

## **1 Corinthians 13; Luke 2: 22-40 (Candlemas 2022)**

I recently started doing some study. As a parish priest, I think it's important that I keep up-to-date with my theological reading to stop things getting stale. One of the maxims of ministry is that in order to feed others, you must make sure you are fed yourself.

So, I'm doing some part-time study at Birmingham University in what is called Practical Theology. This is the study of how people *do* religion and faith, and what that tells us about what they believe. It is very much focussed on the day-to-day life of the church, rooted in our communities. So, while the academic theologians ponder questions like, 'how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?', us practical theologians are asking, 'how then should we live?'

It is a question that sits at the heart of Christian discipleship, and it was one that preoccupied St. Paul in most of his letters to the early churches. For Paul, the logic goes a bit like this: if Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin, and rose again to reveal the new life of the resurrection, how should Christians live their lives? If we know these things to be facts, what difference does that make to us? Put another way, if Jesus could show that amount of unconditional love for us, how then should we show love to others? This is what Paul is getting at in the passage we hear today. At the root of all Christian living are the essential elements of faith, hope and love. These ought to underpin everything we do. Do we reach out to the future in faith? Do we hold hope in our hearts? Do we respond to others in love?

Let's consider the story we heard today from the Gospel of Luke, the story of Simeon and Anna. They spent their whole adult lives waiting in expectation of God's salvation: they spent their lives in faith, hope and love. For them, religion wasn't just something that you *do* at the required points of the year, it was something that was lived, day in and day out. For them, the worship of God was a *habitas*, which means a 'way of life' – it's the word we get 'habit' and 'habitat' from; things we do so regularly that they become almost automatic.

And it's because they lived in this way that, when Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus into the Temple, they knew immediately who He was and what this meant for the salvation of Israel. They trusted that God would act, and they lived accordingly.

At the start of this new year, I wonder whether we are trusting that God will act here in our Benefice? Do we live with faith, hope and love at the heart of

everything we do? Because if we do, then we, too, will recognise those moments when God moves and something extraordinary happens that the rest of the world will probably not notice.

Which brings me to the service of Candlemas, which is always celebrated on this day. It's an old medieval tradition, appropriately timed for what is, for many, the bleakest bit of the year. Christmas is over, but Spring is still some way off, and the days are often dark and cold. In the midst of this, we are reminded that Christ is the light of the world, the light that the darkness cannot overcome. So, to help people hang onto this hope, the service of Candlemas was created to allow people to take blessed candles away with them to light up their homes and spread that blessing through the house. It has no real Biblical precedent, but it makes sense – it is making our faith a real component of everyday life.

So, I hope this tradition will be helpful to us in the weeks ahead. If things get a bit bleak at home, light your Candlemas candle and be reminded that Christ is always with us, even in the darkest times. Remember that we are people of faith, hope and love, and these things shape how we live our lives.

Amen.