

Mixed Reactions

- Events will often prompt a mixture of reactions:
 - take me getting married, for instance!!
 - well... let me clarify!!
 - I had no mixed reaction to getting married!!
 - but one of the consequences of getting married was leaving my old flat...
 - opinions vary about its quality (it wasn't nearly as bad as the one I wouldn't let my mother ever visit!), but I had lived there for four years and I was fond of it!
 - I was delighted to be leaving, so I could be with Helen, but I was also sad to go!
 - so much so that when we returned from honeymoon I very nearly drove back to my old flat and not to our new one!
- I'm sure you have your own memories of occasions or events that prompted a mixed reaction.
- That same kind of mixture of reactions can be true of our experience of church
 - there may be things that we look at with a mixture of feelings
 - for some things in the past, a sadness that they are gone and yet an awareness that they would not work now
 - for other things a joy that they are happening, mixed with a wistfulness at what might be - greater numbers, or whatever...

Mixed Reactions in Jerusalem

- That mix-up of reactions is not a new experience:
 - very much present in the passage we read earlier
- Let's set the scene:
 - nation of Israel had been consistently disobedient under the kings who followed David
 - gone off and worshipped other Gods and idols, looked for peace and security through treaties with foreign kings rather than trust in God
 - God had sent prophet after prophet, warning them of the danger they faced, but they wouldn't listen
 - and eventually God had to act in judgement, and the nation was sent into exile in Babylon
 - this acted like electric shock treatment to many of the Jews sent into exile, and to an extent brought the people to their senses
 - and so God uses even the experience of exile to begin to re-forge faith in his people
 - then **Cyrus of Persia** conquers Babylon, and instigates a change in policy
 - **under the Babylonians**, subject nations were humiliated, and their leadership moved out of the country to prevent rebellion;
 - **but under the Persians**, subject nations were returned to their homelands in the hope that they would be more economically productive and grateful to the Persians for their kindness; a more conciliatory approach
 - and so the door is opened to God's people returning
- In the passage we read the first exiles have returned and begun to rebuild the Temple
 - they establish the altar first, and then a number of months later (**gap between verses 7 and 8!**), they start to lay foundations for the Temple
 - and as they dedicate the newly laid foundations, there is a **mixed reaction**, especially amongst the older folk
- There were probably some very good reasons for this mixed reaction!
 - here was the new Temple starting, a fresh start with God and in the Promised Land, enthusiasm was in the air....
 - **but** the new Temple wasn't nearly as big as the old one! (Solomon had built the old one at the height of the power of the old Davidic Kingdom, when many

(OHP!!)

surrounding states were paying tribute to the local super-power, Israel)

- but seeing the new Temple would remind those who were old enough of the old Temple being destroyed, of the desecration of that old Temple in the conquest during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:9 and surrounding)

- Mixed reactions indeed!

Clear Priorities in Jerusalem

- However, in the midst of the mixed reactions there was a clarity of purpose in what happened in Jerusalem as the Temple was re-founded:
 - despite all the reasons for despairing, Jeshua and Zerubbabel, the leaders of the returnees, knew what was most important!!
- First of all, they knew that honouring God and worshipping him was the most important call on their lives:
 - that's why they built the altar first!
 - they could worship without a roof, but under the Old Covenant not without the sacrifices on the altar...
- Second, they seek to do their work in God's way
- In everything they did, even down to apparently obscure details, they sought to follow the pattern laid down in Scripture:
 - altar built in accordance with Law of Moses - v.2
 - built it on old foundations - exactly where God had said it should go in his instructions to Solomon years before - v.3
 - sacrifices offered in accordance with "what is written" - v.4,5
 - materials from Sidon & Tyre, Lebanon cedars just like first Temple, even paid for same way! - v.7
 - starting month same as Solomon's Temple - v.8, cf. 2 Chron.3:2
- Their priorities were clear!

Clear Priorities Today?

- And so the challenge for us today, as we will shortly take time to reflect together on the history of this congregation, is to shape what we do with those same priorities:
 - to give worshipping him the number one priority, whatever form that takes
 - and to seek always to work in a way that is in step with the Scriptures
- We may have a mixed reaction to parts of our own shared history
 - but if we share those priorities, we won't go far wrong!

Group Time: Past, Present, Future

- We are going to work in our groups for a short while just now:
 - can I suggest that someone act as scribe - you'll find two large bits of paper; we'll explain what those are for shortly
 - you may also want to draw your chairs round into more of a circle so you can hear/see one another - we'll get back together to finish the service as normal when this activity is over
 - while you are getting that sorted out it would be good to get discussion going by finding out how long each person in your group has been around the church... **maybe what their earliest memory of Fintry Church is?**
- Today we're looking at past experiences to see what we can learn to help us in the future.
 - sometimes, looking at past experiences can be difficult
 - the aim of this session is not to dredge up past hurt, if hurt exists
 - nor is it to wallow in reminiscences!!
 - but it is to see whether our past experiences can help us through showing us how best to serve God and one another in the future

First 25 years

- Roughly divided up the 50+ years of the life of the congregation into two 25 year long chunks to make characterising things more possible
 - try and pick out things that would have been characteristic of the congregation during that time
 - write them down on the sheet
 - **aim in doing this is to give thanks to God... and allow us to see whether our past experiences can help show us how best to serve God and one another in the future**
 - so, once you've written something down, make some kind of assessment of the strengths or weaknesses of that thing... (may be different assessments even within the same group!)
 - try and avoid personalising any criticism, and work hard at saying what **was** good about things
 - the point here is not to make negative attacks on the past or people from the past, but to humbly learn from the God-given history of this congregation

Take feedback:

- one thing from each group; **copy to flipchart...**
- if your thing has been said, mention something else...
- **Finish with prayer**

Second 25 years

- As above... including feedback...
- Finish with a prayer

Prayers

- During our prayers we will use the response that is on the OHP:
 - whenever I use the phrase: "Lord, for all that is good..."
 - respond with: "We give our thanks today"
- Start each prayer with specific thanksgiving for that which has been mentioned as good during that period of time...
 - interspersing items with the response above...
 - note or in general ask forgiveness for those things which have been less than perfect
 - and after the second 25 years slot, add a brief prayer of commitment to serve God and demonstrate his love in the local community.

Conclusion

- In the busyness of all our activities, we rarely find time to reflect on our experiences and what God is teaching us through them. It is notable that Jesus, on the return of the disciples' first mission, was keen for them to report back all they had done and taught and to find a quiet place away from the crowds where that reflection process could continue (Mark 6:30-32). On that occasion, the retreat was disturbed by a few thousand people (!), but there are other references to Jesus taking the disciples aside... it does seem to have been a regular pattern of Jesus' ministry. Reflecting on what God is teaching us is important for us too.
 - *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6:30-32)*