

Sunday 8th July, 2018
The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10
Psalm 48
2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Mark 6:1-13

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Today is a special day. Well, of course it is - it is Sunday for a start; the wonderful day of the week given by God as our holy and sacred day. The first day of creation; the first day after the Sabbath; the day of resurrection - all of these we remember as a Sunday; special days indeed.

Today is a special day for another reason, of course. In fact, every time we gather around the altar to share in God's blessings, it is a special day. Because this communion meal we share together looks backwards, as we remember Jesus' meal with his friends. It reminds us of the sacrifice made by Christ on the cross, and celebrates the joy of the resurrection. But it also looks forward, in promise, to all that God will do - it is a sign to the world that we believe all that God has promised - that God's kingdom will come, so that God's creation will be made perfect, and that God's will be done, "on earth as it is in heaven".

So today is a special day - and it is extra special of course for Abigail, Hannah, Jacob, Joshua, and Ryan. Because today they will become even more a part of our worshipping community, as they are admitted to receive communion with us. This is a significant occasion for them, and also for us, as a community. The throw-away line in our church is often "we need the kids in the church, because they are our future". No, they're not - they are our present, our here and now!! They have gifts to offer, like the rest of the congregation - they have blessings to receive, like the rest of us. And today is a visible sign of their place within our faith community.

As part of their preparation for today, Abigail, Hannah, Jacob, Joshua, and Ryan have completed a booklet, where they have explored such things as belonging to the church, through their Baptism, how we say sorry for things we have done wrong, and how our service of communion remembers the last meal that Jesus had with his disciples. Although they were all baptized in different places around the world, they have come to see how they are all part of God's family, and what a wonderful thing that is.

I must admit, when I first looked at the readings for today I was a little unsure as to how they might relate to this occasion. In our first reading, David is anointed as King. This, I thought, might be drawing a long bow - we are not quite elevating these young people to such lofty heights today - although it has to be noted that the oil with which David was anointed as King has a direct connection with our service of Baptism, when the Priest makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized. But no, perhaps we will steer clear of that one.

So, what about Paul's vision, in the Corinthians reading? I'm sure you'd all like to hear my take on Paul's little trip to the third heaven - for it is Paul speaking in the third person that claims to *not* be boasting (although it sounds very much like a boast to me!!) But there is something really important in amongst that - and that is the verse which says "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." This is God's promise - that we are not expected to be strong and perfect; at least not all the time! In fact, often God's ways are seen and appreciated in the little things, in the small acts of kindness; God is known through our weakness, and our willingness to trust in God's Grace. So, that is important for us to remember.

But I think there is a great deal of wisdom in the Gospel today, that is important for us to hear. Firstly, Jesus faced opposition to his message and his ministry. When he went to where instinctively we might think he would be welcomed, back in his own home town, instead he finds that people are wary, if not openly scornful of him.

I am sure I am not telling you something you don't already know when I say that we face such opposition in these times as well. Organised religion, and the church as an institution are no longer held in the same regard as they once were. There are various and understandable reasons for this, some of them very much our own fault and doing, but this hostility which Jesus faces in today's Gospel passage is echoed today - and it is tough. It is not easy to bring this good news to people with the knowledge that it might be ignored, or dismissed, or openly rejected.

But even in the light of the rejection he faced at Nazareth, Jesus sends out those first disciples to go and tell others. They go out, equipped by Jesus, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and with authority to heal and forgive. And that is our calling also - all of us, as faithful followers of Christ.

The disciples are now partners in his ministry in a way they have not been up to this point in the story. They go out in pairs - this work can't be done alone! - and they do not take their own provisions but rather depend on the hospitality of those they meet.

And while some will receive them and be blessed, others will refuse their ministry and blessing. This is most assuredly the reality that we face, too. And Jesus has something to say to us about this. "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."

Shaking the dust off one's shoes may seem harsh, but perhaps in this story it says more about an honest realization that this news will not be what everyone wants to hear - and that in a sense banging your head against a brick wall to try and convince someone whose ears and hearts are just closed is soul-destroying, and ultimately futile.

Our baptismal command is simple - "Go", Jesus said; "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit".

When Abigail, Hannah, Jacob, Joshua, and Ryan were baptized, there were promises made on their behalf. Shortly in the service they will affirm that they wish to continue their life of faith within this community, and through their everyday lives and actions, reaching out to others in grace and mercy. And they will do that strengthened by their joining with us all at the communion rail, stretching out their hands to receive the sacrament and remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Today these five young people take another step in their journey of faith. May we, as fellow Christians, and fellow travelers with them on this journey commit to pray for them, support them, and walk with them, as together we take Christ's message out to the world, and work to further God's Kingdom, on earth, as it is in heaven...

In the name of God. Amen