

Civic Service Sermon

by Rev John Castle

A sermon given on Sunday 27th February 2022
at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst

Readings: John 15:12-17

St David's Day

Many of you will be aware that this Tuesday is Shrove Tuesday, the day before Lent begins. But I'm sure many of you will also be able to tell me what else is being celebrated on Tuesday? St David, Patron Saint of Wales. I wonder whether any patriotic Welsh people among you will be wearing a leek on Tuesday?

I'm not going to preach about St David, but I did just want to mention that he is known for words that he spoke in his last sermon, for which he was remembered.

"Lords, brothers and sisters, be joyful, and keep your faith and your creed, and do the little things that you have seen me do and heard about. And as for me, I will walk the path that our fathers have trod before us."

"Do the little things in life" – or its Welsh equivalent - has, I understand, become a catchphrase in the Welsh language. I think what David was trying to say was that how you behave in the everyday things of life shows what kind of person you are.

Our Civic occasion today

Today we are honouring people who have made a contribution to our community here in Sandhurst. The

Mayor's award ceremony gives the opportunity to recognise people who serve others, often behind the scenes or without great attention being paid to them. And this reminds us that we can all make a contribution.

Cllr Davenport chose for this service the theme of love and the Bible passage we heard read earlier. This is part of Jesus' instructions to his disciples before he left the world to return to God, so it's a sort of parallel to the last sermon of St David.

Loving one another

And what was the key point he was making? "Love one another, as I have loved you." Jesus knew that after he had left them, there was a good chance that his disciples would have to navigate disagreements and conflicts between them, particularly when they faced opposition or threats from outside of their community. They needed to make sure that above all else they showed love to each other.

What is love? – not just words, but actions, ways of treating people, accepting differences, being willing to forgive hurts, seeking the wellbeing of others, even of those with whom you disagree.

Love is important for every community, from a family to a local community like our town, and for the wider world.

Today we are very mindful of the war in Ukraine, where mistrust and hatred, which go back a long way, have come to the fore, causing immense suffering. There are, of course, many other parts of the world where this is also happening, where people define themselves as being not like another

group, creating an “us and them” mentality that gives an excuse for acts of greed or aggression. The only thing that can break this is when people decide that mutual respect, and recognising other people’s needs and rights as well as their own, is the way forward. This is the beginning of a way back to love.

The example of Jesus

Jesus’ parting words to his disciples were to love each other *as I have loved you*. He had chosen them, with all their variety, with all their faults and differences, and loved them into being more like him. Words are meaningless unless accompanied by actions, and Jesus gave them an example of what love means in practice – even dying on the cross for them, for us and for all the world. You will have recognised in the reading the phrase “Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”, a quotation that is often used on Remembrance Sunday each year. That is the ultimate expression of showing love for others.

So what about us? What will be our legacy? What will people remember us for? Like Jesus’ disciples, we can model ourselves on him, serving others as Jesus did, not for approval, or reward, but out of love.

And as St David said, this is shown not just in grand gestures but “in the little things in life”.

Happy St David’s Day!