

150 Years of Ministry Here

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[0:00] May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen. Today is a day when it's natural to focus on the history of the church.

150 years since the first service held, well, maybe not so much here, but there, in this building, a lot has changed, both within and without this church building.

But today, as Andrew said, we go back to the passage preached at that first service, a passage from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which really serves as a history lesson for the Corinthian Christians, telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

Through the story of the Exodus, selected highlights of the people of God in the wilderness. Very appropriate, given we're in the season of Lent in the church year.

For us today, 2,000 years later, 150 years later, it reminds us of the many blessings we have as the people of God, at the heart of which is Christ the Rock, as well as reminding us of the responsibility that goes with that.

[1:28] I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea.

Our ancestors, our fathers, that's how Paul describes the Israelites. So Paul understands the church, the people who belong to Jesus, the Christians in Corinth, you and I today, as the children of the Israelites.

All those who belong to Jesus, the Messiah, who fulfills and completes what Israel was called to be, are now God's people, heirs of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the people of the Exodus.

Is that how you think of yourself? That is who you are. The cloud and the sea. A pillar of cloud led the children of Israel when they left Egypt and turned into a pillar of fire by night.

It was a symbol, an embodiment of the presence of God with them all the way through that difficult time, guiding, protecting and leading them into their inheritance.

[2:50] It led them through the waters of the Red Sea, which parted to let them through and close over again over the Egyptians who were chasing them.

The cloud and the sea spoke of the presence of the living God and the passage from slavery to freedom. And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians.

The cloud and the sea for the children of Israel are like the spirit and baptism with water for Christians. Christians enact the same drama.

God is present with us through his spirit. Baptism with water embodies the spiritual reality of being set free from slavery to sin.

Through the waters of death and resurrection. All passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink.

[4:04] The food and the drink provided by God through the spirit to the people of Israel in the wilderness. Just as in verse 2, St. Paul is paralleling the cloud and the sea with spirit and baptism.

So here in verse 3, Paul parallels God's provision of special food for his people on the journey to their inheritance with God's provision of the food and drink of the special Christian meal, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist.

For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. The rock. The Bible actually only records two incidences where water came out of the rock for the people to drink.

We heard one of them this morning. For some Jewish writers imagined that a rock filled with water had followed the people all the way. Now, Paul, I think, is a bit going along with this to make his point.

That Christians are those who share in the food and drink which is the Messiah's, Jesus Christ's gift of his own self.

[5:17] And Paul is insisting that what was really going on was the hidden presence of Jesus himself. The goal of all of Israel's wanderings and their refreshment on the way.

Or as Paul has put it earlier in chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, the foundation is Jesus Christ. Today, as we remember the first service with a passage which harks back to the laying of the foundation stone, it's very appropriate that we're reminded of the many blessings we enjoy as people who belong to Christ.

The spirit and baptism, the food and drink of communion, the heart of which is Christ the rock.

Through his spirit, God present with us in Christ, who sets us free from slavery to sin and sustains us on the way, all the way, to our inheritance as children of God.

It's also appropriate that we're reminded that blessing comes with responsibility.

[6:36] That it's not about presuming on God. As Paul reminds the Corinthians, when it came to the Israelites in the wilderness, nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them and they were struck down in the wilderness because of their grumbling, we heard a great example today, because of their sexual immorality and especially because of their idolatry.

What Paul is referring to in the verses which follow, most of the people who were brought out of slavery, who were provided for in the wilderness, did not experience the promised land.

God was displeased with them and he laid them low or overthrew them in the wilderness. The privileges Israel received were not matched by responsible behaviour.

Paul's message is, don't go back to the slavery you've been set free from. Don't go back. These things happened to them to serve as an example and they were written down to instruct us on whom the end of the ages have come.

Verse 11. So examples, yes. More than that, examples leading to the climax. Jesus Christ, who died and rose. And that is where we find ourselves in the drama of God's salvation.

[8:03] We are the people upon whom the end of the ages have come. The people who live in that period of history when God's long-awaited fulfilment has begun to appear in Jesus and the Spirit, even as the old age continues.

So if you think you're standing, watch out that you do not fall. Maybe there is a particular personal challenge in these verses today for you.

Where you are tempted to go back to the slavery you have come from. Where you are tempted to put something else in the place of God.

Where you are tempted to grumble. To forget the blessings that you have. That you are being sorely tested.

Maybe with sexual immorality. Do read these verses personally. In terms of testing.

[9:17] In terms of temptation. The danger of setting our hearts on evil things. But I want to say, Paul's wonderful promise in verse 13 is where to rest in.

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful. And he will not let you be tested beyond your strength.

But with the testing, he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. God is faithful.

Today is a reminder of that. It's a reminder of where Holy Trinity Doncaster has been faithful to the blessings.

But never forget that faithfulness is made up of individual Christians. And it is good, I think, today that we are reminded of how Holy Trinity Doncaster has lived up to the blessings and privileges we have in Christ, our rock.

[10:27] I think more than anything else seen in the churches and congregations you have planted in times of urban growth, holding together, as Tom Morgan spoke of, when it would be very easy to have had lots of conflict there, and planting daughter churches, St David's East Doncaster, St Philip's Deep Creek, St Mark's Templestowe, as well as, Andrew was telling me, at one point looking after St John's Blackburn.

And faithfulness also now in times of urban renewal. I think that's part of the expansion of the site here at Holy Trinity Doncaster.

Buildings, yes, but also the congregations that have been planted. The reason why the buildings have been done. The Chinese congregations, but also other congregations, isn't it, as well, of younger people.

And also, even now, not wanting to rest easy, rest on your laurels, but being open to the cooperating parish arrangement with St John's Blackburn.

God is faithful and will make a way for us to remain faithful. And that is so on the basis of our many blessings.

[11:56] The Spirit keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus as Alan Hoskins is praying.

Through his Spirit, God present with us in Christ, who sets us free from slavery to sin, frees us and sustains us on the way to our inheritance as children of God, along with our fathers, our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

and Moses. Let me lead us in a brief prayer before we sing again. Our gracious Father, we do thank you that you are faithful to us, that you will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, but when we are, you will always provide a way out.

Thank you for the reminder this morning of Christ, our rock, in whom alone is our salvation, and in whom alone you will keep us to the very end. we thank you for these things and pray that you would help us to keep being faithful to him and therefore to you.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.