

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2020

Paul Brewster – Mission and Community

Hello, good morning!

In this talk we're going to think a little bit about mission and community. In particular we're going to ask ourselves what our responsibility to others is, and we're going to hear that there are only *two* rules that matter, but that they do have life changing consequences.

I don't know about you, but I was a member of a choir from the age of seven or eight. I was recruited from school to join the local church choir, and music went on to become a very important part of my life. I went on to join the Bath Bach Choir a few years ago and sang with them for a couple of years. Unfortunately I had to give it up because I had too much work to do at the same time! When you join a club you work together towards a common aim and you make certain commitments. In a choir you agree to attend a certain number of the rehearsals and turn up to perform.

You could think of religions as being the same kind of thing - like a club with a common purpose. Let's take Islam as a good example of one of the great world religions. Islam has five pillars five things that every good Muslim should do. You have to have a profession of faith, to agree to pray on a regular basis, to give to the poor, to fast (for example in Ramadan) and you have to commit to a pilgrimage to one of the great holy places of Islam.

In Christianity we have two rules and we can find this in Luke 10. This is the opening for the parable of the Good Samaritan.

*<sup>25</sup> On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*<sup>26</sup> "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

*<sup>27</sup> He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'<sup>[a]</sup>; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[b]</sup>"*

*<sup>28</sup> "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

So those are the two rules: loving God with everything you've got and loving your neighbour. These are not "tick box" rules - you can't do them and tick them off. These are "heart rules".

God made mankind to live in harmony with him and also with each other, but he also gave us the freedom to choose, and from the start, unfortunately, people chose to do their own thing - go their own way - rather than go God's way. This selfish behaviour is what the Bible calls sin.

Well, how do we fix this? We fix it through a kind of reboot - a supernatural reboot. In John 3 we find Nikodemus, an expert in matters of faith, talking to Jesus.

*<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again<sup>[b]</sup> he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>[c]</sup>*

This is being "born again" - a kind of spiritual reboot, taking out our hearts of stone and replacing them with soft hearts, listening to God.

Are we, therefore, having been through this process, perfect?

We're not. If you read John's first letter he says that none of us is without sin, and we all know that's true! But the great thing is, from Roman 6, that in fact the power of that sin has now been **broken** because of what Jesus has done for us. While the choice to sin is still there, it's not now all powerful.

What's more, as you walk on with Jesus in Christian life you are gradually changed. 2 Corinthians 3:

*<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Yes, there are just two rules. Love God with everything you've got and love your neighbour (and not just easy neighbours!). Not only are these the only two rules, but we have help. We can enjoy a supernatural reboot as well as the power of God's Spirit to be gradually changed into His likeness and thus more able to love God and to love our neighbour

Of course this is the heart of the Christian gospel. That's why we're here!

Now, what about those life changing consequences that I mentioned at the beginning? Just two rules but boy, these rules have life changing consequences. One of the consequences that flows from a love of God and love of other people is the Great Commission that we read of in Matthew 28.

*<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Mission flows from a love of God and a love of our fellow man and fellow woman.

A bloke called Hudson Taylor founded the China Inland Mission during the height of the Victorian era when China really was a faraway place. He said that the Great Commission is not an option to be considered but it's a command; something that we've GOT to do

Now, what about Bath? What about Walcot, our parish? You may feel, and I certainly feel, that actually taking the message of Christian faith to our parish and to our city is pretty hard and it's not necessarily my ministry. Perhaps you feel it is not necessarily *your* ministry. But the fact is that it is **our job** and as I was preparing this I was thinking what more can we do at St. Swithin's to reach out to families in our area, to their children... what about those lonely and isolated people? What about people who are vulnerable, who have mental illness struggles and, indeed, what about the "comfortable middle classes"? God is calling us to speak to all of these people, to help them understand what it is that Christian faith offers; the love of God for them. To achieve this, we have to be bold and we have to rely on the power of God as we go.

Hudson Taylor said that there are three stages to every great work of God. First, it's impossible, then it's difficult and then it's done! He also said that all God's giants were weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them. They couldn't do on their own.

That, I think, needs to be our approach, as we begin to plan forward for the future at St. Swithin's we need to be planning ways in which we can fulfil our part of this calling to reach out to our community. Because, to sum up, there are two rules. We need to be loving God with everything we've got, but also loving the people that were here with, and that means we need to take action. Thank you for listening and God bless.