

All you need is love....

On 4th July, three candidates from our United Benefice will be confirmed at St Mary's Church by Bishop Mark Davies. Over recent weeks, I have been preparing the two children and one adults for this day on which they will declare publicly their faith in God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. As part of the service, the Bishop will pray these words: "stir up in us the gifts of the Holy Spirit and make us worthy of our calling; that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord."



During the preparation session looking at God the Holy Spirit, we thought about both the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives each one of us so that we can serve God and about the fruit of the Spirit that can be seen in each one of us. Paul in his letter to the Galatians describes the fruit of the Spirit as being: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. When we live our lives completely in step with God, these are the qualities that will be evident in us. Of course, being human, not all of these will be obvious in us and our prayer should be that the Holy Spirit helps these things to grow within us so that we can become more and more like Christ. We then thought about one of these fruit – 'love' – and what this looks like when we are truly loving.

At weddings, Paul's description of God's love is often read and it is a beautiful description. However, when we look in detail about what it is saying, it is also very challenging. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

Elsewhere, in the Bible, John writes that ‘God is love’ and so we can replace the word ‘Love’ in Paul’s description with ‘God’ to get a wonderful description of who God is: “God is patient and kind; God does not envy or boast; he is not arrogant or rude. He does not insist on his own way; he is not irritable or resentful; he does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”

In our confirmation preparation sessions, we thought this was a good description of God. However, we then discussed how if we are to live our lives reflecting God’s love, we can use this passage to describe how we are to behave by replacing the word ‘God’ with ‘I’: “I am patient and kind; I do not envy or boast; I am not arrogant or rude. I do not insist on my own way; I am not irritable or resentful; I do not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. I bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.” As we read this out, we found it made for uncomfortable reading as we all realised that so often this simply isn’t a true statement about ourselves! While we might like to think that we’re kind and loving, so often it’s about loving on our terms rather than on God’s terms. It’s not easy to love generously, without limit and so we all agreed that our prayer needed to be that we let the Holy Spirit change us so we could say these words without our consciences pricking us so much! So perhaps the Bishop’s prayer during the Confirmation Service should be one that we all need to pray as we seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, reflecting God’s love, filled by the Holy Spirit:

Stir up in us the gifts of the Holy Spirit
and make us worthy of our calling;
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Reverend Jo Farnworth