

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2009



Youth Director and Park End's Youth Worker



Younger Ministers from North, Mid and East Wales get together



Representatives from the East reflect on the Proceedings



Children and Youth Staff from North Wales



The senior saints queue for coffee!

RE-DISCOVERING THE WAY

A précis of the Communion Address preached by the **Revd Eric Jones** (Bangor) at the General Assembly.

What was foremost on the minds of those who chose the theme for this Assembly? "Re-discovering" suggests that we have lost our way. Is that not true of our country? We have now the highest prison population ever, some 86,000, and there is a dire need for more prisons. Have we as a church lost our way? In my Presbytery of Arfon, we have lost forty chapels in the last twenty years, and in the last year alone, three churches have closed. As a country and as a church we desperately need to re-discover the way.

In the Book of Acts there are several references to our Lord's disciples as the men and women of the Way. This is an accurate description of those who followed the One who claimed to be "the way, the truth and the life", and who taught that there is a wide road that leads to destruction, and a narrow road that leads to life. Re-discovering the road therefore is a matter of life and death.

"I am the Way", are the words of our Lord, found in John 14: 6. and were said during the Supper. He knew that the time had come for him to depart out of this world to the Father, he knew Judas and Peter were going to betray him. He washed his disciples feet, leaving them an example which would help them to be the Way. At this critical time, we are astounded by our Lord's words:

Let not your hearts be troubled... I go and prepare a place for you ... and you know the way to where I am going ... Thomas said to him ... "How can we

know the way?" Jesus said to him "I am the way, the truth and the life..."

Jesus is the way to God's presence, therefore he is the truth and the life. To rediscover the way, is essentially re-discovering Him, but how?

1. By Receiving Him

This is emphasised within John's Gospel:

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God

As the BBC was about to televise Jerry Springer the Opera, a Christian explained why he resigned from the Corporation. He had received Jesus the Son of God, as his Lord and Saviour, and could therefore not continue to work for those who allowed his name to be blasphemed.

After the 9/11 devastation in America, we as a church extended a hand of friendship to leaders of other faiths, and invited them to our mid week fellowship. Quite unexpectedly one of our older ladies, shared her faith with them, explaining how she had received our Lord and the difference He had made to her life. She challenged them to do the same!

Dr William Barclay in his testimony, said, that he had given his life to the one who had given him life. We cannot re-discover the way without receiving the one who is *the Way*.

2. By Knowing Him

We turn once again to John's Gospel;

If you had known me, you would have known the Father also. From now on you have known him and have seen him.

The many chapters written by John on our Lord's suffering indicates how essential it is for us to know the one who walked the way of the Cross. Why?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John Calvin compares the Cross to a mirror which reflects our sins and also the love and grace of God. Blaise Pascal reflects how crucial it was for him to know our crucified Lord. When he looked into his own heart he could see nothing but darkness and sin, it was like seeing hell. When he looked at the love and grace of God, he took that for granted, and he was tempted to continue to sin. But in knowing the crucified Lord, he found a certain balance, because there he could see the extent of his sin and the extent of God's love and grace.

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

3. By following Him

"Follow me ..." was our Lord's plea, and those who did so, turned the other cheek, loved enemies, forgave willingly, did not say "Lord Lord", but actually did the will of the Father. His followers soon became known as the Way, because their way of living was so different. As Aristides described

them to the Roman Emperor Hadrian:

"They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who hurt them. If they have something they give freely to the man who has nothing, if they see a stranger they take him home ..."

Michael Green concludes:

"They made the grace of God credible by a society of love and mutual care which astonished the pagans ..."

A church member from Chichester told me this summer how his church reached out to help those in need, those recovering from alcoholism and drug related diseases, those who had been released from jail, and were seeking a new life, and many more ... he said:

"Our passion for God, compels us to love one another and reach out to love for others within our community ... and God is blessing our efforts, and lives are changed ..."

At this Remembrance Table we remember our Crucified Lord, at this Communion Table we Commune with our Resurrected Lord, praying

*"O living Lord, Thy life divine
Live out inside this life of mine."
Because in the words of George Rees:
"You are the Way
And more that the Way to me-
You are my strength
What use my striving, Lord, without
Your aid,*

*As I am nought!
O! Mighty One, that never flinched or
failed;
Your power shall keep my faith
sustained."*

As we re-discover our Lord here, receive him, know him and follow him anew that we too might be worthy of being called men and women of *the Way*.