

Welcome Service for Rev Jeongsook Kim and Rev Rachel Hextall - 2nd September 2018

Sermon

Preacher: Dr Francis Henman

Text "God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him. Love will come to its perfection in us when we can face the day of Judgement without fear; because even in this world we have become as He is." I John 4 v.16b, 17. (JB)

Today we start a new chapter in the life of this circuit, and especially this is true for the Leamington Spa section of the circuit where Jeongsook is to minister, and in Rachel's activities also.

I think it might be a good idea to look at the central precepts of our faith so that we can make the most of this new opportunity to witness for, and to serve our Lord.

The greatest truth that Jesus taught His followers is that the nature of God – His and heavenly Father – is LOVE. Jesus talked to God as Father using the intimate name that a young child uses to talk to its earthly father – something like ‘Daddy’. In the centuries after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension Christians came to realise that we have seen God revealed as the Father - creator of all that is; as Jesus - the Saviour who has experienced human life from the inside; and as the Holy Spirit - who indwells the people of God and inspires us to live in harmony with God. Christians came to understand that these three revelations each have their own personality. So we came believe in One God revealed as three ‘persons’. This doctrine of the Trinity is very wonderful because it enables us to understand that within the Godhead itself there is the central relationship of love. As one minister said “The Trinity is that relationship where love is perfectly given (from the Father to the Son); perfectly received (by the Son from the Father); and perfectly shared (by the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit) and so is shared with all the people of God.” Where love is perfectly given, perfectly

received & perfectly shared.

In our epistle reading from I John 4 v.7-21, we saw how central is the love which is God's nature. God first showed His love in creating this wonderful universe and eventually creating us. 'We love God because He loved us first,' and we show this love in the way we conduct our relationships with everyone we come into contact with. St. John tells us that 'a man who does not love the brother that he can see, cannot love God, whom he has never seen' [v.20]. We can see that if we are to obey the great commandments which Jesus emphasized – namely to love God with every function of our life, and to love our neighbour as well as we love ourselves, then this teaching about love is central.

It is central also to the life of each Methodist Society in this, and every other circuit.

It also points us to one of our greatest treasures – the communion of saints. I have never forgotten being in a retreat given by Canon E. L. Mascall where he talked about **intercessory prayer**. He told us that when we pray, our prayers go into the great river of prayer which continually flows from the Son to the Father and is the central activity in the whole life of heaven. This river of prayer and praise contains all the prayers of the saints and angels in heaven, as well as all the praise and prayers of all Christians on earth. This is what is meant by saying that all our prayers are offered 'in and through the Name of Jesus Christ' I have never forgotten this wonderful idea. It completely revolutionises how you look at your prayers. When we pray we are not isolated individuals. No! We are joining with the whole body of Christians throughout the world, and linking in with all who have gone before. And God hears all this chorus of praise and prayer, and answers it by directing the resources of His Spirit just where they are most needed.

We are Christians because of **the hope that we have**. This hope is planted in us by God's Holy Spirit. It enables us to use all our resources to move God's work forward in our own community. And as we are inspired to work here and now with Jesus' Spirit, we believe that

when our personal time on this earth is ended we will share in Jesus' victory over death, as He promised that we would. ['I am going now to prepare a place for you and after I have gone and prepared you a place I shall return to take you with Me so that where I am you may be too'. St. John 14 v.2b-3.]

The early Methodists used to talk about '**Prevenient Grace**'. They taught, and indeed I believe our own experience would agree, that God's grace goes ahead preparing the way for us. So the grace of God goes ahead and plants in our minds the hope we have and **enables us to gain faith.**

Jesus always needed faith in His power, if He was to be able to heal or work any miracle. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that 'faith is the giving substance to the things which are hoped for, the discerning of things which are not seen.' [Hebrews 11 v.1] 'That is, faith enables us firmly to hold on to realities which we cannot see'.

None of us can ever fully understand the reality of how God exists or works – it is beyond the capability of our finite brains – 'and it is precisely when God cannot be 'seen' in any sense of the word that faith does its greatest work for us. It enables us to give substance, to lay hold upon, the things which are hoped for, to discern the things that are not seen.' [EL Mascall "Grace & Glory" Publ. Faith press (1961) p.41]

Faith leads us to love both God and our neighbour, and this results in praise and true worship. It is essential that in any Christian fellowship every member of that fellowship respects, and gives space, to every other member. That is, we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. If we really do this then people outside the fellowship will take note 'how these Christians love each other.' Too often when people have seen the antagonism between different brands of Christianity this comment has been meant very cynically 'Look how these Christians 'love' each other' We must never give any cause for people to make such cynical comments about any of our Methodist Societies. Jesus said 'This is My commandment: love

one another, as I have loved you.' [St. John 15 v.12] and again 'What I command you is to love one another.' [St. John 15 v.17]

It is important that the whole Church, and also each individual Society, understands that it exists to serve those outside who have not yet caught what inspires us. This is another aspect of loving our neighbour as we love ourselves. After the disaster at Grenfell Tower in London we saw on TV how the local Methodist Church was prominent in giving assistance to those suffering so greatly. In Nottingham, where I live, a number of our churches work ecumenically to host food banks assisting those in greatest need. I have little doubt that that is also true here. These activities are a natural part of what we do, not to gain recruits, but because it is our nature to show love and hope to those living around us.

In Jeongsook you have a very dedicated and well trained person. I am very happy to have sat under her preaching for seven years. I found her theology very good, and her preaching opened my mind in new ways, that deepened my own faith. When my wife died, Jeongsook was very supportive and helped me at a difficult time. I am sure Rachel has similar qualities too. But Jeongsook, or indeed any Minister, cannot do it all by herself. She needs the full support of her congregations. The Church will only go forward if every member does their bit, and of course if every move is taken with prayer to find what God wants us to do, and how He wants us to do it..

In recent weeks, if your preachers used lectionary readings, you may have heard about the feeding of the five thousand, and how next day those who had been fed met Jesus in Capernaum. Jesus told them that they needed a different sort of bread which would feed their souls continually. He told them that He was that bread of life. This different bread of life is faith in Jesus Christ. **It is a free gift from God, not earned, not a reward, but gratuitous, given freely.** God offers this gift to every human being. We who have received this gift, have received it not only for ourselves, but to hold it in trust for others. Part of our love for our neighbours is to share this most wonderful gift with them. [Inspired by Credo item in Times

Sat. 11th. Aug.2018 p.82] That is one of the things that Jeongsook - and indeed all the circuit staff - want to lead you to do.

I do not know that much about this part of the Midlands, but, I do know that during the wars of the roses, in the mid 1400s the Earl of Warwick was centrally involved in the political doings especially in the reign of King Edward IV. Later during the reign of Queen Elizabeth one of her closest friends - Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester - did a large rebuild of Kenilworth Castle in 1570-1, in order to impress her when she visited him there in 1572 & 1575. He hoped to gain her hand in marriage, but the Queen was too canny to allow that to happen. So great things have happened in this area. As I have driven in this area I have noticed beautiful scenery which must help to make life more enjoyable.

I hope and pray that during this new chapter of this circuit's life you will all be able to achieve great things for God's kingdom. I urge you all to live in the love of God, both in relation to God, between yourselves, within the church, and toward the communities in which each Methodist society is set. I pray that when, in years to come, Jeongsook, Rachel, and the members of this circuit, look back on these years it will be with happiness and satisfaction.

God bless you all!!! **Amen**