

United with Christ

Tomorrow is the Uniting Church's birthday and I know we have spent time thinking about, talking about and remembering some of the things which have happened across the last 43 years. As I reflect on my time with the Uniting Church which is 42 years I realise that I have been privileged to connect with well over 100 congregations and countless leaders and members of the church.

In all of these conversations and worship services it is clear that we are very different. Our experiences of life, church and each other are quite unique. So much difference yet there is something that manages to hold us all together in the midst of our differences. Rev John Mavor who was an ex-president of the UCA, spoke about the unity in the diversity and 'living in the messy middle'. It is a phrase which I think is true and does reflect so much of what we still deal with in the diverse situations we live with.



Today we are looking at two of the lectionary readings which speak into the unity- as well as the diversity we deal with.

The reading from Matthew is actually a collection of sayings from Jesus. To bring them together doesn't quite make sense yet they have some interesting ideas coming through. I think they can be confusing when taken as a whole and there are lots of sermons which can come out of this reading. However, there are some core ideas for us to think about today.

We are the people of God and we are disciples of Christ. As the reading suggests, we are like the students and Jesus is the teacher. We cannot be the same as Him, however the reading says *it is enough for students to **be like their teachers***. This is reassuring for us as we recognise that we are all on a journey coming closer to God and continuing to grow to become more like Jesus. This doesn't mean we are the same- rather we are all on our own journey of discovering who we are- as unique people, who God not only loves but knows the very number of hairs on our heads!

It is quite reassuring to hear these words in the middle of the reading reminding us of God's love, care and concern. It seems strange that this is followed by some sentences about the conflict within a family- where different family members are set against each other. Some of us may have experienced this within our own families- with disagreements about particular beliefs- or even our faith. Yet there is something here that we may not understand but is perhaps picked up best in the Romans reading.

This reading reminds us of our baptism. In our bible study on Monday one bible spoke about moving from one country to another country. Other bibles speak about moving from one place to a new place. We do this through our baptism, and baptism connects us with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

It comes down to how we understand what Jesus has done. Through his death, he defeated death itself. Not that our bodies don't die and not that we don't struggle at times, but the death of our spirits has been overcome. Alongside that, Jesus has overcome the challenge of sin. His life and death did something we can never hope to do- overcome sin. And the power of His resurrection means that through Jesus, we have been able to move from a place of sin, to a place of God.



Now that doesn't mean that we are perfect or have it right- it simply means that God is showing us how to live our lives in a better way. Which brings us back to the

beginning of the Matthew reading. We are the students seeking to be like the teacher, who for us is Jesus.

And for every one of us who has been baptised, we have been brought into this new place of being. Through baptism, we can become one. We are united in Christ!

So we are celebrating a birthday but more importantly we are able to celebrate that through Christ we are able to be united- no matter how different we are.

Today as we celebrate communion together- even though we are apart, it is as though we gather as a family, celebrating being together in and through Christ. May we live this out this day and all days.

