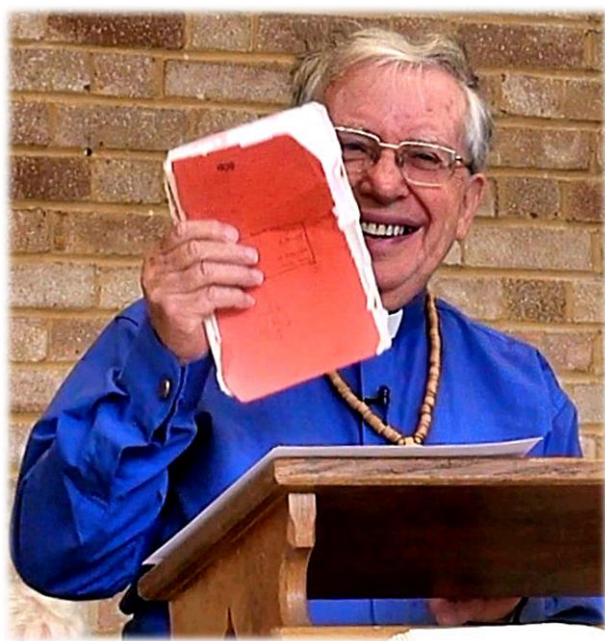


Communion Service Sunday 20th September – led by Revd. David Aplin



With his 54th Wedding Anniversary celebrations still very fresh in his mind, his trusty but well used red prayer book in his hand (not quite Chairman Mao), and a sermon where the computer had said yes – David was back with us.

The sermon was drawn from the Gospel reading, Matthew 20, particularly verses 14 and 15: **“I choose to give to the last the same as I give to you.”**

“It’s Not Fair!” might be our first reaction, David thought, to the story of labourers hired at different times of the day. Some had worked for hours in the blazing sun; others worked for only part of the day; and the last group might have laboured for just an hour in the cool of twilight. We readily understood the old trade-union cry: “A fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.” Yet that was not what happened here. The landowner had said: “Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to the last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to

me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

This rendering, taken from a modern scholarly Bible, drew our attention beyond money. The parable was ultimately about God and the gifts God gave. Scripture made it clear that God did not value us according to our wealth. Indeed, riches could become an obstacle in our relationship with God. We could see this in lives consumed by the pursuit of more, never satisfied with what they already had.

Health, love, and faithful relationships were treasures beyond price. They reminded us that there could be enough in life—more than enough—to make life rich and deeply worthwhile. And we were back at that anniversary celebration.

Accused of being a millionaire when he insisted on paying for the family’s celebratory pub meal, David had responded that having a wife of fifty-four years and a loving family was worth far more than a million pounds. And in a Christian context, he could have added:

- I have the love of God.
- I have been blessed by many spiritual experiences.
- I have been called to serve God in many ways, including preaching.
- I have the assurance that, when this life is over, there is a place and a welcome for me in the Kingdom of God.

David trusted that Jesus awaited him when he travelled that final path and hoped that we all might have that same confidence: the Lord was waiting to welcome us home. The penitent sinner who came to the Lord in faith would be saved and there was a place for each one of us, and for many more besides.

David believed in the power of infant baptism to help a child grow in faith, and the power of teaching the young. Even if people stepped away from church during the busy years of early adulthood and family life, the foundations laid in childhood could help them rediscover and re-engage with Christian faith later. And the story told us that a Christian who came to God later in life would be as fully accepted as someone who had been faithful from childhood, through adolescence and into adulthood. God’s acceptance was not measured by the number of years we had belonged to the Church.

For those in the evening of life who had not yet found God, it was not too late. But faith had to be sincere: those wealthy people in past centuries who had lived as they pleased and then sought (*and paid for*) baptism on their deathbeds were relying on doubtful theology if they lacked sincere repentance. Baptism was not an outward washing that automatically made us clean. True cleansing came from within - from faith, repentance and the forgiveness made possible through the death of Jesus.

We entered the Kingdom of God by God’s free gift, received through faith. God granted that gift whether we had been faithful Christians for sixty, seventy, eighty or ninety years, or whether we found God only a few years before death.

We were called to take faith into the community, but we must not assume that people were already Christian. God desired the salvation of people of every age.

- We could support Christians who were unable to come to church and help them attend where possible.
- We could welcome those who joined online.
- We could serve people who discovered God later in life.
- We could share the faith without measuring anyone by age or length of church membership.

Young or old, all might receive eternal life through faith. God gave generously, not according to the number of years we had served, but according to the truth and depth of our response.

This was Stephen's last Service before his hip operation. So, piled high with best wishes for a successful operation and with a few weeks to recuperate in prospect – perhaps a little “demob happy”?

