

The Sixth Sunday of Easter, 9 May 2021

Psalm 98, John 15.9-17, Acts 10.44-end

Faith is an opening. It opens us to a new way of seeing, a new way of being, a new way of living and loving lived in community. This constitutive element *community* can be traced in each reading, but especially in Jesus' words about abiding in him as he abides in the Father. All this may have a familiar ring, but it bears repeating.

With the above in mind I wonder where you located yourself in today's readings if at all. Where did you find yourself? Where did you come down? Think of a map spread out before you. Can you pinpoint where you find yourself on today's map stroke landscape? I will give you a moment...

Did you find yourself amongst the gentiles who have a Pentecost experience not unlike that of the first Pentecost that we will celebrate in a fortnight? "While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word." (Acts 10.44-end) There is something here about hearing that reminds me of a psalm, "They have ears, but they do not hear..." (Psalm 115.6). In contrast to the psalm quoted there is a hearing of God's word that allows for the Holy Spirit to fall upon us as a life-giving reality.

Taking my cue from the above did you find yourself in today's psalm? Psalms are companions to those who seek to walk in the ways of God, while attending to God's commandments. Psalm 89 is called an enthronement psalm. It celebrates God as king, while affirming God's (sovereignty) lordship over all of creation. We cannot be certain what act of divine deliverance occasioned the psalm, but whatever occasioned it, it called for a new song in which humanity – with all its skill at assembling matter, things seen and unseen – in unison with creation sings a new song. Let the sea thunder! Let the rivers clap! Hills rejoice! Get out the lyre and make melody! Blow the trumpets! Sound the horn! Why? All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation/deliverance of our God. This act of

deliverance gives the people a new confidence enabling to remember that God “will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.” (Psalm 98.10)

Or did you find yourself somewhere in the short, but rich reading from St John’s gospel as it tells of Jesus’ love for the Father, his forever abiding in the Father. The love of which Jesus speaks shows itself in keeping the Father’s commandments. All are called to emulate Jesus’ example. May we all be given the strength to keep the Father’s commandments, that we may abide in his love.

Or did you come down in the joy of which Jesus speaks. Jesus tells us he has come to complete our joy which the old creation, the first Adam could not complete. It is God who is the source of joy. It is God who completes our joy, as we abide in God’s love. Loving as he loves us. His example is our inspiration. Recall what Jesus says about peace, namely that he gives a peace that the world cannot give. (John 14.27) He gives a joy that the world cannot give. Jesus says, “I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Many people are puzzled by the persistence of Christianity and faith and religion in general, but for many Jesus’ words, “I do not give to you as the world gives” ring true. There is a joy and there is a peace that only God can give. Until we grasp the full force of what only Jesus can give we will remain puzzled, unsure, while casting around for alternatives that may give us the peace and the joy we long for, but which only Jesus can give. And “the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.” (Acts 10.44)

Or did you find yourself being addressed with others as friends. Jesus speaks to those whom he addresses about friendship and our friendship with Jesus takes shape and grows in doing whatever Jesus commands, as we abide in him.

Jesus goes on to speak about being chosen, about election. Here at Christ Church we are celebrating that Lynn Finnegan’s ordination date has been fixed for next month and that

Rosie Evans has been elected to train for the ordained ministry of the church as a priest. I would want to draw their attention and ours to what Jesus says about being chosen, "You did not choose me but I chose you." Jesus makes it clear that he chooses men and women for a purpose and that is to bear fruit, fruit that will last. Earlier in the Farewell Discourse Jesus says that apart from me you can do nothing. We need to remind ourselves of this continually. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing.

Finally in the context of today's gospel reading and what has gone before, Rosie and Lynn, as well of each one of us in living in a community of faith, members of the Body of Christ, can ask for whatever in his name and it will be given. Put your trust here. Let us learn to put our trust as God's chosen ones in this promise. It is a bold move. It is foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews.

Taking my lead from Jesus' words about asking whatever in his name I am encouraged now to speak about our stewardship campaign. We are asking you and all members, friends and associates to set up a standing order and those who have already done so in the past to review their present giving trusting all council members will take a lead in this endeavour. In the intercessions listed we find amongst our prayer requests that we are seeking a considered, prayerful and joyful response by all. We are looking to a giving that isn't out of necessity, but out of gratitude for the gift of faith that we have been given the way of abundant living. We are looking for a response that wants to so endow the church that it will bear fruit grounded in God's love, abiding in him while keeping his commands. We are looking for a response grounded in the seriousness of prayer. We are looking for a response that is grounded in the knowledge that there is a joy and a peace that only God can give. All these things are priceless emanating out of the generous and overflowing heart of God. It is against the above backdrop, which wasn't exhaustive by any means that Paul writes to the church in Corinth, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

You will have noticed that this stewardship campaign is addressed to members, friends, associates and even those who simply appreciate the Anglican presence in Vienna and in Austria. It is our desire to put this church on a sound and sure financial footing for the next generation. We build for the future in the present. A future we are being called to shape and live in by the life-giving a life-enhancing power of the Holy Spirit. A future we can and will enjoy as we abide in the Son, as we follow his commandments and first and foremost the New Commandment in his name, to love one another as Christ has loved us. All the above makes for abundant living.

I end with the reading of the Christ Church Mission Statement, because as the writer of the Book of Proverbs already knows “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (Proverbs 29:18) In this I am taking my cue from the reading of the Mosaic Law at various crucial moments in the history of Israel during the reign of King Josiah and the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, who both at one time were high placed court officials in the Persian kingdom.

Christ Church, the Anglican/Episcopal Church in Vienna, seeks to be a welcoming and caring church, providing a spiritual home for all generations that respects diversity and invites people from every walk of life to worship God, to grow as Christians in faith and understanding as well as to participate in God’s mission to the world as disciples of Jesus and stewards of God’s creation.

Led by God’s grace, we aim to:

- Inspire our community to live and work to God’s praise and glory;
- Engage with one another through the shared experience of worship, education and social events;
- Reach out to younger generations in ways that affirm the relevance of the Christian faith for today;
- Build a culture of stewardship, based on the belief that God’s provision is generous and we are stewards, not owners, of everything we possess: our talents; money; time; possessions; the world around us and:
 - Serve God through service to others;
 - Share and meet with those in need;
 - Donate ten per cent of our income to charity;
 - Work together to embed environmental concerns in our worship, teaching and action.