

Revd. Simon Lewis

Sunday 13 September

Creationtide 02

*Isolation Radio Talk*

Exodus 14.19-end, Romans 14.1-12, Matthew 18.21-35

**Love without reserve costs everything - but what a witness. Have you the nerve?**

Good morning.

Will things be different? I really do not know; please God they will be.

Among Christians - indeed all people of goodwill - I sense a hunger for some new vision, some new focus on the things which bring hope, joy, compassion, forgiveness. By no means exclusive to Christians these are expressions of loyalty to their Faith and to their Church; this seems crucial when the foundations of our *common life* are shaken; and shaken they are.

Believer and unbeliever, we must forge a new covenant in common cause against a great enemy. The enemy is not the pitting of belief against unbelief; it is against a great, solid, frivolous mass of complete indifference and public ignorance; it is 'apathy', it is 'disinterest'; it is simply 'We do not care'. It was known by the Prophets of old, and by Jesus, as 'hardness of heart'.

I am a convinced Christian who hopes we could settle, once and for all, the existence of God and the uniqueness of Christ. Faith is often the only reasonable response to questions about God and about human destiny, but oh, if only it was easier! I do not mean the homespun words of comfort - 'it will all be all right in the end'; or the dreadful theology of 'this has been sent to try you' - utter, pure nonsense. I look for a Faith, which enables you to say 'Yes' to the great questions about the order, purpose, meaning of the world: its past, its present; its future.

A Christian starting point then, is that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things - God is responsible for all that was, all that is and is to come. In the creation of humanity, God gave freedom to reject as well as to accept the knowledge of a spiritual presence that is beyond human experience - that is God - and the reality of God's love. Looking for proof you must turn to Christ. The absolute concern is in Christ's words and actions, his death and resurrection. They show the way the creator cares; always; everywhere.

It is, in the name of Jesus that Christians, maybe you, struggle to reach out in love to those who rail against oppression, those who are lost, hungry or dispossessed, those in whom the light of faith burns dim. If you say that love is the highest point in the experience of human life it seems reasonable to say that in loving another person you are discovering something of the face of God.

The reality Christians face is that when we fail to love and to live the Gospel, we fail not only to be prophets but also as pastors. Failing to lift Jesus up in the world demonstrates our failure to love - unwillingness to respond to the demands of the love, reveals that failure. In the end we do not trust that God loves us - unconditionally. Maybe there is some truth in this for you?

When the prophets of old spoke they walked a hard road. They spoke often to a captive people and they were angry at people's unfaithfulness. When they spoke 'the word of the Lord', as they called it, people did not want to hear. They spoke with their own hearts broken because they knew, they understood, the human condition. There was no arrogance or pride, apartness or even bitterness or despair; they spoke from love and hope. It is out of such love and hope, Christians

must speak today. Hope is rooted in love, and now today your hope for the community of the Church must be rooted in your love for the Church. Love is the enemy of fear and so our love for the Church, must overcome our fear of being the Church, and bearing witness to God.

So, where do we look? In Christ, the two strands - that the earth matters, and that God cares, come together; as they come together, they form a cross. The certainty that you are loved stirs love in you - it is as simple as that; to say that it is through Jesus you see God, is the essence of the Christian Faith.

As I read what many Christians call the Old Testament (but must really be called Hebrew Scripture because it is the religious text of the Hebrews and not Christians), I am fascinated, humbled and amazed by the way those people of old, were touched by God and where they found God – in the parting waters of the Red Sea; in the wind, the fire, the cloud, the still small voice - but always God was over and beyond them; beyond their human experience; so much a mystery. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul' said Jesus; it has its parallel in the life of the Christian who always looks for ways in which the Love of God for us, was poured out in the life of Christ.

It is by being loved that you become more loving: through loving you are nurtured and your humanity grows and blossoms. I believe you will have known love when you have received it; you know it, as you watch love at work. We love because God loved us first. Remember though; it was costly. Your love for Jesus will also cost you - St Paul knew that when he wrote his letter to the Romans that 'each of us is answerable to God'.

Christ's teaching is not true simply because he taught it - he taught it because it is true. He showed no *new face* of God; he showed *the* God who always has been. By his life and death and resurrection Jesus The Christ, brings about a new relationship, a new hope, a new understanding about Life itself. It is a new Covenant.

Few will have tried to write a life of Jesus which ends differently. Perhaps his days could have been crowned with honour and fame: he could have died peacefully, revered for his wisdom and his knowledge of God, his purity and his holiness.

The truth was different - he preferred to *love without reserve* and it *cost him everything*. That is a stumbling block for all who would follow in the steps of Christ - the *costliness of love, love without reserve*. Even to try to love as he did involves a re-direction of your life, not once, but many, many, many times. You do not stand in your own strength but in His; you are to be the yeast in the bread, the light on a hill. When you are those things ... what a witness you make!

Thank you for listening

## Prayer

The prayer I share with you today is in form of correspondence between Christ and Pilgrim. It is adapted from a prayer by Henri Nouwen, called *A Prayer to Christ*.

Dear Christ,

I have been told to keep my eyes on you  
because you are the incarnation of Divine love,  
you are the expression of God's infinite compassion,  
you are the visible manifestation of the the Creators' holiness;  
you are the beauty, goodness, gentleness, forgiveness, and mercy;  
in you all can be found;  
and outside of you nothing can be found?

Why then,  
do I look elsewhere and go elsewhere,  
when you have the words of eternal life,  
you are food and drink,  
you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life;  
you are the light that shines in the darkness,  
the lamp on the lamp stand,  
the house on the hilltop;  
you are the perfect Icon of God?

And I am told  
in and through you  
I can see and find my way to the Heavenly Father, Mother?

I hope you can help me, Christ?

Yours sincerely,

Pilgrim

Dear Pilgrim,

First of all let me say this to you.  
You *are* the glory of God.

God fashioned you from the dust of the soil.  
God breathed life into you  
giving you the breath of life:  
you live because you share God's breath,  
God's life, God's glory.  
Life is not about how to live for the glory of God  
but how to live who you are,  
how to make true your deepest self?

So maybe in your letter  
you have the question wrong.

Ask yourself this, 'Why *should* I look elsewhere or go elsewhere?  
When the Holy One  
the Beautiful One, the Glorious One,  
your Lord, your Saviour, your Redeemer,  
your Guide, your Consoler, your Comforter,  
your Hope, your Joy, and your Peace  
is all that I am.  
Yours sincerely  
Christ.

Dear Christ  
To you  
I want to give all that I am.  
Let me be generous, not stingy or hesitant.  
Let me give you all -  
all I have, think, do, and feel.  
It is yours, O Lord.  
Please accept it  
and make it fully your own.  
Where else can I go?  
Amen.

[Adapted from *Seeds of Hope*, Henri Howen, p. 149]