

Affection of Christ

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Preacher: The Rt. Rev. Mike Hill

[0:00] Let's pray, shall we? Our gracious Lord, we thank you for your word. And Lord, I want to pray today that you would take my feeble words and anoint them with your Holy Spirit.

! That they may be life-changing and life-fulfilling words. And Father, we pray as a church that you would help us, that you would prepare us as we think about a new minister.

And Lord, we pray more than anything in these times of uncertainty and hopelessness that you would wake up your church.

That we might pray up and stand up and speak up for you. That your wonderful name may be glorified in us and through us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. I want to preach to you this morning from Philippians chapter 1, which is the reading that John read.

[1:13] And Paul wrote this, God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ. I was flicking through my phone as one does these days.

And suddenly, this woman came on the screen and began to talk. And unusually, she wasn't from the Far East, offering to marry me.

But she was saying something along these lines. She said, I go to church twice every Sunday. She said, in the midweek, I go to my new community group. And on Thursdays, I go to my home group. And I was sitting there thinking, wow, you know, she could teach us something, I guess. You know, four sessions a week or whatever. You know, sounds a bit excessive, doesn't it, to our people of Laodicea neutrality like us. Then she said, and I sit there and I wonder.

[2:26] I wonder, as I sit in church, is this it? She said, I read the New Testament and I get a slightly different impression of the church.

She said, I get an impression of the church, which is, well, she said, I would call it exciting. Is this it? A quote often attributed to Kierkegaard, but probably more likely was off the lips and writings of Oscar Wilde.

He said this, Christ did a great miracle when he changed the water into wine. The church has done an even greater miracle.

It's turned the wine back into water. And maybe, you know, God's put it on our hearts to just think about that, because we're about to receive a new minister, April the 16th, I think Alex told us.

And I think we need to prepare ourselves for that moment, when a new minister arrives with new priorities.

[3:44] So, is this it? I don't know what you come to church expecting, but when you read Paul's letter to the Philippians, you rather get the idea that exciting things were going on in their church.

One of the things we know about Philippi was, it was a great trade center, and in 168 BC, the Romans occupied Philippi, and it remained an occupied land for over a century after that.

Can you imagine that, trying to start a church in an occupied land, where the kind of dominant idea was, that if you're going to bow your knee to anybody, you will bow your knee to the emperor of the Roman Empire.

Paul shows up there in AD 49, and preaches the gospel to them. And you can read about that in Acts chapter 16, where we have a narrative account of what went on when Paul and Silas went to Philippi.

And there were three notable conversions. If you know your Bibles, you will know this. The first was a slave girl, and she earned a tidy income for the people who owned her, because she was a

fortune teller.

[5:24] And they made money off of the fact that she could tell fortunes, and people would give her money, which she had to hand over to her owners. And Paul delivered her of an evil spirit, and these people kicked off massively, because they thought our income stream has been cut off.

So they made trouble for Paul and Silas, and Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown in jail. And then you remember, that the second person, who was converted, was the Philippian jailer. And this is a man who was charged with the responsibility of keeping the prisoners in the prison. And Paul and the other Christians in the prison were praying, and suddenly the doors burst open. There was an earthquake. And all the prisoners poured out onto the streets. And the Philippian jailer thought, Oh my goodness, you know, my Roman employers are not going to like this. So he took out, he was going to kill himself. But he asked a very vital question. He said, What must I do to be saved?

[6:40] You get the answer. Paul says to him, You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Paul didn't say, I got a book I could give you.

He didn't say, Come and meet the Alpha group. He didn't say, You need to do, you know, get your act together, son, and be a bit kinder to people.

No, he said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. And he was saved there and then. And before those two came to Christ, there was a woman whose name was Lydia.

She was, what we would call in 21st century lingo, a smart businesswoman. She had a business that made very expensive purple cloth.

Purple, of course, is the color of royalty and bishops. Whoever thought that was a good idea, really wasn't thinking.

[7:45] And she made this purple cloth. It was very widely used. So she was making, you know, a good dollar out of that. And she was converted.

You see what happens when the gospel is let loose? Things change because people change. And today, I don't know if it is today actually, but we're just at the beginning of a new series of sermons. And the sermon series is called Christ at the Center.

And today, I've got to talk to you about the affection of Christ. I find that a strange word, partly because I think our word, affection, doesn't really tell of the way Jesus relates to us.

Affection for me is like brothers who are affectionate at each other and occasionally punch each other's lights out. And the word that's used for affection here is a very curious Greek word.

[9:04] It's the word splaxton. What it means is intestines. And the reason for that is that Jews thought the seat of emotions was our bowels.

I mean, that's understandable, isn't it? I can't tell you how many guest preachers I've entertained in my life who immediately before they got up and spoke went to the loo for ten minutes.

Some of you know, you know, if you're nervous about doing, you're going for an interview, you'll see, you feel it in your stomach. What Paul is saying is that the affection of Jesus is really the gut-wrenching love of Jesus for all of us.

Somebody wrote, I think it was Dick Lucas in his commentary on Philippians. He said, the big idea of this book is this, knowing Jesus is a deeply personal and transformative experience.

Following him requires the fellowship of other Christians in the task of becoming like him. You're sitting in church and you really don't understand this.

[10:22] My advice is, listen up. And if you're sitting in church thinking, is this it? then maybe this might be your work-up call, wake-up call.

Your life with Jesus will always be less than it could be. You really need to know this. And the love of Jesus is a personal thing.

Right? When we become Christians, we need to know and experience the love of God and trust Jesus.

But once we become Christians, we become disciples and that's something we do together. That's why you're here. But the point I want to make is, if you don't know this personally for yourself, that Jesus Christ is Lord of your life and loves you with a gut-wrenching love, that meant that voluntarily he surrendered to the most painful form of death ever invented by human beings, death on a cross.

If you don't get that, listen up. There are people who go into churches for years and years and years and never get there.

[11:50] It's a particular malaise of the Church of England, if I might say so, having been in it for 40-odd years. I remember a woman who became a Christian in our congregation, a lady who'd been going to church for over 50 years.

I mentioned that. And I thought she was coming to me to tell me she'd been coming for 50 years so I might give her a gold watch or something for long service. she came to tell me I've given my life to Jesus Christ and then she said it's as if Jesus Christ is the best kept secret in the Church of England.

My heart skipped a beat. Why do we know? How do we know that Jesus Christ loves us? We know this because writing in 1 John the Apostle John says this is how God showed his love among us. He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love. Not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[13:20] When I survey the wondrous cross I understand exactly why Jesus loves me.

not just because preachers stand up in church and tell me but because in history there is a very solid event the cross of Calvary which shows me how much Jesus loves me.

See if I had hair on my head it would prickle right now at the very thought that Jesus would die as an atoning sacrifice for our sins atonement is an interesting word if you break it down what it means is at onement that is to say the wrongdoing in my life the selfishness the sinfulness all that stuff that I don't really like to think about needs to be dealt with before I can have an open relationship with my father in heaven and that's the work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary bearing shame and scoffing root in my place condemned he stood sealed my pardon with his blood hallelujah what a savior but Paul of course is speaking to a church to disciples of Jesus people who've already crossed the line and this is a group of people who he's very very happy with people have nicknamed the epistle to the

Ephesians the epistle of joy Paul is extremely grateful isn't he for the Christians in Philippi and there's a good reason for that that the Christians in Philippi knew Christians collected a load of money together and sent it to St.

Paul with a man called Epaphroditus imagine that on a laundry ticket a man called Epaphroditus and he took this money to Paul he stayed with Paul for a while and Paul tells us in Philippians I'm going to send Epaphroditus back to you you know wonder Paul was pleased with them of their own back as new Christians and new church meeting together they collected some money and given it away to support the mission of the church I love that I really do I love the reckless generosity of that and why were they recklessly generous because together they understood that God was recklessly generous in sending his son as an atoning sacrifice for their sins is this it that's a great question and it will always be your question until you understand what it cost

[16:28] Jesus Christ who not not only was the son of God but was fully man when he was here on planet earth when they nailed his hands to a cross it hurt him like it would hurt me or you when they stuffed a spear through his side it would hurt him like it would hurt me and hurt you friends this is not preacher speculation this is historic fact this in itself is a fact that has changed and is changing the world you say well hang on we keep reading statistics of church decline read a few statistics of church growth in China read a few statistics about church growth in Africa in South America friends we gotta wake up not only has this message of

Christ crucified changed lives but it's changing lives and it changes culture you know it's difficult thing isn't it you know I think it's a difficult thing to be a Christian in our country at the moment limitations around free speech and all that stuff I'm not here to give a political speech to you guys and really not Paul writing from prison in chains as he said has thankfulness in his heart and as he tells us in the epistle to the Ephesians he's using his place in prison to leverage support for the gospel in prison he's talking to prisoners so finally

I just want to speculate with you for a few moments on the very nature of this affection that Christ has for us I don't think I could cover this in 20 lectures so I just want to give you a thumbnail sketch what is this affection of Jesus like well Jesus it seems to me and we're told this in Philippians and you'll get this another week when you come to study the epistle it tells us in Philippians chapter 2 that Jesus was obedient unto death it tells us that he gave up his seat at the right hand of God to come down to earth to live in our human mess to transform it and to save us and equip us for heaven you give up that kind of authority you give up that kind of power that is humble and God asks us his people to be humble as well

I've just been telling a bunch of people on Tuesday evenings that I'd have a lot more confidence in the direction of our society and the way it's going if I felt it was doing people good but actually all the data tells us that the way our society is going is making more and more people ill and Paul has a vision of the church which is a place where people will find wholeness and find healing through our corporate witness together I inherited a church where it wasn't like the relationships were bad they just really weren't any relationships I was 34 years old most of the congregation were over 55 and people would say stuff to me like I'd say do you know Eileen

Ferris they'd say is she the one that sits in the second row with a hat on and I would say possibly how long have you been coming to this church 30 years you don't even know the name of the person who sits two pews in front of you I know for many of you you know names is a problem remembering them we've got to do better I mean it's just signal that this is a church where people pull up on a Sunday and go away and they think they're deluded into thinking this is it so Jesus the nature of Jesus love is it's terribly very humble and I love that about Jesus I love the idea that he gave up his place in heaven to come down amongst us and to be with us the second thing is and the

[21:57] Philippians got this the love of God is generous it's formed around an idea that we sing hymns about and worship songs about it's formed around the idea of grace the idea that God loves you despite you God loves you even though you don't deserve it that's the basis of it and the generosity of God's love stretches it's in one of the Johannine letters that we're told the first one that we're told that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us I find that amazing I find that generous and of course as we know by this cash collection they took cash collections are not the only way that congregations can reflect their generosity that they understand the generosity of

God but they are a way they're not the way we need to be generous towards one another we don't want to be judgmental in our churches we don't want to be a church where people have to describe you by what's on your head we don't want to be a church that just like billiard balls on a table kind of kiss off one another no part of our witness to this world which is becoming ill is to be a place where wholesomeness fullness of life and healing can be found third thing is humility generosity the love of Christ is clearly sacrificial 1 John chapter 3 and verse 16 we read these words when I find them 1 John chapter 3 and verse 16 if anybody's quicker than me shout out here we go 1 John 3 and verse 16 this is how we know what love is Jesus

Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters see I think you know when I was in school I used to dread parents evenings I mean my mother and father wouldn't talk to me for months after they'd been to a parents evening you know heard the worst about me I didn't really get on with school I'll be honest with you I was just bored silly by the whole exercise apologies if you're a teacher so I didn't do well and I remember once you know there's this my father would say to me I wouldn't mind it if you were thick I wouldn't mind you if you couldn't do but I hate this comment could do better got worse than that some teacher wrote on my report Mike sets himself extremely low standards and consistently fails to achieve them that's a free bonus for teachers next time they write a report the love of God is sacrificial and we're called to love each other sacrificially if a brother or sister are in need we need to react to it is this it and finally it's consistent I love the value of consistency and I have to say I'm not great at it myself you know I am anything would tell you I have a low attention span and you know she can see me checking out with people when they're talking to me and I don't feel good about that but consistency is a great thing I'm praying that God and the power of his Holy Spirit will make me more consistent I never forgot the time that we were worried about our son's lack of effort and I saw the way my father's advice to

me had kind of not worked so I thought let's try another so he thought instead of calling him on his lack of effort let's incentivize him so I said look if you work hard I'll take you down to that guitar shop in Langley and I'll buy you that guitar that you would like what I really meant was I'll buy you a cheap imitation of the guitar you would like but I tell you he disappeared to his bedroom and he worked like really hard for about a day and then he wanted the guitar so you consistently you don't just go upstairs and work for a day but you actually build into your program a way of studying he had a better idea

[27:51] I mean I come home there'd been my son sitting around the table with a lot of girls from his school and they'd be doing his homework for him it works consistency Jesus loves us in Deuteronomy chapter 31 it tells us God loves you with an everlasting love he's not a fair weather friend not like us who can be so up and down with people so quick to fall out to take offense and Jesus tells us that in this loving community of disciples that he came to fall Jesus tells us this that we're to be salt and light in this world that is to say people are supposed to look at us and conclude with that second century father of the church

Tertullian see how these Christians love one another is this it or is there room for improvement here I ask the question I think one of the reasons why I love Christ church is there are a lot of people here I really do love look if you need to make a personal commitment to Christ today if you're somebody whose life script is rejection or you feel yourself to be unlovable or that you've had a hard time in your life or you struggle with your earthly relationships relationships and find it difficult to trust I'm going to pray that you will be overwhelmed by the love of God this morning but the second thing is believers become disciples disciples learn and do stuff together you're supposed to be salt and light in this world

I've been I can't I don't know how many churches I've been to I don't know how many churches I have spoken to and there's one that sticks in my mind and it's in Stockholm in Sweden it's a long story which I'm not going to tell you you'll be relieved to know but I went there and the priest was a scruffy old man who you know he shaved his face in the morning always cut himself and then he'd stick loo paper on it and then forget to take it off he put a Bible in his hand he became a lion and this church full of respectable middle class people on

Sunday mornings at 11am a Lutheran church I don't get Lutheranism but it's another story every night it turned into a hostel for homeless people drug addicts upstairs on the balcony there were mattresses that homeless women slept on downstairs with the men they'd raised enough money to build a beautiful loo block and shower block for them in the morning they fed them gave them breakfast and the breakfast was served by homeless people who come to Christ and gave their morning up to give breakfast to other homeless people I don't think I'd be the only one in the house who would say that sounds like the affection of Christ to me and when you see it it's stunning and I'll never forget it is this it

I don't think so could it be it yes I think it could but if it's going to be it we've got to wake up a little bit friends we've got to pray up we've got to stand up and we've got to speak up because this dark world needs communities of believers where the light shines and when it does you cannot extinguish it let's pray it's going to leave a few moments of silence and I want to pray in that silence the Holy Spirit will speak into your heart and into your head in the silence can you ask yourself the question

[33:29] Holy Spirit what would you say to me today come come down oh love divine fill thou this soul of mine and visit it with thine own ardor glowing come Holy Spirit Father I pray for those in the house who would love to know you personally and hope that by showing up in church something might happen well something might happen even now in this place Father I want to pray for those who feel rejected feel they can't do relationships find trust very difficult people who are addicted people who've been bereaved people who've been hurt in life

Lord you have the resources to bring wholeness and healing to us all come Holy Spirit we pray for those in the house who love coming to Christ church but largely see the whole exercise as a spectator sport so Holy Spirit whispering in your ear come on wake up stand up speak up come Holy Spirit Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me fall afresh on us break us make us mould us

come Holy Spirit and so

Father we rejoice that you love us with affection with splatthorn with gut wrenching consistent ongoing love and Lord we pray that you would turn our hearts to you and we pray this in Jesus name and the people who agreed said together Amen