

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – 28<sup>th</sup> August 2011

1. Peter was a slow-learner! Many times Jesus had explained to him that the path to glory was filled with pain and suffering and death. Peter's anguished concern for Jesus was a hindrance to him for it might take his mind away from the focus he knew was right. He was to suffer and die, for only then would he be raised and glorified.
2. Set your mind on divine things, not human things. These words are harsh to Peter because no doubt he was acting out of love for Jesus. But Jesus goes on to explain that true love is to follow Jesus' path of service. Only by giving your life freely, surrendering completely your own desires and living for others, will you truly gain life. Such is the call to his disciples with the reminder that the Son of man, the Messiah, will be the judge of that discipleship when he comes in glory.
3. Well, what are these divine things? Romans 12.9-21 spells out a little of what the Christian life will be like, a life characterized by genuine love, with attitudes and actions which put others first, which mean denying self and giving honour to others – be patient in suffering, contribute to the needs of the saints, extend hospitality to strangers, bless those who persecute you 'associate with the lowly, do not claim to be wiser than you are, look after enemies, overcome evil with good.
4. We know enough about the values held in the Roman Empire in those times to know that this advice is quite revolutionary. Christian values questioned many aspects of society which exhibited huge differences in status between classes, cruel and malicious actions, persecution and violence. Paul's advice contradicts most of the moral standards of the time.
5. Yet, this advice is not outdated today. Examine several of these injunctions and see how it applies to your church today. How are we challenged to change our behaviour both individually and as a christian community.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Year – 7<sup>th</sup> August 2011

1. In the midst of turmoil, it is often hard to think straight, let alone listen for the word of God, or even to pray. You might recount some personal story to illustrate this.
2. Two dramatic stories which speak to us about this. Elijah's life was in danger from the revengeful Jezebel (I Kings 19. 9-18. Read preceding chapters of Kings for reasons) He fled to Mt Horeb where he sought inspiration and courage. He learnt that it is not in the storm or fire that God speaks out but in the silence and stillness of a receptive heart. In this reflective time, he discovered that he did not have to fight the battle alone.
3. The disciples were battered by a storm the whole night. (Matt. 14.22-36) When Jesus came towards them in the storm they didn't recognize him. They were afraid and could not trust him. Peter made an attempt but his fear of the wind overcame his trust. Only when safe in the boat, and the wind had been calmed were they able to see Jesus for who he was. He was with them; they were not alone to face the journey.
4. All of us have times of turmoil in our lives: over finances, about children, fear of death, personal relationships, work etc. We ask, "How am I going to get through this?" Having faith in God will not just take away the problem. Elijah still needed to fight his battle against worship of Baal.. The disciples still needed to complete their journey across the lake. But in each case they knew that God was with them and they could face the future with courage. They could 'get through it' because of him.
5. Faith is linked with hope, an essential Christian attribute. Hope includes trust, confidence, refuge in God. It depends on the resurrection of Christ, for in the resurrection God overcame all evil, even death itself. See Romans 10.9. In the midst of turmoil we cannot hear or see that God is with us or that others are there for us. Perhaps we could think of ourselves with Jesus in the boat, or we could stop cowering in our cave, so that we too can hear the still small voice, or recognize Jesus as God with us.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – 14<sup>th</sup> August 2011

1. Wherever there is a group, there are always others who are excluded. It can be easy for 'insiders' to think that they are special, and not welcoming of 'outsiders'. Give some examples from life: members of clubs, students from different schools, ...
2. The idea of God's salvation being for all nations is found even in the Old Testament. The Jews were specially called, but called to be bearers of the light to other nations, not just for their own salvation. The 'insiders' were not to be exclusive. However, many Jews felt otherwise.
3. Jesus challenged his own cultural situation. In his ministry we see that his salvation is for non-Jews (gentiles) too. Jesus challenged Jewish customary rules about cleanliness which even included people. In Matthew 15: (10-20) 21-28 the Canaanite woman was such a one. Perhaps this passage is meant to show Jesus being ironic, even taunting of the prevailing attitude to 'outsiders'. His words, "I was sent only..." and "It's not fair..." may have been deliberate statements to test the disciples, maybe quoting their own words back to them. Jesus he recognized her faith as genuine and healed her.
4. The early Church struggled with the concept that God's salvation might include gentiles. In Romans 11.13-32 (33-36) Paul uses the metaphor of the grafted tree to remind gentiles of the salvation offered to them, and to reassure the Jews of God's continuing mercy and love for them. We think of this all being in the past, but the same issues are alive today. Take for example, the attitude of some Anglicans towards the Pentecostal Churches— how can they worship that way? Or some attitudes to Christians from third-world countries – how can their faith be like our faith? Or how dare people who don't go to Church speak about knowing God?
5. Jesus' inclusive behaviour is a model of how we should be inclusive. The theme of today challenges us to look at groups within the Church. Is there anything in their behaviour which speaks of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'? How do we behave as a congregation to 'outsiders'? How generous are we with our money to 'outsiders'? Do we prefer to keep our money and our prayers and our service 'inside'?

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – 21<sup>st</sup> August 2011

1. The Son of Man is a title from Daniel 7.13-14 of 'one like a human being' who would come to rule the earth. Jewish scholars speculated about who it could be, and so when Jesus asks, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" his disciples gave him the current thinking on the topic. When he asked, "But who do you say I am?" the penny dropped for Simon Peter – "so it's Jesus!" – and he was able to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the son of the living God, the one born to be king. On this divine revelation, Jesus proclaimed that Simon was Peter (petra), the rock on which the Church would be founded, and pronounced the authority of the church to forgive sins.
2. The metaphor of rock is also found in Isaiah 51.1-6. The Jews were very conscious of their inherited faith as descendants of Abraham. We Christians often speak of our inherited faith too. The faith inherited from the apostles, the Anglican tradition inherited from forebears, even 'she comes from a good Anglican family'. Although it is a wonderful thing to inherit faith, and to be baptized as infants, like, there comes a time when we, like Peter, have to answer that question for ourselves, Who is Jesus? It may be a gradual dawning or a sudden revelation.
3. Paul in Romans 12.1-8 knew that once the truth about Christ is known the Christian begins a new life in Christ. He urges the Christians in Rome to be 'living sacrifices', perfect offerings to God, and open to discerning God's will. He urges them not to think too highly of themselves as individuals, but to see that by God's grace they each have been given gifts which collectively fit them to be the Body of Christ together.
4. Paul's words are particularly apt for us as we endeavour to grow as Ministering Communities, understanding ourselves as the Body of Christ. Every member of the Church has gifts which can be offered for the life and work of the Body. If we proclaim Jesus as Lord, then a natural corollary is to recognize in ourselves the gracious gifts of his Spirit.
5. Every time we meet for the Eucharist, we proclaim that we are the Body of Christ; we profess our faith; and declare we are living sacrifices. Our response to the question, Who do you think that I am?' needs to be made by each of us; and once made, the worshipful response is to offer ourselves as living holy offerings to do the will of God.