

Homily – Easter 3 – 18-04-21 - Bishop Cam Venables

Readings: **Acts 3:12-20; Psalm 4; 1John 2:15-17; 3:1-6; Luke 24:36b-48**

Last week I took the dog for a walk at 6am. 'Though it was cold and dark we were repeatedly passed by athletic people running who regularly glanced at their watches to monitor their progress. What was their heart rate? What distance had they covered? How many calories had they burned? And, what was their average speed? In some ways I felt guilty that I was not running, and that I didn't have a watch to measure such things!

It is a good thing to maintain and improve physical fitness, whether training for a marathon or simply walking each day. We feel better for it because endorphins are released, our muscles maintain tone, and... we don't get out of breath walking up the stairs at home! If we want to develop and improve we can set ourselves goals so that over time we gain greater stamina, strength, and capacity.

But, what about spiritual strength and capacity? We don't have an App on a watch to measure these things but there is an Anglican organisation called TEAC who have developed some ministry grids to guide. TEAC is an acronym which stands for 'Theological Education for the Anglican Communion' and their work was developed and made available fifteen years ago.

On the TEAC website there are ministry grids for Bishops, Priests, Deacons, and Lay Ministers as well as a ministry grid for people who are not church leaders. It is this fifth ministry grid I want to draw from because there is helpful challenge within it for all of us.

In this grid there are four questions asked which create a framework:

- What do we hope, or expect, in the lives of people who are preparing for baptism?
- What do we hope, or expect, in the lives of people who have been recently baptised?
- What do we hope, or expect, in the lives of all adults who are growing in faith?
- And, what do we hope, or expect, in the lives of those who have a mature faith?

Given that we're in church listening to this, or reading is, I'd like to assume that we are each growing in faith, and that some here have mature faith. There are eighteen indicative markers for those growing in faith, and a further eighteen markers for those who have a mature faith. I think each of these markers could form the basis of a sermon, but I'd like to focus on five.

The TEAC team of scholars and educators suggest that all members of the Anglican Church should know that *'commitment to Christ is sacrificial, life-long, and lived out in daily life.'* ...sacrificial, life-long, and lived out in daily life.

That we *'should all develop good stewardship in the practice of our interests, time, and other resources.'*

That we *'should all be helped to understand the nature of biblical writings, their history and context.'*

That we *'should all be encouraged and helped to develop a rule of life which includes a sustainable pattern of praying and listening to God...'*

and that we should *'all seek to grow into the likeness of Christ.'*

These are not suggested goals are not limited to those who are ordained, or those who serve on Parish Councils, they are suggested for each baptised person. That we are to each aspire to be more like Christ; and, that we are to pray, study, and respond human need. Imagine the

conversations we might have with one another if we took these things more seriously? Conversations in which we talked about the things we were reading, watching, and listening to which helped us grow in faith.

In the reading from Acts today Peter demonstrated prayer, knowledge of Old Testament writing, and a compassionate response to human need. Chapter three of Acts begins with Peter and John going to pray one afternoon. A man, crippled from birth, asked them for financial assistance and Peter responded by asking God to heal him in the name of Jesus Christ. To the astonishment of the crowd, the man was then healed and for the first time walked by himself into the temple.

Understandably, the crowd wondered who had made such a thing possible and in response Peter preached as a Jew who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, to a large crowd of Jews who did not believe this. He knew his Old Testament and reminded the crowd about the promises that God had made to Abraham, Moses, Samuel and the prophets. He affirmed that Jesus was the one that God had promised; that in him there was forgiveness and hope; and, that in him there was the power to heal. Peter spoke in such a compelling way that an estimated five thousand people decided to accept that Jesus was the Messiah that day!

There was a confidence in Peter's faith that I hope God's Spirit can develop in you and me. For, when Peter saw the need of the crippled man – he prayed that the man be healed. I wonder if we have similar confidence to pray for those who are sick? When was the last time we asked a sick friend if they'd like us to pray with them, or for them? Indeed, when was the last time we asked someone how we could pray for them?

When people asked Peter how he had healed the crippled man, Peter was confident in affirming that God had done the healing, when he had prayed in the name of Jesus. I wonder if we have similar confidence to share with others the difference that faith in Christ makes to our lives? In the first letter of Peter there is the encouragement to, '*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us, to give the reason for the hope we have. And to do this with gentleness and respect...*' (1Peter 3:15).

I think the foundation of Peter's confidence was his knowledge that he was not perfect – but that he was known, loved, and forgiven by God. In the same way... I suggest that we are similarly known, loved, and forgiven by God. I think Peter had a great sense of relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who guided him to pray for the crippled man, and inspired him to share his faith with others.

In God's grace, may we have our own sense of relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit, and may we be open to God's Spirit guiding, empowering, and blessing us in the complex journeys we travel each day.

Friends, would you please join me in prayer...

Life-giving God, we give thanks that you meet us in the midst of each day and send us to a hurting world. Empower us with your Spirit and give us the courage to follow your leading. We pray in the name of the one who is risen, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Some questions from the homily to consider:

1. When was the last time we asked a sick friend if they'd like us to pray with them? and, would we feel confident to do this?

2. When was the last time we asked someone how we could pray for them?

and, would we feel confident to do this?

3. How could we develop greater confidence and ability in being able to pray with and for others?