

## COMMUNITY

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Luke 22:14-20

The subjects from the Christmas readings set for today are two fold, the gospel from Luke recounts the visit of the shepherds to the infant Jesus in the stable and the reading from Galatians 4 proclaims our sonship alongside Jesus and heirs with him. "God sent his Son, born of a woman, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

However I have chosen the readings from Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11 today because I want us to look forward beyond the tinsel, beyond the carols, beyond the manger and ask what Jesus means to us now, what this sonship means to us now. What this means to us as a church community as the body of Christ in this place?

In the period leading up to Christmas we had a series of three Sermons based upon the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel chapter 5 verses 3 to 12, focussing on us becoming more contemplative, compassionate, and courageous. At the end of this passage in verses 13 to 15 Jesus said; "You are the salt of the earth .... You are the light of the world .... Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Now I have an issue with this translation from the NIV bibles we have in church, but it is the same in all of the modern translations, from the Revised Standard Version published in 1952 onward. We have lost the plural sense of these passages by the use of the word YOU. I have said this before but I think it is important to restate the point. The Greek word from which the translations are based is plural. The King James and earlier translations used Ye instead of you. Ye according to the Oxford English Dictionary is the plural of Thou used in addressing a number of persons. To correctly translate the passage in modern English it should read; "You all are the salt of the earth .... You all are the light of the world"

The conclusion of the Beatitudes is that we all are the salt of the earth; we all are the light of the world.

As a Church we can be proud of the effort we are making in a number of areas both in terms of our financial commitment and our time with many dedicated members of our church giving up their time for CAP, street pastors, prayer walks, healing ministry, Balsam, Go Mad, Little Fishes and many other things.

Following the Living Nativity there was an exchange of emails from which I took the following extracts;

"Such a privilege to be part of the Living Nativity each year and see the impact it has on the Cholsey community and on us as a team working together."

"The other great thing about Living Nativity which is the way in which, when we work as a team on a project like this together, we do become closer to one another, get to know each other just a little better and hopefully have some fun as well."

"Our lives are made so rich by our friendships in faith and if through them we can help to reach out to our own community then nothing could be better."

"It really showed me how comfortable I now am in being part of the St Marys Christian Family."

How do we sustain this day by day week by week? How can we maintain our relationships with each other and with God? We can do this by continuing to work together, by meeting together and reaffirming our relationship with God. A lot of the focus of the songs we sing are about our personal relationship with God and worship and praise of him. This is good, but it is only part of our faith. We are not islands, ours is a corporate faith, expressed through our relationship with God and with each other. Jesus chose 12 disciples, when he sent the disciples out they went together in pairs, Paul did not travel alone but with Barnabas, Silas and Timothy.

Jesus gave us a new commandment; John 13:34 "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In Matthew 22:37 Jesus said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

It is clear from some of the last words of Jesus recorded by John and Matthew that our relationship with God is sustained by our love of God, our love of each other and our love of our neighbour. But how?

The unique difference between the Christian faith and all other faiths is the cross the presence of the living God who dwelt among us. God incarnate, the infant Jesus cradled in the arms of Mary, born to be a sacrifice for us, to break the bonds of sin and re-establish our relationship with God. Once and for all Jesus died for us that daily we may be renewed in our relationship with God.

This is the same Jesus who Luke recounts was at supper with his friends; "took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"

At the supper where Jesus said we should Love one another as he has loved us, Jesus said "do this", share the bread and the wine together. We re-establish our relationship with Jesus with communion which is a celebration of that relationship where the bread and wine symbolise the broken Jesus with his arms outstretched on the cross for us.

I believe communion, breaking bread together is central to our Christian community, not the need for me to have communion as a personal ritual, but something that is shared with each one of you.

From the early days of the church there were problems with the practice of communion and we hear about this from Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 11: Paul chastised them saying "your meetings do more harm than good", "when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you". Paul set out some guidelines on how we should share the "Lord's Supper".

We should examine ourselves – confession

When you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

Eat before we meet; although we have a good tradition in our church of shared lunches and suppers.

Paul also gave the Corinthians the form of words we use today to dedicate the bread and wine: "The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

Paul summed up his guidelines for sharing the Lord's Supper together with this statement; "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

From a practical point of view this does not need to be a long liturgy, it can be short like the one we use for our summer communion service, prayer H from Common Worship. In summary, when we share in Holy Communion, we believe Jesus is present with us in a special way that strengthens our faith and our relationship with God and with each other. We are not only remembering Jesus' death and what that means for us, but celebrating his ongoing risen life with the whole Church, and looking forward to his return. During communion, we also find that we are discerning Christ's presence in each other – this is very much an emphasis of Paul's teaching in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Many of you may know John Betjeman's poem on Christmas, I won't read it all just the last three stanzas:

And is it true? And is it true, this most tremendous tale of all,  
seen in a stained-glass window's hue, a baby in an ox's stall?  
The Maker of the stars and sea become a child on earth for me?

And is it true? For if it is, no loving fingers tying strings,  
around those tissueed fripperies, the sweet and silly Christmas things, bath salts and inexpensive scent,  
and hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells, no carolling in frosty air,  
nor all the steeple-shaking bells can with this single Truth compare- that God was Man in Palestine and  
lives today in Bread and Wine.

David

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