

Sermon on Wednesday 27 January 2021

Rev. Bill Church

Reading: Hebrews 10. 19-24

The Epistle to the Hebrews is more like a sermon or an essay than a letter. And, despite what some Bible headings say, it was not written by Paul. Origen, a Christian scholar from Egypt in the first half of the third century AD, said "God alone knows" who actually wrote Hebrews and later scholars have been equally uncertain.

It is apparently aimed at Christians with a Hebrew background or at least a very good knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish ritual. It includes arguments based on Melchizedek and on the details of animal sacrifice, which modern European readers find impenetrable. But it also includes wonderful statements of the incarnation, like Chapter 1, the Epistle for Christmas Day; encouraging exhortations like today's reading; and a celebration of faithful forerunners in Chapter 11, which integrates our faith with a whole array of Old Testament heroes; and homely urging of practical love by which we may entertain angels unawares.

So, the author of Hebrews is a great benefactor, but anonymous to us.

Our lives have been greatly enriched by many before us who are entirely anonymous, from those who "dug the ditches and marked out the fields" of our countryside, to quote the Rogationtide service; or those first Christians who heard the word of Christ in our land and built the earliest humble churches in our emerging parishes. Without them, and many after them, our lives

would have been poorer or even impossible. They have been our anonymous benefactors.

"Seeing we also are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith."
(Hebrews 12. 1)

In other words, we have inherited so much that is good – let us make sure that we pass it on stronger and better, bequeathing healing not division, health not dysfunction, love not bitterness. Then future generations will bless us, not reproach us as bad stewards of the faith and the world.

Roman Law had the idea of *damnosa hereditas* – a bankrupt inheritance, which was a blight on those who inherited and a shame on those who left it. Pray, God, that we will have the wisdom and strength not to leave such a burden behind.

