

What about our future? When a teenager becomes 18 they 'come of age' and enter into adulthood, don't they? Some of you have that to look forward to and, for some of us, it was so long ago we'd rather not be reminded! However, when someone 'comes of age' they do so after many years of nurturing and good parenting and values passed on and important lessons learnt. When someone 'comes of age' they take on new responsibilities (they can vote; drink etc.) and are expected to take their 'new' place in the world, making a valuable contribution to society as they do so.

Might it be time for Emmanuel to 'come of age' as a church? To enter into a new stage of maturity, utilising all the experiences and parenting that you've received these past 18 years? Might it be time for Emmanuel to take on new responsibilities and acknowledge our responsibility to be committed to a Holy Spirit driven future? To be, as Bishop Laurie wrote in *The Pilgrim*, a church with an: "... outward missional energy ..."

I've said a few times during my time here, that we're only limited by our imagination. Give your ideas to the DCC and the Action Groups; be willing to be an answer to your own prayers ...

I want to close by telling you a story about an American Indian who found an eagle's egg and put it into the nest of a chicken. The eaglet hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All his life, this eagle, thinking he was a chicken, did what the chickens did. He scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. He clucked and he cackled. And he flew in a brief thrashing of wings and flurry of feathers no more than a few feet off of the ground. After all, that's how chickens were supposed to fly. Years passed. And the eagle grew very old.

One day, he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. Hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared with a beat of its strong golden wings. "What a beautiful bird!" said the eagle to his neighbour. "What is it?" "That's an eagle - the chief of the birds," the neighbour clucked. "But don't give it a second thought. You could never be like him." So the eagle never gave it another thought. And it died thinking it was a chicken.

We belong to the skies! God has given us wings to soar like eagles, but we've learned the ways of the chickens and confined ourselves to live as one of them and lost our sense of purpose and creativity along the way. I love that promise from Isaiah 40:31: "... *but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*"

Question: Do you want to see Emmanuel as a lighthouse, a beacon of hope and faith in this community? Do you? Do you want to fly? I don't know what our future will hold but what I do know is that our future, whatever shape that will take, will involve each and everyone one of you/us playing your part in creating a church which is best for our town.

Billy Graham: *The evangelistic harvest is always urgent. The destiny of men and of nations is always being decided. Every generation is strategic. We are not responsible for the past generation, and we cannot bear the responsibility for the next one, but we do have our generation. God will hold us responsible as to how well we fulfil our responsibilities to this age and take advantage of our opportunities.*

And may we start today!



*'The God of the Past,
Present and Future'*

Psalm 145:1-21

Sunday 20th June 2010

Rev'd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: I love the way the writers of the Psalms opened their hearts to God in the midst of the changing, often difficult, situations of life in which they found themselves. The Psalms reflect the reality of human experience - warts and all. This is what Charles Spurgeon meant when he wrote: *the Psalms are to be experienced rather than studied.* And we get a glimpse of the God David experienced in Psalm 145 and I have three points:

God is the God of the Past, vs 1 - 7: This Psalm has some tremendous words of praise for who God is; for what He's done; and for what He gives. Vs1-3 explains how God is worthy of our praise, whatever the circumstances in which we may find ourselves. But it could so easily be a prayer couldn't it? If we ever get stuck for words in our prayers, we can do no worse than to pray the Psalms and other 'prayer' passages of the Bible. It's a reminder to us that if we are praying, we will not be short of things to give praise for. Praise follows our prayers and praise precedes our prayers. Prayer and praise go hand in hand: it soothes our spirits and prepares our hearts to meet with God; it brings us into His presence - and I hope that is true of our time together so far this morning. And because the God of the Bible is the God of history (it is 'His story' after all) David looks back, vs4-7, on the many blessings he'd received from God and, as a consequence, he couldn't help but praise God for who He is and for what He had done. No doubt David recalled the times God delivered him from wild animals as he tended his father's flocks; or he remembered he'd slain Goliath against all the odds; or how God had raised him up from being a humble shepherd boy to sit on the throne in Jerusalem. I'm sure there are times when we look back at the works of God in our own lives and we praise him for what he has done. There's no doubt that we all have much to be thankful for as we look back over the past eighteen years.

- We remember the many answers to prayer.
- We remember those special times when the HS touched our lives.
- We remember his presence with us through dark/difficult days
- We count our blessings and see His hand at work (Old Hymn).

I believe that hindsight must be one of the greatest attributes we have as Christians. I say this because if we are feeling a bit low or out of sorts, then looking back breathes new life into our weary spirits! I believe that each of us should deliberately plant markers along the way in our journey of faith so that we can look back at them for encouragement in difficult times.

I have to say how grateful I am to inherit the vision and perseverance of your two previous Team Rectors, Peter Ashton and Elwin Cockett, who, along with the sacrificial giving and service of so many of you, shared the dream to build and complete this fantastic complex that we have today - much of the liturgy I put together for this service, reflects many of those thoughts and so I won't repeat myself here.



I know that, for some of you, our celebration today is tinged with dissatisfaction in the sense that a church built in revival never continued that growth. It takes a lot out of a congregation to build a church, and some never recover, but many become weary as a result, whether that is physical; emotional or spiritual. It's easy to become weary of doing the same old things, but ... we should never want to be in the position that we find ourselves becoming weary of doing God's work. That is the death knell in any church. I love the promise of Galatians 6:9: *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.* Let us hold onto that promise in the months to come.

But as well as remembering and celebrating the past, we also, I believe, as painful as that might be, have to learn to let go of the past, too. I've lost count the number of times people have said to me you know Paul: "*When we were at Saint Mary's things were great ... it was this ... it was that ... it was ...*" but that was 18 years ago. Don't get me wrong, I love SMM and really value its place as a mission outpost in the town. However, it seems to me that, if we want Emmanuel to have a healthy future we begin, firstly, by living in the present, rather harking back to the 'Good old days' and this is what David was saying in vs2: *Every day I will praise you.* Not yesterday or eighteen years ago: today! Which brings me to my next point:

2) God is the God of the Present, vs 8 - 12: Would you want to be a follower of a God who remained at a distance? I wouldn't. David recognised that God made a difference to his present situation and we see this in vs8-9, two of my favourite Bible verses, and they are written in a present tense, that is, they describe something of the attributes of God for today: *The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he had made.* Rich in love ... love is a word that's on everybody's lips isn't it? Love permeates through the whole of society. There are more songs sung about it, poems written about it and escapist books romanticising about it than any other subject in the world - apart from Jesus. Most psychologists agree that man's greatest need is to love and be loved. But we're living in a world that is slipping further away from what love should be. Because love, in the 21st Century, has been hijacked as a cheap commodity that is used for a time and then discarded and when what we feel is all that matters and how we get there is irrelevant.

And because so many people haven't experienced the nature of true love (because of family breakdown; broken marriages etc.) it causes them doubt the love of our heavenly Father and believe that God is somehow not on our side and doesn't really mean it when he says He loves us. They make assumptions that, somehow, God's love replicates the worst, rather than the best, of what the world has to offer. Sadly, there are so many people who feel that way. But God's love is lavished on us without a thought as to whether we are worthy to receive it or not. God loves us in spite of our disobedience, our weaknesses, our sin and our selfishness. Nothing you or I could ever do could cause God to love us any more or any less than he does. God's love for us is perfect and complete. It is boundless, unconditional, inexhaustible, overwhelming, unchanging and supernatural. This is the pearl of great price and one of the greatest gifts that we can give to the world today.

George Pitcher, in his Telegraph column, reflecting on how to respond to the despair following the recent killings in Cumbria wrote: "*The Church at these times becomes both a touchstone of hope and a pillar of strength for those otherwise rendered helpless by despair. It's both what it's for and what it's best at, offering the defiance of an unquenchable and universal love and peace in the face of human darkness and evil.*"

Jesus lived in the present. He preached good news to the poor; he proclaimed freedom for the prisoners; and recovery of sight for the blind. He preached the forgiveness of sins and extended God's healing touch to all (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus never judged people by what they looked like; by what they wore; how they spoke; or what they believed.

Jesus was never turned off by disease; or ugliness. Jesus lived in the present and was to be found amongst the multitudes; the untouchables; the rich; the poor; the sinners; the alienated; the forgotten; and the abused. He was moved with compassion when he saw the mess peoples live were in and saw them wandering around like lost sheep without a shepherd. In His eyes, the meanest and vilest of people were precious. Jesus loved people unconditionally. Imagine what would happen if we lived believing/receiving, all that Jesus has done and can do for us?

- Imagine the impact we could make on our community if we really lived as Jesus lived?
- Imagine the impact we could make on our community if we really loved as Jesus loved?
- Imagine what impact we could have on our community if we really served as Jesus served?
- Imagine what impact we could have on our community if we were willing to prefer the needs of others rather than living for ourselves?

3) God is the God of the Future, vs 13 – 21: David knew of the eternal existence of God vs13: *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and your dominion endures through all generations.* A number of years ago, Paula and I went on a Nile cruise to Egypt and had the chance to visit some amazing temples - Abu Simble, Luxor and Karnak. It was a fantastic experience. One of the interesting things we learned from the guide was that the gods of the Egyptians changed almost every couple of years - depending on the fetishes of the Pharaoh or the mood of the people. Their gods, like many in the world today, were not very consistent! And, similar to the Egyptians and other civilisations, we live in an age where people make gods and beliefs to suit themselves. As we look back through the centuries we see many civilisations and world powers that have risen only to fall into oblivion. They've long lost their impact and, at best, are legendary forgotten kingdoms and Empires. I mentioned the Egyptians earlier, but the list is endless: Aztecs; Inca's; Babylonians; Persians; Greeks; Romans; British Empire; USSR; Apartheid; Communism; and many others beside. All these kingdoms of the earth have come and gone - but God's kingdom has stood the test of time and will, undoubtedly, stand forever. Our God has not withdrawn Himself, forsaken us, forgotten us, left us or changed with the seasons - He's alive and well and present in our world today. He wants to make a difference to our lives.

Psalms 145 reminds us that we have a God who is *gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.* A God who is faithful and true to his promises and a God who gives us a hope built on the past, a hope rooted in the present and, most importantly, a hope in anticipation of the future.

What about OUR Future? A few weeks ago at Mulberry House I heard a story about a church on the South Coast who had a vision to build a new church on a very large housing estate but, before they started to design the building they asked the community what was missing/needed. The answers they received included: Library; Sports Centre; Cafe; Restaurant; Pre-school; Youth Club etc. So the church designed a new building incorporating all of these suggestions and, as you may imagine, the church is an active and vibrant centre of the community. The pastor is often asked about what it must feel like to be the pastor of the most dynamic church building in town - you'd be surprised how often that is asked of me, especially when Diocesan events are held here (as there was on Thursday when all the Bradwell clergy met). The pastor's response was very telling; he said that he isn't interested in pastoring the best church *in* the town, but the best church *for* the town.

There's no doubt that I, and we, have been greatly blessed here and yet, my guess is, that we haven't even scratched the surface of what it is that God has in store for us here. But what I do know, is that Jesus' words in Luke 12:48a is a word for us here: "*To whom much is given, much is expected.*" We have been blessed with much and, it seems to me, much is expected of us, too. What would it take for us to be the best church *for* the town?