

GLORY

Recently I went away for 24 hours with half a dozen other vicars from the Malling area. The idea was to get to know each other better as well as to receive some Christian challenge and encouragement. We went to a small conference centre in Woking where the chaplain led us in our retreat. She had filled the chapel with an exhibition of paintings by a friend of hers, paintings of ruined churches and abbeys, and we lived with these paintings for 24 hours.

I was hugely challenged by a large painting of Rievaulx Abbey, all in black and gold: from one angle it was just a painting of slightly tatty ruins, the sort of ruins you might stop the car for briefly but nothing more. But viewed from the other side, with the light coming in on the painting, it blazed with golden light. I was stunned at the transformation. It challenged me to think about the way I view things in my daily life and how I see people I come across: do I see them with disgruntled, jaundiced eyes, or do I see them with God's eyes, with glory shining out of them? The people and the situations are still just the same, but how I see them is completely transformed. I also found it exciting that it was only the ruined-ness of Rievaulx that enabled the light to come streaming in. Perhaps God can only really come into a situation when it's beyond hope in our eyes; the rest of the time we do a good job of keeping Him out.

So the painting spoke to me of glory, God's glory - and "glory" is something we don't talk about in our normal lives. The exciting thing about the Christian faith is that God's glory can be seen on earth, that Jesus came into our world, and He still comes down into our normal, sometimes grotty lives, enabling them to be transformed.

I am still carrying that challenge round with me, and I hope it will get me through all the busy-ness of Christmas too.

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