

Trinity 3

St Mary's, Barnes, 8am

Luke 15, 1-10

Although Western Europe happens at the moment to be very secular the majority of people in the world today, as in history, believe in God, the source, sustainer and goal of all things. Reflecting on the wonder of existence and the mystery of their own lives most human hearts rise up in praise and pleas for help. Yet understandably we can still ask why God does not make himself known more clearly. As Woody Allen once put it in his characteristic way “Why does God not show me some clear sign like a number in a Swiss bank account?”

In a rather different manner the Christian faith is based on the conviction that God has taken steps to make himself more clearly known. In addition to where normal reflection takes us, he chose a particular people, the Jewish community, through which to disclose his heart and purpose. He discloses his heart to be a heart of hesed, or loving kindness, and his purpose, that we give this loving kindness absolute priority in our lives and build a community based on it. Through all the vicissitudes of their history, conquest and exile, this is the message their prophets hammered home, together with the promise that one day God would show his hand more clearly.

It is against this background that Christians understand the life of Jesus, and today's Gospel. The immediate context was Jesus's willingness to mix with those on the margins of society. One of the things we know for certain is that he took his message about the Kingdom of God to tax collectors, who were despised because they co-operated with the Roman occupiers, and prostitutes. Not only did he teach them and invite them to live in the Kingdom, under God's rule, he ate with them. For this he was criticised, and it is in response to such criticism that we have this morning's famous vignettes. God is like the man who searches the mountains for the one lost sheep. Like the women who scrabbles all over the house looking for the one lost

coin. This is what Jesus was doing in his ministry, and what he was doing was what God was doing in him and is always doing. Searching for us and inviting us to live in his presence.

One lovely feature of today's teaching is the note of happiness. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Repent, by the way, does not mean trying to force yourself to feel sorry about the things you don't feel sorry about at all. The Greek word metanoia is based on the word Mind. It is about re-thinking your life: rethinking who you are and what you are about in the light of the disclosure of God's loving kindness.

God is a God who searches us out and finds us; enfolds us and invites us to live in his presence. As Psalm 139 beautifully puts it

O Lord, thou hast searched me out, and known me; thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising; thou understandest my thoughts long before...

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit: or whither shall I go from thy presence?

If I climb up into heaven, thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also.

Words from the opening paragraph of St Augustine's Confessions have become famous, but they are always worth repeating and reflecting on.

Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.

You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

The Latin word for restless is inquietum- our hearts are unquiet. In the stillness of our hearts, in openness and receptive, using our poor human words, to reach out to the one who is beyond all words, our true quiet, our true rest is to be found.