

Hanukkah St Andrew's 18.12.22

Imagine that we arrived at church on Easter Sunday morning to find that the place had been trashed; the cross torn off the wall and urinated on, the banners pulled down and burned, and there was evidence of occult activities.

What if the people who had done this were members of the ruling power who had banned the practice of Christianity, so that we had to meet in secret to pray together and break bread, ever fearful that we would be reported to the authorities and imprisoned. That we had to secretly teach our children about the Lord and hope they didn't inadvertently betray us at school.

Does that give us a bit of an idea about how Israel felt? Actually, I think it was much worse for them because Jerusalem was the focal point of their worship; the only place where the proper sacrifices could be offered and where they should celebrate the proscribed feasts.

Jerusalem was the location that God Himself had indicated should be the place representing His presence on earth; the place where the Ark of the Covenant rested in the Holy of Holies where the High Priest entered once a year with the sacrificial blood for the remission of sins.

Imagine the joy when the Greeks were routed by the Maccabees and Israel could again worship the one true God in freedom. However, the Temple had been defiled and must be cleansed both physically and spiritually.

The Church

Ephesians 2 v 19 – 22

'...you are ... members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows **into a holy temple in the Lord**. In Him you also are being built together into **a dwelling place for God** by the Spirit.'

Paul likens the church to a holy temple for the presence of the Lord.

Let's briefly consider the church in our nation at this time. Do we see evidence that it has been defiled? Speaking generally, is the foundation of the Apostles and prophets being eroded by a desire to appeal to the spirit of the age, rather than the Holy Spirit?

In Isaiah 30 v 1 – 3 God rebukes Israel for running to Egypt for help instead of looking to Him:

'Woe to the obstinate children', says the Lord, 'to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting Me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, '

And in the next chapter v 1 'Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help ... but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord.'

Egypt is used as a symbol for worldly thinking and behaviour as opposed to Godliness, and only this month, we have seen a call by a senior clergyman for the C of E to embrace

practices which are anti-biblical and ungodly in an attempt to get young people to come to church.

But I'm not just taking a pot-shot at a particular denomination over a particular issue. This is just a recent example. Paul warns against those who come preaching another 'Jesus' or another gospel and warns against receiving another spirit. (2 Cor. 11 v 4)

What about our denomination? What about St Andrew's? Is there compromise or worldly thinking in us? Are we relying on Jesus to build His church or are we watering down the truth, or even changing it, in order to make it more palatable to people, in hope that they will come to church?

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall! (1 Cor. 10 v 12)

In Zechariah 4 we have a record of a vision given to that priest. He had returned from the exile in Babylon with Haggai and Zerubbabel to find the Temple in ruins. They were commissioned to oversee the rebuilding, but as the years went by the workers grew disheartened and despondent over the opposition and difficulties, and the work slowed right down.

We can feel like that. The church in our nation has declined and is irrelevant to many people.

Zechariah was a godly man who sought the Lord, who gave him a vision and an angel to explain it!

The vision was of a gold lampstand – a sort of super-menorah with many oil lamps fed from a golden bowl of oil. The word that accompanied it was:

'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord.' And a promise that Zerubbabel would complete the rebuild because God Himself would overcome the obstacles.

Jesus said that He will build His church and the powers of hell will not overcome it. This is not to say that we sit back and say, 'Oh, Jesus will build His church, I don't need to do anything.'

Not at all! Paul spoke of labouring hard for the gospel; Jesus spoke of *labourers* in the vineyard. We are saved by grace that is free – we cannot earn or work for our salvation, but we *are* to work for the Lord, seeking to win others for Him and building one another up, as well as helping the needy in practical ways.

Let us, in our little corner of the temple, be alert and open to the Holy Spirit, standing on the apostle's teaching and seeking to obey and follow Christ and let us pray for the Holy Spirit to work in all of us to clear out idols and anything that defiles.

Individually

There were people in the Church in Corinth who were behaving in sinful ways. They weren't repentant and the church was tolerating this state of affairs. Paul, as an apostle with oversight of the churches he had established, had to address these matters very firmly and

remind these believers that the Holy Spirit lived in them and could have no connection with such sinful behaviour.

1 Cor. 6 v 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God.

If we have repented of our sins and accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord this verse applies to us as individuals, as well as to us as a fellowship of believers.

Just pause for a moment and consider these truths from scripture:

The Holy Spirit lives in You. The HOLY Spirit lives IN ME.

John 14 v 19 – 20 Jesus said: ‘Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that **I am in my father, and you in me and I in you**’.

John 14 v 23 ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and **we will come to him and make our home with him.**’

Colossians 1 v 27 To them [the saints] God chose to make known ... the riches of the glory of this mystery [something which was previously hidden], which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory.**’

Have you got it? If you are a true follower of Christ, then the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit lives in you. God Himself lives in you. Your body is like the Temple in Jerusalem a place where God places Himself.

Doesn't that blow your mind? Doesn't that make you want to fall on your face and cry out, ‘Lord, how can that be?’

So, it is true of us as individuals as well as the church as a whole, that the Holy Spirit, God Himself indwells us. And what part can the Holy Spirit have with sin?

If there is unconfessed sin in our lives, we must repent of it and receive God's forgiveness and cleansing.

Constantly, as we live our lives we find ourselves falling short of God's standard – His law that we are to love Him above all things, with all our being, and then love others as much as we love ourselves.

Let us quickly confess these things to Him, as soon as we are aware of them in us: I did it/ said it/ thought it/ failed You in some way, and receive, **immediately**, His forgiveness and cleansing.

Bigger issues of tolerated known sin in our lives will probably mean a battle with ourselves in order to truly turn away from sin and toward God, but God sees our hearts and will help us. Think of how the Father in the parable was looking out for his wayward son to return and ran to meet him. Our Father wants us home in fellowship with him, not so that he can beat us up and shame us, but in order to reinstate us and bless us.

Rededication

When the Temple in Jerusalem had been cleaned out and thoroughly cleansed. It was rededicated to God. What a joyful occasion that must have been. This is what is remembered and celebrated at Hanukkah – the Feast of Dedication.

The menorah and the oil

The huge menorah, the lampstand of oil lamps, had to be restored and set up again to shine a light over the city and also to be a witness to the gentiles of the Light of the World. However, they found that they only had enough consecrated oil for one day and the light should always be burning. That was when God did the miracle of the oil – it lasted eight days by which point they had made more consecrated oil. In memory of this miracle of provision this feast of Hanukkah is also called Hag ha Orot – Feast of Lights.

Although this miracle is not recorded in the canon of scripture, having occurred in the gap between the Old and New Testament, there are plenty of recorded miracles of multiplication of provision – the widow of Zaphath's oil and flour, the wine at the wedding in Cana, the bread and fish for five thousand and again for four thousand – so I think we can probably trust that this miracle happened as well.

I wonder if you are feeling battered and damaged, like the menorah? Or are you feeling that you've run out of oil? You know you should be shining the light of Christ to the world but, quite honestly, you have lost the desire and energy. Your own limited resources have run out. You have perhaps lost that first love that you had for Christ when you first met Him.

I have times like that.

If we are in that dreary state of going through the motions without the light of Christ in us or through us, we can come back to Him, tell it like it is, ask Him to cleanse us and rededicate ourselves to Him. Then we can ask for a fresh infilling of the holy oil of his Holy Spirit. In fact, we need to go on being filled with Holy Spirit oil every day.

Remember the vision given to Zechariah and the word of the Lord, then. It still stands: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.'

Anything we are going to achieve for the Lord will not be by our own intelligence or work but by His Spirit working through us.

Response

Has everybody got a little candle?

In a moment I'm going to ask you to switch your candle on to indicate to yourself and the Lord one or more of the following;

Slide: pp hanukkah

- I'm asking God to shine His light into my life and to forgive and cleanse me.
- I'm rededicating myself to the Lord.
- I'm asking for a new infilling of the Holy Spirit.

- I am going to pray daily for someone I know who needs to see the light of Christ in 2023.

It might be one thing, or more than one – or something else that God has spoken to you about.

This is a private moment between you and the Lord, so please focus on your own candle, even if you aren't going to light it yourself. After a brief silence, I will invite everyone to light their candle and we will sing our final song.

Light candles

PLEASE ALL KEEP YOUR CANDLES TO REMIND YOU OF YOUR REASON FOR LIGHTING IT TODAY, OR JUST TO REMIND YOU THAT JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

If this has raised some issues for you and you would like prayer or counsel, please come and talk to Bernard or me. We will stay in here for that purpose while the others go out to sing.

Remember, that when things had been put right, there was great joy and rejoicing!

So, let us rejoice together as we all light our candles and sing 'Light has dawned'.