

# The Blessing of the Bicycles



*Saint Dunstan's Day*  
*19 May, 2007*

## *The Blessing of the Bicycles*

*By the Irreverend Matthew Cole*

### **Collect & Blessing**

Vicar: Remember Lord, that many of our bicycles have risen from the dead, much like yourself. Bless these thy bikes, let not thine hubs spew forth thy gears, protect and shield thy tyres from flats, let thy cotter pins remain without blemish, save our thighs from unquenchable fire on the Maiden Rock Hill, spare the rod brake and spoil the child, and in thy mercy protect us from undue headwinds.

Congregation: Amen

### **Reading of the Commandment**

Vicar: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor his Rudge, nor his Higgins, nor his Dunelt, nor his Raleigh, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Congregation: What about that Royal Enfield?

Vicar: Neither shalt thou covet the Royal Enfield. The Moulton's right out, too.

## The Psalm

*Adapted from King James Bible, 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm*

*Please read responsively*

Vicar:           The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Congregation:   He maketh me to lie down at lunchtime:  
                      he leadeth me beside back waters.

Vicar:           He restoreth my bike:

Congregation:   he leadeth me in the bikepaths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Vicar:           Yea, though I ride through the valley of the shadow of death,  
                      I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

Congregation:   thy rod brakes and thy Dynohub™ they comfort me.

Vicar:           Thou preparest a table before me in the Eagle's Nest Coffeeshop:  
                      thou anointest my chain with oil;

Congregation:   now my chaincase runneth over.

Vicar:           Surely goodness and Sturme  
                      shall follow me all the days of my life:

Congregation:   and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

## The Reading

*Adapted from Shakespeare's Henry V*

WESTMORELAND. O that we now had here  
    But one ten thousand of those men in England  
    To ride with us to-day!

KING. What's he that wishes so?  
    My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin  
    The fewer men, the greater share of honour.  
    No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.  
    Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,  
    That he which hath no stomach to this ride,  
    Let him depart; his passport shall be made,  
    We would not ride in that man's company  
    That fears his fellowship to ride with us.  
    This day is call'd the feast of Dunstan.  
    He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
    Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,  
    And say 'To-morrow is Saint Dunstan.'  
    Then will he raise his leg and show his scars,  
    And say 'These wounds I had on Dunstan's day.'  
    And he'll remember, with advantages,  
    What feats he did that day. Then shall the names,  
    Familiar in his mouth as household words-  
    Maiden Rock Hill, Bay City Plummet,  
    Sturme and Archer, Raleigh and Dunelt-  
    Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb' red.  
    And Saint Dunstan's Day shall ne'er go by,  
    From this day to the ending of the world,  
    But we in it shall be remembered-  
    We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;

For he today that rides his steed with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition;  
And cyclists everywhere now-a-bed  
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That rode with us upon Saint Dunstan's day.

### **The Lenton Observance**

*Selected bicycles are brought forward and sprinkled from the holy water bottle*

### **Hymn**

*Please join in singing:*

Amazing Gears, how sweet the sound  
As they tick along in third  
And it is just about the sweetest sound  
That I have ever heard.

As we ride up Bay City Hill  
Ascending Lord t'wards thee  
We all wish that we had more lower gears  
Than just these bloody three

Help us Lord to become good  
But please Lord not too soon  
There's many a bar 'fore Wabasha  
And cocktails start at noon.

### **Dismissal**

Vicar: Make straight roads for our feet,

Congregation: so that the feeble may not be turned out of the way, but may be made strong.  
*(Hebrews 12:13)*

Vicar: In the name of the Trinity, High Gear, Direct Drive and Low, go forth and ride.

All: RAmen  
*(Congregation is invited to ring their bells)*

† † †

Service adapted by Matthew Cole, the Quicker Vicar, 2006/7.  
Communion is open to all, but you're going to have to go to the bakery and buy it yourself.

*What Would Jesus Ride?*

## Notes on Today's Service:

The chainring on the front cover is from a Rudge; this particular image is taken from Bike Cult's website ([www.bikecult.com](http://www.bikecult.com)) and its excellent Chainring Archive. The actual chainring equipment used in today's service was put together by Peter Martin. Saint Dunstan we'll get to in a minute. The Commandment and Psalm were adapted from the **King James Version** of the Bible (first issued 1611AD, most commonly cited edition is the 1769). This was an update of the first translations of the Bible into English using the new medium of print, a controversial political as well as religious act at the time, by **William Tyndale**. The Roman Catholic authorities looked upon this work with disfavor and, in the true spirit of Christian charity, strangled him and then burned him at the stake, presumably just to make sure, on 6 October 1536. The **St. Crispin's Day speech** is a secular work from the play *Henry V* (properly, *The Cronicle Hiftory of Henry fift*) written by William Shakespeare, who you'd think could spell better, around 1600, nearly 200 years after the battle of Agincourt (1415) which it depicts. At **Agincourt** an exhausted and retreating English army beat a vastly larger French army while suffering only light casualties. It is considered one of the glorious achievements of English arms and is celebrated in the medieval Agincourt Hymn, thanking God ("Deo Gracias") for helping in the slaughter. This was part of the **Hundred Years War** and took place between the Somme River and Calais on the Channel coast, territory still fought over in huge, bloody battles 500 years later. The Agincourt battle happened on St. Crispin's Day, October 15, thus the common name for the speech. You can see the speech on film delivered by **Lawrence Olivier** (1944) or **Kenneth Branagh** (1989). It has often been referenced in other productions, including the title of the HBO World War II series *Band of Brothers* and in the final *Black Adder* episode parodied as "We few, we happy few, we band of ruthless bastards." The speech was shortened and adapted for the **Blessing of the Bikes** and May 19 happens to be **St. Dunstan's Day**, which fits nicely into the rhythm and rhyme. St. Dunstan was the **Archbishop of Canterbury** from 960 to 988AD. He had doubts about religious orders because he didn't think the celibate life would suit him, but then he came down with a horrible skin disease and, it being easier for ugly people to remain celibate, became a priest. He served several English kings ending with **Ethelred the Unready**, wrote the service for crowning the monarch in much the same form it's used today, worked as a blacksmith, goldsmith, painter and jeweler and is the patron saint of goldsmiths. One story has it that the Devil

brought him a horse to shoe and he instead put the horseshoe on the Devil, causing him great pain. St. Dunstan only consented to take it off after the Devil agreed never to enter a place with a horseshoe over the door. This is claimed to be the origin of the lucky horseshoe. While **St. Crispin/Crispinian** (thought to be twins, both shoemakers, preached Christianity in Gaul and beheaded for their efforts in 286AD) were removed from the Roman Catholic sainthood by the Vatican II council due to doubts as to their existence and suspicions that they actually represented a pagan Celtic deity (Lugus-Mercurius), St. Dunstan persists. The nearest church named after him is the extremely traditional **Saint Dunstan's Anglican Church in Saint Louis Park**. The **Lenton Observance** is a nod to the Raleigh Lentons, a model of bicycle, named after the street in which the Raleigh works were located. Good thing they weren't on 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. The hymn we sung to the tune "**New Britain**" which first appeared in shape note form in the 1831 *Virginia Harmony* but is thought to be based on an older Scottish or Irish melody, as were many white spirituals of the southern uplands. The words originally sung to this tune are lost to us. The common lyrics of *Amazing Grace* were written in 1772 by Englishman **John Newton**, a slave-ship captain who became disgusted with the slave trade, repented, and became an anti-slavery activist, lay minister and eventually an ordained minister. He apparently wrote it for his New Year's Day 1773 sermon at Olney, in Buckinghamshire. The final "RAmen" at the close of the service is an interdenominational nod to **Pastafarians**, those who believe in the Flying Spaghetti Monster and think they have been touched by His Noodly Appendage. Don't ask. As for your celebrant today, **Matthew Cole**, not entirely comfortable impersonating a priest, instead became one, ordained by the **Universal Life Church** ([www.ulc.net](http://www.ulc.net), a church founded about a year after Matt himself was founded) following a rigorous screening process consisting mostly of making sure he had a valid email account. Goofball church this might sound like, but actually Matt could legally do most services other than circumcision. In actual life, Matt's wife Karla is the (superb, if I don't say so myself) Music Director at **Saint Luke's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis** where Matt sings in the choir most Sundays. Saint Luke's is doing the Bandshell Service at Lake Harriet in Minneapolis next Sunday if you'd like to see Karla in action. The Blessing of the Bicycles is broadly derivative of Anglican tradition and the **Muscular Christianity** movement popular in early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain.