

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 3rd September 2017
Trinity 12

Baptism of Lydia Brown, Thomas and Samuel Sherliker

Those of you who were here last week will have heard me preach on the question posed by Jesus to his disciples, "Who do you say I am?". We explored what this question might mean and how it challenges us to change, ultimately when we come to the altar of God to receive Christ in the bread and wine of the eucharist and we ask of ourselves, "who do I say Jesus is?". This ultimately is the question for all faithful followers of Jesus. Who is Jesus for us: an historical character, a prophet, a good man, the Son of the loving God? How we answer that question determines how we live our faith; as we always have without thought; as someone challenged to grow in faith; someone in between who struggles just to understand what it means to be a Christian.

How that works itself out in us is expressed by Paul in our reading from the epistle to the Romans today. "Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdoing one another in showing honour". You would think these things obvious. But as always with Paul you have to look past the words and understand the consequences. How these words require a substantial change in what we might think appropriate and acceptable. Take "love one another" as an example. This does not mean "be nice to each other". There is far more to this love that actually requires sacrifice from each other. To truly love one another means giving substantially of ourselves. And this is not easy when we are such different people. I am sure, as vicar I frustrate and annoy many of you from time to time! But that is what is part and parcel of the Christian life; sacrificially giving of ourselves to each other even when it is really tough to do so. And there is a lot more besides. We fall in to the "being nice" thing all too easily. When it comes to taking the gospel seriously along with its consequences on our lives that is a different matter.

Next week we launch our annual stewardship programme. This is when we are asked to give efficiently, effectively and regularly to the life of the church. The church requires your time, your skills and of course your money. We should be clear, when we say church, that is the people, you and me, not the building, beautiful as it is. Ultimately though, without wishing to sound like a black-

mailer, this is about our love for our neighbour and our God. If we are not committed, if we give the minimum that is respectful, if we are lukewarm in our offering in what way is this an expression of the love Paul is talking about.

Today we commit Lydia, Sam and Tom to God. We welcome them into the family of Christ. We say we will love them. How will that love be offered and received? With the passion of the gospel and the place of God in our hearts and lives? Or with the tepid response of social nicety. All these things are one of another. Unfortunately for us it is easy to slip into the life of tepid faith, do the minimum that is acceptable and quietly get on with life in our own little corner. That is not what God requires of us and is not what God did for us in his son our saviour Jesus Christ.

The baptism into which Lydia, Sam and Tom will be admitted is one of passion and warmth and power. Can we, will we show them and help them to know for themselves this reality which is in our own lives. And if it is not, if it needs renewal than use this service, these promises and responses to renew your faith in God and be filled again with the power and wonder of the holy spirit so that you too can let your love be genuine and the power of God burn in your hearts with all generosity and honour.