

TRINITY NEWS

Second Sunday after Epiphany The Otherness of Christ

It has been said of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that when he was executed in the woods of Flossenburg in Germany shortly before the Second World War ended in Europe that some who witnessed it said his radiance in the face of death “turned all their faces towards God”. Bonhoeffer, one of the most brilliant minds in Europe, had been privy to a failed plot to assassinate Hitler, and he paid for it with his life. He lost his life, the woman he loved and planned to marry, to whom he had written such beautiful letters from prison, and a very close family. The Christian Church lost one of its most original thinkers, someone who had paid the Cost of Discipleship, the title of one of his writings, in full. He called Jesus “the man for others.”

There is a deep otherness that hangs around Christ. It is at first a matter of language. He spoke in Aramaic and he was translated into Greek. It was not only a translation of languages but also a translation of concepts. The voicing of translations is never a matter of instantaneous translation. There is always a microsecond between the utterance and the translation. That microsecond contains something that cannot for a moment in time be defined. It hangs in the air and it has a moment of its own. Then it is translated and the space between is forgotten, but it is an inevitable part of the translation.

Today we have such a moment when John calls Jesus the Lamb of God. It is taken from Jewish concepts of the sacrificial lamb and it occurs early in Jesus’ ministry. It must have hung in the air like unwanted words: stunning. We will sing a hymn in the Eucharist today that contains the refrain “O lamb of God I come.” Those words echo the refrain in the book of Revelation 5:12: “Worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive..wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.” We inevitably associate these words with the Cross of Calvary. Otherwise it would make no sense to us in the pictures that we need to align with such statements.

Jesus turns our faces towards God. He lived the words uttered centuries before by the prophet Isaiah about the suffering servant of Israel, referred in our texts today at Isaiah 49:1-7. John the baptiser offers him an

interpretation drawn from his own traditions about sacrifice, and whatever Jesus made of it that day, he was his own best interpreter, and he lived it out. **We are not our best analysts, but we are the only ones who can interpret who we are as beings thrown into the world. No one can do that for us.**

No human life has an instantaneous translation or interpretation. We look at the clumsy moments in our lives with regret and disappointment. But we also have those moments when we transit from a long-prevailing situation or views long held about ourselves and others that is suddenly transcended and changed forever. **We tread in more spacious places and take the first steps of new freedom.** Whatever Christ thought about the traditions of his people, and he was certainly very aware of them, it was surely startling for him also to hear John's translation of the Jewish sacrificial tradition into words that applied to his very life. John spoke more than he knew, but his courage in using these words that must have appalled some of the listeners, showed his dependence upon God in the words that he was given to utter as a true prophet. The moment before John spoke, breaking into the silence of his own reflections, words sprang to mind that were not his own invention. It came out of his attention to God and his commitment to speak about the one who was to come, even using words that surprised him and troubled his hearers. **It may have come as a shock to Jesus himself, just as any moment when we are confronted with matters that we have to deal with that go beyond our present experience can make us fearful of what is to come. We cannot live off the words of others about ourselves, but we do trust some to give us words that can enrich our life and help us to shape our own journey. Jesus trusted John the Baptist to say words that could refer truly to his own journey, and when John was imprisoned he returned the favour with great compassion. May we do likewise to the bearers of hope for us!**

Bishop Arthur Jones

THIS WEEK:

Thursday, January 23.

- Midweek Eucharist 10 a.m.

NEXT WEEK:

Sunday, January 26.

- Parish Annual General Meeting (AGM), after the 9:30 service.

Readings for next Sunday:

Amos 3:1-8; Psalm 139; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 Matthew 4:12-23