

Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, St. Mary's Church, Wimbledon, Second Sunday after Trinity, 10th June, 2018.

Children are introduced to the concepts of good and evil at an early age. When I was a child it was by listening to fairy stories of a handsome prince rescuing a princess from torture and death. The stories I was not so keen on were the Baron Munchausen stories of being chased by wolves or bears!

I know that today Disney's 'Frozen' characters are popular but for my 12 year old great nephew Tom it is the Star War characters that keep him absorbed. I worry at the violence of some of the games he plays but he assures me that it is not real life. But the concepts of good and evil are real.

Our first reading from Genesis introduces us to a modern day theme of the 'blame game'. As we hear reports of modern day disasters be it The Grenfell Tower Fire tragedy or natural disasters such as the Hawaii earthquake we see organisations or individuals trying to distant themselves from taking responsibility for what when wrong. It is reminiscent of Adam and Eve blaming one another for eating from the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden.

How hard it is for us to own up when we have made mistakes, done wrong, especially if we have hurt others. It is only through the Grace of God and the redeeming power of Jesus Christ our Lord that we can begin again. Jesus Christ, although divine, took our humanity upon himself to redeem the world.

I have just attended the funeral of Doreen Gleed, aged 95, a longstanding member of St. Matthew's church. Doreen gave devoted service to God all her life. I thought of her as I read our second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. St. Paul looks ahead from this earthly life to a heavenly life. How encouraging to think of an eternal weight of glory that is to come. We may have suffering in this world but that will be outweighed by the glory that is to come. It is by the grace of God that we have the strength to continue through times of adversity.

We return to the theme of blame and punishment in our Gospel reading. We may want to dismiss out of hand the notion of someone called "Satan" or the concept of Beelzebub and Demons. But right from the start of our Christian journey at our baptism at the point in the service called "*The Decision*", we have the words:

"In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.
To follow Christ means dying to say and rising to new life with him
Therefore I ask:

To you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

The responses: I reject them

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

To combat evil we are exhorted to turn to Christ as Saviour, and the Lord who is the way the truth and the life.

We can certainly see the manifestation of evil in today's world, we cannot escape it, as we listen to the news headlines day by day.

Jesus had demonstrated to the people he met the divine power that he received through God his father and the Holy Spirit. In Mark's Gospel we hear the account of Jesus healing a man with a demon that made him deaf. The Scribes and even Jesus' family did not recognise that Jesus' healing power was of the Holy Spirit.

The Scribes attributed Jesus's power as coming from Beelzebul. Jesus' family think he has gone "out of his mind" and he is disgracing them. In Jesus day the family unit was extremely important and therefore his family had travelled a considerable distance to rescue him from himself and to save the family honour.

However Jesus demolishes the Scribes argument that Satan or the devil has the power. Jesus by his actions show's that the power of evil is coming to an end and God's kingdom is being established. The power of good is overcoming the power of evil.

By the Scribes denying that Jesus' power comes from the Holy Spirit they are blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, a sin which cannot be forgiven. What an awful thought not to be forgiven.

The scribes and Jesus's family wanted to tame the power of the Holy Spirit because it was a power they could not understand.

Why Jesus appeared to reject his earthly family was because they would not recognise his mission as the son of God to do his father's will. So Jesus looks to a family of all people who believe in him, and believe in the power of God , in the world working through the Holy Spirit.

So today we have to ask ourselves do we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit working in the world and in our own lives? Or do we too deny that that power of the Holy Spirit exists?

Why was it that the Bishop Curry's sermon at the Royal wedding attracted so much attention? He demonstrated by his words that he believed in the power of the Holy Spirit working through people today, demonstrating the love of God in action, that love being showered on people today, like a fountain of God's love.

That is what the Christian Church is called to do demonstrate the love of God in action. It is very heartening to read a quote from *'After Grenfell: The faith groups response,'* how 15 different Faith centres in the vicinity of Grenfell Tower helped. ... *'The report says that the four main ways in which faith groups responded to the disaster were: opening the doors of faith centres – and sometimes homes – to people affected; helping to meet the immediate needs for clothes, food and water; providing space for people to pray and reflect, and offering pastoral care; and offering long-term faith-sensitive support Including professional counselling, to victims and other affected....'*

This is love in action.

Perhaps the Church in this country does not publicise enough its Love in action. Perhaps like Bishop Curry we need to shout out to people of God's overwhelming

love for each individual person. I know for a fact what a lot of caring and concern is shown by members of this congregation, whether it is in the more public sphere of the Night Shelter work, or collections for the Foodbank but also on a one to one basis.

Over this last year when my health has not been good I have received offers of help, cards or telephone calls, people praying for me, being showered with Love. I am very appreciative and it is a humbling experience. We have to receive the love of God for ourselves in order that we can share it with others.

By letting go the control of our lives and handing it over to God we become changed people. It is only by opening our hearts and minds to God and his Holy Spirit to receive the outpouring of his Love and Grace that we can then show forth that Love to others. If we were all truly able to do this on a daily basis the world would be a changed place.

I think these words of St. Ignatius of Loyola say it all:

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory,
my understanding, and my entire will – all that I have
and call my own.*

You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace.

That is enough for me.

Amen.