

Trinity I Walkhampton

One of the common comments made to me when I attend anything where good weather is required, but inevitably it is raining, is to hear something like “You could have spent some more time on your knees asking for better weather” or “I thought you’d have more influence than this”. Often said in jest, these comments betray a lot about how people relate to God and what they think the nature of prayer is all about. It also has more than a little of “say one for me” about it. My response is normally also in jest “I have no influence there”. Not because I think God does not answer prayer but because in the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, “...your heavenly Father...causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and the wicked”.

Weather just happens. To pray for a sunny day is, in my view, a waste of my time and God’s time. I do not think God is in the business of manipulating the micro climate of West Devon for our pleasure and convenience. What is on God’s mind is far more wide reaching than the weather of Walkhampton.

What makes the sayings and teachings of Jesus so difficult for us is that they seem to set the bar so high that we have no chance of

ever jumping over it and succeeding at the task: Love your enemies, being slapped in the face and having to take it again, lending people your possessions and then not asking for them back, giving the proverbial shirt off your back, going the extra mile, the list goes on and on.

Is Jesus simply asking us to undertake 1001 impossible tasks before breakfast? Is this the moral code by which we have to live? Well it is most important to remember the context in which Jesus originally spoke. His concern was to demonstrate to his followers that their conduct must exceed that of the religious elite of his day, the Scribes and Pharisees. But in doing so he reinterpreted the Jewish law. The law demanded retaliation; Jesus demanded love. The eye for an eye was to be replaced with the shirt off your back, the extra mile, the turning of the other cheek – that would be a true demonstration of the law of love. He spoke of ushering in a new kingdom based on the reign of God and these precepts were to underpin that reign.

It’s all rather shocking really: having to love your enemies, praying for those who persecute you. And it is meant to be shocking because Jesus is showing his disciples that God’s grace is a shocking

thing. It is poured out on the wicked and the good just as the sun and rain both shine and pour down on both. The grace of God knows no bounds or limits. It is not something restricted to white middle class English folk. It is available to all. That is the scandal of God's love: it knows no bounds. It encompasses enemies, those who we hate, those who despise us, those who would not give us the time of day.

It is summed up in Jesus' injunction, "There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds".

These sayings are meant to shock us into a response and that response is to recognise the kingdom of God is in the midst of us.

St Paul talks of building on the only true foundation for life and that is Jesus Christ. He looks at the Corinthian Church and is asking them both as individuals and as a church: what are you building in your life? Jesus himself talked of the builder who built on sand rather than rock and in the same way St Paul is using the metaphor of a building to ask that fledgling church about how they were constructing their lives. Most here today can look back a fair few years and review what sort of building their life has turned into

over the years. There maybe some rooms that you would now concede are in the mode of follies rather than anything constructive but I hope that we can all look back and see how we have built our lives on the solid rock foundation that Christ offers. It is about that offering of ourselves to God's service that makes for an acceptable building; one built on ministry and service rather than worldly wisdom and pride. For St Paul it was not about which particular church leader was flavour of the month. It was all about Christ; it was all about putting God first above everything else.

Jesus stands our values on their heads. He does so to provoke a reaction in us. That reaction should be dedicated love and service no moaning about the impossibility of undertaking these tasks.

Shocking isn't it: God's grace knows no bounds, is selfless and seeks out the lost and those who are apparently beyond the pale. We as co-workers with Christ have the opportunity to be an influence for good within the kingdom of God. Stop worrying about the weather and consider those who need to get out of the rain and into the light of Christ.