

**Sentence**

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them

*1 John 4:16*

**Collect**

Saving God, Who called Your Church to witness that You were in Christ reconciling the world to Yourself; help us so to proclaim the Good News of Your love, that all who hear it may be reconciled to You, and us to each other, through Him Who died and rose again, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**FIRST LESSON**

**Acts 11: 1 – 18**

**Psalm**

**148**

**Epistle**

**Revelation 21: 1 –6**

**GOSPEL**

**John 13: 31 – 35**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS****First Lesson**

One of my convictions – illustrated loud and clear in this passage – is that the Resurrection of Jesus is not simply something to be believed, but rather is something to be acted upon. In fact, if you tie together this reading and the Gospel that comment becomes rather clearer.

A huge problem for the Infant Church, as referred to earlier, was the fact that Gentile people seemed to be ‘coming out of the woodwork,’ and wanting to be part of the group. All Jewish tradition and expectation closed off any real possibility of this happening. When anyone had such a deep-seated blockade against any such thing happening, it took an enormous ‘sea-change’ to overcome the hang-up. (Remember back to the stress and strain many of us experienced when the ordination of women was on the agenda.) Oddly enough, the answer to that Gentile inclusion is reiterated constantly through the OT prophets and yet it never seemed to hit air space. Notice how often bigotry and bias do not have the solid basis that many of its adherents would claim!

It was a matter of circumstance and event that forced the hands of the Apostles, but even they, too, had their quite embittered critics. (Anyone who points in a new direction will encounter such resistance.) So poor old Peter had to answer to the hierarchy. Not a nice experience. However, there was the positive response from the Jerusalem leaders<sup>1</sup> - as well there might be.

Very often the person of conviction needs to hang in there until the rest of the world catches up.

**Psalm**

*On the other hand, this psalm seems to underline the unchanging nature of God and theology. Never get hoist on your own petard. While God never changes, it has to be said that unless our understanding and perception of Him moves ahead, we remain stranded in a distant and remote time warp which is of no use to others around us*

**For the Epistle.**

It may come as some surprise that this passage I have used often in the funeral service. Here in this wonderful and quite graphic vision of John is encapsulated both the present experience and ultimate goal of the Faith: God is with us as our God.

This becomes something of a conundrum for some, as life these days (any days) tends to be shot through with all sorts of evidence to the contrary. There is no doubt of the fact that life can be totally unfair, and sometimes is really quite a bugger. But John’s conviction (and ours if we keep our eyes open) was that God is right there in the conundrum. Was not Jesus crucified in the real world?

So here is a passage enormously encouraging to a people under some stress, whether that be personally, individually or corporately. Hang in there, John is saying, for the Cross and Resurrection lie at the very root and branch of life.

**Gospel**

<sup>1</sup> Is it not odd to see Peter called to account. A decade or two later and the boot would be on the other foot!

Allow yourself to be surprised at this comment of Jesus, for John records this as occurring just after Judas had gone out to betray Him. In other words, at the very point at which Jesus was 'betrayed and given into the hands of sinful men,' He regards Himself at being glorified. Now, since we tend to have a strange and somewhat jaundiced view of what it means to be 'glorified,' it may help to have some explanation. If and when we manage to glorify God, it is not done with singing or praying or being totally religious. We manage to glorify God if ever and when ever our actions or attitudes somehow reveal God to those around us. In other words, if ever we reflect the character of our Father, then He is glorified. **He is seen – even if only in a small way – for Who and What He is.**

In other words, Jesus is being glorified – as is His Father – when what was happening somehow illustrated and conveyed something of the Divine nature. That, of course, had to do with the coming Cross, or more particularly, with the whole process of **reconciliation**. We would have expected some huge retribution on Judas, would we not? And what do we have here? .....Neither Jesus nor John spell it all out; you are expected to ponder the implications. In other words, observe and *think*.

## NOTES FOR A SERMON

So we are still in the Easter Season – and it continues to be obvious that the thinking and considering process must forge ahead. No chance for relapse or leisure.

One of the striking divergence points between those who are practising Christians and those who claim not to be, is the capacity of Christian and Church to operate in contradistinction to what is clearly Gospel. Whenever Christians do or say things that do not connect with Gospel, then the glorifying turns to denigration. *And it is we who bring that about.*

Over the past few years when the matter of terrorism has been at the forefront, so much lousy stuff has been laid at the feet of Muslims and their Faith. However, not only must we be aware of the faith-differences between Muslim and Christian, but we also need to be very much aware of the reality that more than most Muslims are appalled by the whole ugly business. Frankly, there is very little room for Christians to stick their noses in the air, for past Christian history is bedevilled by ugly and horrific violence against anyone who was disagreed with. We look back in horror at that past, and attempt to disown it. All we can ever do is to try and live it down. And that is not done by finding some other grounds of putting others down.

We may well try and use the argument that we are only human, to sidestep the criticism but that will cut even less ice. The real point is that when we begin to catch sight of the real issues of the Faith and of life, we see that we would have to step right outside what are acceptable Christian values to 'miss the mark.' Human we may be, but we do have a Man to follow.

That Gospel passage today really does land a bomb in our laps. Had any of us been Jesus in that Last Supper situation, had been aware of the treachery of Judas and the pathetic support of the other Eleven, we may well have spat the dummy, and have taken some very severe remedy against the traitor. And if we had done that, we would have mucked up the entire business, and would have ensured that there was no Good News, perhaps for ever. For you see, that normal (?) human reaction of revenge would have still been seen as the only way to go. Thank God that Jesus was prepared to think and act well outside of the square.

When, in Scripture or liturgy, reference is made to the fact that Jesus destroyed evil, we need a change of aspect. What that tends to mean for us is 'that Jesus destroyed the perpetrator.' Had Jesus done that, the evil He encountered would only have been multiplied by whatever retaliation He took. No reduction or removal of evil there.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the method (if you like to call it that) by which Jesus destroyed evil, was purely and simply to **show it up for what it is**.

Take that a step or two further, and realize that evil is destroyed for you when you can see it for what it is and choose to reject it. Not only are you strengthened by the valuable choice you make, but it also goes towards the building of your character. We are, after all, what we do.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges of following Christ is precisely this matter of not just talking the talk but of walking the walk. If love is what the world needs, it will always need to see and experience it at the hands of human beings like us.

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<sup>2</sup> That view of the Atonement which sees Jesus taking our punishment upon Himself retains that terribly human business of revenge and retaliation as an aspect of God's nature, and that is blasphemous. If God had intended to operate that way, the story of Cross and reconciliation would have been very different indeed, and the intended reconciliation would have been rendered impossible!

**Sentence**

‘Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you,’ says the Lord. ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.’  
*John 14:27*

**Collect**

Eternal God, Whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life; grant that we may walk in His way, rejoice in His truth, and share His risen life, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever.

**Amen**

**FIRST LESSON**

**Acts 16:9 – 15**

**PSALM**

**67**

**FOR THE EPISTLE**

**Revelation 21:10 to 22 – 22:5**

**GOSPEL**

**John 5: 1 – 9**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS .....**

**First Lesson**

‘Peace’ seems to be a theme for this week’s readings, and I wondered quite where it is visible in those selections. The answer is somewhat interesting to me.

You will be quite familiar with the story of Lydia, yet as I read it yet again, the thought struck me that here we have a remarkably uncomplicated communication between Paul and that interesting lady. Compare that with the almost normal and utterly tentative conversation you may have with a stranger today, and it is all hedged about with defence and self-protection. I find I have to explain, on meeting someone, that I have no hidden agenda nor have I some potential to damage the interlocutor. Peace, in other words. In this conversation between two people who had never previously met, and yet because of the attitude and faith of each, there was the connection of trust and service. *Pretty important stuff, seems to me.*

**Psalm**

Blow me down, is not the psalm singing the same song? Here the author is rejoicing in the fact that when God is seen to be God, then you are my brother or sister, uncomplicated, and that way life can move on unhindered by tensions and hatreds. Peace again, in somewhat the same terms.

**For the Epistle**

Pardon me, but I have a great affinity with John and Revelation, for reasons you may well have encountered ere this.<sup>3</sup> (In theory, this passage was to have been shortened, but I have been cheeky enough to have the whole lot. ) What is John saying? That regardless of the circumstances in which you find yourself now, you can be sure that wrongs will be righted finally, and truth come to the fore again. This whole book is a stunning example of enormous encouragement, right in the middle of crisis and disaster. Peace once again. And resurrection, if you think it through!

**GOSPEL**

And into this ‘vale of sorrows’ came Jesus, alongside a bloke who had been in strife for what would have had to have been the majority of his life. Thirty-eight years was well above the average lifespan of the time.<sup>4</sup> One is left feeling that either this guy has outlived all his friends and family, or perhaps was not the happiest of chappies so even helpful people deserted him. Another possibility is that this was a self-pitying sort of bloke whom no one could cope with ..... except Jesus. Peace would have come, one imagines, from the point when someone else took any notice of the patient. The outcome was both wonderful, and yet a great challenge to the man: no longer could he claim disabled status: **he would have to learn to stand on his own two feet.**

**Notes for a sermon**

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<sup>3</sup> John is not gazing into some distant future, but pointing people of his own day towards solid and sensible responses to life.

<sup>4</sup> 25 was the average in the Roman Empire. Pretty poor range, eh!

Of all the words in our vocabularies, 'peace' may well be one of the most used and abused. Peace, for a lot of people, would be little more than absence of war. That is a negative definition if ever I saw one. So the real question is what do we mean by peace?

For some it is a matter of the atmosphere really necessary for us to get on with life and living. It offers the chance of a far more positive future than simply trying our darnedest to survive. For others, I suspect, it is a matter of having everything done for us, for all the good things to fall into our lap, so that we can have whatever we want. And when we want it. But none of today's readings offer any such simplistic outcome. It may be most helpful to begin at the end – today's Gospel.

One cannot imagine that in Jesus' day they were without the sorts of people often encountered these days. In 45 years of ministry, I have encountered so many people in need or some sort or another, and yet very few who even considered the possibility that they had their answers within themselves. The vast majority expected that God, or the Church, or the clergy were there to solve all their problems at no cost to themselves. Few of us Christians could ever be party to such a narrow path.

That quite old person at the Sheep Gate pool could have been a case in point. Can you even begin to imagine having spent the last umpty years – day by endless day, except perhaps the Sabbaths – being taken to or struggling one's way towards the Pool in the obviously vain hope of being able to drop in at the required time? Is this the work of a person of absolutely immense patience, or is it the reaction of someone quite despairing? Perhaps he may well have been somewhere in the middle. Call me cynic if you like, but I find it fascinating that – every now and then, where necessary one assumes – Jesus asked the fairly obvious question. 'Do you want to be healed?' In one way it is a silly question to ask; from another standpoint, it is quite essential.

Many moons ago, I had lots to do with a parishioner who, it has to be said, **enjoyed** bad health. She was a real Mona. It was a risky business to ask how she was, because you would get the entire picture. Every symptom and problem was described in minute detail. You have encountered such people surely. So Jesus' question would have been asked of her. And it is an important issue. Not everyone wants to be healed.

There is a significant issue here. Jesus was not some sort of do-gooder who gained some sort of perverse satisfaction from interfering on others' lives. Here was no ego-trip on His part, but a genuine concern for people to reach towards their potential. That always requires considerable honesty and commitment on everyone's part. It is no imposition of largesse, it is a sharing of the load and a being totally honest. The fact that this poor long-term cripple was prepared to commit to the huge difference made the difference between him remaining as a daily visitor to that Pool, or being a rather more useful member of society.

Does not all this present the underlying requirement for any such progress? There can be little room for ego, and lots of room for being prepared to stick one's neck out. It is not some exercise in self-preservation, but an opportunity to be very much more involved with all sorts of people. And it is out of such a move and development that peace can come.

*So often over past years, I have been bullied by people of all sorts, demanding 'help' regardless of the reality of their stories. 'You are supposed to trust me!' has been thrown back at me, as has been all manner of complaints and challenges. My fairly constant response has been to say that when they are fair dinkum with me, I will respond likewise. Only fair dinkum-ness makes co-existence possible.*

In today's world, where 'dog eat dog' tends to be the catchcry and motive for so many, there is small room for being fair-dinkum and honest. Someone might get the upper hand over you, they say. But when we come back to today's readings, to be recalled to the fact that God is God, and that none of the ancient verities will stay submerged for long, one becomes far more confident about the fact that peace comes ONLY through the recognition of God. If that sounds hard, then re-express it in terms of when we operate with truth and integrity with each other, then and only then progress is possible.

The harsh thing about all this is, that we live in a world that has tended to turn its back on God, and we live in the crunch of it all. It is not the best of all possible lives by any means, But ours is the task of living lives of patience and truth, aware of the fact that only this way can any person, community, country or culture move forward. And that will always be the case.

**Sentence**

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

*Acts 16:31*

**Collect**

Almighty God, Whose blessed Son prayed for His disciples that they may be one, as You and the Father are one, grant that Your Church, being bound together in love and obedience to You, may be united in one body by the same Spirit, that the world may believe in Him Whom You have sent, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

**FIRST LESSON**

**Acts 16:16-34**

**Psalm**

**97**

**EPISTLE**

**Revelation 22:12 – 22**

**GOSPEL**

**John 17: 20 – 26**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS**

As we reach towards the end of the Easter Season, the question seems to arise as to why we exist and what is our role. It would have been the focal question to the Eleven as they tried to cope with the situation when the Lord was not right there with them to answer their tremulous questions.

It is a fascinating situation to be in, challenging question to raise, and important answers to find.

**First Lesson.**

This has always been an appealing story, especially for Sunday School kids. While it has all the excitement of earthquakes and miracles, (or is that simply coincidence, ..... or is that another way of saying the same thing?) but on top of that is that remarkable integrity on the part of Paul to stay put even when the escape route was open. Surely the impact on the gaoler stemmed from just that. Had Paul fled, the jailer's life was already forfeit. So not only was the life of the captor spared, but a huge new future lay open in front of *him*.

**Psalm**

OK, so the psalmists can be very wordy, like the 19<sup>th</sup> Century novelists, but see through the wordiness to the power of what is being said. One of the solid reasons we are able to rejoice in God is because all that He stands for remains totally unshaken in a singularly unstable world. Thank God that something is certain!

**For the Epistle**

*It is worth noting that there are not many commentators who accept the paragraph warning about alterations to the book actually came from the pen of John. In fact, the implied threat runs quite contrary to the esprit of the rest of the book.*

Here, as a sort of overview of the Gospel, John makes clear both the availability of the Faith, the accessibility of it, and the fact that there are no 'high jumps' anyone needs to take before being part of the New Community. Mind you, those vivid references to perverts *et al* have less to do with so much sexual perversion that we encounter today than it has to do with those who chase false gods, idols and isms. The horror with which the author deals with such people has more to do with the fact that people are lead away from the truth, than anything else. In Scripture 'adultery' has more to do with 'awhoring after other gods that are not gods' – although the Bible does not accept literal adultery either.

**Gospel**

I do not know whether what follows will be a shock or a help!

If you ask what is all this 'being one' all about, it tends to be expressed in terms of spiritual – and therefore indefinable – stuff, rather than what would really get the world believing. Mind you, we Christians are pretty poor exponents even of that spiritual variety, as we attempt to explain away the clear and obvious lack of unity between denominations and individuals. Unity, as Anglicans discovered centuries ago, has no connection with uniformity. That is a very dull alternative, and reduces everyone to the lowest common denominator.

For 'unity,' read 'reconciliation' and you have a remarkably different picture that offers far greater impact. I am able to be reconciled (made one with) to you without being some sort of mirror image, or clone. And reconciliation means that we can have arms around each other, even if disagreeing about something, and so we are still able to learn from each other.

Just ponder a moment what life would be like for *everyone* if the reconciliatory aspects of the Gospel were there for all to embrace! Do not ever forget that this is really what so much of the Gospel is about!

## NOTES FOR A SERMON

It was many moons ago now, at the tail end of a Confirmation preparation series with young people, and we had gone on a camp up in the hills. On the Sunday morning, at breakfast, we had a sort of informal Eucharist, using orange juice and biscuits. I had warned a couple of the leaders that this is what we would do, but not why! Taking the part of Jesus in that 'supper,' I decided to depart following the sharing of the elements, and ask those who remained to work out where they – as Christians – had to go from here.

Hardly had I left the room, that one of the Pastoral Assistants, a lovely and thoughtful man, came chasing after me. 'What are we supposed to do?' he asked me. 'You didn't tell us!' He was almost scared. Before I answered, daylight dawned for Derek, as he realised that I was doing to that group somewhat the same as Jesus did to the Eleven.

So, what is the Gospel really about; what is the role of the Church; what are we supposed to be doing? This is surely the most significant question to be asking at this time of the year, twixt Ascension and Pentecost. Ask many Christian people and pastors, and it has to do with getting people to heaven. Ask others and it has to do with going to Church and putting your money on the plate. However, mostly it has to do with paying a priest to do whatever it is that 'Church' is supposed to do. *And it was that expectation that led Derek to panic somewhat that Sunday morning at Pichi Richi.* And there lies much of the reason that the Church seems to have lost touch with the majority of people in our particular part of the world.

So why is it that Jesus managed to get alongside people, and we find it difficult if not impossible?

Part of the reason, it seems to my small mind, is that we have done what ancient Jewry did much of the time, and perhaps even continues to do. It had turned a stunning way of life and perception of it into a religion that reduced everything to rules and regulations. That is one of the very issues that Jesus attempted to correct. Neither Judaism nor Christianity, it seems to me, has to do with 'religion,' but rather faces the huge human issues with an response that is remarkably significant.

From the earliest parts of Scripture, those Creation Stories that seem to amuse or bemuse many people, the old Hebrews were asking the question about 'who are we and why are we here?' and 'why are things so often in a mess?' The fact that these old explorations and lessons are in story form tend to lead people to assume some sort of naïveté. Naïve they are not.

TO cut a long story short, the entire faith, Hebrew and Christian, offers to all human beings a path to reconciliation. A chance to deal with all that drives people apart. A chance to live a rather fuller, more significant life. And that is what this business from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer is all about. It is not about some sort of mysticism that takes us out of this world. It is rather far more down-to-earth, even if it has to do with repentance and forgiveness, reconciliation and connectedness. And because we concentrate on 'religion' and who is right, the original point and purpose is sidelined.

Hopefully, this may open some sort of channels for you. Also hopefully, it may also open some channels for all sorts of other people. But it is not a matter of believing something incredible, but a matter of following in a direction that is both profoundly involving and profoundly life-changing here and now.

**Sentence**

God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, Who has been given to us.

*Romans 5:5*

**Collect**

O God, Who taught the hearts of Your faithful people by sending to them the light of Your Holy Spirit; grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through the merits of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

**Old Testament Lesson**

**Genesis 11: 1 – 9**

**PSALM**

**104: 26 – 36**

**FOR THE EPISTLE**

**Acts 2: 1 – 11**

**GOSPEL**

**John 14: 8 – 18**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS**

*You may be a little sick of the constant references to reconciliation and unity, but that tends to be because it is something we pay lip service to, but rarely get further than that. As a consequence, an alternative reading set for today has been offered, to underline the basic human issue.*

**Old Testament Lesson**

It was very many years ago<sup>5</sup> when the connection between Genesis 11 and Acts 2 was brought to my attention, but I still find people who are totally unaware of the matter. Mention was made in last week's notes that the main issues of Judaism and Christianity have to do with resolving current relationship issues for all humanity, and – in spite of all sorts of other emphases, this is what Pentecost is all about.

This ancient tale of the Tower of Babel<sup>6</sup> is not something to be 'believed' but understood. Visit this tale imaginatively, and see what is being said. It is basically a matter that when humans get so impressed with their own skills, capacities and importance, that the real issues of life become blurred and then forgotten. If I can build a skyscraper larger than yours, then my phallic symbol makes me more important than you. And we part one from another, often on fairly bitter grounds. The language 'stuff up' pointed to here, whilst a difficulty to people of all ages and places, is used as illustration of the way we manage to divide ourselves, usually parting company at a very basic level. *Years ago, our daughter was convinced that a couple of foreign girls at her School were deliberately talking others down when they reverted to their native language.*

So language is here used as a significant illustration of the fact that we humans part ourselves from each other, for whatever reason, and underlines the pain and isolation that then ensues.

**Psalm**

If there is one thing with which we humans find difficulty, it is people and patterns and all sorts of things outside of our (current) experience. If someone is different, we find something to fear about them. Whether the matter is true or not is hardly an issue.

Here the Psalmist has the wit and wisdom to rejoice in the wide variations to be found in nature and in life. Differences do not need to be a threat: they can be really quite interesting and exciting. And as the author indicates simply in verses 29 and 30, everyone, human and otherwise, has similar needs. And all have similar experience of life and death. It is a stunningly simple and accurate observation.

**For the Epistle**

This story of the first Christian Pentecost is rather more interesting than is given credit really.

<sup>5</sup> Actually it is jolly nearly 50 years!

<sup>6</sup> The Greek equivalent of 'Babel' is 'barbar' the sound made by people whose language you do not understand. Hence, such people were labelled as 'barbarian.'

On the one hand there is the impact of the reversal of Babel. It is a God-given reversal, not something that we humans have accomplished. Indeed, we tend to be afraid to head in the direction that Pentecost points! Incidentally, this speaking in languages that those listening know and understood, has nothing to do with that phenomenon of ‘speaking in tongues.’ (Glossolalia).

In Christ, and through the Spirit, all the old divisions and hatreds can be done away. For some this is threatening; but it should be welcomed far more.

That quotation of Peter’s from Joel should have far more air-space than it tends to receive. While we tend to look for or at ‘miracle,’ we should be looking at the widening and even exciting directions that the Spirit of God is likely to put in front of us. This is never for our own benefit – even less ‘thrill’ – but rather for the benefit of those around us.

## **GOSPEL**

The Spirit of truth. That should be enough to put us all on some sort of guard as we need to realize again that this quality, truth, is one of the most abused aspects of life as we experience it. I doubt if that is the reason that Philip posed his unexpected question, but it does underline the fact that – very often – the things we seem to long for, tend to be closer and even more mundane than we expect or anticipate.

If I wonder what God is like, I tend to focus on factors like His almighty power. That could be useful as some support for me. But the greater and more important aspects are His characteristics, and that underlines why there had to be the Incarnation: I can understand another human being far better than some series of theological or scientific statements. However, once I catch sight of the nature of Jesus, and of His Father, then I am faced with the challenge of reflecting those characteristics in my relationships with others. That is not so easy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

## **NOTES FOR A SERMON**

A rose by any other name, the old saying goes, smells just as sweet. And whilst we may go along with that, in theory, our practice tends to be somewhat less expansive. I ask you to come along with me on a journey this morning, it may be something of a challenge, or it may be some sort of release.

It may come as some surprise that the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel features in this Year C set of Pentecost readings, but there is excellent and mind-boggling reasons for it to be there. For those ancient sagas are there, not for us to struggle to believe, but for us to espy what the ancients were trying to convey.

All those Creation Stories are there because the old Hebrews spent time observing life and people and their history, wondering quite what life is all about. As they observed, they looked at all peoples with whom they came into contact, pondering the differences and the results of them. They were convinced, it seems, that if they were going to find answers to all of life, they had to account for others’ experiences also. One of the divisive factors of life, they saw to be languages, and the difficulty of understanding each other. Add to that the factor of pride and sense of superiority widen the gulfs, and you can see where that all leads. Even a daughter of mine was convinced that Japanese scholars at her High School spent time talking about the Aussie kids and poking fun. It was a highly unlikely scenario, but she was convinced otherwise.

Now line that up with the Acts 2 story, and what have you here? The reversal, so to speak, of Babel. Instead of division and alienation, togetherness and fellowship. It is a simple and straightforward illustration, and it has to be taken seriously. But it does raise an issue that may be threatening to some.

Much of modern Christianity sees the rest of the world as totally outside the purview and interest of God. And that is a departure from the Biblical Faith from Abraham on. Yes, it is – go back to the promise to Abraham, to Moses, and so on. What Pentecost is making quite clear is that all humans have the gift of the Holy Spirit, and do not have to look too far to ponder where the truth lies, in questions of relationships, in questions of morality, in questions of matters human. And if this is so, then it calls for a sea-change in vision for lots of Christians.

These two interesting things emerge. First, that truth is not far from any of us, if we dare take the time and honesty to ponder; and second, that because this is so, I am not in any position to stand in superiority over anyone. We are in this together, and if I am honest enough, and humble enough, I can learn from fellow humans. That does not mean that all I say and do is ‘spot on:’ nor is the other person’s view and thoughts. But we can ponder together. And learn together.

I have long been under the conviction that this business of being Christian is not something static and staid. I have long left behind creeds and tenets and dogma, although they can still be helpful as guides and as anchors. On the other hand, I do find that being Christian is very much a matter of pilgrimage, of growing, of searching and discovering, and of not being afraid of making mistakes along the way.

As today's Gospel indicates, even the most dedicated of disciples can be afflicted with tunnel vision. Poor old Philip may well have felt a fool as Jesus answered his question. Mind you, it often takes the person brave enough to ask what everyone wants answered, and while that one may feel foolish, the rest feel quite relieved. The point I make is simply that the answer to Philip's question was right there in front of his very face, but his own tunnel vision limited what he understood. If you want to know Who God is like, look at Jesus. The whole point in the Incarnation was to make things far clearer for mere humans, because we can understand a person better than we can understand a theory or proposition.

So, after all the kerfuffle, what difference does Pentecost make? It is saying to us that the Spirit of God is closer to you – and everyone else – than had ever been imagined. God does not isolate Himself from anyone at all. If there is isolation, then guess who has done it!

In fact, I find it somewhat challenging on occasion when, confronted with a decision to make or a choice to decide, I am rather painfully aware that sense and honesty will take me in a direction *other* than that which I may well prefer. And while nothing or No one stands in the way of my choice, I am quite aware of where sense lies. And so does everyone, if the truth is known.

That is the stunning story of Pentecost. This is the stunning story of the Faith! It all has to do with being offered directions and values that enhance life and relationships and everything else. I find it ironic, or should that read *stupid* that so many people turn their backs on enhancement of life. The Lord must weep tears of blood over the folly of us humans.