



To the Angel of the Church in Bromley write....

These are the words of the one who loves you and gave all for you; who frees you from sin and nourishes you with his Word and Sacraments; the one who opens his arms to welcome you into fellowship with him. All very nice and affirming, just as Jesus teaches us that God is; but in the letters to the angels of the seven Churches with which the Book of Revelation begins the writer goes on to say some pretty challenging things.

The Church in Ephesus works hard and resists evil but they have fallen away somewhat from the love they first showed. They need to remember that love is in the centre. The suffering Church in Smyrna needs strengthening and encouraging. In Pergamum the Church is very near to the seat of local political power and they have to fight hard to maintain their spiritual purity. They are not totally successful and the Church is tainted with compromise with the prevailing culture. In Thyatira they are strong in their faith and practice but they have forgotten what sin is and tolerate some very questionable practices. The Church in Sardis has a good name and appears very successful but in reality it is dead; it's all show and they need to wake up. In Philadelphia the Church appears weak but struggles with commendable endurance and holds on to the faith against all the odds. The Church in Laodicea is simply apathetic; neither hot nor cold. They badly need to return to their Lord.

And what of us in Bromley? Well we know what it is to be next to a centre of the prevailing culture, that is shopping and we need to have a clear view of what our relationship to mammon is. Our Churches look pretty successful; we have good buildings and capable congregations; we need to ensure that the spiritual depth is there too. We don't have much of a struggle and could very easily fall into the temptation

of complacency, so we must consciously guard against that too. However close we are to being a fruitful body of Christians we always need to keep the nature and demands of love before our eyes as the Ephesians did.

The 'Angels of the Churches' could be interpreted in a couple of ways. It could be that the writer was thinking of Christ himself writing spiritual letters to angels in heaven. It was believed that all earthly communities had their heavenly counterparts who watched over them and interceded for them. Another interpretation is that the 'Angel' of the Church represented its true spiritual life. The Church itself might present an image, but the 'angel' shows the truth. Either way, the message is pretty clear; the Churches of Asia minor to whom the book of Revelation is addressed were known and loved by God; they needed his encouragement and affirmation but some also needed a pretty stern challenge. "I reprove and discipline those I love" (Rev 3:19).

On 23 May (and, for that matter, every Sunday thereafter) we at Bromley Parish Church will have the opportunity to reflect on the angels of the Churches because on that day our new reredos will be dedicated. It is a remarkable piece of work; designed and embroidered by textile artist Sue Riley and it will give us an original and significant work of art, which is both beautiful and profound to form the backdrop to our worship. The reredos depicts the seven angels of the Church from the book of Revelation as tall pillar-like figures who both watch over us and draw us upwards.

We at BPC are greatly privileged to be able to have such a piece to meditate on. May it remind us to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev 3:22)

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In this edition Michael Camp writes our leading article. It also appears in the magazines of Bromley Methodist Church & Bromley URC