

THE CIRCUS AND THE DESERT: CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN A CHANGING WORLD

Canterbury Diocese Gathering

Saturday 16th May 2015

Where I am, there my servant will be also John 12.26

WORD

From the ordinal.....

To proclaim the gospel “afresh to each generation” to preach “in season and out of season”

SACRAMENT

Religious rites, worship services, liturgies are to be banquets of joy and peace. Eating is a moral act, and sometimes a religious act. Yet the gratitude for holy food and the salvation it brings is fully expressed only when we remember that unleavened bread was first eaten by slaves on the run and the cup of wine is a cup of suffering. Just as I believe bread and wine are transformed, so we are transformed..... into people of compassion, people who see what others overlook, people who can begin to trace the vague outlines of the prophetic vision of the reign of God where justice and mercy embrace and a grand table is set. Where bankers sit next to farmers, border guard’s converse with the undocumented and ranchers share toasts with environmentalists. Where work gloves lie next to linen napkins, hands are scrubbed, feet are washed, thirst is quenched, hunger satisfied and there’s no hint of injustice, no whisper of enslavement..... no sign of barbed wire anywhere.

James Schmitmeyer (in Liturgy and Justice ed. Anne Y. Koestner p 73)

Changing times: A whale swam down the Thames in the 12th, 16th, 21st centuries. The church interpreted it differently each time.

Changing society: The gathered church and the dispersed church, 2011 census.

Link between faith and action, Eucharist and the “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5.6). The church in “conversation mode” building partnerships when advocating. Always answer the question “why do this?”

Citizens broad based community organising is one way to do this: Living Wage, Social Care Charter, Just Money, Limit on unlimited detention for asylum seekers.

Other projects building partnerships, having difficult or surprising conversations.

THE CHURCH ROOTED IN THE DESERT IN THE ILLUSION OF THE CIRCUS

To know Christ sacramentally only in terms of bread and wine is to know him only partially, in the dining room as host and guest. (It is a valid enough knowledge, but its ultimate weakness when isolated is that it is perhaps too civil...) it begins in the soil, in the barnyard, and in the slaughterhouse—amidst strangled cries, congealing blood, and spitting fat in the pan. Table manners depend upon something's having been grabbed by the throat. A knowledge ignorant of these dark and murderous "gestures charged with soul" is sterile rather than elegant, science rather than wisdom, artifice rather than art. It is love without passion, the Church without a cross, a house with dining room but no kitchen, a feast of frozen dinners, a heartless life. Aidan Kavanagh, The Shape of Baptism; the Rite of Christian Initiation. (New York: Pueblo, 1978)

Eucharist means "thanksgiving," and the ritual is the breaking of bread. It is food for the journey of hope, the making of peace, the bringing of justice. Sharing of food and water and sustenance is the basis of justice and living religiously. It is a mockery of the Eucharist to eat at the table in church and to exclude or ignore and not be shamed by those who go hungry, without water and the basic necessities of life. Worship is not what we do in church on a Sunday morning or during Holy Week. Worship is what we do with our lives, our time, our money, our priorities, our excess and our resources every day of our lives.

meganmckenna.com/moveable-feast

We may begin, by making a fuss about the Church as a clever boy may make a fuss about a telescope, admiring its mechanism of tubes and lenses and fiddling with the gadgets. But the purpose of the telescope is to eliminate itself and leave us face to face with the object of its vision. So long as you are aware of the telescope you do not see the planet. But look, suddenly the focus is perfect; there is the hard ball of silver light, there are the sloping vaporous rings, and there the clear points, the satellites. And where is the telescope? It is no more to us than the window pane through which we look into our garden.

Austin Farrar sermon in Oxford 1960

We are commanded in Deuteronomy "You shall not make for yourself a graven image". Yet more solid than stone, more resistant to iconoclasm than bronze, are the images cast in theological language and so engraved upon our minds and throughout our prayers. Healthy theological language cannot be immutable. (cf Gail Ramshaw Feminist Theology p168).

The desert is a necessary place (Jesus was driven there by the Spirit in Mark 1), a refreshing place, and a place to face the reality of God and the world. Silence (not the absence of noise), Solitude (not loneliness), Fleeing (not escaping), Staying (not confined).