

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 95 Born in the night

Reading: Mark 14.26-31, 66-72

Prayers:

In my imagination, I sometimes put myself living out there at night-time on the hillsides of Bethlehem.

I think of myself being startled by dazzling light and the angels' message.

I share with the other shepherds in their amazement.

We shepherds, nobodies to most people, living on the margins of this world, being told that that the King of Kings is born for us in our own village down in the valley!

We don't need to discuss what to do. Making sure the sheep are OK we rush down hill as fast as our stumbling feet can carry us. Then, at the stable, we peep round the stable door and creep in to see and adore the child, falling on our knees before the child in the manger.....

Yes, I'd have been there!

Yet, in our hymn this morning there is a hint that life will not always be easy for this child.

*Truth of our life,
Mary's child,
You tell us God is good;
Prove it is true,
Mary's child,
Go to your cross of wood.*

We find that same hint in a poem by Ron Klug called "Joseph's Lullaby":

*Sleep now, little one.
I will watch you and your mother sleep.
I wish I could do more.
This straw is not good enough for you.
Back in Nazareth I'll make a proper bed for you
of seasoned wood, smooth, strong, wellpegged.
A bed fit for a carpenter's son.*

*Just wait till we get back to Nazareth.
I'll teach you everything I know.
You'll learn to use cedarwood, eucalyptus and fir.
You'll learn to use drawshave, axe, and saw.
Your arms will grow strong, your hands rough – like these.
You'll bear the pungent smell of new wood
and wear shavings and sawdust in your hair.*

*You'll be man whose life centres
on hammer and nails and wood.
But for now, sleep, little Jesus, sleep.*

“Hammer and nails and wood.”

That's the hard part.....

Peter has known the days when being with Jesus has been so exciting and danger has seemed far away....

He's watched Jesus transform people's lives:

- people set them free from the fear of God
- people healed by the touch of God's love
- relationships changed through forgiveness
- people brought back into fellowship with each other
- the Scrouges of his world becoming generous.
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Peter has felt the excitement of being at the heart of a new movement, at the dawn of a new day of liberty, at the beginning of God's recreation of the world.

Peter would do anything for Jesus. Peter would risk his whole life for Jesus....

That is until the hammer and the nails and the wood threaten both Jesus and Peter with pain and loss and death.

In Pilate's courtyard Peter's heart fails him. I suspect that few of us are going to say with absolute certainty that we would not have failed as well.....

There's the rub....

This Christmas we go with the shepherds to the stable and worship the newborn child.

In a sense, that's the easy bit!

The difficulty for me, and perhaps for you, is sharing with the grown man in the cost of love, of following where God leads us, even when it's towards a cross, of sharing in his total self-giving for the sake of the world.

Yet, through our communion, we do not only visit the stable this Christmas but we allow Christ to be birthed in us, to be “at one with us” as he is also “at one with God”.

Through him we gain the courage to love, to keep being faithful even when the pressures from outside and within challenge our love, our faith, our commitment.

May Christ – born in the stable, crucified and risen be with you and me this day, this Christmastime, and in all the challenges of 2009.

Amen.