

St. Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor
Fourth Sunday of Easter-29 April 2007
Rev'd Rob Lamerton

Readings:

Acts 9.36-43

Psalm 23

Revelation 7.9-17

John 10.22-30

We celebrate on Saturday 50 years since the laying of the foundation stone to begin the building of the parish hall. From all the pictures it was a great occasion! The beginning of an Anglican Parish Community here in O'Connor after some years of worship in the Turner school.

We are celebrating it as fifty years on this site as part of the O'Connor/Turner/Lyneham Community. My question is: "What does our presence mean to the locals?"
and: "How are we of value to the local community?"

Our celebrations focus on the establishment of a building; a parish hall as the beginning of a series of buildings and the establishment of this Church as a centre of worship. It was a time of great hope and expectations. Eleven years after the conclusion of World War II and at a time when Canberra's growth was really picking up. We celebrate the establishment of a place where people want to encounter God. To be present to God and for God to be present to us.

When he said: "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me" these were also spoken at a celebration.

The annual celebration of the festival of the Dedication — Jesus was in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. but so often the importance of the location *and* the event means little to us.

The festival of Dedication is often called Tabernacles in December, because it symbolised God dwelling among [his] people. The word Tabernacle referred to a tent or temporary movable dwelling and recalled the tent which symbolised God's presence with Moses and the people as they journeyed. (When John's gospel said "the Word became flesh and *dwelt* among us" it is the same word that is used.)

The Festival of Dedication was the glad thanksgiving for the restoration of the temple sanctuary in 165BC. the place where God was seen to dwell among the people had been given over to the worship of other gods for a few years, but now in the festival, God was celebrated as living again in the midst of (his) people.

So, in the middle of this celebration of God dwelling among his people, in their time when God's people celebrated the return of their holy temple to its proper use, Jesus walks among them and is questioned about being the Messiah.

In the place where God and people meet is the person in whom God meets with people.

So! John, in his writing of the gospel has set the scene for this confrontation: "How long will you keep us in suspense?"
and in this setting the "Jews" are identified with those who are hostile to Jesus so the question may be "How

long will you vex, trouble and annoy us this way?"

"If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" — be straight with us!

But Jesus' response is that he has been clear enough.

— I have *told you*, and you do not believe.

— The works that *I do* in my Father's name testify to me.

Think about what you have *heard and seen*.

But it is clear that the words and actions of Jesus have not been understood or believed BECAUSE as Jesus says:

"They do not belong to my sheep".

"My sheep" says Jesus:

Hear my voice

I know them

they follow me

I give them eternal life

they will never perish

no one will snatch them from my hand

And because Jesus is one with the Father, they belong to God and cannot be snatched away!

There is a closeness / an intimacy here and as I read this I wonder what it is saying about the Resurrection because that is what we reflect on in the weeks of Easter and up to Pentecost.

I think Resurrection tells of a transition from Jesus the Good Shepherd leading from the front *TO* a Jesus Christ who leads from within — in our hearts of faith!

So, as the people of Jesus' time celebrated the festival of Dedication and pondered God's presence dwelling among them they were challenged to see how God was present to them in Jesus.

(Pause)

As we celebrate fifty years on this site...

Fifty years as a place where people encounter God...

Let us ask the question: "What does our presence mean to the locals?".

and "How are we of value to the community?"

What can we do as we move into the future to make this place a place where people encounter God in the way Christ is present within us?

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