

As the pace of technological change accelerates, it is inevitable that what was yesterday's cutting edge becomes today's worn-out waste. The march of technological progress is remorseless, relentless and— despite humans sometimes becoming unaccountably attached to particular bits of kit— largely unsentimental. This process is never more so than in the realm of communications. One hundred and fifty years ago the leading edge of communication was a postage stamp and although we've yet to finally lick the back of our last one, the piece of perforated paper has been succeeded and in most ways superseded by a string of newer technologies— the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, fax, mobile phone, text messaging, the internet and so on. Even if the hardware sticks around - and if the idea is good enough, a wheel say or a printing press, it will- it only does that if other parts of the package adapt and change. So wheels are still with us, but now they sit under cars and planes rather than chariots and goat-carts. And despite regular announcements of its demise, the printed word is still going strong almost half a millennia after Gutenberg first cranked up his press and got lucky. But although we still consume vast quantities of the written word, what we want to read, and thus what publishers print is constantly changing, fashions move on, needs change: the presses keep rolling but what's on them is constantly evolving.

So just last week newspapers were reporting that celebrity magazines have experienced a sharp decline in readership in the space of less than six months. I guess for reporters on the dailies it's nice to know that there's someone going down the pan quicker than they are. However, if things keep up as they are OK, Grazia, Now etc. will soon be but distant memories, closely followed into extinction by Fleet Street- hopefully with the Daily Mail leading the pack.

For the moment, however, Heat and the Sun cling on to life, but when they do finally arrive in the great recycling bin in the sky, they will find it already pretty full of lost publishing genres.

I wonder if anyone under 40 has ever seen an Almanac; I doubt anyone alive has seriously used one, and yet for hundreds of years if you were going to find a book in a home, it was overwhelmingly likely to be an almanac. But what use now those tomes which tell you when is the best phase of the moon to plant your seed; thrill you with tales of the birth of a sheep with two heads, showers of fish and other strange happenings; and make vague but scary predictions about the year ahead. All these functions have been superseded by science, the internet and the Daily Express respectively.

Temperance literature- real life tales of how ordinary folk on the fast train to lurid and lovingly described dissipation found the Lord- Alleluia- and turned their lives around: such reads were once wildly popular but you won't find anything like them left on the shelves of WH Smith.

And from a similar period in time but aimed at the burgeoning children's market there was the publishing sensation known as 'cautionary tales'. Nowadays, of course, our children only need to be warned to be themselves and follow their dreams: Victorian children had to read gory and gruesome tales of what terrible fates would befall them if they chewed their finger nails, made a noise in church, or told lies. One needs merely to observe contemporary cuticles, Sunday Club or the career of Boris Johnson to confirm that the cautionary tale is now defunct. As with many other things, however, you can expect archaic obsolete genres to cling on in the church, and we don't mean the persons of the clergy, just the sermons. So proving my

orthodox credentials, here is a cautionary tale. You may remember a few months ago I stood in this pulpit and made a throwaway remark about the best way to be on good terms with your in-laws is for them to live 6000 miles away. You may have heard at evensong three weeks after that that no sooner had the words left my mouth that the message came in that they were coming to visit in a week's time. They came. They went. And left me with a cautionary tale to tell you about hospitality. You see, if you go out of your way to be kind and accommodating to your guests; if you go out of your way to be hospitable, to show that his mother hasn't lost a son but gained a son in law what happens is that they will wait three months and then come back in October.

Making the most of circumstances, if I'm shortly to lose my privacy yet again, I can at least get a bit of sermon material from the last visit, a Russian doll of cautionary tales.

It was the first time my sister-in-law has visited the West, and what most impressed her, gazing out of the window of the X26 on the trip from Heathrow was London's preoccupation nay obsession with public sanitation. You take it for granted if you see a sign saying 'to let' that it means that someone has some property they want to rent: you don't think, gosh they have a lot of public lavatories in South London. A cultural misunderstanding of course and a certain haziness about English spelling no doubt encouraged by jet lag.

There is obviously the cautionary tale here about not sharing your cross-cultural bewilderment with your brother because he will then share it with your brother in law and thence it will be relayed to that part of Beddington gathered to worship this Sunday. There is also the moral that a little

understanding is not always better than complete ignorance, and also one pertinent to Bible study of the fragility of language and translation. Just the one 'i' makes all the difference between renting and flushing.

However, I want to now move away from cautionary tales, throw them to the wind if you like, and look at the entirely positive sides of what happens when cultures collide. Fly 6000 miles and we have no choice but to open our eyes to other peoples: their way of doing, being, seeing, thinking and speaking. I know you can probably get that effect on a day trip to Margate, but it's not quite the same. Our minds are broadened, our way of thinking challenged, if only because we realise ours isn't the only way of thinking. That, I'm sure you'll agree, is a good thing to realise.

And amazingly enough, Jesus is described as having just this realisation, smack in the middle of his public ministry, about half way through Matthew's gospel. It might sit uncomfortably with our doctrine of an omniscient God, but there it is.

Jesus is out walking with his all-Jewish disciples. A Canaanite woman pesters him relentlessly to heal her daughter. Look, Jesus says, this isn't for you, it's for the children of Israel, not the children of Canaan. If I give this to you, there's less for them. Just give me some crumbs she says. She has realised that even the crumbs are infinitely more than enough. And then Jesus realises something as well. It's a forehead slapping 'doh!' moment. Those Gentiles, those impure foreigners. They can get it too.

Here's where it becomes important to put the tale in its context. It's contained in just one chapter, 15, of Matthew's gospel, but a lot is packed in there. We start with Jesus telling his disciples that what they eat cannot

make a person unclean, it is the evil intentions that come out of the heart that make a person impure. Then on to the Canaanite woman, begging for the crumbs from the master's table. Jesus relents and gives her the scraps. And moves on, next, to the feeding of the five thousand. A bit of bread, a few fish and everyone is fed. You see the connexions?

From those first crumbs thrown to the dogs to feeding everybody, the trajectory is clear: the definition of who are God's people grows rapidly bigger, wider, more inclusive until the whole world is truly in Jesus' embrace. He starts this chapter of the Gospel focused solely on the children of Israel; he ends it holding all of humanity in his hands.

This is the journey all Christians are called to make, an epiphany we all must have; a reality that must permeate every aspect of our lives. God's love and care is not just big enough to feed all of us: he is feeding all of us. People we like, people we don't like; people we understand, people we really don't understand at all; people who are like us, people who are nothing at all like us. And that's not just a nice flighty airy fairy theory for matters of the spirit, a sort of vague wishy washy desire to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. It's about all the million and one ways, large and small, bigger-picture and everyday, we think about and act towards our brothers and sisters; those right next to us, and those right on the other side of the world.

Back to the beginning. Hidden right here, is a cautionary tale. When we build walls and fences, pull up the drawbridge and batten down the hatches we are at great risk of shutting out the very thing we are trying to keep hold of. It's really best not to build barriers. Without them we may feel more vulnerable. But in the end, they just make our world smaller. Even if we end up the butt

of everybody else's jokes; even if end up looking like faux pas fools; even if we end up blushing bright red with humiliation; we must keep our eyes and our hearts open. It's worth it. It really is. God hates walls. And so should we.