

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Second Sunday after Trinity

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Jeremiah 20:7-13 Psalm 69:8-20 Romans 6:1b-11

Matthew 10:24-39

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

At first glance, it is difficult to see how this week's collect:

Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth: send your Holy Spirit and our into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the true bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whoever lives is counted dead before you. Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

connects with Jesus' teaching that he has come to bring not peace, but a sword, and the accompanying warnings of division and antagonism that our gospel includes today.

When we look closer, I think there is a connection which runs all the way through the gospel passage like a hidden current and is made explicit in Jesus' summoning call to the cross: "whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me".

Our doings without love are nothing worth, and whoever does not take up the cross and follow is not worthy of Jesus.

Put positively, love and taking up the cross and following Jesus are what counts.

And because Jesus revealed what God's love is like in all its fullness on the cross, love and the cross are intimately linked.

This is the heart of the connection between the collect and the gospel today:

A life lived from a heart full of the love poured out by the Holy Spirit, is a life of taking up the cross and following Jesus.

And today's gospel is a good corrective to the times we are tempted to think that focusing on a gospel of love is a woolly or soft option; when we are tempted to understand that gospel as a guide just to being nice to everyone.

The love into which Jesus calls his followers is a radical, powerful force for change and recreation in the world. It is so radical that it provokes resistance and opposition seen in its ugliness raged against Jesus on the cross, and against so many who have suffered for similar missions of love through the ages. It is so powerful it carried him through death to new life in resurrection and continues to inspire generations of new advocates through the years that have followed.

It is such a radical and powerful force, that medieval theologians, who were great fans of putting things in categories described such love as super-natural – beyond our natural capacity. They called it a “theological virtue”, which means it is a gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to which we respond. As we allow our hearts to be shaped and moved by such love it draws us towards God in love, and compels us towards our neighbour and the creation around us in love. We participate in the love God has for creation, just as Jesus participated and revealed such love.

This is the love in which and for which we were created, and all things were created and so it is our deepest joy, the deepest fulfilling of who we were made to be.

It is also the love that shines a light on all that is not loving, all that opposes God's will for creation.

When these things are “called out”, especially when they are not generally recognised as a problem, divisions arise. Those content with the status quo do not like it to be questioned.

Jesus, filled with the love of God, questioned everything around him that was not God's will for the creation: think of all the disputes about misguided religious observance and hypocrisy, his

criticism of the misuse of wealth, his welcome for the marginalised in society. He gave signs of what the Kingdom of God was like – this radical love embodied in water turned to wine in celebration, the blind given sight, the lame walking, a hungry crowd fed, a dead man raised to new life; and not everybody was ready to accept this largesse. His revelation of God's love, revealed too, how hard our world finds it to receive such love – the rejection of it, sin, nailed him to the cross.

What Jesus is reminding his disciples in today's gospel is that the it is the love of his message which is what is real and true and ultimate in their existence. When, and wherever this love evokes opposition, painful though that will be, is comes from a false place.

Jesus' disciples were to face this in the rawest reality but he encourages them to make the gospel of love known – in the light, from the roof tops. He reminds them of their infinite value to God, of God's infinite love for them. He affirms that such love is the source of the eternal life of their souls. Remaining faithful to such love is the most fundamental decision they need to make: deeper than family love, deeper than our natural tendency for self-preservation. Remaining faithful to that love is to take up the cross and follow Jesus: to commit oneself to allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts to love creation as God loves creation and experience with Jesus the pain of the times when the world resists such love.

Whilst we have brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who will read this passage with literal recognition, knowing the cost of their faithfulness may be the suffering of persecution – and let's keep them in our prayers – for us it may be important to see where we remain faithful to the gospel of love in costly and yet less dramatic ways and where we might make the collect for today a heartfelt prayer for divine support in living out the depth of Jesus' radical love.

For one it might be maintaining a practice of prayer despite that seeming purposeless to the world outside, for another the commitment to a non-consumer lifestyle investing in care for the

planet or justice in patterns of trade. For one it might be gently challenging language or behaviours around us that fail to honour the dignity of every human as a child of God, or championing the importance in a civilised society of everyone receiving what is basic to our wellbeing. For one it might be speaking explicitly of the love of God which is offered to all to carry them through death to eternal life, for another the choice of work which is unsung but meets the deepest needs of the weakest in our society. For one it might be choosing not to shop on a Sunday because it is important to honour the day we were given to worship, for another the cherished cleaning of church brass for the greater glory of God, when that takes most of a day's energy. All in their way, counter-cultural choices, all...along with as many acts as we are different people... possible responses to the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Yes, there is a difference in magnitude between the witness that Jesus teaches of in today's gospel and my list of suggestions to prompt our thinking about where our love of God makes itself known, but both depend on the way we make our choices about everything we are and do in life. Both are invitations to discern in all we do and in all we are, the joyful impulse of the radical world changing love of the one who we have chosen to follow whether that is easy for us or we are opposed in it. And it is our choices in the little things that prepare us, when called, to make the love-filled costly decisions in which we feel the weight of the cross and prepare us too, unexpectedly, as we try to lift it, to recognise the presence of Jesus beside us taking the weight we cannot bear.

Let's pray this week, whether it is in the formal words of the collect, or in our way, for the courage to allow the love God desires to pour into our hearts to guide us in every choice and action we make, so that we may take up the cross and follow Jesus in revealing the power of that love in the world around us. Amen.

