

### ***Holding on - or holding out?***

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

*I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own [Philippians 3:13]*

I much prefer the translation of our text from the NIV

*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

It is a great relief for me to be able to state without hesitation that I believe that I am where God wants me to be doing what God wants me to be doing.

Coming up to the end of my first year as Rector of this great parish and of being responsible for the worship and ministry focused in and around this magnificent building, I can say unequivocally that Penny and I are very happy to be here and thrilled about all the possibilities for the future.

We just never thought that this is where we would be.

- ✦ Yet - This is what I was born for! I have mentioned before the fact that my mother had one of those 'pleading with God' moments after my sister and I were born and 'promised' my future to God. I don't imagine she ever thought that God would call-in the promise (beware what you say to God - he sometimes takes you at your word).
- ✦ There is no higher calling than to be a Parish Priest and to have the joy of being involved in so many lives at the best and worst of times.

What about you?

Are you secure and confident of whatever it is that Jesus took hold of you to be or to do?

Paul helps us understand a bit of what this means:

- ✦ As someone who had the right cultural heritage, the best education and impeccable religious credentials, Paul should have had a glorious future. It is very unlikely that his Jewish mother was proud of what he became! The problem was that he met Jesus and then he realised that none of the things that mattered to others were of any consequence to him any more.

- ✦ Paul's idea that he might get a big-toe into heaven is very revealing. After a great bit of theology he states his hope, **if somehow I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.** This is the arrogance of someone who thought they had a position through status now realising that they have all that they need through grace. There is a clear realisation that this - being a Christian - is a privilege and not a right and Paul is incredulous that this extends to him. He works backwards to this:

- ✦ **I want to know the power of his resurrection shares the real power of the Gospel.** Poised, as we are, to focus on Jesus' death, this is what it is all about.
- ✦ **The sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death** keeps us grounded. Self-giving and selflessness is at the heart of Christian discipleship. Too many Christians think that sandpaper will be supplied to take the splinters out of the cross. The path of service - which is what God calls us to - has no short-cuts and no aesthetically-pleasing scenic routes.
- ✦ Even if we achieve this, for Paul the hope of his foothold in heaven still seems incredible. He isn't complacent - he is determined: **I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.** I know that commitment is a dirty word - when I was young regular Churchgoing was three times on a Sunday, but now it is defined as once a month. (Those committed to health don't eat once a month, or exercise once a month! Modern Christianity seems to carry too many passengers!) Small steps or infrequent steps means slow progress towards the goal!

Who knows what God has in store for anyone here! We are all called to the way of the cross and we all share that excitement of being on the inside (if only just) of God's kingdom. Yet what is it that you hold on to in God's name or hold out against?

What does God hold on to you for - or what are you holding out against God for?