**Apocalypse Now: Our Passport for Life**

The Books of Acts and Revelation (Apocalypse) do not so much compete for our attention in the weeks after Easter as complement one another. Acts tells of how the first followers of Jesus remembered him and tried to live out his teaching and nonviolent lifestyle in a violent world at the edge of the Roman Empire. Apocalypse is the text of hope reminding us of the triumph of Easter – life over death. It is no accident that it is the last book in the Bible – placed there as our guard against the victor, by force of imperial concern. John tells us that he wrote of things ‘as they are’ and of things ‘as they will be.’ But he also tells us that he wrote of ‘everything as it is written.’ The reason is that in this place, time, we need to pray for achievements of peace and justice to come in the future: we do so in the knowledge that we are also and already lived it out in the here and now. To be a disciple implies that we are poor and powerless before the world. And that’s the world of us all whom we can encounter today: uprooted, wounded, battered, driven by fear and grief, as we are funded by today’s world’s power and poverty. But the challenge of Christian witness is that we confront the world and its problems with the hope and confidence born of Easter. And what keeps us going is what the New Testament calls Grace. Grace is that power which other scriptures talk about but that is absolutely unique to the Good News of Jesus. It is the grace of the Resurrection, we are living out the consequences of a victory that has already been achieved. The Apocalypse is our guarantee that, in Julian of Norwich’s words, all is well: in short, it is our passport to a new life, a life with-out-end.

Follow me, and witness to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation

In today’s First Reading Peter’s defence before the High Priest is that; ‘Obedience to God comes before obedience to men.’ These words echo through the centuries. We might think of St Thomas More’s words at his trial, ‘I die the King’s good servant but God’s first.’ Or St Oscar Romero’s call to the El Salvador military the day before his assassination: ‘When you hear a man telling you to kill, remember God’s words, ‘Thou shalt not kill’. No soldier is obliged to obey a law contrary to the law of God. In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people, I implore you; in the name of God I command you to stop the repression.’ The Gospel Reading – John 21 – is an epilogue to the Fourth Gospel and is equally relevant to us today as it was to the early Christians of the day. It is filled with symbolic language concerning the mission and ministry of the Church. The ‘153 fish’ (a triangular number, a perfect number, meaning all are included) and the unbroken nests represents the mission call of Luke’s Jesus to become; ’fishers of men’. The commission to; ‘Feed my sheep’ represents the Good Shepherd’s pastoral ministry which should be directed to follow us out along the disciples’ path, to draw us near, to invite others freely to join us, regardless of their past, their status, or their race or colour. Our communities and parishes are challenged to be sacraments of just such a space. May it be so.

**Religious lives beyond exclusion.**

The psalm today holds our readings together. It calls the whole of creation to joyful service of the God who Moses encountered in the burning bush. The God beyond naming, beyond idols, beyond manipulation. It calls us to rememberance of the shepherd God who would today call us a liberated people to full life. As such we are to be a sign of where full life is found; where the nobodies are at the centre sharing new life with God’s people. Israel and Church are to model the universal, creative and liberating will of God as they joyfully live out of the divine freedom in confidence and gratitude. The psalm sings of opening access to this living God to the wider world. By John’s Gospel the break between Synagogue and young Church was acrimonious. Yet Jesus renews the vision of the Shepherd God who gathers all the disciples and protects them. This is a renewal of the prophetic vision of Moses but has often been interpreted in an exclusive, anti-Semitic way. But the Apocalypse blows away all exclusivism with John the Seer’s vision of the peoples from every nation, race, tribe and language worshiping in freedom before the throne of God. This is the all the more remarkable for being written, in a time of persecution, under an oppressive Roman imperial power. Our readings coming from real worlds of power politics, political compromise, and religious accommodation, still provoke us to enter the original prophetic imagination of liberation and promise. The nobodies become the People of God. There a gracious space is opened into which we are to invite others freely to join us, regardless of their past, their status, or their race or colour.

**Focus on the simple laws: be nonviolent, welcome the stranger**

John has a vision of the heavenly city being lowered out of the sky. It has twelve gates, open to all the directions of the compass. Inside this city, there’s no temple. Instead the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, they are the temple. This is a renewal of the prophetic vision of Moses but has often been interpreted in an exclusive, anti-Semitic way. But the Apocalypse blows away all exclusivism with John the Seer’s vision of the peoples from every nation, race, tribe and language worshiping in freedom before the throne of God. This is the all the more remarkable for being written, in a time of persecution, under an oppressive Roman imperial power. Our readings coming from real worlds of power politics, political compromise, and religious accommodation, still provoke us to enter the original prophetic imagination of liberation and promise. The nobodies become the People of God. There a gracious space is opened into which we are to invite others freely to join us, regardless of their past, their status, or their race or colour.

**To be won over by Christ’s Gospel of peace**

Festive moments are often unexpected and surprising. On Pentecost day, the birthday of the church, the gift of the Holy Spirit is given to the followers of Jesus gathered in the upper room. The Spirit comes as wind and fire: powerful elements that bring power. But the Spirit comes, ‘as the breath of God’s face shining on us. The Holy Spirit as the Gospel says, ‘will teach you everything’. The commission to; ‘Follow me, and witness to peace, forgiveness and reconciliation’. The marks of our witness to the Good News of Jesus, is to be nonviolent to ourselves and others. We are called to keep our gates open and share a meal with Christ the Stranger. Instead, as Easter people, we see a City whose gates are always open.

Feeling a presence that disturbs

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