

Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity 2020.

Isaiah 49:1-6. 2 Corinthians 5:14-20. Psalm 14. :1-6
John 17:18-26.

The Collect for the eleventh after Trinity: Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ sent forth his apostles to make disciples of all nations; help us to proclaim the Gospel of thy love that all who hear it may be reconciled to thee; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:14 ‘The love of Christ *controls* us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died.’

Don’t you wish that were true? Yet, we do not have to look very far to see that we don’t practice what St Paul preaches. Who does? Not even the Saints did. They were a rum bunch too; though the exception, we believe, is the Blessed Mother Mary. Whatever the definition of the word ‘controls’, she voluntarily pledged her life to doing the will of God. It must therefore be possible for an human to allow the love of Christ to control us.

Well, if not ‘controls’, what about ‘constrains’, or ‘rules’, or ‘moves’, or ‘compels’, or ‘has an hold on us’? You can have some fun increasing your Scrabble potential by checking out the different definitions of all these things. For example, ‘constrains’ is defined in terms of irresistible force, limits, securing, compressing, binding etc. Most of us are out of control, and unconstrained, at least in some aspects of life.

This week we had some footage of the extreme folly of some young men diving into fierce waves crashing against the harbour wall at Saundersfoot. One needed a member of the public to throw a lifebelt out to save him. Apparently, his response was an emphatic ‘Yeah!’ His behaviour, and that of a youngster was completely unconstrained. His love of life put him in (and others) in mortal danger. We also saw the sentencing of the brother of the Manchester Arena bombing this week. He got fifty-five years in prison. They both wanted to ‘control’ life on behalf of a warped ideology about Allah. Can it be said that they did this for the ‘love of Allah’? Paradoxically, they did it because their creed is one of ‘submission’ to Allah. Then there are appeals being launched by opposing parties to either increase or decrease the sentence of manslaughter on three young men whose reckless actions led to the hideous death of a police constable. None of the prisoners have shown the slightest remorse; rather they smiled triumphantly to the cameras so that

their friends could see they were, in effect, constrained only by the admiration of similar lawbreakers.

So, back to our question: ‘don’t we wish it were true’ (that the love of Christ controls us)? Does that mean *our* love for Christ, or *His* love for us? The text only becomes clearer when seen in the light of Paul’s theology. On the one hand, Christ’s voluntary death on our behalf clearly demonstrates *His* love for us (remember Romans 5:8 ‘whilst we were yet sinners Christ demonstrated his love for us by dying for us’). On the other hand, *we* love Christ to the extent that we do our best to live a faithful life so that, at the last, our souls will not experience death beyond that of our earthly body.

The relationship between Christ and the Christian should be one of mutual love. The Christian dies to self, and is enwrapped in the Redeemers’ love. Sins are forgiven, forgotten and covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness (Isaiah 61:10, ‘with a robe of righteousness he covered me.’). Another verse should have been added to our lectionary portion today: 2 Cor 14:21 ‘For our sake he made him to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’

If this all seems complicated, I’m sorry! The ‘simple’ and wonderful fact is that our response to Christ’s death for us, should be one that allows our grateful love to grow and grow. We should earnestly desire to be controlled and constrained so that our earthly tendencies do not dominate our lives. Rather, we should *want* to volunteer to serve Him, because He loved us so much and so infinitely. Then we start to get a glimpse of true freedom, wrapped in the loving arms of our Saviour.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost be glory now and forever. Amen.