

Waiting in between – 20th May 2012. The Rev Keith King

A Contemporary Reading:

Vision of Community, from 'The Compassionate God: An Exercise in the Theology of Transportation' – Choan-Seng Song.

The world has in fact begun to crack. The moment of truth for humanity seems to have arrived. We seemed destined for destruction by our own hands. But behold, miracle of miracles, out of the cracks a light shines. The venomous snake has not crushed the light. The light burns. It gives warmth. It gives hope. And as the dreamer timidly advances towards the light, he discovers that there are many, many others who are also moving towards it from different directions – from behind iron curtains, from across human barriers, from behind walls of our own frightened souls. Yes, all need that light is the only hope – we, the poor and the rich, the oppressed and oppressors, the theists and the atheists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus. We all must get that light, for it is the light of love and life, the light of hope and future. The movement of persons toward that light must have constituted a formidable power, for the snake, the demon, begins to loosen its grip on the globe. Its power is broken. Its threat is removed.

And so God moves on. God moves from the Tower of Babel to Pentecost, from Israel to Babylon, God moves in Europe, in Africa, in the Americas, in Asia. As God moves, God suffers with the people, sheds tears with them, hopes with them, and creates the community of love here and there...Until the time when the community of love is firmly established in the world of strife and conflict, of pain and suffering. God moves on in compassion. We have no alternative but to move on with God toward that vision of a community and communion of love.

Our Biblical journey has come to something of a resting place.

We have journeyed through the high point of Easter and listened to stories of resurrection – of life and hope and we have reflected on images of the Christ amongst us, images such as the Good Shepherd and the True Vine.

Wednesday marked 40 days from Easter Sunday and traditionally that is commemorated as the day that Jesus 'ascended'. On this day as Jesus disappears from their sight he tells the disciples to return to Jerusalem and to wait for the gift of the Spirit which we celebrate next Sunday.

So today is an in-between Sunday while we wait for the gift of the Spirit...

The ascension is something of a theological nicety and the biblical stories are conflicting.

John's Gospel has the ascension take place on the day of resurrection.

In John Jesus tells Mary in the Garden not to touch him as he has not yet ascended to the Father; and yet later in the day he appears to some of the disciples in a locked room and invites them to touch him, the corollary being that between the appearance in the garden and the appearance in the locked room he has ascended...

In Mark's gospel there is an addendum which covers two resurrection appearances and an ascension story – most agree that these were added at a later date.

Matthew does not have an ascension story and it is really only Luke that offers us a story that has Jesus being 'carried up' into heaven with its images of Jesus taking off like a rocket ship into the clouds from the Mount of Olives!!

As I said the ascension story really is a theological nicety in which the human nature of Jesus is taken into heaven from where he exercises all power in heaven and on earth.

The Pentecostal story next week is the outpouring of that power...

The words put into the mouth of Jesus by John in this morning's gospel reading are a prelude to this empowering in the lectionary cycle.

They are really a recognition of the struggle of life and faith and are clearly written for listeners who are undergoing persecution and difficulties because of their faith.

They offer assurance that although the world 'hates' them they are not hated by God and indeed the prayer of Jesus seeks to unite believers with God and with himself as a single unity that they may be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'.

Believer's thus become a bridge between what is hoped for 'in heaven' by God and through Jesus, and the reality of 'what is' in our experience through life on earth.

It seems to me that life is like a maze and we pick our way through it carefully hoping that we are taking the right turns that will takes us to the safety of the centre...

...and we do this both as individuals and as communities and societies as a whole.

Sometimes we take wrong turns and have to go back and find another way of taking us nearer to that centre which is at the heart of God.

There were two articles in yesterday's New Zealand Herald that caused me to ponder about this maze of life.

One was the pending implosion of Greece at it nears economic meltdown and the other was an article about the state of the planet and the way in which our actions as humans is irreversibly destroying our own habitat.

The figures quoted in the article are staggering.

Biodiversity is in free fall as more land is taken for humans to use.

Birds, fish, mammals and vertebrates are shrinking in size and are about a third smaller than they were in 1970. That's because humans either hunt them or because they have diminished their habitats so that they are no longer able to grow to full size.

And the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is at critical levels. Temperatures are set to rise by 2 degrees by 2040 which will see more extreme storms, flooding, droughts and sea level rises.

And the two, the economic plight the world sees itself in and the destruction of the planet, are closely linked.

I was listening to an interview on Kim Hill last Saturday with a Frenchman who owned the Cordon Bleu business. He made a comment that there are 7 billion

people in the world; 1 billion are wealthy and 6 billion aspire to be wealthy. And he commented on the impossibility of the aspirations of this six billion.

As he pointed out it would take the resources of several planet earth's to even reach a fraction of the wealth that is held by the 1 billion.

Because of our incessant desire for personal wealth and economic growth we are suffocating the planet on which we live.

And let us not forget that we are told the world's population is projected to reach for 9.3 billion by 2050 – something has got to give.

Humanity as a whole is charging along the wrong way in the maze of life and it needs to turn around and find a better way...

I remember as a boy seeing men with sandwich boards at Charring Cross station in London walking around with sandwich boards saying 'Repent for the end is nigh!' I feel a bit like one of those!!

I do not want to be prophet of doom and gloom and as a follower of Christ I am charged not to be.

I do not know what the way ahead is, but I do know that a new economic order must evolve – the seven billion demand it as does the survival of the planet.

Our story is one of hope; of new life arising out of death.

Let us hope for a new outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh that we might find a way in the maze of life that draws us closer to the centre; that was is hoped for in heaven may indeed become a reality on earth....

And as we watch events in Europe and around the planet unfold, I think sermons of this nature are to be continued...

