

Synod Eucharist
Friday 5 October 2018
St George's Cathedral

Romans 12:1-21

Psalm 119

Matthew 22:34-40

Earlier this year as I was wondering out loud to the Diocesan Secretary what picture I might bring in to put on the wall of my office he said, 'I have the Te Deum and the Thirty-Nine Articles on my wall'. I think I blinked. It was a bit of banter which has continued to be enjoyed and unpacked as the months have gone by.

I have enjoyed this unpacking – yes, in the office conversations about God and believing and the way God's love has touched us, but also in the day to day of Diocesan life, living into and recognising how we live from the heart of God's gospel. The ways in which as Anglicans we live and proclaim God's love and follow Jesus. Lively conversations about scripture, tradition and reason, which one we give more weight and when, as we learn more and more how to live and proclaim God's gospel of salvation. Sometimes they are conversations in which others help tease out some scriptural thread, or a question of Anglican life.

When Keith told me about what is on the wall in his office, I replied, 'I am putting the Two Great Commandments on my wall!'

These conversations are probably like the ones that you have with colleagues, friends and fellow travellers. Conversations that help us pin down what we believe and why; help us pin down how our hearts and minds are being transformed into something different in the grace of God.

These are conversations that many of us invite, relish, seek out. They are the conversations which can lead to conversion and the realisation that we are more and more being drawn away from old pathways, old patterns and tired habits. In the generosity of the Creator we too are being re-made.

Last week at a conference regarding Women in Prison one of the speakers turned out to be someone I had met a few times before. One of them when she was confirmed. She spent 18 years in Bandyup and is currently a post graduate student at UWA. She works with disadvantaged women. She spoke in a session titled 'The inside story: what happens to women across a prison lifespan'.

My head came up when she said, 'If there's anyone out there from Justice let me tell you, whatever else you do - don't ever cut the funding you give for chaplaincy'. She went on, 'When the funds for an education programme get cut, or the funds for a group designed to help you get back on your feet are stopped, or your baby is taken away, or someone outside dies, the chaplain is there. And, they are there for the staff as well as the inmates. We don't like them because they're pushovers, they're not. They work within the system, with the rules, but they're there. And they care'.

I know I blinked – actually, I blinked back a tear because I know those chaplains.

The heart of the gospel which is transforming invites us to receive the power of it in heart and mind and put our faith into action by all we do and say and are as beloved believers.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus talked constantly of God's love as he travelled up and down the country with his friends. Asked by group of Pharisees, themselves part of a bigger group questioning him about the tax money marked with the emperor's face, and then marriage, family, belonging and heaven, Jesus responded by quoting back a piece of scripture well known to everyone. Not only known but quite possibly recited almost daily by the pious.

'Which commandment in the law is the greatest?' they asked. Jesus' answer was not a single commandment, but two commands. One command focused inward and upward, the other focused outward.

The first, the Shema, cites Deuteronomy 6:4, what Rabbi Jonathon Sacks describes as 'those words which are the supreme testimony to Jewish faith'. The Shema - 'Hear O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might'. Matthew's quote of Jesus' version substitutes 'mind' ('dianoia') dee-an-o-ya for 'might' ('dynamis'), du-na-mis which seems to emphasize the individual's internal conviction of this love.

Heart, soul, mind - all that makes the individual person unique - must be committed to loving God.

But Jesus takes all this one step further, telling his questioners that this commandment by itself cannot be the greatest. If a genuine love of God is made manifest in the life of the one who is faithful, it must reach beyond the individual.

And so, he speaks another Torah scripture, Leviticus 19:18, 'love your neighbour as yourself'.

This is how one commentator describes this love:

By expanding the Shema's "love the Lord your God," Jesus took a principle and made it personal. He moved humanity from a reasoned commitment to a personal relationship. In everything he did, in everything he said, in every action he took, in every life he saved, Jesus showed men and women, all children of God, not how to be more holy, but how to be more human.

Paul's exhortation to the church in Rome, a community learning how to live in the new light of Jesus' command to love, continues to remind us 21 centuries down the track that Jesus has delivered us from slavery to sin. We, like those early believers, have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised through him to newness of life.

We live that relationship. Bodies, hearts, minds. Offered - our living sacrifice - as we practice sharing the love and life of the Risen Lord, discovering as we do how we are being renewed and transformed for living Christ's rule of love now.

It is exhilarating to watch how the body of Christ, and the individual members of it, in the city, suburbs and tucked away places of this Diocese are a living sacrifice. It is astounding to see how people put themselves 'on the line' again and again, how the transformation of minds and hearts brings forth the fruit of loving action telling people of God's welcome for them, of God's wide-open heart for forgiveness.

And this is what the apostle opens up before us, an exhortation, part of the process of being transformed and the renewing of minds.

I hope Paul's words in Romans 12 will be renewing for you tonight:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not repay anyone evil for evil but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved never avenge yourselves but leave room for the wrath of God: for it is written 'vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord'.

No if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So, here we are on the edge of Synod, on the way together, a time to engage with each other, to engage with the formularies of scripture, sacraments, tradition, reason, articles, constitution, and order which have shaped the way we Anglicans live in community, and to offer ourselves once again to God so that we can live renewed, transformed, for his love's sake. In the body that we are because in the love of God there is love to the end.

The God we praise. Te Deum.