

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

18th November 2020

I wonder if, like me, you ever have one of those 'aha!' moments when reading the Bible or during a service? The moment you suddenly realise from where a phrase or a whole sentence or even more comes. The moment when you make that connection between the Bible and the words of the service or vice versa. For me these moments have the thrill of discovery. Often they make me aware of my lack of knowledge of the Bible. I said in my sermon on Sunday evening how we often miss allusions to the Old Testament. But nearly always I love the sense of continuity which they bring. These words connect us to our Christian history or to Jesus himself or to our Old Testament heritage.

Just a couple of examples: the Sanctus ('Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty') that we say together in the Eucharist echoes both Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8; at Morning and Evening Prayer we say 'O Lord open our lips and our mouth shall shew forth thy praise', words from Psalm 51:15; and the prayer that I sometimes use before my sermon is based on the last verse of Psalm 19: 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.'

Then of course there are all those words and phrases which have become part of everyday life to the extent that many, or indeed most, of us no longer realise their origins. On Sunday we heard the parable of the talents and I remarked then that our modern understanding of the word 'talent' is derived from one of the interpretations of the parable. 'Hiding our lamp under a bushel' takes us back to the Sermon on the Mount. Possibly there's a connection here too with one of the stories about Gideon in the Old Testament (Judges 7). Apparently, after the Bible itself, the Book of Common Prayer is the most cited text in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations.

This brings me to the prayer which I used on Sunday at the preparation of the table at the Eucharist:

As the grain once scattered in the fields
and the grapes once dispersed on the hillside
are now reunited on this table in bread and wine,
so, Lord, may your whole Church
soon be gathered together from the corners of the earth into your kingdom. Amen.

Do you ever wonder about the origins of the prayers and other words we use? For example, many of the modern Collects are based on those in the Book of Common Prayer but those in turn draw on much older texts. The prayer above isn't some new-fangled thing dreamt up for Common Worship but is based on one in the Didache, a text which dates from around 100 AD, the name of which means 'teaching'. So this is a prayer which is nearly as old as the Church itself and has been used by countless Christians over the centuries.

In those few words, there is much food for thought. They speak of the physical process of grain and grapes being brought together to make bread and wine - there we might think of the abundance and generosity of God in creation; the provision of our daily bread. In the mystery

of the Eucharist the bread and the wine become for us the body and blood of Christ. In sharing the Eucharist together we are ourselves drawn from our scattered existence and perhaps our isolation into becoming the Body of Christ ourselves, the church. We are reunited with each other as well as with Christ. And the prayer expresses the hope that the Church itself in all its diversity and richness may be united in the Kingdom. Among many other things, the prayer may encourage us to reflect on our own dividedness, on that of the Church and of the world and on the healing we seek in the Eucharist. Rich words indeed.

I find myself wondering whether we ought to have the equivalent of an I-spy book for cross references and connections! Sadly, though, internet search engines would probably make it too easy to complete. But perhaps I've started you thinking

With my love and prayers

Camilla

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