

10 May 2015 Sixth Sunday after Easter

Acts 10: 44-49

Psalm 98

1 John 5: 1-6

John 15:9-17

Textweek [Easter 6B May 10, 2015](#)

We're still in the season of Easter and so very much in the space of trying to understand and make sense of the Easter experience. Like the disciples, the gospel writers and the early church, we seek to fully appreciate what Christ revealed.

The first reading tells us of something that 'astounded' the early disciples as they sought to understand themselves in the light of Easter: "*While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles*".

Luke, the writer of Acts, and the third gospel, was obviously 'astounded' by the development he is narrating; and that gives us some insight into his, and perhaps our, post-Easter experience.

Like us, Luke had expectations of Easter, and expectations of Jesus. Both Luke and Jesus were Jews, they lived within a Jewish tradition and so their worldview was shaped by Jewish expectations. In that tradition they knew themselves as God's chosen, as a people saved through their faith; and they anticipated the coming of a Messiah who would make real the expectations of their faith, someone who would bring them, and only them, into God's kingdom.

The verses before today's reading make this expectation clear ⁴²*He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*"

This exclusive worldview is paralleled in most religions, and was fully adopted by the early church, and that is why, in today's reading, "*The circumcised believers who had come with Peter **were astounded** that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles*".

Luke is very deliberate, as were the early disciples, in showing that Jesus is very much an expectation and a fulfilment within the Jewish tradition, in the formative years of the

early church that interpretation was adopted and accepted; but in our post-Easter experience we too are asked to consider for ourselves what has been revealed; what astounding revelation is made real through the whole Easter experience.

In the narrative of the first reading, Peter and those with him see "*the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles*".

Looking at that another way, they saw in others what they had themselves; they recognised something in others that was the same as them.

If we are in a foreign land and we come across someone speaking the same as ourselves in language an accent, we naturally assume they are from the same country we are from.

Because Peter was confined by his tradition, his assumption was that what he saw in the crowd was a pouring out of the spirit that he had received; which is an understandable and acceptable appreciation of what he saw. He then goes on to baptise them, to accept them into the same tradition as his, and that betrays the blinkers of his tradition.

What if he had paused and asked himself if this was what Jesus had spoken about, what if he had realised that it was not the Jewish people that were God's chosen, but that each and every one was of God's divine image.

The revelation of Christ has been confined within a tradition that we have inherited, and yet what is revealed in, and through Christ was enlightenment beyond that tradition.

The sacrificial lamb, the atonement for sins, the saviour and Messiah are all primitive constructs of an ancient tradition; and we have inherited them because the early interpretation of Jesus' teaching was done by those confined by that ancient tradition.

What astounds me post-Easter is that we continue to hold on to what we really no longer believe as true; and so we avoid looking again for the reality of Easter, for the essence of what is revealed in Christ.

Peter was astounded that outsiders had similar 'gifts' to those who belonged to the exclusive club of the circumcised; and some today would be equally astounded if they ventured out beyond the comfort of their tradition.

In the second reading John suffers from the same orthodox blinkers of exclusivity: "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God*", so those who do not believe "*that Jesus is the Christ*" are not "*born of God*",

When we peel away the blinkers of early interpretation and seek for ourselves we find within the text some valuable guides for our reflections.

What Peter saw, and was astounded by, is that the divine nature is not the preserve of one particular tradition, and Jesus embodied that as a completely new way of appreciating ourselves in relation to the world; in John's language, he illuminates for us, and for all, what it means to be "*born of God*".

Easter is a game changer; it takes us out of the 'Christian Club', it takes us beyond the doctrines and dogmas of a past tradition and invites us into resurrection.

Those who are sharing in the "From the Tomb" reflections have been really helpful for me in my own post-Easter exploration, for they have required me to 'stay with it', and that is exactly what is required, for we have yet to realise that resurrection is a lived experience.

And that realisation does require us to go beyond where we are.

I was looking at a classical image of Jesus, Titian's depiction of the moment Mary Magdalene spots Christ resurrected, and there was some discussion on the page the image appeared in along the lines of, was Christ naked when he came out of the tomb into the garden?

Before we dismiss the question as trivial; it firstly; invites us to 'know' for ourselves the resurrection experience, and then we might ask for ourselves what was revealed for us in this experience: and secondly it is a good demonstration of past interpretations, for classical paintings and icons have Christ displayed in a variety of dress, and that covers up, or distorts the essence of the revelation.

So today, in reading the texts, we see that there has been an interpretation of Easter, one that has kept it in the club of the Hebraic-Christian tradition; so why don't we do something astounding and look beyond that tradition.

The early 'Jewish' disciples interpreted Easter as about Jesus, because they wanted their expectations fulfilled; if you read the book again, you'll discover that Jesus, his teaching and his being is all about us.

Peter Humphris