

Sermon Trinity 13 2017

Introduction

Choir back. Good to be part of the commissioning with its focus on duty, commitment and service within the context of the worshipping life of the cathedral. Worship is all about offering that which is costly and is worthy, our worthiest gift of praise and thanksgiving. All of which connects with our broader understanding of Christian witness and of duty, service and commitment in the wider community.

Volition

I was at Manchester last Thursday - not at the Arena where they were preparing to host a benefit concert for all those tragically caught up in the recent bomb attack back in May of this year - I was just down the road at the cathedral. I heard how the Arena attack had impacted on the cathedral as the whole area became a crime scene and was closed down for 6 days. Yet there remained a wonderful spirit of resilience in the conversations we shared - of standing firm against dehumanising acts of terror - and it goes without saying that cathedrals have a crucial part to play in signalling a deeper wisdom and unity of purpose: of duty, commitment and service to others.

My reason for visiting Manchester cathedral was to find out more about a volunteer programme they've been running for about five years called Volition. Its aim is to enable unemployed people to increase their employability prospects through volunteering. We recognise that Cathedrals have a unique place in their respective communities. They represent a rich heritage providing access to a range of influential connections across any city and a narrative shaped too by a strong commitment to social justice. And, in the case of Volition the aim is to bring cathedrals, civic leaders, partners in business to work together to

open up job opportunities for long-term unemployed people. It sets out to deliver a volunteering and training programme that focuses on an individual's employability needs and over the past 5 years since its inception, has been successful opening up for many a pathway back to work.

Most of the main departments at Manchester cathedral now have a volunteer 1 day per week as do some of their partners. For instance I visited the Print Works - no longer printing newspapers since a previous bomb attack during the era of the IRA - but now a major hub offering a range of food, entertainment and leisure facilities. I accompanied the volunteer manager on to the roof where, amid this urban landscape, I discovered a greenhouse, an allotment of raised beds, and half a dozen beehives. I'm told that there's even a volunteer canon apiarist! The produce from the allotment goes off to make up veggie boxes - some for the Booth Centre a hostel for the homeless, whilst the honey is harvested for sale in the cathedral shop.

Volition is benefitting volunteers who are learning new skills, finding a new sense of belonging, helping them to grow in confidence; it is benefitting the partners also who find it rewarding to put something back into the community by way of service to others; and its benefitting the cathedral's sense of outreach into the community, commissioning projects and being able to scale up what can be done - through united effort - to help quite often vulnerable people break out of a cycle that has limited their chances in the past.

Scripture - Title Deeds

It's interesting that when we come to look at the scripture readings for today the first of these, from Exodus, takes us back to the title deeds of the Church's mission. The genetic thread for this identity emerges from

the story of Exodus and the narrative of God freeing the Israelites from a past that had diminished them, had subdued their spirit and held them captive. Exodus becomes for them a story of redemption - a story to be forever commemorated through the festival of the Passover, a festival that recalls and redefines that essential understanding of Israel's covenant relationship with God.

Fast track now to the New Testament and it was none other than the Passover Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples on the night of his betrayal. Indeed, it was from the events that followed that supper that this narrative of redemption took on a dramatic new meaning for the apostles through the paschal mystery of Easter.

Faith in Christ's passing over from death to new life inspired his followers with a radically new understanding of what it now meant to be part of a covenanted community united with one another in Christ - which meant being united with Christ in his crucified self as well as in his risen life; to be nourished by his abiding spirit and called to share his apostolic mission of reconciling love.

In Romans 13 Paul speaks about the way in which the Christian life is to be patterned on Christ. Therefore he says remember the debt of love you owe one another - how it is love that ought to bind you together in Christ and this becomes the genetic code that will determine the essential nature of the Christian Community and its outreach into the world. Reconciling love, for Paul, is the fulfilling of the law - because it works for that which is good and true and noble in human relationships.

And how precious that feels when whole communities have been targeted by inhuman acts of evil, as was the case at the Manchester Arena and elsewhere on the streets of our cities in recent months. And

how important to communicate a resilience, a deeper wisdom rendering to no one evil for evil but commending a higher vision of human becoming.

And how precious when a Cathedral Community can be seen to use its privileged place and its considerable social capital to scale up what can be done - through partnerships and united effort - to address issues of social justice helping individuals to break out of the cycle that has limited their chances in the past, giving them a fresh sense of belonging, fresh confidence in themselves and a fresh hope for the future.

It's good to be reminded of the commitment of duty, commitment and service and of the title deeds of our covenanted relationship in the crucified and risen life of Jesus, to be reminded of Christ's eternal gift of reconciling love which gives shape and contour to our continuing journey of faith.

Amen