



Drones and choices

If you choose to do so, you can cause a lot of chaos and misery.

The drones periodically flying around Gatwick airport as I write have proved that. Just a few years ago, drones were the preserve of the military. Private citizens could buy them but they were prohibitively expensive and almost as difficult to fly in a straight line. Better drone technology has made them both cheap and easy to fly. In fact, I even bought one as a Christmas present for my Godchild at John Lewis the other day.

As I write this, the motivation of the Gatwick airport drone disruptors is not known. It could be that they are anti-flying activists from an organisation like Plane Stupid, whose motivation is arguably good: i.e. they want to protect the environment and are prepared to use Direct Action if they want to. In 2015, they shut down Heathrow very briefly, by cutting through the barrier wires.

But it could be someone else entirely. Could it be the Russians, fighting back non-violently at the exposure of their spies by the British? That does all sound a bit John le Carre, though.

Whoever they are, whether allied to a particular cause or just anarchists hoping to create chaos, their impact has been massive. 800 flights; 100,000 passengers; making a very basic calculation, that's probably £50 million worth of economic damage, let alone

all the reunions, Christmas meetings and just ordinary holidays that have been cancelled.

You want to catch the perpetrators, stop them, and then regulate things so that this does not happen again, but I am not sure if it is possible to do that. Just think how many drones there are 'out there' already. And now that the potential has been seen, who else will commit damage if they want to? They could even go back to being weaponised, as they were when the army first used them.

It underwrites a truth we know about, that when humans discover an Eden, there will always be a snake lurking within it, which can tempt them into abusing what they find.

Drones: fun, cheap, opening up possibilities... Just this year at church, one couple used one for their wedding video, and we ourselves used one to survey the damaged tiles on our roof. We were glad of the drone: it saved us thousands. Drones can be harnessed for good, but those same drones are currently causing misery.

On the surface, then, this issue is about drones; ultimately, however, it is not about drones, but it is about humans, and behaving well or badly. "Sin lurks at the door, but you may overcome it," as the LORD God told Cain a very long time ago. The choice is for individuals but also culture; the culture that shapes what is or isn't acceptable behaviour.

Dec 2018. Thought for the Train is a short column by the Rev Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.