

Beverley Minster has become something of a home to the Beverley Literary Festival this year. The first two events have happened already: Lord Robert Winston on the limits of genetics and ethics – asking what it is to be human; and Will Self, last night, preaching a secular sermon on the failure of romantic love. If I were playing it safe I wouldn't have agreed to giving a stage to a man of faith but not the Christian faith, and a man of some occasional extreme views, who is an avowed agnostic. Can there be a 'secular' sermon? Well, there was, and I agreed with Will Self's basic premise: if you don't believe that love has a divine origin, romantic love on its own won't save you.

I said last night that this great building, among many other purposes, exists to enable our thoughts and our aspirations to soar. That should mean thinking challenging thoughts. These walls are strong and our windows let light in. This is a complex world and we live in changing times. Many Christians would wish to retreat into the safety of certainties and cherished traditions. It can be tempting to ask if the world might stop so that we can get off. The debate about sexuality is the one generating most heat at present, and it may be that the Anglican Communion will be split over it. But the safest place for the Christian is right on the edge. That's where Christ was.

He is on the edge, the place between, in today's Gospel reading. South of Galilee, north of Samaria. Contested lands, a place of uneasy truce, where even the Romans chose to let the natives fight out their quarrels. He is on the edge of a village, and he meets the edge dwellers. When you go to a medieval city, look to see if there is a church dedicated to St Giles, or a road called Gilesgate or Gillygate, as in York. It's likely to be outside the old walls, on the edge of the city. That's where the lepers lived, and as far as they could get into civilisation. St Giles had a ministry to lepers, so the churches for the lepers, on the edge of things, were dedicated to him.

Lepers lived on the edge because their disease – in those days a collection of different skin conditions – was devastating and you could catch it. It's the same today, though it's curable, and the Minster supports the work of the Leprosy Mission with our mission giving. The lepers knew their place on the edge, and they 'kept their distance'. But their edge dwelling led them to being an example to a divided, broken world. Shunned by others, they found a community of honesty and need and care which broke down the old divisions. Here Jews and Samaritans lived together, not apart. They had something to teach those who thought they were well. On the edge, disfigured by an unclean illness, they became more human. We might ask who today's lepers are, and what they might teach us. Who does a post Brexit Britain push to the edge?

An edgy thing happens. They ask for 'mercy'. That could have simply been affirmation, food, water. Jesus offers them healing, wholeness. But he doesn't heal them. He tells them to go to the priests as if they were healed. You should only go to the priest if you wanted to be pronounced clean, to have your healing verified. Jesus preserves their dignity by making no effort to close the gap between him and them – he

affirms their edgy community. But he recognises their need, and just says - 'off you go' - *as if* they were clean... And they, on the edge, have to learn to take an edgy, a faithful decision. We might not know that Jesus is at work in us, has given us what we ask for. Faith invites us to live 'as if' we are healed, loved, forgiven.

So this story is about faith, not just healing. Ten lepers are healed. One discovers faith. This is a story about going beyond the physical, the needs of the here and now, to the eternal, the vital, the relationship between ourselves and our God. The tenth leper recognises that his healing was God's gift, not his right, and he gives praise in humility where it is due. Jesus recognises that his faith is deep, and proclaims salvation (wholeness is the same word in Greek). And the remarkable thing is that this man is a Samaritan. The one who was most on the edge is the one who finds himself thoroughly enveloped in the saving love of God.

Many of us will have been touched by God, but God's grace leaves us with a choice: do we respond by giving God the whole of our lives, or do we take the money and run? The leper was given all he wanted. He gave it back in gratitude to God, and was given more than he could imagine. I learn two things from this. I should not be surprised at people who gain much from God, but don't make it to full Christian faith (Jesus had a ten percent success rate!). And I should not be surprised to find that someone can make it from devastation to wholeness. If a Samaritan leper could, then anyone can.

It is amazing how many people feel on the edge - within their workplaces, families, friendship groups, churches. Be assured. The edge, the borderland, is where Jesus operates. It is where the love of God is discovered. It is where great wrongs are confessed and forgiven. It is where leaps of faith are made. And it is where our lives are saved. I was led to the edge of thinking about science, genetics, human progress and the nature of life on Wednesday. I was led to the edge of the nature of believing (and the limits of intellect - Will Self is clever!) on Saturday. The Church of England finds itself on the edge of contemporary thinking about same sex relationships at the moment, and it is uncomfortable.

To be on the edge is not then to put our fingers in our ears and sing la la la. It is to find people working out what it is to be human, what it is to believe, what it is to love. That is where we should be. We are in between earth and heaven, between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God. It may feel edgy. Perhaps we are the ones then who need stretch out a hand to Christ and say 'have mercy upon us'. Perhaps we need to stretch out that hand to others, for this should be a place where edgy people find a home. In Christ, we can go on our way. Our faith in him will save us.