

St Luke's in the City

Celebrating at the Crossroads **15TH Sunday after Pentecost, 9 September 2007**

Dear Friends,

IN these reflections on mission and the church last week I concluded that the mission is not ours, but that we are called to be partners in God's mission. Last Sunday we formally began our parish Mission & Ministry Review - with a very pleasing proportion of us sharing our stories and wondering together where God might be leading us at these crossroads. It is also our intention during this Review to listen to the voices of others in the community - organisations and individuals. One of the extraordinary claims of the Scriptures is that though Israel was God's 'chosen people', nevertheless throughout the history of Israel others, outsiders of one kind or another, served as God's partners. "God isn't choosy," wrote Bishop John V Taylor. "And if God chooses his human agents so indiscriminately then who are we to refuse [them] as fellow partners." God's 'chosen people', when preoccupied with being the chosen, can readily forget the reason for being church. God's partners in peace-making, in justice-shaping, in feeding the poor and welcoming the outcast can be very surprising indeed. Consideration of mission cannot afford to look only at the Church, but must attend to what God's other partners are doing. This means being wide-eyed for what's actually happening at these crossroads, on these streets, in this local community.

Christ's mission, as witnessed in the gospels, revealed to Israel that the Temple, the true Temple, was not a building, not a holy place. Rather, the true Temple is a holy people - a 'temple not made with hands'. The baptised share in and are sent for that same mission of Christ, by the power of Holy Spirit, for the life of the world. Thus, mission can never be centred around buildings, no matter how pleasing nor comforting they may be. As we reflect upon mission it is the Temple of God's holy people - recognised and unrecognised - which demands our fullest attention and love. Mission, therefore, is always costly - in fact, mission 'costs not less than everything'. "Because we are Christ's body we are the martyr church, committed to a ceaseless giving away of life for truth and in love. 'We are the Body... This is my Body...'" The two statements go together inseparably to their completion." The mission of the church is the costly and liberating making of a new and holy people, a new Temple, a new creation.

Perhaps the greatest impediment to our capacity to recognise that the mission is God's, impeding our availability to be God's partners, to give our lives away in the service of the Temple which is a holy people, is our impatience. We forget that God's mission is being fulfilled in God's time. Obviously I am not advocating mere passivity. But mission does not mean guessing the future. Our parish review is not a crystal-ball-gazing exercise. The task for God's partners is to be freed from nostalgia for the past, liberated from the grip of anxiety about the future, faithfully attentive to the now. "For those who have faith in Jesus Christ the present is the only tense." Let us pay attention to each and every present moment.

With my love,
David