

Pentecost Sunday 2007

Informal notes – Sermon & Notices together

Sunday 27 May 2007

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Something Very Different this morning...

We began worship slightly differently, as we have done at a few services recently. Our liturgy allows for that – also recently encouraged by members of Parish Council, recognising our desire for general Anglican “order and flow of the liturgy” and at the same time intending that our worship always engages us, and avoids any sense of “just going through the motions”.

It is most appropriate on Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the life-giving Spirit of God. Our Bible readings emphasised the Spirit, from the beginning with God, and in creation of the universe, through the ministry of Jesus, through the injection of God’s life into the new believers in Jesus following his resurrection and ascension, and being with us and in us until all is one day consummated in the full establishment of God’s Kingdom.

That last sentence incorporated a period of time from before creation through the present and into the future; more than we can know or imagine. With all that in mind, how could we just “do worship” by going through the motions, as if it were a tedious routine to be got through for its own sake?

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I want to say things now, that would normally be said after the Sermon and Prayers in what we call “Notices”. All the notices I have for today are about key matters in our lives, and the impact our faith has on our life and our church.

1. Next Sunday – worship – Eucharist with Celtic-style prayers; one of the earliest Christian communities, deeply Trinitarian
2. Next Sunday – Parish Consultation – important issues especially re young people and young families. Not in relation to a single problem, or a single criticism, but considering overall trends and wanting to ensure we work at our vision, to be vibrant as a place of worship, and that we meet the real needs of our worshippers in living lives of faith.
3. Issue of Crime – superb pastoral letter from +Rubin (June magazine); positive responses from Parish Council, also from neighbouring St Anne’s College re noonday bell, time for prayer, and special prayers for peace at the end of each Eucharist; beginning the initiative this week.

4. Property & Finance Committee and Parish Council, met on the previous two Tuesdays; many issues, but noted up-to-date tithes re planned giving (cf. previous magazine on the issue), yet concern about repayment of loan for modernising our electrical supply; yes, we “sweat” these things; not because of lack of faith in God or in ourselves, but because our responses are sometimes slow, and just because we DO “sweat” such things, even occasionally losing sleep!

What has this to do with Pentecost, you ask? Everything, as the Spirit of God enables people to respond generously to the needs of the community, and to ensure that our church has the resources it needs to do what we need to do! Spiritual things are not only high-and-mighty matters, but also deeply practical day-to-day matters

5. Re Richard Dawkins’ book, “The God Delusion”: Weds evening; fair interest already, and two house groups indicated coming en masse, as well as a number of others. Some have deliberately read the book, and found that it has raised many questions for them. [But it is NOT necessary for you to have read it in order to come on Weds night; open to anyone, other churches / people who do not share our faith...

The issues: The intersections between science and faith, including how Christian people respond to new scientific knowledge. The church as an institution has much about which it cannot be proud; “religion” in general has much to answer for. But it IS possible for thinking, rational people also to be people of faith in God. And the secular media sometimes present these matters as if to be a believer in Christ is utter foolishness, as if there are only two possibilities: To be a non-believer in God, or a foolish believer in fundamentalist creationism, believing the world was created 6000 years ago in literally 6 days as we know days. No wonder some Christians are confused!

[Steve de Gruchy’s response to an article in the Mail & Guardian, suggesting that Christianity was a stupid Western import to Africa and should be rejected. Steve’s responses: 1. Nonsense; Christianity is also deeply African. Lively, vital church – even if in many different forms, some unrecognisable from Western styles of church or worship. 2. Really want to apply the argument, and be consistent? Then reject soccer – a silly European import to Africa!

Should Christians (or “theists”) just retreat when aggressive atheists seek to evangelise?

**Read excerpt from M&G article on Dawkins’ matter**

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Anecdotal... usually used in negative sense

But also a positive sense of the word – and that is how I choose to use it today

About MY experience or YOUR experience of God

For we claim to believe that the Spirit of God works in and through each one of us, differently – yet drawing us to God. Enlivens / gives life / breathes the breath of God into us – Ruach Adonai [Hebrew: Breath of the Lord – also means Holy Spirit]

History of this parish

Bold moves 101 - 104 years ago re church community / land / large building

100 years ago this month, set apart this building for holy use

Ups and downs – who knows them all (but God)?

Nick Kerr this week – Archdeacon (explain); He & Barbara 30 years ago;

Plaques – knew hordes of people; each circumstance...

God has guided and continues to guide us

This week: PACSA: Daniela Gennrich

Church in action – OK, so not in Hilton, not “relevant”, yet amazing impact where needed; People from all over: Catholic Cardinal, TWO Anglican bishops ☺, Salvation Army reps, evangelicals, all ages / colours / local and international donors honoured, also local ‘heroes’ who have done the often unpopular parts of the work of God – only the Spirit of God could have inspired that...

Unity – not only “institutional”, but wherever people of God of varying denominations work together in pursuit of common aims related to our shared faith

A Funeral this week, for a person; the family deeply traumatised, following a difficult suicide of a mother – after some years of mental anguish. Church: available. Teas: Of course! Talk, spend time... yes, of course – even if it wiped me out diary-wise and emotionally for a day or so. Even doing the work of God... is still work, and we get tired. Many very touched or moved; directly addressed suicide instead of trying to hide it; offering the comfort that God offers, that the church offers, that the Scriptures offer, welcoming a family in trauma even though not members here – doing all in the name of our graceful God. The family were bowled over by this expression of grace!

And all of this highlights just one of the graceful aspects of Pentecost:

That God – the great God who was before there was even a creation, who does not need you or me to ratify or validate the existence of God; this same God, who came to us very humbly in Jesus Christ, has also come to us by breathing the life of God into us. All life, ultimately, is a gift of God’s Spirit, for without the breath of God, nothing would have life, let alone vitality!

May we be a people who recognise this, and who live accordingly.

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Amen.