

Moved by the Spirit!

A sermon prepared by The Revd Sarah Flashman for our service celebrating Candlemas - Christ's Presentation in the Temple Sunday 31 January 2021

Refs: Exodus 13 v 2 & 14-16, Hebrews 2 v 14-18, Luke 2 v 22-40

The World of Zoom! Through the keyhole!

Like so many of us I have been adjusting to meetings and family 'get togethers' via Zoom and I am struck by the odd way we only get to see part of a person and a little square of their surroundings, in the lounge, or study, or kitchen! Each person on my screen is rather boxed in! I wonder what their larger surroundings are like?! Sometimes the way we read scripture can be a bit like that. All we focus on is the few verses in front of us and we can leave out the bigger picture and setting....

To offer an example, during the summer I 'sat with' Ezekiel's incredible prophecy of the water flowing from the temple (Ezekiel 47). But before I really focused in on the water itself, I started by recalling the placing and dimensions of the temple. Orientated in place and getting my bearings, the framing of the focal point really helped me to comprehend more deeply the water itself; from whence it came and where it was going to. I stood back before I zoomed in!

The temple: a small market town

The temple, where Simeon and Anna appear in Luke's account, was a huge building set in a vast open space. It was the size of a small market town. There was ample room for folk to mill around. As I grasp the size and setting, I think of the nearest market town to me, Winslow, a few miles up the road from Quainton, where they still have regular livestock and farmers markets in the market square. Bible commentators remind us that the scene the small holy family enter is full of the ordinary and the everyday. A spring day brought numerous people of all ages and backgrounds; a great array, those with means, those meeting friends, all overlooked by Roman soldiers posted high above looking down from their look out towers making sure all was well. There were animals and birds being sold for the necessary sacrifices by the market gates, people begging, hoping for some compassion from a pilgrim or two, elderly people as they are wont to do, sitting in the shade beneath trees and in doorways. Into this great melee of business, noise and heaving throng, comes Mary and Joseph with their baby, Jesus.

Voices, distractions, and the still small voice

How on earth did Simeon and Anna spot this small family? What a work of the Holy Spirit! They both, immersed as they were in prayer and devotion and known as the 'Quiet in the Land' were attentive to the prompt of the Spirit. Each in turn wove and pushed their way through the ordinary everyday crowds to behold the miracle wrapped against the sun's rays and held firmly against the heaving throng. It can only have been a work of the Spirit and arose from their own times of corporate worship in the temple and personal daily devotions. Great rhythms of worship, fasting and prayer which opened their hearts, minds, and spirits to God's prompting!

Recognising Christ presented to us afresh

Christ is amongst us, and we need the Holy Spirit sometimes to cut through the noise and distraction to reveal his presence to us and what that means! He comes again and again in saving power. In the ordinariness and business we can again perceive and behold the extraordinary. These days are harsh as we miss our corporate times of worship and fellowship and yet as we engage in whatever corporate worship we can (watched online or read alone) we also have our daily devotions offered in the company of so many other saints, dispersed as we are. It is these times that enable us to spot the miracles in amongst the ordinary everyday. Christ is in our midst and like Simeon and Anna, we too can weave our way through the noise, the countless voices and the distractions to behold Jesus and utter words of prophecy and praise. What we behold again is brought to us through the writer to the Hebrews 'through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death' and free those 'held in slavery by the fear of death...' (Hebrews 2 v 14-

15) In these days of fear and darkness, struggle and sometimes loss of hope, these words offer incredible hope way beyond the current situation. May we seek again a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit so we too are ready when prompted to reveal and lift high the extraordinary message of Jesus Christ in amongst the ordinary and everyday distractions and noise. Amen.