

ST GEORGE'S WINDSOR

EASTER 6 2018

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.' These words are to be found in St John's Gospel; they formed part of this morning's second lesson. I shall return to them in due course.

For now, however, let me draw your attention to a short and very simple poem. It is by the nineteenth century poet Robert Browning. It was first published in 1855, though no one can be sure when it was originally composed. It is called: **My Star**.

**All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furl'd:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.**

The final line of the poem is powerful.

Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Presumably, Browning does not intend us to take his loving a star in the heavens quite literally. Happily, we do not have to look very far to see what relationship he has in mind.

We know that in November 1845 Browning wrote to Elizabeth Barrett: 'Dearest, I believed in your glorious genius and knew it for a true star from the moment I saw it, - long before I had the blessing of knowing it was MY star, with my fortune and futurity in it.' The evidence suggests that the poem is a tribute to Elizabeth Barrett and her work; that it is essentially a love poem.

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But the poem is surely more than one that is harnessed to a particular relationship at a particular time. It has a more general application. It reminds us that a kind of love (loyalty and commitment) is often awakened in us when someone else reveals his or her innermost self to us. It reminds us that a kind of love (faithfulness and allegiance) is often aroused within us when someone else pays us the compliment of letting us know who they really are. It reminds us that a kind of love (personal dedication and affection) is frequently stirred within us when another individual invites us to know something of the secrets of his or her own heart. So much we know from everyday human experience.

Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Of course, this is not always the case. Sometimes what we are given to know about a fellow human being proves to be too much of a burden to us; in some way or another, a challenge that we do not have it in us to accept. Nonetheless, we can still be sure of this. No relationship can claim to be one of genuine 'friendship' which does not include personal disclosure. There can of course exist mutual cooperation, shared interest and enjoyment, and a sort of solidarity, but genuine 'friendship' goes much deeper, and is a rare and precious thing.

Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Jesus said to his disciples: **I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.** Jesus disclosed to them the deepest secrets of his heart; that knowledge of the Father that was at the very core of his being, and that he knew it was his calling to convey to others. That knowledge of the Father was what shaped his every word and action, and was expressed perhaps most sublimely on the cross. It seems to have been the knowledge that, at the heart of everything, lies love, and that it is only in abandoning ourselves to love that we shall ever find that quality of life that some have called 'eternal'. It is such knowledge as this that made Jesus the one he was; guaranteed his character.

As he reveals to his disciples this profound conviction, and as he opens his soul to them, he calls them 'friends'. In doing so, he trusts that his openness to them will evoke that kind of love that you might call 'understanding'. His calling them 'friends' is not so much a statement of fact as an invitation and appeal.

Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Opening the soul to others is, as I have suggested, a risky business. For some, what is revealed will be unwelcome. But, without such revelation there can be no real friendship.

As, all those years ago, Jesus showed to his disciples what was branded on his heart, and appealed to them as friends to understand, so today, through the words of Scripture, he shows himself to us, and appeals to us as friends to offer understanding and allegiance. He asks us to see with him that, at the heart of everything, lies love, and that it is only in abandoning ourselves to love that we shall ever find that quality of life that some have called 'eternal'.

And there, we might put this sermon to bed but for the fact that one thing more must be said. In Christ, so Christians believe, we see God himself opening His soul to us and thereby inviting us, appealing to us, to be His friends. There is something very special here. Such revelation of course could be too burdensome for us, and the lure of worldly so-called 'wisdom' could be too strong for us to resist. Many people clearly find it so. But maybe the words of Robert Browning (albeit that they were probably addressed to his adored Elizabeth) might somehow seem appropriate.

What matter to me if their star is a world?

Mine has opened its heart to me; therefore I love it.

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