

St Gabriel's Family Communion. Sunday 23rd Nov. 2008
Readings: Ezek 34:11-16; 20-24; Eph 1:15-23
Gospel: Matt 25: 31-46

A husband and wife had been having a rather heated argument. They realized it wasn't going to solve anything so they agreed to stop and move on. The next day, the husband thought everything was fine but as they were discussing their son, the husband said, "Well, he must get his brains from one of us." And his wife said, "It must have been you, because I still have mine." We inherit a lot of things from our parents. Intelligence isn't always on the list.

This morning we've gathered to celebrate a number of things. At first they don't seem to be related at all but they are. They're very closely related. This morning is known as 'Stir Up' Sunday.

Stir-up Sunday is the traditional day for everyone in the family to take a turn at stirring the Christmas pudding, whilst making a wish. Before Christmas puddings were sold ready-made in foil containers, they were always made at home. They were made a month before Christmas day so they had time to mature. On Stir-up Sunday families returned from Church to give the pudding its traditional lucky stir. Children were often heard chanting the following rhyme:

*Stir up, we beseech thee, the pudding in the pot;
And when we get home we'll eat the lot.*

These words were an adaptation of what they had heard in church on this day. The name "Stir Up Sunday" comes from the opening words of the collect for the day in the Book of Common Prayer. The original prayer has been adapted into more modern language and is now the CoE prayer after communion for Stir Up Sunday:

*"Stir-up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people;
that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works,
may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

It is also known as Christ the King, the Sunday on which we celebrate the sovereignty of God in Christ. This is the last Sunday in the Christian Year and an opportunity to begin to prepare ourselves for the real Advent.

Combine all that with the passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians about the "glorious riches of the inheritance of the saints" and at first glance they seem totally unrelated. But they're not. They're very closely related. Let me explain.

CHRIST THE KING:

Before we came to Popley Marilyn and I attended a performance of Handel's Messiah performed in St John's by the Hook Choral Society. Tradition has it that in

1743, at the premiere performance in London of this wonderful work, King George II rose to his feet during the performance of the majestic "Hallelujah" chorus. To this day it is customary for audiences to stand during this chorus, even though the "Hallelujah" chorus is not the last movement. Do you know why? Because even King George, king of England, knew there was a power higher than his and he stood to pay homage to his King, the King of Kings.

This passage from Paul reminds us of the sovereignty of God and the Lordship of Christ Jesus, God's Son. "²¹*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything*" If that's the case then in the Kingdom of God, Christ, the Son of God reigns supreme. What does that mean in regard to our inheritance?

The wealthy English Baron, Fitzgerald, had only one son. The son had left home and died while away from home. Fitzgerald never got over the loss of his son, his only heir. As his wealth increased, Fitzgerald continued to invest in paintings by the masters. At his death, his will called for all his paintings to be sold. Because of the quality of the art in the holdings, a message was sent to collectors and museums. A great crowd gathered for what was to be the auction of the century. When the day came and the large crowd was assembled, the attorney read from the will of Fitzgerald. It instructed that the first painting to be sold was the painting "of my beloved son." The painting was from an unknown painter and of poor quality. The only bidder was the old servant who had known the boy and loved him. For a small sum of money he bought it for its sentimental value and the memories that it held. The attorney again read from the will, "Whoever buys my son gets all. The auction is over."

That's the way it is with Jesus. Whoever chooses Jesus, God's only Son, inherits all that God has to offer. Through loving the Son we are able to share in the inheritance of the Father's Kingdom. Through His love and our faith we have in him "*redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*"

In other words, the one for whom, and through whom, all things were made came looking for us. He came to bring us salvation. Because of this saving grace we've experienced, we can freely give thanks.

We can give thanks for the blessings God has lavished on us in numerous ways. We can give thanks through our prayers, both for ourselves and for others. We can give thanks through our participation in the ministries and mission of the Church. That participation might be by singing or helping in one the many and varied roles. It might be expressed in serving on one of the committees or keeping the church clean. Almost everything we do and are involved in at Church and that spills over into our daily lives is part of our giving thanks to God.

In 1636, amid the darkness of the Thirty Years' War, a German pastor, Martin Rinkart, is said to have buried five thousand of his parishioners in one year, an average of fifteen a day. His parish was ravaged by war, death, and economic disaster. In the heart of that darkness, with the cries of fear outside his window, he sat down and wrote this table grace for his children:

Now thank we all, our God, with heart and hands and voices; who wondrous things hath done, in whom his world rejoices. Who, from our mother's arms, hath led us on our way, with countless gifts of love and still is ours today.

In conclusion we might ask "how can we know these blessings that have been lavished on us?" Well Paul writes: "*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*" [vv 17-19]

As we keep asking and we keep praying for ourselves and for each other so we will begin to recognize our true inheritance. That we have been rescued for the dominion of darkness; that we've been brought (or bought) into the Kingdom; that God has seen fit to reconcile us to himself through the blood of his son shed on the cross? And so let's make our prayer today. "Now thank we all our God" for delivering us from the dominion of darkness and for bringing us into the Kingdom of God's own Son. "Now thank we all our God" for the blessing of life and the blessing of this Church. And we give thanks for the seasons, for Advent and a fresh opportunity to have the eyes of hearts opened to know him more.