

Final Eucharist – Sermon by Bishop Martin Lind

Dr Lind referred to the fact that he is a Lutheran Bishop preaching during an Anglican Eucharist, something he enjoyed very much indeed. The Bible texts used in the service were those set in the daily lectionary and had not been especially chosen. He found the Gospel reading, taken from the end of the Sermon on the Mount, quite tough.

‘It is a text full of demands,’ he said. ‘DO to others as you would have them do to you. ASK and you shall receive. KNOCK and the door will be opened.’

But, he told us, it is also a text full of gifts. In Swedish, he said, the word for ‘ask’ is also the word for ‘pray’. In this text we are being asked to pray for the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Lind expressed his sadness that so many politicians are dishonest. ‘They tell lies!’ he said. ‘Where do we find the Kingdom of God in this world?’

Jesus offers a wonderful picture to encourage us. If a child asks for bread, would his parent dream of giving that child a stone? Of course not! Jesus simply points out that if human beings, who are evil, know how to give good gifts how much more will our Heavenly Father give us good gifts!

If we start to think about this, Bishop Lind continued, we find that doors begin to open. Martin Luther taught that the fact that all human beings have the capacity to love others shows that they are capable of sinless acts. For example, when a mother breast feeds her infant that is a moment of pure love. There is no sin there. Luther taught that ‘even the Turks do that!’ reflecting the social situation of his days when there were also Muslims around.

So when Pietists teach that human beings are essentially sinful they are wrong. ‘That is not true,’ asserted the Bishop, ‘We are all the tools of God.’

We have to acknowledge that there is something greater than ourselves. We don’t own our own lives. They are a gift that has been given to us. Ask, knock and you will be given life.

Bishop Martin then offered an illustration, a true story from his own ministry. There was a Swedish woman named Eve. Despite having a severely handicapped hand she carved religious figures in wood and they are found in many churches. She also exercised a powerful diaconal ministry, welcoming newly released prisoners to her home and providing a bridge for them between prison and the outside world.

There was one man who had been in prison for many years. The authorities wondered if it would be appropriate or wise for him to go to Eve’s home. But Eve insisted that he should come, met him from the prison and led him to her cottage. As the pair of them entered the kitchen Eve’s very elderly mother, Ruth, looked up. She saw the man and greeted him: ‘I have been longing for you to come!’

Ruth was being used as a tool by God, Bishop Martin asserted. She was showing God’s love to this newly released prisoner. It may be true that her outburst might have been prompted by the fact that she had lost her son many years before. But the prisoner was not to know that. What he received was a sinless act of love.

The Bishop concluded, ‘We are all called to be God’s tools, to show his love, to ask/pray for the Kingdom of God to be real in our world today.’