

Trinity 16. 27 September 2020.
Called to be in Union with Christ

The Collect for this Sunday:

Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us: open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Post Communion prayer for this Sunday is:

Almighty God, you have taught us through your Son that love is the fulfilling of the law: grant that we may love you with our whole heart and our neighbours as ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Revelation 3:14-22

¹⁴ 'And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation: ¹⁵ 'I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. ¹⁹ I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. ²⁰ **Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.** ²¹ To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'

John 17:20-23

²⁰ 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. **As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us**, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ **I in them and you in me**, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Sermon

Part 1

These last few months we have been exploring who God has called us to be as individuals and as a community of faith.

Called be the church gathered & scattered. Called to be witnesses.

Called to be worshipful, exultant, free, alive, transformed, authentic, mature, faithful

And today we are led to the ultimate calling in our humanity... in our existence... to be in union with God in and through Christ! And the words of Jesus in the Gospel today is one of many passages of Scripture that draws this out. **As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.** Jesus has an awesome closeness and intimate personal relationship with his Father which we are invited into. A relationship of union.

From the beginning of all creation this was God's desire and purpose; for us to be in perfect relationship and union with him. Our salvation story is about how we severed that union through our own wilful disobedience, but God in his great love and mercy sent his Son in our world, and through the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to reunite us to be in union with him. God is a death destroying, sin busting, life giving God who went to hell and back for us to be alive, not half dead lukewarm souls, but human 'beings' burning with the fire of God's love.

Images such as the vine and branches in John Chapter 15 express the importance of being connected to the life of God and his life and love pulsating through his creation will produce a fruitfulness in one's character, lifestyle, actions and behaviour.

'Being' with God is fundamental to this life in God. Being real and being honest with ourselves and with God. Being open and being receptive to God. But being can be hard, and throughout history there have always been tensions with being and doing, contemplation and action, faith and works.

Before lockdown Padre Luiz from 1 Rifles in Beachley in his preach reminded us that we are human beings NOT human doings. We can become so fixated with what we *'do'* day by day that what we do starts to define who we are, and sadly we can think that it is our works and what we do, rather than who we are, that determines our value to God and brings the union with Christ. God loves you and me for who we are not what we do.

Whilst the Scriptures are also full of things God calls us actually to do... these offerings of action... are to flow from being.

I was reading the other day in a fantastic reflection from Brother Lucas of the Society of St John the Evangelist, "We are not our work. Our work may be good, even sacred, but who we are is far more important, far better, far more sacred. We are bearers of the image of God. **This is true in all things, forever.** No particular work, no matter how holy or heroic, can of its own accord give us our lives."

Whilst God may call us to DO all kinds of things, the ultimate purpose and calling upon our lives is to be in union with God through Christ by the power of his Spirit... to be connected to the source of all life and love. Everything else follows from there. God desires our hearts and our communion with him, and whilst he desires that we engage in significant works of love, compassion and justice these are not the goal of our existence, although they may be the outworking of it.

Brother Lucas also writes,

"There is a huge variety of specific acts, specific works, that God calls us to do, and from the example of the Genesis narrative of Adam, being placed in the Garden to tend to it, we see that humans are called to work. But we are not created for the purpose of work. We are not, fundamentally, doers of things, means to some end. God has made us out of love for us, not because some cosmic chores needed to be done."

This is very hard for some of us who want to intervene, who want to serve, who can't sit still, who have to do things to feel good. Lockdown was hard for so many of us because we couldn't 'do' things, and many of us felt a real helplessness. However, when we find our driven selves despairing over the lack of doing and feel worthless and facing uneasiness and false guilt because of the lack of doing, that's when we should realise our need to reidentify ourselves in God not in our good works however good they may be, that's when we can begin to identify ourselves, and God, and others, as means to an end, as tools of accomplishment, as things. I want to do good things, but idolatry of doing good is just as much a sin as any other idolatry.

As Archbishop Justin said amid the media stir over his parentage, "I am who I am because I am in Jesus Christ."

How much are you defined by what you do; defined by your role, your job, your hobbies, your actions rather than your relationship with the living God?

Does the love and mercy of God define who you are? Does being a child of God define who you are? Does being united to God in love and in life form the basis for your life? Is union with God something you desire?

PART 2

Mother Teresa is someone who is often cited as being one of the most active Christians the world has known in modern times as she worked with the poor and destitute in the slums of Calcutta. And it would seem that she was not driven to serve those in need primarily from a place of 'I must do, do, do.' She was driven to serve from a place of prayer; from a place of being connected and engaged to the heart of God; from being in union with Christ.

As I was driving to Gloucester Cathedral last Sunday for the ordination I was listening to Radio 4 and heard again the story of the famous interview Mother Teresa gave with CBS' Dan Rather. He asked Mother Teresa, "who do you pray to?" "God", she replied. "And what do you say to him when you pray?" "I listen" she said. "And what does God say?" Mother Teresa replied, "he listens too!"

I love this story for 2 particular reasons amongst many. Firstly, it's a great reminder of where Mother Teresa and so many other godly characters have got their inspiration for action from. From being in prayerful union with the living

God; from tapping into the life source of the Universe; prayerfully plunging down into the depths of love divine and being immersed in the Spirit of God... and from that place of being with God... knowing the things to do for God.

Secondly, I love the simplicity and the freedom of what she says. "I listen to God and God listens to me." This is profound and freeing. God knows us intimately. There is nothing he does not know about us. I don't need to pretend, be on show, or dream up words and prayers to impress God, or special formulas that will suddenly bring about his presence. An intimate spiritual union with the Lord is deeper than that... beyond words... a sense of knowing and being known deep in our soul. We don't need to do anything. I can just be. Be with him and him with me. Jesus might say abiding or dwelling.

So how can we become more united to the living God?

Stop, breath, be honest before God. Confess... turn from sin and turn to God.

Believe, trust, open up, invite... and stay, dwell, abide

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

Open yourself to his presence, and invite him in, draw near to him. "*Lord inhabit this house, this soul, this body with your presence. Come to me... you're welcome to reside*".

As we do this what is not compatible with love and light within us can begin to react with a certain degree of horror! Our sinful nature, our crooked habits, our dark desires may cause our souls to draw back, to turn away and block out the holy love of God. We then have a choice of the will as to whether we want to stay being in the Lord's light and allow his love to enter every room of our interior house, or not.

As George Herbert famously wrote, "Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back." No! Don't draw back! God is not looking to destroy us, he loves you and me and is looking to be with us so we can be the best we can be! Let the souls dare to draw near to holy love! The more we do this the more united we will become to God.

John's gospel, Ch 14:23 Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

This union with our maker, being at home with God, gives us life in all its fullness in this life, and also life for all eternity.