

**St Thomas, Ipswich, Lent 2, Year C , 21 Feb 2016**

**Revd Jutta Brueck**

Gen. 15.1-12, 17-18

Ps 27

Phil.3.17-4.1

Luke 13.13-end

*Phil.3.20 'But our citizenship is in heaven. It is from there that we expect a Saviour'.*

***A sermon on the 'St Thomas Community'.***

In my late 20ies I spent a year living in a lay community with five others in the Benedictine monastery of Worth Abbey in West Sussex. We had a separate house in the grounds of the Abbey, joined the monks for their daily prayers, with one of the monks having a supervisory role for our community.

This year in the community in Worth was one of the most important and rewarding years of my life – a happy year, but also very challenging at times.

We six people, all in our 20ies from different Christian denominations, who met for the first time when we arrived for our year there shared a home, took it in turns to do the cooking and chores, ran a guest house where we welcomed students at weekends and went to prayers with the monks at least three times a day. Some of us also had outside jobs to support the community financially, so I worked part-time as an accountant in a local firm.

I have said this was an important year and I think of it as a real gift, because there was lots of time to pray, to engage with my faith through conversation with the people around me; lots of time to read and think. Despite the challenges of living and working together with people I hadn't chosen, we became good friends – as we were learning to be patient, tolerant, forgiving, compassionate with our fellow community members

and with ourselves. Living with others provides lots of opportunity to learn about oneself.

For me the year living in Worth Abbey was also a time to work out what God was calling me to do with my life, and it became the turning point when I decided to move from management accounting to pastoral work.

Most of my fellow community members went from Worth Abbey into secular employment, though one of them, still a good friend, offered for ordination in the Church of England 15 years later [and was just licensed as Chaplain to St Paul's Cathedral.]

The year in community was a great gift because I had so much time with God, and I deepened my relationship with God. I developed the habit of regular prayer, an appreciation for living in community and I was able to explore my sense of vocation. A few years later I worked in Manchester and lived in a community which I set up with some liked minded people.

Lay communities as the one at Worth Abbey have been popular since the 1980ies/ 90ies –and they are usually ecumenical - you may have heard of Lee Abbey which still exists, or the L'Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier, where people with and without disabilities live together, rooted in their Christian faith.

In the last fifteen years 'new monastic communities' have emerged in a various of places in the Church of England and Anglican church in the USA –there is a small one here in Ipswich based at St.Matthew's.

These are usually people in their 20ies to 40ies, individuals, couples, families, on the edge of the church or with no previous church experience who are searching meaning and want to explore the question of God together with others.

They are not a residential community, but meet for worship, prayer and meditation, for Bible study and meals together. To them it's important to

explore questions of how to make sense of God and live an authentic life of faith in our contemporary society.

To strengthen their community they develop a rule of life –they call it rhythm of life-, in which they commit themselves to regular prayer, study, eating together, giving, a responsible use of their time and resources and to reaching out to others who may be searching meaning and faith.

Having a rule of life/rhythm of life is their response to cultural trends like consumerism, individualism, greed and the cult of celebrity.

It helps those involved to live out values of the gospel such as making time for prayer, for Bible study, for spending quality time with others amidst the constant demands of work, seeking pleasure and success.

My own experience of living in community, my ongoing love for a life of regular prayer and meditation and observing the longing for community of many people in our society has led to my sense of calling to develop an intentional Christian community in the Vicarage.

My dream is to have four people living in the Vicarage who want to share and deepen their faith, by committing themselves to pray regularly, practicing silent prayer as well as saying prayers together. Some may be in employment or students or someone who wants to explore their vocation and do some pastoral work in the parish or town.

And then, there may be others, hopefully some of you here, who want to join them for prayer and meditation, for study, for meals or outreach, perhaps every week, or when you can – so you are also part of the community.

My vision is that the small group living in the Vicarage making the commitment to focus on their journey with God for a year, or longer, will be like yeast that leavens the life of our parish/ the wider community and Church.

That's the dream – it's based here at St.Thomas - our church which is dedicated to the Saint who was with Jesus, asking the awkward questions, not afraid to voice his doubts, but also faithful and placing his hands in Jesus' wounds.

Our collection of readings this morning may sound strange at first hearing, but they are all about the bigger picture and trusting God against the odds.

In the first reading Abram, of old age, with no child of his own, is asked to believe God when he is told that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Abram decides to trust Go.

Psalm 27, is a psalm of trust in times of trouble: the Lord is my light and my salvation –even, or especially, when the enemy is encamping all around me.

Paul in the letter to the Philippians reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven –something that can be hard to hold on to in this secular world.

And finally, Jesus longing to gather the children of Jerusalem like a hen gathers her brood under her wings – a picture of him gathering all those who follow him under the shelter of his wings –the community of the Church.

Our calling as Christians is to be community – we say on a Sunday 'we are the body of Christ' and 'we break this bread to share in the body of Christ'.

We who come together here at church, on a Sunday, during the week, we are a community – a community in which people participate in different ways and with different levels of commitment, together on the journey of faith.

The vision of an intentional Christian community reminds us of our trust in God and that our citizenship is in heaven. We are starting the process of exploration for setting up the community at our first prayer meeting on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Please, come and join us and keep this in your prayer – that we

may reach the people for whom this would just be right – and that we are all open to what this community means for us. Amen.