

“Has the Trinity no leader?” (The Shack)

A sermon preached on Sunday morning, 26th July 2009 at St Mark's, Little Common by J.J. Fraiss

At his final Downing Street press conference before his summer break, “Mr Brown said that more ‘tough choices’ lay ahead on public spending but stopped short of endorsing the Business Secretary Lord Mandelson’s warning last week that Britain faced 10 years of austerity on spending” (*Independent* 23 July). They appear to be saying different things. How difficult it is to get everyone to pull in the same direction!

At the risk of irreverence, someone has reworded a verse to say, “God so loved the world that he did not send a committee.” It makes the point of the cynic that if you want to get something done you had better do it yourself - and how grateful we are for the decisive action in the original verse in which God so loved the world that he gave his us his Son. However, any group without a leader finds that more is said than done and perhaps little gets done at all, and as another saying wearily notes, at the end of the day it gets dark!

“To whom will you compare me?” asks the Lord (Isaiah 40:25). The answer is no-one because God is incomparable and so to compare him to anyone or anything will diminish him in some respect (even if we seek to project another aspect of him correctly).

Three weeks ago we posed the first of three questions about the popular Christian novel, *The Shack*. We asked, “Can God be mother?” and searched the Scriptures for an answer. We discovered that God can be motherly but he is still a “him” and is known as “Father”.

Our study found that man-made descriptions of God veer towards idolatry (we even lack details of what Christ looked like) and it is the option of unbiblical religion to call him mother. *The Shack* attempts to face distress and keep the faith but it strays from the way of the Lord both in its address for God and its attempt to describe our incomparable God.

Now a second question: has the Trinity no leader? In other words, can we pull in the same direction and seek perfect harmony without a clear authority structure?

Mack, the central character in *The Shack*, had a horrible experience of fatherhood. He saw his father beat his mother and later his father beat him too (p8) – mercifully, the book is only a novel. Dad was an alcoholic and “drank himself to death” (p38). This awful experience, according to the book, is why Mack finds it difficult to call God “Father” and why God has to appear to him as a mother.

In the book, God explains that “we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a *circle* of relationship not a chain of command”. In *The Shack*, God adds, “We don’t need power over the other because we are always looking out for the best. Hierarchy would make no sense among us” (p122). Later in the book, regarding his relationship to the Father and the Spirit, Jesus explains, “We have indeed been submitted to one another and have always been so and always will be.”

There are four applications of this. First, faith is not about obedience. As Jesus Says in the book, “Submission is not about authority” because “I don’t want slaves to my will; I want brothers and sisters who will share life with me” (p145-46).

Second, God does not chastise our disobedience. He says, “I don’t need to Punish people for sin” (p120) and “I don’t do humiliation, or guilt, or condemnation” (p223).

Third, we don’t need church. After all, church is an institution with leaders and in the book Jesus says religion, politics and economics are “the man-made trinity of terrors which ravages the earth and deceives those I care about” (p179).

Fourth, you don’t even have to be a Christian – for that too might put you under obligation to people in authority. So, in the book, Jesus says of people, “I have no desire to make them Christian, but I do want them to join in their transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa [God]” (p182). And, tellingly, the closing pages make no mention of the revitalized Mack going back to church or wanting to be called a Christian.

The book is written to help the author come to terms with his own grim experience. William Paul Young was sexually abused at a Christian boarding school, later committed adultery, and is no longer a member of a church because it “doesn’t work for those of us who are hurt and those of us who are damaged” (wikipedia.org). Mr Young reinvents God in his

book in an attempt to come back to God but only succeeds in going further away from him and his people. So there is sadness behind the book as well as in the book.

We must be compassionate with the author (and have the humility to recognize that church can be a hindrance and not a help for faith) but also faithful to Scripture. So let us turn to the Bible and see what it says about the Holy Trinity of one God in three persons.

First, the Father's lead

The verse I rephrased earlier declares the initiative of the Father: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And the Son explains the Father's work: "you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:27).

So what of accountability? In the Bible, the perfect fatherhood of God includes rewards for good behaviour and punishment for sin. The New Testament quotes the words of Solomon that "the Lord disciplines those he loves" (Hebrews 12:6). So God's parental oversight identifies guilt and deals with it as part of the real leadership of the Father.

Second, the Son's task

In the Bible, Jesus proclaims his submission to the Father. He says that "I do exactly what my Father has commanded me" (John 14:31). This does not diminish his own willingness to serve us by dying for us as the good shepherd who cares for the sheep. As a result, the Father glorifies the Son but nowhere are we told that the Father submits to the Son.

So may we talk about a joyful slavery to God? Absolutely! Jesus says, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). The believer is freed from slavery to sin in order to become a slave to righteousness (Romans 6:17-18). We pursue "obedience to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2). True life is found in living as Jesus' way.

Third, the Spirit's help

As we read of the work of the Holy Spirit energizing the New Testament church, we read that believers, who were originally known as those "who

belonged to the Way” (Acts 9:2), “were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). They spoke much of Christ!

We are called to “love one another” (John 13:35) and “not give up meeting together” (Hebrews 10:25). And, following our Lord’s example and rejecting the wisdom of the world, we take up relationships of intelligent submission – be they in marriage, family, work, church, state or age (Ephesians 5:22; 6:1; 6:5; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 2:13; 5:5). Full transformation into the people we are supposed to be (our aim) comes with the name Christian and is worked out among others who serve the Lord (the means).

Authority and fatherhood are despised in some circles today but Scripture redeems them through the example of Christ. God calls us to obedience, takes the guilt of our sins upon himself in the person of his Son, calls us Christians and puts us together as church. We are the community that calls Jesus ‘Lord’ and we accept whatever change is needed.

So our incomparable Lord is revealed in the perfect community of Father, Son and Spirit which faultlessly pulls together. Unlike the flawed world of politics, we have an example that rebukes our waywardness and redeems our failure and calls us to true faith. May we enjoy the blessing of falling into line with the will of God. Therein lies true joy.

PRAYER: God our Father, you love us, save us and change us. Give us discernment in this confused age and keep us faithful to Jesus for your name’s sake, amen.

Thinking further

- 1, What is a community?
- 2, What is leadership?
- 3, Can people work without authority?
- 4, How may our experience influence our faith?
- 5, Is obedience always good?
- 6, Why do we punish disobedience?
- 7, What is God’s will for your life?

FOOD BANK – EXTRA.

This is a little update on how the Food Bank is doing from Wendy Fryatt.

There are a few changes happening at the Food Bank and we are moving the warehouse operation, amazing I hear you sigh, yes it is! We are hoping by the end of this month to move into an empty factory unit in Halesowen....does this mean no more Stourbridge Food Bank? An emphatic NO is the answer. We will still have the replenish and distribution in the Stourbridge area, it's just the warehouse/administration that needs to move for more space and better road connection along with an actual office. No more will I be dashing to the smallest room to take/make telephone calls, no longer will the administration department be in my dining room, I shall probably miss it.

The name of the umbrella organisation will be **BLACK COUNTRY FOOD BANK**. We have a new web address: www.blackcountryfoodbank.org.uk along with matching e-mail addresses wendy@blackcountryfoodbank.org.uk, admin@blackcountryfoodbank.org.uk warehouse etc, you get the picture and for those of you who didn't realise we had a web site before try blackcountryfoodbank.webs.com.

OK, she must be after something you're thinking and you would be right. The new base needs: Repairs to the flooring £380.00. Machinery removal makes this necessary. Additional racking £1100. Shelves and bearers. The reception furniture has been donated by Loaves and Fishes. A photocopier has also been donated. We need 3 desk tops or laptops and printer. Coffee Machine (this would be great) shopping trolleys. Painting and decorating. Large Van Hire for moving. Transporting Goods. Gardening skills. Lockable shelved cupboards to secure food, and also your time to help.

Could you make a contribution towards these initial costs, would you consider setting up regular give to Black Country Food Bank and support our work?

Please contact us at blackcountryfoodbank@yahoo.co.uk

Thank you for your continued support.

Wendy

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

The Worcestershire Preparation Day for the Women's World Day of Prayer 2010, prepared by the women of Cameroon, on the theme 'Let everything that has breath praise God', held here on October 1st went very well. The National Committee Members even thought that the banner fronting the Music Group had been specially made for the day.

There were over fifty women attending from all over Worcestershire, from near – Lye, Halesowen, Quinton and Dudley, and far – Malvern, Bromsgrove, Redditch, Evesham and Kidderminster.

The numbers have increased steadily over the three years it has been held here. Word must be getting out about the speciality home made soups which we serve.

Everyone enjoyed the day, hearing about the life lived by the women of Cameroon – not easy. Bible studies on the scriptures being used in the service, and after lunch, going through the service itself and ideas on how to integrate young and old, men and women into the service.

Did you know that the Women's World Day of Prayer is the largest ecumenical movement worldwide?

It began in 1887 when Mary Ellen James called for a day of prayer. The wife of a Presbyterian Minister in New York, her heart was touched by the problems, poverty, slums and all that meant to the women living there.

She called the women of her church to come together in a day of prayer, a day "where there shall be confession of individual and national sins with offerings that fully express the contrition".

The movement grew from that small, heartfelt day of prayer.

The Day of Prayer begins as dawn breaks over the islands of Tonga in the Pacific and continues across each continent until the last services of this special day are held back in the Pacific on the islands of Samoa, circling the world in prayer for about 36 hours.

Next year's service will be held at the Lye Salvation Army Citadel on the High Street at 2.00 p.m. Friday March 5th. There will be reminders in the monthly Newsletters, so pencil it into your diary now and come and make a difference with your presence, prayer and praise.

*Christ Church
The Lye and Stambermill*



**NEWSLETTER
NOVEMBER 2009**

CHRIST CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT.

This Church exists to:

Love God, Unite in Fellowship

Serve the Community

Share the good news of Jesus Christ

In the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHURCH POSTERS

It is now possible to produce our own large colour posters for Church events very cheaply (about £10-£15 per poster). All we need are your ideas! Send in your photographs (digital) together with suggested text and we can turn it into a poster. If you don't have a photograph just send the suggestion and we will see what we can do.

STOURBRIDGE FOOD BANK IS NOW THE BLACK COUNTRY FOOD BANK: As we grow, operating the Food Bank is costing more and more money and practical resources, so I'm not after just food but money, items, time and talents. This year so far we have fed in excess of 1500 people across this borough with the equivalent of 15000 meals plus all the toiletries and other items. The donations of food and toiletries are phenomenal; the people of this borough are so generous it never fails to astound us on a daily basis. We have also been joined in our fight against poverty by The Church & Junction 10, Walsall (who are going to be working in the Alum Well and Pleck areas from January) and by a school and church in Sandwell who have heard of our efforts and want to work with us. **Wendy.** (see enclosed flyer for more details of what has been going on).

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH:

Have you ever watched something on the TV or in the cinema or on the internet and wanted to comment? Perhaps you thought that it was inappropriate or perhaps good and to be encouraged. The Church of England central website has a very helpful web page listing addresses and contact details for a wide page of organisations. Do write/twitter/phone/e-mail. It makes the difference. A TV company reckons to receive one letter for every 50,000 viewers. Expressing your views (positive and negative) is significant. **<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/comms/mediaengagement.html>**

REVELATION UNWRAPPED Are you lost and confused when it comes to the book of Revelation?

Transcripts of the evening sermon series on the book of Revelation are now/will be soon be available on the Church Website.

FINANCIAL REVIEW: Many thanks to all who have responded to our annual giving review. Please do return the response form even if your giving remains unchanged.

LYE WINTER FAIR This year the Fair will be held on Friday 4th December from 4-8pm. This is a great opportunity, our whole community coming together to be the Church in the Community. Come and get involved. We have committed ourselves to running a Cake Stall—so please get backing. See Simon or Keith for more details.

PASSION FOR LYE: Sunday 30th May—Sunday 6th June 2010. This week of outreach involves all the churches in Lye. This is the programme for the week:

Sun May 30th A.M. Pulpit Swap. P.M. United Praise & Prayer

Tues 1st June A.M. Children's Event. P.M. Children's Praise Evening together with parents.

Wed 2nd June 7.30pm Men's WII Sports Event

Thurs 3rd June Strawberry Tea and Women's Pamper Night

Fri 4th June Youth Night

Sun 6th June A.M. Own Church Services P.M. United Evening Praise

YOUTH—SATURDAY 31ST OCTOBER at the Vine & Branches, there will be a "**Bright Clothes Party**", lots of light, bright and colourful clothing. There will be a prize given for the most colourful costume. No Halloween Costumes will be allowed. Come along and have fun.

BARN DANCE Get out your dancing shoes on Saturday 14th November at 7pm. There will be a small charge for entry. Paul Jackson is organising, and he is looking for a few people to help move chairs beforehand. Come and join in the fun.

DIARY FOR NOVEMBER 2009

Sunday 1st—Bells Sunday

9.00 Holy Communion
10.45 Holy Communion
6.30 Evening Praise

Monday 2nd

6.00 French Speakers Group
7.00 Prayer Group

Tuesday 3rd

10.30 Net Café
7.30 Alpha Course

Wednesday 4th

10.00 Lion Club
7.30 Smilers Club

Thursday 5th

8.00 Prayer for Rufford at Vicarage

Friday 6th

9.30 Prayer Group
11.00 Open Door + Worship

Sunday 8th

9.00 Holy Communion
10.45 Family Worship
6.30 Evening Praise

Monday 9th

7.00 Prayer Group

Tuesday 10th

10.30 Net café
7.30 Alpha Course

Wednesday 11th

10.00 Lion Club
7.00 Smilers Club

Friday 13th

9.30 Prayer Group
11.00 Open Door + Worship

Sunday 15th

9.00 Holy Communion
10.45 Family Worship and Baptism

6.30 Holy Communion

Monday 16th

7.00 Prayer Group.
8.00 PCC Meeting

Tuesday 17th

10.30 Net café
7.30 Alpha Course

Wednesday 18th

10.00 Lion Club
7.00 Smilers Club
8.00 Men's Muslim/Christian Group meeting
at Omega Security

Friday 20th

9.30 Prayer Group
10.30 Open Door Congregational Meeting
11.00 Open Door + Worship

Sunday 22nd

9.00 Holy Communion
10.45 Family Worship
6.30 Evening Praise

Monday 23rd

7.00 Prayer Group.

Tuesday 24th

10.30 Net Café
7.30 Alpha Course

Wednesday 25th

10.00 Lion Club
7.00 Smilers Club

Friday 27th

9.00 Prayer Group
11.00 Open Door + Worship

Sunday 29th

9.00 Holy Communion
10.45 All Age Worship
6.30 Evening Praise

FRIDAY DECEMBER 4TH 4.00-8.00PM
LYE & WOLLESCOTE WINTER FAIR