Reformation Sunday: Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost

Prayer of the Day
Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-46
34 When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered
together, 35 and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him.
36 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37 He said to him,
" 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and
with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a
second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' 40 On these two
commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this
question: 42 "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to
him, "The son of David." 43 He said to them, "How is it then that David by the
Spirit calls him Lord, saying,
44 'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet" '?
45 "If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" 46 No one was able to
give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more
questions.

Commentary—"toward a sermon"

The plan was to draw a line between Jesus' reply about loving neighbour as oneself and the riddle Jesus poses about the relationship between the Messiah and the venerated King David. The value of reading other commentaries is to keep preachers honest…and to keep us hearers honest too.

Love God and love neighbour is so easy to say. It's tougher to do. Maybe we know that love can be understood as what we do for the benefit of others. Can we always be sure we know what that good is?

The challenge might be to help others when we can while paying close attention that we interact as equals. A couple of commentators suggest that humility is the thing that enables us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

If we skim from the top of the riddle we see something suggesting humility shown by King David. The riddle isn't meant as a change of subject we don't think….more like amplifying what it means to love one neighbours as one self. We won't totally unpack the riddle today. Instead we'll consider what it really takes to obey the commandment everybody agrees is "the biggie".

Maybe the repeated attempts to publicly embarrass Jesus betray a lack of love. Maybe the thing sociologists call the honour and shame code gets in the way of loving one's neighbour. Public challenge riposte events were designed to define the social pecking order. Very much a win/lose sort of proposition. Tough to love ones neighbour as yourself when everybody is jockeying for position.

Ironically even when we try to be humble, we're kind of proud of our virtue. You might recall the TV series Poirot starring Sir David Suchet. In one episode Poirot decides humility would be to his advantage and he announces that in his quest to cultivate some, "there will be nobody as humble as Poirot".

When Jesus confers blessing on the humble, he uses a literal term…we could translate it "down to earth". Maybe other word nerds enjoy the connection between the words "hummus", "humility", and "human". The connection illustrates that we are creatures and we're part of creation. We are entrusted with care of other parts of creation, because we're related to it all. Kinship may well be at the heart of humility.

The writer and preacher Frederick Buechner says truly loving others requires a high level of self awareness. He says to love your neighbour as yourself requires you to love yourself as you love your neighbour. Our task, Buechner says, is that we share the self we love instead of keeping it in a "perpetual safe deposit box" (Buechner, Wishful Thinking a Theological ABC, page 87-88).

The riddle about the Messiah being Son of David and yet Lord over David presents a paradox. The early Christians heightened that paradox with a hymn that finds its way into the letter to the Philippians…In prose form…Jesus doesn't regard equality with God to be exploited. Instead he becomes human…he takes on the form of a servant and even becomes obedient to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11). From this place of moral authority Jesus calls on us as the

church to love our neighbour. He embodies that love. He empowers us to love as we've been loved. Living these paradoxes and riddles might be what we mean about a church in constant re-forming as we learn and grow and start new every day.