

Reflection for Pentecost 9 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

“Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.”

What, I wonder, are your abiding memories of your school days? Even for me it feels like a lifetime ago! For some pupils, their school days are remembered fondly, a time to be treasured, when friendships were made that have lasted a lifetime. For others, it may well have been a period of their lives they could not wait to end, conjuring up memories they would rather forget than hold onto.

Whether we loved or hated our school days, I am sure we can all picture this scenario. The teacher has set the class some work to do, and then must leave the room for a minute or two. As soon as the door shuts what happens next? For some, their pens go, chattering starts and messing around follows. Others just keep working, aware that teacher will be expecting to see results, of some kind, when they walk back through the door. Which group would you or I have been in?

All of today's readings are in a sense about that same sort of scenario. About having faith - a commitment that does not need to be constantly monitored or prodded, a faith that is not distracted or deflected by whatever is going on around but is constantly fixed on walking in the ways of God.

For a moment, reflect on the Gospel and the epistle readings.

Today's gospel reading builds on last week's, in which we were encouraged to think about having a right attitude to wealth and possessions. Again, it underlines and reminds us of the transient nature of earthly things. Not so much this time, though, in terms of death, but as a call for us to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man, whenever that will be.

Think of that classroom image. The issue for those pupils playing around in the classroom is when that door will open, when the teacher will reappear. It could be in a matter of seconds or minutes could go by. The real question though, regardless of when, is what the teacher will see as they open that door.

This theme of the Second Coming is one which the church very often only considers at the beginning of advent. So much time has elapsed since the death and resurrection of our Lord that I suspect we find it hard to think of his second coming as something that will happen. It is however a theme that runs right through the New Testament, and we are called to take seriously. When we do, it should challenge us day by day.

As we reflect at the end of each day on the events of that day, I wonder if Jesus would he be saying to us “well done thou good and faithful servant”? The reality of Christ's second coming should not only provide us with motivation for the way we live our lives but should also inspire them with a sense of urgency, commitment, and faith. There is so much to do - can we afford to waste the opportunities that come our way?

Living in the light of the second coming should also function as a catalyst to confession and repentance when we fail, as we do so often to walk in the ways of Christ.

Can it be said of us that we are *“dressed for action and have our lamps lit;”* as *“those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.”* For that is what Christ is looking for.

Our epistle reading holds before us the character of Abraham the great patriarch or father figure of Israel, and the way his life and his faith were played out very much in the light of what would be, not in the light of what was.

I wonder if we would be prepared to take the step of faith we see Abraham taking. As we reflect upon Abraham’s life story, the absurdity of what takes place in human terms at least, becomes all too clear.

Abraham was not a young man at the time of God’s call, he was 75 years old and his wife Sarah, 65. They had no children and under normal circumstances their hope of producing a family was receding daily, if it had not already gone. Yet it is to this man that God says *“I will make you a great nation”* - I will build my plan of salvation on you. As he steps out and follows God’s call, it is knowing he will never see it come to fruition - just the first tentative steps.

As the writer to the letter to Hebrews sums it up: -

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

The journey of faith is about being committed, being ready even if we cannot see the whole picture or may never see the whole picture. And just because that may be so does not mean we can back off; we are always called to go forward.

Think back to that classroom; a single piece of work does not make or break one's education, but each piece of work is an important part of an ongoing process. Commitment to the process is important, even when the end goal is out of sight or unclear. It is vital. Spend too much time messing around in class and not doing homework and, before long, the educational opportunity has slipped by.

So too for us, in our journey of faith: we are called to be committed, being ready to take every opportunity even if we cannot see the end goal. We are called to constantly work in the light of Christ.

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can immediately open the door for him.”