

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 447. Deep in the shadows of the past

Reading: Acts 13.13-26

Prayers:

STORIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

I was fascinated yesterday when I met with a woman who had recently come to England after living for many years in America. She told me about her mother who was born in Chapel and when I discovered that her maiden name was Hallam I mentioned the name of Muriel Hallam. Yes, she'd known Muriel and gone to school with her daughter, Anne.

This lady grew up in Meadow Avenue in Peak Dale. I knew that Eva Smith who has just died at 100 years of age also lived on the same street. Yes, she'd lived 5 doors away and she remembered Eva's three children and going to Peak Dale school with the youngest of them.

Suddenly, a woman I had never met before who had lost touch with many of the people she had known in her youth was acquainting herself with family and friends from her past. For me, too, this person ceased to be just an individual but someone who I could see within the wider context of the village where she'd grown up and people I knew well.

Paul arrives at Antioch. Just to save you from any confusion, this is a different Antioch from the one where the Christian community had commissioned him for his first missionary journey. This Antioch was in Pisidia, an area of what is now central Turkey.

Like the British in our day, the Jewish people were spread across the ancient world. It was natural for Paul to go to his fellow Jews in order to speak to them about the new act of God in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

What he does first of all is to speak of their common ancestry. He tells the story of how they have come to this point, this moment in which he stands before them as one who wants to tell them about what God has been doing over the last 50 years.

So he speaks of God leading his people out of captivity, of the time when they settled in the land of Canaan, of judges and prophets and the coming of the first king. Then the great King David and how "Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised."

Finally he tells of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus and how this message about Jesus has now come to them. So, in Antioch of Pisidia those gathered in the synagogue recognise that both Paul and they are linked by a common story, a story that unites them.

The question will be whether the story of Jesus is one that will also unite or divide them.

Just as the story of Israel was far from perfect so the story of the Christian centuries has been far from perfect. Today, we hear in the news of how doctors, priests and nuns, sympathetic to General Franco, the fascist dictator, removed the children of those they regarded as left-wing undesirables and sold them to good right-wing Catholic families.

Yet, if the Christian story is marred (and we recognise that we have shared in marring it,) it is also the common story of many in this country. If it is a story which has its darkness, it is also a story of light as Christian men and women experience the grace of God in their lives and act graciously.

Telling stories about the faith which has shaped our lives, with their shades of darkness and light often enable us to see God at work. So we give thanks for the story of faith stretching back to Moses and Abraham.

Maybe, the story of faith is also one that many in our country need to hear and think about. This generation often does not know the Jewish/Christian story and therefore can't understand how it shaped the lives of their parents.

Because they don't hear the story they lose touch with that which motivated and empowered those fine people from their past who they respect but who, in a sense, will never know until they hear their story of faith.

AMEN