

The wonderful exhortation we hear in Paul's letter to the Romans today begins - *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.* The hope that in our good intentions, in our single mindedness of on God and community, anything can be achieved!

Today is a day of remembering and celebration in our community, and we have much to be thankful for! Today we celebrate St Anne's Day, a day we can give thanks for the life and witness of our parish, but when we can also celebrate what has been achieved, and look with hope with what is to come. Because St Anne's Day also falls on the 26th July we tend to celebrate it early while we are still together as a congregation and where we can also acknowledge the end of the academic year.

Our patron saint is someone who can inspire us, and while little is known about Anne or Joachim – Mary's parents, and Jesus grandparents. The experience of our own lives tells us that they lived through an extraordinary period. They were a couple who faced a great deal of changes and interruptions to the pattern of their lives. We do not know whether they lived to see their grandson crucified, and risen from the dead. But we do know that they had to deal with Mary's pregnancy before marriage in a society who would have shunned and excluded them for this. Yet we know that they did not send Mary away and consented to her marriage to Joseph. We know that they raised Mary to be open to God's call on her life, and to be able to recognised God in her midst. Anne and Mary give us an example of how we might be open to all that is possible in our lives.

This weekend Liz and David are celebrating 50 years of marriage, and I was really inspired by a comment they made about wanting their celebration to be a time of thanksgiving, not only for the life they have lived together, but for those who have nurtured, sustained and inspired them through their long relationship. St Anne's Day is like that for us as a community too – we can only be a community working together because we are nurtured and inspired by God and one another. Mary and Anne, were only able to be the Saints they became because those around them also encouraged them to hear and to see.

The Gospel reading for St Anne and St Joachim is one of the most unusual passages in the gospel. It is not really a narrative or even a recount, rather it is an odd explanation of the purpose of parables – in the midst of the parable of the sower – though the explanation is almost a parable in itself. In fact we have heard more than is usually set in the lectionary for St Anne. Usually we would only hear - *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.*¹ The inference being of course that Anne and Mary's eyes were blessed because they were able to see the wonder of what God was revealing in their midst, in the face of adversity, fear and doubt. To have ears and eyes is an

¹ Matthew 13: 16-17

image that points beyond literal hearing to discerning the significance of Jesus' words. Jesus, though, offers no help really in interpreting this, other than to note that understanding is found in such hearing and seeing.²

The Prophet Jeremiah and Matthew have a similar problem; and in fact we face a similar problem as a parish – they are trying to describe how we would live if God was in our midst when we actually believe it to be already true, but often don't know how to describe it or respond to it.

In our baptism we confirm that we will walk as children of God all the days of our lives, and as a parish in our Mission Action Plan we commit again to doing this – we say we are *constantly sharing the love of Christ*³ and I think in many ways we do this – in our words and our actions. But I think at times we don't believe it; we are surprised when we find that God is in our midst. We don't necessarily own the wonderful things God is doing here, or how our neighbours and our friends are nurturing and inspiring us to live each day. I think the problem sometimes is that we don't know what to expect, so we don't always recognise what God is doing!

I was thinking about this week, as people have asked Mum and Dad about our holiday in Ireland. At one point I heard Dad comment, 'I didn't really know what to expect, but we did have a good time'

Often people ask us if our expectations are met, but if we don't know what the expectation is, it is hard to respond. So what is our expectation of our faith? What does it look like to say that we are a community who are sharing the love of Christ? I suspect it's not much different to how and who we are? We are a people who are committed to praying and studying and reflecting with and on God, we are a people who take an interest in each other, and nurture and support one another. We are a people who are committed to working with our neighbours, and caring for those who are vulnerable. In fact we do all these things, but I suspect often it doesn't feel like enough.

Confidence sometimes is just about sharing what we already have and know – as Jesus explained to the disciples; it is about having the courage to name what we can see and hear – not unlike taking time at a significant anniversary to notice those who have allowed you to grow and stay together for a long period of time! And also not unlike taking the time each year on St Anne's Day to give thanks for all that has taken place in the year, and to acknowledge what we give thanks for and also to lament those things which have not gone as we may have liked.

In all honesty, seeing and hearing is not just a skill, but it takes great courage, because if we dare to notice what God would have us do or be, we may have to

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2071

³ St Anne Mission Action Plan 2016- 2019

change the way we are working, or the truths we thought to be true, or even the secret expectations we may hold onto.

Yesterday I had a long list of things to do, it was quite a diverse list from cooking cakes for Tea with the Vicar, to washing, to writing a sermon, and visiting someone who is sick. At one point I was rushing so much it felt like I was dripping into a puddle! This seemed a little silly, so I sat in the shade by the door for a few moments as a gentle breeze came in. As I sat I watched the shadows the clouds and the sun were making, I could hear David singing and warming up for his concert yesterday, I could hear bird song, and buses, and dogs barking – and it made me wonder – what is it that God wants us to hear and to see? It also reminded me that so often, even on days of celebration we are so busy focusing on the tasks that we often forget to see and hear what is actually happening – and so our expectations are unmet.

Today as we celebrate St Anne's day, as we give thanks for all that is good in our parish, as we mark the end of another academic year. Let us remember that God has given us eyes to see, and ears to hear. What is that we can see today – beside us, and around us, and maybe even within us! What is it that you can hear today – around and within? And let us remember too that often it is not what we expect! As we celebrate, as we give thanks – let us take time and make space to see and hear God in our midst.

As I sat yesterday I was reminded of a Leunig prayer⁴ which often inspires me

God give us rain when we expect sun.
Give us music when we expect trouble.
Give us tears when we expect breakfast.
Give us dreams when we expect a storm.
Give us a stray dog when we expect congratulations.
God play with us, turn us sideways and around.

Amen.

⁴ <http://www.leunig.com.au/works/prayers>