

St Augustine's Thorpe Bay

WHY DO THEY BELIEVE IT?

A sermon series at the 10 am services in which priests speak personally about the challenges to their faith.

Despite not having been christened

Sunday 4th March 2018



**Sermon by
Revd Terry Brown
Curate of Canvey Island**

Let us pray, May the words I speak and the thoughts and meditations of my heart come from you Lord our Judge and Merciful Redeemer. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen

I am Terry (Curate at the Parish of Canvey Island) and I would like to thank Father Jonathan and Father Chris for inviting me here today to share with you just a small part of my journey and my experiences of coming to faith despite not being baptised, or should I say despite not being brought up being a Christian and by that, I mean not being baptised, not going to Sunday school. Not going to church apart from when a family relative had died. I had to hang my hat on a description of my faith and challenges so I thought of the first thing that came into my head. And that is what I bringing to you today.

"O" how that hurt me as a youngster, when I found out that my brother had been baptised and I had not. How I kept asking my mum why did you not get me baptised, the answer I got was that there was a family feud. I did not come from a family that went to church although they were genuinely good people and they loved my brother and me and they brought us up well. My father always taught us to defend the weak and never to tolerate bullying of any kind. Social media being the modern day of bullying, but that is a discussion for another time.

We never attended Sunday school as we were never taken, and I remember my cousins all went to Sunday school, again I was sad that I was not able to. I remember the different colour stars my cousins got from the Sunday school teachers when they had done good work and when they passed certain mile stones in their work. They always used to show me. I had little to show them of my achievements.

So, having given you some introduction I am going to take you back to my school days in Furtherwick Secondary Modern School. On reflection, it seemed like secondary modern education for me was one of mainly physical education, mainly due to the fact that I was pretty good at all sports, boxing, football, rugby gymnastics which unfortunate or not took precedence over the more academic subjects like Mathematics, English, History and religious instruction; which I felt was my best subject.

I was always interested in the stories about Jesus. I remember on one occasion being in religious instruction lesson and listening to the teacher tell a gospel story, I went into what I now know as a meditative state, where I found myself in the story right there in the desert. I was laying across a dilapidated old wooden bridge that was connecting each side of the dried-up water banks. My legs were dangling over one side and my head over

the other and I was looking under the bridge, where Jesus was talking to two of his disciples. I had other numerous experiences such as this but it was all put down to my having a vivid imagination, and the seed that was wanting to grow and blossom was not nurtured or encouraged. My other great love was for horses and I spent my weekends if not playing football or rugby riding horses, with my childhood sweetheart Kay. In fact, I wanted to be a jockey and had potentially a place lined up at Newmarket stables.

I never felt comfortable that I could go home and say to my family "I love religious instruction", in fear of embarrassment, of having the micky being taken out of me. So, religious instruction and my spiritual needs kind of dried up and the seeds of my early Christian life laid there dormant. However, I always felt that I had a warmth of presence around me and a burning sense of excitement and adventure and optimism within me. Something I did not understand was looking after me, it never left me this feeling, and as I grew older it made me more emotional and caring. I felt I could never really let myself cry in front of anyone and thought like mad not to cry due to the manly environment I was brought up in, until when my brother got married and had two children Nicholas and James who both suffered and died from Cystic Fibrosis, Nicholas at the age of three and James at the age of 31.

When Nicholas was in Great Ormond Street London; my brother and his wife called us, and suggested we get to the hospital quickly, I took my Father up as well. We got there just too late, as my brother said Nicholas had passed away and how brave he was. He was insistent that I go in to see Nicholas even though I said I would rather not. When we went in he was completely at peace with his hands like this as if he was praying. It tore me apart but my brother and his wife showed little emotion, I think they were both just stunned, and this numbness was with them at Nicholas funeral, they showed little emotion, where I just fell apart my heart was broken. My brother Jim his wife and James moved up to Norfolk where they thought the salt air would be good for James. Unfortunately, after some years my brother's wife left him as she could no longer bear to see the anger in his eyes. My brother not only lost his wife but he lost his son James who died a year or so later.

When I got married to my wife Kay, I prayed and I know Kay prayed hard to God that our children would be born healthy and thank God, all three of them are strapping men with families of their own. And we have five grandsons and one granddaughter.

It was when they were all young children that we both decided that we wanted them to be baptised and I also felt it a good time for me to get baptised.

This feeling that was in - prisoned inside me, of excitement, mystery and adventure a warmth that never left me was at last going to find freedom in my being baptised into a new life with Christ.

We went to speak with the vicar, Reverend Geoffrey Wrayford who was delighted to baptise our children, although he said I would need to go around to the vicarage for several week's discussing what baptism meant.

It was on these visits that I felt like I was in a green house and the seeds in the tray had dried up and withered, the priest was the gardener who watered the seeds and as he did those seeds began to sprout and grow and have never stopped growing, and the gardener has continued to water and prune the tree. I was baptised in June 1978 and confirmed with my wife Kay in July 1978. I can see how Kay has played a huge part in my Christian Journey to being baptised, and an even bigger part and self - sacrifice in supporting **me being ordained**. **This support has not just been in recent years** but since we first knew each other as children some 50 years ago. This Christian **and ordained life** has been life changing for every member of my family.

I was Ordained Deacon in June 2016 and Ordained Priest in July 2017

What I found after all this time since my child hood was that my family needed direction, they needed the sign post to say this way to Christ. It was the reaction

I got from my parents and brother when I found the courage to say to them that I felt like God was calling me to ordained ministry, they embraced me and at the same time embraced my journey and my coming to faith. My lifelong belief that they would ridicule me was washed away.

In 2015 at the age of 90 my mother was baptised and confirmed.

In October 2017, I took my dad's funeral.

My brother has found happiness and peace in marriage with another lady, albeit he has health problems.

I guess what worries me on reflecting on my story is that I have never felt challenged about my faith. The biggest challenge to me and to each of us is to let go, trust in God, that his will be done.

To go where he is calling each one of us, to use the different skills that he has given each one of us.

When I went to St Mellitus college I felt seriously inadequate, standing alongside others who were so gifted. I thought to myself what good am I what can I offer. It was whilst on a pilgrimage walk with a group of people, one of which was Bishop Stephen. I was the shepherd at the back of the group making sure no one was left behind. As we were walking I was talking to the Bishop, he asked how I was getting on at college, I told him that I felt inadequate, like I was standing next to Spitfire pilots. The other students of all

different ages and traditions were so gifted in their musicality, in their academic ability. He said something to me that has stayed with me, and I would like to pass on to those of you who doubt your gifts. He said to me be the pilot of your own Spitfire. Come as you are, not as anyone else but as you.

In my experience and personal journey of discernment to be a priest in the Church of England has not been easy. To become a priest, to become a Christian has probably thrown up as many challenges as it solves; and that you encounter more struggles than you did before but that - what it is - is an adventure; a risky - sometimes painful - beautiful, mysterious and privileged adventure, the quest to continue to learn, to follow the way of Christ, taking Christ out into our communities.

When Jesus calls us to live the Christian life then he is calling us to take risks; to enter the world with all its temptations and dangers because it is only by being in it - by being there in flesh - incarnate in the world - that we can ever hope to transform it or see its redemption by God. We need to be in the world but we also need to be distinctive. We need to do something in order to make our presence there worthwhile.

I have so much more to tell you, maybe you might invite me back, maybe not, but thank you for listening to me; and may this Lent time inspire you to challenge yourself to do something outside your comfort Zone.

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And here I am not talking about giving up chocolates or cakes, but to go where you are needed, to help, to forgive, to love, to share, to pray, to tell the story of Christ our saviour. Amen.