

# Sunday 6 July 2008: Seventh Sunday after Trinity

## Sunday Morning

**Readings: Romans 7.15-25a; Matthew 11.16-19, 25-30**

Yesterday was one of those wonderful St Martin's Days of joyful celebrations. Sophie and Dan got married in church with a big congregation to witness and celebrate with them, whilst Gay Pride was running on outside. As usual we were flying the rainbow flag for Gay Pride. Some of our bell ringers rang the bells and a few of the congregation welcomed people to church. Because of that context, I was thinking that I would have to say something in the sermon today about what is going on in the Anglican Communion, with the General Synod meeting in York and the so-called traditionalist Anglicans whose conference in Jerusalem ended last weekend.

But, fortunately for you, I walked to church in the early morning sunshine through a green and very beautiful St James's Park. A swan with her cygnet swam on the lake. I thought about the last week which, at St Martin's, has been full and lovely. Hearing about Ruth Davies' funeral on Monday with family and friends offering her life with thanksgiving to God; The Connection re-opening in its new building on Tuesday; Michael and Susannah giving birth to Anna-Elizabeth on Wednesday; Sophie and Dan's wedding yesterday, two baptisms this morning. And Richard got off to Hillfield to prepare with the Religious from Melanesia for the chaplaincy of the Lambeth Conference; Liz Russell is on holiday for the week, and Liz Griffiths and I met with our clergy cell groups, mine on the Suffolk coast, a few clergy friends who have been meeting together as a support group for 27 years. It has been a good week.

Early this morning there were a lot of people gathering for the 10k run. In The Mall, someone shouted my name and ran up to me. We hadn't seen each other for years. Their wedding was one of the first I took here and because they are actors, we made it into 'Hello' magazine or something like that. "Who are you running for?", I asked. "A charity for children born with life-threatening illness", he said. "Our child was born in such circumstances nearly 12 years ago." "And?", I asked. "She's alright", he said, "Well, we live with brain tumours but she's alright and so are we." "They don't teach you about that when you are younger", I said.

And I thought about today's Gospel reading and Jesus speaking about this generation who were like children sitting in the market place, and lamenting, "We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn"

The Rabbis tell a story that when we die the question God will ask us is, "The world that I created and set you in, did you enjoy it?"

And I decided that the last thing I wanted to preach about this morning was the Vicar's take on the creation of a new movement called the Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, with its unbelievably naive and, from the pulpit with children present, unspeakably funny acronym.

Go down that road, I thought, and Nilla and Dexter's parents might decide they don't want their children to be baptised after all. They might just walk away.

**What do you want?**

When talking to parents about baptism, I sometimes ask what they want for their child. Usually there are several layers to their response:

health and happiness;

that they grow up secure, and knowing they are well loved;

that they know God, and no matter how life goes for them they know that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. As St Paul says in Romans chapter 8,

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

It is bed rock stuff that these children are being baptised into and that’s why it matters. It is the truth on which life can be lived

Yet most of us will also recognise the account of being human in today’s Epistle – Roman chapter 7: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate...” There’s a degree of muddle in most of our lives and sometimes a gap between what we want and what we actually do. If that’s how it is for individuals then of course it is also true for groups and organisations.

One of the ways of sorting the muddle and clarifying ourselves is to pray. Jesus said pray for what you want. Asking for what we want is a great way of learning to pray and to live in keeping with our desires. It sets our direction and sets our hearts on what and whom we love. Above all, what we are looking for is not selfish and egocentric but “Thy will be done”, to live ‘in Christ’, our lives rooted in the love of God.

That very process clarifies our mind and purifies our actions.

So rather than say that General Synod has become a ridiculously self-important body absorbing the energy of some of our best people and that it would be better for them and us if they met once every three years; and rather than denouncing other Christians with whom I profoundly disagree, I want to remind us that we say we are an inclusive church and that when we made that commitment at an Annual Meeting a few years ago it was said from the floor that this meant seeking to remain in Communion with all the people we are currently in Communion. That doesn’t mean we have to pretend to agree where there are in fact profound disagreements. Truth matters and we have a responsibility tell it as it is. But there is a spiritual discipline in not demonising people with whom we disagree and our task must always be to seek our unity ‘in Christ’. That’s what Dexter and Nilla are being baptised into. It is what we believe.

For the last few weeks our Children’s Club have been getting us to think about people who have inspired us. They are going to do a presentation at the end of the service today.

One of the people they got me thinking about was F D Maurice, whom you can read about on the front page of this week’s Newsletter. He lost his job as a professor at King’s College along The Strand because he didn’t believe in eternal punishment. No one thought about the good he had done or that he really did witness to God in Christ. They got stuck on a narrow point of doctrine, not unimportant but not the basis of our unity. Our unity, truth, love.... is found in God. The Church is an imperfect witness to God in Christ but we had better learn to enjoy it, celebrate it, laugh at it and seek forgiveness for it and our imperfections and to have the courage to say, here God meets us in Jesus Christ.

Dexter and Nilla, at your baptism we will welcome you into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. It does not mean that life will be easy but it does mean our engaging with God who is with us in the glorious dance of life. We pray that we will live up to our calling, for our own sakes and for the sake of the world Christ came to save.