



Ramblings from the Rectory

June 2017

As I write this I am very much involved in preparing to celebrate weddings in our churches. Weddings are wonderful celebrations and it is a real privilege to walk alongside a couple as they take this step of faith; faith in one another as well as in God. Church weddings, along with weddings in general, are not so much in decline as they were a few years ago, but their purpose has changed. Almost all couples that come to see me are wanting to make a further step of commitment in their relationship. Very few are beginning a relationship together. This marks a change in the way that our society in general views relationships and sexuality.

This change is a challenge to the church. Are we to engage with these new attitudes or are we to retreat into a world of Christian holiness? Am I to celebrate with these couples coming to me, or condemn them for not following traditional church teaching about marriage? My view is that I should get involved, and celebrate the tentative step of faith that has brought these couples to me. I also believe that we in the Church must get far more involved with the debate or the world will move on without us.

We have thousands of years of wisdom and tradition to share, but so often we either keep quiet or we hurl insults from the safety of the church walls. We have a tradition that says that the best place for sex is within an exclusive relationship between two people. Society may change but the reality of that truth does not. We have sacred texts that talk about how two lives can be woven together, and that this can be a way to discover our oneness with God. We have texts that talk about equality and love (passionate and practical).

So we have much to add to the debate. Much to add to help people today as they search for what is right in a changing world. But perhaps the greatest thing that we have to offer is a way of approaching this search. We have wisdom which says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4.7). There is wisdom here which says that we should conduct our whole lives within this way of love. This includes our sexuality, but also our arguments about sexuality.

We may disagree; in fact, we are almost certain to disagree. However, if we continue to love then we are able to listen and respect one another, even in disagreement. We can search for the right way without tearing ourselves apart.

We have wisdom which says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 John 4.19). This is a truth that the Church of England is not always good at living out. But after the mess we got into over women bishops, and our very confused response to gay marriage, I see signs that we are starting to search again for a more Biblical way to conduct our business.

We have all this wisdom locked away, it is time that we were more loving, more generous in our sharing of all that God has given to us.

God bless, Nigel.