

St George the Martyr
Shirley
Lent Course 2012



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

Sunday 11 March: Change and Struggle
5 45p.m. For 6p.m. - 7p.m.

1. To change things, or to contribute to changing them, it is good to have an alternative vision of how things ought to be. That is the shortcoming in some protest movements: they are clear as to what is wrong, but rather vague as to what ought to take its place. When Jesus talked about chasing out evil spirits and the awful consequences when there was nothing to replace them, he knew how the human mind and human society work. Abolish slavery - what then? Abolish capital punishment - what then? Abolish capitalism - what then? Wilberforce and his friends had an alternative vision.

2. Visionaries sometimes get a bad reputation. They might be described as woolly liberals. They might be described simply as people who have lost contact with reality. There are, of course, visions/dreams which are so remote from current reality that nobody, including the visionary, can see any realistic prospect of getting from here to there. On the other hand, even where a reformer's vision seems rather far-fetched, the vision may be both desirable and, **just about, attainable.** **Martin Luther King's vision seemed rather far-fetched**

at the time, but many people could see the attractions and enough people thought that there was a possibility of the dream becoming reality. A big part of that dream was the realisation that young children are not naturally prejudiced. Therefore, with the right sort of nurture they might not acquire the sorts of prejudice that was then being acquired through the distorted teaching and example of prejudiced adults. Racial prejudice is by no means a thing of the past (even here - witness recent football incidents), but America has had **black leaders, and not just in football and basket ball**. **Isaiah's vision of various improbable animals/humans getting on just fine with each other** has also been in the news recently, with photographs of the most extraordinary animal friendships appearing on Emails.

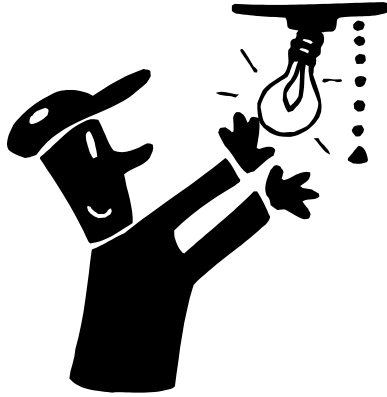
3. What is your vision of the ideal, but achievable, society/world - a different world for your children or grandchildren? What would have to be changed in order to get there? Is there anything you personally are doing or could be doing to bring the ideal about? Is there anything in the Coalition Government programme or in the manifestos of any of the major political parties that would take us nearer your vision. What do you see as the priorities for change? Is the official Church or the local church making the right kind of noises or taking the right kind of actions? Indeed, should the Church/church collectively have **what might be seen as a "political" vision?** (On one understanding of the place of religion in society, the Church/church can happily provide public worship opportunities and a little spiritual advice for democracies, dictatorships, oligarchies, tribal factions, or indeed the Mafia!)



4. As the parish brief on the Church and Change discusses, it would be fair to say that Christ was about radical change, whereas his Church sometimes seems to be about maintaining the status quo. Judged by tabloid headlines, Christians spend most of their time complaining about social change: Christianity losing its place in society (and being shouted down by militant atheism or militant Islam); marriage going out of fashion or being used to describe any sort of temporary union; sex being separated out from both procreation and love, and performed in public; social cohesion being replaced by rampant individualism; the [Protestant] work ethic being overtaken by the world owes me a living syndrome; the family becoming a description of loosely related individuals who occasionally pass each other on the stairs; Britishness being smothered in political correctness; silence and reflectiveness being buried in an avalanche of instant (and largely pointless) messaging... The Christian voice sometimes seems to be the voice of the Grumpy Old Man or of Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells.

5. How do you personally feel about change? Has it all been bad, or can you see good or promising change - bright shoots of everlastingness, to use the poetic jargon of yesteryear? Do you still believe that a blade of grass can crack concrete, or have you given up on hope...though not on (a rather pessimistic) faith or on love? Believing in light when everything is dark is commendable, but maybe not quite as good as being able actually to see glimmers of light where most people just see gloom deepening into darkness. Is the Church providing a helpfully prophetic voice....am I? How are we doing in comparison with the little boy and the starfish? - The little boy was throwing **the stranded starfish back into the sea, and responded to his father's world-weary "It won't make any difference" with "It will to this starfish".**

6. If you are discouraged by militant Islam hogging the headlines, are you encouraged by moderate Islam speaking up for Christianity in defence of **CHRISTmas against the "Winterval" or Winter Festival lobby?** Indeed do you see a positive side to political correctness - as against the old attitude of say what you like, and if it upsets someone, so be it! ? Would you back the right of women to be fully veiled if that is their choice? Is being more open, honest and flexible about sex and sexuality good or bad (or both)? If we are now in this country a persecuted minority, is that in some ways a good thing?



Southwark Mission Prayer
God of faith, deepen our faith
so we may bear witness to Christ in the world;
God of hope, strengthen our hope
so we may be signposts to your transforming presence;
God of love, kindle our love
so that , in a fragile and divided world,
we may be signs of the faith, hope and love
which we share in Jesus Christ.
Amen.