



SERMON - 3rd. after TRINITY -

Does it matter????

Really, what does it all matter in the end? Brexit or not? World Cup (for the Ladies) or not? Chocolate or Vanilla? It will all be the same in the end!

Now some might take me to task for putting serious things like Brexit and the choice of Ice cream flavour together as if they were of equal importance, and I would sort of accept that, except that the whole point is that in the end so much that we do worry about, when we look back over time, will have us wondering as to why we did worry so much about it all. Brexit is, at present, the most significant crisis our nation has faced for many years, and certainly since the I was born, yet historians will likely look back at it and regard it as just another footnote in history, whichever way it goes over the next few months, (or years!!!).

The Old Testament Prophet Isaiah is trying to encourage his people to look forward rather than backwards. To look to a time when things will be different. The people of God were in desperate and dire straights and it seemed that they would never get out of it. Many were in exile, and those few left back in what had been once the 'Land of Promise' were in many ways in a worse state! Too few to till the land properly so starvation and hunger were never far away, and they were surrounded by enemies who took great delight in their demise and hounded them on every side with seeming impunity.

To top it all Isaiah and the other prophets seemed to compound their misery by prophesying doom upon doom. It is an odd thing that those prophets of doom were often accepted as part of the misery, as being in touch with the way it all seemed - sorrow upon sorrow, doom upon doom - and yet were castigated for their negativity but ignored when they preached hope! The Prophet can never hope to win in the popularity stakes.

And Isaiah was no exception. Now, at the end of this section of the book, which began with Isaiah 40, where the end of the term of servitude - the completion of the prison sentence - is announced, Isaiah is once again given words of comfort for God's People. Yet you can still hear between the lines the crowd's reaction, and it is not encouraging. Perhaps it is only whispered, but listen and you can hear it...

'How can he talk of comfort when all we see and have known for age upon age is oppression and slavery?'

You might expect the people to respond with great 'Amens' - 'Yes Lord, let it happen to us', but no... we are often resigned to our state and almost comfortable in it. At least we know where we stand day by day when we expect the worst! Dangling this hope in front of us is cruel! Leave us to stew in our own juice!

It is interesting that even after the restoration of the people back to their land the prophecies of Isaiah were never given great weight by the Jews. For such a great prophet he seems to have been regarded as quite second class. It is not until the preaching of John the Baptist and the story of the New Testament begins to unfold that Christians find in Isaiah's words so much promise and Messianic hope.

And these words of comfort and hope we read today are presented in a three-fold form.

*As a Man whose Mother comforts him,
so I myself will comfort you,
and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem!*

A child may be easily comforted by their mother, and so be 'Sated' - be content - even though moments before the same un-weened child had been screaming the house down and seemingly impossible to comfort! But what about the Man? Who will comfort him when it is all doom and gloom and inconsolability?

But the Mother of the child knows that she can provide that comfort, and she willingly does so, and God uses that beautiful picture to tell His People that he too is willing to comfort them.

More than that, He goes on to promise that they shall be comforted - this is a sure promise. God both is willing and will do it!

All that has gone before will recede into the background when this comes to pass! 'The Rulers and Politics of this world which today seem to rule your very existence will seem as nothing when I comfort you' God is saying 'and when what really matters is put to rights then all this will seem just to have been a bad dream that melts away with dawning of a new day'

By contrast, the Disciples in our Gospel reading had been having a great time. Jesus had sent them out to preach and teach the Kingdom, and although I am sure many of them went out from him in fear and trepidation, here they were, returning with shouts of joy and encouragement for all to hear. This was what it was all about! 'Even Demons had to obey us when we used your name against them Lord!'

Yet it possible, both in the midst of sorrow and exile and also when everything seems to be coming up smelling of roses, it is possible to miss the important things. Above all, what matters is not where we find ourselves today, but rather, where we are with regard to God's promises. Isaiah's message from his God for the people is that what matters is their relationship with God, and that one day God himself will act to put that right! And Jesus too reminds his Disciples that what matters is not whether demons are subject to them, but rather, that their names are written in the Book of Life!

And it is no different for us today. Wherever we find ourselves in our daily lives, whoever ends up leading the Conservative Party and being our Prime Minister, happy or sad, on a high or a low, there is only one thing that matters! That God, in his infinite love and mercy, has done something about our relationship with him so that we can be restored to the life we lost. That is really all that matters! And it is so important that we dwell on that fact and not on all the rest that is going on around us. Yet that can be so difficult. Other things do matter! Politics matters! Family matters! Our health, wealth and those important people in our lives matter! Of course they do!

For those Disciples, the fact that the powers of evil were subject to them mattered. That people were healed through their ministry was wonderful. But it was not what mattered most because all of that stemmed from the simple fact that their relationship with the One whose Name they claimed in their ministry - with Jesus.

That is why, as Christians, we gather together around this Table - to remember - to make real here and now for us both the work He has done for us in laying down His life at Calvary for us and the future promise of His continued presence with us. This act should bring us back to the very centre of our faith every time we come, so that we never lose sight of what really matters. It is not about buildings, bank accounts or even Nations and Governments, - nor miracles or wonders - but about Him, the One who is our Lord and Master, our Saviour and our Friend.

And if you are not sure of that relationship with Christ this morning then let this table be the place where you meet Him and restore that bond. He is here, and has promised He will comfort you, but you must come to Him in order to receive from Him. Come, receive what you are, become what you receive, - the Body of Christ here on Earth!

Amen