

Sermon for Mattins on the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 17th July 2016
Colossians 1:15-28, Luke 10:38-42 - Christ in you, the Hope of Glory

I went to a Confirmation service at Saint Martin's Church in Camberley this week. Bishop Andrew confirmed seven people, ranging from a teenage boy called Israel to two ladies of mature years, a Mum with grown-up children, a young couple who are getting married, who had attended the Alpha Course and discovered a Christian faith, and the children's and youth worker at St Andrew's, our sister church, who, although she has professed a sincere and deep Christian faith for many years, had never actually been confirmed.

It was one of those services where a couple of the candidates gave a short testimony to explain how they came to faith. These were moving stories. In the midst of adversity or loss, on certain instances, the person had suddenly seen clearly that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, cared for them; that they were not alone in the world or lost, and by bringing Jesus into their lives, their lives suddenly became better; everything made better sense. And they felt the love of their fellow Christians, sometimes as a result of coming to Christian belief, and sometimes as part of coming to Christian belief.

One lady said how she was walking past the church when there was a carol service; she was bustling along, going off to do some errand or other, when, as she put it, her feet told her to turn off and go into the church, (whereas her mind was telling her to carry on running her errands). And she followed her feet: and in church she found people she already knew in another context, who made her very welcome.

In that fellowship of faith, her own faith was nurtured and grew. In St Paul's letter to the Colossians, he deals with this, with the heart of our faith, with what St Paul sometimes calls 'being in Christ'. He describes what Christ is, 'the image of the invisible God', the creator, by whom 'were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.'

So Jesus is the image of God the creator, the Unmoved Mover, the creator from nothing. And then St Paul goes on to say, that 'he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead;' and that we who are Christians, who are members of his church, are bound up with that creation. It's not just something that is going on, which we can admire from a distance or comment on with detachment. We are involved: and we are involved in a secret, a mystery, which St Paul proclaimed in his various missionary journeys: 'the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to his saints'. And that secret is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'.

In Christ and through Christ, God in Christ is at the heart of our being. And that was what those confirmation candidates, who stood up and told us about their faith, had experienced. Their faith in Jesus had brought them harmony in their lives. They were in a right relationship with God. Bishop Andrew invited the congregation, as we said the prayers towards the end of the confirmation service, to renew our confirmation vows; to reaffirm our faith. We were all very happy to do so, especially as we had all been so inspired by what the candidates said.

Sometimes we let our busy lives intrude and obscure our relationship with God, with Jesus, just as in the story of Martha and Mary. Martha was too busy, doing the chores. She and her sister were at opposite ends of the pendulum swing, I suppose. Mary was almost too spiritual, and Martha, too practical. But Jesus said that Mary had the better part. She was the one sitting at Jesus's feet and receiving his teaching. And she was doing that rather than preparing lovely food and hospitality - which her sister was doing.

I guess we very often come into the same category as Martha, and we are too busy, we have too many things going on. We don't take enough time, we don't set aside enough time to say our prayers and perhaps read our Bible or reflect on what Jesus would say or do. Jesus told Martha that she was fretting and fussing about so many things; but that what Mary was doing, sitting at the Lord's feet: that is the important thing to do.

Which brings me neatly to another member of the church, somebody who must be unbelievably busy, fretting and fussing about so many things, as Jesus would put it, but who is very happy to let it be known that they go to church; they are part of the Body of Christ, the church.

I am, of course, talking about our new prime minister. As the Church Times editorial said, we wish her well and hope that, with all her duties, she will still get time to go to church. She belongs to the congregation of Saint Andrew's in Sonning in Berkshire, and her father was a clergyman, the vicar of Wheatley in Oxfordshire.

In her first speech Mrs May went out of her way to emphasise her social concern, saying that her government would look after the poor and the disadvantaged in society. It's fair to say that a lot of commentators were rather surprised to hear a Conservative Prime Minister offering this message. It was suggested that it might have come just as easily from a Labour leader; but I think the secret is probably that Mrs May is a Christian, and as a Christian she is concerned that we are all one: that we are all one in God's creation.

'He is therefore all things, and by him all things consist, and he is the head of the body, the church'. Mrs May is in that body, and she seems very well aware of how it works. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Let us pray that Mrs May continues to feel Christ in her, at work in her, and that she maintains that hope of glory, that sure and certain hope that sustains the family of Christ.

Amen.

Hugh Bryant