

Sunday 3rd February 2019
'An Early Valentine'

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Haggai 2.1-9
NT: Romans 12.1-5

“The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.”

It is perhaps an indicator of the parlous, that is to say essentially disastrous, state of my love life that I have two occasions to choose from for the title of worst ever Valentine's Day. One consisted of a romantic meal being ruined by another couple on the next table having a loud and public break up, which included certain revelations about their bedroom antics that made finishing our meal next to impossible. The other was when I was single and living in Prague. A pair of friends from university came to visit and it just so happened that the weekend that they chose to visit had the 14th February in it. On (an admittedly unobserved) Valentine's Day itself, through a series of mishaps and poor choices we ended up having the flat broken into (if pushing an open door can really be described as a break in- but that is neither here nor there). As we were being threatened with robbery by a knife-wielding Russian maniac, the phone of one of my friends, who was, inexplicably, a fan of New Labour synth nerds D:REAM, began to ring, diffusing what might have been a somewhat tense situation with the strains of 'Things can only get better'.

Things getting better- it's an odd concept, or at least it seems it if one takes a cursory look at the world today. And yet it is a pretty good summation of the promises of God. For those are promises made, at their heart, in love. This is not a naïve promise, as people perhaps foolishly believed when D:REAM sang in the heady days of the 90s, but one rooted in a life beyond our own. A life in Christ. What does that look like? Well, St Paul gives us a

pretty clear idea in our second reading: we who are many are one body in Christ and are one with one another thereby. In short- the Christian life is necessarily a relational one. One that is based on care, consideration, and knowledge of one another. A relationship that is based on the bigger and better whole, rather than the individual parts. That is not always easy- it is not always achievable, even, by our own efforts. It takes something bigger. It requires love and, in requiring love, it requires God.

When we come together in love, we are capable of bigger and better things. More splendid things. That is the case for us when we are in love with one another, and it is even more so when we return the unending love that God has for us. Keep loving each other and find in your hearts room for the overflowing love of God- for things really will get better when you do. The best is yet to come. This is the promise that Paul clings to when he urges us to be one body in Christ now in the hope of life everlasting. This is the promise that the prophet Haggai relates to the people of Israel, when he urges what is left of them to come back together and build a temple. It is the promise open to each and every one of us today, as God invites us to know and love one another and know and love him through Jesus Christ. When we love, things can, will, do get better. Even Valentine's Days as disastrous as mine. Truly then the latter splendour of this house, of our house, of God's house, shall be greater than the former.

Fr Fergus Butler-Gallie