

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT

I'd like to feel better but.....



Dear Friends,

Alain de Botton and John Armstrong's new book "Art as Therapy" suggests that we are pretty good at being "DJs of our souls" by selecting pieces of music that will enhance or alter our moods for the better. Visual arts can also enable us to do this but we have often picked up our cues on how to behave around art from solemn galleries or museums and so many of us are a little lost and perhaps the gift shop is more helpful! The postcard we pick up tells us the caption and we learn some key dates, the provenance and even an explanation of an allegory. But does this part really matter? What should art really be for?

One question which almost seems impatient or unanswerable is: if art deserves its importance then it should be able to state its purpose in relatively simple terms. Their theory is that art is a therapeutic medium like music. It, too, is a vehicle through which we can recover hope, dignify suffering, develop empathy, laugh, wonder, nurture a sense of communion with others and regain a sense of justice and political idealism.

However, for art to do any of these things for us, we need to approach art in the right way. It needs to be framed not necessarily according to art history (however interesting this can be), but according to a psychological method that invites us to align our deeper selves with artworks. What does a psychological therapeutic way of reading art look like? They suggest a selection of works that show :-

Hope, shown in the loveliness of Monet's Water Lilies. Some may scorn the prettiness of art, but the writers point out that such

images help us to reflect on the loveliness of a garden, and that far from being at risk of being complacent we risk feeling angry or helpless at the hard gritty world we see around us or in the news if we don't allow beauty to enter our lives and give us hope.

Empathy, a work called the Twilight of life by Tully, shows a very elderly and rather grumpy woman, perhaps with the onset of dementia, and the artist helps us to look at people we may walk by quickly, or find ourselves disliking as their company is not particularly easy, giving us a deeper way of seeing who they truly are, and valuing them, and not just the external shell or difficult nature.

Fragility. By choosing 14th century Venetian glass they suggest the lovely delicate vessels represent the fragility of life. Since the playground we have learned to try to be strong and brave but the glass can remind us of the beauty, delicacy of fragility and how the light can shine through a fine fragile glass, and its sophistication which may need to be protected and treated gently.

There is so much more in this book and I would recommend that you read it if you have the opportunity, but in considering their message of Therapy through Art I realised how much more our worship and building and faith can offer us.

February can be the time of year that some find difficult because of the cold, greyness, lack of sunshine and continuing short days but we can find our "therapy" in Candlemas (2nd Feb) with Anna and Simeon's response to the Holy Child, and its reality check on life with all its bitter-sweetness looking back on the joy and

hope of the birth of Christ, and ahead to the cross to come. This can help us come to terms with our highs and lows in life and yet know that death on the cross leads to eternal life. The forthcoming wedding of Helen Wright and John Harvey is a celebration that we are all invited to and we can give thanks and celebrate their love, and reflect again on our meaningful relationships that we have and have had in the past. Celebrating love, Choral Compline will feature the anthem "My Beloved Spake" by Patrick Hadley and through the singing we may be drawn into the passion of relationships and yet also experience the serenity of peace. The music can make one feel held, transported to a greater place.

Whatever we choose, let's reflect on the therapeutic value of the worship, enabling us to be lifted from the profane to the profound.
Love Jo

Do you have a Heart for Hertford? Lent 2014

An important part of the Churches Together in Hertford's calendar is our Lent event, an opportunity to share a few words or bible studies, taking on something new and challenging that church communities can share together. This has often included meeting one another in homes or church halls. For 2014, a special programme that deliberately follows on from Connecting with Culture in 2013 has been planned to explore the connections we have made and encourage one another in 'Serving the Community'.

It is clear that Churches and voluntary organisations are being called on to provide a range of services that not only meet the spiritual but the physical needs of the community, and to be part of what is now called 'The Third Sector' responding in a manner that is appropriate, measured and true to our calling.

Monday 10th March. Johnny Douglas. From the **London Institute of Contemporary**

Christianity. Will provide us with a biblical grounding in 'Serving the Community'.

Monday 17th of March. Phil Martin. Area Manager from the **Royal Voluntary Service.** Will give us an insight into 'Serving the older generation and the Home Bound'.

Monday 24th March. Peter Hill. From the **Samaritans.** How do we Serve the lonely and listen to the depressed.

Monday 31th March. Sue Jeppesen. **Chaplain to the Isabel Hospice.** 'Serving the sick and the bereaved'.

Each of these events are hosted by the **Methodist Church, Ware Road, Hertford.**

If you missed out on last year's event, do not worry, you will of course be made most welcome with the opportunity to renew connections with friends over a coffee or tea. **Please be sure to arrive at 7:50 for 8:00.** There is no charge for these events but your generous donation for each event will be put to good use by each of the speakers.

