



***Fifth Sunday Easter***

***Acts 6: 1-7 1 Peter 2: 4-9 John 14: 1-12***

There's a line in the passage from John's Gospel for today which is quite astonishing.

"Those who have faith in me will do the works I do, and even greater works." In earlier readings of this passage people assumed that the works Jesus was speaking of were born out by the rapid spread of the Christian communities but for the community of John it had a deeper meaning, they were removed in time and space from the founding disciples and they had to deal with conflict and uncertainty so the community developed a spirit of confidence in the abiding presence of the Paraclete. The spirit of Jesus would continue and the community would build on the original mission of Jesus.

Jesus would have recognised that his ministry was limited by his culture and his home territory. As his ministry progressed he would have been aware of the growing threat to his safety. We can assume that Jesus hoped that what he had begun would grow into a living stream bringing life to many. From the images of Isaiah he may have dreamt that his followers would take the message of freedom, hope, justice, reconciliation and peace to their brothers and sisters wherever there was a need.

Jesus had once told his disciples to set out on their ministries without a lot of baggage. Now he was saying that the chief resource was faith in Jesus' as the revelation of God. This enterprise, of creating a world in the image of God, was to be achieved on faith, love and the sharing of gifts.

We see the beginning of this faith at work in the letter of Peter. Using images from construction Peter speaks of discipleship as doing something creative with stones. Stones are plentiful, in Jesus area stones were plentiful and with adobe they formed the common building material. Stones can be arranged in all sorts of creative ways from fences to cathedrals. Peter calls Jesus a living stone, a building block of a new age which will anchor other living stones in the building of a spiritual home.

This group of people coming from different cultures, of different genders and different socio-economic levels will be asked to model that the children of God are all humanity; that the "blood" that unites them is the "blood of Christ". The group will be a community which will provide support for those seeking to learn the ways of discipleship and a starting place from which to engage in ministry.

In the reading from Acts we see another example of "church" in practical action. The different *living stones* mean that there are a variety of gifts for

ministry. Part of the training in discipleship is discerning the gifts we bring to ministry and the possibilities for growth. The community addressed the question, how do we cater for all? We have preachers but who is attending to social issues? The community was invited to come up with the names of those whom they felt would be suitable. The community then appointed seven assistants.

The picture of the early community reminds us of our involvement in our parishes. Issues are brought to the community meetings where decisions are seen as the responsibility of all. Suggestions are made, discussion follows and when decisions are made the group looks for that unity of purpose which can be described as 'one heart'.

The many dwelling places that John describes are the hearts of the disciples. The kingdom, the house of God, the great tree, the house of living stones whatever image we use we are emphasising that there is a place for all. Let our contribution be a precious stone, the very best of ourselves.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.