

***Pilgrimage***  
**St. Paul's, Milford**  
**Sunday 16 August 2015: 8:00 and 9:00**

*Instead of being drunk and living a life of debauchery, be filled with the Spirit as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves ... giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I've never had to tell a congregation off for getting drunk! It just hasn't arisen. Which is not to say we've never had thoroughly enjoyable social occasions! Especially in the Deep South. But obviously St. Paul had a different experience. He frequently took the early churches to task and here in this letter to the Church in Ephesus he drew a distinction between a pagan gathering and a Christian gathering.

The pagan gathering was a fairly dissolute event. As an interesting aside we might note that the Greeks used the word symposium to refer to a drinking party. Now that may come as a surprise today because we use the word symposium to refer to a fairly civilised and somewhat genteel academic event. It sits alongside polite words like seminar or colloquium.

Anyway, Paul uses the language of drinking to describe the ideal Christian life. Instead of getting drunk, he writes, be filled with the Spirit as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves. Interesting that he picked out those activities and not others.

And of course we still do those things. Our services aren't quite the same when we don't sing hymns. We don't sing psalms as much as we used to although, as you know, we do say them from time to time. Music has the capacity to speak

to our souls. In fact people can sometimes get quite stirred up about music, especially when the 'wrong' tune is used. I defy anyone to sing *For all the Saints* to any tune other than the Vaughan Williams tune *Sine Nomine* which, by the way, translates as 'without a name'!

The early church was also a thankful church. Their instinct was to give thanks for all things and in all places and at all times. The great St John Chrysostom argued that a Christian could even give thanks for Hell because Hell was a threat and a warning to keep him on the right path. To give thanks for all things, because all things come from God. I think we often forget that. When we think of prayer, chances are we think of prayer as asking for something, usually when all else has failed. But if you recall, the introduction to our intercessions in the NZPB is:

*Let us pray for the Church and for the world, giving thanks for God's goodness.*

Over the years I've visited many churches, perhaps more than most people because of the various jobs I've had and believe me I've heard some dreadful intercessions along with some very good ones. It's been said, and I believe it, that you can tell what a parish is like from their intercessions, what they pray for. **You can tell what a parish is like from what they pray for.**

Some are obsessed with their own life, their study groups, their meetings, their pet projects. Nothing about the local community, nothing about the diocese, nothing about the world. It's much the same with parish histories. I've read quite a few and I always look to see what they say about the 1930s or the 1940s. Do they mention the Depression, do they refer to the War or even acknowledge that there was one?

Giving thanks, not just asking for things. As we go through the intercessions today, just note how much of it relates to thanksgiving and not to asking for something.

Today's hymns have been chosen to make a point. I guess, I hope, they always are, but today's point is that as Christians we are on a journey; that journey is called life. We're on a pilgrimage. That means that the journey is just as important as the destination. Life's the same, isn't it? What we do and how we do life must surely be more important than the point at which it ends, surely?

Our first hymn today (639) says it all. Whatever happens to us or around us we are to follow the Master and never give up, no matter how much negativity there is. In the end don't listen to those voices, don't be put off by the weather, just carry on. And the final hymn (47), if ever there was one, is one of ceaseless praise. I do hope we'll sing it with great gusto!

I've put something in the newsletter about a film I saw during the week. I've referred to this before, on the Sunday when we had a baptism. It's about a walkway in Spain, the Camino, the highway to Compostela de Santiago. When I say a walkway I also mean a cycleway or a track. I'm talking about a route that takes perhaps 35 days to cross, about 800 kms across the north of Spain. The destination, Santiago, is where St. James is said to have died. Pilgrims have gone there for centuries and over 200,000 do this every year. Some have a religious purpose, others just like a long trek, others want to examine their lives, to extend themselves, to get out of their comfort zone and ask where they're heading. Progress is sometimes slow. People help one another along the way. And the route is marked out by a symbol in the form of a shell, the

scallop shell, the St. James shell, which, if you look at it, has one single destination point but can be approached by any number of routes, just like the Camino, which can be approached from many countries in Europe.

Many travellers carry a shell with them; they attach it to their pack, drink and eat with it. It's the sign, the symbol. You don't have to walk the whole distance; you can join at any point, leave at any point, stay the night in many places. Each individual follows his own camino and makes his own journey.

Seeing this film, even just reading about the Camino, is helpful for understanding pilgrimage, living a life and following a journey with Jesus Christ.

Another event, one I've referred to in the newsletter and on the whiteboard, is a retreat on Saturday week, the 29<sup>th</sup>, at Vaughan Park. St. Peter's, Takapuna, has invited us to join them. It's designed to open up the subject of prayer. To help each person discover the best way of prayer for them. We're all different when it comes to prayer. Some are helped by reading, others by walking through the bush, others by making something, drawing or painting something, others by silence, others by talking with others.

*So be filled with the Spirit whether you're singing or not ... and give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And may you labour night and day to be a pilgrim!