**St Andrew’s on the Terrace Pentecost 21 Reformation Sunday 29 October 2017**

**The Epistle Ephesians 1:11- 23**

**Thanksgiving and Prayer**

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and

revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as

the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23

which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

**Gospel Luke 6: 20-31**

**Blessings and Woes**

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now,

for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich,

for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

**Love for Enemies**

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs

from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

**Contemporary reading Fr. Richard Rohr gets it right .. on Emerging Church Oct 24, 2009 by Brian McLaren**

Richard says: *It seems to me that the emerging church is emerging because people are finding the ability to have a grateful foot in both camps — on in the Tradition (the mother church) along with another foot inside of a support group that parallels, deepens, broadens, grounds, and personalizes the traditional message. But you don’t throw out the traditional message, or you have to keep rebuilding the infrastructure or creating a superstructure all over again. The emerging church becomes an accountability system for the Tradition, which is needed to keep us honest and not just lost in words. This is a new kind of reformation in which we don’t react, we don’t rebel, we don’t start from zero again. You can’t start a spiritual reformation by spinning wheels, particularly not angry wheels. You have to be for something —totally—or it is not religion. And so the appropriate questions are: What are you in love with? What do you believe in? What is the heaven that you have already discovered?*

*What good thing do you need to share? This is the only work of soul*.

*[Adapted from the CAC webcast, Nov. 8, 2008: What is The Emerging Church?]*

This parallels what I’ve been saying lately about the relation between movements and institutions. When movement people don’t t understand the value of institutions – and vice versa – everybody is worse off. Well said, Richard!

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Our readings were a mixed bag today. The Epistle and the Gospel are the ones chosen for the lectionary this year, for what the Protestant lectionary has called ‘Reformer’s Sunday’ – and a special reformer’s Sunday it is, being almost the 500th anniversary of Luther’s 95 proposals for discussion which led eventually, to his surprise, to Protestantism.

First the writer to the church at Ephesus gives thanks for the faith among the group of which he has heard, then we are treated to an outpouring of praise and a description of God which would have fitted well in a reformation sermon of the 16th century. A God mighty and strong, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion”. One of the blessings in the Gospel reading is poignant read on the eve of 500 years of reformation “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man.” And yet so many lives would have been saved in the 16th century and beyond if the following passage had been observed then in the name of religion “But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.”

Just as then, a new church and churches emerged though with much rebellion, anger and reaction, so now a new church is emerging from the traditional institution. People from the movements McLaren refers to in the contemporary reading, movement people like Luther then, are now knocking on the doors of the institutional church, Catholic and Protestant, calling for change and development. The contemporary reading calls for a blending of the gifts of the two – the tradition of the institutional church and the energy of the emerging movements within. In the New Zealand Presbyterian church we have for many years fought battles with words as weapons over who is worthy to be ordained – first of all, after being asked the question from 1924 to 1955, the institution responded and ordained women as elders, then 10 years later it ordained women as ministers, yet, though different movement people knock on the door now at the moment the answer is ‘no’ to the lgbtqi community – that is movement people keeping the institution honest. It took 31 years for women to become elders, so far in the gay debate we are up to 26 years - only a few more to go!

Luther merely wanted something of this kind of reform within the Catholic Church. As he *perhaps* nailed those 95 topics for discussion to the door of the local church had you told him he would be instrumental in a proliferation of churches, he would have been truly and profoundly shocked.

In your own ‘Reformation pamphlet’ today, there are three diagrams of how the split in churches can be perceived. The first is somewhat stylised, the Protestant churches shown in green; the second begins back in our Jewish roots and the third gives more detail. It may be a surprise to you that Pentecostalism rose from the Methodists who were a reform movement within the Anglican tradition; it may also surprise you Presbyterians sprang from the theology of a Frenchman Jean Calvin; it may be a shock to realise that Baptist and Anabaptist are quite different and rise from different parts of the family tree.

It’s not a surprise to me that Baptists sprang out of the Calvinist branch of Protestantism. There was plenty of Calvinist thought floating around the Baptist church in which I grew up!

Within the Scottish Presbyterian church there were subsequently many splits and re-unions of different branches. A diagram showing this looks rather like a complicated plumbing diagram for a block of flats! I have no doubt this congregation, if we were all to insist on church and religion being exactly the way we wanted it, could create such a diagram quite quickly.

So that’s one effect of the Reformation, a proliferation of Protestant denominations, dividing over practice and/or doctrine – the type of baptism, (Baptists and Anabaptists) the theology of the Eucharist, (Zwingli and Luther and Calvin) the role of the sacraments, (Luther and the Catholics) whether or not to sign up to confessions of faith, church governance, the role of the civil magistrate, patronage versus freedom,(Scottish Presbyterians) biblical interpretation, (everyone) the role of church and state (the radical reformation leading to congregational churches). You name it, Protestants argued over it! This was the height of the period when belief in statements and confessions and propositions was the standard. What you believed was vitally important, perhaps sometimes more than *how* you believed or how you acted, though to be fair, strict moral rectitude was also required.

A second effect of the Reformation was to interrupt the hold which the medieval church had over scientific enquiry. Theological belief now held back scientific research a lot less than before. Ironic, considering the conservative yen for creationism over evolution now. The blooming of the scientific revolution then is seen now as being able to happen in a combination of renaissance, humanists and post-reformation intellectual freedom and individual enquiry. The statement that the reformation made people ‘less religious’ is to say that people were less likely, after the reformation to allow religious systems such as churches to restrict what we could call their secular thinking and investigating of the world.

This was not only a lifting of religious repression, but also a shift of authority in general towards the common people. Feudalism increasingly lost its power and individuals both had the freedom, but also needed, to fend for themselves for their livelihoods.

This led on to a third effect of the Reformation which has been much discussed but which surprised me when I first heard of this idea produced by sociologists of religion – the connection between Reformation and the rise of capitalism.

Max Weber’s argument at the start of the twentieth century was that pre-Reformation, those who had a calling were understood to be only priests, monks, nuns and other members of religious orders. When the convents and monasteries lost status in protestant areas, the idea of a sacred God-given calling was transferred to one’s daily work – the baker, the black smith, the teacher, the artisan were seen as following a vocation. Their work was seen as being done to the glory of God. Whereas the world had been rejected within religion previously, now Calvinist theology approved of worldly activities which brought economic gain and this work therefore was given moral and spiritual significance.

This meant private enterprise developed. When profits were made another problem arose. The new Protestantism did not approve of spending one’s money in luxurious living. There was no chance to use one’s money to donate expensive icons, artwork or relics to the new Protestant church, so what to do with this God-given money? The Protestant work ethic was consistent with investing the money so that the money too in its turn could work. Hence the rise of goods being produced for consumer consumption and the rise of the financial markets argues Weber. As one person puts it: “The believers thus justified pursuit of profit with religion, as instead of being fuelled by morally suspect greed or ambition, their actions were [seen as being] motivated by a highly moral and respected philosophy.”

This might have been a good thing if a booming economy always meant everyone in society benefitted from that boom. We well know that is not true. The Presbyterian penchant for decency and order also meant Presbyterians tended not to support the work of unions, especially when their agitating lead to strikes and disruption of work.

A fourth effect of the reformation, Weber argued, was a disenchantment of the world. He borrowed the term from Friedrich Schiller. Disenchantment is a state of rationalisation and devaluation of mysticism. Wherever the disenchantment came from, whether from the Reformation or some other influence, disenchantment is a valid description of our modernised, bureaucratic, secular Western Society. As a society we value scientific understanding and rationalism over belief. This is in comparison to pre- modern tradition societies where as Weberd describes it: "the world remains a great enchanted garden".[[1]](#footnote-1)

Some of you will be nodding and saying “Yes! That’s right and I like that rationalism better than a lot of wishy washy sentimental mumbo jumbo”. Others of you will be nodding your heads and saying “Yes! I knew something vital and mysterious is missing!”

It was perhaps a seeking of re-enchantment which led to the Pentecostal movement springing out of Methodism. It is a seeking of re-enchantment which brings young people in numbers to mindfulness courses in our Centre. It is a seeking of re-enchantment when Protestants embrace contemplative prayer, labyrinth walking and Celtic spirituality. It is a yearning for re-enchantment of our world which has made the number of books on angels in bookshops these days double and quadruple.

Some personality types find there is only so much rationality that they can stand. Each seek re-enchantment in their own way. This reformation inspired disenchantment explains for me the huge suspicion I encountered down south in the 80s when I began to introduce contemplative prayer and meditation to conservative Southlanders. I had to re-label it ‘Listening Prayer’ to get through the fear of this eastern mysticism. Yet, contemplative prayer was in the very roots of our faith in the very early centuries!

Today’s Protestant churches often are seen re-claiming enchantment practices which have always been in the Christian tradition but disappeared from our branches of church at the Reformation – contemplation, pilgrimage, icons, candles, meditation, centering prayer, journaling, the use of intuition in reflection, the welcoming back of visual representations of God and spirituality . These we will be celebrating on November 26. Look at the notice from Mike and Fiona, I’m fascinated to see it alludes to the early Protestant disdain for decoration and art in churches and encourages us to re-claim art as a tool for spiritual growth and practice.

This is partly what the contemporary reading is saying. Not everything in the tradition needs to be thrown out, even though there is constant refreshing needed. If we go too far, then we might need to go searching through the bathwater for the baby we threw out in mistaken zeal.

Few of us here are Lutheran and probably almost none of us would sign up to thorough-going Calvinism as originally expressed by Jean Calvin or enshrined in the Westminster Confession. But what are we now? And how would we work what we are now?

Richard Rohr suggests the only work of soul is to ask ourselves some simple questions. We could think of these as his four new sola – his four questions which alone need asking. You might want to add more or take some away. I have tweaked one of his already....

So as we end this time of reflection, let us for the moment ponder Richard Rohr’s questions for our own place and time:

What are you in love with?

In what do you trust?

What heaven have you already discovered?

What good thing do you need to share?

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1. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (1971) p. 270 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)