



Harry's wedding and the Church

Don't jump to any conclusions about what I'm saying before you get to the end of this piece, but there's a problem with Prince Harry's marriage. It's the problem that brought on the abdication of King Edward VIII, and it's a problem that nobody seems to mention.

In both Luke and Mathew's Gospels, Jesus clearly states the following: "Anyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery." (Luke 16.18, Matthew 5.32)

Meghan Markle is divorced, like Wallis Simpson was before her, ergo it is impossible for the Church to give its blessing on their marriage, because to do so would be contrary to scripture. It would be like blessing adultery.

What, however, was clear in 1936 is not at all clear today: more than that, everyone, and I mean everyone from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the children at our local primary school, would think that for the Church to refuse to marry this couple would be loopy, even morally wrong. This is love: let us celebrate this love and, as a Church, we believe in giving people a second chance at finding that love.

So what do we do with this verse of scripture? What we tend to do is acknowledge that Jesus was speaking into a society with particular norms, especially with regard to the ease with which men could 'divorce' or more accurately 'put away' wives, when they wished to move on to somebody else. We allow

ourselves to view that verse of scripture in a wider narrative of Jesus' celebration of love. If you want to be critical of this approach, though, you argue that this is just a 'pick and choose' approach to scripture, choosing to live by the things which are convenient and dumping the bits which are 'difficult'.

Now for the non-Christian, why would you care? The Bible is a historical document but it is not especially authoritative. I suppose what might be of interest, though, is how you listen to inter-Christian debates, for every Christian still does acknowledge the Bible as more than this.

Being in the 'liberal' wing of the Church, one of the things we are criticised for by the conservative or evangelical wing for, is doing just this: picking and choosing scripture. We are regarded as heedlessly 'soft' about gay marriage because we are swept up by culture and do not take the Bible as seriously as we should.

And yet where is the evangelical protest about this particular marriage, which is against Jesus' own words? Where are the zealots condemning Harry for his contra-Biblical approach, and the Archbishop of Canterbury for seeming to approve? Nowhere. The truth is that 'conservatives' are flexible about scriptural warrant when they want to be. Which makes you think their objections to homosexual relationships are less about scripture and more about something else.

November 2017 Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.