

A sense of presence

24 1 16

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power.

Our text for today may be found in today's gospel, Luke quoting the prophet Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.' (Lk 4 v18)

How attentive are you in church on a normal Sunday morning ? Do you listen to the readings, follow the sermon and the service with understanding, enthusiasm and devotion ? I love this morning's reading from the Nehemiah, an account of worship in Jerusalem at the site of the Temple when the people of Israel had returned from their exile in Babylon. All the people were 'attentive' despite the fact that the service lasted from early morning till midday – a bit longer than one of ours ! And the people 'wept' when they heard the word of the Lord, when they understood what was being said and when they realised just how far short of the mark they fell.

The challenge of today's readings for me is the question, 'How awake are we to what is going on around us?' In Psalm 19, the psalmist uses nature – the sky and the sun – as signs of the glory of God. As boy treble of fourteen, at my School's Speech Day in the Methodist Central Hall in East Ham, I remember singing Haydn's setting of the psalm from his oratorio, 'The Creation': 'The heavens are telling the glory of God; the wonders of his work display the firmament.' Are you awake to the natural beauty around you: the sea, the sky, the river, the countryside? And when you contemplate the beauty of a sunrise or sunset, a full moon in a clear night sky, the high tide crashing against the sea wall, do you sense the presence of the author of creation in the power and the beauty of creation?

A sense of the God's presence is surely why we should come to church to worship. Okay, I know there are other good reasons to come to church, not least the chance to meet our friends, to have a good chat before and after the service over a cup of coffee and a biscuit but for a church to be authentic, then surely the worship ought to be a door, a window, onto God. When Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Nazareth I bet the atmosphere was electric when he read out the words of the prophet Isaiah from the scroll that had been handed him:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.'

Jesus had just begun his public ministry. His reputation as a teacher and a healer was spreading and, now, this local lad had come home and the people of

Nazareth had a chance to hear him for themselves. Sadly, things went pear-shaped and they rejected the man they'd known as a boy, whose family was still living among them – a prophet is rarely recognised in their own country.

Jesus was touched by the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at his baptism, a sign of the presence of God in the Son of God. And so too are we. Paul in his letter to the church at Corinth makes a simple but clear point that as Christians we are one body made up from many different parts. We have different gifts but we all contribute to the whole for the good of the whole.

But whatever our gifts might be, it is our attentiveness to God, our awareness of him, made possible through the life of his son, Jesus Christ, and through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives that make us good Christians.

So are you still paying attention or did I lose a little while ago ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 33 : Sense of presence

