

## **Second Sunday after Trinity**

**21<sup>st</sup> June 2020**

“Lord, you have taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth...”  
The opening lines of this Sunday’s Collect sum up the spirit of the law, that is the aspiration and attitude of those who follow Christ. If we do anything as Christians it has to be done in love. It does not make sense to do otherwise. In fact, not to put love at the centre of our lives is to misunderstand Jesus’ teaching. And such misunderstandings lead to a form of apostacy, a breaking away from Christian virtue and, of course, Christ himself. Which is why it is so important to remain within the communion of the Church, to keep the faith as we have received it and to pass it on to others. And that faith brings love to the world.

One of the more pleasing aspects of this lockdown period has been the happy accident of providing all of the readings electronically as part of our digital output. I am keen that when we get back to normal – whenever that is and whatever that looks like – we will continue to reflect upon all of the lectionary readings. I would like to hear both the Old Testament and the New Testament epistle read in church, supplemented by the psalm of the day occasionally. The range of readings provides a clearer picture, a pattern which shapes our understanding of the related theme. The theme this week is a strong message, a hard message perhaps, but ultimately a profound instruction that without love at the core of our being we enter into the realm of death!

The picture that is being created this week from God’s word echoes and reverberates with the theme of the prayers which have been written for those re-entering the church for individual prayer. The Church of England has issued a series of prayers which recognise the hardship and hopes of Christians living with the pandemic, praying for healing, recognising the beauty of the world and

the need for some sort of rebuilding when it is all over. The headings of the prayers are lament, thanksgiving and restoration. These are the prayers that will be shared with those who begin to re-enter our church next week.

The headings of lament, thanksgiving and restoration could easily be used to describe the prophecies of Jeremiah. A life that experienced the heights and depths of fortune and disfavour. Jeremiah, the prophet of God, shares this lament with us. He lived at a time when his religion was in constant flux. His fellow religionists had been exiled from the centre of their faith, the Jerusalem Temple, and been banished to a foreign land. God uses Jeremiah, the son of the priest from the priestly tribe of Levi, living in the suburbs of Jerusalem, to speak on behalf of him. His prophecies centre upon the work of the heart. As he grew, he recognized that the place of his origin, Judah, was a frontier territory, that Jerusalem was a marked city but, most importantly, a sacred place. Squeezed between the might of Egypt and Babylon, God's land of promise was to be invaded and desecrated. Yet Jeremiah was able to issue a corrective for his people. Not only was Jerusalem in danger because of its geography, but also because it had forgotten its true nature, its real identity, its vocation in God to love.

And so, today, we hear the prayer of lament coming from the established church which declares that "few communities have been unaffected by loss, illness and death. Fear and anxiety have been prevalent in households and communities." In this we recognise our own pain as well as imagining Jeremiah's. What does our lament mean before God? Would it help to summon your heartache and put your struggles and woes before God in prayer? What do you need to mark as lamentable during this time of lockdown? What has affected your faith? Where has love been absent? Where has peace been destroyed? Say it; shout it out. God can take it.

And so we are led on to the theme of thanksgiving. The Church reflects upon the sense of gratitude which has been expressed, in particular, towards the NHS and care workers. *“The emergence of the Thursday ‘Clap for carers’ was a significant experience both nationally and locally. Thanksgiving binds communities together, turning ‘I’ into ‘we’. The contribution of carers and key workers who have given of themselves sacrificially needs to be honoured.”*

It is this sacrificial love and this communal honouring of life that Paul expresses, in his letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul demonstrates that whatever we experience in this world is shared with Christ. This is because our baptism is a common baptism. In it we die in Christ and we rise, with him into new life. I am always keen to assert this to parents and godparents, that they might begin to understand the grace imparted in this sacrament. Baptism is the invitation into the resurrection life, the ultimate gift of love. St Paul says, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

So, we do have a lot to be thankful for. Baptism turns our ‘I’ into ‘we’ We belong to a community of faith, fully alive. Death no longer has dominion over us. What a moving realisation this must have been to the new Christians in Rome. Despite all their persecutions, all their travail, the dangers of living the Christ-life, they have been offered that most excellent gift of love – of freedom. No anxieties, no lockdowns, no shielding, no separation. God’s love is life.

And so to the final prayer as we re-enter church, that of restoration. According to the Church of England’s liturgists, this includes: *“Naming the unexpected gifts of this Covid crisis as well as its challenges. Celebrating the rediscovery of the importance of the local, and the resurgence of neighbourliness enabling the journey of renewal and restoration.”*

Jesus summons the twelve in the Gospel and sent them out. They were sent on a journey of restoration. Jesus forewarns the disciples of the trials that they will endure. Jesus does not avoid the future tensions and difficulties of proclaiming the kingdom to the world. Jesus was not conflict-avoidant but wise and practical. Here we have the great hope set before us of the kingdom not only being proclaimed but, being lived out and the proof of this life is the excellent gift of love.

For many, restoration can be expressed in the 'build-back-better' campaign, a coronavirus recovery plan. This is a very public response, a grassroots desire to learn from past mistakes, addressing the vulnerabilities within our society, bringing to light social and economic inequalities, desiring to act upon climate change initiatives and lower carbon usage. All of these restorative measures are signs of good-meaning but nothing worth without love.

Today we look to re-enter the church with hope for God's purpose to be realised. As those summoned by Jesus, we continue to pray for God's care so that we may share the life of Christ with others. We pray for God's blessing on all who enter his sanctuary and especially those who seek to lament; those who offer thanksgiving; and for those who desire to restore this world to an image of God's glory. But remembering that **all we do without love is nothing worth.** Amen.