

Sunday 11th August 2024

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Readings John 6:35, 41-51 ([The Message](#))
 Ephesians 4:25-5:2 ([NRSV](#))

Reflection

Why are we here this morning? Each of us may have a variety of reasons why we are here but at the heart of it we are here because we believe in Jesus, because we are following the message of Jesus, because we believe in a better way of living.

Jesus did not have many rules, he was a Jew and so he had grown up with hundreds of rules all designed to control but he said only one was important – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all that you are, and love your neighbour as self. That is what we try to do but we are human, human beings on the way to our full humanity but not there yet, and so we are tempted.

Many temptations arise out of expectations. We have expectation of and for ourselves, and of others and when those expectations are not realised then we react. If you have been watching the Olympics you will have seen many reactions as expectations were realised or not. A silver medal can be greeted with wonder and astonishment when it exceeds expectations, and total distress and disappointment expectations were higher. For some it is the heat of the moment and later they will realise just what they have achieved, but for others it can lead to all sorts of bad decisions. How we behave colours the expectations of others.

We have also witnessed riots and unrest this week also fuelled in part by expectations as ordinary people are fired up by a political agenda fuelled not by justice or injustice but by a desire to cause trouble. In our reading from Ephesians we have Paul's code for loving living, written to a church going through some difficulties. We are not told what but we can perhaps hazard a guess by the code they are given. I wonder what Paul would write to the church today, probably much the same I suspect.

Love one another. Be angry over injustice but do not let your anger overpower love, do not let the sun go down on your anger making room in your heart for fear. Let go of envy and jealousy for these will lead you astray. Lead an honest life, do not steal to get what you want, work for what you need so that you are free to share what you have with others. Use your voice in love, encourage one another, support one another and do not take part in gossip or use word that harm one another. Turn away from bitterness, wrath, anger and malice. Instead be imitators of God. Live in love.

It is Paul's reinterpretation of the ten words for freedom given to the Israelites as they wandered the desert. It is a code for our decision making. It is a code for how we view others and our expectations of them but we must also accept that we all have choices and sometimes we do not make wise decisions.

Jesus did not offer lots of rules but he did invite people to think deeper by sharing stories, so let me share some stories.

Story – A change in perspective (Based on a traditional story)

Aboutall was a small village on the edge of the forest. It was a place to visit with its charming cottages and a stream that ran through the village but above all it was known for its welcome to strangers. It was a friendly village, or at least it had been, but times had changed.

No one knew quite when the change happened or why, but where the villagers had once been in harmony now there was rivalry, and quarrels were happening all day long. Visitors stopped coming and the village chief was worried and anxious. People were not happy; the life of the community was being destroyed and without visitors his people would not survive the winter but what could he do?

One day, a stranger arrived in Aboutall, this was so unusual that the chief instantly heard about it. He rushed to greet the stranger and was surprised to find that the stranger knew all about the trouble. Soon the two were in deep conversation. Anyone watching would have seen a look of astonishment cross the face of the chief, but no one was watching because they were all too busy arguing. Shortly afterwards the stranger left the village.

The chief stood for a moment, a look of wonder on his face, then he rushed to the house of his best friend and shared what the stranger had told him. His friend was equally astonished and could not help but tell his friends and soon the village was buzzing with the news that one of their number was the Messiah.

Deep down the village folk were people of faith and this news was enough to bring them up short. Could one of them really be the Messiah. Everyone wondered who it might be, the baker, the postman, the old lady who sold eggs from her chickens, could it be the old woman whom the children thought looked like a witch? Each one of them realised that they had no idea who it could be and so their attitude to each other changed. Worried that they might offend the Messiah they began to treat each other with respect, and to help each other once again.

Slowly peace and harmony was restored, and soon the visitors returned because now the village was a place of reverence.

Changing the way we view other people changes everything.

Story – Sieving words with care

One day a young girl rushed into her grandmother's house bursting with some news to tell, but before she could speak her grandmother made her sit down. Then holding her hand out in a halting gesture she asked the girl to think before she said anymore, had she checked what she wanted to share by passing it through the three sieves of wisdom. Her granddaughter looked puzzled, so her grandmother explained.

"Before we share a story we need to check it is true, do you know if your story is true?" Her granddaughter thought a little, squirmed a little and then admitted she had heard the story from someone else and was not sure it was true. Her grandmother praised her for her honesty and then asked her if what she wanted to share was good, even if it wasn't necessarily true. Her granddaughter again paused and thought then lowered her gaze as she mumbled that it was not good, in fact it was almost the opposite. Her grandmother smiled at her and said, "Well perhaps it is necessary?" Her granddaughter shook her head. Hugging her granddaughter, the grandmother said gently if this news is not true, good or necessary perhaps we should simply forget it and enjoy time together sharing some lemonade. Her granddaughter smiled.

Taking care with our words changes everything.

Story – Storing treasure in heaven (based on a Jewish folk story)

There was once a very important man who worked in the city. He was well rewarded and had an expensive car, and expensive house and all the gadgets you might imagine. Being very important he often invited clients out for expensive business lunches but made sure to avoid areas where beggars lived in doorways, and if he couldn't, he would distract his clients with fine tales or point to the fine architecture around.

One evening, after a very busy day, he tidied his desk and packed his briefcase ready to leave for his home where a fine meal would be waiting. As he checked his desk drawer for

his keys, he noticed a sandwich, still wrapped, at the back of his drawer. He could not remember putting it there but knew it had not been that day, so he removed it, not wanting it to go mouldy in the drawer, and put it in his pocket to dispose of later. As it happened on his way out of the building, he passed a homeless person in a doorway and almost without thinking took the sandwich from his pocket and gave it to the man with the words, 'something for your supper'.

That night, after a rich supper and ample refreshment, the man retired to bed where he had the strangest dream. He was away on a business trip and after the meetings he and the other attendees were taken out for dinner to the finest restaurant in the city. The menu was filled with the richest foods known and one by one they made their choice, ordered and then sat back to enjoy a pleasant evening. One by one their meals arrived, Pate de foie gras, venison, rack of lamb, turbot with the most amazing accompaniments. The man watched in wonder, his mouth watering, then the waitress placed his meal in front of him, on his plate was a plain sandwich, not dissimilar to the one he had removed from his desk earlier.

Astounded and annoyed he turned to the waitress and asked what she thought she was doing. Was this the way to serve an important man, was this the best the restaurant could offer? Smiling the waitress replied that the man was mistaken, he was not in a restaurant but was in heaven, and they could only serve what people had sent on ahead while they were alive. In his case, they had double-checked, but all that was stored under his name was this little sandwich!

Giving what we have in love changes everything.

Our expectations influence what we do and what we say. Jesus called his followers to live in love and that must colour our expectations. The message of Jesus is quite simply be what you are – a part of God, see others for what they are – a part of God, love one another because together you are a part of God, bear with one another because you are all growing and learning. Never stop growing and learning and always expect tomorrow to be different.