

*The following sermon was preached in response to a request from the Trustees of the Thomas Hayne's Charity. 'Thomas Hayne of Christ's Church, London, by his Will dated 28<sup>th</sup> September 1640, gave 20/- yearly for a preacher in Leicester for a sermon to be preached near the time of year in which the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1588 for a thanksgiving to God for that great mercy to this land.*

31<sup>st</sup> July 2011

Armada

Isaiah 55. 1-5

Matthew 14.13-21

*May the words of my mouth and the thoughts...*

Although Thomas Hayne's bequest doesn't state the sermon preached has to be about the Armada it would seem strange to ignore it completely. In all honesty I have to confess that in my 22years of preaching I haven't yet preached on the Armada so it would be good to rectify this strange omission with at least a few references this evening.

If your memory of history is anything like as poor as mine a few words reminding us of the events of the Armada might not go amiss.

The Armada set off from Spain, under the orders of Phillip II, in 1588. (Just an aside here: Thomas Hayne was born in 1582 so as a young boy the events and excitement of the English victory were no doubt frequently recounted and celebrated).

The Armada had been planned for a number of years, put back a little by Drake's raid on Cadiz, but in July 1588 122 ships set sail for the Spanish Netherlands to pick up land troops before invading England. England and Spain had not been on too bad terms and the reasons

for the Armada are complex and diverse. They include trying to end English interference supporting Protestant opposition in the Spanish Netherlands; Drake and others' raids on Spanish ships bringing treasures back from the WI; and antagonism against Elizabeth I who had had Mary Queen of Scots, a close ally of Phillip's, executed.

The defeat of the Armada again is not a straightforward account. There's a suggestion the massive fleet caught Drake and the English off guard (despite the stories of time to finish a game of bowls); and the English smaller but more agile fleet inflicted very minor damage on the Armada as it sailed along the Channel. When the fleet had to anchor off Calais to pick up troops it lost its powerful crescent formation and was vulnerable to fire ships attacking it; yet even these caused only little damage. Much greater damage was inflicted by the weather and lack of provisions when the Armada was forced to abandon its attempt on England and sail home via the East coast of England, up around Scotland and Ireland and many lives and ships were lost at this stage. I'll leave you to read up further on the details. But for the England of Thomas Hayne a major threat was averted, Drake's reputation gained even higher fame and the country was safe under Queen Elizabeth.

I shall not attempt any tenuous links with the Matthew reading beginning 'When Jesus heard this he withdrew from there in a boat'; or with Harborough's passion for the game of bowls!

But looking at our two readings this evening there is a common thread which I think is both timely for today and has deep historical roots as well.

The Feeding of the 5000 is one of the rare accounts which appears in all four gospels and in more than one form; Matthew having the feeding of the 4000 in a chapter or so's time. It was clearly a well loved story, oft repeated and emphasised in different ways in its telling (which is not to say it wasn't factual). The theologian John Fenton comments how in Messianic expectation there was the belief that there would be a repetition of the miraculous feeding at

the time of the Exodus, and of the gospel writers Matthew would particularly want to emphasise this element.

Particularly interesting is what is meant by ‘the crowds’ in the account. Yes, it refers to those following Jesus, excited by what they’ve seen thus far. But there is also a strong suggestion that ‘the crowds’ refers to ‘all the nations’. What we’re being told is ‘here is the Messiah and he has not only come for the people of Israel, for God’s fulfilment of his promises is for all people.’ Note how at the end of the account ‘all ate and were filled’ – all people; and the 12 baskets emphasise the significance of the 12 tribes of Israel within that.

Matthew’s gospel is generally seen as the gospel written most specifically for the Jewish people with his frequent quoting of OT prophecies, showing them pointing to and fulfilled in Jesus. But Matthew goes beyond the Jews as well; remember those famous words right at the end of his gospel: ‘Go and make disciples of all nations...’

It is good this evening to have the passage from Isaiah as well, a passage which begins ‘everyone who thirsts, come to the waters’ and ends ‘See, you shall call nations that you do not know’.

The Christian message is an inclusive gospel: in Christ all are welcome; the good news of the Kingdom is for all people. It’s a message Jesus reminds us of time and again and which Paul put into practice for the early church.

Despite this truth, as a church we’ve so often proclaimed and lived a much narrower definition of church and we’ve interpreted a more restrictive love of God.

I recently read a review of a book by Rob Bell, a much respected Evangelical church leader who’s come under fire from some more conservative Evangelicals for his preaching of a more inclusive love of God without the judgement and hell that they read as Biblical. In his book

Bell argues that in their hearts many Christians do not actually love God, because the wrathful, vengeful, retributive God whom they have been taught about is not an embodiment of love. His book is full of memorable images; e.g. Christianity has been reduced to a way to get past the bouncer and into the club. The Church and the promised Kingdom of God are not a club for the like-minded, but are places where racists will feel miserable.

At the end of the Falkland's War the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, got into trouble with the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, when in the Thanksgiving service at St Paul's he prayed for the Argentinian grieving families as well as the British. And in his sermon he said,

“Those who dare to interpret God's will must never claim him as an asset for one nation or group rather than another. War springs from the love and loyalty which should be offered to God being applied to some God substitute, one of the most dangerous being nationalism.”

After the Armada, after all times of conflict, we are challenged by how we give thanks without putting down another people – just consider how some are still challenged by how we treat Germans or the Japanese. In Thomas Hayne's legacy there isn't anti-Spanish rhetoric but a simple statement of 'thanksgiving to God for the great mercy of this land' for freedom maintained.

As we remember our history, as we give thanks for the freedoms won so many times over the centuries by so many, giving us the many blessings of life we enjoy, let us in Christ, as Christians, let that thanksgiving overflow in generosity to those in much deeper need than us. Without being party political I believe it is right we should make a priority of our overseas aid, where the acute needs of the Third World cannot begin to be compared with our own financial challenges.

There has also been a generosity shown by so many in this country, time and again, in response to international crises and the present pressing need is in the Horn of Africa. [DEC]

With Thomas Hayne, let us thank God for the blessings of our own lives, give thanks for the mercies we enjoy, and – with him - let that thanksgiving overflow in generosity to others as a living part of our lives and our legacy.

So may it be.

Amen.