

### **Reflection for Pentecost 3 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last**

Recycling is something that is now very much part of our modern way of life. Green bins, brown bins, blue bins, purple bins & orange boxes ... we recycle all sorts of things in different ways.

Regardless of the politics that surrounds recycling, and I am not going to talk about Scotland's DRS scheme, recycling is a process in which that which is no longer of any use is broken up or melted down and something new is created from it. Newspaper may become toilet paper, old cars are melted down back to liquid metal before being reformed into fridge panels or some other similar metal item. Recycling is a way of using resources to their full and not simply plundering the ever-dwindling resources of our natural world.

Restoring on the other hand, is something a bit different.

When we restore, we do not break up or destroy before recreating, rather we seek to breathe new life into that which is old, which has seen better days. To some extent maybe we ignore the economics of what we are doing, because very often we do it through love and the desire to see whatever the item is working again.

Think about the differences between recycling and restoring and then think about the Christian faith and the grace of God towards us, and what becomes clear is that it is far closer to the idea of restoring than to recycling.

Each of us a result of our sin, greed and self-will has become dirty and useless, at least to God. We no longer function the way God intended us to. What is God to do? Does he break us up, melt us down and then recycle us - by far the easiest route, or does he lovingly and carefully restore us once again to working order?

The incarnation and the cross give us the answer to that. God took the hard route, the route of greatest cost, the route of greatest love, the restoration route.

As St Paul put in our reading from Romans *"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."*

The result of God's love is that rather than being at enmity with God, rather than being on a collision course, we are now at peace with God, we are set right with him: and, like any restoration, it is not the object or item that does the restoring but the restorer. Leave an old car in the garage, it will not restore itself - the restorer has to work painstakingly on it. We are justified, we are put right with God through faith, not through our own actions but through God's actions.

Having been restored, having had so much love and grace shown to us, what next? Do we sit in the garage like some beautifully restored car that only sees daylight when the sun is out, or when someone interested enough visits? No, we are restored so that we can once again play a real and important part in God's ongoing process of restoration. We are restored to work every day. Each of us has a clear part to play in what God is doing.

Think of our Gospel reading. The disciples are not allowed just to sit back and watch Jesus, as important as that was. Rather, they are thrown in at the deep end. They have to be part of his mission, but not just in a haphazard way but one that is clearly defined.

The first important step is to "SEE".

*"Jesus had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* As Jesus looks around, he can see the way people were - tormented, exhausted, led this way and that. Jesus perceived the need those people had.

For the church to be following Jesus' example we need to be looking around at the communities in which we live. We should be able to see the needs of that society, needs at a whole series of different levels - spiritual, physical, and social. Jesus could see the people's need for a Shepherd to lead them in the ways of God; we should see the same today.

Secondly there is "CARE"

It is one thing to see a problem, it is quite another to care. We may find it easy to care for those closest to us, but when it comes to others maybe that is a different matter. Do we care for those outside the church? Seeing the crowd Jesus is moved to compassion - compassion that results in action, not just words and thoughts alone. Time and again in the Gospels we see Jesus deliberately moving towards and caring for those who are outsiders - those on the margins. Is that us?

See, Care, thirdly "PRAY"

As Jesus looks and is moved to compassion, the first thing that happens is that he is moved to prayer. Look, he says to his disciples, *"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest."*

That says a lot about prayer and its place in moving forward. As Jesus sees the size of the challenge, the enormity of the problem, despair could have been his reaction; but no, Jesus knows that God can provide the workers that are needed and that is what he encourages the disciples to pray for. As we look at our world, our community, prayer is the first thing we should turn to.

Then comes "PREPARE"

Whenever you pray, there should always be a health warning because it is dangerous. God's answer may well be to point the finger straight back in your direction.

The disciples, though, do not just get sent out, they are trained, prepared and then commissioned for the task that lies before them. The same is still true preparation training and empowering have a vital part to play in the spreading of the gospel.

Finally "GO"

The disciples are then sent out, not alone but in pairs supporting and encouraging one another. They go to those who are lost, and they do so in coordinated manner.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: *"Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."*

This is a model of mission that the church needs to reflect upon if it is to be effective today. But as we do so let us remember that we have been restored, saved by God's love and his grace, not just to sit in the garage but to be functional workers for the kingdom of God.

The challenge for each of us is whether we are sitting in the garage collecting dust having been restored or whether we have been restored to function daily.

*'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'*