

## **1st June 2008 Pentecost 3**

**Rev. Rob Lamerton**

- Genesis 6:9-22, 7:24
- Psalm 46
- Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-28
- Matthew 7:15-29

Text of readings is available at

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/APentecost/aProper4.htm>

"Let us commit ourselves to prayer and to the action that prayer demands, to ensure peace with justice in our land. To renew a measure of hope for our indigenous brothers and sisters, we must be agents of hope."—Bishop John McIntyre of Gippsland.

In this week of prayer for reconciliation, and just after the anniversary of Sorry Day, 26 May, we are reminded that prayer demands action. If we are praying for our neighbour or a friend or someone in hospital or for local indigenous people we should somehow be moved to action.

I know myself that if I begin to pray for someone, I am often prompted to phone or visit. The faithful prayer, in what ever form, opens us up to God and the person or situation for which we pray.

The words of Jesus in the gospel today reflect this. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt. 7.21). There is little point in calling on the Lord's name in prayer if we are not going to allow that prayer to change us and move us to "do the will of my Father in heaven."

Even if we do wonderfully spiritual or religious things — such as prophesying, casting out demons, or deeds of power — if we are not open to the will of God, we are cut off from God. If we are not able to be moved into action by our praying, the flow of God's love is stopped.

Now be assured that our prayer begins as thoughts and that we may simply offer someone to God as we go about our daily round. Some of us may have much more structured and prayerful lives, but our prayers may simply list names and situations and ask for God's grace to deal with them. If you can do nothing else, begin with that.

In the gospel today, which is towards the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that being wise is about hearing his words and acting on them. We don't act to impress or please God, but out of a response to God's love for us — God's grace.

Paul reminds us that we are put right with God through grace, which is pure gift. "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3.23-24).

For Paul, as a Jew, the big argument was whether or not we impress God by being obedient to the Law of Moses — by the works, good deeds and actions demanded by the law. No, for God's grace is given through the redeeming love of Christ. Instead of winning God's favour, we act in response to God's grace.

Paul also says, in this passage from the letter to the Romans, that the Gospel is the power of

God for salvation to everyone who has faith, both Jew and Greek. Faith, he says, is no longer the possession of the Jews; it is also for the Gentiles, for all the nations. Verse 29: "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also." "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock" (Matt. 7.24). Our faith calls us into action, but what sort of action?

When I was young, people thought that, to serve God, you had to be ordained. We have, hope, since discovered that there are myriads of ways to serve God. Our choice of employment or study is a way of serving God and needs to be taken seriously.

Perhaps our parish directory should have a note alongside every name:

- so and so ... visits the sick,
- so and so ... cares for the needy,
- so and so ... prays for the parish council and the Rector (For some who are less physically able, to pray is indeed a very active ministry.),
- so and so ... phones people to see how they are,
- etc, etc.

Sometimes the things that we do are surprising! And for a story of surprising things, you need look no further than Noah's story. It is a story of a profoundly stubborn faith, as the world descended into the same watery chaos as at the beginning.

As we think about the prayer of faith and faith in action, we need to remember, then, that our prayer might be about giving and doing, in our home or workplace, community or church. It†is about having a clearer idea about our place in the church family that will enable us in our common mission.