

Pentecost 2 – St Aidain’s – 2nd June 2013

Readings: Psalm 96 – ‘Sing a new song to the Lord’
Luke 7:1-10 – ‘The faith of the Centurion’

Introduction

Two wonderful readings are part of the group of Lectionary readings for this Sunday.

Psalm 96 is a doxology, a song of ecstasy and praise. It is the ultimate summons to worship. It is a perfect combination of formal liturgical style and pulsing, authentic energy. “O sing to our God a new song! Sing to our God all the earth.”

The singer cannot keep his or her joy to themselves – they want to share it with the whole earth.

What are the joyous times that we want to give thanks to God for?

For some it is personal – new life – a baby. A special occasion or a marriage – the gift of a long life and a wonderful family. It may well be healing or the gift of new or renewed faith.

Then there is a universal message imbedded in the words of verses 3 and 4. “Declare his (God’s) glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared (honoured) above all gods.”

Here we have an affirmation of faith and the greatness of our God. This of course came at a time when there was great conflict between nations and between beliefs. In a sense nothing has changed and we are still in a time when there is great conflict between faiths but mostly based on human conflicts that have power and control issues behind those conflicts and faith issues become radicalised and politicised.

Our belief in our God is paramount but should not lead us into condemning other faith groups. Rather we are called to:

“Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.”

As a boy I remember a number of churches having this as their ‘motto’ so to speak, written at the front of the church or high up so that you could read it as we brought our praise to God. Wonderful words of faith and praise.

The theme of all creation singing praises continues in verses 11 & 12.

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all of the trees of the forest will sing for joy;”

The Psalm concludes looking forward to the day when the Lord comes, dealing decisively with the wicked but also bringing hope and righteousness and truth to all the earth.

Hence the Psalm looks forward to a triumphant day when God’s rule is seen by all.

When we are down, maybe struggling with life a little, this is a great Psalm to read and take encouragement from.

Luke 7:1-10 “The faith of the centurion and the healing of his servant”

While this is a healing miracle, really it is more about the centurion's faith in Jesus which is central to the account. The community does such an excellent job of speaking for the centurion that we hardly realise that Jesus never encounters either him or his servant.

Hence, in a sense, the community is also central to this account.

The centurion seems to understand that he will need the help of the community if he is to convince Jesus to heal his servant. He calls upon a group of Jewish elders to bear witness that he is a worthy character. Clearly there is a strong bond between the centurion and the Jewish community such that Jesus is intrigued by this request and begins to go with them.

Then the centurion sends a group of friends to Jesus imploring him not to come to him as he is unworthy. Rather, simply say the word and I know my servant will be healed.

Jesus is amazed by the faith of the centurion and I'm sure also by the community involvement and support for this healing – supporting both the centurion and the servant.

So often today our faith is seen as a personal aspect of life and not lived out in community. Naturally much has changed since Jesus' time but the sense of community and the support of community is seen also as crucial here.

Jesus is moved by the faith of the centurion and of the messengers.

“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”

Jesus does not even pronounce the servant healed. Rather it is the centurion's friends who return to him that find the servant well.

Certainly this healing reminds us about living in community, allowing others to pray for us and to use the strength of the community when our faith is depleted or we have needs. It is amazing what Jesus can do even without meeting the centurion or his sick servant who is made well.

Allow the community to know our needs and to support us rather than stoically thinking we can cope all by ourselves. This is part of the role of the church community and St Aidan's does this well.

Praise be to God for the Scriptures we have for this Sunday – both give encouragement to worship and faith within our community.

Amen.