

St. Martin-in-the-Fields  
Lent 5 c  
2010

*I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing  
Christ Jesus my Lord."*

Philippians 3:8

As I read and say these words, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I affirm them for myself. In spite of my difficulties with institutional religion in general and the frustration I sometimes experience with the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion of which it is a part, I can still affirm these sentiments of St Paul with my whole heart. I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

I can affirm these sentiments because I know Christ Jesus, the Christ of the gospels, the one who gave his life seeking out the lost and who was accepting of all.

I have no hesitation in reciting the Apostles and Nicene Creeds (though I confess I find the Athanasian somewhat incomprehensible), for these, too, affirm that the mission of Jesus, his seeking out and accepting people, was of God" and that his mission of inclusion reflects the true nature of God from all eternity.

The creeds also affirm that the mission of Jesus was not accepted by all. Certainly the religious leaders of his day did not and as a result, Jesus was crucified. But that crucifixion, far from being successful in bringing this movement of inclusion to a halt, enabled that mission to be extended beyond the boundaries of Palestine and the Middle East to the whole world, to people of every race and language and culture and gender and whatever might separate us from one another. The efforts of religion to restrict and constrain the Divines Love are doomed to fail, whether they be in ancient times or modern.

I affirm these sentiments of St Paul, not because they represent a past experience but because they are a present reality. I rejoice, as did

Paul, in seeing something of the risen Jesus in the lives of ordinary folk. The resurrection, which we celebrate each Sunday, is not for me some ancient and moldy old doctrine about something that happened 2000 years ago, the proof of which I have to take on trust. No. The resurrection for me is a present reality, because I experience, first hand, the risen Christ in people around me, in both those inside and outside the Church.

In having seen something of the risen Jesus in people around me, I have to allow the possibility that others may see in me, in the ordinariness of my own person, something of Jesus, too.

St Paul in our epistle speaks of life as a journey. He says, *I press on to make (the goal) my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* (Phil 3:12). St Paul is quite sure that others will think differently from himself, but where people show respect for differences, when we affirm the possibility that God is able to lead others just as God has led us, then differences may complement each other rather than be a cause of condemnation.

Tenants of the Kingdom still beat and kill the servants of God. And again, the servants of God are not just those found in the Church. Condemnation given is condemnation received. We must never forget that Jesus was not condemned by those outside" the Church but by those inside.

I know that whenever I meet Jesus there is acceptance of me as I am (at least I know this intellectually, whether I experience this truth emotionally is a whole other matter). I would like Christ to be found in my home, and in my day to day routine...with me in my highs and my lows. And, wonderfully enough, this is precisely where the scriptures say that Jesus, in his earthly ministry, was to be found. We read that Jesus visited people *where they were at* and that paradigm hasn't changed. With St Paul I want to: *be found in him* (Phil 3:9) such that others can find him in me.

The Cross, and the sacrament of the Altar which flows from the Cross, is Jesus kneeling before us to comfort us. I can only assume that Jesus on the Cross and in the sacrament of the Altar, knows that we all

need to be reassured again and again of his acceptance and love.

The words of institution say *Do this in remembrance of me*. Do this to make me present. What do we do if we don't remember? We forget. And if we forget, it is not as if Jesus will go off all in a huff because he has been overlooked. It is we who suffer if we forget Jesus' unconditional love for us, a love that our love can only approximate. If we forget Gods love for us, his acceptance of us, we will begin to look for ways to climb over others in a kind of survival of the fittest effort to raise our self esteem. It is a fight against grace which one wins at their peril.

May I again echo St Paul's words to you: If you think differently about anything, this too, God will reveal to you. I have no doubt that others think differently from me, and I am glad that this is the case. It would be a pretty boring world if everyone thought as I do. I offer my words, my reflections on Gods Word, not such that if you disagree with them you will face Gods judgment, but simply so that you may take what you find valuable from them and discard the rest. If you are truly turning to God, he is quite capable of revealing to you what is most needful.

For even with the best intentions in the world, I can only proclaim the gospel as it is revealed to me. Fortunately, when we come to church, everyone has an opportunity to be blessed as we hear the scriptures read, and follow those readings in the pew sheets Beverly prepares for us. Everyone has an opportunity to be blessed by the beauty of the liturgy and the hymns. Everyone has an opportunity to be blessed by prayers, corporate and private, and in the receiving of the sacrament. Everyone has an opportunity to be blessed by the quiet fellowship we share with one another. The words of a sermon are but one element in this multi - faceted act of worship which we package into this hour and fifteen minutes. But the opportunity for blessing doesn't end here. There is always the ever present opportunity for blessing as we relate to those around us during the rest of the week.

Human pride demands that some win and others lose, but with God everyone is meant to win. It was Jesus insistence on inclusion that

was the blasphemy which led to his crucifixion.

For some the path to God may be found through word or sacrament, through music or fellowship, through meditation or scientific study, through art, prayer or acts of charity. Whichever way we choose, Christ is faithful, and Christ will be found by those who seek him.

The Christ could not be contained in a physical tomb nor will he be in a particular tradition. What is in your heart and what is in my heart is far more important than any words which may be said here, or elsewhere, for it is in our hearts that God leads us.