

Sermon for Sunday 21 July 2024

8th after Trinity – 2 Samuel 7: 1 – 14a; Ephesians 2: 11 – end; Mark 6: 30 – 34, 53 – end

One of my holiday memories this year is of standing on a high walkway rather a long way up in the cathedral at Salamanca. We were on a tour which eventually took us out on to the roof and up the tower into the bell chamber. This was not as scary as I had feared, except when the bells chimed! But as I stood inside on the walkway – I noticed particularly the tops of the gothic arches below and how they turned, so that they looked almost like living trees. As if they had grown organically like branches on a tree. I shall come back to that thought later.

Our readings today tell us, among other things, that Jesus became human so that we could be built into a living Temple for the glory of God. Let's look at them in a little more detail.

Our Gospel reading today was two short snippets from Mark's Gospel. In the first, the twelve have just returned from their first solo missionary

journey. Jesus knows they need time alone with him, to rest and de-brief, so they try to get away from the crowds who pursue them. But they are not successful. There follows the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water before the second part of our Gospel – another attempt some days later to get away with the disciples, which is again thwarted. There are too many people who appear, desperate for healing for themselves or their loved ones.

What do we learn from this? Firstly, Jesus shared all of the stress and tiredness of meeting the demands of the non-stop crowds. They had no time even to eat. Even Jesus, with his extraordinary powers, needed to withdraw, to recharge his batteries and to spend time with those he knew best as well as alone and in prayer. Jesus understands when the demands we face lead us to feel stressed and overwhelmed. When we need time away. He has been there too.

Secondly, Jesus' compassion for the helplessness and the suffering of the crowds outweighed his own need for rest. He saw that they were "like

sheep without a shepherd,” so he began to teach them. He also healed the many who came or were brought to him, sending out power so that even those who touched his cloak were healed. This must have been costly, but he gave of himself in response to their need. Jesus reflects the compassion and love of God the Father who gave even his own Son to die for us.

We pick up this theme in our passage from Ephesians. Here we read that Jesus is our peace. In his own flesh, by dying on the Cross, he has made peace for us by reconciling us with God. We are forgiven for all of our sins – our deliberate sins, our mistakes, the sins we’re not even aware of, and the sin we can’t avoid by being part of a world where there is so much inbuilt injustice. And the writer points out that if we are reconciled to God, we are also reconciled to one another because we have all received the same forgiveness for our human failings. In Jesus’ day the most obvious divide was between the Jews, God’s chosen people, and everyone else – the Gentiles. In our day there may be other divisions that we struggle with more – colour, class,

sexuality? Or perhaps in St Michael’s it’s more cafetiere or instant?

The point is, Jesus came as a real human being to die for all of us humankind. So there can be no distinctions.

In our first reading today we heard how King David wanted to build a house for God to live in – a Temple. But God had other ideas. And this is where I come back to the idea of that gothic cathedral where I started. I don’t know whether any of you have been to the Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona?? I haven’t, but I’ve seen pictures of it. I’m not sure if I like what I’ve seen, but I shall reserve judgement until I’ve been there. But it is an enormous modern gothic cathedral. I’m not sure it’s even quite finished yet. But you can see how the architect Gaudi, has understood the way gothic architecture does look a bit like trees – or something that has grown up organically. And that is what it does look like.

If you tour any great cathedral it’s apparent that all the different parts have a function – or perhaps have had several over the centuries.

They are all interlinked, and the building, with all its constituent parts, works together as something beautiful. A place where God can be worshipped. Everything is joined together with the one purpose of bringing glory to God.

That is also the picture of the church painted in Ephesians. We are members of the household of God, but more than that, we are ourselves part of the structure. Jesus is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets are the foundations, and we are growing into a holy Temple, a place where God dwells. St Michael's church isn't a physical building, but more like a living body, an organic structure where God lives. Each part is animated, brought to life, by the Holy Spirit, no part is unnecessary. We belong together, all working together for God's glory.

We belong together just as we are in our humanness, with all our difficulties, our stresses, our human needs, our joys and sorrows, and our differences. Jesus understands what we can do, and what we think we can't. We exist to give glory to God, to share the joy of our faith in Jesus

with others and to show His compassion to our community and our world. Each one of us, alive and connected to Jesus through the Holy Spirit, has a part to play. So, how are we going to do that?

I'm going to finish by praying our St Michael's prayer for mission:

God of mission, Who alone brings growth to your Church, Send your Holy Spirit to give Vision to our planning, Wisdom to our actions, And power to our witness. Help St Michael's to grow in numbers, In spiritual commitment to you, And in service to our local community, Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Revd Diana Young