

1 Corinthians 13

Luke 18:31-43

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is one of those marvellous acts of God (which we like to call coincidences) that the reading from today's lectionary is 1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope and charity – when we have spent the day considering the Kairos document, which takes its inspiration and theological basis on precisely that verse. We didn't specifically choose this text for the closing Eucharist, but the good Lord has provided it for us.

The Anglican Lutheran Society is a charity; and those of us who are involved in church life, in voluntary organisations and the charitable sector inevitably have an involvement with the Charity Commission and with all the regulation that inevitably goes with our work these days. The pity is that the beautiful word charity, which we heard in the reading from the letter to the Corinthians, has lost a lot of the original meaning. Caritas: not just charity, but also dearness, high price, love, affection, esteem, favour. Much more than just being kind and generous with our resources, but doing it in and with love; not because we take pity on or condescend towards someone, but because we hold them in high esteem; not just throwing a few coins at 'the deserving poor', but paying the high price of love for all God's children.

¹³And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

This text is so well known to us, as it is so often read at weddings particularly, that it is easy to lose sight of just how foundational and challenging it is to us as Christians. In the light of 1 Corinthians 13, do any of us feel comfortable about how we live out our faith?

For Lutherans particularly, justification by grace through faith is the foundation on which our life in faith is built. To revert to Latin again: justification, or iustificatio, is the articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae; the article by which the church stands or falls. It is the criterion by which our beliefs are measured, and over the years it has inspired theologians to deepen our understanding of our relationship to God and to each other. The free gift of faith, which is poured out on us by a loving Creator, sets us free *from* the bondage of darkness and sin, and sets us free *for* service to our brothers and sisters in new-forged bonds of joy and mutual charity.

This mutual service, in its turn, has its own articulus stantis vel cadentis; and that is that all our relationships and activities as Christians are marked by faith, hope and charity. It's almost like the kite mark that guarantees that things like kettles, washing machines and light bulbs that we buy are up to standard – if you see the kite mark of faith, hope and charity in an action or a life, you know that Christ is there.

Some years ago a Jewish friend told me the story of her arrival in England as part of the Kindertransport that saved nearly 10,000 children from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Poland by rescuing them from the mouth of the lion that would devour so many millions of Jews and others in the Nazi death camps. She was very young, just 5 or 6 when she arrived in London, having waved good bye for the last time to her parents in Vienna. She was adopted by 2 sisters, regular churchgoers; well-meaning, presumably, but their charity was cold indeed. They treated her with contempt, and forced her to go to church with them; punishments for misdemeanours were harsh; and there was little sign of love or affection. My friend's experience of Christianity was of a loveless, perfunctory, formal religion; and as a result, she developed a thorough allergy to the Christian faith.

So life in Christ's Kingdom is, or should be, lived by faith, in hope and with charity and love. We see this even in the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus – for surely it is he, even if Luke doesn't name him. This blind beggar, sitting by the side of the road, hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by: presumably he has heard something of Jesus' healing miracles; and even the rebukes and the scorn of the people around him cannot extinguish the hope that suddenly springs in his heart. In Mark's version of the story, he casts off his garment, jumps up, energised by the hope, and comes to Jesus; and the mercy he has hoped and longed for becomes a reality. 'Thy faith hath saved thee', says Jesus; hope and unfulfilled longing have been transformed by contact with the merciful and loving Son of David into faith, praise and glory.

For Jesus heals Bartimaeus out of love, just as he saves each of us because he loves us. and loves us to the end. Love lives, and nowhere more vividly than on the cross, where it seems to be most absent, in that bleak and dangerous hill outside Jerusalem to which Jesus is leading the twelve.

In our lives of faith, which should in turn bring faith and hope to our families, churches and communities the love of Christ is made manifest. This is true in the small things just as much as in the big issues. In our interactions with the bus driver and the bank clerk, in our dealings with those who hate us; in laughing and in loving, as well as in mourning and in conflict, in the seemingly hopeless situation of Palestine; whether in London, Jerusalem, Helsinki or Stuttgart, Christ in his charity lives in and through us.

For that, let us praise God and glorify him.

Amen.