

Psalm 149 Matthew 18:15-20 Romans 13:8-14 Catherine Pate
September 10, 2017 – The AbbeyChurch Re-launch @ 600 Richmond.

O God, take my lips and speak through them. Take our minds and think through them.
Take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.

Worship
Work
Love

This week, a group of disciples gathered together to start to articulate a set of values for this fledging community of faith. As we recommitted ourselves to intentionally setting down roots as a collection of the saints and simultaneously sinners we call The Abbey Church, we wanted to put before ourselves some wayfinders (or values) to keep us on track, grounded as we step out together in faith. What you see around this room is the fruit of those labours and you are being invited today to share in the work. But, what if all that we are about all comes down to three simple words: Worship, Work and Love? What if what we are to *BE* about is simply worship, work and love?

Let's begin with Worship

We are all here this afternoon because we seek something in worship. I don't know what that is for you - maybe its community, maybe its familiarity, maybe its acceptance, maybe its forgiveness, maybe its to know, maybe its to *BE* known. Maybe its all of those things. If I'm honest, it is for me. But we are here. We showed up expecting something to happen today. Presumably hoping that we would leave at least a little different than when we came in.

We may not know why this can happen when we gather to worship, but we believe, we trust (or at least we try to trust) that when two or three are gathered in Christ's name something happens. And that something is that God shows up.

We put on this piece of theatre (and that's really what worship is) for an audience of one. Each of us plays our part, we recite our script, we sing our songs, and sometimes we do all of this with our fingers crossed behind our backs. But when we are at our best, our songs are joyful and truthful and we hope and we pray that God is well pleased.

But what the psalmist reminds us of today is that our worship must be done with "high praises of God in our throats and a two-edge sword in our hands" and this is the sword we will use to fight injustice. So our worship, in other words, is preparation. It isn't a comfortable respite from the everyday - a place to retreat or hide. It isn't about making us feel better. There is real wickedness to be fought out there. In word and in deed. And what we do in here has to be connected to the fight out there. So, as we establish a set of values to govern our community, we need to ask ourselves, will our worship prepare us to resist all the forces that stand in the way of God's justice, salvation, and peace?

This is the work.

The world is not benign - there are costs to sainthood/to faithfulness. There is work to be done - justice work - and those who are against that work we are to avoid. This week, the

bishop of the diocese sent a letter to all parishes in the diocese. In it, Bishop Logan calls on the church to "reject any interpretation of scripture that discriminates against others on any grounds including age, cultural background, gender, origin, religion, physical or mental health or ability, fertility, marital status or sexual orientation." His so-called "Youbou Statement" can be read in its entirety on the diocesan website and I commend it to you. It speaks of the work that is to be done and the evil of hate that is to be avoided and actively fought against. And if you do this work, you will be hated for it. You will be told the work is a waste of time. You will be given the distinct impression that it isn't really your job to do; that you have earned the good life you are living and those who don't have a good life don't really deserve it. So, you will sometimes ignore the poor, you will avert your gaze. You will convince yourself that they are not your problem.

Which brings us to love

Love really is the foundation of it all, isn't it? But it isn't our love for each other, or even our love for God. It is God's love for us that makes all of this; the worship and the work, possible. We are more us, free to be us, because God knows us (the saint and sinner in each of us) and because we are known we are free to love.

So, we will be called back to this table each week. And here, in the safety of this community we will be called to practice loving our neighbour.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul sets out the shape that practice should take. The first part of the chapter sets out the rules around taxes and who should pay what to whom and how. The second part moves to set out the terms of life in community; a life characterized by owing nothing to anyone except love. Love is the fulfilment of the law. But this isn't a naive love or an easy love, or a Disney love. He says, "The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in these words, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" A new day is dawning; one characterized by freedom and life in Christ. To "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" - like clothing - is to bear witness to the hope that is in each of us as the faithful. To "love our neighbour is to testify to an alternative future filled with light, no longer darkness, and to bring that light into the life of our neighbour.

In Mathew, the church (or what predates the church - the body of believers bound by faith) is mentioned, not to establish it as the foundation of faith, but to show the ways in which that foundation is so easily destabilized by conflict. Jesus never says the disciples are to avoid conflict, does he? It isn't conflict that is the problem, it's how we deal (or don't deal) with conflict that is the problem. Jesus reminds us that the work we are to practice in here, as a community, is the work of reconciliation. It is the practice of returning to the one we have harmed or the one who has harmed us, and with the support of our community (not the gossip and backbiting and side-taking of our community) but the active participation of our community in that reconciliation work, that we learn how to love our neighbour out there. This is the love we are to be about. God's reconciling love.

Worship, Work, Love

So, what if we as a church; that body of believers bound by faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ right here, right now commit ourselves to something very simple and profoundly difficult? What if we commit ourselves to be a community of deep and steadfast love? The kind of love that will bring us to our knees, bind us together and then tear us out

of our comfort zone and make it impossible for us to ignore the last, the least, the lost and the dead.

What would our songs sound like, what would the bread and wine taste like, what would our sharing of the peace feel like if we committed to be in love like that? I look forward to being with you as we find out.

Amen