

The Power of Love!

Jonah 3^{1-5,10}; Psalm 62^{5-end}; Hebrews 9^{24-end}; Mark 1¹⁴⁻²⁰

*Power belongs to God. Steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.
[Psalm 62¹²]*

At a time when Allied merchant and fishing vessels were under persistent attack from Germany, Winston Churchill, in a BBC broadcast was able to offer some reassurance to the nation: 'I am glad to tell you that the heat of their fury has far exceeded the accuracy of their aim.'

We have as our text for this remembrance Sunday a phrase from Psalm 62 - and it is vital that both sides of the quote are held together:

- ✦ Some are very keen to tell us that **power belongs to God**. But there is much more to power than strength. Which is why it goes on:
- ✦ **Steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord** - because power without love is just like the fury without accuracy that Churchill refers to!

There are too many examples around the love of power exercised without love. Most obviously, at the moment, the efforts of ISIS to terrorise the world into accepting their perverted view of Islam or their distortion of what it is to be human. Sadly, that is not a unique example of the love of power.

- ✦ **Jonah** an example of getting things wrong. It is almost as if he loved the power of being the prophet of doom when he eventually arrived in Nineveh. But the response of the people **changed God's mind** - love triumphed (even if Jonah didn't like it).
- ✦ **Hebrews** introduces the possibility of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ. Here is love in action - and the example of sacrifice that inspired the sacrifice of 2 world wars and still is used to make sense of any sacrifice.
- ✦ **Mark** then presents the ideal of following Jesus. The love God has for us is the only thing that inspires real change - in becoming like Jesus we transform the love of power into the power of love!

One of the great characters of WW1 was the Revd Studdert Kennedy's, known as *Woodbine Wilby*. He was a prolific diarist and writer and, from the first days of the war when he thought it was a man's patriotic duty to volunteer for military service, but ended

the war as a very vocal campaigner for pacifism. In reading his reflections on where God had been amidst the carnage of WW1, two things challenged my thinking about God and yet strangely comforted my faith.

- ✦ **On prayer** he condemns the notion that it is a kind of magic cheque on the bank of heaven, only needing the formal endorsement with Christ's name to make it good for anything

He goes on to explore how prayer is based on Christ in Gethsemane. (Let this cup pass from me.) The prayer is not the request that he should be released from the suffering, but we witness Jesus fighting the terror that is within him. The real prayer, at which he eventually arrives, is **your will be done**.

Real prayer is the prayer not for safety but for courage to do God's will.

I don't know what God's will is in advance - I think I only see it when it has happened. Somehow I have to accept that God knows what he is doing and work through the terrors of the things I cannot understand and struggle to accept.

We need to learn from Christ - thrashing about in God's presence with words (angry words if we need to) until we relax into the faith that allows God to be God.

- ✦ **On the sacraments** he condemns those who make the Eucharist an end in itself rather than a means to an end, *the great end of a Christ-like life*.

He tells the story of a corporal who receives the sacrament and then three days later the Padre has to bury his mutilated body in a shell-hole. Seeing blood spilt and bodies mutilated he asks *is it wrong to see in them God's body and God's blood? They are his; he is their Father, their love and His Heart must bleed in them*.

Here is a great truth in Christian theology - God is not remote from any suffering. Where the sufferer is - where there is pain and brokenness - there is where we see God.

Faith holds on to the greater reality that God knows what he is doing and the painful reality that God shares in the suffering that has to be borne in the outworking of his will.

We need to try the power of love - to preach it; to encourage it; and to dare to live it - to transform our world, beginning with us!