

# St Luke's in the City

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

8 July 2007

## Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

*I set out in this series of reflections by referring to the 'sacred container' of the church and its liturgy. Today I want to explore another aspect of that sacred container, which I am going to call sacramentality. Our faith is not a collection of ideas - though it does depend upon certain ideas. Our faith is a relationship, with God, through the person of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. But because God is ultimate reality and ultimately unknowable - the Holy One, the unnameable 'Other' - everything we might know about God is necessarily mediated. None of us has first hand knowledge of God. The Scriptures are the written mediation of that revelation. However (despite the mistaken impression many inside and outside the church might have on this subject) for Christians the Word is not a book but a person. The Word is a living Word, the resurrected and ascended eternally-present Christ, who we know by the traces of his presence through Scripture, in liturgy, in experience of life, in encounter with other human persons and with the creation. That is to say, Christian faith is always mediated through sacrament, the tangible means which engage our minds, bodies and psyches in the intangible Reality. There has been much debate throughout the Christian centuries about the meaning of 'sacrament'. St Augustine of Hippo is said to have claimed that there are literally hundreds of sacraments. The Church eventually settled on seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Unction, Ordination, and Matrimony. In all cases there was an obvious 'outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace', as the Book of Common Prayer so succinctly put the matter somewhat later in the church's day.*

*So there are these two different ways of thinking about sacramentality. There is the fact that matter matters, that we are bodily and material beings, and that knowledge of God can only be mediated knowledge. People, places, things and events are the Divine traces of God's presence in Christ among us. Life IS sacramental, as any lover knows. Then there are those communally-shared ritual actions which make and hold the faithful as the community of Christ believers, without which there is no church and no christian. By the Sacrament of Baptism we become members of the Body of Christ. By the Sacrament of Eucharist we are sustained and grow into that which is already, by grace, our identity. "We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ. We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread." That is not merely a proposition. It is only real because we DO it, because we eat, together. St Augustine told us how to respond to the Sacramental Bread placed into our hand: "Say 'Amen!' to what you are." The Sacrament both expresses the truth that we are already the Body of Christ, and simultaneously invites the participant to say 'Let this be so' in me.*

With my love,

David