



Pride Service. Remember that this is about Love.

The cruelty exacted upon people who identify as LGBT, by both church and secular authorities, is plain to see. And our church, the Church of England, while unresolved about what it thinks officially, has finally started to say in all its layers of authority that the church must repent of not only its homophobic attitudes, but its cruel actions. Our church is starting to say that and starting to do it. And after the recent report was rejected by our parliament, the Synod, it has just begun a period of two years after which the bishops of the church will produce a teaching document for the rest of us to reflect on.

Law is important. St Paul was wrestling with the struggles he had himself as regard to the law. And as this year is the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, those who work on changing the law should be applauded and thanked. Law and policies are important. Yesterday, here at St James's, we were packed out for the Christians at Pride service and wild applause greeted the Bishop of Buckingham's news that, as he described it, the dangerous quackery of aversion therapy had been overwhelmingly condemned by the Church's synod yesterday. And today, the synod will consider whether it wants to support the church providing official liturgies for transgender people in transition.

Of course, law and policy are really important, and they're one of the ways that change happens both in church and state.

But as I read the gospel and just now, as I listened to our friends, I knew in my heart that today's Eucharist can't be just about church policies and documents and pronouncements.

Because if ever I have experienced an agent of change, it is this Eucharist. This meal we share today is not looking back. It's not so much a memorial service as a vision of the future. Where everyone is welcome, all share food and wine together.

Today is a day as we gather at the altar to be fed once again by the bread of life. Today is a day to feel deeply our own humanity and hear again the invitation to live Christ-shaped lives; ever more closely, giving ourselves over to this gentle, persuasive, broken love.

And to do that we use the language not of the law but of the spirit. We speak hopefully and insistently; we speak as if this persecution cannot win, cannot be for ever.

We imagine a new future and act as if that future is irresistible; to drink in wisdom, to sing, perhaps to cry and to know that the heavy burdens (that St Paul speaks about) the very real struggles and distresses and losses that are carried by you and me (our burdens), can be brought here to this altar and laid down.

And so today, we lay down at this altar our heavy burden of shame, that God's word is so misused against people who are gay.

Today, we lay at this altar the heavy burden of self-justification, our brittle insistence that everything we do is quite all right, thank you very much.

Today, we lay down the heavy burden of trying to figure out what we should do, who we should be, what we should believe.

Instead of being lecturer or legislator, I think the church's role in matters of human sexuality and personal life is of companion. Not lecturer or legislator but companion! Because these things are just not often easy. Matters of the heart are often, well, a bit tricky....

In today's gospel, Jesus says that he himself is gentle and humble and in that gentleness, we can find rest. Let's give ourselves a break here. Remember that this is about love, and that love is at the heart of the gospel.

And so not as lecturer or legislator but as companions to one another, I will close with a poem by way of a meditation. You may like to listen with your eyes closed as it is close to a prayer.

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

Bibliography

Oliver, Mary *Wild Geese* Bloodaxe Books, Hexham, 2004