

Peter Fisher  
**Outside Eden:**  
***Finding Hope In An Imperfect World***  
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The inscription on W H Auden's memorial in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner is,

*In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.*

Finding the freedom to praise God in the imperfection of lives Outside Eden is explored with illumination from the poetry of Auden, Eliot and others. This is an account of what it is to be human by a Christian priest and pastor through the judicious use of his own experience. He is modest about himself, not just in a well mannered self-deprecating English kind of way, but in ways that are convincingly scriptural. For example, he notes that Paul's life and language were allergic to self-importance and links this with evangelism, questioning the desire for success commonly associated with that activity.

Quite a lot of this book might be summarised as finding our place in relation to God. "In order for prayer to be of any use to me it has to be first and foremost not about me...something in me needs to bend...if I am to learn to pray" (p.50). On silent prayer he observes that, "over time [it] has the capacity to unclutter our heart and mind and give us interior 'room to breathe'. However, before it opens up this space for us, silence discloses just how badly we need it." (p.61)

The first three chapters explore our common human experience, in relation to the Gospel, and in relation to the Church. As an Anglican, he observes that the parochial system is meant to stand for inclusiveness, being 'for all the people of the parish' but it easily gets subverted when Christians gather as the like minded, or when there is an emphasis on strong leadership and authority, or when church members settle for 'going to church' as private pragmatists. He notes that the 'problems' may indicate where the Church is discovering new dimensions to its reconciling mission but he does not get bogged down with them.

This is a lovely book: wise, honest and profoundly hopeful.

***The Revd Nicholas Holtam***  
St Martin in-the-Fields