

3rd after Trinity 28th June 2020 – also Feast of St Peter 29th June 2020

I am going a little 'off piste' this week and offering you a reflection on part of the letter of the apostle Peter written to the churches in Asia Minor shortly after Rome burned and Nero fiddled!!

Since the Feast Day of St Peter falls on Monday 29th June this year I am offering you a reading from Peters letter and the reading from the Acts of the Apostles which is the set lectionary reading for the Feast Day of St Peter.

Revd Linda

Collect for Peter Apostle 29th June

Almighty God

Who inspired your apostle Saint Peter to confess Jesus as Christ and Son of the living God:
build up your church upon this rock,
that in unity and peace it may proclaim one truth and follow one Lord, your Son our Saviour Christ
Amen

Acts 12: 1-11

About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread.) When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover. While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him.

The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, 'Get up quickly.' And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, 'Fasten your belt and put on your sandals.' He did so. Then he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.' Peter went out and followed him; he did not realize that what was happening with the angel's help was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. After they had passed the first and the second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went outside and walked along a lane, when suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hands of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.'

1 Peter 2:1-10

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner', and

‘A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.’
They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Reflection

The letter of Peter was written for specific communities scattered across Pontus, Galatia and Cappadocia – communities that were being persecuted at the time of the letter. It was written out of the love that Peter had for people who were going through troubled times and for whom there was probably worse to come – to encourage endurance and trust.

Although churches are open again in some places, services are still not taking place yet and it is unclear when we will be able to return to anything resembling normal. At such a time it is helpful perhaps to look back and see that the Christian community has lived through a great deal over the centuries. It is also good to be reminded of the fact that the church is not all about the building but is made up of the people, and that the individuals are not alone. In the letter from Peter we read about the living stone and this gives us the concept of church as community, as a group of stones – one stone on its own is not much use and may fall, but many stones standing together are strong and can build amazing things. I have been impressed and amazed at the way various groups have formed and supported each other during lockdown. The function of the church is described in this reading as well – a royal priesthood of believers to take the message out ‘in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’. The church then is a community of believers – it can be 5 strong or 500 strong but the letter from Peter suggests to us that it has to be more than one strong!

Peter’s letter also gives us information about what, as Christians, and members of Christ’s church here on earth, we should and should not be:

It talks of what to give up and what to yearn for – no Christian can remain unchanged. Get rid of character faults that hurt the idea of brotherly love – deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and disparagement. Hang onto good stuff like mutual respect and concern, and keep following the word and teaching of God – get nourishment (daily prayer and bible study, regular worship – even if it is online!). We need to continually remind ourselves that the fact that God is gracious and forgiving is not an excuse to do as we like, but gives us an obligation to work towards deserving his love and mercy – not an excuse for laziness but an incentive to effort.

We also get consolation in this reading from Peter as we are told we are chosen and will receive mercy (amazing how much is packed into this one tiny letter). Personally I find this comforting living in a world where there is much suffering and persecution still and where sometimes life is a struggle – especially for many at the moment. We are reminded that we do have a glorious future and should not therefore be shattered by present afflictions (not to say that they are not painful). Christ’s role as cornerstone is central.

Peter was one of the key followers of Jesus Christ. He was one of the first to carry the message to others. As we continue to think of our church in this place, and all of those who support it we pray, that like Peter, we may be ready to hear God’s call, and to become living stones in the church of Christ