

Lectionary Readings for 9th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Isaiah 55:1-5; Romans 8:1-5; St Matthew 14:13-21;

One of the things I like doing on holiday is to have a look inside Churches, although it is more difficult in Scotland as so many churches we come across are locked during the week. In other countries we do not seem to face the same difficulty. We have explored churches in Rome (and taken the opportunity to sit in a pew, and unseen, remove our sandals and enjoy the coolness on our feet from the marble floor, when outside the temperature was sometimes approaching 40C). We have visited churches in other parts of Italy; we have done the same on Orkney, and Skye and the Yorkshire Dales. I always find it fascinating to see the different plaques that there are on the walls.

One of the most fascinating churches I have visited is what is called the Actors Church in Covent Garden where the walls are adorned with the names of actors and actresses who were often household names.

I discovered during my ministry in Carnoustie Panbride, that very often people come into church and are not particularly aware of their surroundings. They don't notice details in the stained glass windows, or don't take time to read the plaques on the walls. And if they are aware of the plaques, they often won't have read them. I remember doing an introduction to a Baptism service and asking the question - do you know the names of the people who are commemorated in the plaques in church? The answer was a rather hesitant "No"

I was prompted to ask this when I come across a supplement, dated 1931, from Panbride Church, which mentioned one person whose name appeared on the wall.

It was dedicated to the memory of a former schoolmaster of Panbride School. It was unveiled 95 years ago in 1925. It reads:- "In memory of William Young 1791-1875: schoolmaster, session clerk and registrar of Panbride. A man greatly beloved. Erected by parishioners."

Mr. Young was the last parochial schoolmaster of Panbride and the report in the Panbride Church Supplement of February 1925 continues "he loved this Church, and many can still remember his venerable figure as he sat or stood in the seat above which the tablet has been placed".

In the church there are plaques also to the memory of James Caesar who was minister from 1851-1907 (56 years) and another one to his son John Caesar who was assistant to his father and later minister in his own right, from 1895-1938 (43 years) – a total of 99 years' service.

There is another to John Dickson, who lived in Panbride House (where the athlete Liz McColgan lived during part of my time in Carnoustie). John Dickson was on the Parochial Board and lived from 1826 - 1896.

There is also a plaque to James Wallace who was an Elder and Benefactor from 1880-1962.

Another to James Campbell Bissett – whose plaque appears in the gallery. Aged 23 he was lost at sea in 1903 from the ship Loch Long in the Chatam Islands which as I am sure you all know are about 600 miles east of New Zealand South Island.

There is also one about Lauderdale Maule the son of the Earl of Panmure and his friend Anatole Demidoff, and in the Session House is the clock gifted in memory of Agnes Caesar who was a teacher at the school and the sister of the minister.

Some of these people like Lauderdale Maule would be well known people outside Panbride. Others only known to the community and church there, but were people who had great influence.

They were certainly important to the community and to their families, and I am sure that all the family members of those I have mentioned would be delighted that they were to be remembered in this way.

But you don't have to have a plaque in a church to be remembered. There will be thousands and thousands of people who would be remembered for what they did and who don't have a plaque here in church.

I wonder who we would remember? I wonder how we would want to be remembered?

This introduction was given prior to a baptism and every time we baptise someone, we are also thinking about the people who will be important to the person being baptised. There are the parents, siblings, grandparents and other family members.

But also involved is the congregation who take a vow to support the family. We might not get a plaque in the church – but the vow the congregation take is important – “we will nurture one another in faith, uphold one another in prayer, encourage one another in service.”

Wouldn't it be wonderful if folk could say about us that we nurtured other people, we upheld one another in prayer and that we encouraged one another.

Looking at the Old Testament reading we find the story of Jacob wrestling with God – and I wondered how he would like to be remembered.

Jacob's name means “heel grabber” or “deceiver” or “supplanter”. Remember what he did in his life:

He exploited his brother Esau's birth right with a bowl of lentil soup.

He deceived his Father Isaac to steal his brother's blessing.

He bargained with God for food and clothing and safety.

On top of that, he's an idolater. It's not until much later in his story that Jacob gets rid of the false gods and idols in his house.

What characteristics would be remembered on Jacob's plaque? I'd like to think that maybe a verse from Genesis 32 would appear. “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome”.

In what words would you like to be remembered?