



Receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken

Rev'd Dr Ellie Sanderson, 21st August 2016

Isaiah 58.9b-end
Hebrews 12:18-end
Luke 13:10-17

This weekend Tony Martin is at a book award gathering, to which he was invited for his work on spirituality, entitled, *a sense of more than*. God is more than. There are moments when we need more than we have and there are moments when we receive something that we know is more than us. The sense of being part of a Divine partnership has been profound for me in these last weeks. When I look at the readings set for our lectionary today, I am overwhelmed by the sense of more than. Here we receive words that are so pertinent, so powerful, and so passionate for our situation, that I am humbled in my heart at the sense of more than that is God with us.

This morning I want to talk to us very practically in the many ways that we can enter this next season together as people who are called into a Divine partnership.

Many of the ways that have become the customs of how we live with God and relate to God are being changed. This has reminded me of the very first sermon that I preached in this church. You may or may not remember, but I used the analogy of banking and shared my internal reactions to the change of the National Bank to ANZ and related those reactions to the ways that people may feel when there is a change of vicar. Ultimately, I concluded, although all the internal emotions that I was feeling were valid, the change of the National Bank to the ANZ would not affect whether I was in credit or debit, how I chose to save or spend, or utilised my resources. I said the same was true of our spirituality, although having a different person as a spiritual shepherd in our midst would influence some things,

ultimately how each of us access, invest, commit to our spiritual nourishment was still ultimately a choice that each of us made. Together we now face a new change and I feel that we need to hear that same thing again. This change that is upon us, should not be a reason to not nourish our prayer lives, to not fellowship with each other, or to not take time to grow our faith. Each of us make a decision every day about whether or not we are seeking first the Kingdom of God in the way we choose to live our lives. The core of our faith, cannot be shaken by this change. In fact, it can be profoundly strengthened as Bishop Justin intimated last week, and it is to that strengthening that I want to really speak.

Whilst we go through the process of understanding the physical strengthening needs of this building – we need to ultimately prioritise our energy towards strengthening ourselves, our faith and relationship with God, our commitment and depth of relationship to each other and our openness, generosity and relationships with our wider community and world who are not already part of our church family. How our lives are shaped by these three dimensions of relationships and commitment indicate how we choose to seek first the Kingdom of God.

We hear in our scriptures today the gift of the Sabbath. The Sabbath reminds us that we are part of a world that is more than us. It brings all those three dimensions that I have just mentioned together. We reconnect as the body of Christ, we honour God by our time and priority and we remember on the Sabbath day that the work of the world can get along quite well without us – we abide, we rest in the God who works through us. It is a day of humility and respect. We gather together, not because *I* need it, but because we need each other and we need God. This week I wrote to our families to encourage them to commit afresh to being part of the family of God together in this season by making the commitment to worship together. I said that the greatest gift you ever give to the church is yourself. By that I mean your presence simply turning up. Do you know that if we were all together all the time we would have a regular congregation of over 150. That is how many regular worshippers we have on our electoral role (and we have hundreds and hundreds on our pastoral role). Imagine how that would feel. Imagine the sense of possibility, energy, power that we

would feel if all of us were always together in the humility and commitment of the Sabbath.

God scatters and sends us out, but often not to people who have not first learnt to be all together. At the centre of the Gospel movement there is the fire of the Holy Spirit which came when the disciples were all gathered as one, in the same place – I wonder if you remember my sermon earlier this year around Ascension Day: the disciples were asking Jesus if now that they were all together was the time when he would restore the Kingdom of Israel and Jesus' response was that it wasn't about them, they had to wait upon God. So they waited, they kept doing what they had been doing, sharing life together in their homes and gathering together in sacred places of worship. I think this speaks to us.

We began this year's season of Ordinary time by linking in with our Thursday congregation and talking about the birds as our teachers. We have had a lovely time exploring that theme in our mid-week service. You may remember that we began with the ravens, which is a sign of God's provision. Well, we ended this week with the eagle, which John Stott relates to freedom. We meet the eagle in our reading from Isaiah today. The flight of eagles is a partnership with the wind. They cannot fly without the wind, something our family learnt this year at Warwick Castle. This is why in our scriptures the eagle is the symbol and reminder of living in partnership with God. Eagles represent being lifted up by God.

How might we position ourselves to be lifted up by God; to be people who live in expectation of the extraordinary encounter of the Divine?

- 1) (as I have already spoken about this morning) Let us really take to heart the reminder of the Sabbath gift we all must choose to receive and to give.
- 2) We must own our sense of community and safeguard it – as a priest I am called to gather the community, but you build it! Everyone has to take responsibility to deepening our relationships with each other. Our relationships are going to be strained, that is a given. We have to

actively safeguard the health of our relationships by believing the best and speaking the best of and to each other. We will reignite our communications tree as a means of community building and with our vicarage open home have increased spaces to be family together. We also need to more actively nurture the smaller communities which are a part of our parish family (of which our 8 o'clock congregation is a palpable community in and of itself that we must work together to bless to be a blessing in creative ways).

- 3) This is a time for dedication in our spiritual practices, such as prayer and hospitality. We want to work towards a rule of life for our Parish, which helps us to be shaped by ways that we can go deeper with God. Later this year we have a celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Renewal of faith. This could well be a time when we collectively commit afresh to what living for and with God and with each other means to us as a community here and now.

Also we have to have to have **fun**. We will not have death by fundraising cake stalls! My step-mum, who experienced breast cancer reoccurrence many times developed a pattern of having cancer holidays: times when she didn't talk about cancer and no one else was allowed to either. I think we will need earthquake strengthening holidays! We must live victoriously in spite of everything, so that we do not let our building needs take over and define our life. For that not to happen, our common life together and our life with God, will have to grow to be more than equal to the energy and time that this building and strengthening process will take.

So there is much that we need to build and share together to grow stronger and stronger as a family of God, but ultimately, even together, we are called to *more than* the sum of our many parts. Because God is *more than*. We are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. We are not building a kingdom that cannot be shaken, we are *receiving* a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. Who is giving us this kingdom? It is Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Let us therefore give thanks to God, for our God is a consuming fire.