

CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	30 August 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Preacher:	The Revd Canon Vanessa Baron, Treasurer

We live in a very beautiful world where there is much to enjoy and give thanks for. But it is also a fractured and lonely world, where increasingly old, familiar structures and allegiances no longer seem to fit. Recent social change has hit young people particularly hard and there is a palpable sense among young people in their 20's and 30's of being economically and socially disenfranchised.

Which may be one reason why increasing numbers of young people are becoming interested in the Christian Faith. If there is no place for you in this earthly kingdom, maybe it is worth investigating a spiritual one. But what might this spiritual kingdom look like?

In both our Gospel passage and NT lesson, we get a description of what the Kingdom of God should look like in practise. St Paul sets out an immensely attractive vision of what the Church, the redeemed people of God, is called to be; while Jesus bids us to follow in his footsteps; both to lose our lives and to find them. As summer draws to a close and the new academic year begins it's a good time to take stock and work out how we are doing.

First St Paul's description in Romans 12. If a young person came searching for the Kingdom of God, what could they hope to find here? At the beginning of Romans 12 Paul writes, 'I appeal to you, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice.' Then he sets out what this means. It's intensely practical, not at all theoretical. Paul piles up phrase upon phrase with extraordinary

energy – the English translations have toned down the original and we lose something of Paul's urgency.

First, God's people are called to love one another, and Paul explores different aspects of what this means. Look down at the list – love is to be genuine, not feigned; it goes hand in hand with hating what is evil and, literally, sticking to what is good. It presumes mutual affection, together with showing respect and honour to each other. This is not always easy in a Cathedral where we have many visitors, but there are various smaller groups to which many people belong, and I think it is there that these qualities should be most evident. Love is prepared to look away from itself and be interested in/concerned for other people. It is difficult to be concerned for people if you don't know who they are – so I am going to be very bold and suggest that, at the Peace, is there's someone near you who you have seen before, but you don't know who they are – please will you ask them their name.

But for Paul, the second great characteristic of God's redeemed people is that they are people of hope – rejoice in hope he says. In a fragile, uncertain world we have hope – hope because our future is assured (Christ in you, the hope of glory, Paul writes); hope because we know what it is to be 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven'. Hope does not erase suffering (the Christians in Rome knew at firsthand about persecution and we face numerous personal sorrows) but it does help us to be patient in suffering and to persevere in prayer – it prevents us giving way either to the despair or the cynicism around us.

And God's redeemed people are called to be generous – to contribute to the needs of the saints and practise hospitality to strangers – nothing could be more relevant - the exact opposite of xenophobia fear of strangers – rather we are to care for them.

Then, perhaps surprisingly, Paul quotes directly from Jesus. We are familiar with these standards from the Sermon on the Mount, but

what we might not realise is that Paul's Letter to the Romans is written some time before the Gospels, giving us some clues about how Jesus' teaching circulated before the gospels were written. Paul applies Jesus' teaching to the situation in Rome with some interesting additions, notably an appreciation that the Roman Christians were not always in control. 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.' If the Roman Christians were to 'hold fast to what is good' it might not be possible to 'live peaceably with all' – a degree of conflict might be inevitable.

But how does this description of the Kingdom of God in practise fit in with our reading from Matthew's Gospel? Where, famously Jesus told his disciples to 'take up their cross and follow me.'

This phrase has been weakened and debased by misuse – we have probably all heard someone talking about a burdensome task or a difficult person they have to cope with as 'the cross I have to bear'. That is not what Jesus meant by the phrase!

To begin with Jesus' disciples would have been shocked by this expression. The cross was a loathed and terrifying method of execution – to see someone carrying their cross was not to watch someone perform a difficult task but to watch someone on their way to certain death. Jesus makes this clear when he says, 'Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

What Jesus meant was that to be a follower of Jesus means being willing to 'die to self' – being willing to eradicate, put to death, to sacrifice our own selfish agendas and desires and seek instead Jesus' way of life. At one level that will be a real loss and, at times, like crucifixion, very painful. But Jesus promises that paradoxically it will bring real rewards. And Jesus' way of life is the one set out by St Paul – a life of love, of hope, of generosity.

When the Lord comes we pray that he will not find us lagging in zeal, but 'ardent in Spirit and faith fully serving the Lord.' Amen.