

St Mary Abbots

Trinity 4, Eucharist

Deuteronomy 30:9-14, Colossians 1:1-14, Luke 10:25-37

Father Christopher

Over the course of the last week we have heard the return of words like values, integrity and honesty. And whatever you think about the policies of the current government, I hope you will agree with me that the discussion of what values guide us as a community, and as individuals, can only be a good thing.

That things like honesty and integrity matter in our politics, and that it is not actually all about self-interest, may have begun to seem naïve to some. But I was very interested to listen to what Sajid Javid had to say in his resignation speech – he spoke of attending the Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, and having heard there about the importance of responsibility to something bigger than yourself. He spoke of bringing people together; of standards; of values; of ideals. And he spoke about the question of how the next generation will view this generation of politicians, and about his duties as a father.

This reminded me of some of the questions put to me by children in our school around what has become known as party-gate. When discussing the rule of law in assembly, something I have a particular interest in from my previous work as a barrister – and the rule of law means the law applying equally to all - children asked me why the Prime Minister can behave differently. It may be possible for adults among themselves, particularly in the tea rooms and bars of the House of Commons, to begin to believe that idealism is naïve, but when being judged by children, shame seems to kick in more readily. We all want to be looked up to by children, and if they do not look up to us, we rightly feel that we have got something wrong.

I do not want to use today's wonderful baptism of Bliss, Jude and Nedd to make political points; but it is appropriate to speak of the way of life into which they are being baptised. And while we in the church try not to stray into party politics insofar as we can help it, it is for us to stand up for high standards of public life and integrity. And today's readings are all about how our faith is not just a matter of abstract high ideals, but about doing good in the world.

*'... we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, **so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.***

In this world we are set about with many temptations. It is not easy always to do good, and indeed none of us manage to all of the time. But that is precisely why we believe in the importance of what is about to happen to you.

In being baptised, the three of you – and I speak to them even though they cannot understand me yet – you will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit that you may grow in goodness, in faith, and in the many good gifts of the Holy Spirit. You - we all - need those gifts. We can do nothing in our own strength. And we need the high ideals of our faith. Yes, they are so high as to be impossible always to live up to, but with God behind us we can turn, again and again, when we slip and fall and seek His forgiveness and help in beginning again. We can seek His help in helping others. That natural altruism that grows out of our love of God, which flows out into our love for all of our brothers and sisters.

The more we love, the more we naturally show that love; just as conversely, the more we live in a cynical, selfish way, the more that becomes habit. But we as Christians stand for something different. And it is that different, counter-cultural, life – lived for God and for our neighbour, which you are being baptised into today Ned, Jude and Bliss.

So who is your neighbour? That is the question which Jesus answers in that most sublime of parables, the Good Samaritan. The Samaritans were the most excluded and separate of outsiders.

All whom you might expect to help this beaten up and robbed man passed by. Frequently I pass by in the High Street when I see people in need. I do also often stop, but I might be in my collar and embarrassed that I don't have any money or food vouchers on me; or, worse still, I might just be in too much of a rush, or not feel like expending the emotional energy in stopping, and give in to that temptation. Or I might not be in my collar, and therefore feel I can more *easily* slip anonymously by, taking advantage of the other shopper, whose flow in the other direction shields me from the pull of obligation. So was the priest in our story. Not necessarily a great villain, but he failed in his duty all the same, as we all do when we do not stop. And who does stop?

Well, in our day there is no-one quite equivalent to the Samaritan I think. But imagine how you would feel after walking past, and then looking back to see a Big Issue seller using all that they have to buy that person a drink. And even holding them in their arms. That person, whoever it is, who shows mercy; the one who stops, who listens, who gives time – who gives attention. That is the one who shows mercy. And that is the one who was a neighbour to the injured man. '*No man is an island, entire of himself.*' We are all connected. We are neighbours to all, and all in need are our neighbours.

You are not being baptised into a philosophy, or a nice woolly, highfaluting way of **thinking**. You are being baptised into a **faith** which demands everything of you. Which means that every person has a claim on you. But in being brought up within the faith – within a faith in which **values**, lived out in a good life, following the example of Jesus Christ, are at the **centre of who you are** and what you do – you will have more satisfaction than anyone could ever desire.

In giving everything for God and for neighbour, you will be freed from the petty selfishness which always promises, but never fulfils. You will gain everything, even eternal life. Likewise, as you begin your Christian journey, the rest of us look to you to be our example.

For to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must all become as little children, just as you lead all of us back to the font, which is the font of new life and of hope. Amen