

Friday 2 April: Good Friday, The Three Hours

Love's Feast

Readings: John 11.55-57 and 13.1-2

I learned my trade as a child and family social worker in the post war housing estates of North Bristol. Fortunately for me I had a gifted boss as my team manager. We juniors were his eyes and ears he used to say – but when slaps became black eyes or innuendo the threat of abuse he was there with us every step of the way. We took very few children into care – instead we tended to visit often, together with him, and put support into the home to effect change.

So one day I had quite a shock. I had been visiting an extremely depressed young mother whose husband had left her after the birth of her second child. She had two boys aged two and one whose care was always on the edge and seemed to be deteriorating. I reported back that the children were running around the flat with nothing on below the waist peeing on the floor while she sat and watched the telly. Derek looked up sharply from the mound of papers on his desk – food, is she feeding them? No meals I said, they grab what they can from the top in the kitchen.

Bring them in, he said with a sigh, enough's enough.

I stared at him – bring them in are the words which change a social worker's day, week, month, year – is there anywhere to put them in the office while you ring around for a foster home, is there any food, any nappies, any toys – will there be a foster home – will the magistrate be convinced enough to issue a temporary care order – and of course the underlying worry – what about my other cases, how to deal with them meanwhile?

Later that day I asked him when there was time to talk – how can you be so sure? What makes these kids different from the other 30 on my case load with slaps and missed meals and seeing things they never should. They are probably getting enough love to manage he said – these two aren't. We have a duty of care – not to achieve perfect parenting but to ensure enough nurture is going in for children to grow up able to cope with the stresses coming to them – these two aren't getting that, in fact they're not getting anything – we may be able to help Mum and get them back one day but at the moment they need nappies, beds, food – the basics of care.

The nurture to sustain normal living, giving us a sense that we are loved and that life is worth living – part of a very basic pattern of expressing life's value.

On the night of his betrayal Jesus decides to eat with his friends, to nurture them for the difficult days ahead. In John's Gospel all Jerusalem is gathering for Passover but this is not it yet. In John Jesus dies at the time of the ritual slaughter of the Passover lambs – the feast is the next day. Nor is this meal represented as a forerunner to Holy Communion – again the death itself plays that part, water and blood pouring out as Jesus gives his body. No, this is an ordinary meal, a dinner party or in Greek Symposium – a gathering to eat and drink and talk.

I wanted to start this memorial of Christ's death here – on the night that he was betrayed Jesus took bread and gave you thanks! I wanted to start here because the whole of what is to come arises out of Jesus valuing of us, of them. When you think of nurturing meals what do you think

of – I think of that social work office at the top of Blackboy Hill in Bristol, able to embrace people in profound need largely because we were always talking and eating and drinking together – coffee and talk, canteen lunch and more talk, pub at the end of the week and more talk – what do you think of?

It's perhaps easy to enjoy the love of friends and family at a party but a truly sustaining and nurturing vision for managing life comes when one who is about to face an abyss of pain and the possible dissolution of meaning takes food with friends and declares that life is infinitely valuable because it contains the possibility of love.

I am glad to be with friends today, with live friends who are here and friends whom I know only through their writing. You will hear a lot from them throughout but from one friend particularly you will keep hearing. She is Etty Hillesum – a young Jewess who discovered Prayer, God, Christ, Love in just a few years of the second world war in Holland. Her life was interrupted by her early death in a concentration camp but not before leaving us her diary – *An Interrupted Life*. I have chosen her to be my particular friend as I try to understand Jesus' death, because she is a woman who has lived close to me in time, because she is not pious but rigorous in her thinking and because she endured the Holocaust without losing sight of the love of God. For me what happened to the Jews and gay and lesbian people, and to so called gypsies and disabled people under national socialism acts as a huge gash in the very idea of a developing civilisation and poses huge challenges to Christian ideas of a loving God. So I find her companionship helpful as I try to understand Jesus and hope you will do too.

Here we start very simply with her words from the transit camp of Westerbork, starting as Jesus did with a feast, a nurturing, sustaining vision for her friends in the days to come, she writes

“I know that we must not lose ourselves so completely in grief that we have little thought or love for our neighbour. This evening M. and I will visit Anne Marie. I shall delve into my little tins to see if there is anything good left to eat with some coffee. There are many landscapes in this camp on the Drenthe heath. A different sunset is staged every night. I believe the world is beautiful all over.”

Love Stretched

Reading: John 13.3-17

On a road on the edge of Edinburgh towards the Braid Hills stands a Victorian Asylum called Craig House. Typically fortress like in my student days it acted as a psychiatric hospital for what was termed rehabilitation for the long term mentally ill. I worked there for a while before going to theological college and it was there that I learnt full square just how vulnerable it makes you to stoop or kneel in front of someone. I was tying a patient's shoe laces – and his foot upped and kicked me. I had a bloody nose and hurt pride, and I certainly learnt how to kneel sideways in front of patients in future.

But it showed me perhaps why stooping to wash dirty feet was taken in Jesus' culture as the work of women, children, servants and NOT of the man of the house – to kneel renders the body extremely vulnerable from back and front – it is not a position in which one is able to keep strongly balanced or defended.

Into this position Jesus, the host at the feast, puts himself to wash his disciples' feet.

Here we have a picture of God which sings throughout the Bible – God of the slaves of Egypt, God of the tiny tribe of Benjamin, God of the poor who need to eat the left-overs of Harvest, God of the an-a-wim- the little ones of Israel. Here is the God of Jesus who has touched women, cured lepers, felt for widows , taught the poor – here is a powerful sign of God's very being alongside the poor.

Yet Jesus is clear too that he does possess authority and power – I am your Lord and Master – and knows that this power and authority come from God. What Jesus portrays as he kneels down is a vulnerable God whose power is used in love and not in domination. He calls forth our love – Teresa of Avila after 20 years of convent life found herself only able to pray at last when she saw in Christ on a crucifix One who needed her care. Later Etty Hillesum wrote of seeing how she and others needed to look after God whose vulnerable love was getting covered up by the violent brutality of the holocaust – he calls forth our love but also demands that we allow him to serve us! Can we let God do that? Serve us?

In other words there is a reciprocity of love and care in the way God serves us and is served by us, which we are to copy in the way we treat one another, and in the ways we shape our priorities for living and loving. How do you need God to serve you?

This picture of God's power, the power of love which resists the power of dominance, upsets the feast, and the spark of difference flares. Judas' difference from the rest is clear and unbending. He renders powerless the power of God to love him and make him clean – he cannot take it. Not all are clean, says Jesus speaking of him after his washing. Notice, Jesus is vulnerable to the way Judas behaves towards him – he does not overwhelm or manipulate Judas into change.

Peter's initial differences are clearly felt too! Peter remonstrates strongly at the idea of his Lord and Master washing him but soon he is utterly persuaded by Jesus' compelling invitation to be loved by him, to belong with him, and is drawn back into the circle having had his say.

Here we come across a way of handling difference between us – to engage with truth, to hold our own, as Jesus does, yet without destroying the other or hurting them.

Recently at the Barbican Peter Brook has staged a play translated from the story of a West African writer – Amadou Hampate Ba. It is a true story of a religious and tribal dispute in Mali in the early 20th century. One part of a tribe has been praying a prayer 11 times as their Sufi sage once taught them to do. But another part of the tribe insists on praying the prayer 12 times as the same sage did at a different period in his life! A corrupt colonial power, poverty and incessant change have led the tribe to fall out over this to the point of murderous massacre. What to do – for both are right!

Two spiritual leaders, disciples of the former sage meet to reconcile their warring families. But they do not speak, they pray, waiting for the spirit's guidance to be completely ready for talk. When they meet it is by night, their torches wandering towards each other in the darkness, led by the spirit of wisdom to meet in the same place at the same time and with the same purpose. One hears the other out and in listening engages in the truth of the other as the other sees it.

The wise men know there is no absolute right in this but the right of ending the bloodshed and this can only be done by one yielding up a preference.

The one who has understood goes off into the night – he faces violence and expulsion from his tribe yet the bloodshed stops – for all can now turn their violence upon him instead as they will on Jesus as the night wears on.

And we are drawn into what it might be like to be able to live in community with one another. All year long, while religious and political extremists have torn up bodies and families of those with whom they disagree across the world and while churches have rent themselves apart in disagreement over what it means to belong, we here have been trying to learn what it might mean to live in one diverse community, to be a community modelled on Christ.

Here Jesus gives us a sign of how to do that – we are to fight with all our strength for the truth we perceive yet without harming the one who disagrees with us, as Jesus harms neither Peter nor Judas, we are to engage with the other's truth yet without losing the authority of the self rooted in the overarching love of God. Set free from jostling for position with one another, delivered from bondage to dominance and privilege Jesus promises us freedom, a new awareness of joy and blessing.

The feast is interrupted by difference, yet not destroyed by it. This piece of music is jarred by the threat of violence, yet remaining one.

Love Rejected

Readings: John 13.18-30 and 18.1-2

We have glimpsed Eden, we have savoured heaven in a meal of friendship and joy.

We have seen that bliss disturbed by difference.

But now as we enter more deeply into the Passion we encounter an aspect of our humanity more difficult to handle, and far more likely to make us despair of the value and beauty of life – that is human treachery and betrayal. Now the unwillingness to manage difference is pushed further until it contorts our human face into a cruel leer – pushed and distorted into the longing to destroy all that does not meet our apparent immediate need.

Lorna May Wadsworth who has painted a Last Supper hanging downstairs ruefully notes how greedily we all search the canvas for the central cast of 4! Which one's Jesus? – that can't be Peter! – what about that strange one Jesus loved? – wow, look at Judas! She guesses we only rest easy once we have established which figure Judas is. And we are quickly bored and disillusioned if he is too evidently evil – not sufficiently like us for us to step further into the painting and own that he is part of us.

Lorna's Judas, if you have a chance to look, is icily cold and handsome, easily owned as one of us.

For we ourselves are betrayed and betrayer.

- we have known the failure of love in people who ought to have cared for us, educated us, protected us, inspired and led us as individuals or nations, we have felt the gasp of disbelief at their words or actions, like a stab wound of horror, someone we thought we could trust has let us down.
- and we ourselves have betrayed – perhaps a friend, a work colleague, vulnerable people who rely on our care yet are easy to poke fun at, we ourselves mouth words of justice so that people might expect us to act one way and we betray ourselves, and act another way letting ourselves down.

We don't know what Jesus did for Judas to want to betray him! – was Judas in love with Jesus and so murderously jealous, was he stealing from the common purse and so guilty and frightened, or did he see the three years he had used up wasted following a sappy weakling who would never free his homeland, a possible leader who now washed feet like a woman?

Who knows – it is because the canvas is so empty that we can find ourselves there.

What Jesus does in this scene from the passion is to keep his eyes open and bear what he sees. This enduring awareness costs him as it will cost us if we remain alert to what is going on around us. Jesus is deeply agitated by what he sees.

Nor, I suspect, is Jesus troubled only by the actions of Judas as he goes out into the night. He is troubled too because no-one follows him into the darkness to try to bring him back – to touch him, talk to him, restore him into the circle of light, try to understand if anything can be done for him. Jesus has told the beloved disciple, so Peter who after all asked the question knows his answer, that Jesus thinks Judas is going to betray him - but neither of them, nor any other disciple, lifts a finger to rescue Judas from himself. They let him go, either in fear or indifference and the trap around Jesus tightens.

Later we will see human beings at their cruel worst, acting as a merciless group in the torture, trial and death of Jesus. But that mercilessness is foreshadowed here in those like us who call ourselves Jesus 'friends! The trap around Jesus tightens because of our indifference to seeing him wherever his vulnerable presence requires us to break out of the group and act with mercy. No wonder Jesus shudders. He like us needs others to act.

Etty Hillesum perceived what Jesus knew, that the vulnerable presence of God requires our action to share and his creative love. Here she prays to God

“One thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that you cannot help us; that we must help you to help ourselves. Alas, there doesn't seem much that you can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold you responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help you, and defend your dwelling place inside us to the last.”

In the midst of the systematic persecution of the Jews in Holland Etty sometimes imagines God to be buried beneath a pile of rocks of human hate which have to be lifted back by us, cleared away by our actions for God to be able to live and breath.

Which is why I have chosen for meditation on the betrayal this poignant picture of a trapped and bound animal on page 6 of your service booklets. Here is a trusting young animal made ready for

the butcher's knife, a vulnerable presence utterly trapped and betrayed, to be contrasted ironically with the sweeter picture of God's blessing in Taverner's The Lamb.

A Vulnerable Love

Readings: John 18.3-8, 12-14, 28, 19.1-16

Despite the trap now tightening around Jesus the arrest in the Garden begins in John's Gospel with an intriguing scene which seems at first to be trivial yet is anything but...

About 200 soldiers arrive in the garden to capture Jesus and he stands forward to protect his disciples – the word for garden is reminiscent of a walled sheepfold in an olive grove and we see Jesus the good shepherd standing at the mouth of the fold to guard his own sheep from the thief who has come to injure and steal. When Jesus asks whom they have come to arrest and answers "I am he" these soldiers fall to the ground. This gospel contains no scene of the Transfiguration, no disciples falling to the floor before the divine and shining glory of God's presence seen in Jesus for the first time, instead this awed and shocked reverencing of the divine light occurs for the first time here, as Jesus is being handed over!

Some years ago the theologian priest WH Vanstone wrote a prophetic book for our over-active times – about how God's glory may be revealed where we wait, and are rendered inactive and must accept our dependence on others – in illness, in advanced old age, in redundancy, and of course at a less harrowing level in friendship, family life and all team work too! For this book he investigated the Passion narratives in a very unusual way. He underlined for us how Jesus being handed over - pro did o mi - to the soldiers, to Annas, to Caiaphas, to the guards, to Pilate and to death may be understood not as a display of weakness or flaw in God but as a portrayal of glory every bit as significant as that displayed when Jesus is more active!

For the divine name to be coupled with a willingness to be handed over into the power of others, without resentment or retaliation, requires that we begin to glimpse an alternative narrative to that which might perhaps describe Jesus as accepting "failure in his original mission" or "acknowledging defeat" here. This alternative narrative, of the undergirding of our life in God even when we are utterly dependent is underlined by Jesus' words to Pilate when Pilate tries to scare him into being more proactive to save his own skin. Jesus maintains his own authority power and questions the depth of power Pilate has ...

"You would have no power at all unless it had been given to you from above."

Poor Pilate! He is as trapped too, the epitome of a person caught in his institutional role and unable to be the agent of their own fate. The single most important duty he has to perform in this backwater province is to keep peace on the streets and prevent any sort of uprising. This fellow in whom he personally can find no fault has enraged the Jewish religious hierarchy to the point of apoplexy, to the very level of questioning his own loyalty to Caesar!

Meanwhile the Jewish leaders rightly argue people are following him – better, they argue, that he die than that the people be murderously suppressed by Rome. Kill him and they will forget him, and things get back to normal. You can see the arguments for peace and expediency on both sides! The trap tightens once more.

What of Jesus knowing all that may happen and yet not lifting a finger to save himself? The scene before Pilate is doubly agonising for us his friends because he seems to have a foot in the door with this powerful man – Jesus could push him to spare him it seems on the grounds of justice or mercy!

From January 1942 onwards after the Wannsee conference in Berlin the whole of German occupied Europe became incorporated into a comprehensive programme of utter and systematic annihilation of the Jews.

Etty Hillesum wrote about it like this

“from all sides our destruction creeps up on us, and soon the ring will be closed, and no one at all will be able to come to our aid.”

She helps us to understand this “all knowingness” of Jesus without our having to dilute his real humanity. She decides, like Jesus in the garden, NOT to hide or escape the Nazis, and like Jesus before the High Priest and Pilate, not EVEN TO STRUGGLE TO DELAY her own incarceration.

Why on earth?

She has placed herself within the greater narrative that Jesus indicates to Pilate, the narrative of the meaning of God in the world. She will suffer yes, but so will her people, she will die, yes, but so will her people, so she goes with them because she has discovered that to be with them and to love them, to show them the truth of God’s compassion and valuing of them is the very point of her life, her sole purpose in being.

To allow herself not to be handed over would, what’s more, be a life lived in constant fear of being found, rejected, betrayed – and fear is more corrosive of the human spirit than accepting risk, facing down dissolution, choosing how to live.

Love’s Endurance

Reading: John 19.16-37

I have felt a huge resistance to looking at this text about the death of Jesus, didn’t want to do it, didn’t want to go there.

I am grateful to the Gospel’s author because at this stage he simply gets on with it. The speed of the narrative itself conjures up the burly soldiers, marching towards their appalling work, shoving the three men through the city to the site of execution, holding the bodies down, ramming in the nails, hoisting up the wood so that the humans beings tortured on the wood cannot breath and will die eventually through asphyxiation – a death stalled for hours or days, sometimes, by the poor victim’s opportunity to lean on a tiny jutting piece of wood to hold the weight from time to time before the brutal sagging again, dehydration adding its curse under the burning sun of noon-day.

Whatever the theological symbolism behind Jesus' cloak spun of one thread – whether a sign of priesthood or not – the picture given of the soldiers' customary callousness and speedy sorting of the spoil is almost merciful - we would not want them dallying now, best over with. If Jesus is priest he is also prophet on the cross – this sort of king of the Jews, a suffering servant, a vulnerable presence, Pilate's ironic title holds, infuriating the religious hierarchy.

That this, or something similar, is what we do with our supposed enemy – is part of my resistance to doing what Lady Julian of Norwich was able to do – to stare at her beloved Master on the cross in awe and tenderness. I balk and want to vomit because we keep doing it, or at least we keep doing it to the image of God in human flesh who is in the way between us and so called peace today – we human beings as a race still use the electric chair, we still use stoning and death by lethal injection, we protest too late against the aerial bombardment of civilians, and turn a blind eye to the torturing activities of brutalised human beings against each other. Our hearts are sick with a sense of impotence I fear over what we have seen happening in Iraq, in Sri Lanka, in Rwanda and Zimbabwe and Gaza.

We are traumatised by our awareness of a war in Afghanistan where our dead are numbered daily but who ever hears of the numbers of innocent slain there? How telling was the photograph pinned to these railings in the Hard Rain Exhibition of torture in Abu Ghraib – a humiliated man, cowering naked, trying desperately to defend himself before slavering and vicious dogs and their brutish guards.

Nor will our minds this Good Friday easily slip over the torture before death of Baby P or of both the little girl and the infant in their cots found starved to death this winter in separate houses on our own streets. We are capable as human beings of crucifixion, of unfathomable acts of evil against one another.

That is the first thing I would want to say about this death – it is hard to look – and the second is that it acts as a universal image of deeds human beings are willing to commit to get rid of unwanted difficulties among us.

So many theological explanations are given for this death that I find myself simply needing to handle it by banishing the resistance - to look and see.

What I see is God so able to give himself up for us, yet without changing the truth and love that he is, so willing to risk putting himself into our hands instead of overpowering us, that instead of escaping the way we are he exposes himself to the very worst elements involved in our being human, the very sides of our nature that we most dread being exposed.

In John's Gospel God is neither diminished nor demeaned by this exposure. There is no resistance offered to the torture – instead Jesus is able to continue to love throughout his death. We seem now to enter a realm of loving behaviour and power which is way beyond us! First his compassion reaches out to those closest to him, who by their standing near have been able to reciprocate his love, to demonstrate to him his own worth and loveable-ness even in this dissolved and useless bloody state. They are now given into each other's care and we see a trinity of love taking place which is to last into the future.

Then Jesus acts as the Passover lamb whose blood was spread with hyssop across the doorway as a sign that the avenging angel should pass over - when life and death are both accomplished as

the living out of God's truth and love, a further act of outpoured love takes place - this time for all people across all time, a universal sign.

Jesus has breathed his last, which means his legs do not have to be broken by the standing guard to hasten asphyxiation. When his side is lanced instead by a spear, water and blood flow out from the wound, the water and blood which we receive in the Eucharist. He is able to give us life even in death – death has no dominion over his ability to energise and feed, to wash and forgive us, to nurture us with his love.

Here God is glorified and we are forgiven the wrong we have done and the wrong we do.

Such is the life giving energy of the love of God that we cannot extinguish it by our worst. Water and blood flow to wash our crying eyes and feed our empty hearts. Therein is our hope!

Faith is not an everlasting effort to do better – an effort which must end in concealment and deceit because we cannot keep it up – Faith is stepping into trust – that God is not us, nor destroyed by us, that God is God, and that God is there, restoring value and bestowing love while we face today, the agonising awareness that it is within our nature to betray him.

Jesus bows his head and gives up his spirit to God who receives it.

Love's Fire

Reading: John 15 verse 12

In the book of Daniel and on page 9 of your readings booklet lie the words which inspired me today:

“I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and the fourth has the appearance of a god.”

What does it mean for us to walk with Jesus in Love's fire, to be baptised into Christ's death?

For some of us this love unto death means seeing our own life as a series of small deaths. So Van Gogh paints his own face into the head of the dead Christ in Pieta and St John's life painted in the Book of Kells is being held by the Crucified Christ - see his wounded hands and feet peeping out from behind John. Seeing our own life in Christ, including our small deaths, is something the young monk Thomas Merton wrote about his own biography

“But you shall taste the true solitude of My anguish and My poverty and I shall lead you into the high places of My joy and you shall die in Me and find all things in My mercy which has created you for this end and brought you from Prades to Bermuda to St Antonin to Oakham to London to Cambridge to Roie to New York to Colombia to St Bonaventure to the Cistercian Abbey of the poor men who labor in Gethsemani: That you may become the brother of God and learn to know the Christ of the burnt men”

Strangely Merton's life was to end in an accidental burn from a live electric source. But his early writing sounds slightly grandiose, because there is in many lives, and for natural causes, a far greater challenge to courageous living than he ever faced.

Charlotte Raven suffers from Huntington's disease, an incurable neurodegenerative disorder. Travelling across the globe to communities of cared for sufferers in an attempt to discover why not commit a dignified suicide Charlotte discovers that she must live this death of the body through to the end, not because she wants to but because she loves her daughter. This love means continuing to remain alive, both for her daughter to have the opportunity to love her, and to enable her to go on loving her child whatever her body becomes in shape and form.

In some people this capacity to deal with death, to look at it fearlessly, even gratefully, becomes transformative. The artist Ronald Searle in a recent television interview spoke of how he had found his reason for being in sketching the horrifying conditions of his tortured comrades as prisoners of war to the Japanese.

"No one who has ever been taken prisoner ever really comes out of his cell. But in a way I am grateful, because at the formative age of 20 you realise what losing your liberty means. This is what made me an artist, because it gave me a purpose. Suddenly you have a subject that matters. Those four years were my formation. A God sent gift."

For others this entry into Christ's death is a matter of determining the will by prayer.

Etty Hillesum wrote how in living in the circumstances of a growing awareness of the holocaust she discovered God alive in Christ and all human beings around her. She determined to live out that love to the end – any other sort of life was valueless now. That love – even in the face of death – must include the understanding of her captors rather than hate or lack of forgiveness. She says

"I try to look things straight in the face, even the worst crimes, and discover the small naked human being amid the monstrous wreckage caused by man's senseless deeds."

Etty is like the young hero Christ throwing himself onto the cross in the poem the dream of the Rood when she writes of her life in the transit camp on the way to Auschwitz.

"The misery here is quite terrible; and yet late at night when the day has slunk away into the depths behind me I often walk with a spring in my step along the barbed wire. And then, time and again, it soars straight from my heart – I can't help it, that's just the way it is, like some elementary force – the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent and that one day we shall be building a whole new world."

But most of us, most of us are not like Etty, neither in courage, nor in insight, nor, please God, in the circumstances which might force such heroism from us.

How do we then conform to the pattern of Christ's death?

Monica Furlong, in her poem *Attraction*, speaks of the loving being of God as a sort of gravitational force. She writes

How shall it die
The "I"?
How learn to fly
A satellite
Around a bigger "I"?
In that flight
Reflected light
Giving it glory?
Pre-Copernican
It thinks itself the centre
Conviction that it matters
Its silly reason flatters
It is too proud to die
And cede the victory
To another "I"

None—the—less it moves
It likes it not
It remembers the advantages
It has bought.
The grace of reason
And the lover's fire,
Opinions, fancies
And the will's desire.
The hold of memory
The clutch of fear
Possessions, talents
And the body dear.
How give up sovereignty
Renounce all these
It would be madness
And the death of ease.

God is what is
(Shall we quarrel then?)
The Sun whose influences
Govern men.
Fatally attracting
Our waywardness
Into new tracks of faithfulness.
Life sprouts abundant
In that summer's heat
And mocks with birdsong
The sad "I"'s defeat.
In green high summer
Shall the soul be won
The rhythms of the year
Begun.

Although we start life believing ourselves to be at the centre of all existence, competing with others, lauding it over them thinking ourselves to deserve what Jesus called the top seats at the feast, gradually that centre shifts as we are nudged, pulled, warmed into the love of God for God's sake – into coming off our perch to enthrone God instead at the centre. We feel the warmth of God permeate our very being until we “get it”, until we understand the trustworthy nature of God's love for us, seen in Christ, and want above all things to give that love to others. This is the loss of self which is for most of us the walk in Love's fire which burns us not.