

Parish of Esher
Christ Church, Esher with St George's, West End

SERMON

Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 3 February 2019
9am Sung Communion, St George's, West End
1 Corinthians 13; Psalm 48; Luke 2.22-40

Ven David Gerrard

In the Name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 13-1. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have no love I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol.

Today is the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple more commonly called Candlemas. But I am not going to preach this morning about the lovely passage in Luke's Gospel that was our Gospel reading because I hope many of you will come to Old St. George's Church this evening where there will be many candles, lovely music and anthems by the choir and a very atmospheric service in that lovely and historic old church, without doubt the finest building in Esher and well worth a visit this evening as we are only allowed to use it for worship a few times a years as it is now in the care of the Historic Churches Trust. Do come. However as I am preaching there this evening as well as here this morning you are hearing about the famous words from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and not about Jesus going to the Temple and meeting Simeon and Anna.

Paul had much trouble with the Church in Corinth which was riven with disagreements and feuds. In the earlier chapters of the letter Paul tried to change the behaviour of the infant Church in Corinth. There was jealousy and quarrelling among the members. There was sexual immorality, men sleeping with their father's wife, prostitution, divorces. There was worship of idols with food being sacrificed to them. There were lawsuits between the members. Most of all there was struggling for power among the church members. Different people boasted of their gifts, about their ability to

speak wisdom or to be knowledgeable, or to have gifts of healing, or to speak in tongues, or prophets, or administrators, and claimed their gifts were more important than others. How unlike Church life today!!

In the passage just before our Gospel reading Paul explains that a healthy church must welcome all these gifts but they must all work together just as different parts of the body, hands, eyes, heads, feet must work together to form a healthy body. All parts are essential and thus equals. So it should be for members of the Christian community. Then Paul begins the 13th Chapter with the words "I will show you a more excellent way" the way of love.

Whatever the gifts people have they are of no value unless there is love between the different members. That is the best way, the only way. Giving gifts to the poor, being prepared to sacrifice one's life are of value only when there is love as well.

I expect most, perhaps all of you, know that there were several different words in Greek all of which are translated by the single word in English - love. There is Eros, erotic love. There is caritas, charitable love, philanthropy; a tender, forgiving, caring, kind, protecting, trusting love - far from boasting and pride. Then there is agape, the love of believers for God and the love of Christians for one another. It is so powerfully an expression of this love that the Eucharist, communion, was used to describe the gathering, the meal that accompanied the Eucharist. It is a love that is eternal. All the other gifts, prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpreting the speaking in tongues, knowledge, they all fade away with time, but true love, agape, abides for ever.

The gift of love does not come once and for all. Paul told us that we have to grow in love. When we are children we talked and thought and reasoned as children do. But when we became adults we learned and saw and experienced more. It was if we did not see in a mirror clearly. Remember in the time of Paul there were no perfect glass mirrors just reflections in water, or in polished pieces of silver. So they could only see partially, while as adults we can see as if face to face - not in a mirror.

It all sounds so simple, obvious, possibly even easy. But it is not. Right up until the end of our lives we experience hatred and rejection and temptations to prevent us from living as we should after having received the gift of love. One brief example of what love ought to be. Tomorrow I am

officiating at the funeral of a man, Eric who met his future wife when they were 14. They married at 22 and sixty-eight years later he has died. She is of course very, very sad but says of him, and this was confirmed by others that he was a lovely man and they had a very loving marriage.

People who are new church members or new Christians often expect, and rightly so, that believers, churchgoers, will live according to different standards to life at work or in families or with neighbours, and that there will not be the arguments and hatreds and deceit that we receive the other areas of our life. And overall that may be the case. But not always. Not in individual cases. And that causes people to be disappointed and to feel deceived, occasionally hurt and humiliated.

So it is up to us, especially when we suffer to set an example of forgiving love, to turn the other cheek, for if we do not behave thus no one else will wish to follow our example, be fellow believers, attempt to serve the same Lord. So let us remember the guidance passed down to us for the past 2,000 years, some seventy generations. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled, where there is knowledge it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned as a child. When I became a man I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain; faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Amen.