

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST YEAR A -26 June 2011

1. Some people are unfortunate enough to suffer from compulsive behaviour. e.g kleptomania, compulsive eating or hand-washing. Something seemingly beyond themselves urges such people to give in. Sin is like that. It pushes and pulls us to behaviour beyond our control. We have a real battle to fight against its power. Even though we know that sinful behaviour is damaging to us and others we can still yield to its compulsive pressure. We can be slaves to sin.
2. Things are not intrinsically evil. Many things we handle every day can be used for good or evil. e.g. money, knife, pen, paint. Similarly people can be instruments of good or evil. Refer to the prayer "Lord make me an instrument of thy peace"
3. We have choice about how we use our bodies our voices, our hands, our minds, our sexuality, our muscles. Paul (Romans 6.19) says that we have a choice whether our 'member' (our bodily parts) are slaves to impurity and iniquity or slaves to righteousness and sanctification. One wonders about the choice Abraham made in Genesis 22.1-14. it was not a choice to kill his son. We see it as a choice to obey God, a choice which God vindicated by saving Isaac from death.
4. In our baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection we have been freed from slavery to sin. We are now 'enslaved to God' (Romans 6. 22). The word 'slavery' still sounds restrictive but think of it like this: we often today talk of 'outcomes'; the outcome of slavery to sin is death; the outcome of slavery to God is sanctification or holiness. This does not mean that sin will not tempt us, pulling us in directions that Christ would not have us take. But if we trust in Christ and put our lives, our wills, our minds in his hands then he can guide us in right ways.
5. If we are enslaved to God we will feel a strong pull to be an instrument of God's reign. Instead of being fraught with fear and self-absorbed with our own wants and desires, we will be more open to the needs of others and to the commands of Christ. We will be open to good; will look for good in others; we will be generous, giving, loving and serving, speaking the truth with courage. 'Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.'

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A - 5th June 2011

1. Acts 1 pictures a divine mystery with a cloud and angelic figures. No matter what actually happened, the significance is that Jesus is no longer confined to Galilee; his power will extend to the ends of the earth! For the disciples it was the climax of their understanding of Jesus: "Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour." (AHB 441). For Luke it was the dramatic beginning of his second gospel, the gospel of the ascended Jesus, whose Spirit was living in the apostles.
2. Perhaps the Ascension is just as much something that happened to the disciples as happened to Jesus. They understood him in a new light, as Lord of all. Their new understanding gave them courage to obey and gather as a loyal community. for the Spirit's power. (Acts 1.12-26).
3. In Jesus' prayer of consecration before his trial and death, he speaks of his glory, his authority over all people to give them eternal life i.e. to know the only true God through himself. His glory comes from giving of himself. (John 17.1-11) . During his lifetime, in this Gospel of John and in the other three, we see disciples who did not fully comprehend that this man Jesus was the Son of God. The comprehension of the truth of Jesus' divine authority came full afterwards, after his resurrection. One way of looking at the ascension is to see it as the recognition by the followers of Jesus of just who he was and his stature as Lord of all. How better to express it than in the vision of Christ ascending to the heavens, Lord of all, Lord above all, Lord over all.
4. Look at how the knowledge that he would share Christ's glory inspired Peter. (1Peter 5)-sharing in the glory to be revealed, winning the crown of glory when he appears, called to his eternal glory in Christ. Peter's response and the advice he gave the elders is one of humility and obedience.
5. What difference does it make to our lives if we believe Jesus is Lord of all? Such faith affects the way we worship, our ministry, stewardship of money and time, obedience of Christ's commands to love God and neighbour as self, the way we behave in the workplace, even our political decisions, for we place God first and ask him what he wants of us and we seek to obey him in all we do.

DAY OF PENTECOST YEAR A - 12th June 2011

1. Today we celebrate Pentecost or the Feast of the Holy Spirit, the celebration of the showing forth of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the first disciples. Acts 2.1-21 powerfully shows the Spirit-filled disciples so filled with the power of the Spirit that they could communicate their faith in a way that people from all over the known world could understand it. Peter, the one who lacked nerve to own Christ on the night of his death, who had cowered behind closed doors in the days immediately following the resurrection, now is emboldened to speak powerfully of his experience and his belief.

2. 'Luke's second gospel' the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is a testimony to the power of the Spirit in the lives of those early disciples. In a way that book has never been completed. The Holy Spirit is still active in the world and in the Church today if we open ourselves to see his works and to be agents through whom he works.

3. Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 37. 1-14) too is powerful to remind us of the power of the Spirit. Sometimes our lives or our congregations can seem lifeless, a heap of old bones. "We're old and tired", "we used to do that but don't any more", "all we can do is maintain the church", "we need to keep the doors of the church open" and "we can't do anything about it" are all "old bones" statements. Yet if we are to live as Resurrection people we need to get over our fear, as Peter and the others did, and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to put breath in us so that we may live: live to speak of our own experience of Christ, live to speak in the language of the people who need to hear, live to serve our neighbours, live to give honour and glory and praise to God.

4. We have Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (John 15.26-27, 16.4b-15) if we but open ourselves to let him live in us.

TRINITY SUNDAY YEAR A - 19th June 2011

1. Christians are Trinitarians, that is, we believe in One God who is Father, Son and Spirit. In the Nicene Creed we find the doctrine in several lines— The Son is 'of one being with the Father', the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son'. In The Gloria we say it at the end with 'you alone are the most High Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father'. The mystery of God has been explained in many ways and yet is inexplicable. By experience, we know God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, so intimately that we call him Father, Son and Spirit. Because of the relationship we have with God, a relationship with all three dimensions, we believe in God as three in one and one in three,

2. We are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and we understand that in our baptism we become children of God, members of Christ and heirs of the kingdom of God (APBA p. 60). Paul expresses this fully in Romans 8.12-17 where he makes these points

- If you commit your life to Christ then your outlook changes. You come under the influence of the power of God and old ways are put aside. Death is past when life in the Spirit begins.
- We become God's children not his slaves, so there is no place for fear in the relationship, only intimacy and love. When we feel called to name God, 'Father', the Spirit is moving us to bear witness to this intimacy.
- As 'adopted children', we share with Christ in his suffering, but with the promise of sharing his glory.

3. As children of God and in the power of the Spirit we are called to be Christ-like in our lives, truly human, yet acting as he did to be compassionate and holy, loving God and our neighbours. The Trinity is not just a doctrine, but for us a way of being too as we act out our lives as children of God, following the example of Christ who lives in us by the Holy Spirit.