

Sermon 18th January 2015 2nd Sunday of Epiphany

This is the beginning of the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. If you want to join in these prayers on the web site there are daily resources. We living here in the Vendee cannot help but be aware of the results of divisions between Christians, when Christ's words went unheeded: "Love one another".

The first service for this ecumenical event was in La Roche sur Yon on Friday night, thankfully easier for me to understand than it could have been as I have been working on a bi-lingual service from the same source for our celebration at Puys de Serre next Sunday. There I had the privilege of hearing some French people discussing the terrorist attacks, but couldn't (because my French wasn't up to it, even if I could have got a word in!) disabuse them of the belief that the Koran tells them to cut the throats of all who refuse to convert.

Faith/ Religion leads us humans into committing sin in the name of that religion and worst of all believing we are doing it in God's name. Did Jesus come as the warrior Messiah the Jews were expecting? No. Did he react to violence with violence? No.

If we live according to the Gospel, we will treat other Christians with love, respect and hospitality, and even more we will treat those who are different from us, those who are outside of our culture, those whom others would hate or ignore, those who hate us in the same way.

Is this easy? No. Do I practise what I preach? No, not in the way I would like. Do you?

Eli, was someone else who hadn't lived up to expectations, the expectations of a priestly role, guardian of the shrine. The role was an inherited one and his sons were certainly not preparing themselves for a priestly role. We are also led to believe from Samuel's writing that society in general had lost its way rather. In chapter one, it appears from Eli's reaction to Hannah that he isn't used to people coming to the shrine to pray to the Lord. However his words have a profound effect upon Hannah as she felt the Lord was speaking through him and her life began to change.

This is something else that is so important for us to remember, God uses any of us, all of us, sometimes probably without our knowing to do his will.

Back to Eli, it seems from Samuel's writings that the society of that time had rather lost sight of God. "The word of the Lord was rare in those days, visions

were not widespread.” Our society, or bringing the question down to a more local level, our church community, is it like that? Do we expect to hear the word of the Lord or see visions?

Our God is so big and so powerful but we constrain him with lack of expectation and belief. Our church and our society needs prophets, needs the word of the Lord brought forth, we need to dream dreams and with that let God direct our words and actions, we need to trust him. In Joel 2: we are told “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and young men shall see visions.” It would be a wonderful outworking of God’s will if we could become a culture that expected that from God, that tested each word yet trusted that God was at work. God who wants all of his creation restored to him, to know his name and to return his love. We are here to help in that process and we need all the help we can get, so let us be open to him speaking to us, however he chooses, than and only then, can we fulfil the task he has for us.

Psalm 139 which is set for today tells us of a God who has “searched me out and known me” Nathanael finds this to be true in the reading from John’s gospel. But is promised even greater things ahead, just as Jesus tells us we will do greater things than his because we will have the Holy Spirit upon us.

Jesus, was himself an outsider, “can anything good come out of Nazareth?”, nor did he act in the way others thought he should, but he loved. He showed love for the Samaritan woman at the well, for the unclean woman who touched his cloak, for the lepers and the tax collectors, the mad and the sick. He castigated those whose religion wasn’t about love but was about ritual, rules and status. But he was also merciful and forgiving towards those who repented.

We are reminded in Isaiah (64:8) that “We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are the works of you hand.” And in chapter 56:7 “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”.

And so, in this week of prayer for Christian unity, let us remember that we are all clay formed by the potter who is love, who loves us, and everyone, that our task, with his help, is to show that light to the world, to demonstrate love and peace so that his house can be called a house of prayer for all peoples.