

Easter 6 2014

Sermon preached at Puy de Serre on 25th May by Revd Caroline Sackley

There have been several ecumenical events that I have been part of over the last few weeks and they have been a real blessing, wonderful experiences and time for me to worship without the responsibility of leadership. As some of you know I believe very strongly that God created one church, the body of Christ, and not a building in sight. I prefer not to argue about doctrine and man-made rituals, but on the fact that we all follow Jesus our Lord and Saviour. I am also very open to experiencing different ways of worship, some work for me, some don't, but it is surprising, although it shouldn't be, what God does even in a service that I'm not enjoying. I always remind myself that I should be seeing what I can bring to worship, not necessarily what I can take and of a story told to me by a Vicar at the charismatic end of the Church of England. I was saying how dry and empty I found it rushing through The Book of Common Prayer Communion service at 8.00am, when people wanted it all done and dusted in half an hour. He replied that it was in just that service that his wife had really found God and become an active Christian, so now he takes them with joy.

God isn't contained in a building, nor can we or should we attempt to contain him in our services. Paul himself was full of the Holy Spirit, he knew what havoc God could wreak in our lives. Are we afraid of that though? Do we try to keep God contained somewhere that we feel is a safe place for our faith to be? Or do we open our lives to the work he wants to do in us? As the letter of Peter reminds us 'it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is God's will than to suffer for doing evil'. The Athenians that Paul addresses want to control God through the services they offer him, they want to buy God with worship, they want to feel affirmed rather than to have responsibility and they don't want to be judged by a God who is the ultimate source of all that there is and they can't barter with saying 'we worshipped you regularly and lavishly.'

We have a Creator God, who is both other than the world and intimately involved in it.

Paul could see how Jesus was not only fulfilling Judaic law, but also all the other genuine attempts to grasp the mystery, the reality of life and death, of God or another ultimate being. In Jesus, God uncovered that ultimate reality. In ways that humans could understand, through the Incarnation, he drew close to his beloved people so that they could see what he was like. This included showing us that such love could also involve pain and rejection, which he did through the crucifixion. His power, his love was then shown to be even stronger than death by the Resurrection.

Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus tells us will be with us for ever, we are asked to live, given the chance to live, because Jesus lives in us. We are reminded throughout the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles that that life won't necessarily be comfortable, safe or secure. But we are promised life in abundance, both now and for all eternity.

John says that people will know we love Christ because of the love that we show for others. If we really love, as Jesus loved us, we will live that love out, not in a comfortable, fair-weather friendship kind of way but in a sacrificial way. This way may well be different to the one of our choice, it may not be as comfortable as the way of our choice, but we are, or should be, obedient and follow the will of the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Light.

When we face our Father, we don't want to have to say, 'well I meant to, but somehow there was never enough time' or 'you know I wanted to but', excuses and cop outs, finding exceptions just won't work. It tells us so very clearly in the Gospels.

Love is an amazing gift, in all its guises, but it is active, it is an experience not to be taken for granted. For us, who call ourselves Christians, we are called to demonstrate that we love, to talk about God's love for everyone, to introduce others to that love. Yes we are all called to do that in different ways, but the message is there for everyone of us, our lives should be devoted to sharing God's love. This is our challenge, the gauntlet that is thrown down for each and everyone of us, let God take over our lives and see where he leads us.

I found a poster on the internet through Touching Lives, its author is unknown but it is a wonderful message for all of us: "When God pushes you to the edge, trust Him fully, because only two things can happen. Either He will catch you when you fall or He will teach you how to fly."

I pray that we will all learn to fly with the Lord and experience with him, who created us and loves us more than we can imagine, the full glory of life with him as our guide, our strength and our comforter.