

Sunday Thought

9th January 2022 First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Isaiah 4: 1 - 7

Psalm 29

Acts 8: 14 - 17

Luke 3: 15 - 17, 21 - 21

Hope of Glory!

How the years have passed! It's a common exclamation, especially at the turn of the year. Added to that many people have said how disrupted routines, caused by the covid pandemic, have given an impression of time rushing on without them. *How the years have passed!* I wonder if Jesus' mother, Mary said that when John the Baptist began his powerful preaching career along the Jordan valley.



Luke's story speeds across the years from Jesus' birth and childhood - thirty hidden years of his learning faith and life at home and in the synagogue, making friendships in support of his coming ministry and maybe gathering experience of military and trade from which some of his teaching illustrations would come. I love the tradition which tells of his journey with his uncle Joseph of Arimathea to buy tin in Cornwall and visit Glastonbury. Now the curtain rises on three years of ministry revealing God his Father to the world.

Luke tells of a buzz of excitement, when John preached and baptised on the far side of the river Jordan, calling people to see the relevance of ancient prophecies. He invited them to get ready for God's great intervention in earth's history - the arrival of the long-anticipated *Christ*. He called them to be baptised as a sign of wanting to sort out their lives with God, with each other and with society in general. *And, he said, there is greater excitement to come. The Christ will baptise you not just with water but with the Holy Spirit of God. It will be like a new experience of life - of fire to make your whole world glow.* In today's terms his message meant, *'very soon Christmas will become Pentecost. Emmanuel - God WITH us - will become Christ IN us!*

Luke was writing from the vantage point of post-Pentecost when he continued his story in the Acts of the Apostles. Our reading today from Acts tells how the first Church was on the move - thousands expressing belief in Jesus, meetings for prayer and fellowship, organised relief kitchens for the poor and plans to take the good news to all the world.

It was not all good news. Stephen had followed Jesus in martyrdom. Philip was one of the other six deacons appointed by the first followers of 'The Way of Jesus' in Jerusalem. He had established a community of believers in Samaria in obedience to Jesus' orders. Now Peter and John were sent to help the new followers realise the Pentecostal joy of the Holy Spirit. The Baptist's promise was coming true. It was not always a matter of signs and wonders, sparks, wind, and voices, but an assurance of being alive with the grace and strength of God. One way to describe *Christ in us* is in terms of a couple who know each other as close friends realising, 'we are in love!' and beginning a life-long relationship all bound up with each other.

The reading from Isaiah's prophecy tells how God cares for his people as a whole community, but now his words have meaning for individuals such as you and me who claim the indwelling Spirit of Jesus. *'I have called you by name. I know you personally. You are mine. I will not let fear and troubles overwhelm you. I created you to bring me glory!'* Jesus' promise had come true. *'When the Spirit comes you will know I am in my Father and you are IN ME, just as I am IN YOU! [John 14].* Paul describes this as *God's secret truth which is now made known. Christ in you the hope of glory! Let's live to praise his glory.'* Those words he wrote to Christians at Ephesus became the motto of Elizabeth of the Trinity – *'Laudem Gloriam – I want all my life to be a praise of Christ's glory!'*

Among my special memories I recall elderly June staying after Good Friday worship to talk awhile. *'I've been in chapel, she said, almost every Sunday since I was born. Last week I came with John to the prayer group. I was listening, instead of worrying over my knitting pattern as I often did, and suddenly I felt warm and alive. I knew Jesus and really knew my faith in him is real!'* It was a similar experience to that which the Wesley brothers knew and led to changing the life of our nation! It is still true that a living church begins with people who have discovered this spiritual passion for Jesus.

A Prayer (with Psalm 29 in mind)

This psalm is a favourite of mine.

I used to read it in sight and sound of West African thunderstorms.

Lord, we praise you for your glory! Glory in the storm!
Your words are like thunder rolling through the heavens.
clearly and powerfully speaking of your ever-present love.
Lightning flashes through darkened skies, across land and
oceans are like revelations of your truth.
Strong winds strip leaves and branches from the trees
as your glory sweeps through us, cleaning up our lives.
Lord, we praise you for the fresh, clean peace which follows the storm
as when we trust you and rest deep in your grace.
All for the praise of your glory!

