

Sermon preached by Canon Philip Banks
at St Edmundsbury Cathedral
The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity (BCP)
Sunday 20 October 2019

“Love the Lord thy God” [Matthew 22]

“Do we travel on what we share, or do we make a God of how we differ”? Wise words from the Desert Fathers of the early church.

Saint Paul is passionate about one thing, and one thing only. In just seven lines of the scripture of the first lesson, he mentions Jesus four times. He’s passionate about Jesus and that what we share is our partnership in the Good News of Jesus.

He is passionate to make his hearers ‘get’ that every bit of their (the Corinthians in this case) is entwined with the story of Jesus. And because those letters are addressed to you and me in our day, Paul is passionate to remind us that every bit of your history, story, who you are – every bit of the person you are – is likewise intertwined with the life of Jesus – and tells us that we are part of a large world-wide family of Grace, people calling on the name of the Lord, partners in the Good News.

“Do we travel on what we share, or do we make a God of how we differ”?

What am I passionate about? What are you passionate about? People can get passionate about how they differ over Brexit; over (in the church) issues in human sexuality; over the climate crisis.

Yet what need to put as our first passion, says St Paul, is our partnership as people together who love Jesus and call upon his name. And today’s gospel – what a gift to us! We receive from God love, strength, purpose, life itself – and all God asks in return is to love back, by loving all the people he has made: love of God and Neighbour, the height of the commandments, Jesus teaches us.

The question then isn’t just “what do I have to do”? but

- How do I live in a meaningful way? What is life about?
- What is worthwhile, what are my priorities, things important to work for?
- How do I achieve happiness?

The answer? To love.

“Do we travel on what we share, or do we make a God of how we differ”?

For when we love, we find our true selves, our meaning, our purpose. The commandment to love isn’t just the imposition of some alien will, but the recognition of what and who we truly are.

So in these days of so much passionate division, where much of the tabloid press want to paint those with whom they disagree as less than human or other or bad or wrong; where we continue to see a rise in racism and homophobia – let’s remember that we as Christians travel on what we share – Jesus - who comes to us not just under forms of bread and wine, but in the form of the other, our neighbour who may be a different opinion or creed or race to me, and in whom Christ dwells.

That’s the Good News, the Gospel that we share.

Philip Banks, October 2019
