

2nd January 2011  
Epiphany  
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Last week I simply told a story. Let me start today with a bible study!

Ephesians 3:1-12

Paul is talking of the mystery of Christ. the mystery that the gentiles have become fellow heirs (vs6); that he (Paul) has the task to bring to the gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ ... and (vs9) to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

remember — the 'mystery' here is that the gentiles are included.

verse 10 though has the important part —

my favourite word in the bible: polupoikilos — many coloured; variegated; “used in classical Greek writers with reference to cloth or flowers; suggests 'the intricate beauty of an embroidered pattern' or the endless variety of colours in flowers. Such, the apostle says, is the wisdom of God that the Church declares” (Foukes p98)

In verse nine, Paul says his task is to “make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery...” and that expands in verse ten — that this wonderful, multi coloured variegated wisdom of god might be made known to heavenly beings... that it might be wider and deeper...

BUT by verse ten it is not Paul's task — (which is to preach to the gentiles)

this is to be accomplished through the church.

the church. us.

and here I stopped my preparation of this sermon for two days. What is this verse saying?

Paul had had his entire life turned upside down, inside out... the INCLUSION of the gentiles into his whole world view did this.

and yet, surely the world he grew up in, as a Roman citizen from Tarsus, would have been as multi cultural as ours is?

am I missing something here? I think so...

INCLUSION and EXCLUSION is/are much more complicated than simply being multicultural...

and

what is the church that Paul is talking about?

that “through the church” something will happen, something will be shown, (to the heavenly beings),

and I think of church as an institution.

I doubt if Paul was thinking of an institution.

but that was what we have ended up with. an institution to which we belong, which has boundaries that define us and tells us who we are.

What would we be without them? what was “church” to Paul?

It has a lot to do with INCLUSION and EXCLUSION. with the “mystery” that Paul is so amazed by.

In Ephesians, Paul writes of the mystery ...

Not a mystery like a unicorn. (do read Jeanette Winterson's story!); not a mystery like Harry Potter; not even a mystery like a child in a manger who was god....

The mystery is that gentiles have become heirs, members of the same body

we (mostly gentiles) are now heirs of the promise that God gave to Abraham, we are members of that body of people thought to be set aside and chosen....

And so the barriers are broken down. the flood gates are opened, All of Paul's ideas about himself and his place in the world, in God's world, have been washed away. He thought he had known. But instead he finds a mystery which turns his world upside down.

He has found a god whose wisdom is varied, multi coloured, a rainbow of diversity and wisdom unsearchable

For Paul, the shock, the horror, was the INCLUSION of the gentiles...

[and yet that was what Isaiah had seen would happen.. somehow someday all nations shall come to your light...]

The wise men are included in the Christmas story. The shepherds, outcasts in their community, are included... they come to the manger.

How do we include? meals together.. and being sensitive to different diets and culture... Listening ... hearing people's stories and telling our own...

How do we exclude? who is excluded? enemies certainly are. people who are "labelled". others whom we simply ignore.

But there are still others who we don't see.

how do we know when we exclude?

At a conference recently, I was very aware that the speaker was deeply into his sociology and philosophy and I felt that something big was missing. To me, it was entirely about homo sapiens, and he was missing the bigger picture. Since he was from Adelaide, which depends on the Murray Darling for its water supply, he took my point. But others (uni chaplains) did not. For them, their students worked in a concrete jungle, lived in concrete apartments and walked on concrete streets. The rest of the world had no place in their world. I was shocked. There was a whole world out there that was being excluded. Fortunately the main speaker at the conference, Dr Joe Camilleri, was very inclusive! He talked of the empty chairs in the room. the ones that would be filled by people born in 100 years time. I felt vindicated. :)

Paul had been blinded on the Damascus Road. In some ways he had been blinded all of his life until then. With the healing that he received he was given new eyes for seeing. We all need those new eyes!

Tim Flannery was talking yesterday on the science show of "the development of a global human consciousness". This is not simply us thinking about including all people, but in fact acknowledging life on this planet and our part in that.

Is *this* what the church is to be: a global human consciousness?

Epiphany challenges the church to be more inclusive.

and inclusive in the widest sense.

We pray that god may open our eyes. That we might know who and what we exclude.

Lord, give us new ears to hear  
Lord, give us new eyes to see  
that we might know and treasure  
the richness and diversity of this world.

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and afterwords:

Some of this thinking has developed from a previous sermon on [Epiphany in 2008](#).

“naming” versus “labelling”. When is naming a power game, a diminishment of the person/thing named and when is it an acknowledgment and response to that person or thing?

While I was using the words of INCLUSION and EXCLUSION here, I am now thinking (having heard Tim Flannery again) that part of the problem is the binary world view.

us/them

self/other

divine/human

plant/animal

animate/inanimate

male/female

slave/free

jew/gentile

what happens when binaries break down and are included in each other?

The incarnation could be the breakdown of divine/human. Seems rather revolutionary to me, but christianity always was rather strange. (trinitarian!) A god whose wisdom is so wildly diverse shouldn't surprise us!

More on sermons that I didn't give might be in my blog <http://anchell.blogspot.com>