



Redemption for 'vile' people

I used to enjoy watching *Glee*, the drama about a Glee Club in an American high school, where the music arrangements made what was traditionally the naffest school activity suddenly seem unbelievably cool.

Last week, one of its star actors, Mark Salling, committed suicide. He was awaiting sentence for downloading thousands of images of child abuse, something he had admitted.

It reminded me of something closer to home: two years ago a priest in South London who I knew slightly also committed suicide for the same reason: while in his case, there were very few images discovered on his computer, nonetheless, they were there. He too had admitted guilt and was awaiting his sentence, but took his life before the judge could give a verdict.

There is something not just wrong about child abuse but also sickening too: and to view child abuse images is to be complicit in the guilt of the way they were produced. It is undoubtedly a criminal offence, and to be condemned. The first sympathy has to go to the children affected.

All that said, at what point do we try to find hope for the one who has committed the offence? Right now, it is as if to commit suicide is the appropriate or socially acceptable thing to do, and somehow that cannot be right.

Or take the current demons of the hour: Harvey

Weinstein and Kevin Spacey. What, right now, are they actually supposed to do?

For one thing, they have to get out of denial. But should they do that, and once (if appropriate) they have served their sentences, is there a time when they can look forward to life with any kind of hope?

Mary Beard, the atheist television academic of the ancient world recently tweeted this:

"may be i shd apologise for this, but i think i do believe -- however difficult, awkward and long term it might be -- in the possibility of redemption, forgiveness and making amends. I'm not exactly a fully paid up Christian, but it is one thing i kind of 'got' from the gospels."

We live in a world where it is easier than ever publicly to shame people. I can almost feel it coming with Spacey: the photograph on the news website of him in casual clothes in WalMart: "Spacey dares to show himself in shop" and an outraged tone. Of course, in a sense, it is easy for me to be sympathetic: I wasn't one of Spacey's victims, nor has anyone sexually forced themselves upon me.

But isn't Beard's sensibility correct in this case? (And, for me, it's interesting that she connects it with Jesus.) Somehow, and yes, in the long term, we must seek to find a space where people who've done something awful, have the chance to do something good again.

February 2018. *for the Train* is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at