



WHAT HAVE THE EARLY CHURCH EVER DONE FOR US EH?....

In the service of Collation, Induction and Installation (answers on a postcard about what each means...) back in May, Archdeacon Greg preached about *"making the main thing the main thing"*. We have tried to honour that charge from him but I'm not sure I've written about that specifically here.

So here goes.

What is the main thing?

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve..." (1 Corinthians 15: 1-4)

This is the passage Greg was preaching on and for Paul it is him coming to the end of his letter to the church in Corinth, who were errant in so many ways (!), and he wants to end on a key note – the main thing. Jesus died for your sins. He was resurrected. You will live forever if you believe. Don't believe and you are not saved. This is of "first importance". The... main... thing...!

We looked at the difference between preaching and teaching recently. One is to impart and develop knowledge (teaching) and is helpful to discipleship and *Growing in Christ*, the other is proclaiming truth that moves the soul towards commitment to, and growth in, faith! That is *Sharing God's love*!

Speaking out the main thing is preaching.

And that's what we seek to do.

It came up again in Morning Prayer this week in the words of Paul. He was before King Agrippa who was deciding what to do with this Jewish, Roman citizen who preached the Gospel of Christ Jesus, crucified as the Saviour!

Paul concludes his speech with these words:

²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:22-23)

Preach it brother Paul!

St Antony's has a history of being a vibrant church in an estate setting (there is no room for a car park!) but that is now essentially a community space with a small weekly gathering for worship (average attendance of approximately 6) and two other weekly church activities.

The congregation is lay-led three Sundays a month and there is a Women's Group and a weekly tea. But most of the activity there is by the Whytebeams Nursery School and other hirers.

Once a month, on the fourth Sunday, there is an informal Holy Communion. We sit around tables. I sit and lead. There is tea/coffee and cake. Chat. And hymns and songs are from a series of CDs. The songs always start with letters close to each other in the alphabet and with hymn numbers that are close in the hymn books. Because I choose them all from one CD (so as not to have to change discs)!

It works and is simple.

We use the seasonal booklets produced a few years ago.

When it comes to the “sermon” we have a led discussion on one reading. Usually done in two parts.

I prompt discussion with questions. And guide with some points I would like to bring out.

Most people contribute.

All sounds quite laid back (which it is).

But it has also been quite profound. For all of us! All Saints and St Antony's.

Let me explain.

Approaching it with the only brief of “it’s quite informal” I rocked up the first time with a reading from Acts – chapter 2, day of Pentecost – and explored what it might say to a church with small numbers and ask - **“how does a church grow?”**

Given that the early church **exploded** across the Mediterranean in the first century – it’s worth learning some lessons from the book of Acts. And that’s what we have been doing. Looking at the early church and asking – *“what would that look like here?”*

We can **all** learn from these chapters....

Week 1: Acts 2 – Peter preached having been filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. He spoke boldly about Jesus and calls the hearers to repentance. 3000 give their lives to Jesus!

MESSAGE: Preach boldly and trust in the Spirit to guide you, and people will be attracted and come.

Week 2: Acts 3 – Peter and John go to the temple and meet a man who has not walked his whole life; he asks for money and they say, *“silver and gold we do not have but what we do have we give you, get up and walk in the name of Jesus”*; the man is healed and many around come to faith.

MESSAGE: Believe in the supernatural power of Jesus and that will attract people to come to faith.

Week 3: Acts 4 (this Sunday 25th Oct) – Peter and John are challenged by the religious authorities; they interrogate them and try to ban them from speaking about Jesus; the disciples refuse, and even more come to faith. People note that there is nothing special about them, they are just “ordinary men”.

MESSAGE: This is for anyone of faith to be bold, assured of their faith, refuse to be silenced and to be certain – that is attractive. Certainty makes people want to know more!

Do you want to see our churches grow? To see many come to faith in Sanderstead and Hamsey Green?

Be bold.

You want to explore how the early church grew in number and confidence?

Join us at 3pm every fourth Sunday. It's fun, challenging, profound and there is always cake!

Tell your friends.

Let's grow something new and special, not just at All Saints and St Antony's but across this piece of land given to us to pastor in the Sanderstead Parish.

All for his glory...

Your brother in Christ

Doug

rector@sanderstead-parish.org.uk