

Trinity 13 Humility

02/09/07

Jer 2. 4-13; Heb 13.1-8, 15-16; Luke 14.1, 7-14.

Come up higher

A visit to the mosque on Pakistan Day. Blended into the back but invited to the front. Hoped to keep silent but invited to speak. Hoping to escape quickly but given priority in the food queue. This is hospitality.

Jesus wants us to work at the humility shown in the story and demonstrated in his own life for this pleases God. Taken with the reading from Hebrews, we are directed to think about attitudes to power, sex and money, and for us this means doing so in an age obsessed with all three.

Sit in the lowest place. For “The place of honour” read, celebrity for its own sake. In 1968 Andy Warhole coined the phrase “famous or 15 minutes. Today this has been devalued to 15 seconds, in other words it’s meaningless, which was AW’s point in the 60’s. ‘Youtube’ and ‘facebook’ enable you to have a world wide audience for anything you care to put out.

On the other hand it is right and proper for society to recognise achievements, gifts, talents and qualities of character. The ecclesiastical procession is a fine example of this. The cross, followed by the choir, Readers, visiting clergy, representatives of other churches, visiting bishops guided by a vergers, associate vicar, incumbent designate and patron, the area dean and deanery lay chair, the archdeacon, church wardens, then the bishop and his chaplain. The procession recognises seniority which increases towards the back, on the principle that the last shall be first.

This can lead to an obsession with our place on the greasy pole, but Jesus teaches that real power lies in humility in the kingdom of God, our main concern as disciples. We are to have a sober estimation of our worth, not taking a lowly place in the quiet hope that someone will tap us on the shoulder, but because it genuinely should not worry us. If we are comparing ourselves with other and scoring points to show how wonderful we are, we’ve lost the plot.

Do you see what pleases God? Love each other as brothers and sisters, entertain strangers, remember those in prison and those who are ill treated. At the heart of true humility must be love, otherwise we are a sounding gong

Honour marriage. How can we please God in an age obsessed with sexuality? The writer to the Hebrews is in no doubt that we should keep this aspect of our lives in proportion. In the past, social convention, public morality, parental control, social embarrassment, lack of opportunity and predictable outcomes and the teaching of the church ensured that restraint and responsibility were valued, along with a fair amount of repression and hypocrisy.

The post war revolution in attitudes has seen increasing liberalisation and the lifting of all restraint to a point where there are very few limits. The consistent Christian approach in any generation will always be the honouring of marriage, respect for promises made and support in keeping them. Compassion and support will always be available when relationships break down.

In these last weeks there has been wide debate about how to control the rise of gang culture in certain parts of our country. The roles and responsibilities of parents are under the spotlight and in particular those of fathers in providing role models for their children. If children do not find love,

affirmation, support and a code for life in their home they will look for that security somewhere else. Marriage should be honoured and kept pure in an age that makes adultery and sexual immorality easy, but which God abhors.

At a James Taylor concert, someone shouted out “I love you James.” He replied “I love you too. I think it helps that we don’t know each other though.” Ultimately what displeases God is a failure of that quality of self giving love and the lack of humility which puts ourselves first, in the place of honour, and ignores the needs of those closest to us. Robust, self giving love is what Jesus shows us. That is the key.

Love of money. “Money is the religion of a materialist society.” Said Malcolm Muggeridge in the 70’s. We are all consumers now. Whatever we have, we want more. The fruit of the love of money, is envy, bitterness, dis-ease, discontent, driven-ness, greed the list goes on. A rich entrepreneur on Desert Island Discs recently said “I am not a nice person. If I see something I want and you get in my way, you’ll see what I mean Kirsty.” He has a bad taste in music too I might add.

There is nothing wrong with enterprise and doing good business. Like sex and power, money is elemental. Using it well, making it work for us is what we are called to do with it, but to keep our lives free from the love of it. Getting value for money, tracking down a bargain is a great gift but if that becomes an obsession, then it will bring discontent because there is always a better bargain. “On his deathbed, my grandfather sold me this watch.” Woody Allen.

Be Content with what you have. This is a real problem with built in obsolescence and technical progress. But it is worth working for. Contentment that is not smugness (I’m OK) and is not derived from what we possess. “Never will I

leave you, nor forsake you The Lord is my helper. That is where our true peace lies, in our relationship with God. It’s the key to humility and restraint in all aspects of life, in our management of power, our relationships and our resources.

50 years of St Mary’s has not all been about spectacular change, but faithful presence, making a difference, because at the heart, we belong to a community of people whose hearts have been touched by God. Amen.