

plumbing the depths
a sermon preached on the
feast of st john, apostle & evangelist
154th patronal festival
7 May 2017
at
st john's
ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL
by fr richard wilson

lections: Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 97; 1 John 1:1-5; John 20:2-8

My greetings to you on this day when we take time in the Easter season to recall the work and witness of our patron John – disciple, evangelist, a thinker who plumbed the depths of how we live with God and one who stood at the very centre of the resurrection mystery.

The readings we have heard illustrate the breadth of John's influence. The word imagery of both the reading from the Wisdom of the Proverbs and the letter of John recall the unforgettable prologue of John's gospel:

From Proverbs:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up,

at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.

From John's Letter:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed ...

From John's Prologue:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

These serve us today to make, as a first point, a bold statement on the salvation of God. In pointing to John's prologue they put in mind for us the mystery of creation for, as soon as we read in each – from the beginning, from the beginning, in the beginning, we are transported

back to our creation story in Genesis – In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth ...

They are of one piece, aren't they, in their message, their imagery and their poetry? They stand as the starting point of our mythic foundation story.

Then in the Gospel, not for the first time in this Easter season, we read the story of Mary Magdalene finding Jesus' tomb empty, calling the disciples, Peter and, we think, John. Although this reading stops short of its climax when Mary recognises Jesus in the garden – we still understand that this is the point at which the reality of the Resurrection is made known to all three disciples, the purpose of the incarnation becomes certain and they are brought to profound belief.

So God's salvation history is mapped from its commencement at the Creation through to the centrality of the Incarnation. Then, being in the mind of John's Gospel, we are brought to his record of Jesus' words – in Chapter 14 – that we might expect him to come again when the Kingdom, initiated in the incarnation will be realised for all time.

This wide canvas of theology provides us the base on which our faith and our hope rests. More particularly, we can find our place in it, in historical time, between the incarnation and the last days. From this understanding the life of Jesus we can see our work of love and justice laid out. We see the pattern that has been made for us to follow.

So we have cause for celebration.

Yet, here, today, it is hard to celebrate for we have grief in our hearts. We grieve that our understanding of this parish, that should be a community of love and justice, has been named instead as one of abuse and carelessness. As I have listened over the past months, as this truth has come to a head, I hear a community that is horrified that these things have happened. I hear a community that disbelieves that it can be so. A community that is appalled that it may have inadvertently contributed to the condition of the parish that has been named, of the unvarnished truth that has been said, of abuse, disloyalty, undermining, and a failure of corporate responsibility.

So we ask ourselves - what did I do, or what did I not do to contribute to this sadness?

Some may even wish to deny that anything of the sort has happened or that the problem has been overstated. But let me assure you that I know from what I have seen and from my own, experience that abuse has taken place here. People have also attempted to bully me here and I have witnessed at first hand the outcome of the bullying of others.

So, what now? How can we restore this parish to our bright vision of a community of love and justice, a vision that we might celebrate? How can we restore the relationships that have been torn? How can we mend the breaking hearts?

As a people who are witnesses to the resurrection we have the responsibility to work towards a reconciliation and healing of our community, and this is always hard work. But as witnesses to the resurrection we have Christ with us who is the author of love and justice and he will accompany us if we are prepared to follow, as he accompanied the two disciples to Emmaus.

I will be working closely with the Wardens over the coming weeks to consider what we can do and be and more importantly, what we might become as a reconciled and resurrected community.

For the moment I believe we must sit awhile with our grief. Not to wallow in self loathing or anger, but to make sure we fully comprehend what we face, to let grief and tears flow until they are spent and not to sweep it all under the carpet, which might be our temptation. I offer to walk this journey with you. From this week onwards I will be available in the chapel on Friday afternoons from 3pm to 5pm if you would like to come to talk, to pray, to sit in stillness, or even to confess. I will also be in the chapel on Sundays between the 8 am and 10 am services. Or you can call me to make another arrangement.

I pray the Lord be with you.

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