

Year B Easter 6

13 May 2012

Dean Helen Jacobi

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

*How might you respond if a person who was not a Christian approached you and said, "Why would I want to be a Christian?"*

This was a question posed recently to all the candidates in an election for bishop, not Wellington, but an election in the US: the diocese of Pittsburgh.

In the US an Episcopal election is a much more open process than here and candidates answer a series of questions which are then published on the web. The good editors of Anglicansonline drew readers' attention to the answer from successful candidate The Rev. Dorsey McConnell.

He said:

"Years ago, a friend warned me to think very carefully before becoming a Christian.

He said it would ruin my pleasure in my own sin, and I have since found he was right.

And there are other consequences as well.

It will seriously hamper your self-centeredness and your pride.

It will make you love people you don't even want to like, forgive people you have every reason to hate, and help people without any thought of gain.

And it will bring dozens, hundreds, even thousands, of additional family into your life, who don't look or talk or think like you — brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters.

Since most of us can't manage the ones we already have, that is also something to think about.

"Of course, there are huge advantages. You will finally know who you are and why you are on this earth.

You will find endless mercy, limitless grace, compassion without ceasing, love beyond bounds.

You will experience real joy, again and again.

You will have an abiding sense of God's care for you, and you will never again depend on the kudos of the world.

After years of trying to create your own universe and run it (which never goes very well), you will be released from the endless task of proving your self-worth.

You will discover that serving Jesus Christ will use every fiber of your being, every cell of your creativity, talents you never knew you had, in pursuits you never would have imagined.

In short, you will discover the grace and truth of God in this life, and in the age to come, life everlasting."<sup>1</sup>

Well you can see why the Rev McConnell won the election as Bishop of Pittsburgh.

And he was in a sense making a commentary on our readings today.

We are coming to the end of the Easter season.

The end of reflections on the resurrection and why and how the earliest Christians became Christians at all.

In our short piece from the book of Acts we hear how Peter and the disciples are somewhat astonished that the Gentiles (ie non Jews, Romans probably) have received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

People who they would definitely consider at least outsiders, if not enemies were seen to have been blessed by God.

As Bp McConnell says being a Christian *will bring dozens, hundreds, of additional family into your life, who don't look or talk or think like you.*

It took Peter and the disciples some convincing to get on board with this idea but they got there in the end.

They were discovering what Jesus had meant when he had said to them "love one another as I have loved you — no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends".

The love was not a feeling but a calling to a way of life.

Jesus had loved them by offering his life and so they in turn were to offer their lives to each other and all whom they encountered.

When we fall in love with someone we offer them our companionship and entrust ourselves to them in marriage; on this mother's day we acknowledge our mothers who have literally offered their life in order to give us life and mothers who every day give of themselves in caring for children and grandchildren.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.episcopalpgh.org/bsearch/final-slate-for-bishop-election/mcconnell-bio/>

With love comes offering of our selves.

We recall and claim Jesus' offering of himself every time we celebrate the eucharist.

We use the language of sacrifice sometimes which is a bit inaccessible to our way of thinking; offering works better.

Jesus offered his way of living and his death so that we might come closer to God and see that evil and death never have the last word.

And then we in turn offer ourselves to each other and to God.

As Bishop McConnell said in his answer – we don't have to prove our self worth any more, by offering ourselves to God we find the reason for our existence, and receive love and grace in return.

If we did not receive God's grace Jesus' words would be impossible to live up to:

love one another as I have loved you,

do what I command you;

these words on their own are not exactly good news as we could never measure up to them.

One writer Paul Scott Wilson says

*If we could do these things on our own, we would not need a Savior. However, it is God's initiative that counts and enables us to do what is required. God provides the resources for us out of our relationship with Jesus Christ.*<sup>2</sup>

In receiving God's grace and love, which we are astounded like Peter to find poured out on us, we in turn offer ourselves to each other and God.

We offer our work life, our family life, our life in community, our church life, our leisure time; it is all given to us by God and we are grateful to offer it back to God in return.

We are getting ready at the moment for our AGM and our time to recommit our financial giving to the parish.

Our offering of our financial gifts is not just about paying the bills, although we do want the lights and heating on when we come to worship;

our offering of money in a committed and sustained way is about offering what we have back to God.

And not just the little bit we might have left over at the end of the month but a portion of our income that we intentionally set aside for our church and for other needs in the world.

And then together, with our resources pooled we can offer worship and service which is worthy of the blessings we have received.

Jesus then is still not finished with us but says so now you are to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

You are to share my love and life with others.

We do that together as a church community in the percentage of our budget we give to overseas missions via the AMB;

we do that as a church community by offering our building and our worship to all who come;

by offering our gifts of hospitality and nurture,

supporting our young people by being their sponsors for confirmation.

Then as families and individuals we go out to bear fruit in our own lives and in the way we connect with others.

Listening to a friend in need,

cooking them a meal,

sitting with someone who is ill week after week,

supporting a colleague at work,

laughing with a friend or a loved one ...

we go out, we bear fruit for Christ.

As Bishop McConnell said

*You will discover that serving Jesus Christ will use every fiber of your being, every cell of your creativity, talents you never knew you had, in pursuits you never would have imagined.*

*In short, you will discover the grace and truth of God in this life, and in the age to come, life everlasting.*

Bearing fruit in this age and the age to come, that is some calling.

It is our calling from the one who called us friends and gave his life that we could give ours.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.goodpreacher.com/shareit/readreviews.php?cat=47>