

TUESDAY COMMUNION
"Failure, Sacrifice and Resurrection"

Hymn: 214 The strife is o'er, the battle done.

Reading: Isaiah 53.10-12

Prayers:

In the Hebrew Scriptures there is sometimes the sense of personal failure and sometimes the awareness that a whole community has failed God and turned against him and his will.

In our complex, less religious society we have far less sense of having failed God as a community. Instead, we tend to point the finger either at an individual or at a group of people and blame them for what has gone wrong. Unless you either decide to wear ear-plugs for the next four weeks or to go to a country like America where the world news is not reported you are unlikely to escape an orgy of finger pointing.

Perhaps what distinguishes people of faith is that sense that we have all failed. That's not to take away from individual responsibility but recognition that we human beings are not capable of acting rightly. Partly that is because of ignorance. Time and again we do not know where the right lies. Partly it's because even when we glimpse what is good and right and true we fail to do it.

If we take the recent banking crisis, and many of us have done our share of finger pointing one can't help but feel that the ultimate blame rests upon us all, either out of ignorance or our deliberate desire not to see what was becoming increasingly obvious. We have all failed.

In the Hebrew Scriptures one of the ways in which a people put right what has gone wrong is through sacrifice. Some of the sacrifices were the offering of a life to God, not a human life in the case of Israel, but the life of a pure animal or bird. In some way it represented the pure offering to God of their own life by the one making the sacrifice.

At Yom Kippur there was also the tradition of people laying their hands on a goat and transferring their failings onto this animal. The animal was then driven out into the wilderness, symbolically removing the sins of the people far away.....

In the New Testament, Jesus is often seen both as a sacrifice for sin and as the man on whom the sin of the world is laid.

- Jesus is killed, the good and perfect man,- being sacrificed on the cross rather than some Temple's altar.

As we identify ourselves with him he becomes the one who represents what we wish to be, God's true and loving and faithful daughters and sons.

- Jesus is also the one who absorbs the fear and jealousy and anger of our world and removes our sins from this world in which we live.

In both ways Jesus becomes “an atonement” for sin: one who enables us to be “at one” with God rather than people who feel eternally in opposition to him.

So Jesus is “crushed” for the sake of others and Jesus reminds us that those who follow him are to take up the cross, to be willing to share in his calling!

But death is not the end. Isaiah declares that the one who is crushed will have life beyond death and that great blessing of ancient people: offspring.

You and I are, in a sense, the offspring of Christ.

We are his resurrection people. As the General Election begins perhaps we recognise that beyond our inevitable differences of political opinion we seek that life for our nation and our world that God desires for us.

We also know that in our personal and national failure (which is always there under every government) there is also the possibility of forgiveness and new life.

It's the promise revealed in Jesus, the servant of God who has been sacrificed for us but who is alive and with us and forever.

Amen.