

Sunday 16TH March 2025: 2nd Sunday of Lent. Benefice Holy Communion, Oswaldkirk.

Some words from St Paul in today's Epistle, "*For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ*".

Gandhi once remarked, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians."! Even within the church some of us may find ourselves agreeing with this statement because the actions and words of human beings often disappoint us. When someone points to the mishaps of a professed Christian as a reason not to embrace the faith, the answer we might give is to look at Jesus instead.

In the Epistle today, St Paul, however, says, "join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us." It appears that Paul appeals to his readers to imitate *him*. This may seem to us to be an expression of vanity, but Paul has just used himself as a negative example of putting his own status and accomplishments before God, saying he regards these as rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ. So what Paul is saying is he does not want his audience to imitate false teachers, rather, he wants his audience to imitate him by throwing off everything that was themselves for the single-minded pursuit of sharing in Christ's suffering and knowing the power of his resurrection. The word "example" is translated from the Greek word *typos* which refers to a pressing that leaves an imprint, like a stamp or a seal and in terms of human relationships, the word came to refer to an example or pattern. Paul presents his own life as the *typos* that has made an imprint upon the lives of others, and it is that he says that is worthy of imitation. But Paul himself is not the archetype, he models his life on Christ, reflected in the words "for to me, living is Christ and dying is gain." For Paul, all of life is captured in Christ so that everything he does is generated by Christ and done for his sake. For this reason, Paul provides Jesus

Christ as the perfect example for his listeners to follow. He calls them to think and act in humility and self-sacrificial service towards each other always looking at Jesus, who acted in humility and self-sacrificial service towards humanity in his incarnation and in his crucifixion.

For us too, Jesus Christ is the archetype, the *typos* that made an imprint on the life of Paul, and we should allow Him to make that imprint on us too. That will lead to a kind of living that requires a certain attitude: not asserting your own rights and considering the needs of others as more important than your own.

Some though, Paul says, are not following this example and have become “enemies of the cross of Christ”. They do not follow the example of Christ as the *typos* modelled by Paul. Instead of having a mind set on Christ, they have “minds set on earthly things.” Instead of being guided by self-sacrificial service to others, they are guided by their own desires. These people may not have denied Christ by their confession or words, but have denied Christ by their behaviour, as described in that quote by Gandhi and many others since far and near. They do not build up; they criticize, are negative, exclude others, abuse their God-given authority etc. By their behaviour they reveal they are enemies of the cross of Christ because they refuse to conform to the pattern of humility and self-sacrifice that led Jesus there and should live on in his followers by the gift of the Holy Spirit. **Instead by contrast, Paul says, “Be Heavenly Minded”,** and not earthly minded. Paul reminds them that their true citizenship is in heaven and not on this earth. The Philippians – and we as Christians – are citizens of Christ’s city, governed by the gospel. Paul uses the present tense, “our citizenship *is* in heaven,” which calls them to enact their true citizenship now, and we should do the same and demonstrate we are citizens too. It is only by being heavenly minded that we can be of any earthly good. That earthly good should be demonstrated in

our communities, not just in our Sunday worship. Jesus emphasises that while going to the temple is important, much of the essential work happens outside where our Christian lives are truly lived, by serving those around us, by forgiving, and by seeking forgiveness, and bring the healing and grace of God to the world.

During Lent many of us are undertaking practices of self-sacrifice, following the example of Jesus when he was tempted in the wilderness. As helpful as these practices are to stave off a mind set on earthly things, we may still find ourselves as enemies of the cross by the way we treat each other. Paul reminds us to imitate him and follow the example of Jesus through humble and self-sacrificial living for the sake of others, and to reveal that imprint given to us by the Holy Spirit - to be with Jesus, become like Him and do as He did.

Thanks be to God. Amen.