

'We are one in the bond of love'

Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, Evensong St James October 13th 2019

Keynote Bible passage: 1 Samuel 18.1- 16, 19.1 – 7, 20.1 – 42

Family and friends are so precious to us. It is likely we have photos displayed on a wall or mantelpiece as we remember them – especially if they live some distance from us. The sermon this evening is prompted by a friendship, aptly described as soul-friendship, of David and Jonathan. The scripture describes it 'the soul of Jonathan was bound with the soul of David., and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.' (1 Sam 18.1). The theme takes a wider view, of '*relationships in the family of God.*' We shall consider first the context of the story of David and Jonathan, then of relationships in the discipleship community of Jesus, and then of the church today.

In our working through the first book of Samuel we are considering events in the court of King Saul round about 1000 BC. After the rule of the Judges, the people of Israel appeal to the prophet Samuel to appoint a king to rule – like other nations. Rather reluctantly Samuel anoints Saul. The author of the book describes him as 'a handsome young man...he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.' At first things for the new king go well and there's victory over neighbouring tribes. He has a son, Jonathan who grows up tall and valiant and he takes on and defeats the Philistines. The scripture records 'there was hard fighting all the days of Saul'. But Saul is disobedient to God's will and loses the anointing. God says to Samuel 'I regret I made Saul king'. Saul regrets he has been disobedient but it's all too late. The prophet Samuel is guided to David, a young shepherd and musician. He is anointed to be the next king. This brings David into Saul's court and his music appeases Saul's temper (an evil spirit tormenting him). 'Saul would be relieved and feel better and the spirit departed from him. 'Then comes the story of the brave David against Goliath. Then Jonathan re-enters the story and in tonight's reading we are told of the close bond between Jonathan and David. A problem of relationships arises with Saul becoming jealous of the friendship between his son and David, king elect. This becomes quite vindictive as Saul is 'consumed with jealousy' even to making an effort to kill David. ('Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan' 20.30.) Jonathan appeals to his father on David's behalf but to no avail. David realises his life is in danger and that the friendship needs be 'on hold'. So, they part ways 'in peace'. Later as David reflects on this soul-friendship he intoned a lamentation (song) over Saul and Jonathan who both had died in a subsequent battle with the Philistines.

He writes a song: 'Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.' (2 Sam 1.26). A bible commentator writes, 'The lament for Saul and Jonathan is one of the most moving and beautiful of David's poems.' So it is, like the story of Ruth and Boaz we read of love which binds us together, as the song goes 'Bind us together with love.' It is a story of loyalty and trust and friendship, of protection and to being lifelong. Soul friendship is a beautiful thing. As I think of this, I'm mindful of soul friends who likewise have passed into eternal glory. The relationship is a reminder, if we need it, of valuing deep friendship in the Lord.

2) We move now to consider the *discipleship community* of Jesus' earthly ministry. What's remarkable is the cross section of diverse men and women

Jesus chose 'to be with him.' He called 12 to be apostles, a loving family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, a woman with a background of need, Mary Magdalene, and 70 to be involved in healing ministry. What we need to remember they were 'ordinary' men and women, like you and me. Consequently, in their 'being human' they didn't get it right all the time. Mary, Jesus' mother was told of Jesus' mission, 'I must be about my Father's business.' James and John had ambition to be at Jesus' right and left in the kingdom, Judas Iscariot betrayed him, and Peter 'the rock' denied knowing Jesus in a crisis situation. Peter, James and John went to sleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus had specifically drawn them aside to 'watch and pray'. Mary Magdalene didn't at first recognise the risen Jesus from the tomb on Easter Day. Yet what was important was the Jesus also taught of the *importance of forgiveness* – not 7 times but 70 times 7. He emphasised the place of reconciliation, of how to deal with anger and retaliation, and of loving one's enemies.

He also prayed a moving *prayer of love* for the disciple followers 'Righteous Father, I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.' Jesus thus formed a community of love, to whom we sing, 'The King of love my shepherd is whose goodness faileth never.' Thus, we are in relationship with Jesus, as he assured his disciples: 'I no longer call you servants, because the servant does not know what his father is doing. I have called you friends, for everything I have made learned from the Father I have made known to you.' (John 15.15)

3) *The spectrum of love.* The letters of the New Testament are a testimony of how the discipleship community inter-related, amongst its membership, and toward those not of its membership. Thus, we may read there of descriptions of different qualities in relationship.

Paul writes to Timothy, 'Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness'.

Peter in his letter urges 'support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love.'

The one I love most is to the church at *Colossae* (our second reading): 'As God's holy ones, holy and beloved, cloth yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience.....forgive one another, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. And be thankful....With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God (including Evensong). And whatever you do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'

I regard this as being 'a spectrum of love', in that through each of these qualities is love. Love as expressed in our relationship with God, and with one another in different aspects of relationship.

Summing up and connecting then and now, Jonathan was a true friend to David. He listened, he encouraged. He repeated his devotion and willingness to do anything for his friend. Surely, we appreciate friendship. Think of and value friendship and what this means to you. The letters of John might be describes as

'love letters' and with a verse I close: 'If we love one another God lives in us and God's love is perfected in us. God is love and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them.' We are one in the bond of love.'