



St Andrew's Parish Church United Service at St Philippe de Torteval, Guernsey
Sunday, 5 September 2021 – Family Eucharist
In Celebration of Rev Juliette Robilliard & Jurat David Robilliard's Ruby Wedding
Readings: Song of Solomon 8:6-7, Philippians 4:4-9 & St John 15:9-12
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

40 years of shared love and faith

They say 'It takes two to tango'. Whilst David and I have danced the Guernsey Bébée, recognising our limitations we've never risked the Tango! The following two anecdotes from soon after we were married will explain why, as also being relevant to the spirit of shared help and faith, after all, it was here in this church that we met and were married subsequently, 40 years ago today.

One bank holiday, half an hour before our guests arrived for lunch David undertook the proverbial quick DIY job with a pick-axe. If you've ever been to Geneva, you'll know that the lake has a spectacular fountain. David's impromptu version entertained our guests, while I used my powers of persuasion on Guernsey Water to come and cap the spectacle. But show me a ladder and I'll shin up it. On another day, I quickly learnt the law of cantilevering and reaching the point of no return. I fell head first through the centre of the shrubs bordering the road whilst the electric hedge trimmer chattered around my ears needing David to extricate me! Today, we are 40 years older: are we any wiser? Judge for yourselves!

These days, an habitual pastime after dinner is falling asleep in front of the television. One programme, however that usually grabs our attention in the delightful *Repair Shop*. What's so charming are the back stories people recount as to why items are so precious to them because of the people they bring to mind. In addition, frequently, two experts need to share their knowledge in order to restore a beloved item: and, love and shared faith are the essence of the Bible readings this morning.

Bind us together Lord ...

The Song of Solomon is an allegorical portrayal of an individual seeking God as fervently as a young person seeks their lover. Irrespective of the extravagant imagery of the writing, it is easy to grasp the meaning of "Set me as a seal upon your heart". The purpose of a seal being to unite & bind two items together or, as is the case with this reading, to bind together the individual to God. A seal so prized that material creature comforts are nothing by comparison. And so strong a seal that death cannot prevail against it. That surely is the epitome of love whether in married life, family life or Christian life that love, conquers everything.

Life happens to all of us but faith carries us through

We are, however, if nothing realistic. Life happens to all of us whether married or single, in daily living, Christian living or Church life. The seal of God's love is vital to hold us through all that we encounter whether those are issues with health, employment, relationships, bereavement or faith. Who better to explain about what life can throw at us than St Paul? Paul had a strong bond of friendship with the Church in Philippi but on his second missionary visit he faced persecution and imprisonment and so, had to leave his beloved friends for their safety, as well as his own.

Now, writing from a prison cell in Rome, he conveys his thoughts after a life-time of reflection and his time serving as Christ's faithful missionary. Though wrongfully imprisoned, he can say whole-heartedly from the depths of his faith, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say rejoice. And don't worry about anything, just pray sharing all your thoughts with God. Be purposeful with all pure Christian intent." All well and good we might think but Paul was steeped in scripture from a child. In adult life he was an orator with the gift of applying his faith and conveying its meaning to others. Individually, we may feel we are nowhere near his ability. That would be to forget his early exposure to Christianity, which was to deny Christ and to seek out and kill those who followed him. We all have our individual human faults and faith-failings.

What is the seal that loves longest and never fails?

What then is the seal that can bind us to God the Father? The seal is Jesus Christ. In the Gospel, Jesus absolutely suffuses with his love saying, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love." He urges us to keep his commandments, so that it will be much easier to abide in his love and then, our joy will be complete. And, above, all he states "My commandment is that you love one another, as I have loved you". A commandment sounds dictatorial but not when bonded to the spirit in which it's founded, that of love. In that light it urges us to apply the principal, however, love's grace allow for lapses. It recognises that we are human and not perfect as Christ. Whatever our relationship with each other, we too can offer forgiveness, as God forgives us. God's love helps us to grow through testing times, to be stronger in faith and move forward together.

May it continue to be our heart's desire for Christ to seal us to his Father's heart, then, the peace of God, which passes all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.