

# St Luke's in the City

## **Celebrating at the Crossroads** **20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost & ThanksGiving** **14 October 2007**

Dear Friends,

THANKSGIVING Day's heart is not really about lists of tasks, budgets and the like. In truth, for Christians thanksgiving is a matter of worship. James Alison has described worship as a 'dangerous and de-humanising thing'. Such language may seem shocking. After all, are we not here to worship? Well, yes... and no. As in all things, the devil is in the detail! "Worship," writes Alison, "is a perfectly normal way of being within this violent world, and it is part of the violence." (His article 'Worship in a Violent World' forms the basis for this reflection. <sup>1</sup>) To make his point he cites the Nuremberg rallies as indicative of the cultural normality of worship, and to illustrate how worship works and the effect it is intended to exert on crowds. Though the consequences are (thankfully) less destructive, exactly the same dynamics can be observed in sport, politics, business, and even in churches – since all are equally capable of constructing worlds of rivalry and competition, in which someone or some threatening minority is victimised for the sake of unanimity and 'peace'. Witness the recent rugby World Cup! Witness the Anglican Communion! Worship of this kind is a very normal way of being in the world.

But True Worship - which is the liturgy of the eucharist - undermines all worship, all our competitiveness, rivalry, anxiety and fear. Whereas worship is for the benefit of 'party officials' of one kind or another, True Worship liberates us from rivalrous and competitive imaginations. Whereas worship is designed to take us out of ordinary life for a time, in some form of temple, True Worship is the pattern of an entire lifetime which enables us to live fully and freely in ordinary life, everywhere. Whereas worship aims to create a feeling of togetherness and attempts to coerce a crowd into some future action, with True Worship no achievement is necessary because it is the celebration that something has already happened. Whereas worship requires stage-managed emotion and must be 'exciting', True Worship detoxifies us and relaxes us into the quiet knowledge that Christ crucified is 'just there'. Whereas worship always strives for unanimity by the loss of individual identity and by making enemies and victims, True Worship is centred in Christ the Forgiving Victim who does not demand unanimity, and who peels away comforting myths and false belonging. Whereas worship builds false and premature camaraderie through some group ecstasy, True Worship is the gradual, gentle, slow basking in the beauty of particularity which enables us to celebrate the strange uniqueness of all. Finally, whereas worship aims to comfort us with some larger myth in which we all know the outcome, True Worship is more like a 'jagged edge', a willing celebration of the contingent, the brave, the unimagined, the not-yet, the risky, undermining all comforting myth and leading us into the life of the One who inaugurated the New Creation. May our ThanksGiving be True Worship, centred in Christ who undermines all worship.

With my love,  
David

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<sup>1</sup> in Alison J, *Undergoing God: dispatches from the scene of a break-in*, New York: Continuum, 2006, pp33-49.