

17th February 2008 Lent Two

Rev. Rob Lamerton

Home Groups

- Genesis 12:1-4a
- Psalm 121
- Romans 4:1-17
- Matthew 17:1-9

Text of readings is available at

<http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/ALent/aLent2.htm>

St. Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor — Second Sunday of Lent — 17 February 2008

Genesis 12.1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4.1-17, Matthew 17.1-9

Revd Rob Lamerton, Denise Manley, Brian McKinlay, Revd Jeannette McHugh

Rob began with these words:

The Genesis reading recalls Abram's journey of faith as the beginning of his calling to be a source of blessing to 'all the nations of the earth'.

Paul speaks of Abraham as the father of the faithful, reminding us that he responded to God before the Law of Moses was established. His relationship with God was about God's grace.

Themes of night and day, darkness and light, blindness and sight, permeate John's gospel as well as other things (flesh and spirit).

Sight, day and light represent the things of God, whereas blindness, darkness and night symbolize separation from God and not knowing God.

Nicodemus the Pharisee come to Jesus by night! And we begin to discover, as he enters into conversation with Jesus, that he could see God's hand at work in what Jesus was doing.

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." But Jesus begins to talk about being "born from above"! Traditionally this has been translated "born again" and a whole section of the Christian family has taken that title for themselves. "Born from above" gives the sense that God is the source bestowing new life, new insight.

Then Jesus speaks of the Spirit being the agent of this being born from above. "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit" — and the water of baptism being the sign of this!

Although the idea of birth "from above" did not sit well with the Jews, it did have meaning for the Greek audience for whom John also wrote. The whole discussion with Nicodemus is about readiness and openness to God and believing faith leading to "eternal life"; faith in the son of God leading to the quality of life that only God can give! "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. The purpose of this is so that the world might be saved (or healed).

Sorry! The apology to the stolen generations is a step in that healing! So Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about the beginning of faith in the Son of God.

One of the ways we can undertake our journey of faith is within a Home Group where we find deeper friendships, nurture, and care and where we encounter God's grace and where we can become better disciples of Jesus, open to the enabling of God's Spirit and to the saving healing work of God in and through God's people!

Following this introduction by Rob, Denise spoke about the beginnings of the home groups at St. Philip's, how they came about and our hopes for them. She then told us about the Sunday group, which she and Ann lead. She also mentioned that we believe that now is a good time to consider establishing more groups.

Brian then spoke about the experiences of the Tuesday group, which he and James facilitate, and Jeannette, who is a member of the Tuesday group, shared a reading about small groups.

Rob concluded by inviting us to consider joining or establishing new groups.

Below are the notes of what Brian presented. They are composed of thoughts from all the members of the Tuesday Group.

The home group is an important opportunity to be with others from our parish community, to reflect together, to be together.

It's a joyful celebration of our community; a practical community and a community of spirit.

In the Tuesday evening group we have a flexible monthly pattern for our meeting.

Roughly speaking, each month we have one evening when we spend our time in prayer and worship.

- Once a month we have a concentrated study on a topic from the Bible or to do with our faith.
- On another occasion each month, we try to work on some practical issue, for example to do with the environment or a need in our local community.
- And each month, we have one evening just to have fun and enjoy each other's company, perhaps with a potluck meal.

The home group is a place of sharing; being able to share things that are important to each of us. The private prayer time is supportive and invaluable.

Of course, it's important that we keep confidential the things that we share with each other.

We give the gift of time to each other. As well as the hospitality of the home where we meet, we give hospitality to each other. We are open ourselves to each other and come prepared to

give and to receive.

The home groups are open groups. We welcome anyone from St. Philip's to join in and we are always looking out for new members!

Sometimes, we may share a personal experience, a blessing or a need. We might do this through a personal story or a piece of music, a picture, a poem or a scripture.

We respect the diversity and differences we find in each other.

In the group we challenge ourselves and support each other as each one journeys — into the *Cloud of Unknowing*, as one member put it.

Together, we become more confident to share our experiences of faith — and our experiences of doubt as well.

We give each other the opportunity to talk about the things of the spirit and to explore questions of faith — and so honesty and openness grow. As friendship grows, we learn to care for each other, to be available to each other when we have a need of help.

We help and encourage each other. We have fun and a good laugh, as well.