

Sunday 30th July 2017 – Proper 12 - T 7

‘All things work together for good’

In the collect set for last Sunday we prayed, that ‘God who has prepared for those who love him, such good things as pass our understanding, will pour into our hearts such love towards him, that we will obtain His promises which will exceed all that we can desire, provided that we love him in all things and above all things’. In the collect set for today, which we have now prayed together, we have asked that he will ‘**graft**’ his name into our hearts, so that it will become a permanent part of our life, so that as we grow in faith, we will more readily have the confidence to proclaim the name of ‘**Jesus**’, and so share his promises with others.

In today's reading from St. Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we are encouraged by Paul to allow the Spirit of God to work in us through our prayers, so that our lives will conform more to that which will be reflected through our lives, and be in the image and teaching of Jesus Christ, and not our own.

In the last two Sundays' Gospel readings, we have also heard Jesus say quite emphatically – 'Let anyone with ears listen!'

Although not present here in St. Andrew's, last Sunday, I have since read Charleen's sermon, and would have also responded similarly to last Sunday's readings as reflected in her sermon.

For it is as we continue in the faith of Jesus Christ today, in a world that regularly displays the evilness of humankind, that we also need to be able to discern the good from the evil, and

its causes. That links us back directly to last Sunday's Gospel of the wheat and the weeds. There are of course many times when we do not know what to pray for, as Paul speaks of in the New Testament reading. There are many dilemmas to be faced where the right course of action or outcome is not always clear. It is not always a black and white situation.

The situation regarding baby Charlie Gard, which has made headline news over these past weeks is a case in point, causing much pain not only to Charlie's parents, but also to others who hold a different view. I guess none of us would wish to have to make a judgement on such an issue. None of us, myself included, would want to be seen to be acting as 'God' in that or any similar situations. Although, not what Charlie's parents initially wanted or their

supporters, they have now finally made the decision to let Charlie go.

Charlie has now been released from life here on earth to enter heaven. As Jesus said in all three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark & Luke's (Matthews 19.14) albeit in another context – 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs'. That is Jesus promise to Charlie, to his parents, and others supporting them, and ourselves included. May Charlie now rest in eternal peace and his parents find that peace which passes all human understanding.

It is however always in the assurance of our faith, that God, who knows best and who continues to love us in all the tribulations of life, and who will always be there for us, that

we are convinced as Christians, that there is nothing that can separate us, Charlie's parents or others from his love, except our own actions as St. Paul states in the New Testament reading today. 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Or Lord'.

There is a variable collection of parables, which make up our Gospel reading today. We have the mustard seed being compared with the greatest tree. There is the small amount of yeast and the large loaf which it produces, when added to the flour. There is the one pearl which is worth more than all the other goods in the merchant's possession.

And the final picture is of the net, a picture of the judgement spoken of by Charleen last Sunday, when on the final day there will be an out-sorting, and a separation of the good from

the evil. There is no doubt in my mind as spoken of by Charleen, that there will be a judgment at the end time, but that it will be God's judgement that will prevail. The first two parables refer to growth, while the second two parables reflect the teaching of Jesus and our response to it. Stephen Croft, The Bishop of Sheffield, believes that taken together, these two parables describe the mystery, that some people 'stumble' on the kingdom almost by accident when they are looking for something else. Some will respond to Jesus teaching and seek ways to 'graft' it into their own lives, making it part of their lives, while others will choose to ignore it.

The dragnet thrown into the sea gathers all up together, and concludes with the acceptance of those who have responded positively, while

those who have chosen to ignore the message are ‘rejected’, or as I prefer to believe, reject themselves from the Kingdom of God. For surely we have all been given that choice – as famously portrayed in Holman Hunt’s picture of Jesus as the ‘Light of the World’ captioned by those familiar words - ***‘Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with them, and they with me.’ (Rev 3 v 20)*** - for the choice is ours.

Whatever our interpretation may be of the place of the parables in the teachings of Jesus, there can be no doubt that they are there for us to reflect upon and respond to in our own lives. For we are all called to prepare ourselves to be welcomed into God’s Kingdom, and by heeding Jesus’ words, we can be assured that

by following him and his teachings, salvation is available to each one of us now, as it will be in the future. But let us not leave it too late!

While we rejoice in our belief in a God who is loving, and from whom nothing in this life can separate us, we are also charged with reminding ourselves, and in the process warning others, that our God has set out what his expectations for each one of us is through Jesus' teachings. For as Christians, each one of us has been called by God, chosen to serve his purposes in the situation in which we find ourselves and Paul reminds us in our NT reading, that 'all things work together for good for those who love God'.

Working together, even in this time of 'Vacancy', we can and must as part of our Christian Vocation, continue to seek to draw

others into fellowship with ourselves and so help to extend God's Kingdom here on earth. So that in accordance with our Dioceses vision we might support Bishop's Andrew's vision of *'Transforming Church – Transforming Lives.* The late Eddie Askew wrote many books with reflections and poetry on the Christian faith, which are sold to raise funds for the Leprosy Mission for whom he worked for many years. In one book, he reflects upon the Masai people of East Africa and their language. The words 'to believe' - in Masai means to 'agree with'. A Masai elder illustrated this with reference to a hunter shooting an animal at a distance – only the hunter's eyes and fingers were involved in taking part in the act. The Elder went on to say, for a man really to believe, is however, rather like a lion going after his prey.

All parts of the lion's body are involved, and at the end the lion's whole body envelops the prey making it as it were, part of its own body. This is the way the lion kills. This is also the way a person believes and this is what faith is, said the Masai elder in their culture. The elder went on to say that they had been taught that they must search for God, but in their culture God, has searched for them. For in the end it is not the Masai who are the lion, but God who is the lion. The lion image, like the lion itself is both beautiful and dangerous. It pictures God's total involvement in seeking us, taking us to himself and it also tells us that faith, is God's gift to us, and that our response can't be lukewarm agreement from afar, but deep commitment. The initiative is God's, but we

are not his prey, we are his people and his gift to each one of us is – life, resurrection life.

I close with part of one of Eddie’s poems liked to these thoughts - (‘Many voices – one voice’ P60.)

‘Your love scares me, too. because its two-way. You love me Lord, that’s fine. I can go for that. Comforting, like cool tree-shade on the veldt. But your love draws me close. Closer asks for a response. Commitment. deep down. That’s harder to cope with. Sometimes, forgive me, loneliness is easier to bear than your arms around me. I can hide from myself in platitudes, but your love burns them away, like sun on morning mist, soon gone. And in your presence, I see my fear, and know my lack of faith. Lord God, Lion of Judah, help me to understand that your strength is gentle, your compulsion courteous.’

So, let us take heart from Paul's words to us today
that –**Nothing will be able to separate us from the
love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**'. *AMEN*