

The 12th Sunday after Trinity. 30 August 2020
Called to be Authentic

Introduction

O Lord, open our lips

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. **Amen.**

The Collect for this Sunday:

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than either we desire or deserve: pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

The Bible readings for this Sunday are: Romans 12:9-18 and Luke 7:43-45

Romans 12:9-18

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[c] Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"^[d] says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."^[e]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Luke 6:43-45

A Tree and Its Fruit

⁴³ 'No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

The Sermon. 'Called to be Authentic' by Revd David Treharne, Vicar.

In our first reading today, Paul is telling us to live and love in a way that is pure and genuine and authentic and sincere. "Love must be genuine... or sincere" etc... (Rom 12:9).

The Greek word translated “sincere” in the NIV is the word Anupokritos (an-oo-pok'-ree-tos). The last part of the word is our word hypocrite. The prefix “an” means “without”. So the Greek word actually means, “without hypocrisy”. In classical Greek the word “hypocrite” meant someone who wore a mask in a play. So in other words Paul says the true believer should live and love without a mask... a very relevant image for us today! This isn't a prophecy giving us a get out clause from Covid measures, but an exhortation that the Christian life of love should be real and not one of pretence. It shouldn't be hypocritical. It should be sincere, genuine, the real deal... authentic!

You may have read that Jesus was not a fan of hypocrisy. Indeed in looking for a Gospel reading today there are plenty of passages to choose from that denounce outward religious show and exhort sincere and genuine faith. Jesus' lambasting of the religious leaders time and again is quite astonishing and very sobering as one called to be a leader! Just take a look at Matthew Chapter 23!

And Jesus isn't the only one who takes a dislike to hypocritical life and faith. It's a big issue for people today when it comes to church life, that as Christians our words don't match up to our deeds. On the other hand, people notice and respond attentively to those who sincerely and authentically live out their faith. Authenticity for millennials (people in their 20's and 30's) is meant to be particularly important.

Authenticity can be said to be the relationship between what we are inwardly and how we act and appear outwardly. Authenticity is when these two are in agreement. When the inward and outward don't agree we enter the realm of hypocrisy, insincerity, falseness and feigning.

Of course all of us, at one time or another, enter the territory of trying to appear differently to others than what we really are inside. That's why many of us related so well to that comedy years ago called 'keeping up appearances.' We try to appear confident when we're afraid, poised when we are dazed and uncertain, peaceful when we're anxious, happy when we are fuming, interested when we are bored, healthy when we are sick, intelligent when we haven't got a clue, concerned when we are apathetic, devout when we are not in a great place spiritually!

Although we do this the fact is deep down we don't like doing it. There isn't really a sense of peace and fulfillment when we have successfully deluded people about who we really are or what we really feel or think.

Unless of course one is utterly enslaved to self-deception, we all long for integrity between the inner and outer person. Indeed I think that despite our pretence there is a deep (and I believe God-given) longing to be authentic, to be seen for who we are and not to be hypocrites. It is stressful and exhausting when our energies are devoted to appearing rather than being. Deep down we all know the calling to be authentic.

Come down O Love Divine

One of the joys of the end of lockdown has been the resumption of weddings, and I've already had the privilege of doing 4 of them recently. I think that pretty much every couple I've ever dealt with has expressed how they want their marriage relationship to be marked by authentic love. And that desire of course is certainly not limited to marriage. I would have thought that most/all of us want genuine authentic love and friendship.

Authentic real love is open, transparent, sincere and genuine.

False love is closed, wears masks (metaphorically speaking), pretends, keeps a record of wrongs, tries to control and manipulate the other, needs to be 'right' at all costs (want to butcher a relationship... just insist on being right all the time) and false love looks merely to satisfy the self, which can dent trust and intimacy.

True love can handle weakness and failure, sickness and poverty, wrinkly skin, questionably fashion sense, smelly socks and the most curious habits! True love may not necessarily be successful in the eyes of the world but it never fails and never ends.

False love is temporary and fades away. True authentic love is faithful, utterly fulfilling and eternal.

GOD of course is love... true holy and perfect love, despite all that religious folks might otherwise convey at times. And the love we see modeled in the person of Jesus Christ is sincere, genuine and authentic, particularly in the crib and on the cross where the authentic love of God is revealed in the utmost vulnerability. ... no pretence there!

And here is a vital point. It is through God in Christ that our longing for authenticity is satisfied. He not only gives the freedom to be outwardly what we are inwardly, but he also, and more importantly, enables us to be inwardly who we were designed to be. Jesus enables us to remove the mask of pretence that we put up to the world. In turning to him in humility and brokenness and trusting him as Saviour and Lord we can become inwardly and outwardly what God created us to be.

There is tremendous freedom, joy and fulfillment when we can be our true selves; where in vulnerability the brokenness of that 'old self' still hangs about, our imperfections are exposed but also God's grace and goodness is shown and the work of newness of life he is doing in us is revealed to others.

SO how might we be authentic in our lives? Here's a somewhat unsophisticated, though not easy, 3 step start...

1. Be Vulnerable.

Don't be afraid of being appropriately vulnerable. The Bible encourages us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16) and acknowledge the ways in which we are still broken. Honesty with ourselves, God and others is the first part of conversation... and that word awareness. Awareness of what is going on inwardly and outwardly and any self deception and incongruence. Prayerfulness before God and non judgemental companionship and fellowship are really important.

2. Embrace the Cross.

With the awareness of your vulnerability and your brokenness walk with Jesus to the Cross and stay there a while!

This is a hard and uncomfortable and painful place to go because this is where God can be allowed to do his thing. Crucifying the old self in and with Christ we can then know his power to save and redeem!

3. Live in and for Christ by the Spirit.

After you have been vulnerable and have stayed at the cross, we allow Jesus to redefine us, renew us, reshape us. We let go of what has been and surrender what is burdensome and unholy and embrace the new life in Christ through the Spirit of God filling our hearts and lives and make us more and more the people he created us to be.

This is just a suggested path of how to be authentic. It's a process that can't be rushed, it can't be forced, and it can't be hypocritical!

When God does an authentic work in us and we begin to be people who live and love genuinely and sincerely with less and less hypocrisy, what happens?

1. We might start to display the Beatitudes that Jesus described in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-16).
2. We might think with a transformed mind and express and live out genuine love (Romans 12). Love might start to overflow in actions (1 Corinthians 13)
3. And other fruits of the Spirit may follow (Galatians 5:22-26).
4. Our attitude will become more Christlike with the virtue of humility appearing, and we'll look out for others' interests and shine like stars (Philippians 2:1-18)

5. Prayerfulness without ceasing & thankfulness in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
6. Our self control our speech will change (James 3:1-11 & 13).
7. In living the authentic Christian life we will bring glory to God!

Still

Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Conclusion

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.