

## Saint Cuthbert's, Delta - Sunday, August 29<sup>th</sup> 2010

*+ Almighty God, who called your servant Cuthbert from following the flock to follow your Son and to be a shepherd of your people: in your mercy, grant that we, following his example, may bring those who are lost home to your fold; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen*

First I'd like to thank your Rector, Al Carson for his kind invitation to preach this weekend as part of your celebrations at St Cuthbert's. I bring greetings from Bishop Michael who I know was with you as you celebrated St Cuthbert's Day in March. I also bring greetings from my own parish across the line ... or at least across 120<sup>th</sup> Street in north Surrey. They are delighted to have someone else preaching this morning.

I have never regarded myself as being old. I do remember as a kid working out how old I'd be when the year 2000 came around and it seemed very old. However as the year came closer I revised my opinion.

As it is probably clear I am not from here, but from over there, though we have been here for now for ten years, having lived previously over there. This year Britain got a new Prime Minister who is younger than me. What's worse the President of the United States is younger than me; even the Canadian Prime Minister is younger than me. But to cap it all St Cuthbert's is younger than me.

One of the challenges for those preaching on such occasions as an Anniversary is that the content of the sermon may have been heard many times before. If so my apologies as I appreciate this is of more concern to you than it is to me.

Last year we were back in the UK and spend some time in Durham with friends who are both Anglican clergy. He is Archdeacon of Durham and lives in a wonderful house overlooking the river and literally in the shadow of the Cathedral.

In the early part of the nineteenth century a medieval shrine has unearthed at the great Cathedral (one of the finest in all England) believed to contain the remains of Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne.

Cuthbert worked in the north of England as a shepherd, tending the many sheep that populate the hills of that part of the country even to this day. He is understood to have received a vision which drew him to become a monk in Melrose, now in Scotland. Later Cuthbert spent many years travelling on horse and on foot ministering to the scattered communities in the remotest parts of the country between Galloway and Berwick. Cuthbert often lived alone as a solitary before retiring to the island of Farne. Just a few years later he was called to be bishop of Hexham with his ecclesiastical seat at Lindisfarne. He was only a bishop for two years before his death (aged 52); gosh that's

pretty young. Cuthbert was renowned for being dedicated to his flock, through preaching and alms giving, and his gifts of healing. Apparently he was regarded as being a person of 'extraordinary charm and practical ability', with a keen interest (not unlike St Francis) in birds and animals. Whilst living on the Farne Islands, Cuthbert instituted special laws to protect the Eider ducks and other seabirds nesting on the islands; these may have been the first bird protection laws anywhere in the world.

If you have the chance (if you haven't already) visited Durham and Lindisfarne I strongly commend them to you ... well worth visiting.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah this morning we hear how the people of Israel have for generations worshipped 'worthless things' meaning idols. Also they have forgotten that God has been part of their history for ever in being involved in their lives. Does that ring any bells? Does it seem as our generation have so often seem to have forgotten God in favour of the self and the endless pursuit of our own ends.

Part of the blame says Jeremiah rest on the shoulders of the leaders ... where priests have become specialists in the laws on sacrifices ... but seem no longer to no God. Likewise the prophets (both court and temple) have uttered false prophecies ... because they do not come from God.

Of course it is, as in our modern era, easy to point the finger of blame at our leaders ... in government, in the workplace as well as in the Church. However leaders in the Church (both lay and ordained) have the responsibility to ensure that we keep our life and witness as the Church focused on God, not on disagreements about this matter or that. For when the Church is divided we are least effective and most likely not to respond faithfully to God's call.

The gospel passage today recounts the healing of a person suffering from what is termed 'dropsy' meaning in our terms, an oedema. Like the prophets spoken of in the Jeremiah passage ... the 'lawyers and Pharisees' are so correct on Sabbath day observance but are speechless in challenging Jesus for seeking to heal a suffering person on their 'holy day'.

Now I know last night you had your banquet and I don't want to know if you had a high table and who exactly sat where. Suffice it to say ... sitting people at a formal meal even in the time of Jesus was a challenge ... later, age rather than honour or wealth were used as criterion to prevent problems! However we should concentrate on the meaning that Jesus has in this passage ... ie that we must wait for God's invitation to the Kingdom ... God will not be fooled by our self-promotion ... for those often spurned in the time of Jesus (in both Jewish and Greco-Roman societies ... the poor and the disabled ... should suggests Jesus be invited ... that giving to the poor (those unable to repay) will enable people to be admitted to the Kingdom.

CK Barrett suggests that Jesus (as host) invites the outsiders and the unimportant to participate in the life that he offers. This is important for us to remember. The Church exists for everyone ... not just for those with money to keep the place running, but rather that all of us should use our God-given skills in the service of God and in the service of others.

There is no question these are not the easiest of times. Church attendance in the mainline churches (and in others too) is in decline. We have to face that fact and not ignore it. However we have so much to be grateful for ... for our mission and ministry in this parish, now celebrating its first 50 years. Your links in the community not least in sharing worship and events with other denominations in North Delta; for your prayer life and service, for your work with young people; for the many wonderful things happening in this church in the name of Jesus Christ.

I had a brief look at your web-site and was so delighted to see of your involvement in so many projects in the community. Also it is wonderful to read of the many small groups that assist in the nurturing newcomers as well as supporting the existing congregation in the journey of faith. And each and every one of these projects and group exist and rely on the fact that this church was planted here and has blossomed here for these past five decades.

This occasion (50 years) marks an important milestone for your Church. It is right and proper that we look back with thankfulness to God for all that has been achieved. At the same time this is a moment to look forward ... to the next 50 years to invest and re-invest your skills, your time and your resources to further develop and grow the mission and life of this place.

What is the vision for St Cuthbert's as you enter the next 50 years of your life? We all have our ideas about that I'm sure. And the MAP process in the coming 18 months will help to clarify and focus your place in the community as a place of worship, service, or prayer and thanksgiving. I am especially pleased that in the East this parish will be working with St Helen's, St Michael's and my parish Epiphany to determine a pattern for the future ministry of the Anglican Church in Delta and eastern Surrey.

As we journey onwards perhaps one line from the gospel may give us encouragement as we celebrate today.

*'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'*

This is not a reflection or comment on who sat where last night. Rather it is a reminder that this Church (as any Christian Church) exists not for its members or for its well off and influential neighbours. Rather it exists for those who need the Church, who need God, who are in distress or hardship that we might offer some comfort or support in the name of Jesus Christ.

And it is a reminder that we are part of the heavenly banquet not because of right, not because of our Church attendance or good works, but because God has invited us and we have responded to the call.

So let's us celebrate 50 years today and look forward to the centenary celebrations. I may not be Archdeacon of Fraser at that time but my guess is that God has an exceptional, wonderful, unexpected future for this place, dedicated to Cuthbert who served his flock in entirely the way you are called to serve your community.

Amen