

Being World Christians

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (OS 27C)

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Perhaps the most astounding outcome from the September 11 attacks, is a sense of unity and common humanity that has developed in the world. The president of France remarked, this day we are all Americans. Not only in the sense that nationals from over 43 countries shared in the death toll, but that the sheer horror of the event, reminded us that we all share in the lives of one another. Like the sixties, when we were transfixed by man walking on the moon, and the fragility and smallness of our planet became apparent as we have seen it from space, as we watched the towers fall, we were there and part of the scene. Even in Mongolia, the images were available. We were not at ground zero, and did not experience that particular horror but we shared in the event through technology. We see this again with the commemorations for the death of Elizabeth 2.

With the development of the internet, and these technologies, there develops a sense of new community that resembles a village. Even though relations with our neighbours are breaking down, with this new technology many of us are able to form strong relationships with others through common interest or purpose. I am part of a group who preach the Revised Common Lectionary and there is a level of sharing particularly in times of crisis that draws us together. We share our dilemmas and find that we are not alone and are grappling with the same issues - bringing God's word to life and applying it to the world in which we find ourselves. Our congregations to whom we preach may be quite different, yet there is the common need to feed on the word of God.

World Communion Sunday celebrated on the first Sunday in October, has come from the American Church and is an invitation for churches of many denominations and nations, to remind themselves of the bigger picture. To see ourselves as more than national and denominational Christians, but as all belonging to a greater whole, the worldwide church. And the technology of the internet helps draw us closer together in these things. It is a reminder to us, that our baptism is more than just a nice day out, but a joining in to the body of Christ, a membership of a worldwide family. And like a family, we cannot choose to ignore the circumstances of our brothers and sisters. This is a day, where we can put aside our differences and focus on the common things that matter.

Much of the church has divided, on the basic assumption that this leader or that has the true divine interpretation of holy Scripture. In all these divisions, there are elements of truth, but often the breakdown comes from the diverse opinion on how to interpret a few words in the Greek or Hebrew, whose meanings have become unclear over a period of time. We have tended to argue our case for our interpretation or method of interpretation of Scripture. We have tended to view the world in a bi-polar framework - there are two views - mine and the wrong one. Yet we seem to overlook the very essence of the Scripture itself.

I have a cartoon which depicts God speaking to the world saying - "What part of - Thou shalt not commit adultery did you not understand? "When Jesus said "love your enemies", what could be more clear - yet Christians have tended to make enemies of those who they

love or should love. On this day as we break bread, we are reminded that we are not alone, but that we are part of a worldwide communion, who share in a common act of remembrance. As Anglicans, we have this sense to a certain extent. Not only are we encouraged through the Anglican Cycle of prayer to pray for other diocese and provinces worldwide, but when we travel, there is an amazing experience of unity in diversity if we are able to share with another part of the Anglican Church. And those of us who have had this opportunity are changed forever. We get to glimpse at the bigger picture.

So how do we become world Christians?

Charles Spurgeon said, that the preacher should prepare his sermon with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. He was referring to idea that the preaching should always relate not only to the Word of God, but to the world in which it finds itself. A world Christian has the newspaper in one hand and the prayer book in the other. We tend to be overloaded these days with the events in the world, but our first engagement with them should be to take them to God. When Christians are persecuted in Ambon, we ought to pray for them as much as if it were happening here in Minlaton or Edithburgh or Ardrossan. The family of Jesus knows no national or international boundaries, and all deserve our prayers. And when we pray, we should allow God to speak as well. Sometimes we will be prompted to find out more, or God will give us a burden to pray more for a particular group or situation. One such group for me are the Karen tribe of Burma/Myanmar and Thailand. When their name has come up in the past God has prompted me to find out a little more about them, about their situation. (God has reminded me again as we selected our project to work among them). We can be burdened so much that we are called to go - called to serve, and certainly, we ought to take opportunities to give, but we should not turn our backs on them and their situation.

Part of my dream of the ministry unit is that we have a vision that touches all the world. We may not always be able to give but we can pray and we can find out more about the people we hear of. Our greatest enemy is to see the world finish at the borders of the state or diocese. It is interesting, that Nauru has become prominent in our news of late. I worked there for about four months in the middle seventies. Nauru is a small island with a circumference of around twelve miles. The Nauruans had an interesting worldview that went something like this. The rest of the world is located beyond the horizon. The horizon is not so far away, so the rest of the world can't be that big and is of no consequence. We as Christians can be like this, looking at the rest of the world outside of our framework and so of little consequence. Or we can choose to engage the world with our prayer, our finances, and our love.

On this day, as we share greetings from around the world, let us be mindful of our role in the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. To be a world Christian means to care that other know of the love of God for them and the gift that Jesus gives. When we think this way, it will shape our response to the Taliban and the Moslem world. We must respond with love. Islam is the enemy as it denies people access to Jesus and the life that this gives. But Jesus says love your enemies. This is the essence of being World Christians that we are called to love in Jesus name.

Let us together rejoice in being part of the worldwide church as well as accepting this responsibility to pray for the world.

AMEN.