

Sermon

'Christ is the King'

Year C 2019 Christ the King



For more than a century, the Anglican Parish of Saint Peter in Brighton Beach has survived, and at times thrived, through 'many dangers, toils and snares'. But how?

On annual general meeting last week, the prayer of the day, and the epistle, spoke of Jesus Christ as the One who was, and who is, and who is to come. He is the reason the Anglican Parish of Saint Peter has survived, and thrived, 'through

many danger, toils, and snares', for more than a century. He is our hope for surviving, and thriving, in the century to come.

Nearly half a millennium ago, the founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther, wrote:

'It is not we who can sustain the church. It was, and is, and will be, the one who says, 'I am with you always, even to the end of time.' For you and I were not alive a thousand years ago, yet the church was sustained without us – and it was done by the one whom it says, '*Who was*'...The church would perish before our very eyes, and we along with it (as we daily prove), were it not for that other man who so obviously upholds the church and us. This we can lay hold of and feel, even though we are reluctant to believe it. We must give ourselves to the one of whom it is said, 'Who is', and 'Today'. Again, we can do nothing to sustain the church when we are dead. But he will do it, of whom it is said: '*Who is to come*', and '*For ever.*'"

Last month, an elder of our Parish, Doctor Maree Methven, took me aside, and told me about a passage of scripture, that had proven itself trustworthy and true, throughout her life; Maree is well into her nineties. It is an obscure passage, so you can imagine my surprise when, at an annual Anglican clergy retreat a fortnight ago, the retreat leader began to speak from the same verse of holy scripture. Is the Lord himself speaking to his church, through the word of the prophet Isaiah:

‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’

Isaiah is berating them for rejecting the Word of God, which was to trust in God, to let God be God, but they were running around trying to fix things for themselves. They say to Isaiah, ‘Do not tell us what is right.’ They had deliberately chosen to live in their own illusory bubbles. Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, says of pride that it is our ‘refusal to..let God be what God is’. Our doing starts to become empty. It is just us doing things.

There is, of course, no lack of things to be done in the Church. But, as our retreat leader said, ‘I can’t help wondering whether it is some of our frenetic running around rather than ‘being still and resting’ in God, that is our undoing’. This daily ‘practice of the presence of God’, to which each of us are called to as Anglicans, is a deeply joyful, and a deeply blessed one. The first of the Beatitudes, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ is translated in the New English Bible as, ‘Happy are those who know their need of God.’ Otherwise we are a wanna-be God. We often talk about alienation from God as a result of sin. This is how it happens, in every day, simple terms.

For more than a century, the Anglican Parish of Saint Peter in Brighton Beach has survived, and at various times thrived, through ‘many dangers, toils and snares’. Why? How?

Rabbi Eliezer ['Elijah'] was one of the most distinguished Jewish scholars and poets of the 11th century. At the end of his life, when his health was failing, his students asked him to teach them the ways of life that they may “merit through them the life of the world to come.” Rabbi Elijah replied, simply: ‘When you pray, know before whom you stand’. For the Christian, may we never forget, that within the Christian Church:

‘there is a Redeemer and there are the redeemed, there is a Lord and there are his servants, there is a King and there are his subjects..In every symbol representing the relationship of Christ and his people, including that of the Body, Christ dominates the scene.’