

The Last Sunday of Trinity 25th October 2020

Collect

God, the giver of life,
whose Holy Spirit wells up within your Church:
by the Spirit's gifts equip us to live the gospel of Christ
and make us eager to do your will,
that we may share with the whole creation
the joys of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings

Leviticus 19:1-2. 15-18

The LORD said to Moses, ² 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

¹⁵ "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.

¹⁶ "Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

"Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the LORD.

¹⁷ "Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so that you will not share in their guilt.

¹⁸ "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.

Matthew 22:34-end

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'

³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴² 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?'

'The son of David,' they replied. ⁴³ He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"? For he says,

⁴⁴ "'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.''"^[a]

⁴⁵ If then David calls him "Lord", how can he be his son?' ⁴⁶ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Reflections:

The message of today's scriptures is a powerful one. It seems so easy – love God and love your neighbour; the root of every major world faith, the foundation of world peace. So why do we still have conflict? How can it be so hard?

Perhaps the answer lies in our tendency to interpret the text as referring to two loves – love of God and love of neighbour – when in fact there are three: love of God, love of neighbour and love of self. Yes –that's right. Love of self. Let's explore these three loves a little further.

Love of God. How do we love God? The 'standard' way to express love for God is in worship and for many of us, love of God has been tied up with attendance at worship services, but that has been difficult of late. Has this in any way diminished our love for God? Perhaps a time away from church attendance has deepened our

love of God and opened our eyes to new ways of loving Him. The structure of church is a religious one; religion codifies spirituality. It gives faith a framework and context within which it can be expressed, interpreted and understood. Away from this framework, other expressions of spirituality can come to the fore. How many of us have been filled with awe when surrounded by the glories of nature on our daily lockdown walk? Or wondered at the minute details encapsulated in a tiny flower clinging to a crevice in a wall? Or been immensely grateful that we have a home and job? Awe, wonder, gratitude – some would call this ‘mindfulness’ but these are just some of the words that inhabit our worship, our love of God. How are we learning to love God in our lives?

Love of neighbour. The middle bit of Jesus’ pithy response. The idea of ‘who is my neighbour’ is explored in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but that is not today’s question. How do I love my neighbour? Covid19 has given us many opportunities to ‘love our neighbour’ through myriad acts of kindness, but our neighbour is not just the person who lives a few doors down the road from us. We have neighbouring countries, continents, even. Do we ‘love our neighbour’ when we buy cheap, mass-produced goods from places that employ child labour? Do we ‘love our neighbour’ when we buy cheap ‘farm fresh’ produce from farms whose pickers are treated as slaves? Do we ‘love our neighbour’ when that special gift has thousands of air miles on it, shedding tons of polluting CO2 across its path? Neighbours can come in many forms – how often during the course of a single day might we make a choice that ‘loves our neighbour’?

Love of self. ‘But surely’ you may say ‘that’s being selfish’. Loving yourself is not the same as being selfish. Jesus’ words are also plainly there in Leviticus - love your neighbour as yourself. The fable writer Aesop knew them as ‘do to others as you would be done by’. They are also in the Muslim Hadith: None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself. As yourself. What does it mean to ‘love yourself’? This is important as we are made in God’s likeness. In not loving ourselves, we are rejecting God’s likeness within us. One way to look at it is the aeroplane model. Remember the days when we flew on aeroplanes to holiday in exotic locations? The safety briefing always included instructions on wearing oxygen masks and the directive to place your mask on before helping anyone else in an emergency. Wearing the mask ensured you were in a fit state to help others – not wearing it could risk you becoming another casualty. Think of loving yourself as donning the oxygen mask. If we do not invest time in ourselves, we are not giving proper heed to the Creator whose image we carry within us. We also risk losing a proper perspective on life, perhaps leading to burn out, resentment of others and stress related illness. Have you ‘loved yourself’ today?

Jesus words speak of three loves – God, others and yourself. When we get these three in balance, we create a triangle of love. The triangle is the strongest, most stable structure in engineering; stools with three legs do not rock; surveyors place their instruments on tripods; artists’ easels have three legs – and look at the pyramids! How long have they lasted? Nurturing the essence of Christ’s words within us will lead us to a more balanced way of living, in harmony with ourselves, others and our Creator. Now doesn’t that sound like a blueprint for the peaceable Kingdom of Heaven on earth?

Rev Jenny Ellis