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## *The Ties that Bind – The Very Rev. Andrew Tremlett*

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Andrew Tremlett**  
**Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London**  
**The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 7, Year A**

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. —Matthew 10:37*

I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Diocese of London UK, where just a few months ago in St Paul's Cathedral we saw the confirmation of Election of the then Bishop Sarah Mullally as the now 106th Archbishop of Canterbury.

Dean Candler, can I thank you for your gracious invitation and warm welcome. Arriving on Friday, with my wife, Prof. Maggi Dawn, who is preaching this morning at All Saints, I was starting to think that the Atlanta City authorities had put on a great welcome, until I read that the Spain v. Saudi Arabia soccer world cup match is taking place here later today!

And on this Father's Day, I was tempted to begin by wishing you and your households well as you gather around your dinner tables today, but the today's gospel scripture leaves me a little uncertain:

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;*

which is a reminder of the radical nature of Christian discipleship, where our ultimate allegiance is to God in Christ, in a way that puts all our other ties and bonds into perspective.

You may know the story of the beautiful hymn written in 1782 by John Fawcett, 'Blest be the tie that binds'.

Fawcett was the minister of the Wainsgate Baptist Church in Yorkshire, in the north of England, and was offered a more lucrative and prestigious position in a larger church in London.

The story goes that it was the emotional pleas from his existing congregation that persuaded him that he was bound to them and ultimately caused him to think again. The hymn became a celebration of enduring Christian and community fellowship.

So I want to focus this morning on the ties that bind us and then reflect a little on the radical call of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on our lives.

During this your 250th anniversary year of the Declaration of Independence, I can only reflect on how deep and enduring the ties that continue to bind the United States and the United Kingdom.

In 1941, Sir Winston Churchill is claimed to have said that 'St Paul's must be protected at all costs' during the bombing raids of the London Blitz. Some 300 volunteers patrolled the roofs and great dome of St Paul's, neutralising dozens of incendiary devices that were devastating the city.

But one bomb did fall on the Cathedral itself, destroying the high altar at the East End. In the aftermath of the Second World War, behind the replacement high altar, a new chapel was created as a memorial Chapel to the American service personnel who had given their lives to protect our nation.

President Eisenhower committed to St Paul's the roll of honour in which each of their names was inscribed; the flags of the then 48 states were portrayed in the stained-glass windows and the flora & fauna of the United States depicted in the woodwork.

To this day, those strong ties that bind us come to the fore each year at Thanksgiving when 1,000s of your fellow Americans gather in St Paul's to hear your Ambassador speak as they celebrate that great holiday.

On Tuesday, St Paul's will host a Service of Thanksgiving for the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

And a loyal group of Americans – St Paul's Cathedral Trust in America – continues to support us: my reason for being in Atlanta is for our board meeting in the next couple of days.

But let's return to Matthew's account of Jesus' life and ministry.

It's well known that Matthew structures his gospel around five blocks of teaching, perhaps echoing the five books of the Torah, the authoritative teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures.

We all recognise the first block – which includes the Sermon on the Mount – and is about the character of those called to be part of the Kingdom of God.

The third, fourth and fifth blocks cover the Parables, the Church and the End Times.

But the second comes in Matthew 10 which starts with Jesus naming and commissioning the twelve apostles, giving them power to heal, warning them of impending persecution, and then preparing them for their mission.

Then you get this block of teaching with instructions about evangelisation, which are forthright, bold and challenging.

Up until this point, the disciples have been in close contact with Jesus, forming an extended and itinerant group, accompanying him as he taught, travelled and transformed the lives of those he encountered.

But Matthew Chapter 10 marks a breakpoint, where the disciples will have to make their own way:

*See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves ... Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues.*

So, no wonder the tone of Jesus' directions to them change to match – they will have to fend for themselves, depend on one another and realistically will find a mixed reception.

And then comes our key text this morning:

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

In other words, if you are heading out on the road on your own or in pairs, you can't afford the luxury of looking backwards, thinking endlessly about the comforts of home or trying to maintain those closest of relationships because you'll never get on with the job.

The radical thing about Jesus' message is not that he was saying that a son should hate his father, or a daughter should hate her mother – far from it.

The point is that when we are called to service and mission, we have to keep our eyes on the journey ahead and not try to plough while looking over our shoulder.

In a world where we seem to be obsessed with the things that divide, rather than the ties that bind us, it's good to remember that following the call of Christ with a singleness of mind can also go hand in hand with building strong communities and lasting relationships.

Eighteen months ago, I was delighted to welcome to St Paul's a large delegation from the Ebenezer Baptist Church led by The Revd. Dr Raphael Warnock. This was to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Dr Martin Luther King Jr. preaching in the Cathedral on his way to Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

It reminded me that alongside the radical call of the gospel to set aside our loved ones for a season, there is

also the call to build community, to foster and to nurture, and to equip for the next generation.

This is something I know lies close to your hearts with the wonderful project to complete the Good Faith Chapel – a place of prayer and contemplation, worship and education, invitation and mission – which I am greatly looking forward to hearing about from Dean Candler later.

So my dear friends in Christ, when we hear the call of Jesus to follow him - to put him above all other – let us also give thanks for the ties that bind us.

In the words of one of my illustrious predecessors, the poet John Donne, whose statue survived the Great Fire:

*No man is an island, / Entire of itself; Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main.*

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