

All Saints – 2018, Isaiah 25:6-9, Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44

So begins an important week in the life of our Diocese. The candidates for the episcopal election have given the electors their 'manifestos,' and what now remains is for the Synod to gather, discuss each candidate's strengths and weaknesses and vote accordingly. I have been reading each candidate's profile looking for those hints of classical Anglican thinking and theological method. Looking for understandings of pastoral care and the importance of being a focus of unity. Yesterday we celebrated the life and times of Richard Hooker, perhaps the preeminent theologian of the Anglican tradition during the Elizabethan period, a time when the Church strived to discover a comprehensive vision often described as a Middle way between the Puritans and the Catholics. Perhaps the best known element of Hooker's comprehensiveness is the famed three legged stool approach holding in balance scripture, reason and the living voice of the Church. Again I looked for hints of allegiance to this 'way' in our candidate's profiles.

The St Philip's running group gathered yesterday morning at Mount Ainslie an exclusive and elite group, three of us. We ran the race and kept the faith! As we gathered on the start line the race director asked us to call to mind the ancient peoples on whose land we gathered in a 'Welcome to Country' ceremony. I was reminded that many, if not all cultures in varying ways acknowledge their dead. In East Timor we were surprised to find a blend of Catholicism and Animism or ancestor worship amongst the indigenous folk. Many had family graves in their front gardens painted a garish bright blue. Most of us don't have our relatives buried in the front garden – not unless we murdered them (!) but as the race began yesterday I was aware of the War Memorial and our own commemoration of the dead. So what of us then today as we celebrate All Saints, what's it all about?

I was given the opportunity to wrestle with this very question when midway through my academic preparation for ordination, I was packed off to The College of Resurrection in Mirfield, West Yorkshire. It was for me a wonderful experience to live 'in community', the students and the brothers of the Community of the Resurrection sharing in prayer and worship and study; my experiences were formative and remain influential today. The Community, founded in 1892 by Bishop Charles Gore was and is committed to a bold understanding and living out of the incarnation. The brothers worked initially in the grimy industrial north amongst the poverty stricken and later also among the disadvantaged in Apartheid South Africa. For them God was present in these folk and an important understanding of that presence was the Communion of Saints. So today is a celebration not just of those folk gone before us, but the entire Church of God, this is not ancestor worship, this is not a memorial service, we celebrate today those enjoying the beatific vision and those still striving for it.

To help us understand this the Dean of Studies of the college during my time there encouraged us to read certain texts one of them was 'The Vision of God' a 1920s book by Kenneth Kirk who went on to become the Bishop of Oxford. I still have a copy on my bookshelves. It is a series of lectures based on the beatitude - Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Kirk's thesis is that the Vision of God is the goal of human life. So All Saints Day a day when we celebrate is a chance to consider what it is that we are called to, what is our goal? Hooker expounds a vision of humanity which finds fulfilment in God, a theocentric humanism, I like that and I think our readings help us.

When we look at our first two readings this morning, both give us visions of a new world, a new way of being. They are both texts that were produced out of adversity. Isaiah's prophecy was good news for the People of Israel in exile in Babylon and the Revelation of John the Divine is a vision of a new heaven and earth in the midst of the persecutions of the Roman Empire. They are communities who have waited for God and are now celebrating in God's presence. This is the God who in the person of Jesus weeps with us, but who also promises to wipe away all our tears. The Church is born out of adversity or importantly the way we have dealt with the adversity.

These are lovely visions, they allude to wedding banquets, food and wine and unbridled joy. The Isaiah account is all about the community of Israel coming home, the Revelation account is about the entire created order being made new, and then we hear the account of the raising of Lazarus and the final piece in the jigsaw, the salvation of an individual. It's about Salvation, it's about heaven, it's about the Vision of God and this has dimensions which are communal, cosmic and individual, our calling is to hold them together and proclaim them, it is the Good News.

I think the natural way of thinking about this is that we are first individuals, we gather in community and we look out from there into the cosmos. But I wonder if the Bible invites us to a different view. The Bible is after all a cosmic story, it begins with creation and ends as we heard today with new creation. The meaning of this cosmic story is to found in the life and new life of Christ. At the heart of the story is the community who bear the goal of the Vision of God revealed in Christ, and each individual is invited to find their place within the story as part of God's people... to be a Saint!

I pray that the new Bishop of this diocese will be well versed in the Anglican way of scripture, reason and the living voice of the Church and that that will expressed in their proclamation the gospel. The gospel that calls us to be saints in our own time: dealing with adversity through hope and seeing that hope in the cosmic, communal and individual understanding and vision of our salvation. Amen.