

St. Edmunds 1st August 2021

Ephesians 4:1-16, John 6:24-35

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

My first question this morning - what is important to us? Answers on postcard please. Books, trains, television? Our garden? Music - of any type? All of these may be quite flippant answers - not everyone can understand my fixation with books, especially our postman as he staggered up our drive with five book parcels recently. Even I struggle to understand the train enthusiast thing- and I have been living with it, the books, the dvds, the atlases, and everything for more years than you would believe possible.

I think that the pandemic may have made us realise what we really need to get by, as we sat about in our houses for months. A good internet connection? A really big television? More space? Less space? I'm not talking here, obviously, about the essentials like food and something other than tap water to drink. What were we missing out on? Family, friends, a change, social gatherings? Maybe for some people it was much the same as normal, as outings are rare at the best of times. Possibly it was the way everything came to a sudden halt, maybe we found it frightening, maybe we still do? Either way, we were left to think about things for quite a long time.

In 1943 a man called Abraham Maslow devised and published a hierarchy of needs - what people must have- and pictured it to look like a pyramid. On the bottom are the things that every human must have to survive -food, water, warmth and rest. The next things up are still necessary - security and safety. Those two sections are called the basic needs. At the top of things we need is self fulfillment, being ourselves, achieving our full potential. And so the top is quite ambitious, not necessary to life, but the top of what we can achieve. Each of us, fulfilled and content, happy in our choices, doing what we are good at, what we want to do.

What is it our readings today that made me think of that? Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a section which begins "I, prisoner in the Lord". Well, does it mean that when Paul is writing he is a prisoner in reality, locked up as he frequently was for proclaiming his faith, causing trouble in the eyes of the Roman authorities? Or did he see himself as held by the Lord, restricted or newly liberated by his belief, given a new start? He goes on to remind his readers, those perhaps listening to his letter, that they have been called to one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. There are a lot of things there to discuss, to think about, in a world where we all want more in so many ways. It would be easy if we all needed the same, wanted the same out of life, but Paul knew, like we know that people are not that straightforward, we are not that straightforward.

Paul speaks of the gifts we have been given. Now when we mention the word gifts, maybe our thoughts are simple. Presents. It's Hannah's birthday tomorrow, Peter's on the third. What do you get them? Not books - Hannah has full range of my shelves, and still manages to find books to buy herself. Peter has a room full of railway books, but someone still found a brand new one to give him recently - Cathedrals of Steam - a neat title for him. Afternoon teas, life experiences like a balloon trip that he was given once? I can see this is going to need some more thought.

Seriously, the Gifts Paul speaks of are that some would be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and some teachers. Quite an impressive list of jobs, vocations, skills. All mean work! He meant of course that the people in the new churches he had seen grow had these roles. People, men and women, had found themselves able to be teachers of the faith, pastors to others, spreading the good news of Jesus to those who had never heard of him.

Maybe we are thinking, well that's all very fine. But I've done my bit. I'm retired, or resting. I am not going to start with all that kind of thing. Even if I wanted to go into groups of people, which I don't, I don't feel safe doing so. Even if I knew what some of things involved! Well, I think that one thing recent months have taught me is that you can, we can all

make a difference over the phone, by texts, by writing, by small communications. I think we can use our gifts by the small communications we make, to the hard pressed shop worker, anyone we come into contact with. I'm not sure how many lives have been changed for the better by a phone call, a letter, or a zoom call, but I think that where we are genuinely concerned for someone we can make a difference by a small gesture, whether we call ourselves pastors, teachers or whatever. I know because I have been on the receiving end of those gestures.

The Gospel reading features a lot about bread. Not surprising, really. Bread was, and is, in many parts of the world, basic to what people eat. Historical programmes on television often show bread being eaten, even forming the plates that poorer people would eat as scraps. Perhaps it's interesting that even in the twenty first century we still have to have food banks so that people in our city and area can eat, that a footballer has to convince the government that children need food in school holidays. Jesus said that so many people followed him in boats on this occasion because "you ate the fill of the loaves". They still want a sign, like Moses giving the Israelites food in a desert. That was miraculous, they say. Why can't you give us bread like that?

Jesus points out that it wasn't Moses that gave them bread, but God. He tells them the truth, which was as valuable then as it is in the twenty first century. "I am the bread of life. "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty".

It's not easy when we don't think that we have what we need, what is vitally important to us. But I think Jesus is saying that using our time, our gifts, what we have, our faith, can give us, and others, what we truly need. Amen.