

SERMON AT 8.00 AM HOLY COMMUNION (BCP) AT ST JAMES' CHURCH, YARMOUTH AND 11.00 AM HOLY BAPTISM (CW) AT CHRIST CHURCH, TOTLAND BAY ON SUNDAY 27TH AUGUST 2017 (11TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY) BY JAMES COOK

Readings: Romans 12.1-8 and Matthew 16.13-20

Title: 'Mature in the Faith'

Aim: To help us to live as mature followers of Jesus.

If you or I are faced with the same question as Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" what is your response to Jesus and what is mine?

Do we regard Jesus as simply a good, well-intentioned man, whose radical ideals brought him into conflict with the authorities and who suffered the inevitable consequences? Peter saw much more than that: in answering the question from Jesus, he replies, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

"You are not just someone who represents a philosophy or an out-of-date religion. You are the appointed, anointed and living personification of Almighty God."

Jesus responds to Peter's confession of faith with a personal revelation and commission for this disciple: "You are a rock, and on this rock I will build my church. Your

faith in me will make a difference to your life and to the lives of countless others who will follow me, because of your example and the authority I give you.”

Peter is to grow into a mature and responsible Christian disciple and church leader. What of you and me? As we grow in the knowledge of who Jesus is, and as we commit ourselves to him in faith, what will he expect of us and how will he empower us to fulfil his purposes?

One of the marks of mature, adult Christian discipleship is sharing regularly in Holy Communion with fellow believers. In the Church of England, communicants are required to be baptised and confirmed in the Christian faith. Through our baptism, we declare Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. If baptised as infants, that declaration is made on our behalf by our parents and godparents. [If baptised as adults, we make that declaration for ourselves, as John Holdoway does today.]

In baptism, we not only declare who Jesus is, but we declare our intention to turn away from sin and to follow him. At our confirmation, we affirm these baptismal declarations and promises. [As soon as possible, John will be confirmed and thus become a communicant member of the church – not only here but anywhere Christian believers gather around the Lord’s Table.]

Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, teaches us how to live as mature Christians – how to live out the consequences of

knowing who Jesus is and of choosing to follow him. This morning, we consider some of that teaching and how it might apply to the way we live.

Paul describes this as being ‘living sacrifices, which are holy and acceptable to God and which are our spiritual worship’. The Romans, unlike us, were very familiar with the sacrifice of animals in worship. In following Jesus, says Paul, we offer our lives up to God, and this is an act of true Christian worship. How dedicated are our lives to God and how much of ourselves do we give to God in worship?

This giving of ourselves to God represents a radical change in motivation and direction. We begin to live not according to the ways of the world but according to God’s ways. This, says Paul, is a transformation: a renewing of our minds.

At our baptism, we say that we reject the devil and all rebellion against God, that we renounce the deceit and corruption of evil and that we repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour. This is the renewal of our minds, of which Paul speaks, and it is achieved not by our efforts but by God’s grace.

As our minds are renewed, so we discern God’s will for us – what is good and acceptable to God and what makes us complete people in his eyes.

Paul describes how this renewal of our minds – this change of attitude – will come to affect our behaviour towards our fellow Christians: (1) we are not to think too highly of ourselves and (2) we are to acknowledge the gifts that are given by God to others but not necessarily to us. Even the measure of faith that we possess is a gift from God and it varies from one Christian to another.

From our knowledge of other Biblical passages, we know that Paul's list of spiritual gifts here is not exhaustive. We see that Paul does not elevate one gift above another. He makes it clear that some Christians will have one or more gift while other Christians will not receive those same gifts. There is to be no sense of pride in our gifts and no sense of inferiority on account of gifts that we might like but do not receive.

Paul is also, it seems, saying something about the way that we exercise the gifts that God has given us. We are to use them for the benefit of others in our community and we are to exercise them with humility.

Shall we look at this brief and partial list of spiritual gifts in Romans 12.6-8 and ask ourselves which gift or gifts we recognise either in ourselves or in fellow Christians whom we know?

- Prophecy: the ability to sense what God might be saying in a particular situation and to share that insight for the blessing of others.

- **Ministry:** the ability to empathise with others, to understand their needs – spiritual or material – and to endeavour to meet those needs through prayer and practical help.
- **Teaching:** the ability to learn and to help others to learn from us whatever might bless them in both spiritual and practical terms.
- **Exhortation:** to receive encouragement from God, whether through prayer, Bible study or circumstances, and to encourage and motivate others to fulfil God’s purposes for them, as individuals and as a community.
- **Giving:** When we are generous with our time and our possessions, others are blessed and encouraged to be generous too.
- **Leading:** If, with energy and courage, we give a lead to others to move in God’s work and ways, they will be glad to follow our lead and so to receive God’s blessings.
- **Compassion:** Can we, as Paul suggests, act not only with compassion but also cheerfully towards those in need? If we can, both we and those for whom we care will be doubly blessed.

As we share with others the spiritual gifts that God gives us all, may we give effect to that transformation, that renewing of our minds of which Paul speaks. Amen.