

## A Hate Sermon!

Psalm 136; Proverbs 2<sup>1-11</sup>; 1 John 2<sup>1-17</sup>

Whoever says 'I am in the light' while hating a brother or sister, is still in darkness. (1 John 2<sup>9</sup>)

Evensong sermons can be lethal - if they follow a good lunch, then the challenge is always to ensure people are awake: if they anticipate a later meal then the task is to keep the listener focused in the moment and not on what is to follow. When I began preaching I was given some advice that I have always remembered: people don't need to see the point of a sermon, they need to feel it!

The Psalmist - in the reduced version of Psalm 136 that we heard - gets his message across: God is good, **his mercy endures for ever!** Proverbs is also nice and safe and suggests that we can be good if we **understand** how to be good. What a nice cosy evening we could have had if John's letter wasn't included. These make points that we can see - there is nothing to unsettle or challenge us.

John then begins hopefully enough - he has introduced the idea that God and sin are fatally opposed in the previous chapter and begins here with an assurance - **if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.** We are also reminded that forgiveness is not just possible but assured - **he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.** The challenge is then clear - **whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.** Christians become more like Jesus and if you don't there is no real evidence of faith.

This much is fairly straightforward - no-one is forced to become a Christian: but those who are Christian need to live up to that. Again we can see that point

The challenge of the new commandment is given - and then John drives the point home in a way that we certainly feel. **Whoever says 'I am in the light' while hating a brother or sister, is still in darkness.**

I spent a generation in classrooms challenging unsuspecting victims with the question: *what is the opposite of love?* there was always a flourish of hands suggesting that *hate* was the opposite of love. But that isn't the case. *Indifference* is the opposite of love: an absence of feeling or care.

**Hate** is either the passive or the active and negative expression of that same emotion that is positively expressed as love. The Greek word, *miseo*, is a verb with a definition that includes 'malicious and unjustifiable feelings towards others, whether towards the innocent, or by mutual animosity.' In classical literature, it can also mean to *reject* and a *permanent and deep-seated human hostility to others.*

How easily we could adopt a view that being nice to others is the antidote to this. Yet, John is clear that the alternative is the positive expression of **love**. Now we can settle to the digestion or anticipation of our dinner, because we have heard so many sermons on this, ranging from the platitudinous to the indulgent.

To 'feel' the point of the sermon we rather have to face the betrayal of love in hatred that arises in our own lives.

- ✦ In a world where hatred can be expressed as indiscriminate violence and terrorism the challenge to love those with whom we have profound disagreements is a constant.
- ✦ In a world where hatred can be expressed in the freedom allowed to bear arms in the USA love has to show that freedom can liberate all God's creation.
- ✦ In a world where hatred can be expressed in the resolute selfishness of a sustained rejection of people, ideas or things that unsettle us, love needs to change us and not them.

How easily we justify our hatreds and thereby deny our faith. How hard to turn hatred inside-out so that it becomes love.

Who sees the point? Who feels it?