

Staff Prayers – Wednesday 21st August 2013, Church House – Stephen Dawson

Music - Albinoni – Adagio from Oboe Concerto No 2

Historically Celtic Christian monasticism was noted for its combining of monastery and mission, for balancing contemplation and action, and it is this combination that has resonated very strongly for me over the past 10 years or so, and that led me to become a friend of the Northumbria community.

The Northumbria community is a modern monastic community that is very much inspired by the Celtic saints. Whilst the Community's mother house is based up in the North East, not far from Wooler, the Community is essentially a dispersed monastic community held together by a shared Rule of Life, based on Availability and Vulnerability.

Availability here means being available to God and to others – expressed in a commitment to being alone with God in the cell of our own heart and being available for hospitality, intercession and mission.

Intentional vulnerability is expressed through being teachable in the discipline of prayer, saturation in the Scriptures and being accountable to one another.

Like any monastic community, prayer is at the heart and it is the form for Morning Prayer from their daily office that we will be using this morning.

Reading 1:

Psalm 15:1-5 NIVUK

"Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose way of life is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbour, and casts no slur on others; who despises a vile person but honours those who fear the Lord; who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind; who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken."

Reading 2: [PAUSE]

2 Samuel 22:31-37 NIVUK

"As for God, his way is perfect: the Lord's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You make your saving help my shield; your help has made me great. You provide a broad path for my feet, so that my ankles do not give way."

Reading 3: [PAUSE]

Colossians 3:12-14 NIVUK

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

The other morning some of us were together in a church where the rector saying Morning Prayer and leading us in guided, silent prayer. He said 'Let us pray for those whom we love.' And that was easy. Then he said 'Let us pray for those whom we do not love.' And there rose before my mind three men for whom I had to pray. They were men who have opposed my work. In this they may have been wrong. But my wrong was in resentment and the feeling of letting myself be cut off from them, and even for praying for them, because of it. Years ago I read a quotation from Mary Lyon that recurs to me again and again. Nine-tenths of our suffering is caused by others not thinking so much of us as we think they ought.' If you want to know where pride nestles and festers in most of us, that is right where it is; and it is not the opposition of others, but our own pride, which causes us the deepest hurt. I never read a word that penetrated more deeply into the sin of pride from which all of us suffer, nor one which opens up more surgically our places of unforgiveness.

Samuel Moor Shoemaker, *And Thy Neighbour* (quoted in *Celtic Daily Prayer* p246)

It's odd that, for all the words we read, and sermons we hear, occasionally something will speak so clearly and directly to us that it recurs again and again. Like Shoemaker, this quote from Mary Lyon does that to me. Time and again I have found myself coming back to it when tempted to say 'Who do they think they are?'

Nicky Gumbel tells the story of the correspondence in one of the national daily newspaper around the time of the First World War. It started with a very short, succinct letter to the editor: 'Sir, what is wrong with the world today'. As you can imagine, it sparked quite a post bag, with assertion, claim and counterclaim. It ended as follows: 'Sir, what is wrong with the world today? Me!'

However we understand the story of the fall in Genesis, it is interesting to reflect that the first relationship to be broken was with God, as Adam hides from the one who he had previously communed with. Then his relationship with others is broken – well with Eve in fact, as he blames her for his predicament. Finally they are both cast out of the garden and the ground brings forth thorns and thistles. The relationship with their environment is damaged. Strange how we always want to start with the external, or with others, when the first thing that needs attention is our relationship with God.