

Latimer's Curate

When I was a very young Christian, I read a book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who was imprisoned by Adolf Hitler in a death camp. He wrote the following poem just before he was hanged in April 1945.

*Who am I? They often tell me,
I come out of my cell
Calmly, cheerfully, resolutely,
Like a lord from his palace.*

*Who am I? They often tell me,
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.*

*Who am I? They also tell me,
I carried the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
Like one who is used to winning.*

*Am I really then what others say of me?
Or am I only what I know of myself?
Restless, melancholic, and ill, like a caged bird,
Struggling for breath, as if hands clasped my
throat,
Hungry for colours, for flowers, for the songs of
birds,
Thirsty for friendly words and human kindness,
Shaking with anger at fate and at the smallest
sickness,
Trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Tired and empty at praying, at thinking, at doing,
Drained and ready to say goodbye to it all.*

Who am I? This or the other?

*Am I one person today and another tomorrow?
Am I both at once? In front of others, a hypocrite,
And to myself a contemptible, fretting weakling?
Or is something still in me like a battered army,
Running in disorder from a victory already
achieved?*

*Who am I? These lonely questions mock me.
Whoever I am, You know me, I am yours, O God.*

I suspect that every Christian will understand those words. I need all of you to encourage me today, to have the faith of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to stand firm. Not to be swayed by the culture around me, which I am. Not to forget the faith I was first given, which I do. To realise, as Jesus warned us, that to follow Him is costly. That there are times when we speak, but in private wonder if we are hypocrites. Please Lord, give us all the strength to continue following your Words, and helping others who are on that narrow way.