

Rector's Annual Report (2017) Parish of Christ Church

"Faith, Hope and Charity"

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity." These are wonderful words which we hear today on *Quinquagesima Sunday*, words which at once catapult us into Lent and which capture the real vocation and character of our life together as a Parish. Our parishes are outposts of the Church Universal. They are communities of love, the places where we participate in nothing less than the divine love shown to us so paradoxically and profoundly in the way of the Cross, in the pilgrimage of Lent. Charity means love. Lent is really nothing more than the concentration of the Christian life as the pilgrimage of love.

It should not go unnoticed that *Ash Wednesday* this year falls on February 14th, *The Feast of St. Valentine, [Bishop and Martyr]*, as the Prayer Book Calendar puts it, but enclosed in brackets, acknowledging thereby that its *"historical character is obscure"* yet its commemoration nonetheless remains. Whatever one makes of Valentine's day - and there are a number of different accounts - it has entered into the imaginary of the Western Church and extends into the secular world where it now dominates; in part, as an economic generator for chocolatiers, vintners, florists, and various aspects of the silk industry. It speaks to modern romanticism and eroticism.

These are forms of love which ultimately belong to the deeper and profounder forms of love which are highlighted by Paul's great hymn to love from *1st Corinthians 13* and signaled in the great Gospel story from St. Luke about our *"going up to Jerusalem"* with Jesus. That journey instructs us in the lessons of love about which we are blind, like the disciples who hear what Jesus says about the meaning of the journey explicitly in terms of his passion and death but *"understood none of these things,"* and like the blind man *"sitting by the way-side begging"* and incessantly calling out to Jesus. What does he want? *"Lord, that I may receive my sight."* To know our blindness is the necessary condition for our coming to see. In a way, what drives the Lenten journey, here imaged as *"going up to Jerusalem"* is desire, itself a kind of love. The point is about our seeking what God seeks for us with all our heart, mind, soul and strength; in short, love.

The love which defines us arises from our desire and the knowledge of our shortcomings but even more from God, from the divine love which has made us and has made us for himself that we *"might lovely be."* But that love is often hidden and unknown to us, *'Love unknown'* as the poet Samuel Crossman states in a lovely and moving hymn: *"My song is Love Unknown"* (# 596). The hymn surveys the pageant of God's love for us in the story of Christ, *"love to the loveless shown, / that they might lovely be."* It recounts all the forms of our unloveliness in contrast to the divine love. *"He came from his blest throne,/ Salvation to bestow;/ But men made strange, and none/ the long-for Christ would know."* The hymn reminds us of the intensity of Holy Week, of our *"rage*

and spite" against the goodness of God in Christ, of the contradictions in our being, our shouts of "*Hosanna*" so quickly turning to "*Crucify*". The hymn confronts us compellingly with our sins and failings but in the greater light of the divine love, convicting us so as to compel us to "*stay and sing,/ no story so divine,*" and recalling the interplay of grief and love that belong to the divine friendship which Christ's sacrifice reveals.

This is the deep love of God in which "*we live and move and have our being,*" the love which invites us to himself and makes us partakers of the divine. What a wonderful vision! This love challenges all of the other forms of love that belong to our lives with one another, the forms of love which belong to our obligations and duties, care and compassion towards one another.

We live in anxious and confused times where great uncertainties clash with greater 'certainties' about proscribing language, revising history, asserting identities, and all in the name of a kind of social justice strongly asserted and in the face of great inequalities socially, economically and politically. Much of it addresses real problems of abuse and injustice. But in its zeal and reaction, it easily becomes the mirror image of the wrongs it seeks to redress. It is often blind to the larger problems that belong to our instrumental reason which reduces us to objects and commodities and which is fundamentally dehumanizing. In seeking to make things better we often make things worse. Our zeal sometimes outruns our thinking. We are, in T.S. Eliot's prophetic words, often too "*assured of certain certainties/ and impatient to assume the world*" (*The Preludes*).

There are very real problems that belong to our political and social world which we cannot ignore or about which we can remain indifferent and complacent. There are, however, no practical solutions to theoretical problems. It will require deeper and more critical thinking and much, much more compassion. In a way, our *Quinquagesima* readings require of us a kind of thoughtful humility. The challenges to our postmodern culture, paradoxically, are found in what it most reacts against, early modernity itself perhaps.

"*Love bade me welcome,*" the 17th century Anglican poet and divine, George Herbert, begins the last poem of his great work of poetic erudition called "*The Temple*". Love invites us, it seems, "*yet my soul drew back,/ guiltie of dust and sinne.*" There is an awareness of our own shortcomings and failings. There is, in short, *contrition*, sorrow for our sins. "*Dust and sinne*" remind us of the liturgy of *The Imposition of Ashes* on our foreheads on *Ash Wednesday*, a symbol of our recognition of ourselves as sinners but also a sign of repentance. "*But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack/ from my first entrance in,/ drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,/ if I lack'd any thing.*" God, personified and named as Love here, not only invites us but comes to us and questions us. This is itself wonderful. The questioning underscores that we are primarily intellectual and spiritual creatures for whom knowing and loving are interdependent activities of our souls.

The second stanza reveals the dialogue between the contrite soul and Love. Contrition now becomes *confession*, the open acknowledgment of our faults and failings. The soul responds to Love's first question with the words, "*a guest, I answer'd, worth to be here,*" aware of its own unworthiness, an echo of *The Prayer of Humble Access* in the Prayer Book liturgy where we say that "*we do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness,*" a profound check, too, upon all the forms of presumption in our disordered world.

Love's response is gracious and accommodating. "*Love said, You shall be he,*" a guest made worthy to be here. But how are we made worthy given our awareness that, like the soul in the poem, we are "*the unkinde, ungratefull?*" The soul confesses in a nutshell what all our sins and failings come down to, namely, our unkindness and our lack of gratitude to God in his love for us. Our unkindness and ungratefulness arise from our blindness; we are not open to God's love and so it is unknown to us.

Christians in a way are nothing more than those who know the love of God, sinners who know God's love for us while we were yet sinners. This and this alone changes everything and shapes our thoughts, words, and deeds even in the face of our cultural confusions and its assertions and demands. Here the soul confesses that because of unkindness and ingratitude, "*I cannot look on thee.*" All too true yet not entirely true because that would be to forget that "*God is greater than our hearts*" of unkindness and ingratitude. In an absolutely exquisite and touching phrase, the poem gives us Love's response to our confession. "*Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,/ Who made the eyes but I?*"

It is all there in the smile, the smile of divine compassion, the smile of the God who reminds us of who we truly are, namely, the creatures whom he has made. It is "*he who has made us and not we ourselves,*" as the Psalmist puts it (Ps. 100), words which are echoed here. When we forget this, then we are most deadly and destructive to ourselves, to others, and to our world.

The soul in the poem shows us true contrition and confession and in the third stanza compels Love - and one may put it that way, I think - to talk about redemption. "*Truth, Lord,*" the soul says about the God who has made us, "*but I have marr'd them,*" meaning the eyes which God has made, "*Let my shame/ go where it doth deserve.*" This is an intense self-acknowledgment of the true nature of all sin. Notice that it does not presume that sin can be simply ignored or overlooked. "*And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame?*" Love is explicit about the passion and death of Christ, he who bears our sins that we may be freed from sin. This is the principle of *satisfaction* in Christ's overcoming of our sin. It is all about the divine love, the love which compels our loving service.

"My deare, then I will serve," the soul says in reply, suggesting that at best we are merely the servants of love. This, too, is only partly true because there is something more that God wants us to know. Our service of Christ in our lives with one another is also about our participation in the divine love, a love which has an incredible intensity and intimacy about it captured in the last words of the poem, words which suggest that we are more than simply servants; *Christ has made us his friends*. We are drawn into the divine life itself. *"You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat,"* a reference at once to the Holy Eucharist and to the heavenly banquet, to our eschatological end with God. The response is concise and simple; it can't be any other way. *"So I did sit and eat."* The *satisfaction* of the needs of our soul, our very being, and of the justice of God is found and can only be found in the God who is Love.

God's love of his own nature and goodness seeks our good, a good which is found in fellowship with God and with one another. Our life as a Parish is about being a community of love; quietly and patiently, sweetly and strongly. It is always about faith and hope, about our knowing and our longing, but even more it is about love. *Ubi est caritas, ibi est Deo. "Where there is charity, there is God."* May that be our challenge and our desire.

The year 2017 has been, once again, another miracle. We have continued with our patterns of worship and devotion, with our programmes largely of learning and study in such things as both the Sunday and the week day services and the special Advent and Lenten studies as well as the Christ Church Book Club. This year we have added to the website my weekly Chapel reflections from King's-Edgehill School. Sermons and meditations continue to be posted providing a kind of outreach beyond the confines of the Parish. In short, these things all belong to the larger mission of the Parish.

The past year saw as well a number of capital improvements. The wooden walkway and stairs were, finally, replaced with concrete. The Parish Hall was completely repainted. These are all important matters of stewardship with respect to what has been entrusted to us. The Hall and the Church have been thoroughly cleaned twice a year thus making the daily and weekly upkeep a little easier.

We are at last getting a better handle on the working of the Heat-pumps. In extreme cold, they cannot get the Church to a reasonable temperature for worship but are able to maintain the interior fabric. We have the Hall to retreat to on occasion. I would anticipate that several Sundays a year we might have to have recourse to the Hall for worship. The Hall is heavily used by the Girl Guides four nights of the week. The Ham Supper and the Lobster Supper continue to be good fundraisers as well being good fun. The spirit of cooperation everywhere in the Parish is, I think, outstanding. We have continued as well with the annual *Capella Regalis* concert in late December which attracts many from the wider community and has become a very special event for the community of Windsor. A big part of that event is the pulled-pork supper superbly pulled off, if you will pardon the pun, by Judy and Scott Gilbreath, Marilyn Curry,

Scotty and Kathy Cameron, Alex and Tannis Jurgens, and Rod and June Kershaw and others. The two *Newfoundland & Country Evenings of Musical Entertainment*, one in the Fall and the other in the Spring continue to be well received. The Men's Club, thanks to the labour of Scotty Cameron and the eggs provided by Darrell Beaver, continues to meet once a month for breakfast.

We face the usual problems of declining and aging demographics but are countering the tendency towards despondency and despair that is often a consequence. The blessing of the wrought-iron railing at the font in memory of Helen Gibson as well as the plaques honouring the dedication and labours of Eric Nott, Barbara Hughes, and, of course, Helen Gibson, to the Parish of Christ Church, was an important event, celebrating precisely the kinds of determination and spirit that have helped to keep the Parish going. It goes without saying that we are able to keep going because of the *Christ Church Foundation* which contributes greatly to our operations from the interest generated from its investments. We remain committed to the Anglican form of our Christian witness and to our being a part of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, contributing monies to the Diocese such as we can but without jeopardy to the very existence of the Parish itself. That, too, is part of our witness.

We have embarked upon a form of community outreach to the Town of Windsor in this past year and hope to continue to build upon this beginning in the years ahead. While the Parish no longer owns the *Old Parish Burying Grounds* where the original Christ Church building once stood, we recognise an historical and ethical interest and commitment to the upkeep of the site particularly in terms of the much needed restoration of many of the gravestones. In this year past we initiated the restoration of about ten stones closest to King Street and are hoping to continue a partnership relation with the Town for that project and with other things that will enhance the appearance of the site. It is a modest but important form of community outreach on our part and I hope that it will have the support of the Parish as a whole.

Another aspect of the Parish's ministry and outreach is found in the weekly services at *Haliburton Place* in the Hants Community Hospital, the bi-monthly services at *Windsor Elms*, and the monthly services at *Dykeland Lodge*.

There are many to be thanked for their labours and continuing commitment to the life of the Parish. I want in particular to mention our lay-reader and sexton, Bev Morash, who despite various health issues which have resulted in him having to slow down continues to be deeply committed to the Parish. Jacoba Morash, of course, continues her outstanding labours with respect to the Sanctuary Guild and, no doubt, to doing more than her share of other work throughout the Parish. Our thanks to Muriel Fraser and to Elizabeth Spurr for the times when they have been able to help with the Altar.

The Parish is singularly blessed to have Owen Stephens as our organist and music director. His liturgical sensibility is evident each Sunday in the choice of hymns and

particularly in the preludes and postludes. These are part of the service and provide an occasion and time for a kind of inwardness and reflection. One of the great challenges for the churches in our culture is about learning to “*be still and know that I am God.*” In a way, our liturgies are our constant attempt to attend to God in Word and Sacrament. Thanks, too, is owed to our choir, small but dedicated, who contribute to the ministry of music. It is quite remarkable that we are able to maintain a tradition of simple sung services. I particularly want to thank them for their commitment to the singing of the Gradual Psalm at the Holy Eucharist each Sunday. It adds, I hope, to the beauty and the intention of the service.

I am grateful to the Parish for its continued support of my ministry among you and at King’s-Edgehill School. Teaching and learning are the important features of our life together as a Parish and, I think, an important witness and mission in our times. Many thanks are owed to the Parish Council: to our wardens, Alex Jurgens and Scott Gilbreath, to our Treasurer, Rod Kershaw, and now to his right-hand assistant, Cathy Cameron, to Judy Gilbreath, our indomitable Secretary, to Scotty Cameron for his endless goodwill and humour, and to Bev Morash for his many, many contributions. Thanks is owed to Trevor Hughes for his labours as our Solicitor and for his work with the Christ Church Foundation and, of course, to Barbara Hughes and Eric Nott for their guidance and counsel.

Among the many things for which Marilyn and I are grateful is the birth of our grandson, Silas Barry King, whose baptism at Christ Church in the summer was a very special event. We are very grateful to all of you for your interest and delight in this moment in our lives. It is a whole new venture - the venture of being grandparents!

I have also endeavoured to keep up with some modest scholarly enterprises, participating in the *Wisdom Belongs to God* Colloquium honouring Dr. Wayne Hankey’s retirement after many, many years of teaching at King’s College and Dalhousie, one of my mentors and teachers. Some forty papers were presented including a paper which I contributed, “*The Dance of Apophatic and Kataphatic Theology in the Sermons of Lancelot Andrewes,*” as well as papers by my daughter, Elizabeth, and my son-in-law, Evan King. I also gave an address to the National Council of the Prayer Book Society of Canada on “*Redire ad principia: The Mystical Theology of the Book of Common Prayer.*” Both papers stress the idea of *redire ad principia*, the return to a principle, to God, which informs the mystical theology of *The Book of Common Prayer* and, of course, by extension, the life of the Parish.

It is all about our circling back and around and into the mystery of God revealed in the creedal witness of the Scriptures and participated in sacramentally through the life of prayer and praise. “*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three,*” St. Paul tells us, “*but the greatest of these is charity.*” May the divine love of God in Christ Jesus continue to shape our lives and our witness.

Fr. David Curry
Annual Report for 2017
February 11th, 2018
Quinquagesima Sunday