

Trinity Sunday

Romans 5 v 1 - 5

Matthew 9 v 35 - 10 v 4

When I started preparing this service I was very aware that we would be in the aftermath of the general Election. Of course - I had no idea what the result would be - did any of us guess! I did think that, whatever the result, some of the divisions within our society might be highlighted and that some people might be feeling anxious or afraid.

Trinity has always spoken to me of the Community of the God-head which possibly seemed like a pertinent theme for today and we have heard two of the lectionary readings for the day. I hoped they might speak to us. But, first of all I would like to tell you about two encounters I have had this week.

I was on the 935 bus coming into Birmingham and an elderly gentleman sat next to me. He was very chatty and explained in quite a loud voice that he didn't usually catch the 935, he usually went on the 33. He didn't think he should go on the 935 because the people on the 935 were better and more important than him. I asked him what he meant. He said that people on the 935 were cleverer than him, they lived in better houses and had more money, they had better jobs and had had more school. I said that I did not think that that made people better or more important than him. He replied that he wasn't very important and he wasn't clever. I don't usually make big God statements on the bus and everyone was listening but I couldn't help myself. I said, "All those things you have talked about don't make people better or more important than you. You are just as important as anyone else and God loves you and each one of us just the same. He went very quiet then - so did the whole bus!

I was walking in Sutton Park towards the exit. You have to go along a roadway around the end of a pool to get to the exit and lots of young black cattle were coming towards me. Three young boys 8 - 9ish came up to me. "Will they eat us!" said one. "Of course not" I replied, "they just like to eat grass. They certainly wouldn't want to eat you." "Will they hurt us?" was the next question. "Not if you walk on the other side of the road and don't frighten them." It was obvious that they were still very nervous. It can be quite intimidating having them walking towards you. "Do you want to walk across with me?" I asked. I thought they were going to hold my hand! They were quite scared. As we walked along the cattle all moved to the other side of the road. I explained that they were nervous of us as well. One of them started saying, 'Shall we shout at them?' I said that wouldn't be kind and might make them frightened. As we passed the last of the cattle the boy who had wanted to shout said "Let's get some stones and throw them at the cows." I said, "Don't do that. They haven't hurt you. Just leave them alone." I walked on. They certainly left them alone while they could still see me.

The elderly gentleman made me think about the many ways that our communities can be divided, the 'us and them's'; It can be as apparently trivial as being the 935ers and the 33ers!

So many of the commentators over the last few days have said how tribal the voting has become between the two main parties. It seems to me that human beings have an instinct to divide into us and them. If you are in my group that is fine but not if you are the outsider, the one who is different. The image of the Trinity for me is about different parts of Trinity working together in community. God gives us a pattern of community.

The three boys made me think about how being frightened can make us react. They were scared of walking past the cattle but once they were past, and they weren't frightened anymore, the one boy wanted to throw stones at what had frightened him. I think that might be a common human reaction too. It seems to me that the election has made some people afraid of the result and they feel antagonistic and want to hit out at someone with a different view point.

How good it was to hear about all the people going to the area around Westminster Bridge last night for a night out. They didn't want to hit out or retaliate. They just wanted to behave normally.

In the gospel reading we hear a list of the 12 disciples, the 12 disparate men that Jesus chose to be his team, his community to work together to share the Good News. We do not know very much, if anything about some of them, but the ones we do seem to be a very unpromising team.

We have four fishermen - not very balanced team already. Peter, who blusters, asks lots of questions, gets things wrong and denies Jesus. He is forgiven by Jesus and becomes the rock on which the church is founded. Andrew, who finds the little boy at the feeding of the five thousand. Maybe he was good with children, an encourager. He certainly has lots of trust in Jesus. James and John, the argumentative brothers with a pushy mother and a father with his own business. James seems to have become an organiser in the early church and John took care of Jesus' mother, Mary. John was the pastoral one perhaps? Philip is the disciple who went on to convert the Ethiopian -so possibly good communication skills? Matthew, a tax collector for the Romans. We might call him a quizzling, working for the oppressors, possibly taking more than his share - that was common practice - and subsequently very unpopular. Thomas was the doubter, the one who wanted proof but he was also brave. He was prepared to go to Jerusalem when things were becoming dangerous. Simon the Zealot. He would have been a nationalist, on the margins, a freedom fighter. Prepared to fight for Jewish freedom from the yoke of the Romans. A bit of a loose cannon. I can't begin to imagine the tensions there would have been between Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector. And the last one we know anything about -

Judas. The keeper of the purse, the treasurer. The one who misjudged the situation and ended up betraying Jesus.

This was the unlikely group that Jesus entrusted to share the gospel. To be honest, not a group I would have put together for an important job. So what was it that they had to give them the gifts they needed?

The Trinitarian reading that Paul wrote to the Romans gives us an idea of the gifts that the disciples were given and the gifts we can have too. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ, who also gives us access to God's grace.....

We know that even when we are suffering, that God will give us endurance. That endurance will strengthen our character which will, in its turn, give us hope, and the end of the reading says – 'and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us'. Gifts indeed for the disciples and us.

And the connection between the man on the bus, the three little boys and the general election?

I believe there are real divisions in our society that have been shown during and after the election and that many people are anxious and afraid about the future. My hope and prayer is that the 'team' we have elected, however disparate, will be able to work together to share good news for all people. My hope and prayer is that the divisions in our society will be healed, and that all might know that they are loved and valued equally by God. My hope and prayer is that when people have been afraid that they will not lash out at what has made them afraid. My hope and prayer is that each one of us can be part of Jesus' team and make the Good News a reality.

This might seem an unlikely hope but I hold fast to Paul's words - 'Hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.'

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