

One of features of our Anglican worship is the use of what we call the Collect. These are Short prayers, some of which are the same every week and others are what we call the Collect of the Day. These are short prayers that are designed to draw our thoughts together, to give a focus to prayer; often, but not always, highlighting one or more of the themes of the lessons set for that particular Sunday.

Some of these are very ancient, dating back to the very early years of the church, some date from the Reformation and the pen of Cranmer, a few date from the last century~ written when the prayer book was revised at time of the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. The rise of modern liturgies has brought more collects into being though many lack the elegance and dignity of their predecessors

I just want to base my thoughts this morning on the collect of today:

‘raise us, who trust in him

from the death of sin to the life of righteousness

that we may seek those things that are above.,’

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What comes into your mind as you hear these words, ‘that we may seek those things that are above’?

There is of course the hope that we have in Christ; that death is not the end, that there is a richer fuller life beyond the grave. But by the same token we need to think not just of the hope of our calling but also the point, the purpose of our calling. For we can get very self-centred in our spiritual life; we can

focus on the benefits to us and completely ignore what God is seeking to do through us.

So I just want to reflect on the words of the collect, ‘that we may seek those things that are above’, in the context of the petition in the Lord’s Prayer:

Thy Kingdom come, they will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

How is God’s Kingdom to come? How is his will to be advanced?

The Kingdom is advanced, God’s will is done by very ordinary people, by the likes of you and me – that is how God has chosen to act. If we are going to be signs of God’s Kingdom, to be the ones through whom that Kingdom is to be advanced, then we need to seek those things that are above.

We need, in short, to be a community that is a sign of God's Kingdom, that shows in its very life together the priorities, the attitudes, the values of the Christ who called us and gave himself for us. A community of people that does not just seek the benefits of the kingdom but seeks to draw others into the kingdom and serve others in the name of the Kingdom..

We get a picture of such a community in our lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. The Church described here is a community with a deep commitment to each other in mutual care and service coupled with a deep commitment to God, as manifested in the priority they give to meeting together for worship. They met to learn, to pray, to break bread together. There was something about that community that was inherently attractive in that they had earned the

respect of the wider community and were the sort of community that others wanted to join.

Our Gospel passage consists of part of passage in St John's Gospel in which Jesus develops the theme of himself as the Good Shepherd. As I have remarked before the word used in the original Greek for good in Good Shepherd. *kalos*, carries with it the connotation of beauty and attractiveness.

There is something attractive about Jesus that drew in those who felt ill at ease, or felt rejected by the religious structures of their day. The early Church in the Acts of the Apostles demonstrated something of that same attractiveness. May we in our own day, as we seek those things that are above, be conscious not just of the hope to which we are called, but also of our obligation of care and concern for each other and those outside that his Kingdom may come, his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.