

SERMON AT HOLY COMMUNION (CW) AT 9.30 AM AT ST SWITHIN'S CHURCH, THORLEY ON SUNDAY 12TH AUGUST 2018 (11TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY) BY JAMES COOK

Readings: Ephesians 4.25-5.2 and John 6.35, 41-51

Title: 'Chosen in Christ'

Aim: To encourage us to receive Jesus as the Bread of Life.

When we have a series of consecutive Bible readings, according to the Common Worship Lectionary, extending over two or more weeks, do you like to treat each one like an episode?

Like me, do you enjoy watching a series of weekly episodes forming a television drama? I especially like historical dramas. The first few minutes' viewing is always taken up with trying to remember, from the previous week, the story so far.

It is the same with me when following the Bible passages set for each day in the Common Worship Lectionary. "Where were we last week," I ask myself. "Is this a new topic or a continuation of a previous one?"

In today's reading from Ephesians, the writer continues to explore how as fellow Christians we might relate to and

work more effectively with our fellow Christians. Although some learned scholars question the authorship of this Epistle, I am willing to go along with the majority view that the writer was the Apostle Paul.

In preaching last week, I suggested that the advice given in the Epistle might be very useful in learning how best to conduct ourselves in current discussions about the nature and direction of the emerging West Wight Mission Community and the creation of a single benefice. There is more such advice in this week's passage from Ephesians. Here are some points that I find helpful:

‘...speak the truth to our neighbours...’ Let's be open and honest with each other about the new scheme – what we like, what we don't like, and what we don't understand. That way, problems can be sorted out rather than being left to spring up again later.

‘Be angry but do not sin...’ I hope that there isn't much in the plans to make us angry but, if there is, let's not hide it; but let's also not hold on to our anger. May we let it go.

‘...labour and work honestly...’ The creation and operation of a team ministry to serve God and the people of West Wight will require hard work. Let's each do our share and not leave it all to others. Especially let's give time and energy to helping the needy, both outside and within our churches.

‘Let no evil talk come out of your mouths...’ If we are nervous about change and if we should find it difficult to work with other people, especially new leaders and colleagues, let be gracious in what we say both to them and about them. We are to play our part in building up the faith of others, not damaging it. Paul would have us ‘put away’ all bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and malice. There’s some plain speaking about our very human shortcomings!

We finish, however, on an upbeat note:

‘...and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.’

That’s a piece of Biblical advice that I like to give to couples preparing for Christian marriage, but it’s good advice too for those working at new relationships within the Church.

While from the writer to the Ephesians continues to teach us about our behaviour towards others, the Gospel writer John continues to teach us about our relationship with Jesus.

Last week, Jesus revealed himself as ‘the bread of God’: ‘...that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’. In today’s instalment, Jesus invites us to come to him as the bread of life so that our spiritual hunger and thirst will be satisfied.

Do you have a spiritual hunger and thirst that you are sometimes desperate to be satisfied? Maybe the answer is “No, not really. I have no strong desire either to live as Paul urges or to know Jesus as the Bread of Life.” If that is your answer, then I would praise your honesty but lament your situation.

I recall a particularly low period in my life, when I found myself listening to a recording of an old Salvationist hymn that touched me deeply: the chorus went like this:

What! never thirst again?
No, never thirst again;
What! never thirst again?
No, never thirst again,
For he that drinketh, Jesus said,
Shall never, never thirst again.¹

I knew that I needed to rediscover Jesus as the one who would satisfy my spiritual hunger and thirst. He rewarded my search with a deeper and more lasting sense of his presence. That search was conducted over several months, through prayer, reading the Bible and worshipping in small village churches like this one. It was in fellowship with other Christians who supported me in my quest and in the touch of the Holy Spirit that my hunger and thirst were satisfied.

¹ Mary Agnew Stephens (1865-1935), 1903.

For those on such a spiritual quest today, Jesus speaks through John:

“No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me.” We need stop resisting and to allow God the Father to draw us to Jesus.

“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.” We need to stop listening to the voice of the world and listen instead to the voice of God the Father, as he speaks to us through the Bible.

“Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” We need, as individuals and as a community, to receive Jesus as the one who gave his life on the cross for us.

As we take bread and wine in Holy Communion today, we are reminded that Jesus gave his body and blood to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst. Gathering at his Table, may we allow the Father to draw us to Jesus, may we hear and listen to the voice of the Father and may receive Jesus as the one who gave his life upon the cross for us. Amen.