



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF EAST LANCASHIRE

Sermon for the Tercentenary Service of Freemasonry

Manchester Cathedral – 17 September 2017

The Revd Canon Richard Hawkins ProvGChap

Read by WBro Russell Conn.

וייצר יהוה אלהים את האדם עפר מן האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים ויהי האדם לנפש חיה

Read by WBro Dr Mo Asfar.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّنْ طِينٍ
فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

WBro The Revd Canon Richard Hawkins then continued

“Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being”. (Genesis 2.7)

Passages read in three different languages but I am sure the linguists amongst the congregation will have recognised them as an extract of the text that WBro Paul Rose read in Hebrew earlier. (Genesis 2.4b-9)

The Hebrew is taken from the first of the five books of the Torah – בְּרֵאשִׁית – Bereshit, literally meaning "In the beginning". Those books form the first five books of what we, Christians, call the Old Testament. The Arabic is from the Quran Chapter 38 and translates as - “When your Lord said to the angels: “Indeed I am about to create a human being out of clay. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.”

Here we have the three great monotheistic religions expressing a shared belief. The manner in which our faiths and our understanding of God’s work in the world and the form of our

worship may have evolved and diverged over many centuries, but at the very heart is our rootedness in a shared belief in a Supreme Being who breathed life into mankind.

As a card-carrying Christian I find that an awesome image. The image of God who loves His creation so much that He breathes life into it, a love that is unconditional, a love that is free to each of us so long as we want to accept it, receive it and are moulded by it. A love so strong that in the words of our last hymn reached out and “saved a wretch like me”. A love that gives us freedom and yet a love that brings such responsibilities. That love is the same love that the Right Worshipful Provincial Grand Master read about in that wonderful passage from Paul’s First Letter to the people of Corinth (*1 Corinthians 13*). Many will recognise it as a wedding favourite and for that matter at it is popular at funerals. Paul wrote his letter most probably in the Spring of AD 55 towards the end of his 3 years living in Ephesus.

The whole of Paul’s letter is a timely reminder for us today as it continues to instruct and inspire us. History sadly repeats itself as most of the questions and problems that confronted that fledgling church at Corinth are very much with us today - problems of immaturity, instability, divisions, jealousy and envy, lawsuits, marital difficulties, sexual immorality and misuse of spiritual gifts. Yet in spite of this concentration on problems the letter contains one of the most loved chapters in the bible, the one read to us and in our service book. This timeless chapter speaks to us of the nature and qualities of love.

It saddens me that English is a very limited language as it lacks a vocabulary that can express the richness of many Greek and Hebrew words. So the word that we have here translated as “love” in its original Greek form means a special form of love - it is a love that is a selfless concern for the welfare of others. A love that is not called forth by any quality of “loveableness” in the person loved, but is the product of a will to love in obedience to God’s command. In Christian terms it is like Christ’s love manifested on the cross.

I would like to suggest to you that that passage is at the heart of what it is to be a Freemason - after all our guiding principles are “Brotherly love, relief and truth”.

We strive to live in a manner in which “Brotherly love” will fashion not only our Masonic life but reaching beyond into our own individual lives - a desire to attend to the welfare of others, to seek the best in our neighbour - a generosity of love that notices, is moved by and responds to the needs of the sick, the down trodden, the rejected and the devastated.

Over three hundred years good men have joined the Freemasons, some have done great deeds, others smaller acts of kindness. Many have served their country, some paid the ultimate price, not least the lost of the Great War for which the United Grand Lodge of England in Great Queen's Street stands as a monument to the honour of their sacrifice.

Yes - Freemasons have led in the field of arts and sciences, there have been great statesmen, soldiers, sailors and airmen, explorers, writers, musicians, actors, and yet the majority of us claim no fame or glory but we rejoice with the great and the humble in a brotherhood united in the love of the Supreme Being that breathed life into us all. That love is witnessed through the generosity of Freemasons over the centuries from the big projects: hospitals, hospices and residential homes, schools and universities, cathedrals and churches, research projects and air ambulances to the millions of small individual acts of charity - the walking frame for the infirm brother, the teddy bear given to a sick and frightened child, the gas and electricity bill that was paid, and on and on and on. That love was demonstrated by the Masons of this Province very recently for within hours of the tragic events across the road here at Manchester Arena money was pouring into the appeal initiated by our Provincial Grand Master.

But love is not measured solely in financial giving but in the manner we relate to each other day by day - the love shown among us. The call made to a brother or friend in need, remembering our widows, the inclusion of the stranger and guest at a meeting, the support given to the Lodge member who is struggling to get to meetings, the encouragement given to the new member who is wavering in his attendance.

As we rejoice for 300 years of Freemasonry I take you back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians and invite you to reflect upon this passage in the light of our shared membership of this amazing Brotherhood. Lay this passage alongside your life and relationships.

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

Amen

*WBro The Revd Canon Richard Hawkins ProvGChap
17 September 2017*