

SUNDAY 14 JUNE-TRINITY 1: St George's Eastergate.

You will be seeing very clearly, by the changing of our liturgical colours to green, that we have moved into another season of the Church's year: we call it the season of Trinity or Ordinary time. The festivals and feast days of the last few weeks are over.[except one very important one which I shall come back to later] and now we are beginning a good number of weeks without the excitement that those festivals[Easter,Ascension,Pentecost and Trinity] have given us...how ordinary do we expect our time to be?

In some ways our liturgical season could be said to match the mood that many of us are experiencing at this point in our society's crisis. Initially the excitement and panic of our pandemic made life anything but ordinary; many people compared it to times of war. But that is beginning to be over now, thank God, and many people are experiencing a slump in their mood, finding it difficult to keep the daily grind of life going in relative isolation still. Some of us are beginning to panic about how safe it is to be going out again. In our church year it can be very tempting to want to be living on the high of festivals all the time instead of living in the here and now of where we are in our Christian lives. Ordinary time brings us back to earth to consider what God is doing in the here and now...to be alert...to what God is doing now!

The words of Jesus in our Gospel reading to His disciples were “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out His labourers into the harvest” ...He then made it clear that they were themselves to be the answer to this prayer, and sent them out. Have not many of us felt over these past weeks that we long for those around us to be undergirded by the knowledge of God’s love ? In the Creed each week we call ourselves the ‘apostolic church’..and that is exactly what we are. This is the first time that the disciples, followers, of Jesus are referred to as apostles...in other words those who are sent out into the world to proclaim God’s message. When we pray for the people around us to understand and respond to God’s message we must, like those first disciples, be prepared to be God’s answer to our prayer. [as we grow up in the church of God we move up from being disciples to being apostles...just as before we could drive we were driven around perhaps by our parents but now we are in the scary position of being in the driving seat...can you remember how scary that was the first time?]

So we are all apostles...we can’t hide and say evangelism is the vicar’s job because we are just ordinary people...but it can be a bit scary. On the other hand it gives us a real sense of purpose...we are not in a totally different world to Jesus and his disciples; don’t we often feel just like Him that the people we see on our screens day after day are ‘harassed and helpless, like sheep without a

shepherd.' ...when we see the crowds whipped up against racism in often a nonsensical way? when we see the government of our day in constant indecision? When we pray in the midst of our present crisis and turmoil...Jesus says to us...you are being sent out in my name to preach and to heal...no excuses...its us! And just incase we were in any doubt about whether or not we were up to the task just look at the list of those he chose...impetuous Peter, who acted first and thought later; and cautious Thomas who always needed to to work through every possible outcome before committing himself to action...imagine those two together on a PCC! Simon the zealot...the equivalent of a freedom fighter or terrorist today; Judas Iscariot...enough said; and even Matthew a tax collector whose occupation singled him out as having sold out to the Roman occupying forces.

What of the rather puzzling instructions that Jesus gave...do they have any relevance for us in our time? I suppose the first thing to say here is that Matthew recorded them in detail, presumably because he thinks they remain relevant to the church even after Jesus's death and resurrection. The one that is perhaps most puzzling is "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." I can hear all of us saying at this point "Isn't Jesus about proclaiming Gods love to all people everywhere?" and of course we are right...but that was at a later

stage...only after God's plan for the salvation of the world through Jesus had been explained to the chosen people the Jews...if they had been bypassed at that time their mission in the world would not have come to fruition. In the same way today the apostolic church, of which we are a part, needs to fully understand and absorb God's message to be effective in its mission...so we are called to be part of that. Also we , the church, need to be showing Jesus healing mission and to explain it to each other, in a way that draws people outside of the church to God's message.

As an aside here, as part of being alert to what God is doing in these present times we are very aware that far more people are watching our recorded services than normally come to church and it seems to me that one way of responding to that as Apostles could be to draw to peoples' attention one of the Enquirers courses that are being made available free on Zoom by groups such as Alpha...watch this space in next month's magazine...it could be a chance for some of us to encourage friends in that direction or even go there ourselves.

When those first Apostles went out on their evangelistic mission they did not have an easy time. Jesus does not promise us, we know, that following his instructions will bring us an easy life. When they went out they must have been only too aware of their weaknesses...'like sheep amongst wolves'..a more

appropriate phrase then, perhaps now we might say we often feel like 'fish out of water'...This is where the words of St Paul in our Epistle today come into their own. He knew what it was to experience the hardship of being an apostle but in the midst of all that, imprisoned in Rome, he was able to write of the strength that he had experienced as a result of suffering; and of God's love being poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit; and of seeing God's proof of his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.]words from our epistle for today]

I said at the beginning that there was one very important festival that we celebrate in Ordinary time that I would mention later...it is of course Corpus Christi which was celebrated in the Anglican church last Thursday...the festival when we remember with thanksgiving the gift of Holy Communion ...the time in our Sunday morning services each week when we are reminded of God's greatest act of love towards all of us in the giving of His own life in the death of Jesus...we are sent out from this remembrance as God's Apostles...reenergised and with hope in our hearts.

AMEN.