

John Roome - Thanksgiving Service

Holy Trinity, Cowes 6 September 2018

Canon Andrew Neaum

The John Roome known by this old Vicar is rather different from the active, adventurous bright, go ahead, socially and professionally successful, sizzingly-scintillating sailor and man of the world who we recall with such gratitude and joy today.

I knew him, an old, wise man in his most comfortable of studies, his face creased in tolerant amusement, at the follies, foibles and frailties of humankind.

I knew him as a composed, thoughtful parishioner in a pew. The depth of who's intelligent, deeply held, though healthily critical faith, allowed him to believe uncompromisingly in life beyond life.

I knew him as the incisive, wise chairman of the Boldre Church Trust, a fund he'd had the foresight to help set up and organise to be independent of and inaccessible to, the overly pious whims and mad fancies of bishops, priests and the zealously pious. A fund that could well preserve a local architectural gem, St John's Boldre, from the Church's suicidal, disregard of rural churches

I knew him as an old man, still in love with his wife, whose care for her in her final illness, both spiritually and physically was enough to moisten the eyes even of this most cynical of parish priests when he contemplates human nature.

I knew him as an old man who reinforced my own predilection for the company of the elderly. Experience, wisdom, tolerance, understanding and informed, good conversation, are most to be found and enjoyed in the old. Viva the elderly and a pox on ageism!

And yet William Wordsworth reminds us that the child is father of the man.... That there is continuity in the life of a human being. John the little boy, John the school boy, John the bright young man of the law, John the bridegroom at the altar with his lovely Kate, John the parent, John the sizzling, scintillating sailor, John the wise old patriarch of his family and of his church family at St John's Boldre, are all of a piece:

*My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.*

So we celebrate his whole life, the whole man, his childhood, his youth, his wife, his children, his career, his retirement, his faith, his Church, his God.

And because we're in a church, and because he was a man of faith, and because I'm a parson, and because the Church, when it comes to mankind's mortality, offers the most coherent narrative of hope available to us, and also because we're in the fabled Cowes, and my arrival here, for the very first time, was most exhilaratingly by sea, I turn to another favourite poet to celebrate the John I so admired, and the sea upon which he rejoiced to sail with such panache and verve, and the faith of faiths, the Christian faith, he held so deeply and which I love beyond telling

The poet Charles Causley, was a Cornishman and Christian. He served in the Royal Navy during the war, and his poems sparkle with the sea's spray and are salted by faith in that walker beside and upon the sea of Galilee, the friend of fishermen, Jesus of Nazareth.

His poem called Mevagissey tells of the discombobulation, of that little town's parish church when it's visited by Jesus' fishermen friends..... Just a few verses:

*Peter jumped up in the pulpit
His hands all smelling of fish,
He guernsey was gay with the sparky spray
And white as an angel's wish.*

*The seagulls came in through the ceiling
The fish flew up through the floor,
Bartholomew laughed as he cast off aft
And Andrew cast off fore.*

*They charged the thundering churchyard
Like a lifeboat down the slip,
And the congregation in consternation
Prepared to abandon ship.....*

*"Draw your tots!" said Peter,
"Every man to his post!
It's not so far to heaven's bar
With the charts I've got of the coast!*

*Shoot the boom like Satan!
Prepare to take on boarders!
Send up your prayers like signal-flares!
I'll steam the secret orders!*

*"Stoke up the engine-room boilers
With slices of heavenly toast!
The devil's a weasel and travels on diesel
But I burn the Holy Ghost!".....*

That's the faith to give the troops, that's the faith to give the sailors, that's the faith to give yachtsmen and women, that's the Christian faith I know and love. That's John Roome's faith. That's the faith that makes sense of life. Swashbuckling, full of joy, wild enough to blow and blast us from our ruts. Full of risk and excitement. Nothing at all to do with puritanism, wowserism, school-marmish censoriousness and conventionality.

So, from within that faith, John's faith, we thank God for John Roome and his like, determined to.....

*Shoot the boom like Satan!
Prepare to take on boarders!
Send up our prayers like signal-flares!
And steam the secret orders!*

*Stoke up the engine-room boilers
With slices of heavenly toast!
The devil's a weasel and travels on diesel
But we burn the Holy Ghost!".....*