

2023-10-22 ... 6.30pm Homily for Evensong ... Revd Jane Stephenson

Proverbs 4: 1 – 18; 1 John 3: 16 – 4: 6

**1 John 3: 16**, the opening verse of tonight's reading is a statement of one of the fundamental truths of our Christian faith:

**"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."**

I was reading about this passage in preparation for tonight's service and I found a reflection from Bible Gateway posted by a minister called Alan Bevere. He begins with the words:

***"It's easy to love in theory. It's easy to know what to do in theory. It's easy to tell everyone else how they should love in theory. Love up close and personal: that's hard."***

How do we show such love in our lives? How can we take responsibility for the things that need to be dealt with through self-giving love?

It is certainly not easy to do the right thing. When we experience something annoying happening, or we hear from someone else about a problem caused by lack of wisdom, or downright injustice, we tend to say "why have **they** let that happen?" or "**someone** should do something about it." If only we could find that elusive group, or individual "them" we could "set **them** straight" couldn't we?

It's always easier to blame, or pass problems on to others, but when we do, we tend to set aside the opportunity to take personal responsibility. Sometimes of course we do decide to give our support to a particular cause, something of which we approve, but that support may be more in terms of our approval than our active participation. Social media for example which seemingly generates support for many causes is not necessarily accompanied by action. It is easy if you are on Facebook for example to see a post or a photo and to press "like." The post may receive many likes, but there is no check on whether real action follows. There is actually a term on social media called "slacktivism." It means to give support without action: to press the like button, to wear the badge, or the scarf, or the clothing that indicates our loyalty, but not act with meaningful support. Slacktivism is not just to be found on social media and if we really want to show we care about something we have to become more active.

The writer of 1 John states bluntly:

**"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."**

Love in God's world requires action impelled by that love. Love in action is that Jesus laid down his life for us. That is not sentimental love, it is a radical, dangerous love that sets its face against the confines of a humanly-contrived and controlled world, in order to show that God's love for us and God's desire for us to fulfil our potential is boundless and all-embracing, but demands a response from each of us.

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Among the many casualties of the current troubles in the Middle East was a young Israeli woman who very sadly died two weeks ago. She was helping her father to hold the door against Hamas gunmen, to save the rest of her family, which she did. We will probably be fortunate enough never to have to die for someone else. We can however live a life of service to others that may be quite unfashionable in some circles. We can share our worldly goods with others. We can welcome strangers into our lives and communities. We can recognise the duties of love in action by not leaving people in physical need, or in fear and desperation. We can sign petitions from Aid Agencies to persuade governments to let food and other supplies into Gaza; we can like photographs of aid convoys, but perhaps we have to do more than passively approve or disapprove of events. We should speak out against injustice in any part of the world, maybe join a demonstration, or not only send a donation, to a cause, but organize aid where possible. These are decisions we each have to make, but we need to make them in remembrance of the love that Christ showed for us in laying down his life.

I know that many people in this church actively support work done in the local community and have been instrumental in setting up systems and premises for pastoral care, physical care and for prayer to bring help to those who struggle. I know too that we all have times when we are tired, when compassion fatigue sets in, when our help is more tokenism than real. That's when we tend to start saying "**they**" ought to do something about this. It needs courage and strength to continue to give loving support, but we do not need to struggle alone. If we are really to love one another as he loves us we must allow our faith in Christ to be embedded in our lives and our hearts. There will be times when that determination wavers, but if we use our faith as our yardstick, we will each know when we have fallen short and we can redirect our faith and our action to be in line with a loving God. Then it will not be "**they**" – the anonymous officials and organisations of the human world, who determine our paths, but we ourselves will have the joy of living our lives as Christ's true disciples: laying down our lives for one another, for others to use, as he laid down his life for us.

Love in action!

Amen