

An Address by Belinda Speed-Andrews at St David's Church – 27th September 2020

May I speak in the name of the living God, father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus'. The mind of Christ. I don't know about you, but I sometimes don't know my own mind let alone anyone else's and above all Christ. But then I don't think Paul is asking us to know what is going in the mind of Christ but more to think, to regard, to have the same attitude as Christ. In Christ's actions we have the perfect affirmation of love.

How do we know God? How do we know Jesus? Because in order for us to have the same mind that was in Jesus we need to know him first. God has been revealed to us through the scriptures. He has been revealed through the stories of the prophets, through Abraham, Moses Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nehemiah and many more. But we never really saw God because to see God was to encounter death. Remember how God told Moses to hide in the cleft of the cliff as God covered Moses with his hand until he passed by and as God removed his hand all Moses saw was the back of God as his glory passed by. God was with the Israelites in cloud by day and fire by night. He was with the Israelites as he spoke to them through his prophets, through Kings and through Judges.

And then something happened, something changed.

But what was the step change? The step change was in the Incarnation; God became man. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death. God walked among us, lived, ate drank, worked among us. God was with us in Jesus Christ. I want to suggest that Jesus spent 30 years in Nazareth just hanging out with his community, living learning and working as a carpenter. If we do the maths that is 90% of his life was just being with, being among his family, friends and community and doing what we do, living. The other 10% was healing teaching, admonishing (9%) and the last week of his life was suffering betrayal defeat and death (1%). So we know if we look at Jesus' life he lived just like us, he ate, drank, laughed cried, worked and learnt, just like us.

To know someone you have to be with them, really with them. I would want to argue that most of us have acquaintances and can probably count on our ten fingers those we really know. God created us out of the abundance of his love to be with Him, not for anything else. And all of us here perhaps know that it is our sinfulness that keeps us apart from our creator. But we are all working on that, that's why we are here today.

Our calling as Christians is to be with God and this is what Paul is saying to us today in the verses we heard from Philippians. To have the same love, to be in full accord, and of one mind with Christ, we need to be with God, that is all.

As Christians we are called to imitate the way God is. The purpose of creation was for God to be with us and for us to be God's companions, to accept this invitation to be with our creator, for this is how we shall spend eternity so why not spend our temporal existence being with God too.

How are we to be with God to imitate God? The answer is to follow the way God is with us in Christ. Christ's ministry had a time of abiding in Nazareth, a season of teaching, healing, training and debating in Galilee and a season of pain and suffering in Jerusalem, and so we ourselves can and should, I want to suggest, expect to experience pain & suffering, but also the joy of exchange of experience and solidarity and controversy with others and a time of abiding, enjoying and sharing existence with one another.

Matthew's gospel opens with the angel's promise that the Messiah is to be called, Emmanuel, God with us. It ends with Jesus' promise to the church; 'remember that I am with you to the end of the age', and in the middle of Matthew, Jesus promises that 'Where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I am there with them'.

However, our default as a Christian community is not to be with but to do for, or work for. In other words we perceive a problem in society and we think we have all the tools to correct the problem. This in itself is not a problem and is sometimes the right action to take. But perhaps when this is our default, we see ourselves as having all the assets and the other as a deficit - lacking something that we can provide or a problem that only we can solve. In working for we create a them and us and we don't really get to know the other and in a sense we use them for our own means, to make us feel better about ourselves. This is not Christlike.

If as I suggest being with God, with one another and with creation we can learn how to have the mind of Christ, how do we do this. One theologian suggests the following: presence, attention, mystery, participation, delight, partnership, enjoyment & glory.

Let's take an extreme example and let's just imagine that you are aware there is a homeless person sitting, living, sleeping in a doorway on your road. Let's call him Brian. Perhaps our default is to try and help Brian by giving food, pointing him to a homeless charity, a place where he can sleep warm and sheltered from the weather. We do this out of compassion but I suggest we do this as it is the easiest way of helping but it is also seeing this person as lacking, as impoverished as a person full of deficit. We react this way because this is how we have been led to believe this is what discipleship is in part. We also believe that this is the way to solve a homeless person's problem. But how many times have we heard how homeless people are unable to re-adjust back to what we call normal living?

What if we decided then to spend time with Brian and not try to solve, repair or even encourage him to do what we think is the best for him?

To be present; to spend time just being with Brian, chatting with him, listening to his story over a cup of coffee, we may then begin to really see him as a person, a real person not just someone or a problem we can sort out.

Attention; this is hard. Attention is being with Brian as he shares perhaps his most deepest, painful experiences and for us not to try and heal or to solve his problems. We may feel anger, horror and disgust at the stories he shares but it is not about us this is about us being attentive to Brian.

Mystery; it is not for us to understand why, or even to try and explain why. It is for us to sit with Brian and know that we may ourselves be challenged to re-think our own assumptions and understandings. We may not understand their choices but that is just it, they are their choices and it is not for us to judge or to even solve.

Delight; there may be very little delight in this Brian's life but if we take time to just be with them, there may well be laughter in the absurdity of a situation. It may be in the journey of this relationship, perhaps Brian decides eventually to attend an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting. Perhaps it is just this act which creates the sense of enjoyment just because a positive step has been made.

Participation; there may be much better ways of spending time with someone but the life of a homeless person is chaotic and participation is that. It is being with them in their chaotic activities however crazy and absurd they may be. It is how you can genuinely be with that person.

Partnership; partnership flows from participation as you begin to work together; a greater understanding begins to emerge, a being with one another.

Enjoyment; to enjoy is to revel in the abundance of a given moment, to the here and now and all the hope and energy in the things that never run out. A homeless person is someone society has no use for but in truly being with we can learn and appreciate the abundance of this person created in God's image. This person may have no use in society but that doesn't mean we can't enjoy them, their company.

Glory; perhaps a homeless person is not somewhere we could look for glory but in the relationship that has grown, the trust and understanding of each other; in us seeing the whole person and not the label homeless, this itself is a glimpse of God's glory for we are truly with this person at this moment.

This may all seem like a lot of work but it is not. We can be with god as we are today in worship in prayer here or on our own, in hearing his word, but what happens when we leave this building. How are we going to translate all of that into the Nazareth of our lives? By being with each other whoever the other is and in recognising the 8 elements, participation, attention, delight, partnership, enjoyment, mystery and glory we begin to see Jesus in the other and therefore begin to be like Jesus. Not working for to relieve our sense of guilt or to make us feel better about ourselves but by truly being with and recognising in ourselves our own deficits and that being with God in the other, we are truly complete and will have the mind of Christ. Amen.