

THE SUNDAY SUPPLEMENT

21st June 2020 – 2nd Sunday after Trinity / Proper 7

Welcome to this week's *Sunday Supplement*. For those who would like to, a service of Holy Communion is available on our YouTube channel from 7am Sunday.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMSD6J4ngi9rCe7kzY66Xfw>

The video includes an opportunity to share in the prayer for Spiritual Communion which is set out on page 4 of the *Supplement*.

READINGS & COLLECT

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Psalms 69:8-11

Romans 6:1b-11

Matthew 10:24-39

*Lord, you have taught us
that all our doings without love are nothing worth:
send your Holy Spirit
and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtues,
without which whoever lives is counted dead before you.
Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

Amen.

SUNDAY MESSAGE

This message is also available as the sermon in our recorded communion service.

There's no such thing as a silly question, we often say. Sometimes we then curse the asker of the silly question, because the most basic questions (which 'silly questions' usually are) are often the hardest to answer.

Nearly twenty years ago, when I was still quite a junior barrister, I practiced mostly in the Chancery Division of the High Court and did a lot of work in the Companies Court. The volume of cases was very large, and it was customary for counsel and judges to share in some abbreviated language to make things work smoothly. You would tell the judge that all the formalities had been correctly observed and ask for

"the usual compulsory order" or something like that, without setting out the detail of what the papers showed, if it was all in order.

I remember one such occasion. It was just after Christmas, early in 2001, and the current Master of the Rolls, Sir Terence Etherton, had just been appointed as a Judge of the Chancery Division. It was his first time sitting in the court. Unbeknown to me, Mr Justice Etherton had never worked in this court and he didn't yet share in its intricacies. When I asked for what I knew I was entitled to, he said to me, very politely, "Mr Tudway, this may be a silly question, but why is it that I am entitled to make that order? Could you point me to the relevant law?".

In that moment, I realised that if I had ever known the precise source of this everyday jurisdiction, it was at least 5 years previously, while I was training. The court was full of people, many of whom I could expect to become my clients in the future – provided they never saw me make a fool of myself in public! I thumbed nervously and aimlessly at my copy of *Sealy & Milman's Annotated Guide to the Insolvency Legislation*. After a few seconds, it miraculously fell open at exactly the right page (out of about 1000), on which the answer was clearly printed. All proceeded swiftly from there.

I had a similar experience around the same time when District Judge Sturdy, sitting in a County Court somewhere in the South East of England, said to me, "I don't know the first thing about Insolvency Law, Mr Tudway, so if you want this order, you're going to have to explain to me exactly why you are entitled to it." On this occasion I was ready, but I shall always remember Mr Justice Etherton, and District Judge Sturdy, with affection and respect – not because they made me feel inadequate, or because they made me work, but because they were not afraid to show humility in a public office and ask what we proverbially call, the 'silly question'.

In church a few years ago, someone said to me: "silly question, but, we are always told that we have to be more like Jesus. But why? Where does that come from? Jesus was quite sharp with people and got put to death: I'm not sure that I want to be like Jesus."

I hope that you are in no doubt that our calling as Christians is to be more and more Christ-like. Equally, I think we are all entitled to feel something of the apprehension of the questioner, because the way of Jesus is the way of self-sacrifice (ultimately, in Christ's case, on the Cross).

What would your answer be, to the question "*why should we be more like Christ?*"

If you wanted a quick and simple answer, you could probably do worse than cite 1 John 2:6: "*whoever says, I abide in him, ought to walk just as he walked.*" You could also pick out several commandments in the Gospel of John. In his High-Priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus says "*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*" And then in John 21, he says "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" Those who wish to place themselves in the shoes of the disciples must hear these commands to the first disciples, to go into the world in the same way that Jesus went out into the world. Our mission is to share in His mission.

If you were focussed on the hard aspects of being like Christ, you might reference Philippians, chapter 3, in which St Paul says, "*I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*" In that quotation Paul is using, as an example, his own desire to be more Christ-like, in order to show us how we also ought to feel.

We know that God commands us to love Him, and love our neighbour as ourselves. Now, when we want to make something accurately, then we follow a pattern, a template, or an example. If we want to keep God's commandments, then what better pattern to follow than God incarnate, Jesus Christ?

It's often Paul who shows us the way because, in Paul, we see a human being who just like us is grappling with what it means to follow Jesus fully and completely. Paul goes right back to the ideas of Genesis, of man being made in the image of God. In Romans 8, he says that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son: notwithstanding our fallen nature, we have the image of God built in; it is 'hard-wired'. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul says that all those who contemplate the Lord's glory are being transformed into his image. In the present, it seems, we can recover some of the image of God that we have lost.

The First Letter of John talks about what the ultimate result of this life of moving towards Christ might be: "*we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him,*

for we shall see him as he is." The writer of this letter looks forward to the day when we no longer see through a glass darkly, when God is more fully revealed to us and, in consequence, we will be more like him.

John Stott talked about the three passages I've just mentioned in terms of eternity: three perspectives of past, present and future, illustrating God's purpose of transforming us in Christ-likeness. His eternal purpose of predestination in Romans; his present purpose, in historical time, in 2 Corinthians; and his final (or 'eschatological') purpose, in 1 John.

For me, today's passage from Matthew gathers together a good deal of what I have already talked about. It picks up the same ideas that are present in John 17 and 21. Having just sent out the twelve disciples, in the passage we heard last week, Jesus is instructing them on their Mission. He compares them to students or servants; he is the teacher or master. In reassuring the disciples, Jesus teaches that God knows the minutest detail about everyone, even the darkest parts, and he makes this promise: "*everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.*" This idea of acknowledging Jesus must mean following his pattern. You can't say, for example, "I believe in God, but none of the Ten Commandments applies to me."

The closing words of this passage are not especially comfortable reading. In my Bible they are headed "*not peace, but a sword*". They parallel those words from last week's lection, "*I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.*" No-one can say that they are misled into thinking that life as a disciple of Jesus will be all easy going. Except perhaps those who have been deluded into following the Prosperity Gospel. When we try to speak into the state of the world, when we try to bring something of God into the life of the world, into the public square, we are likely to be shouted at, or shouted down.

The idea that the way of God might not be wholly welcome to the world is deeply embedded in the Old Testament, whose prophets repeatedly rail in the name of God against the state of their nation (especially at its treatment of the poor). The same idea is powerfully present in today's passage from Jeremiah 20. The mocking, the derision, the weariness of Jeremiah are all too real, but ultimately the prophet is confident that God will vindicate him, and he ends the lament with the triumphal "*Sing to the Lord, Praise the Lord.*"

In the Wednesday Supplement this week, I said that hope – true hope – is not about a desperate expectation that either God or someone else will do the hard work for us. A true hope in God involves truly following God now and always, not waiting for God to impress everyone at the last moment with a miraculous act. I love the joke that Paul makes at the start of Romans 6. What should we do: sin as much as possible, so that God can demonstrate his grace and forgiveness more impressively? Quite the contrary: knowing that we will always need God’s forgiveness, we are nevertheless to strive to be his disciples as best we can. When we chose to be baptised into Christ and accepted all his many benefits (as Psalm 103 puts it), we are baptised into his death. In more colloquial terms, you cannot expect the rights without accepting the responsibilities. In law, we might talk about the benefit and burden of a covenant: the consideration, the *quid pro quo* for a promise. Paul says that we are united with Christ in his death, and when we talk about Christ’s death, what we are really talking about is making the ultimate sacrifice: self-giving for the redemption of others. If we want to be followers of Christ, this is what we are signing up for. We are signing up to follow him through thick and thin; not to earn his grace, but to be like him in giving ourselves.

We hope that we will not be so put to the test as to discover in our own lives that whoever loves father or mother more than Christ is unworthy of Him. And we hope that we will not have to come close to taking up a Cross in the way that Christ did. But that is the essence of the relationship we have with Jesus. We are prepared to lose our lives for his sake, because he gave up his for ours. That in a nutshell is where we are called. That is why we must be more Christ-like, that is why we must walk where he walked.

NOT PEACE BUT A SWORD

Depictions of Jesus with a sword are unusual in Western art, but there are a few in Eastern iconography. The image to the right is in fact a fresco (a mural painted on fresh plaster) and can be seen in the Monastery of the Ascension in Kosovo.

Jesus’ teaching that he comes to bring a sword rather than peace seems strange at first hearing, in the context of his many promises of peace, including the beatitude “blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). The meaning of the sword becomes apparent when we read the whole of Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 10, in which Jesus begins by telling his disciples to give a blessing of

peace to any house that receives them. A distinction is to be drawn between the purpose and content of Jesus’ teaching (which is peace) and the response of some hearers of that message (which is division, among other aspects of rejection). Jesus knows that his message will bring peace to some but that others will reject it, creating division: but Jesus intends only peace.



In art, the sword does not only symbolise violence and division. Since power in early civilisations had to be gained and retained by force, the sword became widely understood as a symbol of leadership and honour (a man at one removed from the use of force which might once have given rise to that power). By extension, the sword also symbolises justice (think of the Old Bailey). The sword of justice is two-edged: it protects both sides without favour and is powerful when it needs to be.

CLOSING PRAYER

*Loving Father,
we thank you for feeding us at the supper of your Son:
sustain us with your Spirit,
that we may serve you here on earth
until our joy is complete in heaven,
and we share in the eternal banquet
with Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

AN ACT OF SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

You may wish to set aside a space for prayer in front of a cross and/or candle, in a part of the house which is calm and comfortable.

The Act of Spiritual Communion is best used at the time of normal church services, or as a personal response after listening to a broadcast or livestreamed service.

Guidance appears in italics. You may wish to say aloud the words in bold type.

Introduction

Begin by making the sign of the cross and thinking of those who might otherwise be sitting around you in church.



**In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Reflection

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

**Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all your sins, confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Word of God

Read one or more passages of scripture, perhaps the readings set for the day. Today's readings can be found listed earlier in this Sunday Supplement. You may wish to read the sermon.

Prayer

Begin with the Collect. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the needs of the world, our community, family and friends and to the prayers you ought to offer for them.

Spend time in silence to reflect on the issues raised in the readings or the sermon and apply them to your own life.

End with the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven... or

Our Father in heaven...

Prayer for Communion

This prayer may also be used at the appropriate point while watching a live or recorded service of Holy Communion.

**Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day.
Amen.**

(After the prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Closing prayers

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord.

**The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life. Amen.**