

## **The Heart of Christianity**

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**Talk by the Rt Revd Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough**

At the heart of Christianity is a person – Jesus Christ. That may not come as a surprise, but it's very important to state. Jesus Christ – not the church – is at the heart of Christianity.

Of course Jesus Christ was a Jew, and Christianity did develop from Judaism. We would say as Christians that Christianity developed Judaism – completed it, brought it to its fulfilment. What the Jewish believers call their scriptures – the law, the prophets and the writings – what Jesus knew as his scriptures – we Christians call the Old Testament. And the writings about Jesus, explaining his importance, explaining the Christian faith, we call the New Testament. Together they form our Christian bible.

But again the heart of our faith is Jesus Christ.

We believe that Jesus was both man and God – fully man, fully God. And at the heart of Jesus Christ is relationship and loving relationship. We believe as Christians that God exists as one God but in three persons – the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And that those three persons are in perfect loving relationship with one another, and were so before anyone or anything else came into being. Before we were created, before the world was created there existed, in the heart of God, loving relationship. And Jesus coming into the world - becoming a baby, becoming a man, dying on the cross for our sins, rising from the dead - Jesus coming into the world came to show us the perfection of loving relationship. To call us into relationship with God. To call us into better relationship with one another.

When we look around at the problems in the world, and the problems in our own circumstances and situations it becomes very evident that there is a flaw in the human makeup. We are, in the bible's language, sinners. That is we fail to reach perfection. We go wrong, we mess up our relationship with God and with other people. Our relationships are flawed and damaged - and we as people are flawed and damaged - and that accounts for the problems of the world.

Jesus Christ came to offer a solution to that problem – the solution.

Because Jesus Christ offers us God's forgiveness where we are sinners, where we have gone wrong, where we are flawed, he offers us in himself the forgiveness of sin. He offers us a renewed, restored relationship with God the father. And he offers us, he gives us his Holy Spirit, to help us rebuild our lives, to help and strengthen us as we seek to live in the way he wants. So he comes to offer us a renewed relationship with God, the chance to start again regularly – the chance to start again each day in a renewed relationship with God. He offers us the strength of the Holy Spirit to help us do that and as that happens he calls on us as Christians to better our relationships with one another – that is to love one another, to love our fellow Christians and our fellow human beings. The two great commands that Jesus gives are that we should love God and love our neighbour. Those of course come from the Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament. But they are at the heart of it.

In summary, the core of Christianity is Jesus Christ. And what Jesus Christ is all about is loving relationships. A restored relationship with God, knowing his love for us and our call to love him and restored relationships with other people – again based on love.