

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



Sunday 10 September 2023

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity (Proper 18 year A)

Readings: Romans 13.8–14, Matthew 18.15–20

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

Sermon by the Reverend Canon Philip Banks

Do you believe in angels?

Imagine the scene on my railway journey recently. Janet and I had travelled to Worcester for a couple of days: our St Edmundsbury Singers were on a mini tour there, singing as the guest choir for the cathedral services there. I had to leave a day early, so early morning I get the fast train to London, the plan being that Janet would drive our car home later that evening.

Half way to Londo and my phone rings.

Janet says

“You know I’ve got the car here in Worcester... the car keys are still on you”?

Oh dear.

Next scene: the refreshments trolley approaches my seat.

“Cup of tea and a snack”? says the lady.

“I need more than a cup of tea and a kit-kat” say I.

She asks what’s the matter, and I tell her of my plight.

“Don’t fret dear” she says. “Give me the keys, and your wife’s number! When the train gets to Paddington, I don’t get off – it turns straight round with new passengers and I’ll be back in Worcester before lunch – she can meet me there and I’ll hand her the keys.”

How completely wonderful, an angel in disguise, I thought.

I was going to hop up and hug her, but thought other passengers might think there was a safeguarding matter to report. I did write an effusive letter to GWR though.

Do you believe in angels?

All this got me thinking (not just about angels in disguise).

Travelling makes you realise how much of your life – ordinary life – depends on the goodwill of other people.

Travelling really does verify some of those old clichés:

“It’s about the journey, not the destination”.

“Real life is what happens when you are making other plan.”

“Life is like a highway.”

So much of our day-to-day life depends on trusting the goodness of others. Trusting that other people will keep their word.

You trust the pilot to fly and not to crash.

You trust that the Air BnB host, to whose house your SatNav has led you, will honour the booking you made many months ago in your living room.

You trust, somewhere at the back of your mind, that if something bad happens to you, someone will help you.

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



Sunday 10 September 2023

Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity (Proper 18 year A)

Readings: Romans 13.8–14, Matthew 18.15–20

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

Sermon by the Reverend Canon Philip Banks

By the way, she was called Sue, the angel on the train, and she met Janet with the car keys later that day, and refused to accept any kind of thank-you gift.

It is always the case that our lives require trust: for trains to run, for food eventually to reach our shops, for electricity, water, broadband to run on demand. We are reliant on the goodwill of others.

We must trust.

We live at a time when trusting our politicians and media is at a very low ebb as they continue to try to polarize and divide us from each other. We must somehow resist allowing that distrust to creep into our ordinary relationships and encounters. We must not get drawn into this divisive language of so much of our press which tries to dismiss anything that is kindly and thoughtful and wholesome and caring: dismissing it as ‘wokeism’. Distrust: it eats away at the foundations of our common life together.

Last week marked the first anniversary of the death of our beloved late Queen: this polarization and lack of trust is exactly the opposite of what she, and our new King, stand for.

We hear the words of Saint Paul today: “Owe no one anything except to love” and “The commandments are summed up in this word: love your neighbour as yourself.”

My train journey reminded me that, although the world is large and that there’s good reason to be disquieted or anxious, we depend on trust and on the goodwill of others. For there are plenty of people who do keep their word, can be trusted, are ‘angel unawares’, helping others when they lose their way or when something befalls them. These are the things which are the foundations of our Christian faith and of our community life.

I believe in a God of compassion and mercy and love and justice who created the world out of an overflowing of love, and who I experience as the source of life, and the ground of my being and my becoming – and which I glimpse from time to time in those around me – their insight and prayer and loving community.

Do you believe in angels?

How will you be an ‘angel unawares’ today for someone?

How will you and I renew trust in the goodwill of others today?

Owe no one anything except to love.

Oh – and do be careful where you put your car keys.