

Sunday 5th May 2013 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m. (St Andrew's College – Merriman & Upper)		5th Sunday after Easter 6th Sunday of Easter Year C
Acts 16:9-15	Ps 67	Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5
		John 14:23-29
Trust		

“Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears.”
 (Jn 14:27)

Who do we trust?

Who do we trust? Who do we listen to? Whose word do we take seriously? I wonder how many people know what star they were born under, or read their horoscopes in the newspaper, or consult fortune tellers; how many people ask a sangoma or a slim mannetjie for guidance in relationships, or jobs; or call on the amakhosi for help. There is the story of someone who consulted a fortune teller....

At the fairground, Bert thought it might be a good laugh if he visited the Gypsy fortune teller, so he went inside the tent, and she read his palm. "Ah...." said the woman, as she gazed into his palm. "I see you are the father of two children." "Ha, you fortune tellers are all a sham!" said Bert scornfully; "I'm the father of three children!" The woman grinned and said, "That's what YOU think...."

As Christians, we believe and trust that our future is in the hands of God; that we do not need to turn to horoscopes, or sangomas, or amakhosi, because the power that is within us is greater than any other; and that we can indeed trust God for the way ahead.

A journey of trust...

Our three scripture readings take us on a journey of trust; they give us a glimpse into the future, and the road we must take to get there.

The reading from Acts (16:9-15) is a short story from the life of the early church – the conversion of the woman Lydia, who heard what Paul had to say about the good news of Jesus Christ; she believed, and was baptised. We don't know very much about her; we don't know how her life unfolded; except that she and her family were changed by her conversion and her new-found faith – as conversion and belief in Christ does: we no longer live for ourselves, but to the glory of God.

We are given this glimpse into Lydia's life, and what we see is incomplete. She has a long road ahead, yet she has this new-found faith in God to sustain and guide her. She has begun her story.

If you could write one or two sentences about your life as it is right now, I wonder what you would write, what you would see as the most important thing happening to you at this time. What has shaped you. What has changed your life. Perhaps all is going well, everything is peace and light. Or perhaps things are really difficult right now, you are carrying burdens and problems that are quite overwhelming.

Each one of us would have a different story to tell. But in one sense we would all say that our lives are incomplete. We have a long road ahead. There is much that we have to face. We don't have all the answers. But like Lydia we are invited to believe, to put our faith and trust and hope in Jesus Christ. And as we do so, we discover that we are sustained and guided by God, that through the uncertainty and fears and sadness and joys, all the unknowns, of our life, we are not alone. Like Lydia, we step onto this road of faith, trust, and hope.

The reading from Revelation (21:10, 22-22:5) speaks of the future, the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, the end of all things, the time when our stories have been completed, all books written. Everything has been brought to perfection. We are in the presence of God. There is no more death, or sorrow, or struggle, or heartache, because everything has been brought to perfection. It is the big picture that we shall have one day; and it is the picture we sometimes have in this life when we

look back, and see how things have worked out, how God has carried us on the road of trust and faith.

Our Gospel reading (Jn 14:23-29) speaks of how we get there, what will sustain us as we go: the promise of Jesus that he will be with us, the promise of the Holy Spirit that will be given to us, the promise of the peace of Christ. The presence of Jesus. The power of the Spirit. The peace of Christ. We might ask - is that all? Isn't there anything more definite? More certain? Can't we know for sure? How is it all going to work out? We are left hanging in mid-air, and all we can do, it seems, is trust.

It reminds me of the story of the guy who was rock-climbing, slipped and fell, but managed to grab onto a branch of a tree growing out of the cliff. And as he hung there, he cried out, "Help, someone help me! Is there anyone up there?" And a voice replied, "This is God. Let go of the branch, and I will save you." And the man answered, "Is there anyone else up there?"

The place of trust...

We have very few certainties in life. Very few guarantees. Nothing is for sure. We can't control what happens to us. Life is a matter of trust. Living in the place of trust.

Claire and I have had the privilege of living and working in some remarkable communities in the course of our lives. We were based in Mbekweni and Kaya Mandi, two big townships in the Western Cape, through the last few years before the release of Nelson Mandela; I remember the murder of Chris Hani, the despair and terror of those days, followed by the excitement and euphoria of the first democratic elections. By that time we had moved to Bonteheuwel, on the Cape Flats, and I remember the demands of those years, as our children were born and as we coped with the pressures of a big parish.

Those were very tough years. Yet we look back and remember them as golden years, a special time of our lives, when we were immensely

blessed and enriched by the people we met, the friends we made, our experiences of ministry, what we learned and went through. And over time the problems and heartaches we experienced – and they were not light ones - took on another perspective, and we were able to see the big picture, to see the hand of God, the river of life that sustained us, the leaves of the trees that brought healing and hope.

We learned to trust, to let go. To go with the uncertainty. The unknown. To walk into the future, into the furnace, into danger, to face terrors, with nothing more and nothing less than the presence and peace of Christ, and the power of the Spirit.

We don't need fortune tellers, or sangomas, or amakhosi, to help us through the future. We simply trust, ask, receive, let go.

Trust in life, and trust as we face death. Trust that we are wonderfully carried in love, the love of God, the love of those around us.

Trust, and do all we can, not abdicating responsibility – tackling the issues we face – Gupatgate, the condition of education in the Eastern Cape, service delivery in Grahamstown.

Malala Yousafzai is a young girl from Pakistan, who grew up under the shadow of the Taliban, and their efforts to prevent girls from getting an education, having a voice, having a future.

Chelsea Clinton wrote recently: “When [Malala] was as young as 11, she was writing blogs for the BBC, writing about her ambition to become a doctor, her fears of the Taliban and her determination to not allow the Taliban – or her fear – to prevent her from getting the education she needed to realise her dreams...

“[Finally, in October 2012, when she was 15], a Taliban gunman boarded her school bus in northwest Pakistan and shot her and two other girls, attempting to both kill Malala and, as the Taliban later said, teach a ‘lesson’ to anyone who had the courage to stand up for education, freedom and self-determination, particularly for girls and

women.... Malala is now where she wants to be: back in school. The Taliban almost made Malala a martyr; they succeeded in making her a symbol. [She is writing a] memoir ... to raise awareness about the 61 million children around the world who are not in school... However Malala concludes her book, her story so far is only just beginning.”¹

CONCLUSION

Our stories may be just beginning, or nearly complete. We are shaped, transformed, by the gospel encounters, as well as by the evil we experience. May we learn to trust, to let go. To go with the uncertainty. The unknown. To walk into the future, into the furnace, into danger, to face terrors, with nothing more and nothing less than the presence and peace of Christ, and the power of the Spirit.

¹ Chelsea Clinton, *Time*, April 29 / May 6, 2013.