

## SERMON

### TRINITY 16 2009B

#### **The rabble among the people had a strong craving...**

It hardly seems biblical, but the text is actually from the Old Testament lesson this morning...

For the English word 'rabble'... the Hebrew word is **Ha'safsuf**... 'mixed multitude' is the PC polite translation which will not fit here.... The writer has some contempt for those about whom he is writing... so when teaching Biblical Studies at Manchester, the term I used was 'riff raff' ... 'riff raff' is indeed the better contextual translation...

Hebrew **Tanha** is translated as 'craving'... which is the rather 'Marks and Spencer's' view of what might be better translated as 'lust'.

**The rabble among the people had a strong craving...** no I don't think so...

The better Hebrew translation of the word *Ha'safsuf* here rabble and *tanha* craving would therefore come out as :

'The Riff Raff among the people had a strong lust'... much better... and that 'Riff Raff' who had said 'lust' had a lust for meat. Indeed according to the Hebrew text this lust was as all consuming in terms of the whole people of Israel as it was unfaithful to God. Moses, shall we say, had 'a problem'! Manna was seen not to be 'the thing'... the 'promised lot' of the Promised Land cut no ice whatsoever. The faithfulness of God in delivering what he had promised became insufficient. The riff raff people of Israel, were, as we northerners might say, had become a load of 'moaning minnies, wanting to go back to the

slavery of their past. They had no consideration of the sure and certain promises that God had in store for them for their futures. Moses as leader was getting more and more fed up...and the reaction of this great paragon of 'faith and virtue'???... well, he started to moan too!

*'Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favour in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me?'*

And the moaning goes on for another four verses... very ably relayed to us by our Subdeacon Rong Xian this morning.

As Christians it seems to me that it is very easy to want to return to the fishing grounds of our past. It is very easy to want to return to the past rather than be excited about the apostleship of our futures; it is very easy to glorify what 'used to be'... rather than being creative and faithful with what is. It is very easy to crave the indulgences of meat rather than be content with the manna fed leading of a living God.

From time to time, I suspect we can all be found guilty of creating a God who is in 'our image and likeness' a God who at one stage we have got quite comfortable with, but a God who is ultimately not real. not the God of our present and future, and who stands before us, feeds us, and leads us as one people into the Promised Land of this world and the next, which he has prepared for us.

You can hear the condemnation of the deuteronomic historian of the lustful Riff Raff in the text we have, never mind in Hebrew, or in any better english translation. Yet, where this Riff Raff were, one could say was only human, and it is a state all too easy to slip into... a state where futures are to be afraid of, a state where destinies and visions and truths in Christ are, at best, to be paid lip service to.

And even more, the values and quality of our faith which in reality are there bubbling below the surface can go 'off the boil', and we can become fractured from our joint mission, and from one another.

'Fractured from our joint mission and from one another'?

In terms of 'good stewards' of that which we have I want to be 'ever so basic' and suggest that the most important things we have next to our faith in this place is, simply, each other.

In my ordained ministry thus far, I have always tried to see those I meet as being placed before me by God himself, as unique people, unique people God has 'given to me' as a 'gift'; people from whom I can learn of the nature of the divine; people who are uniquely gifted by the Spirit, and who are able to show me something of the image of Christ himself... if only I have the grace to look...if only I have the grace go look!

So with this in mind and heart, what do we need to guard against as we seek to journey on together into God's future which he has assuredly prepared for us as a community?

Well, a sense of place and role in this community is in itself a good thing. But if 'my place' becomes heightened to the extent that 'the place' that 'place' becomes the be all and end all, and the same place of any other is belittled, that is not the true nature of the Body of Christ, where *every* limb and organ is as vital to the healthy body as any other one.

The pilgrim people of God need to move forward on their journey *together* in mutual appreciation, love and concern. The pilgrim people of God here, need to move onward in faith and in love recognising each other not just as examples of flesh and blood which need to be coped with but as spirit filled bearers of Christ's image which need to be loved.

Does our sense of community at Leicester Cathedral communicate a place where each is cherished in this way?

Are we good stewards of that which God has given to us in each other? Two very important questions!

Secondly, how does such cherishing affect today's equivalent of the New Testament God Fearer who looks through the 'windows' of this Cathedral Church, and yet is rather fearful of entering.

How does the person who enters here on Back to Church Sunday feel?

I have heard so many sermons about being good stewards of God's creation at harvest and about being good stewards of the

gifts that God has given to each of us and about being particularly generous and disciplined in our response in financial terms for the Church's mission and ministry.

All these are as laudable as they are vital, and I would not want to detract from anything that is said about such things in the coming weeks in this series of sermons concerning 'God's Gift our Response.'

But the first of God's gifts to us in faith is actually each other. There needs to be a real and spiritual sense of givenness, which is always seen here when we engage with each other in the community of faith, the Body of Christ expressed in this Cathedral Church.

Our response to each other comes from our appreciation of Christ's unique love for each one of us... a love not earned... a love not deserved... a love freely given... a love totally sacrificial... a love given to us as we are now... and not as we feel we ought to be.

If only the lustful Riff Raff of Israel had seen such a thing in their faithful God... !!!!!