

Mattins, Trinity 6 (28/7/2019)

- Genesis 42.1-25
- 1 Corinthians 10: 1-21

It was during a Dean's Conference in London a couple of years ago that we were taken to the headquarters of the Times Newspaper near London Bridge. As part of the visit we were given the opportunity to question four Times journalists about anything we wanted to.

And one of the Deans who was having a particularly difficult time with the Times newspaper and who disagreed hugely with the way the newspaper was interpreting events at that particular cathedral, asked the Times' religious correspondent why reporting of the incident had been so negative.

His reply was interesting: he said that in all his experience as a journalist he had come to the conclusion that if someone seemed to be being evasive it was usually because they have something to hide and he considered that it was his job as a journalist to discover what it was that they wanted to keep hidden.

We can all think of examples when the press has done well in exposing a hidden scandal: the systematic abuse of children in Rotherham would not have come to light were it not for the press's determination to investigate and cover it.

And we can also think of lives blighted by the press's interested – innocent people who the media have built up in order to knock down again: from football coaches to Archbishops of Canterbury.

But I take us back to the comment of that journalist: if people are evasive it is usually because they are trying to hide something.

In the passage we heard as our second lesson, Paul is trying to urge the Christians of Corinth to live with integrity. It wasn't so much that the people there felt that they had something to hide. Corinth was a cosmopolitan, international city with a reputation for being liberal and permissive. Christians in Corinth seem to have been enjoying being part of that culture, so the issue was not that they were hiding something, but rather they were enjoying all that the wicked city had to offer. It was almost as if it didn't matter what they did, as long as they said their prayers: being a Christian cancelled it all out.

Paul is trying to steer them away from that lifestyle. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and his cup of demons, he writes. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.; To be a Christian has consequences for us; what we do needs to be compatible with what we profess. There needs to be integrity with us. Our faith and our life are one and the same thing. They should be integrated, and we should therefore have integrity.

All things are lawful, write Paul, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful but not all things build up. Just because you can do it, it doesn't mean that you should, he argues in a report to a libertarian, anything goes philosophy, because there are aspects of living like that which will damage the individual, and there are aspects of living like that which will damage other people.

No, we are to behave in ways which will build us up, which will build up other people and which will build up the church.

As Christian people we are to live with integrity, remembering that not all things are beneficial, not all things build up, and that we are not to seek our own advantage, but that of the other.

We are called to behave in ways which will build us up, which will build up other people, and which will build up the Church and God's kingdom.