

Dear Friends,

People seemed to be quite shocked when on Boxing Day, a young mother was seen to put her Christmas tree out for recycling – with 25 December behind her, Christmas was over! Happily, I don't think many of us do that. However, we must be careful that we don't fall into the same trap at Easter and Pentecost.

One of the joys of catch-up TV is that you can eventually get around to seeing programmes that you wanted to watch. One such programme for us, recently, was BBC One's *Painting the Holy Land* which had been shown in Holy Week. In the first episode, presenter Lachlan Goudie visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and remarked, 'in here it is Easter every day'.

For Christians, Easter is not so much a day but a season that runs through to Pentecost. But even Pentecost is a continuation of Easter – for Pentecost is about the coming of the Holy Spirit in power and the beginning of the church preaching the good news of Jesus Christ; good news that focused on his death and resurrection and the challenge of the Gospel message.

The New Testament book of Acts is effectively a sequel to Luke's Gospel. While the Gospel outlines the ministry of Jesus, Acts outlines the ministry of the church, with particular reference to the message it proclaimed for it is clear that although what the Apostles did is not unimportant it is what they said about Jesus that was at the heart of their ministry.

Acts includes six great sermons of the Apostles (three by Peter, one by Stephen and two by Paul). The first and probably the most famous of these is Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41), which was to a mainly Jewish congregation, familiar with the Scriptures. The last is Paul's sermon at Athens (Acts 17:16-34), which was to a mainly Gentile congregation, unfamiliar with the Scriptures. Today, we undoubtedly live in a society unfamiliar with the Scriptures, so there are some lessons here for us.

In Athens, Paul was distressed to see the city full of idols. Although that may have been because of his own sensitivities, his response suggests that it was because it troubled him that people did not know the true and living God. The altar, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD', summed up Paul's concerns completely. What they worshipped as something unknown, Paul proclaimed to them. In doing so, Paul was not afraid to draw insights from their own philosophers and poets but the climax of Paul's sermon was the resurrection of Jesus.

In our preaching, in our personal witness and our general conversations, we also need to engage thoughtfully with people around us. There are insights to be gained from classical and more contemporary culture – it is probably not that helpful to try to have a meaningful conversation with a younger person by talking about Shakespeare or even Rudyard Kipling. The same is true with older people who are probably not terribly impressed with a quote from Lady Gaga or Taylor Swift.

On Sunday 20 May, the church moves out of the season of Easter and into the season of Pentecost. However, for Christians, every day is Easter Day – for Christ is risen! And for Christians, every day is Pentecost for it is a day to celebrate the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and to tell others the good news of Jesus, the Saviour, who died for us and who rose again.

On our next quarterly plan you will notice a significant change. Flavel Church, Dartmouth, which for more than 30 years has been a united Methodist-URC congregation is becoming a church of a single denomination, the United Reformed Church. This is tied in with Flavel's recent growth and plans for the future. We wish the friends at Flavel God's blessing in a new chapter of the church's ministry and service.

God bless

*John Haley*