

ONE WORLD, ONE MISSION

PREACHER : The Ven Peter Lock, Archdeacon

Sunday, July 19th 2009

Trinity 6

2 Sam 7.1-14a; Eph 2.1-11; Mark 6.30-34,53-end

10.30am

Rochester Cathedral

40 years ago the astronauts took off for one of the most risky journeys – the first exploration outside this earth's environment to the moon. From the pictures they sent back to earth they enabled us to see our planet for the first time from another body and declared what a beautiful sight it was. But boy - were they secretly glad when they came down to earth and were back home.

I heard the story about a business man who used to give very generously to his local church, although he never attended services there. The Vicar eventually went round to see him to thank for his generosity but also to invite him to a service or at and to tease out from him he gave so generously but never came.

'So why do you give so generously?'

'Well,' said the businessman, 'I travel the world and am away a lot, and when I come down the road and see the church spire I know I'm home'.

Here are two stories from very different experiences and yet with one thing in common: the appreciation of home – of feeling at home, of having a place to lay your head at night. It adds stability to a person's life and probably answers a very basic human instinct – the need to return to somewhere which is yours.

In a sense there is this theme running through our passages of scripture today. In the OT David realises that he has built a house for himself, and no doubt it would have been a grand place for those days; and so he thinks the time for the people of Israel finally to settle as their nomadic wanderings has long gone, and now there was the opportunity to bring the people together under one roof, so to speak, and become a kingdom, a state, a people to be reckoned with. A home.

And then David realises that whilst *he* has a grandiose home the God whom he worships and follows is not celebrated in any way that is permanent. There is a tent and a tabernacle which they have carried around with them but this is no longer appropriate at the stage when Israel is settled. So there must be a temple for people to come and worship and the ark finally find its resting place too. It's as if David has a flight of conscience: for if he's living in something rather special so too should God. But the conversation rather turns on David and he has to hear that it won't be him who builds the house. The leaders of Israel as soon as they begin to get the buzz of leadership and enjoy the power are often brought to earth. In an earlier generation Moses had to face the same sort of thing when he realised it would not be him who finally leads the people into the promised land. It would be someone else.

They both had to learn that it is God's people not theirs and it is God's earth not theirs.

In the epistle to the Ephesians we read of the coming together of Jew and Gentile. This was revolutionary stuff from St Paul:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also member of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself the cornerstone.¹

It doesn't quite impact with us today as it would have then. But for me it's this sort of biblical passage which I believe is at the heart of us talking about one world and a common humanity which despite our diversities and different cultures we need to see under God to be at one. God's desire is to unite people in Jesus Christ: and to unite them all in him and under him as a common humanity. Indeed I

¹ Ephesians 2. 19

think this concept has been present throughout the OT even expressed in their care for the aliens amongst them because the people of Israel too were aliens in a foreign land as they were constantly being reminded.

Our true home is actually in the presence of God. Any temple (as in the OT) or church is but a reflection of the heart's desire to be with God. And whilst that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to have a building, those buildings which do express that presence also helps us to come close to God and even enter into his presence. Isn't that what our cathedrals and parish churches are about?

However, in the real world that sort of permanence can only be made when there is also a stability of nationhood and politics, where peace reigns within and without a nation. I came across the staggering figures that there are according to the Refugee International agency, 23 million displaced persons in the world: that is, those who in their own country cannot find a home because of internal conflicts in their own homelands. It's a figure that doesn't include those who are aliens in other countries: this is just those who within their own country haven't got a home. This is an appalling situation and one which reflects something of our inability to live together as a common humanity and take responsibility for our neighbours and their rights. Nor can we ignore the fact that some of the causes of their plight is through people who would claim to be religious and follow a religion.²

I don't think I am stretching those biblical passages to fit a particular political concept. For me it's the same as seeing all human beings made in the image of God. God's love is not just for a few but for all. His nature can be understood by all *because* we have his nature, although we are a fallen people. His presence and grace is for all so that we might become as St Paul says: citizens, a holy temple, a dwelling place for God. What a challenge and what a thought – aliens and strangers becoming citizens: Jew and Gentile together!

That is a mission worth sending people on – which is exactly what Jesus did and where we join the gospel reading for this morning. He had commissioned them and sent them out in pairs to heal the sick and cast out the demons.³ In between the start of that mission and their return comes the dreadful news of the execution of John the Baptist: a warning that the good news will not always be heard with receptive ears.

So Jesus welcomes the missionaries back with the lovely words: *Come with me, by yourselves, to a remote place and rest a little.* The RSV says a deserted place. Imagine Jesus saying this to the returning astronauts: and their response might be: 'You want to see the desert we've just been to!' That might also be the words of the returning disciples – I wonder what stories they had to tell.

So we get the hint that actually the disciples' true resting place is with Jesus himself. They were at home with him: in a deserted place.

So what might we take with us from these passages?

1. The displaced person, the refugee and even migrant workers are part of our common humanity and under God have a right to have somewhere to call home, a place which is permanent and peaceful. Their plight is an utter disgrace in God's world.
2. Our churches and cathedrals should, more and more reflect the presence and peace of God as well as his challenge to us all to become more like him in his love, grace, care and compassion which is most deeply seen and revealed in Jesus Christ.
3. Our hearts too are a home for God and indeed, as in St Augustine's prayer, are restless till they find their home in him. Which is why we should never be afraid to respond to his call to come away with him and find that the remote or deserted place may just be the place for rest so that we might re-engage with God's work. For it's his mission and it's his world. It's his home.

² Refugees International reports:

There are 23 million conflict-induced internally displaced people in the world, people who have been forced from their homes but are unable to cross an international border and receive protection as refugees. Despite the fact that there are twice as many internally displaced people as refugees, the international response to internal displacement continues to be disorganized and under-funded. The internally displaced lack formal legal protection and no single agency is dedicated to alleviating their plight.

³ Mark 6.7