

19th May 2019 - Easter V

Preacher: The Revd Dr Calvin Samuel

Hymns: 1 All people that on earth do dwell
 624 Calm me, Lord, as you calm the storm
 658 A Charge to keep I have
 564 O thou who camest from above
 662 Have you heard God's voice

Readings: Isaiah 51:1-3, 7-11
 Psalm 130
 Mark 12:28-37

“Love God with all your mind”

Sermon Focus

Loving God is central and loving with all the mind is as valid a pursuit as all the heart, soul and strength.

Introduction

Today is Aldersgate Sunday, the Sunday closest to 24th May when we remember John Wesley's encounter with God which left his heart strangely warmed. Why do we bother to commemorate that moment? Because from that moment of encounter, which was similarly experienced by his brother Charles 3 days earlier, a life of devotion and discipleship followed for those two brothers and others who like them had experienced similar heart-warming. This ultimately led not only to the creation of the people called Methodist, it also marked the beginnings of a wider renewal of the Church across England Wales and Ireland, and wider afield in the Caribbean and the Americas.

My own country of Antigua, a tiny island, 17 miles long and 12 miles wide, was the first country outside of the British Isles to which Methodism spread in 1760. In this very church building in the baptismal font to my left is a stone from Antigua etched with broken slave chains as a memorial to the many slaves who despite their chains, nonetheless found freedom in their coming to faith as Methodists. They too discovered that their hearts were strangely warmed.

Aldersgate Sunday, then, is a time not only to remember Wesley and his heart warming, it is also an opportunity to remember those in his wake whose own lives were transformed because of the witness of those around them who were shaped by the love of God. Our text today wrestles with precisely this concern, that of the Love of God. We are exhorted by Jesus himself in the great commandment to Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' And Love your neighbour as yourself.'

Jesus does not attempt to say that we must love God with 4 distinct parts of our being: heart, soul, mind and strength. Instead he is saying that we must love God with all

that we have and all that we are; and in order to do that we must love our neighbours as ourselves. When we do, that is when we will find true life. Do this and you will live out the ideals of the Kingdom of God.

Nonetheless I want to spend a little time thinking further about two aspects in particular. What does it mean to love the lord with all your mind and what does it mean to love God with all your strength? But first we begin by considering the most crucial question of all. What does it mean to love God?

So, what does it mean to Love God? I find it striking that the great commandment is not to obey God; it is not to honour the name of God; it is not to serve God; it is not to bring glory to God. It is not to tell others about God. The great commandment is to love God. When we love God, of course, we will seek to obey God, we will seek to honour the name of God, we desire to serve God and our deepest hope is to bring glory to God and to tell others of God.

Nonetheless, the great commandment is: Love God. May it be your deepest desire: to love God. When you go out and when you come in, love God. In your labour and your leisure, love God. In public and private love God. Whether you are used by God or laid aside by God, love God. In good times and in bad, love God. Whether your rate winning or losing, love God. When things are going well, love God. When things are painful and seem hopeless, Love God! Whatever else may be said of you let it be always said of you that you love God.

Who has been in love? Who is still in love? When you are in love the object of your affection is on your mind all the time. I fell in love when I was in Theological College. Let me tell you it was not great for my studies. I was distracted all the time because this woman who would later become my wife was never far from my mind, everything I did she was in my heart, I wanted her to be able to be proud of me. I tried to spend as much time with her as I possibly could and I wanted to introduce her to everyone I knew, partly because I wanted them to love her too and partly so I could say, yup, I know: She's with me. Falling in love is a life altering and reality altering event.

When we truly love God, God is never far from our minds, everything we do he is on our hearts, we want God to be able to be proud of us and we want to introduce God to all of our friends who don't know him because we know they're going to love him too, and partly so we can say, yup, I know: He's with me. Truly loving God is a life altering and reality altering event.

That love of God is not a love turned inwards on itself but a love turned outwards both enabling us and requiring us to love our neighbours as ourselves. We live at an extraordinary time of change. A time when there are forces that seek to divide by means of terror, forces that seek to differentiate by means of rhetoric. A time when our nation is divided over Europe, over politics, over immigration and religion. We live with the harsh realities of the murder of Muslims at prayer in New Zealand, and of Christians at prayer in Sri Lanka. The escalating and ongoing conflicts in Syria and Libya, not only threaten stability but also increases the number of asylum seekers, further exacerbates the immigration debate, and reminds us of the fragility of life. In days like these we are in ever greater need of the love of God turned outwards enabling us to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is what it means to love God.

But what does it mean to love the Lord with all your mind? The human mind is one of the great wonders of God's creation in which our own creativity reflects, though as through a glass darkly, something of the creativity of the God whose image we bear. Every achievement credited to the human race began in the mind. The Chinese mission to explore the dark side of the moon, began in the mind; the ambition to find a cure for small pox, began in the mind. The dream of a day when we can be judged by the content of our character rather than the colours of our skin begins in the mind.