

It's a family thing



Richard Dormandy *reflects on* Philippians 2:5-11

Cultures with a prominent honour/shame ethos know their national and family stories; how life should be lived; and how respect should be given. At best, it makes for responsibility, care, self-offering and mutual celebration. At worst, it straitjackets personal expression and legitimises revenge.

Biblical cultures certainly had this ethos. Appreciating this not only explains obscure passages, but also uncovers meaning in some of them. The famous "Christ hymn" in Philippians is a case in point. It begins and ends in eternity, telling us that Jesus did not regard equality with God as "something to be exploited", and ends with him being publicly worshipped. The worship of Jesus can, in Jewish terms, mean only that he is unambiguously seen as God. This

echoes the start of the passage, that he was "in the form of God."

The middle of the passage tells us of Jesus' self-emptying and obedience "to the point of death". But how are we to interpret this obedience? Is it grovelling subservience and unwilling, helpless compliance? Our understanding of corporate family identity in the ancient Mediterranean offers a different insight. The Son was freely playing his part in his mission, taking the story to its next chapter. In this way he gladly honours the Father by redeeming the world. In return, the Father honours Jesus by publicly exalting him and giving him "the name that is above every name". The Son emptied himself through incarnation; the Father gave of himself through sharing his glory. 🍷

Words from the cross, part 6

A series for Lent

by Caroline Fletcher

"When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John 19:30

Have you ever suffered to achieve a goal: perhaps when training for a marathon or losing weight? The harder a goal, the more satisfied we are when it's accomplished.

Jesus' cry, "It is finished" was a cry of victory. Despite being physically and spiritually exhausted, he did not give up on life disappointed and defeated. Jesus died with

words of victory on his lips, knowing he had accomplished his God-given task. His utter obedience to God meant that he was willing to suffer to achieve his Father's will. From the most terrible of events, the crucifixion of an innocent man, God brought good. For us too, obedience may lead us along the path of suffering. The world may see nothing in this but hopelessness and despair, but let us take heart that we serve a God who brings good out of evil. Let us remember Jesus' victory cry for, if we remain in him, victory in the darkness is ours too. 🍷

“Without waiting, begin at once to obey him with the best heart you have. Any obedience is better than none.”

John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Roman Catholic cardinal, theologian and poet

Heavenly Father, this Lent help us gladly to offer ourselves in serving the family story you call us into. Amen.

Finding God in the spring

by Caroline Hodgson

Honouring the cycle of the seasons is one of the best ways of feeling God's presence, so take time to notice God at work. What signs of spring can you see in nature? There may be buds and leaves on the trees, daffodils, primroses and even tulips on the ground?

It's the time of year when we sow what we'll harvest later. Even if you don't think you're much of a gardener, why not try planting some seeds this year? Nasturtiums are easy, or you could try growing rocket, lettuce or even tomatoes – either in the garden or in window boxes. Before you put them in the earth, have a close look at the seeds. They're shrivelled and brown, dead-looking things. It's almost impossible to see the life contained in them, so plant them with this brief prayer:

Lord God, each year we place our trust in you to bring life to the world again. Amen. 🍷