

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: Acts 3:11-26

Luke 7:11-17

Date: Sunday 5 June 2016

Theme: Peter emerges

"It's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am."

"Champions aren't made in gyms, champions are made from something they have deep inside them - a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have last-minute stamina, they have to be a little faster, they have to have the skill and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill."

"I'm so fast that last night I turned off the light switch in my hotel room and was in bed before the room was dark."

"Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee, his hands can't hit what his eyes can't see."

Some quotes from the amazing Mohammed Ali whose death at the age of 74 was reported yesterday. What a life! What a story!

Over the last few weeks here in church we have been on an amazing journey, telling the story of two men whose words have much to teach us and which give us lots of things to think about ...

In Lent, holy week and Easter we followed the last days of Jesus on earth:

we saw him enter the city on a donkey as people waved palm branches,

we saw him have a special meal with his friends which we still remember today when we share bread and wine

we saw him arrested, tried and put to death on Good Friday

we saw him raised from the dead on Easter Day

we saw him appear to his closest friends and to crowds in different locations for a period of about 6 weeks

we saw him promise the gift of the Spirit

we saw him leave them and return to be with his Father in heaven

we saw the Spirit come at Pentecost and the believers come to life as they understood who he was, become filled with him and regain their confidence and boldness to tell other people all that had happened.

In all of this journey we have noticed that alongside Jesus it's his friend Peter who is in the spotlight.

Peter who is there, no doubt, shouting Hosanna,

Peter who is at the table and witnesses the strange deal with bread and wine and the talk about the body and the blood,

Peter who tries to intervene in the garden and take on the soldiers trying to arrest his friend,

Peter who realises that crucifixion is coming and is frightened to death that he's going to be next,

Peter who runs to the tomb on Easter morning and finds it empty,

Peter whose denial is forgiven in a one to one conversation with the risen Jesus by the lakeside,

Peter who hears the promise of the Spirit and experiences his new life,
Peter who is determined to carry on the work Jesus began in healing and in speaking boldly first to the Jewish people and then to others.

As we have told the story, it's the focus on these two men – Jesus and Peter, that draws our attention.

And this morning as we heard the reading from Acts, as Jesus disappears from the scene and Peter more and more takes centre stage, we hear Peter say these words:

Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come ...

Peter, of course, is speaking to Jewish people in particular, people who had just not understood who Jesus was and what he was all about. They had had a part to play in the whole thing going sour and in the arrest and trial and death of the popular carpenter preacher.

Peter's words, therefore, are to them to say "how could you have got this so wrong, say you're sorry and God will forgive you, he'll wipe the slate clean and put everything right ... there are better times ahead with him."

Now we may say that's all very well. It's an interesting history lesson to be reminded what some guy said to some other guys 2000 years ago. What's that got to do with me?

The answer of course, is that it's got everything to do with us ... because what Peter said was true for those first hearers and for us as well. We may not have had a part to play in the events leading to Jesus' death in quite the way they did, but we might well be running our lives as if Jesus didn't matter and as if what he came to do was for someone else and not for us.

So Peter says these words to the Jewish people in the story but also us:

Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come ...

What does it mean to repent?

What does it mean to turn to God?

What does it mean that our sins may be wiped out?

What does it mean that times of refreshing may come?

Repent – means saying sorry that we've airbrushed God out of our story, that we've been trying to do life without him for too long.

Turning to God – means recognising that Jesus lived and died not just to add to the collection of stories about great religious leaders, but lived to show us how to live and died in our place to bring forgiveness and hope.

Wiping out sins – means that God looks at us differently. He looks at us as if we were clean, washed, renewed, refreshed, not covered in the grime and muck of our selfishness.

Times of refreshing – is to say that life with God is better than life without him, suddenly we get to see the world through his eyes, to appreciate the wonder and beauty of all he has made, to know that we are part of his world-wide family, joining one third of the world population as a member of his family, knowing that however tough life gets, we are never on our own.

Today is a very special day for Millie. She is washed to signify cleansing, she is signed with the cross to remind her in the future and us right now that Jesus lived and died for her, and the promises that we as members of the church family have made along with those of mum and dad and godparents show that we are planning to include her in this family, the family of God which is big and exciting and full of life.

Let's pray ...

Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come ...