

I cannot describe 2014 as a great year. In fact it would be fair to say it was an *annus horribilis* – a horrible year. It was a year laden with conflict and misunderstanding and misrepresentation and convenient lies and unfairness and no reconciliation or kindness and love and never giving the leadership the benefit of the doubt. It was just too awful. I don't know where it came from. Having said that, there were no completely innocent parties in this bad movie. **We all owe each other an apology for our selective hearing and love; our lack of kindness.** Sadly in the end it is the mass desertion of the family at this critical moment when we should have held onto each other; been each other's lifeboats and life support, that is most baffling and painful. Instead we simply broke ranks and weakened the family. I think of all who have left - daily. I long for their return. Daily I look down the road – prodigal father like – anticipating a home coming. Instead only the opposite happens. How sad. I am unreservedly sorry for my role in all of this and have spent months in prayer praying for the right people to lead us and where to focus. How do we come back from this calamitous year and restore relations once again.

I am reminded of the story of the monastery which was facing closure as there were no new vocations and an aging and largely unhappy community and the community which it served no longer came on retreat or for spiritual direction. I suspect that was largely because of the ambiance in the monastery. The Abbot out of desperation goes to consult a mystic hermit Rabbi who lives in the forest. On the day that he arrives he explains the situation to the Rabbi and its consequences – no visitors in search of God in the quiet and therefore no revenue; no lifeblood, no communion amongst the members and no new vocations. The Rabbi listens intently but is silent and at the end of the Abbot's submission he remains silent for three more days, baffling the Abbot. Finally the Abbot says that he has to leave and does the Rabbi not have any advice and he is sorry to have intruded into his silence. The Rabbi assures him that he welcomed the intrusion but had no advice but then as the Abbot heads for the gate he says "just remember that one of you is the Messiah" leaving the Abbot even more confused.

Upon his return the community anticipates a flood of wisdom and the Abbot sadly declares that there is no dramatic life changing wisdom just a passing reference to the fact that one of them is the Messiah. Dejected they all walk away to their comfort spaces to which they regularly retreat to avoid communion. Except now they are burdened with this Messiah thing. One of them is the anointed One. But who? Me? Brother John or James or Peter? Who could it be? And if it is not clear then everyone should be treated as the Messiah surely. And so piece by piece the once shattered community is restored because everyone is treated as if they were the One. And soon life returns to the community as a result and joy is restored.

The story is simple and the message is obvious. What is challenging is the call to treat each other with respect and love, conferring dignity on each person. People who stay at All Saints don't stay because they are made to feel as though they were the Messiah. They stay because they hope we will change and be a loving church one day and they will hold on for that day. I hope so too and that is the first statement of need:

For each of us to hear God crying out to us that one of us is the Messiah! That is where it all begins. Real family, real religion begins from that premise. It becomes the glue that binds us to each other and we know that it is really love when we are bound to people wholly different and people we don't know and don't understand and like even less. We are

attached to people who do not see the world as we do. Then we are engaged in an act of love so profound and transforming that we are never the same again. Sadly I see too much avoidance of this crucial activity: naming each other Messiah; recognising each other as family – indelibly, eternally connected to each other through the sacrifice of love made by Jesus on humanity's behalf.

The second and only other need is to restore this house – which is what we are now - into a home into which the family can move and live comfortably and grow into the God intended person each one of us is called to be: to move from superficial, tick-the-boxes religion to a religion of relationships that challenge our comfort theology. “Be ye transformed by the renewal of your minds” in other words listen to God and not yourself! And then allow what God has said to you to begin to shape you. Resisting that and opting for the self-shaper option – which is where most of us are now – is simply disastrous and not life enabling. For now, let God so that this cold empty structure can become a warm and warming hearth once again: a hearth with heart and with God – not ego – at the centre

Prayer: Restore again the fortunes of Israel o Lord!

Fact: God only shows up to help and make the impossible possible when we have decided to suspend our narcissistic and ego driven world-views and have truly embraced each other as Messiah and as family; when we have demonstrated that we will hold onto each other no matter what.

Theme for 2015: Restoring the community; rebuilding the walls

May God bless us all as we move from the easy gentle slope to the sheer rock face that is beyond our own capability and needs God's hand and God's angels to take us to the summit.

See you on the mountaintop

Love ya

Michael