

Message from Bishop Robert

Published in the Diocesan Weekly News: July 13, 2021

Not passengers but citizens

“But I have not done enough.” These words were said to me some years ago by a member of the congregation in the church of which I was the Rector, to explain why they could not go ahead and be confirmed. ‘I have not done enough... I don’t deserve it...’ of course, as I tried gently to explain, if any of us waited until we have done enough to be confirmed no one would ever be! The extraordinary thing about our faith is that we recognise that we are saved by grace through faith. It is the amazing thing about God that the love that is shared in Jesus Christ is given without condition, the father runs to the prodigal son, Jesus walks with the sinner. “As the Father has loved me”, says Jesus, “so I have loved you” which leads the author of 1 John to write “We love because God loved first.”

This is why I have found recent comments disparaging of those who might be considered passengers in our churches unhelpful. If we take seriously the truth that God loves us first, we are all in one sense passengers. None of us, whoever we are, are here in our own strength, but are carried by that love. The one who comes just once a year to sing carols is in need of God’s love and is loved by God as much as any one of us. We are all held by God’s love and in this understanding there has to be a place in God’s Church for all. All are indeed welcome, all have their place, the committed, the unsure, the curious, because this is the very nature of our God, and as a result in our churches we are called to practice abundant hospitality. Of course, there is then so much more.

The nature of love is not that it demands, mandates a response, crucified truth does not coerce, but it draws us out from ourselves to the other.

Being loved we respond in love, become part of the way in which God’s love is shared, not least through our participation in the mission and ministry of God’s Church enabling others to see that they also are loved. This is part of what it means for us to be Eucharistic people.

This is why, as Bishop Rachel was saying last week, it is right that in these coming weeks we are reminded that we should begin by resting in God’s love, finding, rest and recreation, re-creation, there. To be clear this is where we begin, it is not a reward for service, or a prize for achievement but a gift that God freely shares with us that we may be confident not in our own strength but that we are loved first.

In this way anxiety is cast aside, our anxiety and that of the Church. There are of course things that we must do, activities we should undertake, but it all begins with God, and it rests in God as we rest in God.

We are not really just passengers of course. The nature of God is that we are far more than that, fellow citizens of the household of the saints, but our citizenship is a gift, given to enjoy and to live. That is something my candidate discovered when she accepted the gift of confirmation. It is something Bishop Rachel and I pray we will discover anew in this season.

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