

OPEN AIR CHURCH SERVICE AT MANDURAMA
FOLLOWING THE DEDICATION OF THEIR MEMORIAL
15th MARCH 1992

Officiate: Reverend Victor J. Smart

Readings: Genesis 15: 5-12
 Philippians 3: 17-4:1
 Psalm 26: 1;7-9;13-14
 Luke 9: 28-36

INTRODUCTION

In my words of introduction to the dedication of this Memorial, yesterday, I mentioned how when God put people on the earth, there were no cities or towns. The earth was raw. Consequently God issued a command for them to go out and conquer the earth. That is – bring it under control. Make something of it.

He has continued to remind mankind to go out – explore and develop the resources that are at your fingertips. We see an example of this in God’s call to Abraham.

(1) ABRAHAM – CALLED AND REASSURED:

God gave a command to Abraham. It was like this. “I want you to uproot – and go to another land that I will show you; and I will make of you a great nation.”

Abraham believed God – and took Him up on His promise. He stepped out into the unknown. But – wait a minute; he began to think things over, and said to God, “How can You make a great nation out of me, when I don’t have any family. I have no son and heir”.

Quite calmly God instructed Abraham to look up into the heavens, “Can you count all those stars? – No – of course you can’t. And such will be your descendants!”

Though Abraham believed God – God wanted to show him that He was not a promise breaker. He did this in a way that Abraham would understand.

He asked Abraham to get three beasts, that he named. Abraham was to kill them and cut them down the centre – just like a half sheep you have seen hanging in the Butcher’s Shop. Then Abraham was to place them on the altar facing each other. This was an old ritual that Abraham was familiar with.

The original idea was, when two people made a deal – or a promise, they used to pass between the two half sections of the beasts. It was a sign – that if either one broke the promise – they would cut him in two like the beasts.

Now, when Abraham prepared the beasts and laid them on the altar, facing each other, God came down. He appeared in the form of a smoking brazier. That is to say – in the form of a brass bowl filled with smoking embers. You’ve seen a priest in an Orthodox Church Service of Worship – on television – waving a smoking bowl – a sign of God’s presence. The smoking brazier in Abraham’s case, was a sign of God’s presence.

Now, the point is – that God passed through the halves of the beasts; alone – signifying that He was relieving Abraham of any responsibility. God was taking it on His own shoulders.

By this, He was saying; “If I fall asleep on my promises, so-be-it, I am willing to be split in two like the beasts. So – Abraham was reassured.

(2) GOD'S PROMISE TO US

Abraham reached the land promised by God – and he was given a son. God kept His promise. Not everyone sees the fulfilment of their life's goals. Death sometimes intervenes. Moses died just before he reached the Promised Land. Some of our pioneers died before their vision was fulfilled.

But the New Testament gives us a more complete picture of God's plan for mankind – other than making something of the world He entrusted to us. In this, death plays an all important role.

In the Philippian letter read to you this morning, the Apostle Paul reminds us that our ultimate home is in heaven. But we cannot reach heaven in this body. Paul says "Jesus will come and transfigure these wretched bodies and transform them into the likeness of His glory".

Does this mean then, that all our efforts here in this world are a waste of time? Indeed no! God is using our efforts, our trials – our hurts – our failures and successes, to mould and shape our lives for the world to come. It is an inner experience...We can face toil and hardships, but the most difficult of all to face for some people – is death. When the strange thing about this, is that "No one has ever entered heaven alive".

But once again, God steps in to reassure us. Why! – even Jesus needed reassuring. He told His disciples that He was going to suffer grievously – be rejected by Church Leaders and put to death, but He would rise again on the third day. Not only was this a fearful experience for His disciples, but it was very unnerving for Himself. Why! – later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, with sweat rolling down His face...He cried out:

"Father if it be possible – PLEASE – don't let Me go through with it".

But, you see, God honoured Jesus' humanity, the same as He honours your humanity and mine – today, in giving us a glimpse of the after-life. It was when Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him into a mountain to pray. While He prayed, His appearance changed – His clothes became as brilliant as lightning. Suddenly two men appeared. They were Moses and Elijah. They had been dead for hundreds of years – yet here they were!

They too, were radiant, and talked with Jesus about His coming death at Jerusalem. Here was a resurrection scene – we've got a glimpse of it.

CONCLUSION

Friends, as the pioneers of old stepped out into the unknown, in response to an inner call – and today we have the beautiful township of Mandurama – an inner voice is calling us to take a step further, and press towards the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven – our true home.

Because of its mystery, we find ourselves so often walking in a cloud, as it were; and we long for some light to lighten our way.

Let me relate to you some words quoted by our Late King George VI before he died:

"I said to the man at the gate of the year
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the
unknown'. And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness
and put your hand into the hand of God. That – will
be to you, better than light, and safer than a known
way'".

(M. Louise Hoskins)