



Community as reconciliation in class, culture and ethnicity

w/c 10 November 2024

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,²⁷ for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26–28)

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–27 and Romans 15:1–9

The culture Paul was working in and through had several significant resemblances to our own: a common language (Greek); it was easy to travel widely, so many cities would contain individuals and groups from other races and cultures; a general decline in 'old-time' religion with several new beliefs jostling for attention and members. Looking at verse 28 in the quotation above, what other groups – ones pertinent to today – might we think of as we read through Paul's first-century list?

Through our readings we can perhaps see this week's topic as the positive mirror to our thinking last week – how can we build up our fellow believers and others around us. The word for neighbour in Romans 15:2 is after all the same as used by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Greek word translated here as 'please' holds thoughts of carrying out willing service for others. The Message puts it fairly robustly: *"Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"* Do we? How could St James do more?

Today, the thoughts Paul outlines in our Corinthians' reading are all too often reduced to the cliché of *"being in the world but not of the world"*. Can we think of examples for ourselves. Who should we become 'like' for the good of the gospel? In the Greek, 'like' (ὡς (hōs)) is stronger than just an outward resemblance. It is the same word used by Matthew in the Lord's Prayer where we ask for God's will to be done on earth *"as* in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

It is often said that church exists for those who not yet its members. What would church look like if we could make it attractive to those among the 7,000 or so in the parish or 70,000 or so in the town who are not with us on a Sunday morning? Whose presence in church might make us uncomfortable?

I think it could be useful to think around ideas of acceptance here as well. After all, rejection is one of the clearest signs on unreconciled relationships. It may be worth reflecting for a moment on the protected characteristics that underpin equal rights in this country and asking ourselves – how do we address each within St James? They are listed on the website of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and are:

<i>age</i>	<i>marriage / civil partnership</i>	<i>religion or belief</i>
<i>disability</i>	<i>pregnancy and maternity</i>	<i>sex</i>
<i>gender reassignment</i>	<i>race</i>	<i>sexual orientation</i>

Thinking back to last week – how do we apply those principles of conflict resolution to those across the church whose views differ fundamentally from ours on, say, the role of women or the date of creation?

"Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the 'fight with fire' method...is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community...Yes, love-which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one's enemies-is the solution." (Martin Luther King Jr)