

As I watched a workman heave himself head first out of a top floor window onto the scaffolding on my neighbour's house, I was reminded of the stained glass I saw every day as a student in Lincoln College Chapel. Jonah heaving himself out of the whale onto dry land with a surprised look on his face and above him, Jesus rising from the Tomb. That was C17th glass but our East window is much later 1878 stands in a tradition of painting called **type and antitype** which you can trace back to 1200's in Canterbury Cathedral. The Oxford Movement which affected the style of this church revived the idea and it was taken up by Burne-Jones and Henry Holiday, our designer among others.

Type and Antitype? What does that mean? The type is the idea or prophecy that can be found in the actions of God in the Old Testament which is then brought to fulfilment in the New. The antitype (not mean opposition) then is the final revelation of God's plan of which the type is the rough draft, the first inkling.

Supremely then the antitype, the full revelation, is to be found in Jesus and here in our window's middle section are 6 stories of his life from the Gospel of St John which reveal his divine nature and mission in the world. Why John? Well this church is dedicated to John the Evangelist, the gospel writer. And why that dedication? Perhaps because the church was founded by John Marshall. So our antitype line shows Jesus as (left) Light of World and Welcomer of all into the Kingdom of God; on the right as Healer and Good Shepherd, pastor of his people. And as we have been hearing each story from John's Gospel is referenced by an OT type or early example from lives of Naaman, Ruth, Isaiah and David.

Today on Passion Sunday then we move to the central section, the most important sections, where we see the antitype, the full revelation, picture of Jesus crucified on the cross with his distraught mother being comforted by the 2 other Mary's and John the Beloved disciple. Do you think his face might be modelled on that of John Marshall in whose memory the window

is dedicated? And below the young man standing is Isaac, Abraham's son, carrying a bundle of firewood on his shoulder. Type – Abraham called to sacrifice his son to God even though all God's promises for the future rested on him – but boy is rescued by the discovery of a ram caught by the horns in the thicket which is sacrificed instead. Type and antitype - Jesus, the Lamb of God, crucified, are linked by the text in the middle, 'God will provide himself a lamb'.

So what is this all about? It is of course trying to answer the question that has tormented humankind for millennia. How can we be right with God? What can we weak, sinful creatures do to put ourselves right with God? When crops failed or disaster threatened, people often thought God was angry for their misdeeds so wanted to placate him, put themselves in his good books. One way was to sacrifice something very precious to buy off God's wrath. The story of Isaac is probably very old since it hints at the dark tradition in many places of child sacrifice, giving the best you have to God. Of course this was anathema to the Israelites and Isaac's story, as well as being a tale of testing Abraham's faith, also tells people a child's death is not wanted but that animal sacrifice will suffice. It is the foundation story of the whole sacrificial system of the Israelites where the Temple in Jerusalem becomes like a vast abattoir, where animals are slaughtered in droves to make guilt offerings to restore fellowship with God or as in the case of Jesus himself, 2 turtle doves sacrificed in place of his life, offered to God at the Presentation.

Even in OT times (see psalm 40) people realised this did not work. So in the antitype window John says that there is a better, more effective way than all this slaughter. The clue is the text 'God will provide himself a Lamb'. No amount of human effort can put us right with God. No sacrifices we can make can persuade God to forget the past and smile on us again. Central to Christian belief is that only God himself can put us right, can freely forgive us our sins and wipe the slate clean. It is all free gift on God's part and God acts to provide his own guilt offering. God himself

does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. As John records Jesus says, 'I when I am lifted up will draw all men to myself' His lifting up on the cross will lead to the salvation, the freedom, the cleansing of all for all time. Here is truly the Lamb of God (Gospel and Agnus Dei) who takes away the sin of the world.

But how can we understand this amazing action? Christians have wrestled for 2000 years with the question 'how does the death of Jesus take away our sins? The New Testament offers a whole host of clues which have been developed over the years as ideas have changed. Jesus defeated the devil/evil on the cross and empty tomb; or God's honour was satisfied by the death of the sinless one; or the slate was cleaned when the innocent took all the blame of the guilty or just seeing God die for us will change us. There are some 12 different theories, metaphors that I know of to help us understand the mystery of the death of Jesus the Saviour of the World. Each have their strong and weak points. Important thing to remember is that the church has never said that one way is the right one. Look at Creed 'he suffered death and was buried and rose again'. No metaphor is chosen just the facts. So we are free to choose whatever way of understanding the cross that helps us. But if we want to be true to our patron saint, then perhaps there are clues in his Gospel which help me when I look on the crucified Lord. Perhaps the greatest is in John 3.16 'God so **loved** the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'. Since nothing we can do can set us right then it is God who acts out of love, nothing but love for his creation (not guilt, honour, anger or devils). Love is what we see when we look on the cross, God's love for us which in turn draws us to love him in return. And it is God himself who pays the price of love, sacrificing himself (he and Jesus are one and the same we say in the Creed) to bring us back to a relationship of love. It is his selfless love that ends the cycle of violence and revenge and opens the way for us to receive and live out his forgiveness. Our window with its hint of the saving of Isaac by God providing a lamb, points to the

act of God's total love in becoming the lamb of sacrifice himself to set us free. That deepest of costly love, our freedom from sin, the transformation of the cosmos – not a bad picture for us to contemplate, a window worth having in the centre of our gaze.