

St George the Martyr
Shirley
Lent Course 2012



Can we build a better world?
(Learning from William Wilberforce)

Sunday 26 February: Slavery
Sunday 4 March: Friendship and Prayer
Sunday 11 March: Change and Struggle
Sunday 25 March: Redemption and Restitution

Sessions will be on Sunday evenings
from 5.45p.m. (refreshments in the Choir Vestry)
for 6p.m.—7p.m. In the Lady Chapel

Everyone Welcome.

It is interesting that two of the four pictures on offer to illustrate Slavery are of **locks on people's minds, rather than balls and chains around their legs**. This York Course series reminds us that slavery didn't end with British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and British abolition of slavery in 1833. However, it also reminds us that in his many campaigns - against slavery, public hangings, brutal prisons, inadequate health care, inadequate education, poverty, and low standards in public life, the Yorkshire man William Wilberforce was fighting

locked minds. He was fighting the prejudices of those who directly benefited from the evil systems of the time, and the prejudices of those who simply thought that this was how things had always been, and that to talk of change was pointless. (Think of the Bob Newhart cannibal song in which one small **boy at the cannibal family dinner table ventures to suggest that “eating people is wrong”, and gets laughed down.**)

Modern slavery is one aspect of modern life which Christians (and others have challenged), but there are many others. Sometimes, Christian advocates of change are praised for leading the way. Sometimes, they are condemned for **rocking the boat. Often, they are regarded as “doing politics” instead of just “doing religion”.** The Church as an institution may be seen by some as **standing in the way of desirable change (e.g. women’s rights), just as it was when Christians who benefited from slavery defended it, and Christians who benefited from apartheid supported it.** The Bible reflects the times in which it was written as well as challenging contemporary mores; and while Bible thinking laid the basis for ending slavery and ending the subjugation of women, there are plenty of Bible texts that could be quoted in support of keeping things as they were.

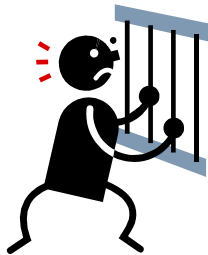
Session 1: Slavery then and now: William Wilberforce was never a man to see things that seemed wrong to him, and tut tut or reflect that someone ought to do something about it. If it was wrong, it needed to be changed; and if people were needed to affect change, he was going to be one of them. While he **did take personal morality seriously, he wasn’t content to concentrate on this and leave public morality to the politicians.** In particular, he was in it for the long haul - **none of this “well, I have tried, and it simply isn’t working”.** His approach was **“Try, try and try again”.**

Sex slaves are perhaps the most prominent current reminder that slavery is still an issue in this country. Otherwise, we tend to think of it as someone **else’s problem in some other countries, e.g. Gabon and Benin.** However, from time to time, cockle pickers drowning in Morecambe Bay, or the escaping servant of some rich foreigner in London, or abuse by care staff who are illegal immigrants and afraid to blow the whistle, reminds us of what may be going on **under our noses.** **“Fair Trade” is an on-going argument about the slave-like or certainly unjust conditions in which some of what we eat, drink or wear, is pro-**

duced. Is compassion fatigue tenable for Christians? If you feel yourself loved by God, can you deny love to others who are lacking it? **“Love one another as I have loved you!”**

Session 2: Friendship & Prayer then and now: John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, is from Uganda. When The Ugandan President Idi Amin had the Archbishop Janain Luwum killed, John’s reaction was **“You killed my friend, and I’ll take his place”**. (And just in case we relax in the knowledge that London isn’t Kampala: John Sentamu was spat on, pushed down an escalator, and received hate letters containing human excrement, because he was a black Archbishop here.) Wilberforce needed his friends, and he and his friends prayed together as naturally as they had tea together. On friendship and slavery, the most powerful Jesus quote is **“You are no longer slaves and I will call you friends”**. Methodist leader Leslie Griffiths expresses regret that friendship has been so sexualised - as if meeting of bodies is far more important than meeting of minds.

On prayer, there is an interesting debate to be had about running prayer and action together, about praying for specific things, and about prayer as partnership with God in God’s project. John Sentamu says that when he heard that his sister had been arrested in Uganda, he and other family members prayed for her safety, but she was butchered by Amin’s thugs. But he, like Wendy Craig the actress (another York Course contributor), consistently gets up early to pray, and places every dilemma and every project in God’s hands.



Session 3: Change & Struggle: Wilberforce was not a man of his time, in the sense that he looked at what was happening, and instead of just living with what was he set out to change what was wrong: having a vision of how things ought to be. There is a difference between a task being impossible, and a task being nearly impossible... and if you look at history and look at nature you

see a lot of the nearly impossible being possible, e.g. Plants growing through concrete and through the frozen ground, and Christianity still being a force for good 2000 years after its leader was killed and his followers scattered. Think Cicely Saunders with little in the way of resources, think Bill Gates with vast resources. What is your vision of the world of your children and grandchildren? What can you do to make the vision reality?

What do we think of what has changed? In 1946 the Censor cut from a film shots of drinking alcohol, an unmade bed, and *a man* stripped to the waist! Today, not only on film but on daytime TV..... Do freedom and happiness go together, or does excessive freedom bring its own slavery? (Young people are prone to feel that they have to...., because everyone else is.) Is it good or bad that Christianity no longer enjoys a privileged status in this country? Is political correctness a good or bad thing: encouraging sensitivity, or suppressing honesty?

Session 4: The Bible then and now: We are actually leaving out this session, because we have only four Sundays readily available. But you might like to think about three questions:- 1) What does the Bible have to say on **today's big issues?** 2) **Do we read the Bible to shape our opinions, or to confirm our prejudices?** 3) Why do most church-goers only use a Bible on Sundays?

Session 5: Redemption & Restitution: **"The truth is, we're all addicted to something. Only when we appreciate the nature of addiction will we be able to set its many captives free."** (Jackie Pullinger) Jackie provides a helpful counterpart to the bland assumption that we are talking about other people's problems and other people's solutions! **Redemption and freedom mean something highly specific for a slave: what do they mean for us? Do we live redeemed and liberated? (A friend of Wilberforce said that "His presence was as fatal to dullness as to immorality, his mirth as irresistible as the first laughter of childhood".)**

Most of us are quite good at identifying individual sins, even at times our own sins; but how good are we at recognising and dealing with Sin - our broken relationship with God (and each other) and the healing/redemptive possibilities? **Is our prayer "transformative"?**