

## Sunday Thought

1<sup>st</sup> August 2021 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Readings

2 Samuel 11: 26 – 12: 13a

Psalm 51: 1 - 1

Ephesians 4: 1 - 16

Mark 6: 24 - 35

### Hive Church



I have been listening to joyful noise this week. That's not new Christian choruses but familiar summer sounds. The garden has been a-buzzing with many varieties of bees and other insects. I think that is why this image came to mind as I read today's excerpt from Paul's letter to Christians at Ephesus. It's a picture of the church as a bee-hive – a place of constant activity!

While the emphasis of Paul's words is about the need for Christians to have a distinct Christlike lifestyle, he also speaks of the many normal activities which were and are recognised as the total ministry of the church. Those things are chiefly the exercise of gifts which God has given to individuals and groups engaged in his purposes both in the church and in the community. Paul lists some of those gifts as involving apostles – including preachers, worship-leaders and teachers – and prophets who speak and act for, and sometimes against, current social and political issues. Then there are *pastors*. The word means *shepherds*, – those who care for the everyday concerns of people all about them – *the cheerer-uppers, the tear-sharers, counsellors, guides and practical helpers*. I suppose we would think of these as the *workers*, although the analogy should not be pressed as in the beehive the *workers* are always females! The most important point Paul would stress is how *workers, drones, and queen bee* are all engaged together making honey and drawing attention to the hive's activity. He is desperate that this should be the case in the churches. The Church's unity of life comes about as its people share humble, gentle, patient, tolerant Christlike ways, growing together in God's love and in the work of Jesus' Kingdom in their everyday world. The neighbours cannot help noticing! It doesn't take long for the garden to know when the bees are busy. It's the same with their delightful product. Anyone who loves honey on toast will know that runny honey gets everywhere! So does the real life of the Church of Jesus Christ!



There is much more to Paul's words. They are an important starting point if we are to seriously ask what the post pandemic church should be like. I hope we do. It will be sad to miss yet another of God's revival opportunities.

Any transition time needs to begin with important and fundamental questions. Two such questions arise for us in today's Gospel reading when Jesus speaks to another crowd of people who persistently follow him. It was the day after he had fed a great number of them in the hills East of Lake Galilee. The crowds were back again today, many with healed bodies and minds and even more with changed lives. His followers wanted more of yesterday. Unaware that Jesus had followed his disciples back across the lake the previous evening they pressed on round the shore to find him back in Capernaum. Their first question was, *'Teacher! When did you come here?'* to which Jesus replied, *'You were looking for me in the wrong place and for the wrong reason.'* He could have used words I have often toyed with in some church services and committees – *'Lord, what are we doing here?'* *'Lord, are we where **you** are needed most?'* Those are the questions we must surely ask in the light of what the temporary church closures and worship changes have shown us. The hive may change, just as new styles of beehive have emerged through the ages. Even today as natural environments are changing, hives need to be relocated. Queen bees move on to allow a new generation to take over.

*'What are we doing here?'* can of course be answered by simply comparing ourselves to Paul's picture of the church and asking, *'What really matters most?'* Jesus tells us the priority is providing the sustenance – bread or honey – which gives eternal - full and forever - LIFE to the whole world. *'That bread which I am really concerned with,* he told the Galilee crowd, *'is God and his Kingdom – and that begins with believing in ME!'*

So, the ultimate question is *Are we here because our stomachs – our physical appetites – are empty or because our hearts are full of Christ and long to share him and his kingdom with a desperate world?*

#### A Prayer (based on Psalm 51:1 - 12)

This psalm refers to last week's story of king David's disgrace, involving adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of officer Uriah. The king confesses. God is gracious. David's words have become a well-loved penitential prayer.



*Lord, I have done wrong to my people, to myself and to You.  
You have made my failures clear to me and I need your forgiveness.  
I feel dirty and want you to shower me clean.*

*I come to you, trusting your constant love and mercy:  
Take away my sin. Give me wisdom and sincerity to mean what I say.  
May my experiences be a warning and help for others.  
From a grateful heart I say, 'Thank you, Lord.'*