

## MOTHERING SUNDAY 11 March 2018

Sister Wendy Beckett, the art expert who presented a television series on painting, has also given us a Lent book in which she uses paintings to explore topics like silence and peace and love. Many of her choices are instantly easy to enjoy, Manet's lilacs: so vibrant you can smell them and visualise Spring bursting out of winter gloom in yellow, green and blue, the world coming to new life. She also likes Dutch interiors and the calm, ordered décor and furniture and the young women with flawless complexions and the competent demeanour of managing large and complex households. Other paintings are difficult. One is just three grey stripes and Sister Wendy invites us to see the glory of God in grey. I do not find this easy, But then, Sister Wendy is lenthening me, she is stretching my understanding and asking me to grow.

As a teenager at a time when teenage was just about being invented, I read chapter six of St John's Gospel and was astounded. John tells us that Jesus spoke outrageously of his disciples eating his flesh and drinking his blood. John says that many left and would no longer follow him. Jesus turns to Peter. "And you", he asks, "are you leaving too?" Peter tells him, "No, Lord, to whom should we go, you have the words of eternal life." At a time when the Christian was assumed to be universal, just about, in society, here at the heart of the gospel people turned away.

Growth is complex. Here is numerical decline on one hand and a serious and also a profound development of understanding. Peter has a different and astonishing insight into just who this man is and what he means.

The collection of suggestions for growth gathered from the Away Day is full of ideas for personal growth. People want to do things better and they ask for help in all sorts of ways. Doing the jobs in worship, reading or leading intercessions. Helping in the cafe or stewarding. A wide range of opportunities sought to serve and the recognition that we may need help to do it all well.

In the reading from Acts, 2.42-47, we hear of growth in the early church. At that stage it was a simple strategy and the tactic was friendship. God has befriended us and made us followers of Jesus, in his name we offer you friendship with us and with God in Christ. Join us to eat his bread and drink from his cup.is the mission statement. People were invited in to share warmth, respect and mutual care. Can we, dare we better this?

I have realised, on Mothering Sunday, that Sister Weny is mothering me. A mother, indeed a parent quickly learns how children grow. The baby gets into a routine, the parents rejoice only to find the baby has changed the universe yet again. You cannot treat a two year old like a baby, nor a teenager like a two year old even if the teen is showing every symptom. Sister Wendy is educating me, she wants me to grow and to find the Divine glory even in the grey. She encourages me to look through the pigment and the oil and the canvas which carries them to the artist's vision of trying to produce an image of what is hidden from the eye. I am to learn that it is not a matter in life of arriving but always of becoming, of being receptive to the wonder of God in this world and the glories offered to us all.