

Easter 5 2010

Acts 11:1-18; Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Peter said *'The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us'*
I.t.n. +....

Two of us sat [at St Saviour's] here in church on Friday at Morning Prayer and read – for the OT reading - part of the account of the Israelites' early preparations to make a *Tabernacle* for the Lord. Centuries before the later building of the Temple, this was to be a kind of home for the Lord, a place in which God's presence would live, which they could carry around with them on their continuing journey to the Promised Land. The passage we were reading from Exodus started with the requirements for the building of the tabernacle, the materials and the provision that needed to be made. But by the end, the free-will offerings were coming so thick and fast from the people that the artisans involved in constructing it were at a loss to know how to use them. There was something rather amusing about the solemn tones in which the account was made of this in Exodus, and by the time we'd got to the end – where Moses announced 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary', and people were 'restrained from bringing, because what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work' – we found ourselves shaking with laughter.

Maybe it had this particular effect on us because one had just been through two Annual Church Meetings where a very *different* picture was all too clear – of there being not nearly enough people available and willing to fill positions and help to keep things running.

And yet, in that classic passage from Revelations read as our 2nd reading today, John the Divine has a vision of the 'new Jerusalem', of God making all things new, and he hears this proclamation:

See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away'

That passage is, of course, often read very appropriately at Funerals. But we are mistaken if, as Christians, we only interpret those words of hope as about some future after-life. They are meant to give us hope for the present as well, and hope for a 'new creation' *here*. Our eyes need to be open to what God is *already* doing in response to our daily petition, which Jesus instructed us to pray – 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.

I think that in church we often prevent ourselves from seeing God's hand at work in the world by being too pre-occupied with waiting for people to attend *our* activities, or to volunteer for *our* little tasks and routine maintenance. This can dim our eyes to the things that certain individuals may want to bring to us, and can make us blind to what is already being brought about – blind to the signs of that kingdom coming even now.

The theme of **newness** is stressed time and again in the Bible, eg. in the Psalms, and it is a particular theme of Easter, with its promise of new life. We heard of an early working-out of this promise in the church, when Peter – in the Acts of the Apostles – came to the realisation, through a dream, that Gentiles as well as Jews could receive Jesus Christ, and be baptised. He too heard a voice from heaven saying "What God has made clean, you must not call profane". However it

comes to us, time and again I believe the Holy Spirit continues to bring us similar opportunities to re-evaluate what matters to God, and what is necessary in our church life. Prayer, worship and service to others are three essentials that spring to mind for Christian life, but we might ask ourselves “is our vision of these things too limited?” The Tabernacle the ancient Israelites built was meant as a receptacle for God’s presence in one place, but the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ leads us to believe in the **Incarnation**, the truth that through Christ – in the words of Revelation – ‘God has made his home among mortals’.

In the light of this we should be wary of divisions between what is ‘religious’ and what is ‘secular’. Our vote in this coming week’s General Election *does* matter, and we need to decide for ourselves which outcome will best further the Kingdom of God. Within church itself we should avoid distinctions between ‘them’ and ‘us’. We should honour the grace of baptism by being more open to see the gifts we each have, and how those gifts work out in the world, at work and in the family as well as in church. The ‘new commandment’ from Jesus that we ‘should love one another’ may sound soft and fluffy, but is actually very demanding as Christian love mustn’t depend solely on natural popularity or immediate attraction. Through true obedience to this commandment we can better achieve the unity that is Christ’s will for the whole church, and deepen our fellowship together. The Holy Spirit told Peter to accept Christians different from himself, ‘to go with them, and not to make a distinction between them and us’; may that be so for us too.

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