

Sermon 31 August 2014 12 Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 3: 1-15

Psalm 105: 1-6, 23-26

Romans 12: 9-21

Matthew 16:21-28

In the first reading we have an account of Moses being called, it is a story that seeks to illustrate the movement that takes Moses beyond being a shepherd in the wilderness to his becoming an active participant in bringing, or realising freedom for his people.

Like Jesus, we have the story of Moses not as a history lesson, and not as a story of our faith, but rather as an illustration of life, and a life that is lived with reference to Divine fullness.

And within the story we learn the identity of God, and are given an icon that also identifies the nature of God; this is very much an abstract appreciation of God, perhaps designed to encourage us away from the primitive personification of God as a wise old man living in the heavens.

In the second reading Paul provides us with some clear guidelines, affirming how we might be and act as we live out and make real our calling as the 'body of Christ', there is nothing abstract in Paul's language, rather we have tangible and understandable directions for life.

With these two texts we should therefore have some IKEA-like instructions that will enable us to construct our lives in integrity with the Divine image of our creation; however the gospel reminds us that it's not as easy as it looks.

The gospel reading opens us to the third section of Matthew's gospel, the opening words "*from that time on*" introduce a turning point, a movement from the day-to-day ministry and activity of Jesus, to a focus on death and resurrection, dying and rising are the climax of all that has been revealed. "*From that time on*" identifies for us that we are now looking at a new creation, a new insight and a new enlightenment.

The character of Peter in the narrative enables us to enter the story; for Peter provides us with a reaction to this new beginning, and perhaps we will find an echo of our own reaction as we too seek to engage and encounter the possibility of a new creation for ourselves.

Jesus reveals to the disciples the reality of dying and rising, he introduces them to resurrection as a life reality; however Peter does not want to go there.

This is the same Peter who, in last week's gospel, we heard received the keys to the kingdom.

Peter, the rock on which Jesus said he would build the Church has now become "*a stumbling block to me*". Peter has lost sight of Christ's revelation "*setting his[your] mind not on divine things but on human things.*"

When we heard the vision of living that Paul presents in the second reading today, surely we could appreciate the truth and the integrity of it, we probably all found it affirming, and in varying degrees all seek to live into the reality it represents. But do we have the same ease when it comes to the gospel reading?

Can we appreciate the reality of resurrection; can we see beyond the animal instinct of life into the depth of eternity?

The revelation of dying and rising need to be brought into focus as a life process; we need to leave behind the primitive notions of 'Life after death', and look again at what it means to be fully alive.

In our modern age, 'dying and rising' might be better understood in terms of 'investment and return'; and so we might look at our investment plans and also at our savings plans.

Consider, what you invest in;

Where do you put your money?

Where are your assets?

Where, and in what, do you invest your time, your thoughts, your energy and your activity?

Next take stock of the returns on your investments;

How much of your investment is creative?

How much creates and gifts life?

How much is generating new life for all?

Consider how much you save and in what areas you are saving.

And then sit with the gospel once again:

"those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware...."

Aurora Leigh (1856):

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Once you see the burning bush your prayers change

No longer can you pray to God, for you know he is not there!

Once you take off your shoes and feel the holy ground on which you stand

You burn with a divine fire!

You feel yourself aflame, and yet no longer consumed by life

Once you know yourself in the image of God

You no longer creep through life toward death!

For now you seek to rise toward eternity....

Peter Humphris St Paul's Anglican Church Beaconsfield Western Australia

“those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Once you are the burning bush, you realise life is not to be saved! For life is not consumed!
Rather life is a gift and it is a gift that calls to be given
For it is in giving that we receive.

Peter Humphris