

The Anglican Church of St Philip's O'Connor, Canberra, ACT, Australia

Pentecost 4 1st July 2007,

Rev. Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14
- Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
- Galatians 5:1, 13-25
- Luke 9:51-62

Text of readings is available at <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/CPentecost/cProper8.htm>

For a long time the rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne has been a part of Australian life. There is also a divide between Western Australians and us from "the East". Last night we saw played out on our television screens one of the great rivalries — Yes, the Bledisloe Cup match between Australia and New Zealand — Wallabies and All Blacks.

In Jesus' day it was not rivalry so much as bitter hatred and distrust between Samaritans and Jews and it was not just words, but genuine belief that one way was better than another. There were rival temples at the centre of both and there was a real divide. The Samaritans worshipped in the temple on Mt Gerazim whereas the Jews worshipped in the Temple in Jerusalem — BOTH claimed to be the real thing, the true sanctuary of the Law.

Our story is set today in Samaritan territory but we find that Jesus is NOT going to *their* temple *but* to *Jerusalem*.

According to Josephus, Samaritan hostility was directed most strongly against pilgrims travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem for the various festivals. So pilgrims found it easier and safer to cross the Jordan and head to Jerusalem that way.

We are told that although Jesus is in Samaritan territory, he

"set his face to go to Jerusalem".
"and he sent messengers ahead of him".

Obviously for Jesus the history and tradition of the Jerusalem Temple weighed heavily as he had been there at age 12 to become "Bar Mitzvah" — a son of the Law.

Some years later he is passing through the Samaritan Galilee and his messengers — sent ahead to prepare the way — enter a village where they are not prepared to welcome Jesus.
He is going to the wrong temple!

Two elements of this story recall the great prophet Elijah.

The first, when it is mentioned that the time was near for Jesus to be taken up. This simple mention would have recalled our Old Testament reading about Elijah being taken up.

But then also, the story recalls an event in Elijah's ministry when the king's messengers were headed to the wrong place of worship and Elijah called down fire from God which consumed the soldiers.

So, having decided to follow Jesus in his mission to Jerusalem, James and John resort to Elijah's methods to destroy their opponents in this unwelcoming village.
"Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and destroy them?" — and Jesus rebukes them!

Called as disciples of Jesus they cannot liberate themselves from old ways of thinking. They are called into a new experience of God with Jesus, but they continue to look *back* for example and inspiration.

Incidences such as this and the time when the same disciples seek preferential treatment are indicators that Jesus' way of serving God was entirely new and different.

"The greatest among you are servants."

Instead, James and John, — wanting to follow Jesus, — look back and want to emulate the old ways where God was seen to wreak havoc on enemies. God's justice now is about praying for and loving enemies and forgiving persecutors. Old ways? — Approaches to the Iraq war dealing with aboriginal communities?

So as Jesus "set his face to Jerusalem" so must old ways be put behind.

So we have the stories which follow:

- One person says: "I will follow you wherever you go"
In response, Jesus points to the hardship of his way.
"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, BUT the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.". Count the cost!
- Then Jesus calls "Follow me!" The person offers a very ... reason for not responding immediately — he/she must fulfil his family responsibility. It may not have been that the father had already died but could have meant "I will follow you when I am free from this family obligation!"
Jesus' response: "Let the dead bury their own dead" might be turned around to mean "choose to be with the living!" proclaim the kingdom of God. "Don't waste your opportunity,
Today: choice creates the future! Don't be held back!"
- Finally, another says he would like to follow Jesus, but must first say farewell to his family (and we must remember how important family responsibility was).
To this Jesus gives the interesting response about not looking back after putting one's hand to the plough. Of course ploughing a straight furrow is impossible if continuing to look back. You cannot keep going in the right direction if looking back. You cannot drive a car looking in the rear vision mirror!

There's a great line in a Meatloaf song about looking at the highway of life through the rear vision mirror!

Jesus calls us on! To share with him on this journey which requires fresh attitude, a leaving of old ways. It also needs concentration and *focus* and an unwavering commitment to its completion.

The same spirit is emphasized in Paul's letter to the Galatians — leave behind the old ways! enmity, strife, jealousy, anger etc. etc... — by contrast the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control! There is NO law against such things!

As we look to the new way I want us to look at how we run this parish and I note we still have gaps on Morning Tea, sidespersons, and cleaning rosters — we are trying to ensure our children's ministry works effectively!

Home groups
Building Project
Pastoral Care

These are NOT life changing issues but they make St Philip's parish operate better and provide a base for how we minister to others. Please consider offering time to make them work!

As we look to the future, we cannot keep looking back.

We journey on keeping focussed on the task as Christ walks with us.