

Trinity 12
14th August 2016
Jesus – The Cause of Division
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The text of the gospel which we have just heard sounds somewhat controversial to say the least. Jesus, who we regard as the bringer of peace and goodwill, is disputing this saying that his is a message of division and not healing. Furthermore today is one when we welcome a young child into the great family of the church through Baptism. Surely this cannot be appropriate material for such an occasion, can it?

However when we look more closely into the passage, together with that from the letter to the Hebrews, we may see things differently. The passage tells us that life is not always a bed of roses. There are times when it is hard to bear as one 'problem' after another seems to be heaped upon us. In such times it is very easy to give in, to throw in the towel, and turn our back on God feeling that he has let us down at the very times when we need him most. The various examples cited in the passage are of people from a variety of backgrounds who were saved from destruction of one sort or another by their faith. Through faith in God, anything can be achieved; it is a matter of trust which, in time, grows into faith. It is an ongoing process, something we grow into.

In the gospel passage Jesus is making the point that to follow him requires commitment, and that comes at a cost. That commitment can bring conflict within families when some members cannot accept what others do or say. Differences can and do develop within families. Unfortunately stubbornness results in the differences becoming even more deep-rooted often resulting in unnecessary estrangement for long periods. He goes on to cite the example of people who worked on the land who, from their experiences of working outdoors, could accurately predict the weather based on their interpretation of the current climatic conditions. Useful though that may be, in so devoting their attention to such matters they more often than not, remained oblivious to everything else that was going on around them!

Jesus' ministry did upset the authorities, and caused trouble not only for himself but for his followers also. This was something they could not comprehend. 'Couldn't see the wood for the trees' it might be said. Immediately following on from the extract there is the example of persons in dispute who result to legal processes to settle their differences. In such circumstances the only guaranteed winners are the legal advisers! They get their fees regardless of the outcome! Far better that the parties involved sit at a table and work to agree a settlement. From my experiences of such matters, the first was to come to a common understanding of what has developed, and identify the point at which they came to disagree. With the facts established, it is then, and only then, that the process of mediation can begin and, with an element of goodwill on both sides, a settlement could then be possible.

Living in today's rapidly changing world does bring its fair share of challenges. It is also fair to say that it also offers opportunities which would have been unheard of even twenty years ago. I confess to an almost total lack of understanding of smart phones, mine being very much of the 'dim' variety. I manage quite well with its limited facilities. I do not feel marginalised just because it doesn't take photographs or provide 24/7 access to the internet. Or am I guilty of the same blinkered thinking of those agricultural workers referred to earlier, cossetted in my own little world and out of touch with reality? My teenage granddaughters think so I am sure.

I *am* concerned at the seemingly endless reports of random knife attacks and shootings of innocent members of the public in several European countries including the UK. There are economic uncertainties following the vote to leave the EU, although the pre-election predictions of doom and gloom do not seem to have materialised ---yet. But then, there has always been unrest of some sort or other.

For those of us old enough to remember the second world war, it was a question of accepting the situation as it was, taking such precautions for ones own safety as one could and making the best of what we still had, rather than dwelling on what we couldn't have, or no longer had. It was a fact that church attendances increased significantly during the period of hostilities. Whether this was out of desperation, or deep down at times of trial belief in God finally surfaced is difficult to judge. Most of us will have faced anxiety in our lives at some stage. When the 'chips are down' to have faith in God to help us through is a wonderful gift. Illness of someone close to us, unexpected redundancy, relational tensions with peers or adolescent children are just some of the difficulties many of us have to face at some time or other. That wonderful hymn of encouragement comes to mind at such times. More popular in Free churches than in Anglican ones, I feel, it contains those encouraging words 'What a friend we have in Jesus, and the repeated invitation to take our problems and concerns to the Lord in prayer. It is contained in our current hymn book as number 727; do read it through when you have a moment. It is truly amazing what we can achieve if we have faith in God.

Whether it is tending to the needs of someone who is ill, comforting them over the loss of employment and, just as importantly, sitting down with them to work on the practicalities of managing the financial implication that it brings. This coming week the 'A' level examination results will be known. They will bring joy for some and angst for others. Great patience and understanding from parents, grandparents and friends will be necessary. In each case the engagement needs to be on a non-judgmental level. But, of course, amongst the trials of life there is joy; the loved one who recovers from their illness, alternative employment is sometimes attained, and yes, young people do find success and fulfilment in their lives.

There is a saying that 'sometimes we have to be cruel to be kind'. That does not mean that we can resort to physical violence to get our point across. Nevertheless there are occasions when things have to be said which are for the greater good, even if it is not what the person or persons want to hear. When faced with such a dilemma think of that hymn again and 'take it to the Lord in prayer'

Now it will not have escaped your attention that we have with us this morning, the family and friends of the Willis family who are here to share in and otherwise witness the baptism of Lucy. That part of our time together in which sponsors and godparents make promises on her behalf will begin immediately after I have finished speaking (which will be very soon you will be pleased to hear). They will acknowledge publically their responsibility and commitment to care for and nurture Lucy in the Christian faith. That is some responsibility and will be acknowledging that they cannot achieve that alone. Nevertheless they assume those responsibilities **'With the help of God'** .We, as members of the congegation of this church will be supporting them with our prayers not just today but in the future also. If there is one thing we would like the family to take away this morning is that at times, the road ahead will be tough, but you are not alone, and that with faith in God, the difficulties and challenges (let's not call them problems) can be addressed and overcome. The welcome which will be expressed to them later in the service is not just for today, it is for everyday. May that be a comfort to us all.