

for transformation

a sermon preached at baptism and eucharist on the

8th Sunday after Pentecost

3 August 2014

at

st john's

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

by fr david moore, vicar

The Lections: Matthew 14:13-21

We celebrate this ancient ritual of baptism knowing full well that we live in the nuclear age. It makes no sense to attempt to attempt to practise Christian faith as though we inhabit the static three-decker cosmos envisaged in the book of Genesis. Certainly, our task is made difficult by the language of the church's liturgies, and especially its hymns and songs – so many of which do assume a pre-scientific world view. But baptism will only make sense when we see how it relates to the 21st century.

Therefore, the first thing I want to offer to you on this important day in your lives Arielle, Julia, and Kamlesh, is this: in submitting yourself to the church's ritual of baptism you are not attempting to think like, or imagine the world like, a person who lived in first century Palestine. You are not trying to copy the life of a 2000-year-old person. In fact your baptism is not primarily about Jesus the historical Christ at all – though we obviously are formed by Christ as wisdom teacher and guide. You will promise to 'turn to Christ', to live as a 'disciple of Christ', to 'renounce Satan and all evil', and to be 'buried with Christ in his baptism' – yes!

But what does this mean for you who are children of the nuclear age – inhabiting an evolving cosmos of trillions of stars, in which earth is not the centre, a cosmos expanding at an exponential rate, and on a scale of mind-blowing magnitude? I encourage you, then, do not attempt to live this baptism as though you do not know these things. I encourage you, also, do not look upon baptism merely as a matter of belonging to an institution called 'church'. And I encourage you to reflect upon what being 'made members of the body of Christ' might mean in the light of the facts of an evolutionary, expanding cosmos.

The second thing I want to offer you as you commit yourselves to turn to Christ is this: reflect upon your baptism in the light of Scripture, and church tradition – *and reason*. The Biblical texts are not scientific manuals or news reports. Rather, they are the *theological* meditations of thinking persons. The Church's tradition – its dogmatic teachings, liturgies, and symbols – are not rules or codes to be blindly or unthinkingly adhered to. As well as reading the Scriptures and praying the liturgy, think, and reflect upon life in this cosmos.

This leads to the third thing I invite you to consider about your baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. Think about and reflect upon your baptism as persons who live in a cosmos where *matter and energy are interchangeable*. This is crucial. Thanks to Albert Einstein and many other scientists, we now know this astounding fact: "If the energy contained within the tiniest grain of sand were completely liberated, the result would be stupendous".¹ Einstein observed that it's as though vast quantities of energy are imprisoned in matter. We all know this now – we know that nuclear fission and fusion are very real!

I invite you, then, to reflect upon your baptism as though you yourselves are Divine energy – imprisoned, so to speak, in the ordinariness and limitedness of fleshy matter. I suggest this is what it means to be 'buried with Christ in his baptism' – the release of the vast Divine energy stored within your very material bodies requires the transformation of those same bodies. Baptism involves water. Water has long been a symbol not only of cleansing – but, more crucially, of burial and transformation.

This leads to the last thing I would like to offer you as you express your desire to be buried with Christ in baptism. If what I have suggested is right, then transformation of the

matter of your lives is the means by which you – and all of us – ‘live as disciples of Christ’. You will shortly be marked with the oil of Chrism – that you yourself may be a living sign of the cross. The Paschal light will be presented to you – that you yourself may be a living Paschal light. The ways in which all this will be accomplished are as varied as are each of us, of course. But regardless of the particular detail, it means that each of us is infinite Divine energy stored in fleshy matter – to be released again and again, for the sake of ongoing creation. This makes sense of what our tradition calls ‘resurrection life’. Dying and rising with Christ is an ongoing process of transformation – in you.

And this is precisely why in the 20th century the churches, ecumenically, restored the centrality of baptism and Eucharist as the very engine room of mission. It is for this reason – as you will have noticed in your process of coming into the Anglican Church – that Eucharist is *the* liturgy of the church, celebrated not only every Sunday, also during the week. Please don’t be offended, but the fact is that a liturgy of the Word is like a one-armed person. Something crucial is missing – the liturgy of the Sacrament!

In the liturgy of the Sacrament, matter *matters* – and is fundamentally good. We, who are Divine energy embodied in matter, give ourselves bodily – not just in our minds and through words, but in bread and wine and *our own flesh* – to the great work of transformation. At the Altar ‘we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice’ – as one of the sending prayers in *A Prayer Book for Australia* expresses it.²

Reflecting on this in the light of what we now know about energy and matter: each and every person is invited to offer themselves for transformation. What are we doing at the Altar? Certainly not just repeating well-worn prayers or following old customs. What are we doing in that moment in our liturgy called the ‘offering’? Certainly, it is not merely what we put in that bag. In fact, *we ourselves* are the ‘offertory’! Arielle, Julia, and Kamlesh – along with all of us – at the Altar it is the unfathomable and infinite Divine energy which is ‘locked up’ in your flesh that you offer for transformation. Your baptism expresses your intent and desire to be so buried with Christ. At the Altar *you yourselves* are the broken bread and the wine poured out. What we have heard in today’s gospel is not mere history – it’s the sacramental pattern of life itself, ongoing in each of us.

So, we are invited to take our own lives – placing them, so to speak, upon the Altar – offering them for blessing, for breaking, and giving them for the life of the world.³ The Body and Blood of Christ is ritually and communally expressed in ordinary matter – bread and wine. The Body and the Blood of Christ is interiorly and individually real in *your* ordinary matter – in the fleshy reality of your lives, lives offered as living sacrifices, offered for transformation, that the astonishing infinite Divine energy stored in the matter which is your flesh may be released for ongoing creation.

Christ is still saying to each of us: “You give [the world] something to eat”.⁴

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² The Anglican Church of Australia Trust Corporation, *A Prayer Book for Australia*, Sydney: Broughton Books, 1995, p144.

³ Matthew 14:19

⁴ Matthew 14:16