

TRINITY 4

Thank you to those of you who sent me get well messages while stuck in the Rectory. For someone who has always loved Wimbledon since very little, I couldn't have timed my confinement better – I have never watched so much tennis and so many new and up and coming stars.

I can't say the same for the ping pong going on at Westminster! What we have witnessed in grim detail, only undermines the vocation and integrity of MPs in particular and, their commitment to serve with any kind of humility in general.

As much as our readings jar and conflict with our current, unhealthy and unsettling, domestic scenes, perhaps instead they should be held up as a timely corrective. We certainly need to keep our country's needs in our prayers just as we need to see our own failings in the failings of others.

In our first reading, Paul is not attacking anyone any more than he is belittling anyone but quite the reverse. He is giving thanks for the Christian community in Colossae and only wanting to encourage them: "We have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God." Imagine if we received such a message, here, from Bishop Martin – we would surely be thrilled to receive such a kind and personal postcard or 'tweet'? Of

course, I know he does pray for us as we do for him. When I said to him the other night, 'Have fun at General Synod this week in York' he lifted his eyes to heaven as if to say (which he didn't) those famous words of John McEnroe, 'You cannot be serious!' We know the different political goings-on within our institutional life can often be oppressive, like our national politics, especially when egos take over or dominate or, when 'one side' claims victory over another. We too, can sometimes be 'elastic' when we use the Holy Spirit to back up our point of view over another. We can sometimes be discouraging to those younger than us who perhaps need to bring new life to the 'old hands' who resist giving up!

I think the same when we compare Synodical government with the government of Westminster; we can get carried away that the Church is just a debating society with motion after motion and report after report. Are you with the Samaritans or are you with the Sadducees? Whose side are you on?

However well-known today's Gospel may be, it still applies to us regardless of particular affiliations or creed. If the commandments and summary of the law are a vital part of our heritage and Christian belief – I believe they are – how do we apply all that our Gospel entails in practical and caring ways? It was the priest and the Levite who one might most expect to come to the rescue of the one who became a victim to robbers and their abuse which left him 'half dead'. I guess, though, the cry 'mea culpa' goes up - whenever we pass by on the other side – whether it be the Big Issue seller or the

man wrapped up in a blanket in a shop entrance, protected only by his dog.

Whether it be a reluctance to help refugees in real and practical ways or just helping out a neighbour who is lonely or sad...we can always say that we are too busy or blame the politicians or say, that's one for the Salvation Army – they do that sort of Samaritan thing better than us?

It is the irony of the Gospel that the one least expected to help was the one who helped most. And that's a big challenge for all our churches of every denomination, and why, I suggest, some charities work most effectively by being more 'anonymous' or, I would prefer to say, less explicitly 'religious'.

I think of the anonymous and confidential service called 'The Samaritans' founded by Chad Varah – to which I was personally drawn to and help out as a student. I think of this man working for RNLI Aldeburgh in the picture just to the left of this pulpit. On this 'Sea Sunday' heroes like Karl Barber are precisely that because they help unconditionally and save lives unconditionally. You will also think of so many others who help save lives in perhaps less dramatic ways but they are still there for us – not wanting publicity and certainly not wanting the limelight – but whose quiet and gentle compassion continues to be a vocation in itself.

US speaker and author Dante Stewart tweeted this on July 2nd and challenges us by saying: "Many people don't leave Jesus or religion because they hate both. They leave because they

realize how often we love control more than inclusivity, arrogance more than humility, assimilation more than freedom, and power more than love.”

So I end, where I began and believe this time of silent prayer now is a golden moment to thank every Good Samaritan who touches and transforms our lives and, yes, dares us to reciprocate. AMEN.