

Trinity 20 2018
Mattins
Chichester Cathedral

When I was a boy- and indeed later as a young man - I played a lot of cricket. I still love the game – that is when it is played in the right spirit. Nowadays I am an umpire, which is equally enjoyable, although it does mean having to give batsmen “out” from time to time and sometimes being on the receiving end of their disappointment or even anger – usually with themselves, but occasionally with me...

I have always found parallels between cricket and Christianity, and as I was preparing for this morning I found another in our second lesson. Jesus is quite clear (as he expands his theme of the narrow door and describes the owner of a house shutting out the unwanted callers) that some people are very much “*in*” and others are “*out*”: not because they are, or are not, LBW or “caught behind”, but because in reality, like those standing on the pavement outside the house, there were those amongst his listeners who only had a casual acquaintance with him and not a fully committed relationship. Jesus is using the image of the homeowner barring certain callers to emphasise how those who want to be part of his kingdom must share his life and not simply have a passing, casual interest in him.

However, to modern ears, Jesus might sound strangely uncompromising, here. And the analogy with cricket breaks down too as most people’s Christian lives have an ebb and flow about them and we cannot surely be absolutely “*in*” or absolutely “*out*” with a loving God. In past history, the idea that you *could be* gave rise to some very dangerous theology about one either being saved or damned – some of which is still around.

One of the ways that – at its best - Anglicanism deals with this is to stress that we don’t *own* truth, or own right or wrong. Rather, our tradition is *wrestle* with it: much to the annoyance of those who want a much more certainty and indeed a totally uncompromising kind of faith. Of course, by virtue of our baptism we are all “*in*” – in

Christ, But at our best we also speak of the As a result, we speak of the comprehensiveness of Anglicanism weighing up issues and trying to discern what is right or wrong), and we just have to accept that there will be those who see this as a “cop out” and criticise us for incoherence.

But to return to this morning’s passage from Luke’s Gospel, how do we explain Jesus’ “all or nothing” stance here?

Well, the answer is to see the passage in context. Jesus is on the journey to Jerusalem, where he knows he is to face his passion and death. As a result, there is a tremendous urgency to his teaching, which he is expressing in every town and village he passes through on his way there. He wants a response from people and he wants it *now*. But - say the people in the story - *“We ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets”*. *“Not enough!”* says Jesus, *“It’s all very well inviting me to dinner and listening to what I say, but you actually have to live out what I have taught you and not sit on the fence!”*

There are, of course, echoes here of our first lesson from Isaiah, where we see that tension within the prophet himself: a tension between – on one hand - a sense that the people, now in exile, have brought this exile on themselves through sitting lightly on the ancient faith , and on the other, that they feel unjustly treated through no fault of their own. This resonates with the people outside the door in the Gospel story who have been shut out through their own fault, whilst feeling that this is totally unfair and are being unjustly punished.

But the urgency of Jesus’ message still applies to us today. We can’t duck it! In a world where we wrestle with truth, there is the frightening reality that whether in Russia, the United States, China, and elsewhere, there are those in the corridors of power who chose to *deny* truth and speak of *fake* news, if it suits them to do so.

Christians are called upon, daily, to stand up for what are the values of God’s kingdom and refute those that are not. Oscar Romero has just been canonised for doing just that in 1980 and paying for it with his life. But, also in the modern world there will be

those who we still need to touch “on the edge”, who are neither absolutely “*in*” or “*out*” and Cathedrals have huge gifts with which to do this.

The number of candles lit by tourists here and the messages they leave, surely points to the fact that people don’t fit neatly into a category of either believer or unbeliever. People’s souls are simply not binary in that way. They are much more complex. And so, cathedral ministry is *comprehensive... all are welcome*, but never *compromising*, diluting the message of the Gospel: We transcend boundaries because ultimately, God sees the potential in absolutely everyone to be one us and with him, in Christ.