

WEEKLY SERMON

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A priority of every Christian

With so many positive initiatives underway in the Diocese and people keen to come to Blackburn, it is essential we do not get too pleased with ourselves. One Area Dean recently and helpfully reminded us not to be self righteous.

In Luke 15 Jesus is addressing the religious leaders of His day, who were pleased with their own goodness and proud of their praying, obedience to the law, generosity and charitable activity. They thought God should be pleased with them.

The parables of Luke 15 teach what really pleases God and makes His heart beat more than anything else, a concern for the lost and those without faith. Without Him a person is lost. This uncomfortable description is mentioned in the famous hymn Lord for the years....'lost indeed without Him'.

All are lost, outside the garden and need to be found.

The reason is because just as the sheep and the coin were owned by the farmer and the widow, so God the Creator owns all He has made and has the right to the love and obedience of every soul. All are made to know and be in relationship with Him.

And so if this is what is God's concern, it follows that we as Christians should follow Jesus' example and do two things:

1. Search for the lost

The farmer and the widow were so concerned for what was missing that the search to find was their single priority. Similarly, the chief business of the Christian church is to be outward facing and work to bring others to faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself said He came to seek and save that which is lost (Luke 19-10)

So every Christian should make it a priority to try and lead others, family, neighbours, colleagues, to a place of commitment to Jesus Christ. Too often we can be over occupied with church life that time to meet, know, build relationships with those without faith doesn't happen.

It was General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, who said to Rudyard Kipling, the poet, on a world tour:

'If I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my hands and beating a tambourine with my feet, I would do it.'

As Christians we have much to learn in growing this passion for what we in the Church of England call 'the cure of souls'.

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2. Rejoice over the found

The joy of the farmer and the widow in the parables is expressed in a great party atmosphere. When a person comes to faith and is converted, we should find good ways to hear the testimony of how that has come about and then celebrate. Hearing those stories will warm out hearts and encourage others to seek and find for themselves.

I love it that when someone becomes a Christian through the ministry of CAP, Christians against Poverty, because they ring a bell in the office in Bradford! As there is joy in Heaven over even just one person who turns to God in repentance and faith, so this should be the thing that gives us greatest joy.

Conclusion

So let's not lose sight of this heart beat of God and make sure we have the same concern as He has for those who have yet to believe and are yet to receive His gift of eternal life.

As William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the last century, is reputed to have said: 'The church is the only organisation that exists for the benefit of non members!'

May that be evident by the way we as Christians live our lives. That pleases God more than anything else. Amen.

Bishop Julian Henderson, Bishop of Blackburn