



Mark 2.23-28

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

This sermon was first delivered at the joint service with Bonanova Catholic Church on 19th January and repeated in a slightly amended form on Sunday 24th January 2010.

In our Gospel story we find Jesus upsetting the religious authorities of his day by sharing a simple meal with his disciples. Just a few grains of corn; a snack to take the edge off their hunger, until they could share a proper meal later. But their meal was against the law as far as the religious leaders were concerned, because the disciples were harvesting grain on the Sabbath day – the day set apart for rest, for worship, for God.

I hope the simple meal we are enjoying at the Communion Table this evening won't upset anybody, but in the eyes of some religious folk this too is an illegal meal. Our two churches are divided not just by half a kilometre but by centuries of division and disagreement and by vast libraries of rules written by men.

Jesus replies to his critics

We are swimming against the tide tonight and some would consider our display of unity to be naïve and unrealistic. But we should be encouraged by the words of Jesus, who also swam against the tide.

He answered his critics with a question:-

Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.

(In my mind's eye version of this incident, as Jesus is saying these words he is breaking off another ear of corn, eating some and offering some to those around him, including the Pharisees!)

There is stunned silence at Jesus's words. How dare this son of a carpenter use God's word to criticize its expert lawyers?

But they don't know who they are dealing with, and he goes on:-

The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

He's saying that if someone really loves God and wants to show their love for him and their obedience to him in the way they live, they may need to break a few religious laws along the way. 'Just watch me', he says!

A meal of memory and anticipation

Whenever we celebrate the Mass or Holy Communion we are of course primarily remembering our Lord's last supper and the shedding of his precious blood on the cross. We are also celebrating his resurrection and sharing in the power of his risen life.



St George's Church
BARCELONA

But we are also doing something else. We are a handful of hungry Protestant and Catholic disciples of Jesus, sharing a few grains of corn; a snack in anticipation of a more substantial meal to come. Because one day, brothers and sisters, we will be seated at a banquet so great we are not capable of imagining it. We will be joined by a countless multitude of people from every tribe and tongue and nation, all saved from sin and disease and death and earthquake by our precious Lord and Saviour Jesus. And we will worship him together in complete joy and freedom and complete unity, with no rules to separate us.

We are not there yet; this is true. But we are called to live now, every day, in a way which anticipates and prepares for that great day. We are to live generous, open, humble, joyful lives which step over the walls of division to love and serve each other and together, to serve our fellow human beings in all their need.

The material and spiritual hunger and brokenness of the world we live in cannot wait for the churches to officially unite. It really cannot wait. The world needs to receive the benefits of our unity before we have that unity. And it is up to us ordinary Christians, Anglican, Catholic, whatever we are, to join forces and make it happen however we can.

My challenge to every Christian man, woman and child here tonight is this. Find a practical way in which you personally can work with Christians from other churches to demonstrate the good news of Jesus Christ in your neighbourhood. Share a few grains of corn with the hungry, in anticipation of the banquet that will come.