

SERMON, CHRIST CHURCH WEST WIMBLEDON, 26TH JUNE 2016

Hannah Neale

Texts: Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9: 51-end

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, in what has been an historic week, we come to you and pray, that your Grace and mercy will be with us as a new beginning opens up with all its possibilities; all that is unknown. Speak to us now, words of hope and reassurance, of your guiding hand in the years to come, through the resurrected power of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Latin American Theologian, Reubem Alves says, “The stories of the Bible have power only if they are metaphors for the here and now.”

Within the context of their time, many of the stories or passages we read, seem far removed from our current thinking or way of life.

Take the Psalms. Psalm 35 for example.

“Fight my enemies Lord. Attack my attackers, disappoint and confuse all who are glad to see me in trouble!!!” Fighting talk.

And we read in today’s Gospel narrative, that disciples James and John, who Jesus had already named “Sons of thunder”, wanted to completely wipe out a Samaritan village because they were not prepared to welcome Jesus as they travelled on their way to Jerusalem.

“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them”?

We might not use the same language today, but the feelings are there, nonetheless, and people act on feelings, not merely on words.

This past week, has shown us how strongly held feelings can cause us to act ; in one case, with violence against a defenceless mother and campaigner; in another, using the democratic process to express those deeply held feelings.

So we see that the Biblical passages though distant and past, find echoes in the stories we read about, hear about and witness in our world today.

James and John reacted to rejection in what is possibly a natural human way: they were hurt and they wanted to strike back.

Their focus was on what they saw as their new-found power, and for them, their journey to Jerusalem would give them even greater power, for there, Jesus would be crowned King, the Messiah, the long awaited Saviour of Israel.

They revelled in what they saw as their opportunity to be part of this new reign of power and might.

Jerusalem was certainly not envisaged as the place of broken dreams.

When Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem, he was not merely taking our place on that cross; he was setting our pattern for living. That pattern for life, is summed up in Jesus's response to his rejection by the Samaritan villagers. He says to James and John: "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy lives, but to save them"

If Jesus had come, not to judge but to save, then a radically different form of discipleship is required to that shown by James and John.

When we react, as the disciples did, in self-righteous indignation to those who oppose us, we are not working with the Lord: we are destroying and not saving. Reacting makes some people feel good for a moment, but it does not produce love and it does not produce life, the abundant life that Jesus came to give us.

What is good about having a faith in Christ Jesus, is that we have an alternative dream—a dream of breaking loose from the chains of vengeance. The more secure we are in God, the less inclined we are to return evil for evil and the more open to being involved with those who might seem unlovely and constantly needy.

Jesus says “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord”.

That is why, in the aftermath of what has been an historic week, we as Christians remember that life given up for us, and recognise our responsibility, no matter what side we were on, to be that conduit of healing, bringing about the peace that our Lord died for.

There will need to be healing, and our focus as Christ’s disciples in our world, is to ceaselessly point out what it is that binds us together – our common humanity - the need to stick together in order to preserve to our world. That preservation can be brought about by the Fruits of the Spirit as told to the Galatians: patience, kindness, gentleness, love, self-control.

God’s grace sets us free—from intolerance and prejudice and from everything that would keep us from following him. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem in order to die that Jew, Samaritan and Gentile might be reconciled with God, and be made one in Him.

The people have spoken. Let the Church say Amen