



**Proper 29, Year C – October 17 2010**

2Timothy 3.1 – 4.5

**A Homily preached by the Rev'd Tara Livingston**

Last week Herbert O'Driscoll spoke to us about the Church in the future and becoming a "centre for spirituality".

Why?

According to a recent study in the U.S. 33% of all people identify themselves as "Spiritual" and not "religious". They do not want to conform to a pre-determined set of ideas or ideals that stifle their ability to think, to explore, to ask questions with a sense of wonder and awe.

Well, we ARE a centre for spirituality. People are seeking, wanting, desiring, connectedness to one another and to something bigger than themselves.

They are seeking spirituality – a sense of wonder and awe.

What do we have that they want? Why don't they come? Why aren't they here?

There was a time when everyone knew at least part of the biblical narrative if through nothing else than Christmas pageants at school and the Easter story in the spring. They would have known the basics of Noah's Ark and Jonah and the whale and would not have heard them and rolled their eyes.

There was a common language between the people within the walls of a Church and those who never entered such a building. Now we are up against not only a lack of common language but against assumptions about what we believe and what we require for belonging – note that said belonging and not membership. People think that to come through the doors of our building they already have to have learned everything that there is to know and to comprehend the intricacies of our service.

In Timothy we hear that everything we need can be found in scripture but he uses a word that either strikes fear into our very hearts or gives us the hook on which to hang our faith – "sound doctrine".

Timothy a faithful early convert to Christianity was a member of a worshipping community that was so set in its ways at such an early stage, was so dysfunctional that he almost quit being a Christian altogether. From the small amount of evidence that we can find it is likely that the community to which he belonged was relying very heavily on ancient Jewish practices and an aesthetic lifestyle where they banned marriage and certain foods. Timothy had had it. Paul encouraged him not only to remain as a Christian but to take his passion and faithfulness and to become a respected leader in the newly forming faith.

The "sound doctrine" that Timothy refers to in this second letter actually means "good instruction". He did not want people to be taken backwards and convinced of things that were against Jesus message.

So if sound doctrine is good instruction then I hope that you feel that you get that here. Sound doctrine is not nor should it be about you believing that this way of doing things is superior above all other options.

When I was a child I understood the story of Jonah and whale to be a cool story about a man living in the stomach of a huge fish and then being spit up on a distant shore.

Cool.

Now I understand through exploration the complexities of the story – Jonah being called from a small town to go to the big city and tell them that God is disappointed with them. No easy task.

I learned these things through sound doctrine – through good instruction. Sound doctrine is not “right belief” which therefore implies that any other way of thought is “wrong belief”.

(story)

Sound doctrine is about exploration, instruction, teaching – travelling with the scripture as we journey through our lives and finding different meanings over time. So what does this mean for the people outside of these walls, those 33% who are seeking deeper meaning, connection and a sense of wonder and awe.

It means that we do not – or should not expect them to be able to say the Nicene Creed with conviction the first time they enter – because there are many people who have been in these pews for 40 years who cannot do that.

It means that they are allowed – in fact encouraged – to have some hard questions about our liturgies especially things like our Eucharist prayers.

It means that through our music, our movement, our ritual, our readings we want them to experience wonder and awe – not to feel excluded or sidelined because they don’t know all of the steps to our dance or the tune to our song.

We want them to come and find an experience of the God that they are seeking – a creator who loves them and cherishes them, questions and all. Someone told me the other day that our beloved Ansley once said that her ministry was here in the Church and that the ministry of you in the pews is outside in the world. I believe this to be true.

Ansley and I – our job is to equip you with sound doctrine – with good teaching – so that you might go out and share it with those you meet.

And then.... invite them to come so that they too may experience a sense of wonder and awe, a sense of connectedness and belonging both to God and to one another.

Let us shout to the world that we are not a centre of judgemental dogma or a place with an expectation of uniformity. We are a centre of spirituality where we are all called to engage, explore, learn and experience God.

And for that, thanks be to God.