

A New Start with a New Archbishop

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Collect for Sunday Trinity 17

This week's Collect Prayer is built around a very famous quotation from St Augustine of Hippo, one of the most influential of all the teachers of faith in the western Christian tradition. Augustine knew within himself a *restlessness of soul*, and he diagnosed it as the consequence of not having yet become



fully converted to God. He came to see that while we continue to depend on our own strength and understanding, there will always remain something within us which is unanswered, incomplete, distorted even. Only when we entrust ourselves fully to God will we come to that restfulness and peace for which we were originally created – the Sabbath Rest which God himself enjoyed on the Seventh Day after he had created the world and seen that it was *good*. It is this Sabbath Rest which is the destiny of the entire creation, *made new*.

What is true, in this way, of each one of us is true also of the whole Church. Over the last few decades, we in the Church of England have become used to a listlessness of soul which is reflected in the bitterness of disagreements between us all about what we are trying to do as a Church, who we are trying to appeal to and how, and how we may better respond to the needs and the callings of *all* of our members, including women and those who are LGBTQ+. Many of us have found this exhausting.

In his letters to Timothy, a young man at the start of his life as a Church leader, the Apostle Paul speaks of the *qualities* which are apt in those who help care for the Church, and the *patterns of life* which will sustain them, and the wider Church itself, most effectively. In today's reading, he reflects on the need for *endurance* – for resilience and patience in the face of trials and challenges, a deep stamina of soul. Paul finds this, not in his own strength, but in *following Jesus Christ* even when this leads along the

way of the Cross. If we are willing to go with Jesus to the *threshold of death*, says Paul, we shall arrive at the place where *life is renewed*; but our strength will be in this *close alignment with Jesus Christ himself*:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel, for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself. Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2.8-15

Most specifically, Paul urges us not to get sucked into a pattern of mutual *wrangling over words*, as he puts it, endless debate and disputation and argument. This *does no good*, he says, and leads to *ruin*, especially for all those who witness it. This is exactly how it has felt for the last few decades in our churches, as we argue over the roles of women and LGBTQ+ people, and seem little interested in the ‘still, small voice’ with which Jesus himself calls us into a greater mutual grace (cf 1 Kings 19.12).

My own hope, with the appointment of Bishop Sarah Mullally as the next Archbishop of Canterbury – someone a bit more liberal than many conservatives really want, a bit more conservative than many liberal people want – is that we shall recognise that the life of faith is not about having things just as we would like them; but, rather, learning to grow in mutual grace and goodwill in the face of things which are *not* as we would like them, but in which, led by Jesus Christ, we can begin to see the *signs of new hope*. May she be a leader who can call us back from our wranglings and restlessness, to the stillness and peace of soul which come from turning more completely to God himself. And in the friendship of Jesus Christ, in the valley of the shadow of death as well as by the still waters where our souls are restored (cf Psalm 23.4, 2-3), may we find a renewed friendship with each other within the household of God.