

FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Church and Community

Bible Readings: 1 Cor 13:1-13

Luke 15:11-32

Date: 27 January 2019

Theme: Gifts Day

This is the third and final sermon in the series for the beginning of the new year.

We began with Vision Sunday, that day when, at the start of the year, we remind ourselves who God is and who he wants us to be.

We spoke about the early Christian confession “Jesus is Lord” as the new way people in the early church orientated their lives and put him centre stage and in sharp focus. And 2000 years later, here in Farnham, following Jesus and giving our lives over to his control is still what this is all about.

We spoke about the two words: variety and the same. That the same God, the same spirit, the same Lord works in us and through in a variety of different gifts, services and activities to bring about his plan and purpose for the local church and for the wider world.

Last week was Gifts Day, when we were thinking about the ways in which we can play our part in what God is calling us to do and to be. We looked at the picture in 1 Corinthians 12:12 of the body and its members.

We saw that it was Christ’s body, a spiritual belonging. We saw that the members are interdependent, we need each other. We saw that God gives gifts to his people to enable and facilitate the work of his body, his work of ministry and mission in and through the local church in the community in which it is set.

And we asked the question posed by our ACC visitors most recently: is there anything I can do to help? Various people have signed up for a conversation about that question and the list is still there should anyone else wish to do so this morning.

Vision. Gifts. Today we are thinking about Response. Our response ... our response to the vision of who God is and our response to the gifts he has given us. A response primarily and very practically of love.

The bible reading from 1 Corinthians 13 is very well known. It is read at weddings. It is read in the old-fashioned, but beautiful, language of the King James Bible. It offers guidance for life and a picture of a loving community made up of loving individuals who bring change and transformation to the world in which they live.

I want this morning to focus on the three little parts of these 13 verses:

- a. vv1-3 love is everything
- b. vv4-7 love looks like this
- c. vv8-13 love has a future

Love is everything

Paul repeats this little phrase ... “but have not love” three times. He speaks about speaking in tongues. He speaks about prophecy, mystery, knowledge and faith. He speaks about sacrifice of possessions and even his own person.

These are not bad things. Indeed, they are good things in and of themselves ... but if I have not love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal, I am nothing, I gain nothing.

Love is everything.

Now this kind of love is not the kind of love we come across when we say I love fish and chips – I mention that because Josh and I had that this week, one the evening Kathryn was out! It’s not that. It’s not the love we come across when we see a Hollywood movie or romantic love or even erotic love. It’s not that.

Tom Wright, the former Bishop of Durham, now academic, who writes on this passage say this:

“Paul has in mind something which, though like our other loves in some ways, goes far beyond them, as sunlight goes beyond candles and electric light.”

This kind of love is everything.

So, if it’s not these other things, what does it look like?

Love looks like this

vv4 to 7 will tell us:

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

So often we hear these words and we imagine the wonderful journey ahead of us in our married life, as if these things will be true of us each and every day.

What we forget, perhaps, is that this whole letter and maybe this chapter in particular is written by Paul to a church where they had got things out of kilter, where they were not living as they should, where the values of the King and the kingdom were put to one side, ignored or completely disregarded.

Life in the Corinthian church was in a bit of a pickle. And these words which we love so much are actually words of rebuke ... almost like Paul was speaking to the WI in Sandringham, hoping that the politicians in London might listen in.

Patience, kindness, contentedness, freedom from, envy, boasting, arrogance or rudeness, preferring the other, being peaceable and calm are to be the hallmarks of this kind of love. It doesn’t gossip when it sees something to

gossip about, it celebrates right and truth and grace. It bears, believes, hopes and endures.

This, of course, is the kind of love we have seen in the life and witness of Jesus. He has been a wonderful example of how we should do life: how we should speak, act and think. Paul, too, it seems, is commending himself as a fellow disciple, someone the Corinthians should not only listen to but look at and learn from as well.

For a church leader this is a challenging calling – but it is part of the deal. For a leader of any kind exemplary behaviour is rightly expected. The allegations – and they are only that at present – against Alex Salmond are good examples of this.

I have only this week seen some examples of this kind of loving, not in leaders but in ordinary men and women, seeking to live out Christian faith in challenging circumstances and it has been moving and humbling and inspiring all at the same time: the love of a mother for her severely handicapped child; the love of a father for his daughter realising the error of her ways and coming back; the love of a son knowing that personal sacrifice would be the loving response to his mother's request for help; the love of a husband, faithfully standing by as medical tragedy hits his wife and for now, at any rate, shatters hopes and dreams.

So, love is everything, love looks like this and finally ...

Love has a future

vv8-13 point up that what we see now in this life is only a glimpse, a hint, a promise of more to come. This life may be brilliant, but the next life will be better. This life may be fulfilling, but the next life will be complete.

Prophecy, tongues and knowledge will come to an end. The partial gives way to the complete. The child becomes an adult. The mirror image makes way for face to face reality.

All these pictures and images are meant to encourage us, to inspire us, to lift our eyes from the challenge of the present to the wonder of the future. Signing up as a follower of Jesus is not just for now. For sure we do see the world differently with his eyes. We do have a heightened sense of the beauty of creation, the value of family, the gift of service, the joy of receiving. We do have all those things ... but we know too that on that day, when he will come again, he will usher in the new heavens and the new earth and the old order of things will pass away.

If this life is the smell of the coffee ... the next life is to get to drink it or even eat the cake, and savour its taste more fully.

So, if this is the vision of the God who makes himself known; if this is the God who gives us gifts that we might love him and serve him by loving our neighbour as ourselves; if this is the God who invites us to live in love, by love and for love in the world, we can only stand and gaze at him and want to respond.

We respond with our will – we say: Lord, we are up for this.
We respond with our heart – we say: Lord, we love you.
We respond with our life – we say: Lord, is there anything I
can do to help?
We respond with our resources – we say: Lord, what do
you require of me? What can I give?

Let's pray ...