

Address from Team Rector, Reverend Howard Robson Sunday, 28 June 2020

Romans 6 v12-end
Matthew 10 v40-end

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our gospel passage, Jesus makes a crucially important point. It is not simply that who receives you receives me; it is about the manner which you, the disciple, adopt. To help others with, let's say a cup of water, in Christ's name, signifies that you the disciple accept Christ as Lord. If your acceptance of Christ is therefore clear in your demeanour, then others, in accepting you, will also be open to receiving Christ. It is the practical outworking of the prayer that Jesus has no hands but ours, no eyes but ours and so forth.

The challenge in this is that many engage with charity, but not necessarily in Christ's name. If we say well, that's OK, then we reduce Christianity to no more than a social welfare programme; we reduce Christianity to what are called Christian values. Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, making friends with strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting prisoners are all good things to do, but lots of atheists do that and they do it very well. But fundamentally, that is not what Christian faith is about. Faith in Christ as God's Son is to come first. Good works then flow because we now understand properly through Jesus' ministry, what life is all about.

I could do lots of charitable works, but I could do them only because it makes me feel good and worse still, only for those whom I think deserve it. I might give to a disaster appeal, but only because it affected people like me; I might send clothes to charity and congratulate myself on how recipients will reflect on the character of the person who sent nearly new items; I might give to children in need because one of my favourite entertainers did a really funny sketch. Whenever I qualify or appraise my act of assistance, it almost inevitably means that someone elsewhere does not receive because I don't think they merit help; or I imply that a recipient benefits because it is I who have done the giving. This is what Christ means when he speaks of surrendering the self; it's not about me, it's about Him; only. So, give in Christ's name.

Which is great; but I'm left with another question; why in Christ's name? why not in the name of the Buddha, or the pixies, or anything else? What makes Jesus so special? It's a bold claim which clearly Jesus had no problem making, but still, a bold claim nonetheless.

What is it which makes something that is good, good? What is it that differentiates between what is right and what is wrong? Why does wrong bother our conscious and right satisfy even when we know that no-one else knows about either? For the Christian this points to a loving Creator God who has ordered the world to work

for good. And our experience backs this up because truth, justice, peace, love, each knowable on an individual basis, but each points also to something bigger than us. And that doesn't change over time; far from it. Truth, justice, peace, love stand the test of time. And when it comes to lies, injustice, war and hate, human history is littered with the consequences of those and the response is always, this is wrong – from believers and non-believers alike. The Christian simply acknowledges that Christ makes that loving Creator God visible. Which then takes assisting others out of the realms of opportunity, or benevolence or even power to be assistance in the name of love. Bold or not, but when we do that, Christ is visible to others.

Today is Wingrave's patronal festival for Peter and Paul. Perhaps we think of them as totally different men, but actually, each in his own way had to deal with a massive reappraisal of his life. Hot headed Peter who put his own opinions first and legalist Paul whose faith lay in the Law of which he was so proud. Both came to understand that what they were searching for was found in Christ and as Andrew said last week, they, we, become bigger than the sum of our parts - Peter became the rock on which the church is built and Paul became the catalyst for the spread of the gospel across Asia Minor. Two people who came to understand that Christ is all in all and who were very clear that whatever they did, it was in the name of Christ alone.

And what of us today? As we come out of the lockdown we can reflect on our collective experience of how communities have reacted to the pandemic. Many places have seen a surge in community engagement and suddenly, perhaps we have come to know our neighbours. This is the church's opportunity, which is of course you and me, to point to Christ and the loving Creator God who is at the root of all things good; we become part of that creative force, in Christ we become bigger than the sum of our parts.

Today's gospel calls us to put Christ at the heart of what we do. Believers are to be rooted in Christ's mission and wholeheartedly accept that the risen Christ walks with us in the ordinariness of daily life. Then Christ will honour what we do. It's as simple as that. Amen.