

40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

DAY 13 – God’s Grace Adopts us into His Family

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’ Matthew 21:37-40

I once heard a theology lecture by a Jesuit which started with this: “There are two kinds of religions in the world. There is one kind which argues that its religion is THE religion. The other type feeds the hungry, cares for the sick, and clothes the naked. Religion of the first type seems too anxious to convince others that theirs is the only way to salvation, and they end up killing people to prove it. Religions of the second type are respectful of other faiths while remaining faithful to the truth.”

I am fascinated by the number of people in our churches who have, not just a distrust or dislike for people of other faiths, put a real hatred. I’ve heard some appalling things said about Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists or Jews. What’s worse is that they usually know precious little about these faiths. And generally, what surprises many Christians is that the writings of these faiths contain many of the truths that are contained in the Bible.

And it’s sad when a Christian says to me “Oh, those (*insert faith name here*), they don’t care about each other or do what we Christians do”. Really? During the second world war, while many Christians feared for their own lives, or while some Christian denominations actually supported the Nazis, countless Muslim families, officials and diplomats, as well as whole nation states, harboured and helped Jews escape the Holocaust. The deep human desire to help people, to pray for people, to show mercy and act for justice has its origin in only one place...God. There is no God, but God.

What is important here is not who we are and the way in which we respond to our understanding of who God is, but the truth about who God actually is. I’m not speaking of universalism here. Because it is the revelation of Jesus Christ that brings into clear focus who God actually is, not who we think God is.

Remember what Meister Eckhart said; “Pray God rid me of God”. It is not what we believe that adopts us into the family of God, but God’s Grace that invites us and makes us His children. And belief is not the same as acceptance. After all, I can believe that the earth is flat, but I have to accept that it is not. My belief is not the truth. Only God is the truth.

And God’s Grace is for ALL people. When Christ turns His eyes to God on the cross and pleads on our behalf, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”, He absolutely knew what He was saying. For none of us have it right. We all fall short of the Grace of God. But it is God’s Grace that adopts us, not the other way around.

God’s Grace adopts us into His family for God’s will is that none may perish and all may know Him.

As the hymn, “I Cannot Tell” succinctly puts it in verse 3,

I cannot tell how He will win the nations, how He will claim His earthly heritage,

How satisfy the needs and aspirations of east and West, of sinner and of sage.

But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory, and He shall reap the harvest He has sown,

And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendour, when He the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.

PRAYER

Loving God.

Thank you for Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

For in Him by grace you have invited us all into your family.

I pray for those who are lost or confused, who do not know Christ,

Or do not know what He has done for all people.

Rather than sit in condemnation of other faiths or people,

Help us see how You are working in and through them,

That, eventually, like us, they will see the full manner of the Grace

You have bestowed upon all people and will be awakened to You.

In and through Your son, Jesus.

Amen.