

Faith Comment published in the Petersfield Post

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He is with us forever



As you read this I have just finished a run of am-dram performances of the great Thomas Hardy novel, Tess of the D'Urbervilles. I play Angel Clare, a man who turns his back on what was expected of him by family and society to find meaning to his life in the natural world around him. There is a lovely cheeky irony for me that as the son of a clergyman and as a church leader myself in real life I am getting to play the son of a clergyman who rejects the church in the play! I have grown fond of the character and have a lot of sympathy for Angel. Essentially a foolish and confused character, he is led by his heart to fall in love with Tess only to find the constraints and strictures of his upbringing and times (and his own fallen nature) prevent him from accepting her as she really is - a woman with a difficult and painful past. Tess is a victim, who has done nothing to deserve the wrong done to her by the dastardly Alec D'Urberville.

The pressures on all of us to conform to life, society, culture and dogma are immense and essentially I wonder if it can do nothing but confuse us and lead us into failure? Often the moments of glory and wonder are found when we refuse to do what we think we must do in favour of what our hearts and souls tell us is needed.

Jesus is a wonderful model of this attitude and an inspiration for all: those of faith and those with none. Jesus refused to conform to what was expected of him and in that is found his true glory. This week, at Ascensiontide we remember that Jesus even fails to conform to the restraints of death and time. Although it seems sometimes that he has gone, and is no longer walking on this world Christians believe that his Spirit lives on to inspire, sustain and renew us, no matter who we are or what secrets we hold in our past.

And he is with us forever.