

Sermon Proper 10, 6th Sunday after Trinity

John the Baptist discovered what later disciples and Christians found; that proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and Lord of our lives doesn't mean that all goes well or even smoothly. Hopefully, for us it does mean that we have someone to turn to and rely on when things are desperate. And how much more desperate does it get than having your head chopped off?

Herod knows that many revere John the Baptist as a prophet, he is seen as a holy and righteous man, and we are told Herod liked listening to him. Then there is the birthday party: probably too much to drink, the guests, the girl and her mother and disaster.

John bore witness to the one who was coming after him, who would be greater than him. John did exactly what he was supposed to do, he stood aside to glorify the Christ and continued to bear a faithful witness with no rewards on this earth.

So to must we bear witness but stand aside, to let God be glorified in our lives. We must put aside our egos, our pride, our quest for friends and riches, to serve the one who enables us to be and to do. It is thanks to God we achieve anything, he gives us strength and power to be what he intends us to be. Humility isn't a in line with present day culture, in fact it often sounds quite negative. However, Mother Theresa said: "If you are humble nothing will touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know what you are."

So Ephesians begins right at the very beginning reminding us of our dependence on God and how much we have to be grateful for. This is the God who created us in our mother's womb, who knows us by name and has chosen us to be part of the ceaseless circle of love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The letter to the Ephesians shows the life of the Christian church in the context of God's great plan, it gives advice on how to live the life we were created for rather than just giving a set of moral rules. Paul reminds us how accepting Christ into our lives means change for us, we can't continue in the same way of living. In Christ we are offered redemption and the forgiveness of sins through God's grace and mercy. Paul's huge change in life style has been repeated by many people over the years who have turned from crime, substance abuse and wrong attitudes by accepting Christ and calling on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe none of us need to make such huge changes, but most of us need to make some changes to our way of life, our thought patterns, our behaviour. Sometimes we, like Paul, are stuck with past experiences, memories and lessons which need to change. Becoming aware of old patterns of behaviour is the first step, once recognised they must be dealt with or they will always cause problems. Family myths are very strong, childhood taunts are damaging and all things like this can affect our behaviour and thought patterns all of our lives if we let it. One of the processes we used in counselling those adults who were abused as children was moving from being the victim, weak and helpless to someone who was no longer a victim. It is so easy to get stuck in the past.

Paul struggled, the disciples struggled, John the Baptist must have had moments of wondering, but they all tried to lead the lives that God wanted them to. It doesn't matter what age we are, with God's help we can change. The change is to become the person he wants us to be, to be doing what he wants us to do. Another quote from Mother Theresa: "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things."

Just think of how many of us there are in these congregations; think what great things we could do for God if we all worked together using our individual gifts, changing, growing and developing as he wants us to, and doing it all for his glory not our own.

As Paul says later in Ephesians 1:17-19 'I pray to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory that he grant you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. By having the eyes of your heart flooded with light, so that you can know and understand the hope to which he has called you, and how rich in his glorious inheritance in the saints. And so that you can know and understand what is the immeasurable and unlimited and surpassing greatness of his power in and for us who believe, as demonstrated in the working of his mighty strength.'