

Trinity 5 2010 – Sharing the Good News

Isaiah 66 vv 10-14 p753, Psalm 66, Galatians 6 vv 1-16 p1172, Luke 10 vv 1-20 p1041

Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.

Jesus sent 70 (or possibly 72) people out to preach the Gospel. It must have been pretty daunting. They weren't to make any preparations for their journey. Some places, Jesus warned them, would be hostile to the message. They would be like *lambs among wolves!*

But, when they came back from the mission, they were ecstatic. They had all returned safely. We're not told how their message was received, but they do say to Jesus, *Even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.* Their experience of working for Jesus was pretty remarkable. You could say they were fulfilled with the Holy Spirit and that is a deliberate pun.

Jesus too is ecstatic at the success of their mission. He says, *I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.* The preaching of the Kingdom of God by the Church destroys all the power of the Evil One. The proclamation of the Gospel is victory over sin (our human alienation from God) and over the consequences of sin (death).

But then He says, *Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

Our lives are rooted in God. Our relationship with God determines everything else about us. *Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.* What does that mean? It means that you have eternal life. God is with you here on earth. He is looking after you. He hears your prayers. His Holy Spirit dwells in you and you live in Him. Through His grace you live in accordance with God's Holy Law, a Law which is summarised in the twin commandments to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself. *Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.* If you are a Christian, your name is already written in heaven. If your name is written in heaven, you know that the joy you experience as a Christian here on earth is only a foretaste of what God has prepared for you when your life on earth is over. *Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

[Is there anyone here today who isn't a Christian? Do you want to know how to become a Christian? Well you put your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for you on the Cross. Then, as St Paul says in today's epistle, the world is crucified to you and you are crucified to the world. Nothing else matters except that you are a new creature, a new creation in Jesus Christ.]

The Church's mission, then, begins in your relationship with God. As a Christian, you love God with all your heart and you trust Him for your life. If you love God, you must love His Church. God's Church is the people of God. The Church is the dwelling place of God (not so much these wonderful stone buildings, but the hearts of Christian people). The Church is the Bride of Christ and the Body of Christ. The metaphors are mixed but the Bible is quite clear in what it says. If you are committed to God, you are committed to God's people, the Church. If you remember that Christ died for you, and how He died in that terribly

agonising way on the Cross, surely you cannot help but love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. If you remember that Christ was crucified for each one of your fellow Christians, surely you cannot help but love one another as Christ loved you.

The Church's mission begins in your relationship with God and with your fellow Christians who, all together, comprise His Church. But mission cannot stop there with my personal relationship with my Saviour and my fellowship with other people like me. God is the Creator of Heaven and Earth. *God so loved the world that He sent his only-begotten Son.* Humanity's alienation from God is a great scar on the heart of our Creator. God's heart is torn apart by our wars, our selfishness and greed, our infidelities and dishonesty, our failure to love one another as brothers and sisters and God as our loving heavenly Father.

There has been a lot of talk this week about prison and its role in the punishment of offenders. Crime and punishment raise a lot of difficult questions, but the point, for us Christians, is that from God's perspective both the victim and the offender are the object of His love. God made both victim and offender. Christ died for both of them. A Christian penal policy must deliver justice and mercy both to the victim of crime and to the criminal.

And this is generally true of the way God deals with sin in all its manifestations. This week I saw photographs of the skulls and skeletons of people murdered in an act of genocide of appalling proportions. It was a church in Rwanda where people had thought they would be safe, but where, in fact, they were massacred. God loved those men, women and children. He was cut to the quick by their cruel deaths. He was angry and in His anger He promised justice and He promised mercy. And yet God also loved those other human beings, who had so far fallen from what it truly means to be human, that they had perpetrated this atrocity. In His anger He promised mercy and He promised justice. I can't explain that sort of love and I don't suppose you can. I can only point to the Cross where Jesus, the Son of God, dies the victim of us sinners and also dies for us sinners everywhere and in every age. I can look at the Cross and see the true love of God and, as a Christian, I can know that that is the kind of love God requires of me.

And, if I have that love of God, then I too must love the world. I must work for justice and mercy, for peace and reconciliation, for healing. I must care for the poor and the sick, the lonely and the bereaved. I must strive for honesty and integrity, decency and truth. I must not only pray, *thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven*; I must work for the coming of God's Kingdom; I must try to do His will in my life; I must try to persuade and influence other people to do God's Will. I must share my faith. It sounds like I'm going to be pretty stretched! What I ought to say is that you and I have to work for justice and mercy, to care for people in every kind of need, to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God. What I ought to say is that we have to complete Christ's Work on earth, to overcome the Evil One and every manifestation of his influence. By *we* I must mean God's Church – the people who all over the world believe in Him and comprise the Body of Christ, the Temple and Communion of the Holy Spirit.

Our calling as Christians is a high one. *Rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*