

The life of heaven in our midst

Reverend Rob Lamerton

Sunday 17th August 2003, Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

- 1 Kings 2: 10 -12, 3: 3-14
- Psalm 111
- Eph: 5: 11-21 (22-31)
- John 6: 51-58

In our prayers today, we pray for the Celebration Community in Queanbeyan. A member of the community (which is a community of mostly lay people with some priests) is Alison Caitlin, a woman of ninety years of age. Sandy and I went to Alison's (Ali's) 90th birthday earlier this year. Bishop George wrote to Ali and the letter was read out. Part of it read something like this: "May your life become more holy day by day so that when it comes time to go to heaven, you will barely notice the difference." Surely our lives are to be lived with such an openness to God such a growth towards holiness that we begin to be aware of and express the life of heaven in our midst.

[and also this week we remembered Clare of Assisi, Maximilien Kolbe and Martin Luther King Jnr. Rob spoke a bit about them. They were three different "views" of heaven. ...as an icon is a "view" through which we glimpse heaven... (in discussion LA)]

That is essentially what those words "eternal life" mean in John's Gospel... "life of the quality of heaven". "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day." Ch6 v51

Up to this point in John's gospel Jesus has been speaking of himself as the Bread of Life. ... and I imagine the Jews who appear in the story, and we too, feel comfortable with that because it seems to speak of a present Jesus symbolized in a fellowship meal ... or as Bread of the World...

BUT in v. 51 the tone changes "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." GULP; these words are getting a little gruesome! Very uncomfortable!

The Jews in the story object; possibly we object too as Jesus starts to talk about flesh and blood. "unless you eat the flesh of The Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." The language changes from Jesus present as Bread of Life to very sacrificial language of flesh and blood. Some who have written and studied this gospel think that it is an attempt to balance the idea of Jesus the Bread of Life in fellowship meal and preached word with the story of his suffering.

It is language with which we feel a little uncomfortable. // but the great Christian writer Edwyn Hoskins said it is language by which the Christian Faith stands or falls. I suppose it is much the same as St Paul trying to correct the triumphalism of the Christians in Corinth when he said "we preach Christ crucified."

I have always thought that in the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine which are for us the body and blood of Christ // notes about choice of words // I have always thought that in the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine which are for us the body and blood of Christ that we enter into the mystery of life and death and resurrection which is at the heart of God.

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day."

Reg Fuller writes: "It would be very congenial to have a form of Christian worship consisting of a fellowship meal celebrating Jesus as the Bread of Life and a proclamation of him as incarnate wisdom. But our canonical (gospel of) John goes further than that and insists that the Christian liturgy moves further to an eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of Jesus, that is, to a participation in the sacrifice of Calvary.

Some modern translations of the Prayer of Humble Access have softened the words "Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of your dear son Jesus Christ and to drink his blood"

But their whole purpose is to get us to reflect on the gift of his life.

I am *NOT* saying that bread becomes flesh or wine becomes blood. I am saying that in the Eucharist we are entering the area of Christ's sacrifice to a point where life/death/new life meet. The place where St Paul says "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (pause) ...and we proclaim Christ crucified the power God and the wisdom of God.

The Eucharist celebrates that in Christ God is near in both life and death and that is intended to strengthen and encourage our lives.

In Ephesians (Paul) speaks about living like people "making the most of the time" because the days are evil. He is encouraging Christians to live the quality of eternal life and to express it in praise.

1. psalms/hymns/spiritual songs
2. giving thanks to God.
3. in the name of Christ.

I just want to conclude by recalling the lives of [one of] the saints of this week.

1. Clare of Assisi: moved by St Francis to abandon possessions and founded the Poor Clares.
2. Maximilien Kolbe: Gave his life in place of a father of young children...
3. Martin Luther King Jnr.: struggled for civil rights.
4. And Mary the Mother of the Lord.

(All) seemed to "make the most of their time" and reveal something of the eternal life of Christ.

There have been a number of strands in what I have said today.

- Jesus the Bread of Life
 1. Fellowship Meal
 2. Word preached
- Partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord
 3. Focus on ...gift of life in the Eucharist
- The Living of Lives which
 4. Give praise