

Sermon preached at Eaglehawk 28th April 2013 by Rev Ralph Clarke
Readings: Acts 11:1-18; Rev 21:1-6; John 13:31- 35

John has Jesus saying, "Now, the Son of Man has been glorified". In our society, that word glorified often means tizzed up, something that looks better than it really is. An old car that's given a coat of paint might be called a glorified old bomb. A journalist accuses the government of "glorifying its performance" by highlighting a few good things that it does and ignoring the bad things.

When Jesus says the Son of Man has been glorified he doesn't mean he is made to look better than he really is. Jesus glory is a reflection of the glory of God, & of God's goodness & love reflected in Jesus death on the cross. In John's gospel, Jesus death is not dishonourable and shameful but the highest act of God's glory. Jesus disciples or followers, were called to reflect Jesus glory by loving each other "as Jesus has loved us". "By this", he says, "Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have this love, one for another". Jesus calls us to be there for each other, to put ourselves out for one another.

Before Easter, most of the focus was on Jesus. Jesus mission, reflected God's mission. After Easter, it seems Jesus continuing glory is to be reflected in the life and mission of the people of Jesus. We represent Jesus. The church's mission is to reflect God's mission as we see that in Jesus.

This time after Easter is a time to imagine what Jesus mission can mean for us now as individuals, as a church, and in a wider sense in our country and world. This Congregation has developed a 7 point outline of Dreams and Visions.

- * Believing – a Jesus centred faith for the 21st century,
- * Caring – for people and the environment,
- * Gathering – to celebrate life and faith in God,
- * Learning and Growing – through sharing,
- * Resourcing – making the best use of what is available,
- * Supporting and initiating – outreach locally, regionally, nationally and globally,
- and * Welcoming – everyone regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age or status.

Under each of these the Church Council has indicated how these can be achieved and is next week going to work out ways these can be measured & delivered. It's quite an exciting list. This document is not meant to make the church look good but is to be lived for the glory of God. In this we are following a tradition of the early church.

In every place the early church had to work out its particular mission as the people of Christ. In Acts 11 the Jerusalem church is challenged to accept all people regardless of race, sex, religion & other differences. Peter's vision is that the church accepts even non Jews as people of Christ regardless of the emotions and feelings they might have. Non Jews were also responding to Jesus and the new church was called to be open to others.

Another example is in Revelation 21 with its vision of a new heaven and earth. Isaiah 65 also talked about a new heaven and earth centred in Jerusalem, but here the new is because God is present on earth. "The home of God is with mortals". John says, "All things are being made new", cities, people, suffering, sorrow and death are all being transformed.

These are big themes. How can we as individuals & a church community reflect these aspects of Jesus life now? Loving others as Jesus loved us rarely means being crucified like Jesus. But it does mean being willing to sacrifice ourselves a bit, & to think of others as much as ourselves.

The acceptance Peter called for is not always easy, even in our time, particularly if we have foreign refugees, violent people or drug addicts in our community. Yet it is these very people who need our acceptance, and care. If we cannot accept others, we cannot share Jesus love with them.

Revelation 21 points to God's newness. How can we reflect newness in our community life? New things are not always good. If we start a new life that includes drugs, violence, exploitation or injustice we might become a nuisance. The new that God brings is his kingdom life, love, justice, peace, inclusiveness, mercy & forgiveness. You might wish, like me that we could do what Revelation says and transform suffering, sorrow and death, but these still remain. Part of our task might be to at least point to God's newness by helping one another through tough times, because we believe sufferers have more to look forward to than suffering. We might encourage those who challenge the drug trade, believing that life is meant to be more than deadening our brain to all that hurts us. We can challenge children to use Twitter and other sites to encourage rather than bully others. We don't have to do the same things as these early churches, but what we do as church does need to reflect God's glory in the world.