

Sunday Thought

4th July 2021 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

2 Samuel 5:1- 5, 9 - 10

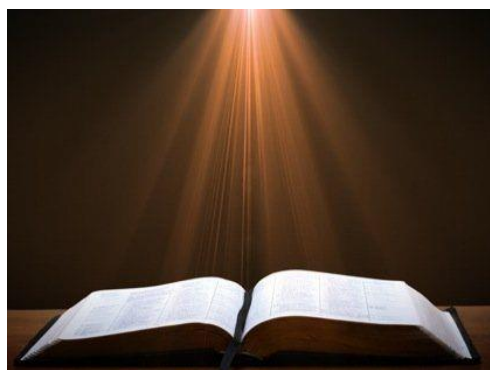
Psalm 48

2 Corinthians 12: 2 - 10

Mark 6: 1 - 13

Time to think of Basics

Last Sunday's Methodist Conference worship began with the hymn *All are*



welcome. It followed the emphases of the addresses by the President and vice-President who, with the week's business in mind, spoke about creating a church which would be intent on the inclusiveness of all people, regardless of race, gender, social status, or any other difference. It comes as another challenge to us all to re-think the nature and work of the church in the light of the cultural and social changes of our time as well as adjusting to

new patterns for our post pandemic church-life. It was good to share on-line the reception of new ministers and deacons prior to their ordination later that afternoon while not forgetting that in our churches, ministry has a much wider context. In various ways we are all ministers for Christ Jesus and his church. That is brought out in our Gospel reading today.

Jesus had returned to Nazareth from Galilee and in the synagogue there he began teaching his message of God's Kingdom. People who had known him since he was a lad were amazed at his wisdom and his miracles, but he could not please them all. Others, probably those safeguarding their positions and authority, rejected him as a *commoner* – the carpenter's boy. There could have been prejudice too about the family's Bethlehem origins. This created a lack of faith in Jesus and caused them to reject his ministry. As a consequence, Jesus was unable to proceed with his mission in Nazareth. The next step was, in his words, *to shake the dust from his feet* and move on to preach in surrounding villages. It was at this point that his disciples were called to share in his *ministry* as preachers and healers.

Jesus gave his men a short course of ministry training before they set out. It consisted of two *lectures* – 'Kit' and 'Practice'. Their equipment was to be basic – a stick, no money, no bread, not even a clean shirt, instead they would accept hospitality where it was offered. Their work was the same as that of Jesus – giving everybody his words and challenging them to repent and be changed by letting God turn their lives around. The preaching would be accompanied by care for the sick in body mind and spirit – with healing and counselling care.

How ministry has changed! I read of some of the early Primitive Methodist preachers in the Black Mountains where I began my ministry. They were just the same as Jesus' ministers except they worked in a different physical climate. These men told of how they often had to sleep in the open and survived on nuts and fruits from the hedgerows plus an occasional turnip from the fields. It had changed somewhat in my time, although it was there that I first heard the vestry stewards' prayer – *'Lord, you keep our minister humble and we'll keep him poor!'*

It is good to recall the basics for the ministry in which we all share – both for us who are respectfully ordained, and for all who have meaningful parts in the lifework of the church. Jesus still makes it clear that our ministry as a church has two prongs. First, to preach, not just for the cosy converted but for all in the community, of all ages, who as a result feel the need for a turning around of their lives and to share in God's family – God makes it plain who they are. Then to care for the sick, afflicted, anxious folk in the places all about us.

The first prong leads on to fellowship in a space for meeting – perhaps a traditional church building – where worship and teaching is offered in different ways to meet a variety of opportunities. The second means using that same 'space' as a refuge for all sorts of human need and conditions within the local community - being *'as Christ, the healer to them'*.

These are the basics of ministry. I should add they are not just my *Sunday Thoughts*, but our Lord's orders. Reading Paul's words to Corinth today we recall that this ministry is not about pride of place, personal glory or public acclamation. Real success for Jesus and his church, Paul says, comes from our position of being servants for all. *For when we are weak – when we take the servant minister role – then we are strong – trusting in Jesus whom we serve.*

A Prayer [with today's Psalm in mind]

*Lord, take us round your church to remember what we are here for:
This is our sacred space.
We want it to be a space worthy of you,
where we share in your praise together with the church world-wide,
where we remember your constant love for all the world.
A space from where we can work and witness for justice in our society,
share in bringing your joy to all,
and tell the next generation the story of your good news.*

