

## 18 July 2021: The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

2 Samuel 7: 1-14a; Ephesians 2: 11-27; Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

**‘Christ is our Peace’ - *Michael Brown***

*‘I will listen to what the Lord God will say, for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful, that they turn not again to folly.’ (Psalm 85: 8) Common Worship © Archbishops Council*

### **Introduction**

If St Paul had been Professor Jonathan Van-Tam (so to speak), he might have phrased some of his verses differently:

- So, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5: 7b) *and*
- So, For freedom Christ has set us free (Gal 5: 20) *or even*
- With Jesus as Manager the whole Team is fixed together (Eph 2: 20b-21a)

The Bible consists of many different sorts of books. There are stories, legal codes, poetry, songs for worship, letters, books of wisdom, and some books contain more than one of these styles. And quite naturally each of these styles can use different forms of expression from literal to symbolic.

One way of using words which is beloved of bible writers is word association or associative thinking which trades on the ambiguous meanings of some words. (If you want a good crossword puzzle or pub quiz answer, the technical name is ‘polysemy’ = ‘more than one meaning’.)

## **2 Samuel 7: 1-14a**

So, in today's Old Testament reading, the ark of the covenant had been kept in a tent but now that David is settled in a permanent home he is wondering whether a more substantial 'house' should be provided for the ark. He consults the prophet Nathan whose initial response is, 'Go ahead and do what you think best.' *'But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan'* (v4)

The next day Nathan gives David the prophecy which plays on the meanings of the Hebrew words. He is not to build a house [temple] for God because God will build a house [dynasty] for David.

This prophecy provided the basis for the belief that the dynasty of David would eventually be restored by the sending of a Messiah.

## **Ephesians 2: 11-27**

In today's New Testament reading, Paul gives us a virtuoso performance of associative thinking which trades on the meanings of a Greek word which can mean 'house'/'building'/'household'/'temple'. It works like this:

The church is God's house in which God has joined together Gentile and Jewish christians. Both groups are now therefore built as living stones into a house. Christ is the cornerstone (stone that joins together parts of a building) of this house. This building grows into a temple or house or dwelling place for God.

But all of this is only possible *'For he (Christ) is our peace'* (v14). And this has happened because, Paul says, Christ has proclaimed *peace* to both the divided groups of christians. Now 'proclaimed' is a better translation than 'preached' as used in other versions. 'Preached' sounds too much like an ordinary occasion in church. What is happening here is far from ordinary. It is a *royal* proclamation, the pronouncement of a ruler - and so it is to be obeyed.

## **Ephesians: Peace: Church**

Many things could be said about peace all inspired by today's reading from Ephesians but the essential principle is this:

Peace is the underlying condition of the church manifested to us in the Gospel.

This principle doesn't just mean that peace ought to be the underlying condition even if it isn't. More than this, it is a refusal to accept conflict as a natural reality. It is a refusal to accept that conflict is a positive way of being human.

It is only because of the incarnation, crucifixion-resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that there is a church. If we remember this, we may be able to avoid two errors in thinking about the church.

The first error is that we treat the church just like any other social body with its own rules, regulations and procedures which it decides entirely for itself. This ignores and so in effect denies that Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive now.

The second error is that we regard the church as completely identical with Jesus. When this happens Jesus as revealed in his Word in Holy Scripture no longer rules over the church because he is no longer separate from the church. This has the effect of identifying our current interests with the will of God.

For as the Church of England teaches:

*'THE visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men [people], in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'* (Article XIX)

## **Conclusion: Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56**

Today's Gospel reading finishes with this verse: *'And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.'*

As with the woman suffering from haemorrhages in the Gospel reading for Trinity 4, the garment Jesus is wearing is seen as an extension of his personality.

However, this time the wording is more precise: the 'fringe' - which probably means not so much a decorative border but one of the blue tassels worn by Jewish people in accordance with the Law, e.g., *'Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner.'* (Numbers 15: 38 - the Lord speaking to Moses.) The fringes serve as a reminder to the keeping of the Law.

But how might we describe the 'personality' of Jesus? In many ways, but the Word would be a good place to start with its recall of these verses:

*'When peaceful silence enveloped all ...down from the heavens...leapt your all-powerful Word...For the whole world was on his flowing robe.'* (Wisdom 18: 14, 15, 24)

Or as this theme is picked up in John's gospel: *'For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.'* (3:17)

But once we start reflecting on such things, we will become 'Lost in wonder, love and praise', and our hearts can only echo these words from Paul:

*'...the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ!'*

**AMEN.**