



GRACE 1999

Look up, or imagine that you are looking up, to the roof of the building. You know that beyond the roof is the sky and the darkness of the evening.

RE: INCARNATION

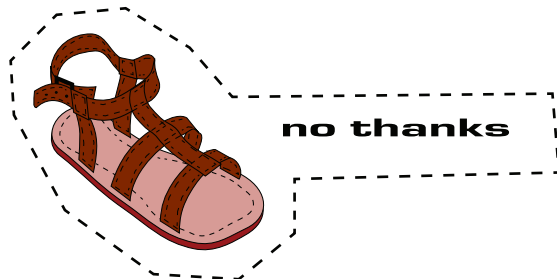
Many of you will by now have seen the poster showing Jesus as Che Guevara. There are many things that could be said about this image. One could wonder whether the image of Jesus should be mapped onto someone who was one of the founding fathers of modern terrorism, or whose legend at least helped to inspire it. The world has suffered much since the 60s from the romance of revolutionary violence, of the beautiful young people who die for a cause - and kill for a cause. One could wonder whether the image still carries real resonance to any but leftist baby-boomers who had the Che poster on their walls in 1968. Or one could wonder why it still perpetuates the image of Jesus as a guy with long hair and a beard. If the poster were long enough there'd be sandals too.

Yes, Jesus has an image problem. They keep publishing the old photo, and when he asks them to use his latest one they complain that no-one will recognise him if they do.

Actually, here in the West we have a few shots of Jesus doing the rounds. One has blue eyes, blond hair, white robes and sandals, and was big in Sunday Schools, especially as the photographer's assistant had arranged a few children around Jesus for cute appeal. If they'd had cuddly toys back then there'd have been a few of those too. This image has fallen out of favour in recent years, especially since that nasty business when someone tried to kill all the people who weren't blond and blue-eyed.

More in favour with the politically correct is an image taken by a respected photojournalist and war correspondent, while covering the first-century Palestinian problem. Jesus clearly hasn't washed for a bit, has splinters, black hair, brown eyes, dirty robes and sandals. He is being menaced by the security forces.

The Sunday night fever people much prefer the 90s album cover shot [that's just 90s, not 1990s], of Jesus dressed in white on a glass floor, surrounded by an adoring crowd. He is glowing white all over, and it isn't just the ultraviolet lights. Unfortunately he is still wearing a robe and sandals. Gold disco sandals.



Then imagine that you are looking down on your body. What does it look like from above? Imagine its size and its surface. Then begin to move upwards, seeing your body from a greater distance.

Move higher and higher.

Remember your body within the church building but move upwards so that the church looks smaller, and you begin to see the streets as if you were ascending in an aeroplane, and then all of the neighbourhood with bright lines of street lights and then all of the town.

Climb higher and higher, but without forgetting your body in this place.

In fact, Jesus's earthly appearance is nowhere described in the Bible, except in mystical and symbolic terms in, for example, the Book of Revelation. One effect of this to us strange omission is to prevent us tying Jesus down to a particular place and time - the Incarnation becomes about Jesus in the contemporary world here and now, all heres and all nows, utterly committed and involved and refusing to be distanced or irrelevant. The trouble with all our favourite images is that they remove Jesus from the contemporary world. They make him a historical figure or an alien not at home in our lives. Like visiting royalty, meeting him becomes a somewhat constrained and artificial encounter with someone who is clearly not part of the world you and I live in. We don't expect him to be quite up with the latest developments, or else to be floating serenely in a state of purity untouched by such worldly matters. Even if we believe in him, we either unconsciously limit his relevance, or set the rest of our lives in the modern world at naught as we look forward to leaving it behind for a robes-and-sandals Kingdom - forgetting that these things were once as contemporary as combat trousers and trainers, and that in their time they conveyed the immediacy, the worldliness, of the Kingdom. While we look back for a first-century Jew, Jesus is incarnate in the world at the other end of its timescale, among those who create the future.

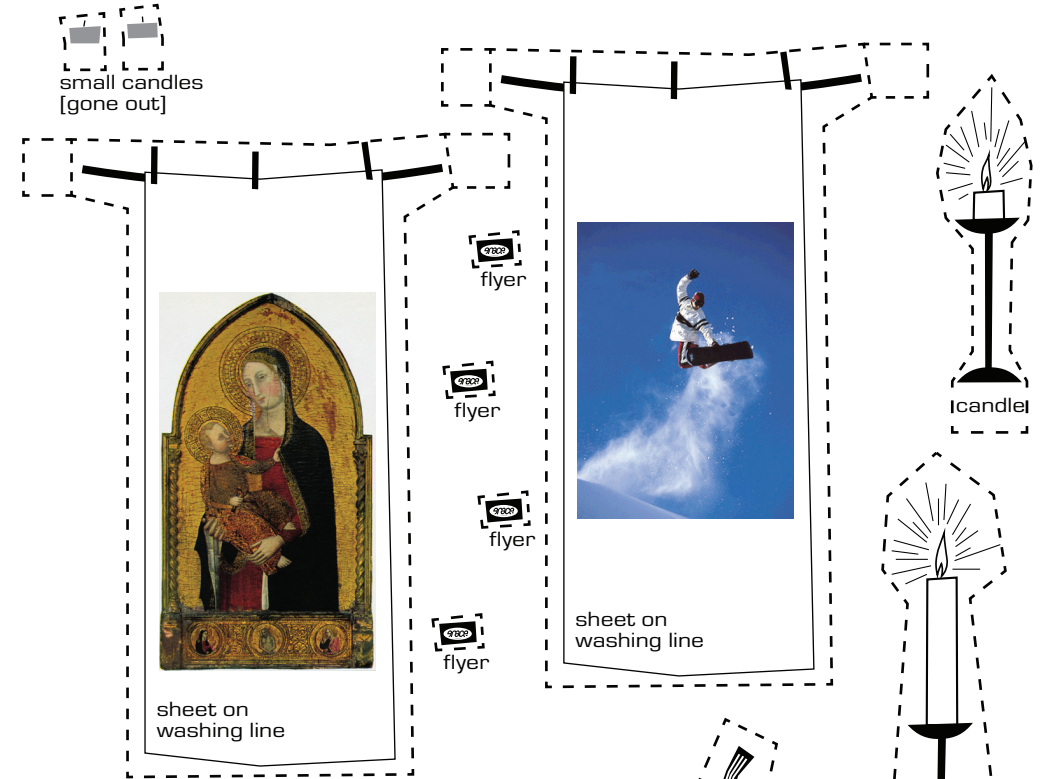
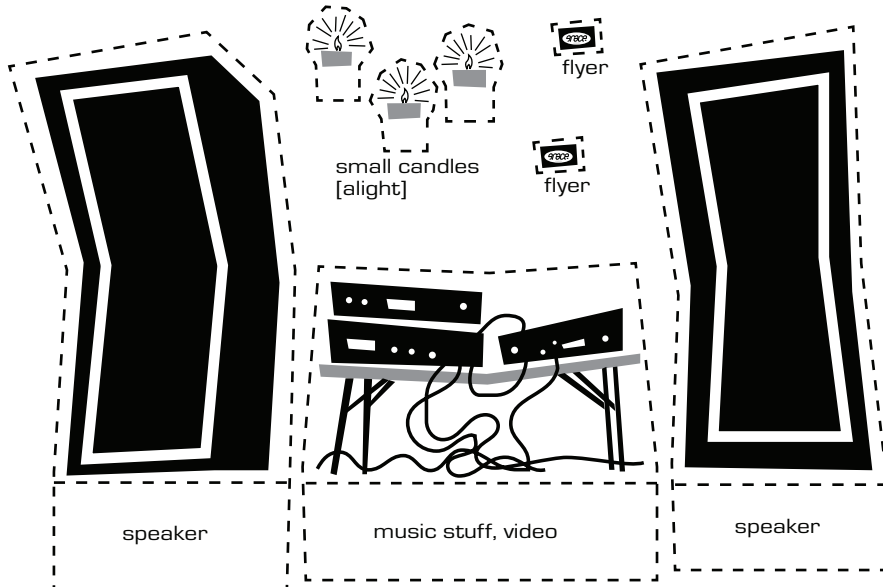
What was it Jesus said after the Resurrection - I will go ahead of you to Galilee. Ahead of us - always. It's hard to follow someone when you're looking back - you might fall over. And Jesus swapped his sandals for running shoes a long time ago.

steve collins



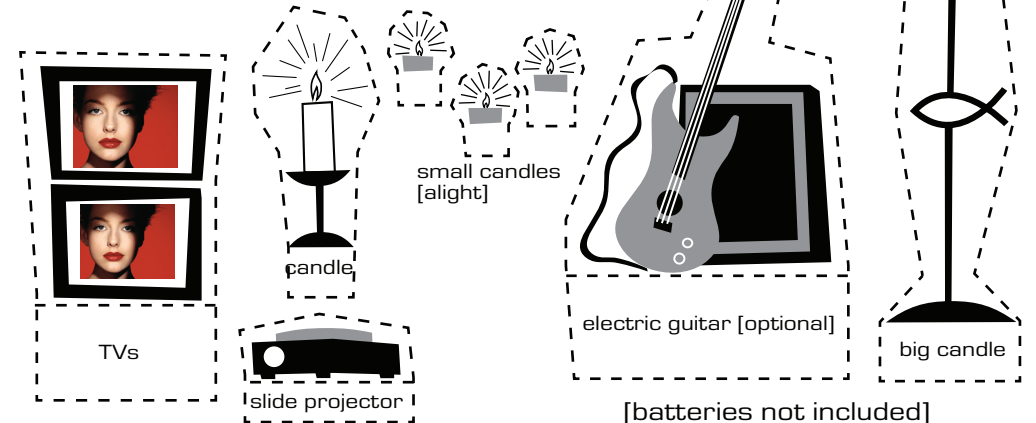
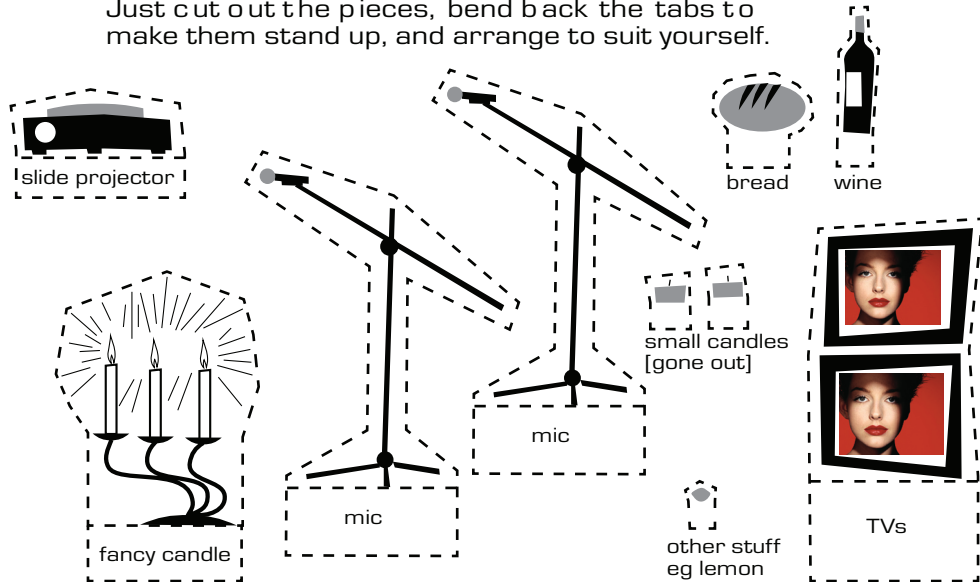
And then imagine more and more of the Earth's surface lit up by the sun and the moon. Its surface is rough and pitted and surrounded by a coloured aura. You go higher. The Earth is now just a blue and white circle and as you go higher you are surrounded by planets and galaxies and shifting patterns of light. The light is strangely close and far away at the same time.

But you have not forgotten about your body left thousands of light years behind on the surface of the earth gently spinning out its time.



MAKE YOUR OWN WORSHIP!

with Grace's easy-to-use 'alternative worship' kit. Just cut out the pieces, bend back the tabs to make them stand up, and arrange to suit yourself.



And then imagine moving back into the solar system so that you are descending and getting closer to the Earth's surface again, as if it is coming up to meet you....the round Earth, the outline of the continents, the island of Britain and the buildings of your town, the focus becoming more and more detailed.

USING IMAGES IN WORSHIP

intro

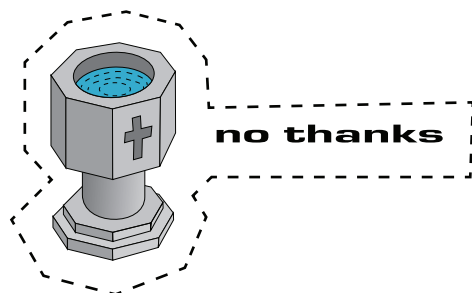
A lot of groups are reimagining worship. Part of the journey for most involves experimenting with a variety of expressions of worship - new music, liturgy, prayers, ritual, and using images and symbols. The culture we inhabit is image-based. The use of images is intuitive, natural and authentic for those that have grown up in this culture. It is also helpful in mission because it's a language and form that many outside the church relate to more readily than a culture dominated by words. Evangelicals have not got much of a history of using images in worship so there's little tradition to draw on (unlike the Orthodox and Catholic traditions). It takes some experimenting to get a feel for the language, to find what works and what doesn't.

imagination

The key to getting going is imagination. A lot of people don't try anything new or different because they don't think they are creative. We all are. Once you get going the ideas come thick and fast. The first step feels the riskiest and hardest. Others think they haven't got the expertise - you don't need it. Still others think they can't afford it on their budget. You can do a lot for next to nothing with a bit of imagination.

sparking ideas, not prescriptive

The idea behind these notes is to help you get started. A lot of people need some encouragement taking that first step. It can be very helpful going and meeting with and seeing what other groups are doing as a spark to the imagination. However these notes are not meant to be prescriptive. There isn't one way to do these things. One of the exciting things in worship at the moment is the amount of creativity being rediscovered. Similarly when you see what another group are doing, use some of the ideas but don't just copy. Find your own voice, your own language, your own expression of worship to God.



You can see clearly the body that you left behind.

choice of images

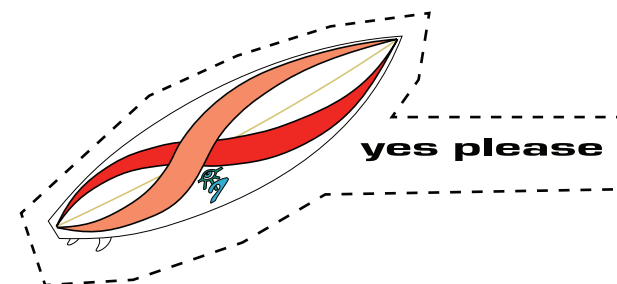
There is a large element of experimenting with what is appropriate and works in worship. A helpful starting point is remembering it's worship so the images should enhance the worship. This may seem obvious but sometimes people can get so excited about the images they are using that the focus can be all about how wonderful the latest images are rather than them being an inspiration for worship or a pointer to God. It is important to keep some kind of dialogue going within the group about what the images are saying for them and if they are helpful or not. Then the group can learn the language together, what works and what doesn't. It's a way of helping people find out how others are using the images to enhance their own worship, which in turn may help them.

The issue of quality is a difficult one. There is a balance between wanting everyone to get involved and express worship in different ways and wanting to use good quality art etc. You just have to feel your way with this but encourage people not to go in for things that are naff. A good rule of thumb is to think how friends outside the church would react to the images.

The most difficult area to use in terms of appropriateness is video. In part this is because the images are moving rather than still and so can easily become too much of a focus, particularly if they are on a big screen. You don't want to create a cinema! Also video is a very powerful form - it's important not to abuse this power just for effect. We've all experienced being bombarded with images on the news of refugees for example. It's too easy for this kind of image if overdone or used inappropriately to desensitise people to issues of justice.

One approach to using video is to have the images focused around one idea or theme. For example during a service about Pentecost having flickering flames for 10 minutes, or images of water droplets during a prayer of confession. This way the images enhance the worship rather than become the focus. Another approach is to use more complicated sequences that might be more of a focus for a meditation or prayer.

Sensitivity and appropriateness are important, but you learn them as you go. It is worth looking out for those in the group for whom this is their thing and who seem to have a good grasp of it.



Imagine that this is a journey between two realms...

overhead projectors

A lot of churches use these for song words and nothing else. Here are some ideas to try:

Get some coloured lighting gels (coloured acetate) and lay that over the words.

Design some images on computer, print them out. Get them colour copied onto acetate.

Get some of the group to write graffiti/paint pictures and colour photocopy them onto acetate.

Colour photocopy any appropriate image e.g. icons, Celtic cross, creation.....

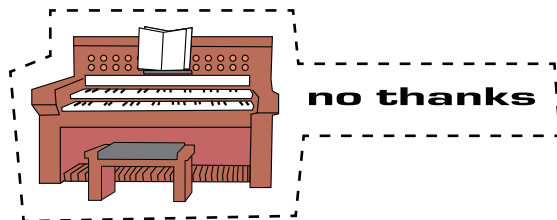
Rather than use the usual screen, hang a sheet up, or get hold of a roll of muslin and hang a series of strips up and project onto that, or get hold of an old parachute and project onto that.

Try projecting from behind rather than in front (simply reverse the image).

Use more than one OHP - borrow them. Hang screens at different points in the room to get away from the front being the only focal point.

art

Have someone paint a picture during the worship service on the theme. Ideally this is best done by someone who is an experienced artist and can prepare the picture beforehand. Have paints/paper/clay available for people to draw/paint/model during the worship, then take photos of what has been produced and use it another time on slide. Or hang the pictures around the place. It's worth bearing in mind that a lot of people will need encouraging to try this kind of thing. Also the process of expressing something is as important as the end product. Encourage those with artistic gifts to produce stuff in advance either to have as sculpture, paintings, or to photograph and use on slide.



and that it is the journey that Jesus made when he was born as a baby, and it is a journey that God is taking between earth and heaven, crossing the distance, as if there is a ladder with its tip out of sight.

And God is reaching down from the cosmos by this ladder.

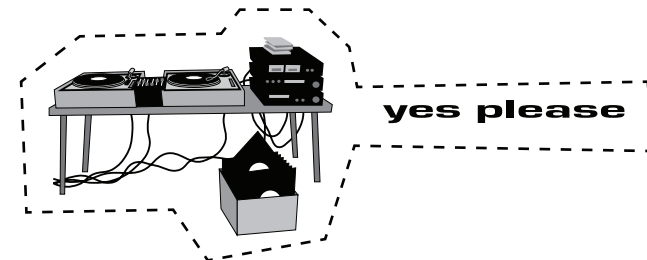
And the foot of the ladder is at your feet.

Your body is the place where heaven and earth are meeting. You are the place in between. You are small and located on the ground, but you see things beyond your reach.

slides

Borrow projectors - as many as possible! Often members of churches have them and never or rarely use them. They are very happy to loan them. Borrow slides. Lots of people have slides that sit in the cupboard and don't get used. Be sure to mark them clearly and look after them. Take slides. Borrow a camera. Get some people taking slides on a theme. Use shots of creation, elemental stuff (e.g. water, fire), stained glass windows, icons, abstracts, bread and wine, Purchase slides. Cathedrals and art galleries often have collections of slides. With several projectors you can project images at various places in the room. Use sheets, muslin or a parachute.... You can project onto walls or the ceiling. It's a good effect with muslin to not just have a flat surface. Try creating some depth and layers. Try projecting from behind. Your imagination is the limit.

Words projected on slide look great if you can produce them. If you can get white words with a black background you can project them over an image from another slide projector or video projector. There are different ways to do this. Ask around - there may well be someone you know who could do this at work. One way is to print out laser copies on A4 of the words you want, photograph them and use the film negatives (which will be white on black). Chop them up and put them into slide frames. (You can buy a box of 100 for about £5 from a photo shop). Another way is to create a template on a computer of an A4 sheet with say 32 boxes the size of slides. Write the words into the boxes and take either the disc or a printed copy to a printer and ask for the sheet to be printed on negative film. You then get your white on black and chop them up and put them in slide frames.



And in this place God comes to you.

Think again of the sensations in your body as it rests on the ground and imagine that this body is touched by God. It is caressed by angels from heaven. In this body, heaven and earth can meet.

video

You obviously need at least a video player and a television. If your church has not got one, use yours or borrow one. A simple but good effect is to use two televisions. To do this you need a splitter. This plugs into the video player and gives you two outputs for the televisions. With long leads work out where to place these - away from the front is helpful so that it doesn't feel as though we are gathered to watch television. For larger scale events you can use a video projector. They are straightforward to use. Several schools, councils, youth agencies have them that you can hire. Project them onto any flat surface e.g. sheet. You can get a special screen which is helpful for back projection, but a sheet is pretty good. There are other bits and pieces e.g.. vision mixers that some people use but these are a luxury.

As with slides and OHPs build up a collection of images. Start small i.e. one image you want to use. You don't have to have video running all the time. Video material can be got from a variety of sources:

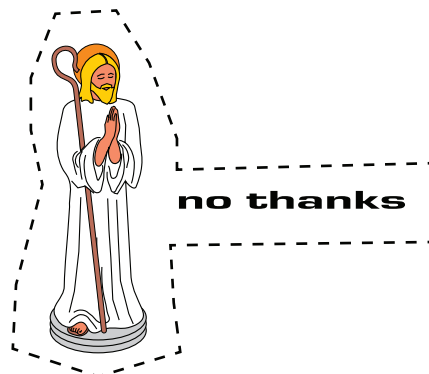
Off the shelf videos:

The 'Images for worship' series has been made specifically for use in worship. It is set out in a series of tracks on particular themes - e.g. 'Spirit', 'people' or 'environment'.

HMV have plenty of rave/fractal type videos that are good for creating a certain kind of vibe. There are computer graphic videos - the downside of these is that the images are a bit cold/clinical which isn't brilliant for worship - organic ones are a lot more 'real'.

Creation images(e.g. National Geographic). Lots of people have used images from the film 'Koyanasqaatsi'. Hunt around and ask around and you can find stuff. Filmed programmes from the television - wildlife, news, documentaries,....etc

One of the difficulties can be finding a clip but it being too short. With two video players and the appropriate lead it is possible to compile a longer sequence using record and pause buttons.



Make your own:

Most people can get access to a camcorder at least. Try making some of your own images e.g.. candle burning, people, water, traffic.....

With a small bit of investment you can get a text writer to put words onto video. This can be very effective, particularly if it is a slow sequence of one or two words at a time that connect with a theme e.g. at Pentecost, different words for the Spirit - fire, wind, breath, dove, dangerous friend etc. If you can't afford this, write them and use a camcorder, or create the sequence on computer and film the computer.

computers

It is possible to link a computer up to televisions or projectors and run everything from there. However this is more specialised and requires more software etc. If you are interested in that get some advice from a computer shop or someone who is doing it. (Often at larger events e.g. Spring Harvest, Brainstormers this technology is used).

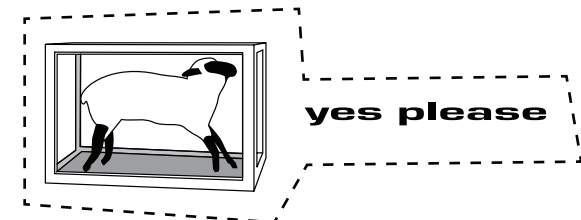
copyright

Copyright is a big issue. It would require a whole other set of notes to go into it in detail. If you are producing your own stuff you are fine. Other than that you need to check it out.

outro

The overall setting for worship is very important. Things like lighting and layout affect the mood a lot so it's worth thinking everything through. The main goal is enabling people to worship in ways and forms that they can relate to. These notes have focused on image use. But ritual, poetry, liturgy, prayers, readings, scripture, meditations, poems, stories, songs, tracks are all other ways of expressing worship. Worship doesn't have to be technologically slick, it's whether it is real or not that counts.

jonny baker



Now imagine God speaks to you and says :

“I am your God.

I am the God of your father and mother, and of their fathers and mothers. I am your God.

I am the God of Jesus Christ, who came from infinity to humanity and was visited by the wise.

I am the God of this Earth, its matter and substance. I am your God.

A CLEARING FOR LENT

One thing I find is that the busyness and pressures of life cause me to leak identity, to gradually lose my sense of who I am, and I need to spend time with God to restore it, away from the masks I have to wear elsewhere.

God is the fount of all true identity. If we have real identities, as opposed to the identities constructed and deconstructed by the world around us, then they are to be found with God who knows who we really are and who we could and should be. If identity is found through relationship, then it's our relationship with God that ultimately determines who we are.

But I think it's hard for most of us to accept that God gives us identity, because we generally see God as the constrictor of identity, always saying 'thou shalt not', always limiting the options, always snipping off the buds before they have time to flower; pruning us into a nice drab green bush and still calling it a garden.

Of course a lot of this is down to the Church, God's enthusiastic gardening assistant, snipping off the flowers for our own good, in case they should turn out to be weeds which might offend God the next time he takes a turn in the garden. It's a distorted spirituality but it haunts a lot of us, and it's the strongest impression that the Church has made on the non-Christian world - that Christians don't and can't have any fun, that to be a Christian means giving things up all the time, a permanent state of Lent, without ever getting to Easter.

Perhaps we have never understood well enough that the purpose of renunciation is to clear room for new things to grow. It's like a gardener cutting back overgrown bushes to make a clearing where new plants can grow towards the sun. Maybe the seeds were there in the ground all the time, but couldn't germinate; or maybe the gardener put new seeds or plants in the space cleared.

Either way, Lent might be a clearing of undergrowth to allow the sun and the rain to touch the soil of our being and tempt the dormant seeds out of hiding.

Lent might be a time, not of empty renunciations, but of reassessment, of taking stock, of spring cleaning, of taking our bearings and mapping out the next stage of the journey. Lent might be a time, when we remember who we are underneath the things that society piles on top of us like coats on the bed at a party.

This is a holy and blessed place because I am here.”

Perhaps Lent can be a time of clearing space in our lives so that we can see the realities of our situation, who we are, what we really need, what our relationship with God is like and what God is up to.

And God waits for us,
not like a lion ready to pounce if we let our guard down
and not like an interfering mother-in-law
but like an old friend who's seen it all before and likes us anyway
and with whom we can spend time without having to pretend or explain.

Let's read some words from 1 Corinthians 13:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

We are usually encouraged to read these words as a challenge to ourselves, a goal to strive for. We are seldom encouraged to dwell on these words as a description of the character of God. Let's read them again:

God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, does not boast, is not proud. God is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs. God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. God never fails.

On the next page there is this altered quote we've just heard, and a picture of a clearing in undergrowth. Spend some time contemplating the words, and if you want, write in the clearing anything you think you need to grow, and in the undergrowth anything you think you need to cut back.

steve collins

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ways perseveres. god never fails.

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**The Journey:
meditation by the Late Late Service
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lord god, guardian of the wild spaces,
of feasts on mountaintops and flasks of tea in snow,
of cagouled cloudy beaches and headlights at midnight on the motorway,
thankyou that we find in the bread and the wine a space to be with you.
throw us the compass of who we are and whose we are
let your hope be a big sky within us
let your presence be sand in our pockets

