



Advent 4

THE NEW SHOFAR

but those who hope in Yahweh will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint- Isaiah 40:31

⁵ *When Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;*

Our reading from Hebrews today speaks eloquently of the way in which God builds relationships on a foundation of faithful obedience. This is what God wants. Our writer picks up the thoughts of the Psalmist when speaking of Jesus’ purpose in life...*I have come to do your will, O God.* As this was the focal point in the ministry of Jesus, so it becomes for us, as baptised men and women forming the Body of Christ in this world, our own life foundation.

We are thus left with this wonderful Advent question: *what is the will of God for me/us?* Perhaps the most succinct, accurate, and also universally applicable answer that can be given to this perennial question is found in the gospel of Luke. Jesus is challenged to affirm that the Law clearly teaches *that we are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself* (Luke 10:27). The response of Jesus leaps out at us from the pages of the Bible: *do this, and you will live.* Here we have, in one simple statement, Jesus’ understanding of our calling as disciples. We are to love and to love no matter what. We are to love, no matter who it is who comes into our lives; no matter what it is that is happening to us. This is surely at the heart of today’s reading: The desire of the Lord Jesus to root his life in love as the key to his life purpose and to answer what it means to obey God.

Obedience in Action – we are to be living obediently in all things

Secondly, this obedience takes shape in our lives as a response to the deep desire to obey God. In Hebrews 10:5 the writer has Christ accepting that his life of loving, faithful obedience is to be lived out in a body, *a body you have prepared for me.* We should not be too quick in moving to understand that the obedience of Jesus is linked only to his death on the cross. That is true but it is only one part of the divine obedience. **Hebrews 10:7** makes it clear *I have come to do your will.* Not simply in death, but throughout his whole life we see the willingness of Christ to do the will of God in his body. After all, how else would Christ do the will of God? For us too, our life of obedience must take bodily form; must be made real in each and every act we carry out in our daily living. When we speak and we act we speak and act as

Jesus would act. We are, at those moments in our lives, the presence of Christ in the world. Those with whom we engage must come away with an experience of the Living Christ. Our thoughts and desires directed towards God are not enough. What is being demanded are practical actions that serve and impact the lives of others.

Absorbing the word of God

It is important to note here that obedience to the will of God comes through hearing and absorbing his Word to us. Growing in Christ, in our relationship with God is going to come in response to the invitations presented to us in His revealed scriptures. What is revealed there remain as fundamental to Christian living today as it was when the Church was being brought together as Christ's Body in the days immediately after the Ascension.

Here is where Hebrews takes us back to **Psalm 40:6-8**. What we translate *as a body you have prepared for me*, is more literally translated as *you dug ears for me!* What this suggests is that God gives the psalmist the power to listen intently and to take into himself the words and thus the will of God. It is a great image! God digging away in our ears to remove all that hinders His divine word making its way into our hearts and minds. Hebrews outlines for us the way to follow the footsteps of Jesus. We have to make the will of the Father the foundation of our lives, the cornerstone of the lives we build. We are to absorb His will as Jesus had absorbed the will of His Father – *let not my will but thine be done*.

Offering the Whole of Life

What then should we make of the references in these verses to sacrifice? One thing is obvious. We are to understand that God is no longer interested in the offering of sacrifice of animals as burnt offerings! God takes no pleasure in them (verses 6,8), and Christ has abolished them (verse 9). What is demanded of us is far more challenging. Rather than offer an animal sacrifice Hebrews 10:9 tells us that Christ came to ***do*** *the will of God*. And, in the Biblical sense of that word, Christ *did* and *kept on doing the will* of his Father. For the Son, doing was a continuous act, a whole-of-life activity. Nothing he did on this earth was done without the Father's expectations in mind. Therein is our personal sacrificial offering. Our lives.

This becomes central for us as we approach the coming feast of Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation. It is a time for us to prayerfully reflect upon Christ's model of service and then ponder the ways in which we are being called to renew our commitment to follow Jesus, the Son who lived his entire life as an offering of faithful obedience to God. His example calls us to step up and offer own lives, in their entirety, in faithful obedience to God.