

The Gospel; at the heart of all we do.

Last Tuesday I was present in the congregation at a very full St Leonard's Church for the Induction and Installation of the new Rector, the Reverend Canon Timothy John Pullen. The Service was presided over by the Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham the Right Reverend Paul Butler (soon to be installed as the next Bishop of Durham). It was a service containing both liturgical as well as legal elements which illustrated well the role which the Church of England retains in our society. But the Bishop was clear in emphasising the Gospel as being at the heart of that role. The reading chosen for the service was from St Paul's letter to the Romans: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation* and in his sermon, the Bishop pondered on that sentence, applying it to three aspects of Canon Timothy's life and by implication to our lives too. The three aspects he considered were scripture, creation and faith. So just how do we ensure that the Gospel is kept at the heart of our lives?

Looking at those three aspects of scripture, creation and faith, tells us that the Gospel fashions and directs us. Scripture, the word of God is not something which we should allow to simply lie idle on the pages of the Bible. When we read the gospel we should reflect upon its meaning and look to interpret and apply it to the circumstances and situations we find ourselves in. In a real way this means allowing its teaching to be a guide as to the way in which we approach the many questions which life throws at us. No matter how disconnected the Gospel may seem from what I am experiencing or going through, Jesus offers us a different angle, a new way of discerning the truth; of seeing and recognising that in our lives the presence of the word of God is important and relevant.

By inference this flows into seeing and discerning the presence of the Gospel in creation. By taking hold of the Gospel as the value by which our lives are lived, we discern how vital it becomes. The challenges we all face in the world, be they small or great exist within the parameters of God revealing himself to us through his incarnate word and through creation. Fashioned out of love, creation unfolds as the mystery of that love in action. The way we are towards each other is a manifestation of this love, and in Jesus we see that love in its fullness, and it animates our actions and defines our deeds.

Faith is our response as the call to express our acts and deeds in the knowledge and truth of the Gospel takes hold. We come each week to be fed by the Gospel in word and sacrament so that we keep our heart and spirit close to the Lord. Our faith asks us always to examine our motives and to question what it is we are asked to do. Our faith in that word and sacrament sends us out into the world, to bring the message of God's love in all its beauty and truth to a world that struggles with the weight of doubt and disbelief.

Today's gospel offers us a parable that encourages us to pray continually and to never lose heart as exemplified by the tenacity of the widow. The question which Jesus poses at the end; *when the Son of Man comes will he find any faith on earth?* gives us food for deep thought. As a Church we have to ask it of ourselves too. Keeping the Gospel at the heart of all we do will help us with our response.