

Sermon for Fourth after Easter, 2021

Isaiah 26:1-4. 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11. Psalm 36:5-10.
John 21:1-14.

The Collect: Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: grant that thy people may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise, that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Isaiah 26:3 ‘Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.’

There has been a lot of muck-raking this week in Parliament; capitalised upon by the media. One thrives on the mistakes of the other. Neither really wants the raking to come to a tidy end; unlike in a Japanese gravel garden where every stroke is finished to perfection, and the gardener completes the task with satisfaction. No, calling the Prime Minister to account is presented as good for the country as it shows us who might be pulling his strings. There’s truth in that. But, it also pays the bills of the Opposition and journalists. Tell-tales were not popular at school were they? How different things would be if Boris had just said last week that he did indeed ask someone else to pay for his refurbished flat, but realised that it wouldn’t look good, and that he ought to pay for the extravagance himself? Would he have been forgiven and told not to do it again? Not likely! The Test Card would need to be brought out of storage if there was no News to excite TV viewers. The world is preoccupied by dissension and misery. Sometimes Churches are too. One source of ‘joy’ is East-Enders, and some younger people get their happiness from Net-Flix and other screens where video-gamers happily murder their opponents’ avatars online. Life is hardly a picture of perfect peace is it?

The Collect tells us: ‘the unruly wills and affections of sinful men’ can only be put in order by Almighty God. But, the majority of people are afflicted by the inbuilt assumption that we ourselves can sort things out, and can resolve uncertainty to our own satisfaction. You might call that self-confidence, a measured amount of which is necessary in society. The opposite trait would be a lack of self-confidence, leading to inertia and unintentional dependence on others to make a decision for you. We have been given the gift of reasoning by God, and it needs taking out for a walk now and then! Confusion comes when people ‘stand for nothing, and fall for everything.’

I’m glad to say that the reward for exercising ‘ruly’ wills and affection can be shalom-shalom - perfect peace. But there are preconditions. First, we acknowledge that the source of peace is God Himself. Do we really, realistically, think that perfect peace can be created by ourself? The idea is appealing, but ludicrous. It’s origin is the snake in the Garden of

Eden: ‘Yes, Eve, you can be like God if you swallow that apple!’ The ruler of ‘ruly’ and unruly minds ultimately has to be God Himself.

Secondly, we have ‘to love the thing which God commandest’. In short, we must be obedient to Him (which neither Eve nor Adam, nor the Snake were). Obedience wasn’t a popular idea in Eden, and it’s not caught on fully yet. There are as many personal rebellions as there are people on Earth. You might remember that in Luke 5:4 Jesus, calling his first disciples, told Peter to cast the nets on the right side of the ship, and Peter protested that they had been fishing all night and caught nothing. He verged on disobedience by personal disposition. Here, in today’s Gospel of John (21:5) Jesus tells them to ‘cast the net on the right side of the boat’. The difference between Luke and John’s gospel is that in the latter occurs after the resurrection and Peter doesn’t argue! That’s out of character for him. Like Peter, our temperament may be argumentative. So, we have to submit our natural tendencies to God in order to hear and obey His commands.

Thirdly, we haven’t just to obey His commands, but to love them. God’s commands, however hard or impossible this may seem, stem from His love for us. I remember as a child having a severe infection in the leg, and needing antibiotic injections for it. They were intramuscular, and hurt like hell, and I resisted the doctor with all my childish might. As adults, and specifically as Christian adults who have asked God to rule in our hearts and minds, we have to move from a lack-loving tendency towards self-regulating to being enjoyers and lovers of obedience to God. Remember the hymn, breathe on me breath of God? It says that we would love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do; with the help of the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we must fix our minds and hearts where true joys are to be found. Isaiah puts it thus in 26:3 ‘Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.’ In other words, we make sure that we are determined to apply our rational sense, and true Christian knowledge to what God wants. This is an act of the will. We trust God more than we trust ourselves. We stop arguing with Him over what the best solution to a problem might be. We stop arguing with ourselves. We stop arguing, by habit, with other people. And, when we do that, we find a great and wonderful peace. It is the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.