

20150208FifthAfterEpiphany

As I sat down on Wednesday and read through the four lessons (counting the psalm) for this Sunday and was struck by how they complimented each other. They had the same message but they also seem to have a connecting theme which perhaps is best summed up by the opening words of the First Reading from Isaiah: ***Have you not known? Have you not heard?... Have you not known? Have you not heard?***

This first reading is from a classic chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter forty. I wonder how many of you know its beginning verses? "*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*" which seems quite a contrast with "*Have you not known? Have you not heard?*" where the prophet, speaking God's words to the people goes on to demonstrate God's power and strength. God "*sits above the circle of the earth*". Don't forget we are still in the flat-earth era of scientific belief so the circle referred to was the 360Deg view of the earth and God would be sitting above it all, looking down on earth and seeing people "*like grasshoppers*". Isaiah reminds his hearers that it is God who "*brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing*". Seasons come and season go and it is God who "*blows*" on the crops causing them to "*with*". "*Who is God's equal?*" the prophet asks. Not only is God Holy and powerful but also caring - God knows us all by name! This is why God is amazed at the response of the people. "*Why do you say, O Jacob, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?'*" God through Isaiah goes on to demonstrate God's vigour and power and assures the people that they too can be like that: *those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

And how do the people respond? I would like to think that their response is bound up in the verse we (said) sung from Psalm 147. Yesterday at the Lay Minister Training I rather crudely and rudely said that we mustn't view hymns as merely "bum-breaks" - opportunity to give our weary bottoms a chance to get blood flowing again. The same can be said for the psalm we have each Sunday. It has been carefully chosen to speak into the Old Testament or First reading. Today is a typical example. The Psalmist lists God's attributes including that delightful line which all choirboys love –he takes no delight in any man's legs! And ends with a most beautiful phrase: "*the Lord's delight is in those that fear him : who wait in hope for his mercy.*"

Now, often the Second Reading, being from the Letters in the New Testament is read sequentially. That is to say, each Sunday we read the next part of the Letter we heard the previous week. So often they do not fit into the theme of the Sunday – where the OT and the Gospel purposely match. But this Sunday – Wow! – it really compliments what has gone before. Isaiah asked: *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* Well, Paul is telling those Corinthians that he proclaimed the Gospel to them, not in order to boast but that they **might** know and **might** hear! And he adds significantly: and *woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel!* Paul tells them that he is free so that he can become like any of them – like a Jew, like a Gentile, like the weak ...all to win people to Christ. Paul says: *I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some.*

Jesus became like us –a human being – so that he could tell us the good news that he could save us. Like the Jew, like the Gentile, like the weak, like the strong – he became all of these. *All things to all people.*

Did you hear that Gospel this morning? It seems to describe a busy day in the life of a busy person. Jesus teaches in the synagogue, then he cures Peter's mother-in-law, then the crowds gather around Peter's front door and Jesus cures, as Mark says: *many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.* I'm sure that he taught while he healed.

Then for Jesus, it was off to bed. But he doesn't sleep late the next morning. Mark tells us: *while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

We are always being told that we should live our lives like Jesus. Sure, we can't touch people and cure them of diseases and demon possession but a simple look at today's Gospel reading demonstrates a set of concepts, ideas, values that we (and by 'we' I mean the whole Church) should be doing. What? Well, we must be willing to heal – the church if you remember was the first organization to run hospitals, we must be willing to teach the whole city that comes to our doors – the church ran the first schools and universities, we must be willing to pray, to be alone with God to hear God's commands to us – as individuals and corporately as the body of Christ. Through our prayers, we must be willing to obey what we hear God telling us – *Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

It is fascinating that Jesus' disciples can't find him that morning early while it was still dark. Fascinating – why could they find him? Because they must have been looking in the wrong places. To me that means they do not yet know Jesus as well as they might – Do you know him? *Have you not known? Have not heard?*

Where would you look for Jesus? Think of a place to look. Do you think you would find him there? Why did you think of **that** place? I would love to do a quick survey and see what your answers were. Did some of you, following the Gospel's lead, looking for Jesus praying in Church, perhaps? Some of you might have said, you would look for him in our graveyard, with all the down-and-outers who sleep and do all their other business there. Yes, he was concerned with the welfare of the poor and those on the edges of society so perhaps you **would** find him there.

George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community, once wrote, "I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died. And that is what he died about."

Perhaps some of you thought you might look for Jesus up at UCT, teaching; touching the minds of those who can think and who have influence over others. Did any of you think of looking in your homes for Jesus? Perhaps with your loved ones? Or have you written them all off already as complete unbelievers and unworthy of Jesus. If so perhaps you would find him there.

What about in your own heart?

Did you look in your hearts for Jesus? Yes, I know that sounds quite corny and sentimental but it is also true and you may couch it in different words if you like. But Jesus should be there. If you didn't find Jesus there – what then? Perhaps you would like to pray with someone about that. I'm sure one of our newly trained lay ministers would be happy to pray with you. Right now, all I can do is quote three bits of our readings from this week which complimented each other so well. *...The Lord's delight is in those that fear him : who wait in hope for his mercy. .. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Have you not known? Have you not heard?*