

## ON BEING A CHRISTIAN

Sermon by Laurie Crawforth

As we come to the conclusion of the Diocesan “OneLife” mission, which has been supported by the Archbishop of York and a team of Bishops from the Northern Province of the Church of England, we need to think what this means for us. The conclusion, or climax, of a mission might suggest that in drawing to a close it is coming to an end. But this Mission is not ending now, rather it is a point of development for us all, as we seek, in whatever way we can, to further Christ's work in our world. Our church has long supported Mission organisations, especially the Church Mission Society, Mission Aviation Fellowship, Mercy Ships and others. Their work continues, and we offer support and prayers for them all....their Mission doesn't stop, even if ours does.

This brings me onto my theme for today - “On being a Christian”. I want us to explore a little more deeply what being a Christian means – to us personally and to those around us – asking who we are, and why we call ourselves 'Christians'.

It's often said that we don't have to be Christians to do what is right and compassionate. And this is true. We all know people – colleagues, friends, relatives even – to whom this applies. We all have an innate sense of right and wrong, a natural sense of justice, and of compassion for others and the need to care for them, And to some extent I think we sometimes benefit from this in our own selves – which of us hasn't simply felt 'good' about doing things that help others in some way?

But I believe that something in us can take away from any feeling or sense we may have of self-satisfaction, because we know that we are responding to something that is outside and beyond us, something that can and does make real demands of us. And that is, as C S Lewis put it, and St Paul often reminds us, 'Christ in us'.

Why is this so? Because Christ asks us, and demands of us, that we be different, and promises that we will find both the will and the strength to follow His teaching and respond to His calls, not merely because we hear His words, or out of respect for Him, but because we are asked to share His love for all. We are called not just to care for others but to love them too, whoever and whatever they are. Not necessarily easily done, because

we may not actually like them. But Christ's call is clear. And that moves us to a different level.

In the parables in this morning's gospel, of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus speaks eloquently of his love and concern for each one of us. We are his sheep, and we do get lost, and then He seeks us out to bring us back into His fold. He cares for us totally, even concerning such things as our possessions, because they are part of who we are.

Being a Christian is not necessarily easy. Christ tells us to take up our cross, but, He says, if we also take up his yoke and bear its burdens we will find it light and easy, because of our strength in him.

We all face challenges as we go through difficult times, we may even turn away, but deep down we know that He is there for us, his love cares for and heals us.

I grew up in a Christian home, somewhere was never a sort of Damascus Road moment for me. But I have faced these challenges, especially when the opportunities for pleasurable activity seemed better than a church service. But in the end, like others, I found new strength and commitment as I responded to them.

The rewards that come to us from our Christian commitment are personal to each one of us. They include a sense of fulfillment, even contentment. They give us courage sometimes to face up to and confront criticism of our faith in Christ. That faith and the trust that goes with it draws us together into the wider, deeper fellowship of Christ's followers. It is what enables us to declare and show what being a Christian means.