

Sunday 7 July 2024. Trinity 6
Revd David Treharne: Final Sermon at Tidenham & Chase

Well, here we are. I'm so glad to have made the decision over 12 years ago to apply for the post of Vicar and Priest in Charge here. It's been quite a time and so much has happened.

- My father dying Nov 2014
- Roseanna growing up and having most of her childhood here
- Kathy's cancer diagnosis and that journey.
- Covid and my 18 months of brain problems.
- I've lived all of my 40's, my best years, here... best balance of youthful energy and experience.
- It's been a very good time but also a costly time personally. I can say to you sincerely that I've given my all!
- The privilege of knowing you folks, worshipping with you, sharing mission and ministry with you, sharing laughter and joy, tears and pain... living life together with you. What an honour and what a privilege to have been your vicar and having been involved in so many life events! Thank you for being companions on the journey.

And what can I leave you with today?

Well, over recent weeks we have been looking at 2 Corinthians. I think it's been a very timely text to have had. 3 messages in the letter seem particularly poignant to highlight as I leave.

1. God's ways are not our ways.

When one gets involved with God and enter the Kingdom things are turned on their head. God's way of measuring success and significance is entirely different to the world's way. This is a central message of 2 Corinthians. Throughout the letter St Paul turns upside down our natural expectations of the way life works, the way we think church should work and the way the Kingdom of God works. When it comes to God's ways and the Kingdom, it's topsy turvy land! God takes what is low, despised, and weak to accomplish his purposes. Just scroll through 2 Corinthians and you'll find it taught that comfort comes through affliction (2 Cor. 1:3–7), sufficiency is through insufficiency (3:1–6), life come through death (4:7–15), blessing comes through suffering (6:3–10), salvation comes through grief (7:2–10), abundance through poverty (8:1–2, 9, 14), and boasting through hardship (11:16–30). And then today in Chapter 12 is a key principle: God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). Weakness is necessarily seen as good in itself, yet it is God's chosen means of displaying his grace and glory and power. The Lord fills and uses the empty and broken vessels.

When you think you're strong and self sufficient and all conquering then you are weak! When you are weak and insufficient and broken then you can discover true strength and the power of God. This is a massive spiritual truth.

Pride and rebellion has been the cause of so much damage to the world, the church and to our lives. We look to ourselves. We rely on ourselves. We make ourselves God! Paul emphasizes the folly of such a philosophy and the need for humility before the Lord and one another. God's ways are not our ways.

2. Relationship and Reconciliation.

One of the main reasons Paul wrote 2 Corinthians was to address relationship issues.

Paul addresses the need for the Corinthians to reconcile [with an estranged brother (2 Cor. 2:5–11) as well as with Paul himself (7:2–16)]. Indeed, **to fail to reconcile is to be outwitted by Satan** (2:11).

Believers have faced and continue to face divisions across the global church and we will constantly face relational challenges that need to be faced and worked through. The challenges will come from within... our own weaknesses, brokenness and sinfulness. And the challenges will come externally from others and from unholy forces at work seeking to distort, damage and corrupt.

Do not be unaware of the battle against sin, the flesh and the devil in the realm of relationship.

God's mission is all around relationship and community. As Trinity, he is relationship and community... and calls us into relationship and community... with him, with one another and with those around us.

Relationship and community is the area where God's reign is most clearly shown in hospitality, reconciliation, forgiveness, in working together in partnership, in listening and speaking well of each other, in attitudes and acts of kindness and generosity, in a smile, in encouragement and blessing, in patience and in humility, in genuineness and authenticity, in co-operating with the Holy Spirit, in peace and love... and it is the area which is most vulnerable and at risk of going wrong. The Bible is FULL of relational destruction but it is also full of the transformation in relationship through God's intervention in the world!!!

To find harmony, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace when there has been disagreement, dispute, difference and division is a sign of the Kingdom and a sign to the world. May the church of God here be that sign!

3. **Servant leadership.**

In all his writing but especially the Corinthians, Paul gives a powerful example of what it means to be in leadership and have responsibility within the body of Christ.

God's people and above all, Christian leaders are to do what Christ himself did: pour out their lives in self-giving love for the sake of others. We are called to model Christ—through sacrificial love (2 Cor. 4:10–12). "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation" (1:6).

Not to point to ourselves and big ourselves up (goodness me, how much misuse of power in leadership we have seen through the centuries). NOOOOO!!! We are to point beyond ourselves to the one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

We are not to puff ourselves up... we are not to proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (4:5).

Servant leadership is not option. It is the high calling of all who lead God's people. Leadership and its responsibilities are shared and seek to bring the best out of the whole Body of Christ. It is permission giving. It is humble and open to change and the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is responsible and accountable. It is also imperfect and vulnerable to attack and mistakes. **Pray for those who have responsibilities amongst us.** Encourage them. Bless them and be kind to them... our priests, churchwardens, officers, PCC members, preachers, worship leaders, pastoral assistants, volunteers etc...

If I was going to add to 2 Corinthians... from some of what I have I learned these last 12 years it would be?

- That God's love and faithfulness is extraordinary and it is faithful.
- That whilst the world has changed a lot since 2012 (Olympic year), yet alone 2,000 years ago, the Gospel is still sooo relevant. The power of God in Christ to transform lives is as fresh as ever! God and his love make go in and out of fashion... but his love, his presence, his justice, his truth, his mercy, his joy... is unchanging!!! At Peter Kenyon's funeral the other

day the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke Ch10 was the chosen reading. Less than 300 words that sermon is as relevant and powerful today as it was then! If our politics and our communal life was driven by that Scripture alone the world would be very different!!!

- Faith in action, lived out authentically day to day can make a difference to people and our world. And that that faith needs to touch every part of life... not just Sunday! Faith is for the home, our communities, our work places, our retirement, our socialising, our finances, our relationships, our family dynamics, our politics and so on! Live it out! Share the life of God! And that's the conversion... remember... us orientating our decisions and our lives around Christ, rather than always expecting God to orientate himself around us.
- I have learned that I need to learn so much more. Humility. "Not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less." CS Lewis.
- 'Relationship' is central to life and faith for the Christian. Relationship with God, relationship with each other as church, relationship with those around us locally and further afield.
Relationships give the greatest joys and the bring the biggest heartaches.
++Justin and +Rachel spoke about forgiveness at the service at the end of May. Forgiveness has been the single biggest issue, apart from the wider issue of relationship, that has come up in my ministry here. Forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel... in the Cross of Jesus Christ.
Being the church, a group of people in community led by the Spirit with Jesus at the helm is an awesome thing.
- Finally, but also foundationally, I have also learned time and again that Jesus Christ is Lord of ALL... and following Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life... is the best decision one can ever make and that the presence of his Spirit in our hearts and interactions is utterly essential for life!