

STBO!

[Jeremiah 15¹⁵⁻²¹; Psalm 26¹⁻⁸] Romans 12^{9-end}; Matthew 16^{21-end}

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
[Romans 12¹²]*

Diane Abbott MP had a quote attributed to her on Social Media this week:

If it wasn't for the nice gentleman who invented electricity – we'd all be watching television by candlelight!

Some things are just too obvious to comment on!

I feel a bit the same about the Epistle today: if you needed a crash course in what living as a Christian should be like this is it (forgive me grouping things together to make it easier to explore them):

- ✘ **Let love be genuine; love one another with mutual affection; live in harmony with one another do not claim to be wiser than you are; never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God -**

This is about our personal integrity as Christians – this is really where we **deny ourselves and take up [our] cross and follow [Jesus]**. Do we ever think that we can choose who to love or even who loves us – that can be a real sacrifice, to give that freedom up? Or to have harmonious relations with everyone? Really? Or, on the basis of your own understanding, to say, *I can never forgive/forget/move on from....* Leave God to sort things out – how can we be sure he will get it right?! Of course, I have heard and read the views that suggests, *you can love someone without liking them and sometimes harmony needs dissonance to be effective*: sheer equivocation and poppycock!

The real problem with taking up our cross is that we aren't in control: no crucified person was heard to say, *can I have that cross, it looks a bit smoother or, would you mind moving that nail through my wrist a bit as it isn't very comfortable.*

The cross absorbed God's wrath once – it's those not carry their cross who are the target now!

- ✘ **Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; outdo one another in showing honour; bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them; do not repay evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all; so far as it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all -**

This is about how we relate to others. I confess that I grew up with competitive religion: ladies hats certainly had winners and losers; who had memorised the largest amount of Scripture; which preachers could go on longer than 2 extra-large mint imperials; etc. I have been in Christian communities where they take seriously the competition to see who can be the best at **hat[ing] what is evil**. The competition that I have yet to see taken up seriously in any Christian community is to **outdo one another in showing honour**. We would never have to worry about living **peaceably** if that was one of our major concerns.

- ✘ **Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer; rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep -**

This is how faith makes a difference to the life we live. Positive, patient and prayerful! We talked enough about that last week, so we move on!

- ✘ **Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink -**

This is how we know that God in Christ has made a difference to who and what we are. The words of the less sentimental verses from the hymn, '*Take my life and let it be,*' resound so much with this.

**Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.**

**Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.**

(Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874)

Most sermons have the rallying cry, *be done with naughtiness*, but this one has perhaps, *be done with haughtiness!* We aren't too good to share what we have our own homes with others – especially those we may prefer not to! I know that this can be difficult, especially in an area like this: none of us want our money to be spent on things we wouldn't spend it on ourselves, but **food** and **water** and time (that's what **associate** really means) surely must be shared.

The alternative is that we become like Peter and tell Jesus how things should be – and would deserve the inevitable **Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me!** And that really would be like watching television by candlelight!