

Monday 23rd July 2018
Cunard 'Mauretania' Celebration

Liverpool Parish Church

G: John 4.7-14

One of the many privileges of being a member of the clergy in this church is to know that each week as we take services and minister to the congregation of the Parish Church and to the surrounding City of Liverpool we follow in a long line of men and women who have provided a Christian Witness in this place, overlooking the River Mersey, since the 13th Century.

If you spend a moment before you leave and return to the Queen Elizabeth to visit the exhibition in the Narthex you will begin to understand the close relationship between Our Lady and St Nicholas and the River Mersey, indeed it is true to say that we have watched over every ship that has ever sailed out from or indeed sailed into the port of Liverpool. As the city has grown around us we have remained the constant unchanging presence, that is apart from the odd tower falling down and a rebuild after the second world war. An unchanging presence providing a beacon of hope for countless sailors and their families from the earliest days of sail to the present day and although now much of the river's traffic heads to the new port to the north we are still able to watch over the growing number of cruise ships that moor almost at the bottom of our garden, and so this morning we welcome once again Cunard and Queen Elizabeth back to your spiritual home as Bishop Paul described the city of Liverpool for Cunard at your 175th Anniversary service just 3 years ago. Here in this church we are privileged indeed to have custody of the many memorial plaques marking the life of Cunard and its role in the maritime history of the city.

Today we come yet again with all at Cunard, to celebrate and to remember with thankfulness "The Glory of the Mersey" that was the Mauretania.

Just over a week ago I stood on the banks of the River Mersey overlooking the Cammel Laird Shipyard and witnessed a sight that is no longer a common occurrence on the River, the launch of the RRS Sir David Attenborough, “Boaty McBoatface”, although quite a crowd gathered to watch the part-built ship slide into the river the crowd was nowhere near the 50,000 that gathered on that July day 80 years ago to witness RMS Mauretania. In preparation for today I watched the Pathe News Clip of the day and saw Lady Bate as she spoke of the red-letter day for herself and Merseyside, she successfully broke the bottle of champagne on Mauretania’s bow and the great ship slid into the Mersey, in the background the waterfront of Liverpool and this church.

Indeed, our order of service includes images from the launch and the photograph of Mauretania moored alongside the Princes Dock landing stage, where Queen Elizabeth is this morning at the bottom of our garden.

But why should I make that point, it’s not that we claim this privilege because of our heritage, not just because we can show an unbroken presence of this church, in this place, on maps going back to the 13th century.

No, the privilege that we have serving in this place is that we serve not as guardians of heritage but as Christian ministers speaking of our living God and seeking to make him known in this place. To enable the encounter of the living God in people’s daily lives

The reading from the gospel of John, also speaks of such an encounter the woman at the well. This passage which gives us the longest recorded conversation between Jesus and another person, records an incident early in Jesus’s ministry when he is travelling back to Galilee his journey causes him to travel through a Samaritan city. To understand the context The Jews and the Samaritans didn’t get along. They had common religious ancestry, but over the centuries they had divided and come to have different religious beliefs, and their differences caused prejudices on both sides, conflicts. Jews and Samaritans didn’t just have

different views on religious beliefs. Relations between the two groups were tense and unfriendly, with Jews typically viewing Samaritans as lower and unclean.

But, still, Jesus travels through this Samaritan town, and stops at a well, tired from his journey. A Samaritan woman, unnamed like so many women in the Bible, comes to the well, and Jesus asks her to draw him some water to drink. She's surprised that Jesus even speaks to her. As a rabbi, a teacher, a man, Jesus wouldn't have initiated conversation with a woman in a public place. And as a Jew, Jesus wouldn't have initiated conversation with a Samaritan, as she notes. But Jesus tells her, "if you knew the gift of God, and who it is [that is talking to you], you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman is naturally confused by Jesus' strange talk. How can he get water without a bucket, she wonders? Jacob, their revered forefather got water from a well with the help of God. Can this man Jesus do that? Jesus answers, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman responds, even if not understanding fully, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus goes on to tell the woman all about herself, her history. The woman asks if Jesus is a prophet – an interesting question from a Samaritan, since they don't hold the writings of prophets as scripture. They debate a bit, about their different religious views. But what Jesus tells her, brings her to the knowledge of who Jesus is, the Messiah, the passage closes with the woman bringing others to meet Jesus, this man who knew all about her, and they believe that he is the saviour because of her witness.

An encounter with God, in the ordinariness of life changing her life and through her no doubt changing the lives of countless others. The living Water

The great psalm of thankfulness psalm 107 contains the words that we have just heard which foreshadow an event recorded in the New Testament. The famous story of the life of Christ

from Mark chapter four, follows the fifth section of Psalm 107, which describes the plight and eventual rescue of those on the sea. While Jesus and his disciples are on Lake Galilee a storm swells. Jesus calms the storm by saying, "Peace! Be still!" In the same way, Psalm 107 describes the Israelites at sea when a storm arises. The waves "mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths," and the Lord then "makes still" the storm. The living God who calms the storm, - incidentally it is worth taking time to make a brief diversion into the former Port of Liverpool Building adjacent to the Cunard building just across from where the words of psalm 107 verse 23 and 24 are scribed around the grand entrance hall. All who came to do business in the port reminded of the works of the lord in the wonders of the deep. The creator God who gives us the Living Water

As we gather to Commemorate the great ship RMS Mauretania, we remember with thankfulness all who played a part in her creation; the Cunard board whose vision it was that gave her life, the skill of the craftsmen of the Mersey that turned that vision into reality and the courage of the crewmen and women, many from this city, that sailed her across the oceans of the world. Mauretania may be no longer but she still "works her way into our affections" and we pray that will continue to be the case for not just the Mauretania but the many great Cunard ships that will continue to find the "Haven where they would be" in their Spiritual home at the bottom of our garden.

Fr Bill Addy

