



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

Last Sunday after Trinity ~ October 25th 2020

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also thinking about how other aspects of church life and people's needs can be met. Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's: Sundays 8am & 11am ~ Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's: Sundays 9.15am

St John's: Sundays 9:30am ~ Tuesdays 10am

Please Note:

Except for medical reasons (and those under 11) we are now required to wear a face mask in our church buildings.

Prayers for this Week

Your love, O God, is boundless. We who were strangers have been made your children. We who were defenceless have been brought into your household. Keep us mindful of your deeds of mercy, that we may love you with our whole heart and love our neighbours as ourselves. We ask this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Lord of the teasing riddle, whose questions undo our certainty and set us on a different path: give us a heart of passion, a searching mind, gentle strength of body and unseen depths of soul, that we may love you wholly and our neighbour as ourself; through Jesus Christ, the law of grace. **Amen.**

Reading: Matthew 22 v34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ‘What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’ ”? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?’ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Meditation

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” is Jesus’ reply to the test set for him. It remains a test for us to live by. It is Jesus affirming that this golden rule is foundational to the Christian way.

It is particularly relevant today, when we are all asked to take protective measures against covid, not just for the sake of our own lives, but also for the protection of others. Sadly, we hear and see actions where people are looking after their own interests, and not those of their neighbours. So it is relevant, good and timely to be reminded of the link and balance in our care for our self and others.

“Do to others, as you would have done to you” is sometimes called the ‘Golden Rule’. It is said that this rule can be found (more or less) in virtually all different belief systems throughout the world. It seems to be a principal that human societies aspire to in many different times and circumstances. It is, of course, sadly true that also in most human structures of societies there have been times when the rule has been obviated by those in power, or by those who want change, or by those who want a different basis for communal life in many different eras and geographical locations. Jesus’ reply clearly indicates that it applies to societies and individuals with a Christian basis or heritage, but we also need to admit it has just as likely to have been laid aside.

We also need to face up to it that Jesus with this reply also invited us into much more than life according to the ‘Golden Rule’. For we are invited to not only love our neighbour as ourself, but also to love God. We are invited to love God with all that we are, heart, soul, and mind; and similarly to love ourself and our neighbour with all that we are.

Now Jesus is asked this question by one well versed in the Jewish tradition, a lawyer who knows the Law. So it is not surprising that Jesus takes him on on his own ground by quoting from that law; Deuteronomy 6 v5 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”, followed by Leviticus 19 v18 “you shall love your neighbour as yourself”. The Leviticus command is to love your neighbour rather than to hate or seek revenge.

Last night when I read this, I noticed a difference between Deuteronomy and Matthew, and I also remembered a difference between Matthew here and what we recite frequently in our services. Can you spot it? Here’s another clue, this is what we say in our orders of service, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” which is in fact what Mark’s gospel has Jesus say. So, it set me off on a trail!

- ◆ Deuteronomy has three; heart, soul and might.
- ◆ Mark (12 v30), and our services have four; heart, soul, mind and strength.

But note the lawyer who agrees with Jesus in Mark (12v33) sticks with the three of Deuteronomy; heart, soul and might.

- ◆ Luke puts the words onto the lips of a lawyer, who Jesus congratulates, but then who goes on to ask “who is my neighbour” and Jesus gives us the story of the Good Samaritan. Luke (10v27) has the same four; heart, soul, strength, mind.

As you probably know the New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the Old in Hebrew. But there was also an official Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was widely known in the time of Jesus and by the authors of our gospels (it is known as the Septuagint as it was believed that 70 scholars came up with exactly the same words when translating); this version of Deuteronomy similarly has three; understanding, soul, strength.

◆ Matthew has three; heart, soul and mind, and NO strength!

We will come back to the NO strength (might), but first a little about hearts. In Hebrew thought the heart is the source of our understanding, (Hebrew emotions are located, quite reasonably in our bowels), so I have noticed that sometimes the Hebrew word is translated heart and sometimes understanding. Perhaps this explains why Mark has four terms as he wants to give us both meanings and includes both heart and mind. The word we usually translate soul, also means breath, and has echoes of the Genesis story when God breathes life into Adam.

But back to strength. It could be that early on when copies of Matthew's gospel were being made, someone missed strength out accidentally. It could be that Matthew just remembers his bible differently, however we rather think he had Mark's gospel in front of him, so it looks like a deliberate change. But if it is meant to be noticed, what does it say to us?

It says that love is not expressed with strength. Love is about being vulnerable, serving, and being open. It cannot use force, or manipulation, or power or status. Yes, there is sometimes a need for tough love, love which is hard to stick by, but is good in bringing people round. Paul has found a better way to put this than I could. "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

And Jesus also asks even more of us, to love our enemies and to do good to those who hate us. Turning the other cheek hurts when it also gets slapped! But we are asked to come back with love which is not shown through strength or might, but in vulnerability and peace. You do not need to use strength to show love, but you have the strength remaining in you to be vulnerable, risk taking, giving and receiving. So, with all that you are; Aspire to love your enemies! (which sometimes feels improbable); Love your neighbour, that is all your fellow people, but it can be hard; Love yourself – you are worth it! Love God, because he has first loved you!

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

The risen Christ is here in the midst of us. We bring our prayers to him as Lord of the Church.

For the Church universal, of which our buildings are a visible symbol,

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For our congregations as we remember your promise that when two or three are gathered in your name you are in the midst of them.

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For our homes that we may be still and know that you are God and the fulfilling of our desires and petitions as you see best for us;

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the pardon of our sins when we fall short of your glory, for your blessings in the past and for a vision for the future.

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the gift of the Holy Spirit and new life in baptism, for the foretaste of your eternal kingdom in the sacrament of communion

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the blessing of our vows and the crowning of our years with your goodness. For those who come in times of joy or times of sorrow, those who have much to look back on, and those who have much to look forward to.

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

For the faith of those who have gone before us and for grace to persevere like them; for the benefactors of our churches and all who have died in the peace of Christ and are at rest.

Lord receive our thanks and prayer.

O God, from living stones you prepare an everlasting dwelling place for your majesty. Grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit those who serve you may always be kept in your presence and we may have a sense of fellowship with Saints John, Mary, Peter and Wendreda. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.