

Cathedral sermon - Douala 2015 8th June

My friends I stand before you as a confident human being. I can say this because of my faith in Jesus Christ. I do not speak arrogantly but humbly because I am a Christian. There is no place for arrogance in the Christian faith. However we can be humble and confident

It is easy for us to be arrogant. We respond well when someone flatters us; when someone defers to us; when someone makes us feel superior to them. We like this because it is what men and women like. You have better schooling than me; you drive a bigger car than me; you are better dressed than me; you are better in business than me; so I will defer to you and give you a superior place.

This is what they say to our face; but behind our backs they mock us. We do not have eyes to see straight ahead and straight behind at the same time; so they choose their moment to make fun of us.

We cannot be arrogant without people mocking us. We cannot be arrogant and Christian at the same time because Jesus Christ came among us as a Servant Lord; he humbled himself; ultimately he suffered and died for us. Our Christian calling is to be more like Jesus in how we regard ourselves, and how we regard other people. St Paul encourages us to have the mind of Christ. This means that we must give every bit of effort to be more Christ-like. This is the teaching in the Letter to the Ephesians where it exhorts us to grow into the fulness of the stature of Christ.

We must look at people as Christ would look at people. In the gospels he looks at others with compassion - even when they are wrong. We must speak to people as Christ would speak to people. In the gospels he speaks words of peace, words of grace, words of love, even when someone is gripped by human temptation. This is how his followers should be. This is how you should be. This is how I should be. This is how Christ's church should be as together we witness to the world, whether it is in the UK or in Cameroon or anywhere else.

We cannot be arrogant as followers of the crucified Saviour; but we can be confident because Christ is in us, before us, beside us, and behind us. He wraps his arms around us and embraces us. Christ is in all, to all and for all. He is there for those who love him, and for those who reject him. When he died he did not die for those who loved him; he died for his love of us. Scripture tells us that before we loved, God loved us.

Our confidence in Christ does not come from the flattery of those around us, but from the love God has for us that pours forth like a beautiful fountain - bubbling, refreshing, lifegiving. Drink deeply from the well of life like the woman at the well in Samaria. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Our confidence in Christ comes from his words of comfort. Comfort has nothing to do with sitting on a lovely soft chair; comfort means 'strengthened'. When we pray for the comfort of the Holy Spirit we are praying that the Holy Spirit will give us spiritual strength.

Often we find ourselves in trouble; often we find that temptation is powerful before us; often we may feel afraid in times of challenge or of danger. With confidence Jesus so often says in the gospels, "do not be afraid". I say to all of you this morning, whatever anxiety or problem you bring in your heart; whatever

trial is besetting you - do not be afraid, for he is with you, and if you have that humble confidence that Jesus brings you, all will be resolved. Do not be afraid.

Fear is a mighty power. So many of us fear the truth; we fear the truth about ourselves. We are afraid of being vulnerable. We are afraid of showing our real selves to other people. We are afraid of facing God, and so we hide.

This is what we read in the Old Testament book of Genesis. It is a story about God and man written many thousands of years ago. It tells of a truth about God and man from many millions of years ago. Man is afraid to tell the truth, afraid to admit to personal weakness, afraid to face himself, and afraid to stand fully in the presence of the glory of God.

Adam is disobedient. He goes against being the person God created him to be. God created man to be fully alive in his glory. Man hides from God because he knows he has done wrong. God always searches us out. Psalm 139 says, 'Lord you have searched me out and known me. You know my sitting down and my standing up'. We can hide our face from God but God does not hide his face from us.

My friends, if you are still with me, take this time to think if the man I am talking about is you. Man hides from God and he tries to make others responsible for his own failures. So Adam blames Eve. Because men and women are alike, we equally avoid facing the truth. Both men and women turn away from taking personal responsibility for what we say and do. How often have we tried to escape from the truth by passing the blame on to someone else? Stop and think about this. I know I have done it, and from time to time I will continue to do it, because facing the truth is uncomfortable. When he was about to die on the cross Jesus prayed in a garden; he prayed that the cup of death might pass him by; but he placed himself entirely under the countenance of God his Father.

It is part of our confidence in Christ that we face truth, for if we do not we miss being with Jesus, who 'is the Way, the Truth, and the life'. He wills us to follow in his way, to rejoice in his truth and share in his life. John ch. 10, says clearly that Jesus has come so that we may have life, and have it abundantly. God's purpose is that we should live life richly, and fully recognising who has given us this life, and giving thanks and praise.

I repeat, fear is a powerful influence. We so often are afraid of the truth. Sometimes because of this fear of the truth we demonize the truth; we accuse someone who carries an uncomfortable message of having a demon. The only demon is the human arrogance within us which seeks to avoid truth; the human arrogance that denies the humility of Jesus; the human arrogance that seeks to blame someone else for our own sins. Each of us can wriggle like the serpent, every one of us can slither like the snake as we seek to hide the truth in the long grass. Is this speaking to you?

Jesus speaks the truth to the crowds. What do they say 'him be crazed' he is mad. They don't like being challenged

The response of the Scribes is even more extreme. They are challenged by the teaching of Jesus. Out of fear they do not say he is mad, but make a more desperate claim. They say he is possessed. What an accusation to make. They make it out of fear. They are afraid of truth. They take a popular route. They try to win over the crowd by saying that Jesus has an unclean spirit; that he is a messenger of the one the people rec

ognize as Beelzebul. What desperation is this? Yet they are only doing what we all might be tempted to do when faced with the truth.

Jesus has the answer. How can Satan cast out Satan. Only one more powerful can cast out the work of the devil. Only God can be supreme over all things and God cannot be divided. Jesus responds to their fear by stating that God cannot be divided. Jesus invites them to be part of the power of truth; it is the power of God. God transcends all human conventions and all human institutions Even families. We all love our families. I love my wife. We have been married now for 32 years. I love my daughter and my son; I love my grand-daughter. I love both my parents who are still alive aged 81 and 82. I love my mother in law, and I love many others who are good friends. They are all blessings from the Lord. However Jesus invites us to think big. He asks me to enlarge my horizons. He asks you to think big. He asks you also to enlarge your horizons. He demands that I consider all of you as part of my family. He asks you to consider me as part of your family. He unites us. He unites us through faith, through love, through grace, through fellowship. For we are the Body of Christ. When we are truly his body we cannot be divided against ourselves.

I am from the UK. You are here in Cameroon. I hold you in my prayers and I ask you to hold me in your prayers, for we are one in Christ. We cannot be divided because Christ holds us together. The culture in my country and the culture in your country is very different. We may disagree about a number of issues as we might with people from many other places - but the household of Christ is not divided, because we are held together in Christ. Our family is not one because I agree with you and you agree with me, but because together we look to Jesus Christ who is our Lord and Saviour. One hymn we sing in England says this 'Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name you are mine.'

So I stand before you with confidence; confidence that we are united in Christ; confident that when we face the truth about ourselves and the truth about God we have nothing to fear.

It is this confidence in Christ that the great Apostle St Paul addresses in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians. He carried many burdens. He had many burdens placed on him in his apostolic ministry. This was especially true in the early church in the city of Corinth in Greece. St. Paul had witnessed in the Body of Christ in that city a church that deeply divided against itself. His desire was for unity in the church there. Yet his desire was not that a human level of unity was needed, but rather a deeper sense of unity. His desire was that those who followed Christ should follow the one Lord. Jesus is the point of unity, for Jesus is the Truth, and all the Christian family must unite around the truth that Jesus is Lord.

This image is powerful for those of us in the world-wide Anglican church. We know that there are things over which we disagree - but one thing is true for all of us. Christ is head of the church, and there is but one Lord and God. St. Paul says 'all this is for your benefit, so that the more grace is multiplied among people, the more thanksgiving there will be to the glory of God.'

Stand confident in Christ therefore, but stand humbly. Allow the truth always to flourish. Let the peace of Christ dwell in you richly that you may live together as Anglicans in Cameroon to the glory of God our Father.

Amen