

Trinity 19 2018

Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the realities and verities of existence. The bliss of growth, the splendour of action, the glory of power. For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision. But today well lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day.

-- Sanskrit Proverb

The author of the letter to the Hebrews remains shrouded in mystery. Even early in the church's history, a Christian as learned as Origen had to admit his ignorance of the true author of Hebrews. Several theories regarding the author's identity have been proposed over the years, but all of them contain significant problems.

Most of the churches in the eastern part of the Roman Empire believed Paul to have written the epistle, leading to its early acceptance into the Canon by the churches in those areas. Even though Clement of Rome drew much from Hebrews in his late-first-century letter to the Corinthian church, many in the Western church pointed away from Paul as the source of the book. Authors such as Luke, Barnabas, Apollos, and even Clement have been considered as possibilities. The unknown authorship of this book should not shake our confidence in its authority. Hebrews makes important theological contributions to the biblical Canon, it has been drawn upon as sacred Scripture since the late first century, and Christians have for two millennia consistently upheld the divine inspiration and, therefore, the canonicity of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews is known, along with James, as one of the Catholic epistles as it is written by an unknown author to the church at large.

The strongly Jewish character of the letter to the Hebrews helps to narrow down its date of composition, most likely AD 64–69. Significantly, the book makes no reference to the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in AD 70. With its myriad references to Hebrew customs and the Old Testament, the book was likely sent to a Jewish Christian community, possibly in Rome.

Throughout its pages, Hebrews makes clear that Jesus Christ exceeds all other people, pursuits, objects, or hopes to which human beings offer allegiance. Hebrews pictures Jesus as better than the angels, as bringing a better lives to humanity through salvation, as offering a better hope than the Mosaic Law could promise, as a better sacrifice for our sins than a bull or a goat, and as

providing a better inheritance in heaven for those who place their faith in Him. Jesus is indeed superior to all others.

This message of the superiority of Jesus would have been particularly important to Jewish Christians in Rome, who were struggling under Nero's persecution and were considering moving back toward the Mosaic Law. The writer to the Hebrews showed these Jewish Christian believers that, though they were faced with suffering, they were indeed following a better way and they should persevere.

Those Jewish Christians in Rome must have felt very separated from God because of the hostile environment in which they lived. It must have been a great comfort to be reminded that;

⁹ but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower^[a] than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Perhaps we, too, need to be uplifted in our lives from the humdrum of our daily routines and the problems of our lives so that they might be, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us this morning, that they may be, "*crowned with glory*".

Shortly, at the Eucharistic prayer we say and sing the words;

"Therefore with angels and archangels,
and with all the company of heaven,
we laud and magnify thy glorious name,
evermore praising thee and singing:

**All Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,
heaven and earth are full of thy glory.**

Glory be to thee, O Lord most high.

[Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.]

Lucy Winkett, the Rector of St. James, Piccadilly, has written that;

"This passage encourages us to imagine it in such a way that it gives some space in our hearts and heads; perhaps we give it some contemplative

attention, so that in the end we are inspired to live differently, knowing that this beauty exists perhaps just out of earshot.....

In worship, we sing to express not only our earthly unity, but also our unity with the angels and archangels and with the whole of creation. Angels are not rulers of creation, but they are the invisible bond of creation. Worship binds earth and heaven together and we worship in time and eternity each time we pray.... Music makes glory visible and audible in the temple and the worship of God. Joining with the angels is our purpose on earth..... so we understand that the glory of God that we experience in worship gives us energy and inspiration to live the life that Jesus lived, even though we are bound to die. We are, like he was for a while, just a little lower than the angels.”

The Anglo-Catholic movement in the Church of England is not very popular at the moment with the hierarchy. One of its many attractions is its worship which, through music, drama, ceremonial and sheer outrageousness transform and moves us from the humdrum of daily living to a higher spiritual plain. It indulges all the senses. Hearing and music, Sight and ceremonial, Smell and incense as the it symbolises our prayers going up to Heaven.

As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us, we have to look closely at the way in which Jesus and his message is higher than the angels and points us to God in all his majesty. So, we come back to the Sanskrit proverb;

Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the realities and verities of existence. The bliss of growth, the splendour of action, the glory of power. For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision. But today well lived makes yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day.

-- Sanskrit Proverb

Amen.