

Sunday 13th June 2004, Second Sunday after Pentecost

Robert Lamerton

Readings:

1 Kings 21:1-21

Psalm 5: 1-7 APBA p 226

Galatians 2: 15-21

Luke 7: 36-8.3

A friend mentioned to me the other day about his daughter who went to a Pentecostal church and was disappointed that nothing much was made of the celebration of Pentecost.

Some months ago while overseas, I went to a church which took pride in being a bible believing and teaching church — but in the service, apart from a few references in the sermon, — there was NO bible reading.

Then recently, another of our Anglican clergy expressed concern about the number of his youth group and people from other churches concerned about and reading about "The Rapture". [a google search brought up]... 52,800 sites!

It is a word used to describe the second coming of Christ, but it is largely tied up with the complete restoration of Israel to the Jews and the rebuilding of the temple of Solomon. This belief leads some fundamentalist Christians to support Israel in its struggle against the Palestinians ignoring the fact that quite a number of Palestinians are Christian. Supposedly the destruction of the Palestinians will allow Peace in Israel and then the Lord's return.

The idea of the "rapture" is developed from 1Thessalonians and Matthew 24:31, 40-41

which suggest:

That Christ promised his return at an unknown time of the Father's choosing

That his return will be universally visible and his identity unmistakable.

That those who follow will be gathered up.

The difficulty is that this thinking is taken and applied in every era of history where there is international or national upheaval and trauma.

There is now a book titled "LEFT BEHIND" referring to those who because of unbelief are not taken up to be with the Lord at the Rapture.

Dr Andrew Corbett has a very good answer to this on his website and points out that what Jesus says in Matthew is more about the immediate danger to Jerusalem which came true only 40 years later in AD70.

He also points out that the reading from Thessalonians is not about Rapture but about

Resurrection. Much is *wrongly* made of Rapture by WRONG reading of the scripture.

All that was by way of introduction!

I like to use the set readings from the prayer book lectionary BECAUSE they highlight — they shine the spotlight on various aspects of our Christian Faith.

PENTECOST

TRINITY

EASTER

This week we begin the long series of Sundays after Pentecost *or* Sundays of Pentecost.

Having surveyed the events of Jesus' life from the expectation of his coming, to his childhood, ministry, journey to Jerusalem, death, resurrection, ascension and pentecost... We then pondered the mystery and wonder of God at Trinity.

Now we come to those series of Sundays when we reflect on aspects of our Christian life. The words of Paul's letter to the Galatians remind us where we begin.

We are justified (put right) NOT by the Law
But by Faith in Jesus Christ.

In fact he says he DIED to the Law of Moses — so that he might LIVE TO GOD.

But now he has been crucified with Christ and now
"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

This is surely what happens as God's Spirit touches us — that Christ comes to dwell

IN ME!

IN US!

and so we begin to think about

the Christian Life
the life lived under the influence of God's Holy Spirit.

Columba of Iona, born in 521, of noble birth, was trained as a monk in Ireland, but, so the story goes, some dispute erupted that he could not resolve and for which he felt responsible, so in 563 he sailed (rowed) with 12 other monks to Iona, where he established his monastery — which became the base for mission to the Scottish mainland.

Columba took himself away to reflect on Christ's way for him.

Barnabas, apostle and martyr, was a wonderful healer of relationships — his name means 'son of encouragement or consolation'. He helped the newly converted Paul gain acceptance among the believers. He also sought out Paul for their missionary journey which began at Cyprus (his home).

He defended the rights of the new gentile Christians at the Council of Jerusalem and he parted company with Paul after a dispute over their companion, John Mark. He seems to have been standing up for people all along. That was the life of Christ in Him!

The issues for our Christian journey which seem important in the first reading and the gospel are:

First reading — God's people are called to dispense justice.

Gospel — God's people are called to dispense forgiveness.

First Reading

Ahab and Jezebel depict all that is wrong and unjust — as they manipulate to deprive Naboth not only of his ancestral inheritance, but also of his life and I wonder what God's judgement is on the Israeli's occupation and the great Wall which deprives people of their ancestral heritage.

[note from webeditor. A letter from Palestine is posted here at olivegrove.html. L]

We cannot use our position of responsibility as God's people to behave unjustly.

Finally the Gospel

The image is powerfully emotional — the woman stood behind him at his feet weeping, and began to bathe them with her tears and to dry them with her hair. She continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

The Pharisee only notices how unacceptable her behaviour is *and* that she has a bad reputation!

But her tears reveal the depth of her grief — her awareness of her failings — in the presence of one who loved her.

The story that Jesus tells, indicates that her love and feeling reveal the depth of her pain.

Over the last few years I have encountered a number of men who if you met them you would think they are alcoholics and you might be right — but in 3 cases all these men in their 30's and 40's have been sexually abused as children. They cannot forgive themselves (because they tend to blame themselves; they are so ashamed and humiliated).

It's a kind of depression where they punish themselves and drink to cover their shame. Forgiveness eludes them! But I believe with love, care and prayer, the grace of God can help.

As we look to discover the life of Christ, the life of the spirit in us, we cannot avoid the issues of justice and forgiveness needed for others to discover the life of Christ for them.

