

Rev. John Griffiths ThL (Hons1) [Moore] BD [Lon]
Sunday, 12 January 2020
First Sunday after the Epiphany

In order to give you a focus, I should like to begin by asking you a question. My question is this:

“What was Jesus about?
What was Jesus really, fundamentally, about?”

In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, in the Gospel reading tho that Sunday, we a get a tiny first clue.

After attending the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary had been searching frantically for Jesus and when they finally found Him in the Temple, He said to them “did you no know that I must be in my Father’s house?” Even at the age of 12, a special relationship was developing in Jesus’ mind.

The years passed and clearly that relationship matured and as His public ministry unfolded

Every thing Jesus said
Every thing He did
Every thing He sought to accomplish was motivated by His love and devotion to
His Father and His Father’s will.

The big test of that relationship came in the Garden of Gethsemane leading up to His trial and crucifixion.

He faced an absolutely appalling prospect:

The physical agony – nailed to the Cross.
The anguish of spiritual separation from His Father, bearing the sin of the world.

He prayed earnestly:

Is there any other possible means?
Was there no other possible way?

Nevertheless, the Father’s will was always going to determine Jesus’ decision.

His relationship with His Father was the dominant and most fulfilling factor of His life, and His heartfelt desire is to share that relationship with you and with me.

From His death upon the Cross, there are a number of important outcomes. I want to focus with you on three:

1. First and foremost, He died to save us from our sins. He took upon Himself the judgement of God for our sins.

In this service, we are reminded of St. Paul teaching “This is a true saying and worthy of all to be received that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

Jesus offers us forgiveness as a gift – the response on our part is faith in Christ our Saviour and faithfulness to Him in love and devotion.

2. In addition to forgiveness, God makes a further gift, a further free gift.

The gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Life.

This lifegiving Spirit.

The same Spirit by whom Jesus was born and lived on earth.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is God with us, by which He is both our assurance and our guide.

There are not further conditions to receive this gift. He, the Holy Spirit, is the prerequisite to a 3rd gift.

3. The gift of adoption.

Here I want to remind you what St. John teaches us at the beginning of his Gospel, Chapter 1, verses 11 and 12. “He came to His own but His own people did not receive Him but to them that receive Him He gives power to become children of God – to them that believe in His name” and the power which he gives is the power of His Holy Spirit.

We are not God’s children by nature. We are God’s children by grace of adoption.

It is his gift
the gift of a loving Father.

Jesus seeks by these gifts to impart life. He himself is the fount of life, and the life which He seeks to share with us, is life in relationship with God.

This relationship which He offers
Is not casual,
Is not formal, but
Close, loving and devoted.

A relationship with is motivation
For all that we do
And all that we are.

A relationship within which we acknowledge ourselves to be His children.

It is as we read the Bible that
We become aware of what Jesus is about,
We become aware of what God expects of us, and
We become aware of what God is offering to us.
Bible reading is “God taking to us.”

Prayer, our talking to God, takes time. It takes time each day, but also importantly, it takes time for us to understand what prayer is really about, and this is not learned in five minutes.

Prayer is not treating God as though He were Father Christmas

Prayer is not seeking to twist God around to our way of thinking.

So many people give up praying when God does not give them what they ask for.

Prayer does not change God’s mind at all, though it may at times encourage the activation of His will in response to our faith.

Remember what Jesus is about. In prayer He actively seeks God’s will and teaches us to do the same.

As God’s children, He teaches us how to address God –
He is our heavenly Father.
He also teaches us to pray as He Himself prayed –
“Thy will be done.”

The Christian faith is relational. It is at the heart of the two grand commandments.

1. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, and
2. Your neighbour as yourself.

Prayer is part of the development of our relationship with God – especially our responding to what God says to us and teaches in the Bible.

As our relationship develops so does our understanding of God and God's will, and, as a result, as unlikely as this may seem initially, our acceptance of His will.

(Conclusion)

It makes no sense

No sense at all to say that we want to go to heaven where the whole focus is upon God, when we give little or no time to Him day by day.

Heaven is not a reward for what we have done or how we have lived here on earth.

It is God's great and lasting gift to us.

It is in recognition of the reality of our faith and of our commitment to Jesus Christ.

It is a natural extension of the relationship already established with which we value now with God.

If you take nothing else from this service this morning, take this with you and make sure you act upon it.

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This Church is which you worship is named after St. John the Evangelist – let me close with his words – his purpose in writing the gospel which bears his name.

“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jest is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

(The closing prayer)

Our Heavenly Father,

As we have focused our thoughts upon Jesus Christ your Son, recognising both the love which motivated His life and ultimately His death, and that in both life and death He has reached out to us that we might share His relationship with you –

Help us so to respond that we fail not to grasp the opportunity which He is offering.

Help us to seek and to treasure* our relationship with you.

In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.

* Ref. Matthew 6:21