do you present Christ in a predominantly Hindu country like Sri Lanka?' He replied:

> I repeat the words of Jesus, 'No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me you will know my Father also.' Through other great religious teachers you can come to God, but only in the revelation of Jesus do we understand God as *Father*.

Jesus was not the first to address God as 'Father'. In pagan religion and in the Old Testament there are references to a 'Father-God'.[1] However, Jesus invested the title with a wider and deeper meaning. He referred to and addressed God as 'Father' and taught his disciples to do likewise. Significantly, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when under great stress, he used the Aramaic 'Abba' (Mark 14:36), a name used also in the Spirit-filled prayers of the early Christian community (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:16). Originally a child's word, similar to 'Daddy' or 'Dad' in English, 'Abba' had become a common way of talking to or about one's father, expressing the intimate relationship between child and parent.

[1] E.g. Jupiter and Zeus; Deut. 32:6; Hos. 11:1; Jer. 31:9b; Isa. 63:16; Mal. 1:6.

The writer of Ephesians says, 'I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name' (3:14, 15). These words reflect Jesus' teaching that a Father-like God is one to whom we have immediate access. Such a notion must have shocked those Jews who believed that it was not possible to approach God directly. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and that but once a year, on the Day of Atonement. There are many people *today* who also think of God as unapproachable. In the words of W. Chalmer Smith's hymn, he is the 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise, In light inaccessible hid from our eyes'. Of course, it is right that we feel a sense of the numinous, the 'mysterium tremendum'.[2] This is particularly necessary at a time when much contemporary worship encourages a spirit of 'mateyness' with the Almighty, in Edmund Fitzgerald's words, 'He's a Good Fellow and 'twill all be well'.[3] However, if we have a proper understanding of the nature of God as our *heavenly Father*, it is possible to balance a sense of reverence for the transcendent Creator with the assurance that, as *our* 'Abba–Father', he welcomes us into his presence. In a similar way we might think of the children of a Royal Family feeling able to go to their parents in 'boldness and confidence'.

The writer also tells us that God is the Father 'from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name' (NRSV). The word 'family' poses a problem for the translator. It could refer to every family 'whether spiritual or natural' (Jerusalem Bible). 'Spiritual' is used here in the sense that, by faith in Christ, we become individually sons and daughters of God in a special way (John 1:12), 'adopted' children who are able to use the intimate 'Abba' in addressing God (Rom. 8:15). By contrast, 'natural' is used in the sense that all members of the human race are children of God since he is the Creator of all that is. On the other hand, 'family' could refer to every local congregation, or the total community of the Church, the so-called 'Family of the Church'. Either way, as Paul makes abundantly clear, God is not partisan, for 'There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . slave or free . . . male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28). God treats *all* alike, even to the extent that 'he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' (Matt. 5:45). The universalism of God's Fatherhood should rule out all claims to a monopoly of truth by any nation or religious group. Although opinions will differ regarding the standing of other world religions in relation to Christianity, there is no justification for the dogmatism which discounts those who differ in belief and practice. Nor is there any excuse for the spiritual snobbery which denigrates a spontaneous cry for help in a desperate situation by someone not accustomed to pray. A good human father does not turn a deaf ear to a son or daughter in need, even if that child has lost touch and gone astray like the younger son in one of the parables of Jesus (Luke 15:11–32).

Because of the ambiguity of the Greek word '*patria*' in this verse, the RV margin has '*fatherhood*' as an alternative to 'family', thereby suggesting that the characteristics of human fatherhood are derived from the Fatherhood of God, an idea supported by the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 7:11). J. Knox, J. B. Phillips and W. Barclay interpret it in this way, the latter translates, 'that Father who is the origin and ideal of all fatherhood in heaven and on earth'. If God is the pattern for true fatherhood, we have certain guidelines for good parenting, although Jesus would be thinking of a good *Jewish* father when he made the comparison. Three characteristics may be noted in this respect. The Jewish father, as the undisputed head of the household, had absolute authority and expected total obedience. Second, his special responsibility was to provide a religious and moral education based on knowledge of the Commandments and Jewish Law. Third, the basis of the relationship was a deep, tender-hearted love undergirding the discipline necessary for such an upbringing. So the Psalmist makes the comparison, 'As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him' (Psalm 103:13). Jesus used the analogy of an ordinary, fallible human father to illustrate 'how *much more* will the heavenly Father give' to his children (see Luke 15:11–13). His first-hand experience of human fatherhood would have been Joseph, and we may assume that something of the father 'rubbed off' on the son. R. E. O. White makes the point in verse:

> If Joseph had not driven
> Straight nails through honest wood,
> If Joseph had not cherished

[2] Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).
[3] *Omar Khayyám.*

His Mary as he should,
Would Christ have prayed 'Our Father',
Or cried that name in death,
Unless He first had honoured
Joseph of Nazareth?

The axiom, 'like father, like son', can be reversed as it was by Jesus who, replying to his critics, said, 'if you knew me, you would know my Father also' (John 8:19). The nature of God is mirrored in his Son, who is depicted in the Gospels as passionately concerned for the poor, sick and needy, never rejecting anyone who came to him. Such all-embracing love is manifest pre-eminently in his death on the cross, when 'he laid down his life for all', including his executioners (Luke 23:34). On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9), and because he is 'the human face of God', we know that the One who created the Universe is also like a loving Father.

Finally, although 'Father' was the name for God most favoured by Jesus, there are those who find it an unhelpful, even offensive, expression. Some reject it on grounds of male bias. However, when the masculine gender is used, most people are aware that God is gender*less* and is therefore, metaphorically, our divine '*Parent*' – in whom reside the ideal attributes of fatherhood *and* motherhood. There are also those whose personal experience has given them a grossly distorted perception of fatherhood. Once, when I was encouraging a group of teenagers to think of God as 'our heavenly Father', one of the boys suddenly burst out, 'My father's a ****** (*expletives deleted*), how can *I* think of God as *my* father?' It is said that Martin Luther found great difficulty in beginning the Lord's Prayer because of his dreadful memories of childhood. For this reason, it is essential to understand the Fatherhood of God *in the light of the Sonship of Jesus.*

Knowing God as a '*heavenly* Father' through his Son, Jesus, enables us to have that due sense of reverence that prompted the writer of Ephesians to say, 'I bow my knees before the Father', and also to be sure that he is the God to whom 'we have access . . . in boldness and confidence' (3:14, 12). In John Baillie's memorable words, 'At the centre of the Universe there is That which is more like a father's loving heart than like anything else we know'.[4]

[4] *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926).

ON PREACHING

Touch and Go by Margaret Forrester (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2002. £7.99. pp. 129. ISBN 0–7152–0800–4).

The lameness, tameness and sameness which characterizes a great deal of modern preaching concerns me. Too many ministers seem to have forgotten that the human mind resembles a picture gallery more than a debating chamber. This being so, how refreshing it was to read this book of thoughtful imaginative sermons. Margaret Forrester is well aware that word pictures and good illustrations linger in the memory far longer than an abstract dissertation. Margaret is a worthy 'follower of Jesus', not only in having a great deal of love in her heart, but also in the way she embodies her message in everyday non-religious stories, the modern equivalent of the farmers, fisherfolk and housewives about whom Jesus spoke so often in his parables.

'The book of Job', Margaret says, 'is poetic theology.' So in many respects is Margaret's preaching. In one sermon, preached to her much-loved Edinburgh congregation whom she has served for more than twenty years, she begins by saying, 'I want you to think of this church as a theatre . . .' In another, she imagines Philip and Andrew corresponding. In some very moving pastoral sermons she deals with the spiritual struggles of people, with the battle between faith and doubt, hope and despair. Aware that the Gospel has social and political implications she has also included sermons on 'Touching the world through politics'. Margaret's addresses are honest and relevant, easily remembered and challenging. She has succeeded in communicating Biblical truths in simple everyday language, while at the same time retaining intellectual integrity.

The central 'touch' theme of the book reaches a magnificent climax on the second last page, in a most powerful illustration about a woman with learning difficulties. I am not going to elaborate further on this 'touching' story. Better that you buy the book and read it, and the sermons, for yourself.

JAMES A. SIMPSON, Bankfoot, Perth