



Br Stuart for Easter 4 (2021)

‘To preach is to make oneself vulnerable’ - so some of us were reminded the other day. The reason is that, wittingly or unwittingly, the person who most needs to attend to what is being said is very often the preacher!

As we live together at such close quarters and are committed to living the common life as members one of another in the body of Christ, there are probably few surprises. However, here goes...

Today’s second reading began: ‘We know love by this, that he [i.e. Jesus] laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.’

We aren’t too keen on saying “ought” nowadays – perhaps because we realise that what drives or inhibits us in our behaviour towards each other is usually so much more complex than meets the eye.

St John says, “ought”; St Paul is more realistic when he confesses that so often the good he wants to do, he doesn’t do, and what he doesn’t want to do is what he does.

When we look at the history of the Church, not least of the Religious Life, we see a history of struggle to know how best to grow in the integrity of life in the Risen Christ. So many of the “oughts” of ascetic disciplines have been very loud, and many of the abuses of ascetic discipline are enough to make 21st Century hair curl – such hair as some of us have left...and most have largely failed in their object of making people more whole as the human beings God created them to be: more compassionate and generous, less judgemental and critical, less anxious and more courageous, because deep down they know that they are loved and valued - profoundly loved and valued as they are, warts and all.

...and this is the aim of the Benedictine life; to become secure enough in the love of God AND in the love of our Sisters and Brothers, that we are gradually healed and freed of the insecurities at the roots of pride, anxiety, judgementalism, wooden narrowness and so on.

Down the centuries the great spiritual teachers have reminded us that this is the work of God, and not to get too fussed about our “progress”. [the gardener who keeps pulling up the seedling to see how their roots are developing, will kill the plants!] Rather, they advise: ‘Be still and let God love you.’ – ALLOW God to love you, however messy a shambles you may feel you are.

I was reminded of the children’s story by Max Lucado about the Wemmicks.

The Wemmicks, in case you don’t know, were small wooden people carved by an old woodworker called Eli. Each Wemmick was different: some had big noses, others large eyes;

some were tall, others short, and so on. I tell their story because I have found it very worth pondering.

Each Wemmick had a box of golden star stickers and a box of grey dot stickers. The wooden people were very critical of each other and went around their village sticking stars or dots on one another. The good-looking, intelligent ones got gold stars; those with rough wood or chipped paint or who were clumsy got grey dots. Punchinello was one of these. When he tried to do something to impress others he always fell over or made a mess of it, and so the other Wemmicks would cover him with grey dots, and when he tried to explain, he would always say something silly – so they gave him more grey dots.

“Punchinello deserves LOT of grey dots,” the wooden people would say, and after a while Punchinello began to believe that he was useless and would hide away at home and only came out when he had to. He became very sad and depressed.

Then, one day, he met a very different kind of Wemmick. She was called Lucia [which means ‘Light’]. Unlike everyone else, she had no gold stars or grey dots stuck to her, even though the other Wemmicks tried to cover her in gold stars. They admired her for having no grey dots – but every time they tried to stick a gold star on her, it fell off. And if someone tried to stick a grey dot on her for not having any gold stars, it would fall off too.

“That’s the way I want to be,” thought Punchinello, so he asked her how she did it.

“It’s easy,” she replied. “Every day I visit old Eli, the woodcarver.”

“Why?” he asked.

“You’ll find out if you go to see him.” – and off she skipped leaving Punchinello thinking, “But will **he** want to see me?” – so he went home instead. But as he sat at home, gazing out of the window, watching the wooden people giving each other stars and dots, he began to mutter to himself, “It’s not right. It’s not right!” and he decided to go to see Eli.

But as he stepped into Eli’s workshop he got cold feet and turned to run away – but he heard a deep, strong voice, “Punchinello, how good to see you. Come and let me have a look at you.”

Punchinello was amazed. “How do you know my name?”

“Of course I know your name. I made you!”

Eli picked him up and sat him on his workbench. “It looks like you have been given some bad marks,” he said as he saw all the grey dots.

“I didn’t mean to, Eli. Honestly, I’ve tried so hard.”

“Punchinello, I don’t care what the other Wemmicks think.”

“You don’t?”

“No – and you shouldn’t either. All that matters is what I think – and I think you are very special.”

Punchinello laughed. “Me – special? Why? I’m not very talented and my paint is peeling. Why do I matter to you?”

Eli spoke very slowly, “Because you are mine. That’s why you matter to me. Every day I’ve been hoping you would come.”

“I came because I met Lucia. Why don’t the stickers stay on her?”

The Maker spoke softly, “Because she has decided that what I think is more important than what others think. The stickers will only stick if you let them, if they matter to you. The more you trust my love, the less you’ll care about their “stickers.””

“I’m not sure I understand.”

Old Eli smiled. “You will, but it will take time. For now, come and see me every day and let me remind you how much I care.”

Eli lifted Punchinello off the workbench and set him on the ground. “Remember,” he said as Punchinello was leaving, “You are special because I made you – and I don’t make mistakes!”

As Punchinello ran back home, he thought, “I think he really means it!” – and as he thought that, a grey dot fell to the ground ... and then another ... and another.

It’s a children’s story – but for children of all ages! Perhaps we do well if every day we spend a little time with our Maker and simply allow him to tell us how much he cares for us.

“Be still,” the sages say, “and let your God love you.” ... and remember, ‘Our Maker doesn’t make mistakes!’