**Parish Choir Service Sept 15 2019 at St Augustine’s**

Genesis 1:1-27a. Psalm 100. Colossians 1:15-20. Matthew 6:25-33

*Jane took her husband George to see a psychiatrist for a check up. After examining him, the doctor took Jane to one side and said, "I have some very bad news for you. There is nothing I can do to help your husband. His mind has completely gone."
"I’m not really surprised," Jane replied, "George has been giving me a piece of it every day for the last 50 years."*

Here we are, in the Parish of the Valley, once again coming together as one body in Christ. Last Thursday, at the Parish “Wardens, treasurers, and synod delegates” meeting, we were also “one body”, as together we reflected on those things that excite us and also those things that challenge us at this time.

This evening, here at St Augustine’s, we are again one body, gathered together to Praise and Worship God, through Jesus our head. Worshipping God together in song, gathering together our Parish choir, is a particularly powerful way to express our Praise and Thanks, and one more way to honour Jesus, our Church’s source of life and growth. And we thank Marie Zettler, for it was her great suggestion that we gather a Parish choir!

And we thank God, for we owe everything to God. As our reading from Genesis reminds us, God is our Creator, our very life comes from Him. We are reminded by the psalmist in psalm 100 that all Praise and Glory and Joy and Worship is due to the Lord our God “who made us and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.” And the letter to the Colossians reminds us that Jesus is the *restorer* of humanity. Humanity went astray, starting with Adam and Eve, and eventually Jesus was sent to reconcile us to God, to restore our relationship with God. In Jesus we are a new creation. We are a new creation, not only personally, but communally as well, for He forms us into His body, the Church.

The funny thing about Creation is that it is ongoing. Throughout the millenia, not only has the earth been expanding and evolving, but so has the Church. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and always, and the gospel truth hasn’t changed, but the shape of Christ’s body, His Church, has been continually evolving into something new throughout the ages. The Church of today looks nothing like it did in the Middle Ages, or, if truth be told, it looks nothing like it did only a few short years ago.

Such growth involves a *death*, of sorts. The Church, as we once knew it is dying, and making way for something new. Some of the traditions that once fed us are no longer nourishing or helpful and they *need* to die. But, through Jesus, God has rescued us from death, again and again, in so many ways. I’m not just thinking about being rescued from the sorts of *sin* that lead to death. I’m thinking of the sorts of death that we were experiencing just a few years ago: the death that comes of apathy, confusion, lack of direction, fear of the unknown; the sort of death that comes from clinging to the past and looking back, not forward…. I’m trying to name the sorts of things we were feeling just a few short years ago, before we embarked on this Area Parish journey.

I can remember at a Great Chapter meeting about three years ago, Archdeacon Rob Davis spoke of the church as a boat. If the church was a boat, he was saying that we have been sailing, or perhaps I should say, we had been “drifting” for many years on relatively calm waters. But he rightly said that things have changed and we need a new, purpose built boat. The waters have become turbulent. Being here in Whitewater country, I could say our boat has entered into rapids and whitewater, and using Rob’s analogy, the old sail boat is no longer sufficient to carry us safely through the turbulent waters. So, that’s a bit worrying!!

But, helpfully, our gospel reading speaks of worry, and Jesus says ‘don’t worry!’. Jesus knows the power of worry to kill initiative and creative impulses. The Greek word for worry means to *be preoccupied with* or *be absorbed by*. Jesus talks about being preoccupied with food, for example. (That’s a preoccupation that we share here in the Valley with all our church suppers!) So, He says, look at the birds, they’re an example of a proper attitude towards food: they work hard to find it, but they don’t store it for possible future shortages. They simply rely on God to provide.

Preoccupation with a long life won’t lengthen it, or worrying about your appearance is futile. If God cares for the birds and the plants, how much more will He provide for, and *clothe* those who are faithful to Him. So, don’t be preoccupied with your physical needs.

That may be easier said than done, for several of the challenges that face us have to do exactly with physical needs. At some point we will be addressing financial challenges and the shape of our buildings, for example. But the moral of the story is: Put God first and don’t worry! Don’t let these “preoccupy” you and suck the life out of you. Realistically, we need to tackle the challenges that face us but don’t worry. God will show us the way forward.

Together, we will continue to follow our Lord as we build and re-create our new Parish of the Valley, stepping into a ‘new boat’ as it were. We can do so with confidence that God has a plan. Let’s see ourselves as co-workers, helping God’s plan to unfold, but we do so completely depending upon and leaning upon His guidance and strength. So, worry not! We are in God’s hands. This takes a lot of trust to believe, not only in God but also in one another. It’s reassuring to know that we are all brothers and sisters, together, members of Christ’s body, together in this place, and Jesus, our head, is with us, helping us every step of the way. Thanks be to God. Amen.