

The people took the young man home alive and were greatly encouraged. Acts 20.12.

Last Sunday we saw how encouraging, *paraclating*, is not only something we all *need*, but is in fact the main job of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete himself. So who did *you* encourage last week? Well, now we come to one of the most comic passages of Acts: Paul is preaching so hard into the night that poor Eutychus can't stand it any more. The eyes close over, and he tumbles out of the upper window and kills himself. That's not too encouraging, is it? Vv7-9...

There's a lovely story of an Irish preacher droning on in his sermon. He noticed that one of his congregation had given up and fallen asleep. The minister ordered, 'Wake that man up!' The parishioner shouted back to the pulpit: 'you put him to sleep, your reverence. You wake him up!' Yes, it's true: the clergy are the only ones who talk in other people's sleep.

So, who's at fault here? Paul or Eutychus? Should Paul have dumbed it down and cut it short to keep Eutychus's attention? Or should Eutychus have made more effort? Should everything be run round Eutychus and his needs?

When preachers are boring I wonder if they really understand or even deep-down believe the Bible. Preachers don't have to go out of their way to be difficult, but it should be recognised that this is a serious business. The Bible is hard, partly because it is a very, very old book, but more importantly because here we encounter God himself. Sometimes, like Jacob, we have to wrestle with God. The sad thing is that so many churchgoers just give up on the Bible. It's too

difficult, they say. Haven't time. Too busy. And anyway, the Bible's boring. It's not that important.

Not that important? I spend half my life unpicking the wrong notions people have of the Bible. Half the stuff in the Bible they don't believe in isn't actually in the Bible! When so few people really know our core document, it's not surprising the Church has nothing to say and is collapsing.

What's at the bottom of all this? Consumerism, the corrupting ideology of consumerism. The consumer is king. At the centre of everything is *me*, and my needs. Consumerism makes us expect life to be entertainment. The teachers are here to amuse the children. School should be fun. Even *Church* should be fun. We've forgotten that we actually call this a church service. My work should be fun. Marriage should be fun.

And this is where the danger comes. Once marriage *stops* being fun, we want out. *Why* should work be fun? That's why they pay you. It's because it *ain't* fun! There is this ridiculous expectation now that the whole world is got up for your personal benefit. The whole world revolves around you. Parents, teachers, ministers, wives, husbands, employers - they're all there to make you happy. It's your *right*! Life is entertainment. The worst thing you can say is 'Bor-ing!'

As I say, this is all part of the outworking of the ideology of consumerism which is essentially extreme selfishness. Have you ever heard of the Plowden Report? The Plowden Report of 1967 changed the landscape of our society with its worship of 'child-centred' teaching. The child-centred approach is now rigid orthodoxy. Education now is not about the

imparting of knowledge; it is about amusing children. The child comes first. He is the centre of the universe. What a terrible notion to put into a child's head! Forty years on we are living with the effects of this me-centredness all around us.

And that's why my sympathies are with Paul and not Eutyclus. We need to work at things. There are things in life, worthwhile things, which require struggle. Yes, it was a struggle to follow St Paul's teaching, but it was worth it. Jacob wrestled with God at the Jabbok River. Life is *not* entertainment. People do *not* exist for my sake to amuse me. This is why stem-cell research is wrong. You cannot grow one life for the exclusive good of the other. We are each ends in ourselves. The ends, however good, never justify the means.

Training to be a doctor, an engineer, a concert pianist, a linguist takes time and sheer hard slog. We don't give up when it becomes a bit challenging. I'm still struggling with the Chopin *Etudes* for the piano each day, but they're worth it.

Eutyclus was wrong. He shouldn't have given up and taken the lazy way out. Ours is a Eutyclus society. We take the lazy way out now, appealing to the lowest common denominator. We call it 'dumbing-down' and it is very depressing. Let's not stretch anyone. Let's *amuse* Eutyclus and keep him awake. So let's give him reality TV, titillation, any old trash to keep him amused, because we mustn't ever *challenge* anyone, must we? And so the entertainments industry makes billions playing to the worst in us. *They* wouldn't have let Eutyclus fall asleep!

It's a childish society which thinks that life should be entertainment, and that you have a right to *expect* perfection.

That's fairy-land. *Reality* is that things go wrong and life is 9 parts boredom and one part fear. Sorry to be a party-pooper!

The Way of *Christ* is the Way of the Cross, the Way of *sacrifice*. Isn't the Cross a big letter 'I' crossed out? Take up your Cross and deny yourself! *Deny yourself?* Wow! The whole point of consumerism is that you deny yourself *nothing*.

But the cult of consumerism is empty. It leads nowhere. Why are so many people on drugs and alcohol? There's nothing there. The greatest sin is to be boring. The next time a child says, 'I'm bored', you reply, 'Only the boring get bored'. It's a failed ideology, because it is the exaltation of selfishness.

Only the Way of Christ via the Cross satisfies. Christ condemns modern living. He says: stop loving self, and start loving God and other people. Put Christ not self at the centre.

Let's come back to Eutychus. He should have made a bit more effort. But Paul unabashed, put his arms around him, and coolly announced, 'He's alive', v10... Then, amazingly, he went back upstairs, had something to eat, and carried on preaching! V11... Notice that the people in v12 were *encouraged* at this great news... It's the third time that word occurs here. And why *wouldn't* they be encouraged? Christ had brought the boy back from the dead. Unlike the ideologies, he can walk the walk. We have a great Saviour who has dealt with our sinful past at Calvary's Cross and who at Easter has conquered death. He is an almighty God, and with Christ walking with us, we can live confident lives even as we face the bad times. Through Christ Paul raised Eutychus. Jesus is Lord, and he is able. That encourages us *all* in our daily walk.