

## **Where do you belong? Where is home for you? Where are your roots?**

Sermon preached by The Reverend Canon Christopher Andrews

St Edmundsbury Cathedral, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019 (Lent 2)

Christine and I lived for many years in the North East and if you ask a Geordie where he or she comes from they won't say, "I come from Newcastle" but "I belong Newcastle". Not I belong to Newcastle but "I belong Newcastle". Isn't that strong? Coming to the North East from Croydon we found this Tyneside identity and pride irresistible and were soon caught up in it ourselves. You may have had similar experiences in your life in different places.

And of course this is a question that we as a nation have been wrestling with for the last three years and indeed much longer than that. Where do we belong, the four countries that make up Great Britain and N Ireland, in relation to each other and together? Where do we belong as a nation in relation to our neighbours in Europe and in the rest of the world?

It is the same question Abram in our first reading must have asked himself. Where do I belong? At God's behest he had just left his native land behind and set out for he hardly knew where.

Abram knew only one thing, that where he and his people belonged was with God.

In our second reading from his letter to the Philippians the apostle Paul was answering a similar question. “Our citizenship is in heaven” he wrote. We belong to heaven. Remember Paul was a Jew by birth and a Roman citizen. He greatly prized Roman citizenship and the sense of identity and security it gave you. So, as citizens of heaven, said Paul, Christians can taste something of its peace and security now, in their daily life on earth. We belong with God and with Jesus Christ here and hereafter. Paul’s firm belief.

And what of Jesus in the gospel reading today? Where did Jesus belong?

He was quite clear. “Today, tomorrow and the next day – Jesus says this twice – I am on the road. My place is with the ordinary people of Galilee, all of them, especially the people that others look down on. This is where I belong. And my road leads to Jerusalem which should be the city where everyone belongs and is safe. “But”, he said “Jerusalem kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. It does not know what belongs to its peace.” Jesus added “All I wanted was to gather your children together, as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it.” Jesus showed us where we belong. We belong together and with him.

Over this Lent and on the road to Good Friday we shall see again and again the depths of his belonging with us. Jesus, on the road, in the towns and villages, Jesus on the way to Jerusalem; Jesus at the last supper and on the cross. All the way through we see Jesus embodying the common humanity he shared with us and that we share with every other child, woman and man on this earth. God's gift to us all is our common humanity in Jesus Christ.

This in Jesus' name is where we belong and who we are, all of us "members one of another", in Paul's words.

Let me tell you about two people who show us the fundamental importance of our seeing ourselves in this way.

The first is Abp Michael Ramsey. In 1973, just after the United Kingdom entered the European Community, Michael Ramsey preached about Europe's calling to be a Christian Europe, and about its responsibilities towards poorer developing countries.

He said: "The picture comes to us from the gospel of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem because it did not know what belonged to its peace. We may picture today Jesus weeping over many cities and countries, some with their poverty and hunger, some with their wealth and complacency."

We might add today, Jesus's tears for Christchurch in New Zealand and many other places damaged by people's hatred and violence. Then Michael Ramsey said this:

“The tears of Jesus unite our world and show us how bound in a bundle we are.”

Which is why I felt it was right this Friday as chair of the local Interfaith Forum to go to Friday Prayers with the Muslim community at the Quaker Meeting House in town, to reassure them of our sympathy, friendship and support.

My second example is bang up to date: David Nott, the surgeon who since 1998 has been working in war zones in Africa and the Middle East, principally in Syria and often under the most dangerous conditions of open warfare. Here is his book, read recently on BBC Radio 4. In his exceptional work he focusses on one reality: the terribly injured person lying in front of him, whether soldier or civilian, terrorist or victim, man, woman or child is a fellow human being in need of his help - and human life is sacred. Nothing else matters.

In particular there is his account of his treating a wounded ISIS member in Aleppo, when six enemy gunmen broke into the makeshift operating theatre. David Nott tells how he froze and

couldn't move his hand. So, although not religious by nature, he decided all he could do was pray. He prayed to God that he would be able to control his shaking hands and complete the operation. I quote: “And then an extraordinary thing happened. As I looked down to see what I was doing, I felt my colleague

Ammar's head gently touch mine, in a simple act of brotherly love. Suddenly my hands relaxed. My legs were shaking but my hands were steady and after another hour we finished the operation."

At moments like this what else do we have to share with each other but our God given humanity?

So to end: the final words from that same address in 1973 by Michael Ramsey:

"We have no need to ask with the self-righteous young lawyer in the gospel, And who is my fellow human being, who is my neighbour? My neighbour is Christ and Christ is everywhere."

Amen.

© Christopher Andrews 2019