

St Luke's in the City
8th Sunday after Pentecost
22 July 2007
Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

There are many reasons why Eucharist came to be highly regarded but little practiced in Anglican history. I am no historian, and even they paint more than one picture on the subject. Nevertheless, it is clear that by the late Middle Ages eucharistic practices had become prevalent which would have been both completely unrecognisable and completely inconsistent with the early church's ritual communal meal. As it goes with reform movements which work by extreme reaction, in reclaiming one truth frequently another is lost. Consequently, generations of Anglicans were fed a lop-sided diet of Word-without-Sacrament, of Matins and Evensong with occasional (three or four times a year) Eucharist. It was not until the late 19th century that the centrality of Eucharist as principal liturgy of the church came to be asserted again, and it took many decades for that to take effect in parishes. (Some parishes haven't heard yet!) Another blessing of the 20th century ecumenical and liturgical movements has been the recovery of not only baptism but also Eucharist. One of the most influential documents circulating in the mid 20th century was the World Council of Churches' "Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry". Christians of many stripes and persuasions came to realise that, regardless of historical differences, we have a common initiation into Christ by Baptism, and by the one Eucharistic action of Christ in which we participate we are becoming what we are. In baptism we are born, but at the table we are fed. Jesus said, "This is my body for you. This is my blood." Christ is present on the table and gathered around the table. When Sacramental Bread is placed in our hands we say 'Amen!' to what we are. As the Bread of the Sacrament becomes a sign for our very own bodies, we become that living bread - living sacrifices, offered for the life of the world, to the glory of the One who took our humanity, that we might share in divinity. Eucharist is indeed the source and summit!

All of this requires REAL presence. Not only the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament - which Martin Luther vigorously defended, against extremists - but our real presence also. Real people with real fears, hopes, memories, joys, agonies, conflicts and desires - not let's-pretend moralising religion. Real bread which is actually broken and shared among God's people. Real tables around which the community of believers can literally gather in common sharing - not distant altars, and not altars fenced off behind rails. Real action involving the whole of the assembled believers, engaging all the senses - not just disembodied minds and torrents of words. Symbols large enough to be seen, touched, tasted and heard - not embarrassed and barely visible concessions to some misunderstood history. Ritual actions in which all are doused with water, all are censed, where before God, and in the sacramental moment, the status, class and role we play in daily life become as nothing. Pray that we are becoming what we are - the Spirit-filled and servant Body of Christ.

With my love,
David