

# St Luke's in the City

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

17 June 2007

## Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

*As I indicated last week I am reflecting during these Sundays after Pentecost, during this time for steady growth in our baptismal life, on various aspects of the sacred container which holds us – the 'holy, catholic and apostolic church', as we say in the 'apostles' creed'. What do Christians believe, and how? There is on offer a bewildering range of answers. Some Christians, taking Luther's dictum of 'sola Scriptura' ("Scripture alone") out of context, claim the Bible teaches the Christian disciple absolutely everything they need to know. Other Christians are embarrassed by the Bible. Particularly since the time of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformations the church has been divided as to the status and role of the Bible, the ancient sources of Christian tradition, and, increasingly, the relationship between theology and science. Some Christians, eager to defend the integrity of the Bible and the honour of God have denounced all scientific discoveries which appear to undermine Biblical texts – such as the rejection of carbon dating and the fossil record and the claim that the world is only six and a half thousand years old. It also has to be said that some Christians, embarrassed by God's apparent ignorance about biology and God's apparent violence, deprecate the Biblical texts.*

*Anglicans have refused to follow either of these dead ends. The Anglican position is famously known by the expression 'Scripture, Tradition, reason'. Anglicans rejected the Puritan distortion, that the Bible contains all knowledge – rules for the life of the church as well as information on all subjects. As Archbishop Michael Ramsey put it, "Scripturalism is not the same thing as the appeal to Holy Scripture"! Rather, as the ordination candidate confesses before the bishop, Anglicans declare that the 'Holy Scriptures contain the truth necessary for salvation.' For salvation! Whatever is needed 'for salvation' is to be found in Scripture, but that does not necessarily mean that we will find in Scripture a definitive set of rules for the life of the church nor should we expect to find in Scripture explanations for biological, paleontological and astronomical phenomena. Anglicans rejected the Puritan claim that the Bible can be read in isolation, knowing that it is highly unlikely that Scripture can be rightly understood in a vacuum. It is the community of believers, the church, which is the witness to, the keeper of, and the interpreter of Holy Scripture. That is to say, 'Tradition' – the writings of the Church Fathers & Mothers, antiquity as interpreted by the living church in the context of liturgical prayer. And Anglicans have always rejected the anti-scientific, anti-modernist, anti-intellectual tendencies of Puritans and other literalists, recognising that reason, the human capacity for logical thought and the application of moral conscience, is a God-given attribute, the divine Logos deepening our understanding of divine revelation. May our mission and ministry at these crossroads be formed by the creative synthesis of balanced faithfulness to Scripture, Tradition, and Reason.*

With my love,

David