

Sunday 8th May 2016  
Body, Mind, and Spirit  
Crossed Wires

Jesus College Oxford

Psalm 62  
1 Samuel 3:2 – 18  
Mark 1:16-20

You might think my choice of title Crossed Wires is a little strange – why did I pick it? When I left school many years ago, my first job was working as an engineer for Post Office Telephones, which many years later became BT. This was in the days before computers and optic fibre technology. All the equipment was electro-mechanical and wiring was copper or aluminium cable and each individual wire needed to be connected by hand. There were no pre wired cables with plugs on each end. If any wires were incorrectly attached to the wrong place, i.e. crossed wires, it could cause problems because things wouldn't work as they should. It sometimes caused people to receive telephone calls not meant for them – when this happened people would often say 'Oh we must have crossed wires'.

Back in August of last year, I received an email asking if I would come and speak at one of your services. My first thoughts – I don't know anyone in Oxford, this is a wind up, someone has got their wires crossed and are confusing me with someone else. But then I received a telephone call confirming that it definitely was me – so here I am. As I mentioned, although I don't know anyone in Oxford, before he became Bishop of Oxford, the recently retired Rt. Revd John Pritchard was Bishop of Jarrow and I can claim a very tenuous link with Sir Harold Wilson a notable alumni of this college.

You may not believe it but I am actually old enough to remember when Harold Wilson was the Prime Minister. Many years ago during a TV interview, he claimed that the best pint of beer he had tasted was Federation Special, this was supplied to the House of Commons by a small brewery in the North of England - Federation Brewery in Gateshead – this is the brewery that I worked for many years later. I did say it was a tenuous link!!

When I discovered that the theme for this term was Body, Mind and Spirit – it set me thinking. If we do not have that connection in the right balance we end up with the equivalent of crossed wires.

My own call to Reader and much later ordained ministry reminds me in a way of the call to Samuel. Someone told me that I would speak in front of many people. At first I didn't really accept it – Never, not me - was my first thought. I thought someone has got their wires crossed here but that story is for another time.

These two readings – Eli, a priest, you would imagine that he would have it all together - yet it took three failed attempts before he recognised the Lord's call to Samuel.

Simon, Andrew, James and John four fishermen – there just had to be something about them. They heard the words 'Come follow me' (Mark 1:17) and there was an immediate response. They dropped everything and followed.

How do we know that we have Body, Mind and Spirit in balance?

Athletes in any sport, whatever their success, it was due, to a great extent, to the preparation or training.

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So it is in the Christian life. We must develop a lifestyle of training to be like Jesus. Christians should prepare through training, discipline, and hard work. Jesus came in human form so that he might show us what it means to live and serve God. It is his example that we are called to follow.

In Methodism, John Wesley called this sanctification, the process by which we become more and more like Jesus in our thoughts, words and deeds.

We do that by learning to live and think as Jesus did.

When I read some of the Letters from Paul, I wonder if he realised that it was very difficult for the new Christians to maintain their new way of life, especially when surrounded by their former way of life. We all know how difficult it is to change our habits and our way of life.

How do we do it? We need to retrain our body, mind and spirit to live and think as Jesus did. As Christians we are to look, talk, and act differently from the world. Our acceptance of Christ means we have accepted a new lifestyle. To overcome all of the temptations around us and our tendency to fall back into old habits, we need to go into retraining. Paul tells us, in Ephesians 4:23 that they begin in the mind, which then extends to the body and soul.

The mind is the seat of reflective consciousness and intelligence, the place we process information about the world and interpret it.

It is where we make decisions and determine our attitude and disposition, which determines our behaviour and conduct. That then determines what we do with our body, the actions we undertake.

As followers of Jesus Christ, our deepest desire should be to do the Father's will and that means following in the example of Jesus. It is this desire which then helps us to overcome our own self-centred desires and affections. No longer are we in control of our lives but rather it is Christ Jesus who lives in us.

Retraining the body, mind and spirit involves the continual process of readjusting our thinking. It is the gradual conforming of the person to the new spiritual world in which they now live. In this retraining, the person is not passive, but is a fellow worker with God in the process. So which comes first? Retraining the mind and our thoughts or changing our actions? The answer is both.

You need to change to begin thinking like Jesus and many did a few years ago by asking, "What would Jesus do?" But you also need to take on the actions of Christ in your daily life. They will feel uncomfortable at first but as you begin to live into it, you will find that your thinking and perception of the world and others will begin to change too.

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Play is a very important part of keeping our body, mind and spirit in balance.

Although some people will tell you that men in particular never grow up, it is true that some of us left the idea of play when we left our childhood and took on the ways and airs of being an adult. Many adults think play is silly and certainly not spiritual. In fact, many adults have lost the ability to play. Somewhere along the way, life takes more serious turns: studying, getting a job, marriage, raising a child.

What happens is that those responsibilities rob us of the ability to play. We need to regain it. Play can be a spiritual exercise that can teach us about living in the kingdom of God.

Think about the success of Messy Church.

By its very definition, play is unpredictable. When you play, you never know how the ball is going to bounce or what might happen. That's good for us because we try to live lives that are too ordered and controlled and the affect is that we lose the joy of life. It also teaches us spontaneity. We learn to let go and relax and encounter whatever may happen.

Jesus told us that to enter the kingdom of God, we must become like little children.

Play helps us to do that. So stop taking yourself so seriously and enjoy life!

When we take our grandchildren out, they often like to involve us in their games – especially the crazy golf where they get squirted with water by huge model dinosaurs – even more fun if it is grandma and grandad getting wet.

They are very competitive and love beating us.

Learn to play and experience the joy of the kingdom of God.

A young boy about nine years old went with his parents to Europe one summer. Part of their tour was visiting the great old cathedrals of the past. As he would visit cathedral after cathedral, he saw the massive stained glass portraits of the disciples and other saints. He was impressed as he stood looking through the beautiful stained glass windows. Back home, his Sunday School teacher asked, what did he like the most about the great churches of Europe and he said the windows of the saints. She asked what his definition of a saint was. His mind went back to those massive stained glass windows, and he said, "A saint is someone God shines light through."

May we begin retraining our body, mind and spirit so that in the lives we lead, the light of Christ shines through us. Amen.