



THE NEWSLETTER



ALL SAINTS CHURCH Upper Norwood

April 2014

The Vicar's Monthly Letter

Dear friends,

We do not have to look far in news reports to see signs of conflict in our world. Syria is still being torn apart by a terrible civil war. Other Arab countries are facing extraordinary upheavals, Iraq still; Egypt; Libya. The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, despite so-called peace talks, remains tense and unstable, and there is the perennial potential for conflict between the West and Russia. Closer to home, we know that conflict and sometimes even violence can disfigure local communities, or even in that most intimate or personal of groups---our own families. Conflict, with peoples divided on ethnic, or political, or more personal grounds, seems to be endemic to the human condition. And our response can be all too easy, for most of the time we want to take sides, to divide the world into good and bad; then we can fall prey to the easy temptation of demonising those whom we see as an opposition.

It is in the context of such a world that we can look at the passage in St. John's Gospel 12:20-26, and note that it, too, starts with ethnic conflict. The passage tells us that it was Greeks who came to meet Jesus. In those times, Greeks and Jews were in many ways as different as chalk from cheese, their philosophy and outlook markedly different, and nationalistically minded Jews would have had little to do with Greeks, even with Greek converts to Judaism---such as those in this gospel passage. Yet Jesus transcends that ethnic divide, and at the end of this passage we hear him say 'I will draw *all* people to myself.'

The writer of John's gospel sees Jesus' significance going way beyond being a Jewish reformer---to being someone of meaning for everyone.

But the route to that is telling. Jesus said, according to John, 'When I am lifted up'; this should be taken to mean when Jesus is lifted up in glory, on the cross.

John is suggesting that when Jesus was crucified, that was his moment of glory, and it was so not just for the Jews, but it was done for all. The message of the cross is universal, all will be drawn to him, not just Jews but Greeks and Arabs as well, not just white nor black, man or woman. Although, God forgive us, the church has even turned the cross itself into a symbol that divides rather than unites, Jesus's message of the cross speaks not to tribalism, even to our Christian tribalism, but to the humanity we share with all. He shows all the true way of transcending conflict and finding glory.

But how? What does that really mean---*how* can the cross work in healing divisions?

If a conflict is to be overcome it usually means that someone must bear more than their fair share of the pain of a situation. In any conflict, whether between nations, or groups within a nation, or even parties in a warring marriage; if each side insists on their rights, if each side adopts a morally self-righteous stance and seeks for glory only by forcibly achieving a victory, then tensions can only increase, the pattern of reprisals and mutual recrimination will continue, and conflict will only get worse.

There will be no healing, and so no glory worth having, without the cross. It is only when one side sacrifices some of its 'rights' and seeks for peace that there is any hope of healing.

This applies at almost every level, international, national, and personal. Jesus draws all people to himself by enduring the cross, by not standing out for his rights but by taking upon himself the painful consequences of human sin. And one of the ways in which the cross has the potential to heal is in showing the path of self-sacrifice.

I suggest that is a message the church needs constantly to remind itself. As I said at the beginning, in conflict the temptation is always to become a crusader on one side, and, worse still, then to turn Jesus into someone only we Christians possess---and to narrow the focus of the cross down what Jesus has done for Christians as if 'exclusively.'

Dying on the cross, Jesus drew all people to himself, and in committing ourselves to following him we commit ourselves to a similar way of life. Any church or any group of Christian people that really wants to be an agent of reconciliation and peace in a world of conflicts must be one that is prepared to take the cross into its own life, which means resisting the temptation to seek victory and triumph, but to try to overcome conflict, and then to see what the path of self-sacrifice might entail to bring about peace. The message of self-giving love and self-sacrifice is what we experience at Passiontide---what Christ has done for us, and what we can do for others.

Fr. Leonard



CLERGY

Vicar

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SERVICES

All Sundays

8.00 am	Said Eucharist
10.00 am	Sung Eucharist
6.30 pm	Evening Service

Tuesdays

7.30 pm	Said Eucharist
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1st Saturday of month

10.00 am	Said Eucharist
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