

Beautiful Words - Week Beginning 8th June

Words transform us. Beautiful words redeem our spirit. They find their way into places of hurt within us and heal them. They slip past the sentries of the mind. They are the kisses of the soul. They enter our bodies like holy Communion. And then they do their fertile work. We live our days differently when we carry living words inside us. These living words shape our lives in many ways, but mainly they transform our fear. . .

Something within us is always desperate for the nourishment of words. In her lovely book *Saved by a Poem*, Kim Rosen quotes poet Mary Oliver: 'for poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.' So much healing happens when the soul is opened. We are healed by the words that let mystery in. Too many words, even religious ones, carry only hard and dry knowledge. They do not moisten or soften or reconcile. Poet David Whyte warns that 'This is not the age of information ... forget the news.' In *Loaves and Fishes* he writes:

*This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.
People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.*

Jesus used beautiful words to heal the fear that fills us when we lose direction, confidence and heart – words to warm us when we shiver on cold corridors with no familiar rooms to welcome us in. We need to hear them now. The whole world needs to hear them now.

But who will speak those words to us when the Church itself is in danger of losing its own soul? Where do we look for the vital voices of hope? We look within. Our hearts still carry the echo of God's music in Creation, of the Saviour's song in redemption. Too long have those hearts and voices been silent. To paraphrase the words of Hindu mystic Rumi, 'speak a new language so that the Church can be a new Church, the world a new world.' . . .

Hans Urs von Balthasar, theologian of beauty, believed that 'God needs prophets in order to make himself known, and all prophets are necessarily artistic. What a prophet has to say can never be said in prose.'

We forever search for more beautiful ways of expressing the inexpressible. At a service to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the King James Bible, the (then) Archbishop of Canterbury was reflecting on translations. Dr Williams spoke of the importance of choosing words that carry 'the almost unbearable weight of divine intelligence and love pressing down on those who first encountered it.' . . .

Percy Bysshe Shelley believed that poets rather than politicians were the unacknowledged legislators of the world while the much loved poet-president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel, said that his success in peacefully overthrowing totalitarian rule was due to his choice of weapons – beautiful words. Our Church at home and abroad is in dire need of salvation. Here where I am based, in the north of England, from the land of the powerful prince-bishops, dare we hope for a poet-bishop to arrive soon?

(*Treasured and Transformed* pp115, 116, 117, 118)