

**Trinity 18 BCP WW**  
**7 October 2007**

Lord, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9  
Matthew 22:34-46

What think ye of Christ? The Son of the God, the example of perfection to which we aspire? And to love my neighbour as myself using Christ Jesus as the example of perfection seems to me the essence of Christianity.

Just think how this message has been perverted over the last 2000 years, especially by those who have used the church as a means of gaining and maintaining power over their neighbours. Manipulative ministers, power-seeking presidents ... imagining that the divine will was entirely congruent with their own, replacing selfless service with personal promotion. Like those in today's Gospel trying to trip Jesus up. It is no wonder that the church is held by some as an example of hypocrisy and posturing. It is no wonder that so many of my children's generation who think about the deeper issues of life, have turned away from it.

We do not serve our neighbours by wagging our fingers at them. It is hubris to imagine that we are in any position to finger-wag. It is abuse, a pathetic attempt to bolster our own self-image by trying to take what does not belong to us: someone else's freedom. Jesus never finger wagged except to hypocrites and pretenders. As Joel Edwards, leader of the Evangelical Alliance, said recently, it would be wonderful if 1000 fingers wagging could become 2000 arms outstretched.

Loving our neighbours as ourselves demands that we first must love ourselves and take responsibility for ourselves. Jesus so often ministered to others by holding up a mirror so that they could see themselves more clearly and realise the extent of their own imperfections. When we see ourselves as others see us, when we see the beams in our own eyes, we suddenly become more humane, more loving, more forgiving of the motes in our neighbours' eyes. We become more delightful, more delighting, more creative, less rigid. It is a spiritual gift from God to perceive our own sins. Only then can we turn again. In the words of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, 'I turn with groaning from my evil ways, and I re-turn into my heart, and with all my heart I turn to thee.'

This is liberation. It is salvation. It is the way to holiness and wholeness, for once the fig-leaves of pretence covering our own true selves have been exposed to the light of Christ, the more quickly they fall away to reveal the simple beauty within.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,  
and when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'twill be in the valley of love and delight. When  
true simplicity is gain'd, to bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd, to turn, turn will be our delight,  
till by turning, turning we come round right.

Then we shall be able to love our neighbours as ourselves in love and delight.