



**Sunday, 26 August 2018 – Trinity 13**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: Ephesians 6:10-20, Gospel St John 6:56-69**  
**Focusing on portraying God's love**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

In my welcome to the service I asked if you had ever been to prison? I also said that I had and promised to explain. When I was 13 years old I accompanied my Dad and one of my sisters to the old prison one Sunday afternoon. Dad had taken a *Fact & Faith* Film to show the prisoners, instead of their usual chapel service. It was in the old days of spool reel cine films, so while Dad was changing to the second reel my sister and I sang gospel songs to the prisoners. Whereas I was invited to visit for mission purposes St Paul writing to the Ephesians from his prison cell in Rome, had no choice. He was chained night and day between Roman soldiers to ensure that he does not escape. The soldiers may have considered that they were keeping a captive under lock and key but Paul will have maximized the opportunity of having a captive audience! Many messages of faith will have been shared over the course of the weeks, months and years that he was held a 'prisoner for Christ'.

'Messages' and how they are conveyed bounced off the page when I prepared for this service. And, as the today's prayer urges "Help us to proclaim the good news of your love that all who hear it may be drawn to you". In our culture today, we are bombarded with messages that everyone expects us to hear. In offices it's the corporate mission statement, in schools it's educational ethos, plus social media and mainstream media all clamouring for our attention. How do we sift out what's important and what's fake news? And, how do we Christians, help people to discern the difference?

In my new role as Chaplain of the Guernsey Financial Services Commission, I've learned that what people most want is not to hear messages, but rather that their inner voice can be heard above the message-bombardment. People want to be listened to and loved for who they are not merely the productivity they may represent. Only if they are given the opportunity to be heard will they have resources to sift out the noise from the many messages they receive: to discern those that have integrity to provide something to strengthen them spiritually and transform them into wholeness of being, as Christ intended. Of course, the same applies to people in all walks of life.

Paul, from prison, encourages the new church to be strong and fight the temptations of their secular world. Using the visual aids around him in his cell Paul encourages the Ephesians to buckle up with spiritual body armour. Jesus too faces the challenge of feeding his disciples spiritually with his living spiritual bread from heaven. Some of them stuck with him but others dropped away reverting to the familiarity of Jewish tradition rather than be challenged by fresh perspectives.

Jesus urges his disciples and us all to be distinctive from the same-old-same world view. But that does not mean putting distance between us and the rest of the world. We who worship in this church have a key role in supporting the many out there. We all know that as Christians we do not live in a purity bubble but offer our best witness when getting alongside people who need encouragement and support in daily living and exploring faith. Jesus urges recognising the value of relying on the Holy Spirit to give life to our inner being because the flesh – our human nature - is often motivated to take the easy line. So, what motivates the Spirit? It is the same as God the Father and God the Son, love, pure unconditional love.

In our secular world, the church has long since lost pole position as the place where people come not only to worship but also to meet life-partners, recreation and welfare. Too often, the church these days is seen by society as just another venue where like-minded people gather but, in the main, society is failing to see any connection worth hearing. How do we bridge the gap? How do we help society at large to conclude the same as Peter “Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Somehow, we need to project a message that’s worth others hearing. No amount of trumpeting from the pulpit by me will do it. Hoping that people will walk through the door on the off-chance won’t do it. People need to see true Christ-like qualities welling up from our inner being. Those qualities Paul tells us, are faith, peace, righteousness, steadfastness and truth. which come from salvation. Salvation is not a one-off event, but an on-going desire to be reconciled to God by receiving his forgiveness in return for which, he offers his life-living Spirit. We all know this but how steadfast are we in desiring not only to be reconciled but also to love and honour God and each other in our daily living?

If people see these qualities shining from us, they are more likely to seek our company hoping for a non-judgemental listening ear into which they can unburden themselves. And, the more they see us in that light, the more likely they are to be drawn to Christ’s love in action, which speaks louder than any words that you or I can say.

A final thought: what message do we convey? Do we, as the Collect urges, steadfastly proclaim the good news of God’s love that all may be drawn to him?

Amen.