

# United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

## Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

### Year A – Trinity

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### Trinity 1, 25 May 2008

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9-18. Commandments  
Psalm 119: Teach me O Lord  
1 Corinthians 3: 10-11, 16-18. Nature of wisdom  
Matthew 5; 38-48. Turn the other cheek

#### Thank you for welcome

Lovely service  
Those who kept things going, especially Sally, phone calls  
Baptism of fire baptisms, weddings, baptisms at Barlow

#### In all this activity, need something to live by.

#### What do the readings say?

OT commandments: you shall not revile the deaf, or put a stumbling block before the blind  
Wisdom psalm  
    need psalms  
    What is wisdom: sophia  
    Love of love  
    Need to fight for it  
    Proverbs market stalls

Epistle tells us that this wisdom, manifest at Jesus Christ, unexpected, unpredictable, not world's wisdom

#### Gospel interesting

Pacifist – certainly not

- Turn the other cheek a provocative act
  - At the time of Jesus, striking someone deemed to be of a lower class with the back of the hand was used to assert authority and dominance. If the persecuted person "turned the other cheek," the discipliner was faced with a dilemma. The left hand was used for unclean purposes, so you couldn't do it.
  - Turn other cheek: go into the street and say do it again where all can see what you're like
- Give your cloak as well, could be provocative
  - By handing over one's cloak in addition to one's tunic, the debtor has essentially given the shirt off their back, a situation directly forbidden by Jewish Law. By giving the cloak you're reduced to nakedness, something that brings shame on the viewer, not the naked (Genesis 9: 20-27)

**However, we look at this, I think it's a call to get involved.** not just a private matter

And that's what we must do. We have to judge best how to do this: wisdom needed

### **Involvement plan the two great commandments**

Love God and neighbour as self

- Love God:
  - show our love in church services. beauty, good words, good sights, good sounds. More anon.
  - learn about God, explore the divine, listen to the divine spirit, hear divine wisdom. More anon.
- Love neighbour as self
  - Not better than. Explore ourselves and be honest with ourselves. Humility.
  - Serve the people of this parish and this church
  - Man in park: acid, needles, round from rectory.
  - Driving along Linacre road: each side, Different drugs. This parish.
  - How do we serve them, what can we do for them?
  - we should be challenging, not silent

So there's a blue print for action. REFER TO PROFILE

To seek and fight for delight for all, wisdom for all, sophia, love of love.

In all of this, my job is to be your pastor, teacher, provoker, comforter, challenger and nurturer. All that will be my privilege, and I do it willingly and with enthusiasm. We all have a part to play in enabling the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, or that the church militant here in earth may become the church triumphant.

## **Trinity 2, 1 June 2008, Year A, CW Eucharist, Barlow**

Romans 1:16,17: 3:22b-28

Matthew 7:21-29

There are times in our lives when we can feel utterly overwhelmed by the difficulties that beset us. There are times when we can feel that we have lost control and that life has become chaotic. There are times when we can feel bewildered about how our lives have turned out and uncertain about how we might make any sense or progress in them.

Thursday for me

Assailed

Can't cope

Family

So much worry it does choke the best intentions, the seed

The readings for this Sunday urge us to listen to God's teaching and to do it, whether it be revealed in the Old Law given to the Jewish people, or revealed in the New Law given through Jesus. It is, we're told, in God's Law that we find the way out of chaos and bewilderment that threaten to overwhelm us.

The order of the universe: order, not control.

We are often a bit put off by the idea of law of any sort.

imposed on us by external authority. Law limits what we otherwise want to do. It curtails our freedom. Law threatens us with the fear of punishment to make us conform. Law demands obedience, whether we agree with it or not. For someone else's benefit.

But the image of the law of God is that it is for our benefit, not for the benefit of the people with power. The image is that the Law shows us the right way to live, to chart a way through chaos and bewilderment that beset us.

In the Gospel, dramatic illustration

quakes, rift valley, importance of foundations

Jesus calls on us to do the Law of the Father, so that we can weather the chaos and bewilderment, rather than collapsing in a heap when faced by the difficulties of life.

I rather suspect that we know the right thing to do, but we cover it up with face saving excuses and reasons why we shouldn't do it.

It's only when we're feeling drowning that we can see the lifebuoys, but when we do see them, we find the Law of God our delight rather than a burden, the source of rescue and security.

To do the 'will of the Father,' to do the Law of the Father, is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit already implanted within us, a rock on which to build the houses of our lives and the promise of an eternal home in the Kingdom of Heaven. All we have to do is stop resisting.

And we need to be kind to ourselves. We need to be compassionate with ourselves and trust in ourselves.

Well, what I feel at the moment is the need to be easy on myself. Compassion for myself, and curiously enough it is in suffering oneself that one can more easily sympathise with the trials of others.

We are not in control. It really is a matter of putting one foot in front of another in faith, trusting in God. We are bound to get things wrong because we put such a huge premium on success, on appearing competent. We are bound to get it wrong, because we don't see everything, and that is the sin of the world that Jesus takes away, but we can do our best. That is all we can do.

## Trinity 2 BCP

**O LORD**, who never failest to help and govern them who thou dost bring up in thy stedfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The first great commandment, to love God with all our hearts and souls and minds and strength.  
Minds.

Intellects.

How do we love God with our intellects?

By using our heads, intellects. By thinking, questioning, ratiocination. By challenging what goes on around us in a godly way. You can't say that Jesus is not challenging: everything he does is challenging. He challenges establishment, Romans, Pharisees, pompous asses, the lot. He condemns nothing – well not quite, he condemns hypocrisy and pretence and people who impair the development of children, he condemns almost nothing, but is always full of compassion. Hear the epistle in that wonderful phrase: *whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

These two readings tell us, as do so many others, that Divine wisdom is not that of the world. Pilate asked what is truth. Wrong question. Right question: who is truth. And the way of truth is compassion, not rules. bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. *And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

The challenge for us is: how? That is why we need to think and reason. God gave us brains: let us use them. Let us feed them by asking godly questions, studying Holy Scripture, applying reason to Scripture and to the society in which we live.

Anglicanism famously regards its three pillars as Scripture, reason and tradition. We read Scripture (d we hear it?). We bang on a lot about tradition. But we are sometimes too unwilling to think about our religion. We see a lack of compassion in too much rule-bound behaviour: it's always been done this way.

Let's be intelligent about our faith. The key thing, perhaps, is to do nothing that comes between ourselves and anyone else and God. We are bound to get it wrong, because we don't see everything, and that is the sin of the world that Jesus takes away, but we can do our best. That is all we can do.

*And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

## Trinity 8, Proper 10, Year A

13 July 2008

Isaiah 55:10-13

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9.18-23

### The prodigal farmer

Didn't examine the ground first to do a feasibility study. Just scattered it. He just did it. He didn't choose where, he scattered everywhere.

Interpret this story in several ways.

First, **we are the farmer**. Let's not worry about whether we should do this, or that. Just do something. Doing our job properly, looking after ourselves properly, nurturing growth in others. It's not our place to worry about whether or not the seed will sprout – we can't predict the future. My last job: students' reaction unpredictable. Prodigal with my work: schools, visits, walking the streets, preaching, who knows where the ground is receptive? Who knows who listens to the sermons?

Second, **we are the seed**: the seed is all we are heard to say and seen to do. We need to challenge injustice, We need to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.

Third, I take today's Gospel as much as a story for each one of us individually as a story about describing different types of people, so **we are the ground**. We are mixed ground. Paul talks of sin and flesh. His use of the word flesh is not ours. Paul talks of being on a journey from an old life – for which he uses the term in the flesh – towards a new life in Christ – for which he uses the term in the spirit. (Nothing to do with soul and body). And a characteristic of the fleshly life is sin. There are several ways of looking at sin:

- wandering from the path of enlightenment, missing the mark
- erecting barrier between yourself and the Divine
- erecting barrier between someone else and the Divine
- not making the most of the opportunities life brings - a life unlived

Sinners are on the whole quite hopeful – we can keep trying. A failure to achieve perfection, but no barrier to trying again. We will have to bear the consequences of our actions, but that's another matter.

We are all a mixture of life in the spirit, and life in the flesh.

- There is within each of us ground that yields good harvest.
- There is within each of us ground that yields crops that are choked by uncontrollable passions, by the sin of the world. We are all imperfect – we can never know the consequences of our actions, or of our failing to act. Many of us live off, or hope to live off, pensions from companies that in Biblical terms are deeply sinful. There is no way of avoiding this, the sin of the world.
- There is within each of us stony ground on which nothing grows. Quite often that stony ground is hidden from us until some event, some crisis, makes us realise the errors of our ways for decades before – we see ourselves and our actions in a new light. And it is a story that calls for self examination to identify the stony ground to confront it. It's not until we've recognised it for what it is that we can do anything about it. When we see all this, it is like being led back in peace; instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. The rain and the snow come down from heaven to water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout. Again, a hopeful message.

**So what is my message:** since we can not get everything right, we just bash on, doing the best we can. The meaning of life is love. It will not be perfect, but we can do no more. And we can try

and grow into the life of the spirit by forgiving: forgiving others, and forgiving ourselves. Jesus teaches that we will be forgiven when we acknowledge our faults: when we have seen ourselves in a mirror as someone else sees us, as God sees us. **It can be pretty frightening when we realise we are not as good as we thought we were.** But CHRISTIAN teaching is that such penitence, turning again, yields forgiveness. *The vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.*

Having opened our minds to the possibility that we are not as good as we thought we were, the cleansing waters can flow. Having acknowledged our sin, and resolved to turn again, we let the rain and snow from heaven water the earth within, asking it bring forth and sprout. The great flood.

### **A postscript**

There are people in both my parishes who object to the notion of women priests and bishops. There is no secret about that: you made it clear that you did not want me to be a woman. I don't know yet if there are people who enthusiastically support the ordination of women, all I know is that there are people in both parishes who oppose it. You might bear a thought for me: I have to minister to you all – every one of you, and it is my privilege so to do. Please remember that.

All I ask is that we be simple and straightforward with each other, generous in listening and careful in speaking.

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
    When true simplicity is gain'd  
    To bow and to bend we shan't be asham'd,  
    To turn, turn will be out delight  
'Till by turning, turning we come round right.

Joseph Brackett 1797-1882

## **Trinity 9, Proper 11, Year A**

### **27 July 2008 (Baptism at OB)**

We're in the middle of a series of parables about the kingdom of heaven. As I've said before, I don't think this is about what happens when we die—Holy Scripture says almost nothing about that (and certainly does not say that we go to heaven)—but rather about what it could be like here and now. Last week with the parable of the sower I said that it was a parable of the prodigal farmer, the wastefully generous farmer, and today's gospel is a variation on that theme of generosity.

It's an everyday story of country folk advising them not to pull out the weeds before the good crops are ready, because in getting rid of the rubbish you might damage the good. One of its message to me is not to fuss about getting things precisely perfect. The time for that will come as the time for weeding will come, perhaps at harvest when you can more easily sort out what's worth keeping from what's to be thrown away. Let's not be too hasty about making decisions. Apparently ugly ducklings can turn into swans.

This describes the reality of life on earth in which there is a constant struggle to survive, and provide the means of future life. And a constant struggle within each of us between the good and the bad. My model of being human is that of a supermarket trolley. Left to its own devices, it refuses to go in a straight line, and it needs a regular guiding hand to keep it on course.

The parable is about the church, too: the kingdom of God on earth, as we say week, in week out, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. And all these agricultural parables point to the crucifixion and resurrection: the death of the old enabling the transformed new life to follow on. Early Christian writers compared the blood of Christ—that is the crucifixion—to the water that irrigates soil and gives life to the crops; they said that the blood of the martyrs, who gave their lives for the kingdom of God, irrigated the soil of the Church, and brought forth new life.

And this is what we symbolise in baptism: a washing away of the old life to enable new life following Christ's teaching and example, the helping hand to keep the supermarket trolley on course.

The potential for this new life is within us all, the Christ within, the divine core within, if we will let it flourish and fill our skins. Today we must vow to nurture this new life in William James, Henry Edward and Emelia Jayne. We must be vigilant to care for and protect it in them, and, as we recall our own baptismal promises, in us all. The newly baptised are joining a 2000 year old procession of witness to truth. Baptism signifies the indwelling Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit, ever dwelling in the holiest realms of light;  
Holy Spirit, ever brooding o'er a world of gloom and night;  
Holy Spirit, ever raising Sons of earth to thrones on high;  
Living, life-imparting Spirit, Thee we praise and magnify.

Holy Spirit, ever living as the church's very life;  
Holy Spirit, ever striving through her in a ceaseless strife;  
Holy Spirit, ever forming in the church the mind of Christ;  
Thee we praise with endless worship for thy fruit and gifts unpriced.

Holy Spirit, ever working through the church's ministry;  
Quickening, strengthening, and absolving, setting captive sinners free.  
Holy Spirit, ever binding age to age, and soul to soul,  
In a fellowship unending—thee we worship and extol.

Words: Timothy Rees (20th C)

## **Trinity 10, Year A, Proper 13**

**27 July 2008**

1 Kings 3:5-12  
Psalm 119:129-136 (9.30 am only)  
Romans 8:26-39  
Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

The gospel

Glimpses treasure, buries it, sells all that he has to buy the field where it's buried  
Glimpses pearl, sells all that he has to buy it

renunciations – not literally all perhaps, but all that we hold dear, that we think we can't do without  
A beautiful home, some possession—there's nothing wrong with having things, it how we regard them when the problems start. These things limit us, because they blind us to the possibility that things could be otherwise, and that we might benefit if they were.

Attitudes: Have to do it my way  
Anglican communion - intolerance  
Even in church: forms of service, particular liturgies, doing the same year in year out.  
intolerance of people who disagree with us – this can lead us to do silly things.  
What we insist on because we like it may well be something that someone else dislikes.

We are in danger of putting our faith in human creations rather than in ....

On what? On reason? Certainly not  
'Our reason is overwhelmed by so many forms of deceptions ... that it is far from directing us aright.'  
Calvin

The OT lesson and the psalm tell us what.  
Wisdom, Sophia  
Proverbs  
Prostitutes. What the adulterous woman took away, Wisdom bestows as permanent gifts.  
the substance that is present with God at creation proverbs 8:22  
ground of our being

the stardust of the universe out of which we are made  
the nature of God  
the mediator between God and God's creation  
Wisdom/word - JC

It is in us, and we don't know how to get at it. Because we cover it up with layers: postures, pride, pretence, all in order to make us appear bigger and more attractive-so we think-to show off.

When we insist on something, or feel that something is so important to us that we are willing to ignore the wishes of others, we need to reflect on why we are being so egotistical.

Personal needs taking precedence over those of the community.

William Blake talks of our having *'mind-forg'd manacles'*. He is identifying our propensity to create and cling to the chains that rattle behind us. We long for security, but settle for the safety of a high-security prisoner. It takes grace to show that things do not have to be that way, and even - sometimes - to reveal that there are any chains there at all.

It could be otherwise.

God does not ask anyone to be crazy or rash or shallow. He asks them to love him with all their heart and soul and mind. People can love only what they know. In the parable, the man who buys the field with hidden treasure has already seen the treasure; and the merchant who buys the pearl knows something about pearls. People start to let go - and should only start to let go - when they understand the freedom God wants to give them. People should 'sell it all' when they have first begun to comprehend the beautiful words 'the freedom of the children of God'.

Real self-abandonment can only come with trust in God and learning that trust takes time and humility and honesty. Any other kind of sacrifice seems unlikely to have much to do with God - it will probably be egotism or a parody of what sacrifice is about.

There is more than one way to sell what you have (Christ tells two stories, not just one). Anyone one can think of great men and women in history who have made some fantastic and public act of renunciation. Yet there are also very many obscure lives, for the most part hidden, in which everything has been sold (sometimes literally, sometimes not) for the sake of the kingdom. Subsequent generations often live on these people's generosity - whether they know it or not.

To give one tiny example: often churches in England have been paid for by people who could hardly afford it, or who have run up personal debts to pay for the bricks. There have been innumerable generous men and women on whose generosity we have all been reared.

When Christ tells the parables, he is not spinning fairy-tales. He anticipates what would actually happen and what had begun to happen in his days. When this kind of joyful self-surrender stops happening, then people have become strangers to themselves. They have got into serious trouble indeed: their hearts have grown cold.

Heavenly Father, when we think we know best, make us remember that it could be otherwise.

Heavenly Father, when we think something has to be done in the way that suits us, help us to look into our hearts to see why.

## **Trinity 11, Year A, Proper 13**

Isaiah 55:1-5  
Psalm 145: 8-9, 15-22  
Romans 9:1-5  
Matthew 14:13-21

Several themes:

- Jesus went off on his own – the importance of solitude.
- Crowds: Jesus was always followed by large crowds of people.

- Feeding the hungry.

Solitude and its importance for refreshment, especially when we've had bad news, as Jesus just had (John Baptist's death) is something that I've covered recently in *Rambling Rector*, so apart from this brief mention, I'm not doing it today.

But crowds I am doing. Jesus was always followed by crowds of people in his public ministry. Some folk think of Jesus as a solitary preacher, a recluse or a hermit. He's none of these. He's not an arm-chair rabbi. He's a man of the people. He's seen at home, in synagogues, at temple festivals, at weddings and funerals and by sick beds. He watches farmers sow seed, he watches seeds grow, he watches how birds of the air behave, and how children play. He eats with publicans, sinners and prostitutes.

Who are the people who followed Jesus?

- Some have lost their land.
- Some are feeling the burden of heavy taxation.
- Some are oppressed by Roman cruelty.
- Some are alienated from established religion.
- Some are sick, hungry and thirsty.
- Some are despised: lepers, tax collectors, lunatics.
- Some are homeless, destitute, and marginalized.

All need restoration to fullness of life, and know they do, and ask for help.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is censorious about very little, but always, always about hypocrisy, pretence, complacency. Jesus is scathing about sanctimonious religious leaders. He criticizes political leaders. He finds fault with his disciples. But he's never angry or annoyed with the people. He doesn't tell them they're poor because they're lazy. He doesn't tell them that they're being punished for their sin. He doesn't tell them that public money shouldn't be spent on them.

Jesus knows very well that folk who follow him are not saints, and that they don't follow him purely for spiritual reasons. That's you and me! He also knows that very often they're in that situation because good things in life have been taken away from them by the powerful who amass for themselves economic, political and cultural power and position at the expense of others.

Sounds familiar?

When Jesus sees the crowd, his heart is moved with compassion. In Holy Scripture, 'compassion' is a strong word. In Greek it means heart to heart. Our heart takes upon itself the suffering of the other: it's now more ours than the other person's. We carrying the other's burden.

How do we show compassion?

- Sympathy/empathy (what is the difference?)
- Trying to understand one another
- (Psalm and Epistle)
- Feeding the hungry metaphorically: doing for them something that will lessen their burden and grief.

And here is the third message from today's (OT lesson and) gospel: food and drink—not just material food and drink but sustenance in its widest sense. Support.

A fourth century church father said that when we say that Jesus has compassion on people it means that all the individual suffering of many people is gathered in Christ, and Christ bears all the suffering at the same time. That is what we mean when in the Mass we talk about Jesus taking on himself the sin of the world. The suffering of the people is Christ's passion. Christ is the sum total of all the poor in this world.

The feeding of the five thousand is not just a demonstration of Christ's miraculous power, but symbolizes the way in which following the way of Christ can lead us to fullness, wholeness, restoration, salvation, healing. Healing: being made whole, not medical cure. Getting rid of all the stuff we don't need to carry. Jesus' burden is light because we dump all the rubbish – I've said it

before and I'll say it again. The manifestation of the kingdom of God here on earth. The disciples tried to shoo folk away, but Jesus told them to feed the people there and then.

This is our job too. We feed the hungry here and now by

- fighting injustice
- comforting the disturbed (and disturbing the comfortable)
- serving the homeless, destitute, and marginalized.

There's plenty to do, and we can't all do it all, but we can all do something. St John Chrysostom said that 'God said to human beings, I have created heaven and earth, now I give you the power to make earth heaven.' That is what happens when we feed the hungry, actually or metaphorically by helping someone who asks for help. That is what we pray day in, day out, when we say 'thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.'

Today's readings and the Lord's prayer are spurring us to action.

## Trinity 11, Year A

03 August 2008

### Evensong

1 Kings 10:1-13

Acts 13:1-13

### How to put these lessons together?

Old Testament

- QoS: queen of the south, young woman of Song of Songs
- QoS to Solomon = gentile to anointed one, Metaphor for Christ and Church
- Sheba's chastity depicted as a foreshadowing of VM
- and the three gifts that she brought (gold, spices, and gems) have been seen as analogous to the gifts of the Magi: Isaiah 60:6; *And they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring forth gold and incense*
- Koran – QoS converted to Abrahamic monotheism
- Maybe just in praise of Wisdom

Wisdom

Proverbs 8:25 with God at creation, material out of which we are made

Proverbs 8:31 something lovely about a well-ordered enterprise, the order that adherence to the precepts of Lady Wisdom can bring.

intimately linked to Yahweh's life and being.

In Job 28, wisdom is hidden. Mortals do not know the way to wisdom: only God understands it.

In Proverbs, Yahweh makes it accessible to mortals: in fact, the love that God bears for creation makes God want the best for us, so Wisdom is available to all who will heed it.

Song of Songs is the final step with (apparently) no mention of Yahweh, though many commentators have assumed that Yahweh is one of the participants in the action.

Wisdom was present at creation (Proverbs 8:30), frolicking amongst creation should have been translated *little child* or *architect*?

Wisdom provides the correct understanding of the world, an understanding needed to please God and succeed.

Wisdom is intermediate between God and creation, and the relationship between humanity and Wisdom is an image of the relationship between Yahweh and Wisdom.

Wisdom delights in humanity as Yahweh delights in her, this shift evident in Proverbs 8:30-31: focus progresses from Wisdom before Yahweh to humanity before Wisdom.

Wisdom mediatrix between Yahweh and humanity, 'linking the enigmatic divine world with the tangible world.'

Wisdom is Mary?

Wisdom stands for the fullness of life promised by the sages to those who follow in her way (Proverbs 8:35), the author framing her 'against the background of Israel's sad history by the sexual emphasis

Wisdom has assumed the burden of the covenant, fidelity to the Lord, in language reflecting the old struggle so mercilessly bared in the book of Hosea and elsewhere.'

There is no personification in the Old Testament that compares with that of Wisdom. Justice and peace may kiss, alcohol is a rowdy, but 'only Wisdom is given a voice that resembles the Lord's'.

Wisdom and the Holy Spirit are all but equated in the Wisdom of Solomon

Tertullian: identifies sophia with the second person of the Trinity.

Origen puts *Wisdom* before *Word* (JC)

Schleiermacher: the principle which orders and determines the world for the divine self-imparting which is evinced in redemption.

Bulgakov: wisdom's energy = essence of Godhead: the nature of God (which is in fact *sofia*) is a living and, therefore, loving substance, ground, and "principle."

Bulgakov: *sofia* is love of love.

Marketplace, Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly

The one leads to death, the other to life, a contrast make all the more vividly in chapter 9.

This is why **we need discernment**

Dublin

Tom seemed well enough, but asked me questions that implied he though i was flailing around in life ever since I left Dublin. I was flailing around well before that, in fact I think it's the authentic human condition for those who look outside themselves and look back into themselves.

So on we go. Just when we think we're getting the hang of it, something happens to disturb our complacency.

## **Second lesson**

The missionary call of Barnabas and Saul records a problem that bothers many Christians: How to recognize the guidance of God, how to know the directions of life, and to find the will of the Holy Spirit in these matters?

Up to this time Paul has never acted as an apostle. A Teacher. Perhaps the most important thing about this section is that here is found a revelation of the manner of the leading of the Spirit, how the Spirit of God guides his people.

The first three verses set the scene for the call of the Holy Spirit.

Some had the gift of prophecy, and others had the gift of teaching. In Greek it is clear that there were three prophets and two teachers. The first three are prophets: Barnabas, Symeon, and Lucius. Then there were two teachers: Manaen, a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, a foster brother of Herod.

Here is a collection of people from all walks of life who made up the church: a black man, or perhaps, two blacks; a man from the island of Cyprus, Barnabas. With them was Saul of Tarsus. He is not called an apostle, he is not even a prophet; he is a teacher in the church at Antioch. At this point in his career, the only gift that had become manifest in his life was that wonderful ability he had to teach the Word of God. Now while these men were performing their gifts, busy doing what God had equipped them to do in the church, the Spirit of God spoke to them.

That is very significant.

There are many people I find today who are looking to God to lead them in some dramatic way.

cave?

mountain?

expect the dramatic?

Maybe, but often, as in this lesson, the call comes when one is busy exercising his gift where he is, just as here. These men were busy employing their gifts, and, in the midst of their activity, the call of the Spirit came.

You can steer a ship or a car if it is moving, but it is very difficult to steer it when it is sitting still. God loves to see people at work at what they know to do, and then he will give them further direction.

## **Intellect**

God moves folk to do things, we choose what we do based on where we are  
The Spirit did not tell them to go to Cyprus; that was the choice of Saul and Barnabas. The Spirit told them to move out, but the men decided where to go.,  
As Paul put it, "work out your own salvation [solutions]; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his pleasure," {Phil 2: 12-13 RSV}. Responsibility. Talents. Make the most of what you've been given.

Evos waiting for direction like robots, automatons, ruled by computer-impulses which come from the Spirit. This devalues intellect, ratiocination.  
Ratzinger.

Paul and Barnabas had no idea that they would be able to have a hearing before the governor of the island, the proconsul, the man placed there by the Roman senate and responsible for the control and governance of the whole island. But that man, prompted by the Holy Spirit, though he was a pagan Roman, sent for Paul and Barnabas, and asked them to speak to him the words of truth.

You can never anticipate how the Holy Spirit is going to work things out. But Paul and Barnabas came and began to preach to the governor.

This is the beginning then of the great ministry of the Apostle Paul, expressed through the power of his teaching. That was what impressed the proconsul.

So discernment, wisdom: with each step, the next one becomes a bit clearer. if we try and stay where we are, we shrivel up and die. Something here about church:

Change but no change.

We have to take steps.

For me too

is this the right job? I don't know. But I'll never find out unless I take steps to find out.

Our journey *through* life is, in fact, a call to journey *into* Life - into fullness of life, which God has opened to us through Jesus the Christ. If we are open to be led by His light, then - like the Magi of old - we shall find ourselves on a journey that forces us to take risks and that will radically change us, from inside out.

We ask about change: is it right for me?

My pride starts agonising. But here is this opportunity: Ezekiel: eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it: stop moaning and get on with it.

Let the holy spirit speak to us: be ready to listen to that still small voice. Stop yabbering on and try to listen.

## **Expectans Expectavi**

FROM morn to midnight, all day through,

I laugh and play as others do,

I sin and chatter, just the same

As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage,

I dance and tumble and do rage

So vehemently, I scarcely see  
The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not  
Visit, a heart I have forgot,  
A self that I have never met,  
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul  
Unwitting I keep white and whole,  
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care  
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands  
And listening ears Thy servant stands,  
Call Thou early, call Thou late,  
To Thy great service dedicate.

May, 1915

In this journey, we don't know what the future has in store. Bunyan Christian said to Evangelist, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder Wicket-gate? The Man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining Light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that Light in your eye, and go up directly thereto: so shalt thou see the Gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

**Do you see yonder shining Light? He said, I think I do.**

That's as much as we can hope for.

## Trinity 12, Year A, Proper 14

10 August 2008

1 Kings 19: 9-18

Psalms 85: 8-13

Romans 10: 5-15

Matthew 14:22-33

Today's gospel follows on from last week's: having fed the five thousand, Jesus goes off alone (again), and sends the disciples across the lake in a boat to face storms and their own inadequacy.

First, a word about *sea* in Hebrew Scripture. If you remember the creation stories, you'll recall that very early in the process, earth is separated from the waters. The earth where we plant our feet, the sea where we flail about and sink. The sea is an image of chaos – unpredictability, the opposite of wisdom in a sense. The sea is inhabited by leviathans and these are not just whales and all that move in the waters, but symbols for the troubles of life that rise up like waves and engulf us. When you look at today's Gospel in this light, it becomes more than just a miracle story.

And there is no shortage of storms that threaten to engulf us.

- Global: the filthy rich getting filthier and the poor getting poorer.
- National: dishonesty, spin peddled as truth even when the evidence of our eyes contradicts it; a me-too culture; the failure to acknowledge that rights bring responsibilities. And so on.
- Church: Both in today's gospel, and bang up to date today, the Church is likened to a boat in a storm with no competent captain to steer the ship. Sound familiar? The Church is in danger of being swamped or smashed on rocks. Women bishops, women priests, homosexuality, the nature of leadership, the authority of Scripture. And not just the Anglican church either.
- And local, the storms of church life, forging new relationships, devising ways of working to suit changing circumstances.

It's a hard fact that the sea is indeed a suitable model for life. Life is unpredictable. It will never be comfortable – and if it is, we can be sure that our comfort is at the expense of someone else's distress. It's a real challenge for us to accept that we are not in control: we can't control the storms of life, and we can't control each other.

And neither, I put it to you, should we want to. If we look at particle physics, where chaos theory seems to rule, things of great beauty result from unpredictability – or what seems to us poor blinkered humans to be unpredictability. We need to learn to accept what comes – this is a lesson that I need to take to heart. Sure, we might make loose plans for the future, but let them be just that: loose, plastic, flexible. I know from 30 years of pastoral work that most of people's distress arises when reality does not match up to expectation, when expectations are too firm.

So rather than trying to control each other, surely the thing is to appreciate each other's gifts, and do all we can to allow those gifts to be fruitful. That will take us into a future that we can't predict. It means taking risks, but then Jesus was for ever encouraging people to take risks rather than vegetate in cosy comfort. If Our Lord's teaching is to be relied upon, the result will be delightful, unexpected. It will lead us into new experiences rather than stagnation. We will be challenged, we will be uncomfortable, but then is not that what Jesus Christ did throughout his ministry: disturbing the comfortable and comforting the disturbed? The image of God the disturber that Abraham knew, that Elijah knew, that Job knew, that Jesus himself knew, that we know.

Comforting the disturbed is what we see Jesus doing in today's Gospel. It's almost as if he sets them off on a course that he knows will disturb them, and then he's there to comfort them. He brings peace—but beware! peace is not what folk often think it is. To the Jews, then and now—and remember that Jesus was a Jew—peace (shalom, salaam, salvation) is something that you have to be prepared to fight for. Peace implies defended boundaries. Peace means wholeness—that is, what is stolen from you must be restored to you before you can say you are at peace. It is not flabby, spineless niceness. It is robust, something that has been arrived at by argument, by negotiation and by acknowledgement of errors and regret for mistakes. *Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins ....* The passage to peace is stormy. Friendship requires honesty and straightforwardness, and better harsh honesty than dissembling diplomacy.

I say to you that we need these stormy winds to freshen us up and help us to sort out what's important. We need to step out into them, as Peter did, and not lose heart at the occasional squall – and there are plenty squalls in life as we deal with bureaucracy, with commercial concerns, and with each other. We need critical friends, not yes-men, to keep us in touch with reality. We must go into the unknown together, trusting each other, with faith that a hand greater than ours will shape our plans and actions.

The ride is unlikely to be predictable, but its fruits will be delightful.

## **Trinity 13, Proper 15**

**17 August 2008**

**Isaiah 56:1,6-8**

**Psalm 67**

**Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

**Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28**

There's always been a clear message in Holy Scripture that the message is for everybody. This is clear from today's Isaiah extract. It's the message of the entire story of Noah – a kind of Groundhog day of Noah doing it again until he gets it right and sees that Nineveh is to be spared. It's the message of the Epistle, though I find that difficult to decipher, but I think one of its messages is that we should extend to everybody else the charity that we have benefitted from. There are so many references in the Gospels to this same message: paying the workers, the wedding reception, to name but two.

But anyway, Jesus is clear that it is NOT a matter of doing things according to the letter of the law, but of using one's nous, judgment, compassion. And he illustrates this in a rather clever way. At first hearing, you might think that the Gospel is about healing, but if you look at it in context, you'll see it's not. It comes in amongst the healing of the crowd, and the story about Jesus going back to

Nazareth where he is not appreciated. Just before this scene, Jesus has been back to the Temple at Nazareth, and the only thing that his own folk say is isn't that Joseph's son?

And if I had subjected you today to the long gospel you'd have heard that the woman's story comes after Jesus being absolutely vicious to the Pharisees and others who were being jobsworths and telling folk that they had to do it this way. It puts me in mind of my time in Wirksworth ...

So, woe to the jobsworths, the rule-keepers.

Remember that this is Matthew's Gospel, and that Matthew is writing his Gospel as a Jew and intending it as a means of attracting other Jews to the faith. It's not, like Luke's Gospel, aimed at non-Jews, but aims to emphasise the continuity from Abraham, Prophets, David, Jesus. Jesus the Jew. So the scene is set in the bit we hear for an exchange between Jesus the Jew and a Canaanite, an outsider, a nonJew, fertility cults, by no means someone that loyal Jew would normally talk to. Shocking that they should even converse. And shocking that the conversation should be about dogs. And here she is testing Jesus – in fact there seems to be a bit of mutual testing going on. Give us a bit of your chocolate. Why should I give it to you, you're from Staveley. We don't mix with folk from Staveley. Ah yes, but even folk from Staveley need to eat, otherwise how would you ever have someone to look down on.

Well maybe, but the message is clear. Jesus finds her faith unswayable. She is persistent. There's a message of us there. Nag, nag, nag – it works, I discovered that when I was a child. Too often, I give in. Hope, hope, hope. It works.

Trust, trust, trust – it's difficult when you're tired and worried, but this woman does not ask for a sign, nor does she ask for the best place in his kingdom. This woman of faith simply asks that her daughter to be made well again. An unselfish request.

It's the nonJews who seem to have more faith in Jesus than the Jews.

In the time of the Gospel, the divide between Jew and nonJew was almost as tangible as the wall that the modern day Israelis build between Jewish settlements and Palestinian settlements. Or the wall that still exists in Belfast. Or the wall that has been taken own in Berlin.

We need to remember all these things if we are not to fall into intolerance. God has no favourites. And draws no lines

So what relevance is this for us?

- We are told to buy local.
- Young men last night
- The church invents rules about who can and cannot have communion, be married in church, be baptized in church. Is this Gospel-based.
- The church invents rules about who can and cannot represent Christ at the altar.
- The church invents rules about who can and cannot read the lessons, serve in the sanctuary, take the collection.
- We seem always to be building fences, like the Israelis, the Berliners, the British in Belfast.
- We seem to like exclusive little clubs. I've been a member of several: country boy, grammar school boy, Oxbridge graduate, medical graduate, academic, church musician, and now the weirdest club of all so far. As time has gone on I've felt and seen the fences that these clubs erect between me and the outside world: to be known as a member of a club might or might not change how I look at the world. But it certainly changes the way the world looks at me.

We need to be careful about the barriers we erect, and ask are they compatible with the Gospel teaching? Remember this, if we draw lines and erect fences, we'll find Christ with those on the other side. Ratzinger

Compassion

Those who are aware of their own imperfection are inevitably the most tender, compassionate, and understanding of others who are bruised or weak. It is the self-righteous who are not suited to God's purpose.

No man shall have the right to fix the boundary to the march of a Nation

## 19 October 2008, Trinity 22, Proper 24

### Mass

Isaiah 45: 1-7: the most unlikely people  
Psalm 96: 1-9: Sing to the Lord a new song ...  
1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10: stop worrying ...  
Matthew 22: 15-22: Render to Caesar ...

*Render to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's.*

If this is a call to pay taxes unquestioningly, then I am quitting the church without delay. There must be, there has to be, another way of looking at this.

The passage occurs as part of an exchange between Jesus, the pedantic Pharisees, and Herod's yes-men—the jobsworths and the secret police—who are both trying to find an excuse to report him to the authorities. If Jesus had said 'pay taxes' the Pharisees would have reported him for being disloyal to the Jewish cause. If he'd said 'don't pay' the Romans would have him by the short and curls for speaking against the Emperor. A no-win situation.

But Jesus is far from stupid. He uses his *nous*.

The message to give to Caesar what is Caesar's is itself controversial. Most of the listeners would have resented the Roman occupation, so quite likely felt that *nothing* rightly belonged to Caesar, and would not be prepared to give anything. And anyway, any loyal Jew—which Jesus was—knew fine well that the earth is the Lord's and all that therein is (Psalm 24). Everything belongs to the Lord. The Lord is the important one here.

This is an interesting passage at this time of economic uncertainty in *our* lives. How do I see this passage at a time when I've already been told by one of my parishioners that his take home pay has gone down by 30 quid a month? How do we interpret this passage at a time when we see our taxes used to maintain the exorbitant incomes of godless fools who got us into this mess?

Maybe the first message is that we need to be wily as foxes in the pursuit of truth—to stand up to those who oppose us, and not to give in. And that in itself is a good enough message at a time when some people think their Christian duty is to be meek and mild, sugar and spice and all things nice.

But maybe there's another message too. It was Caesar's head on the coin—pay to *the image* what is his. But, my friends, it is God's image that is in every one of us. It is the divine image that we see when we look into our hearts. We are made in God's image, so we might give ourselves to God by giving to the world what only we can give, by being ourselves, our gloriously human, true selves.

But how do we know what our gloriously human, true selves *are* in a society that is full of distractions that prevent us from knowing ourselves. A culture that is full of noise, musack, temptations, and above all full of the message that we can only know ourselves by what we buy. The so-called *lifestyle choices* that are, in fact, lifestyle prisons forcing us to try to earn more and more, to maintain our status—and to accumulate as much wealth as possible so that we can cut ourselves off from the mess of the world.

Economic pundits talk of the present time as a crisis. Crisis in Greek means decision, judgment, opportunity for change. In Hebrew, it means rebirth, in the sense of something new rising from the ruins of the old. Let's pray that we are indeed in a crisis that allows something new to grow. Let's hope that we can allow our real selves to break through all the rubbish that we surround ourselves with—possessions, attitudes, the tunnel vision of consumerism. It's interesting that the notion of salvation that we discussed last Wednesday can be interpreted in Hebrew theology as emerging into a wide place, wide views, seeing clearly in all directions—like the views in the fens of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, all options open, unlimited. Liberation from ignorance.

We need to get to knowourselves. This means peeling away the onion skins that have grown up around the divine image within each of us—*this* is what we can give to the Lord, the image that is written in every one of us. Pope Benedict XVI at his inaugural mass in April 2005 said it slightly

differently: 'Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away [unlike the Government], and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return.'

When we let Christ in to dissolve the layers of consumerism that cover the divine image, we will be able sing our own divine song to the world *unimpeded*, like the birds of the air. In the words of T S Eliot

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

Maybe like me, you feel unworthy. Well, throughout the Bible we have stories of the most unworthy people being used to do the Lord's work: Abraham, Joseph, Jonah, David, to name four. The Thessalonians in today's Epistle were a pretty unlikely bunch—licentious, persecuted, worried about their mates that had died. Paul reassures them that all will be well. And likewise, we mustn't let ourselves be distracted by our own twitteriness and unworthiness.

Last week's Gospel that you would have heard if it hadn't been Harvest here [Barlow], told us about the guests, good and bad, who accepted what was offered to them at the wedding feast. So, let us approach the altar and eat the meal of love that Our Lord offers. Let's use this time of economic uncertainty to accept that we can *not* predict the future, that there's no point retreating into prisons of our own making, there's no point surrounding ourselves with possessions that might easily vanish tomorrow. Then we will be open to the divine spirit, and there's some chance that we will be able to render to God what's God's—that is, *ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice; humbly beseeching, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with his grace and heavenly benediction.*

Let us sing our own new song to the Lord.

Sing for your loves of heaven and of earth,  
in words of music, and each word a truth;  
marriage of heart and longings that aspire,  
a bond of roses, and a ring of fire.  
Your summertime grows short and fades away,  
terror must gather to a martyr's death;  
but never tremble, the last indrawn breath  
remembers music as an echo may.

Through the cold aftermath of centuries,  
Cecilia's music dances in the skies;  
lend us a fragment of the immortal air,  
that with your choring angels we may share,  
a word to light us thro' time-fettered night,  
water of life, or rose of paradise,  
so from the earth another song shall rise  
to meet your own in heaven's long delight.

URSULA VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

## St John's Derby Patronal Festival

06 May 2008

Exodus 33: 7-11a;  
1 John 1  
John 21: 19b-25.

Let us pray.

O Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, eternal Wisdom, inspire my words to illuminate the mystery of the Godhead for the minds of them that hearken. Amen

It's good to be here. Thank you of inviting me, Fr Bob. St John's—and St Anne's—played a significant part in my training. For those who don't know, I was on placement in these two parishes with Fr Michael for what turned out to be 6 months on and off. What I saw affected me greatly. Faithfulness of people and clergy. Steadfastness. Spirituality – and all underpinned by the unassuming example of a man who epitomises what a parish priest should be, and whose example I take to heart.

It's an example that seems under attack these days when clergy are encouraged to embrace the awful culture of corporate managerialism, to be managers, doubtless an MBA degree soon a necessary prerequisite for ordination in the CoE. And yet it's not right: curiously enough, it was a Baptist pastor who wrote "it is high time some ministers abandon delusory notions of themselves as senior managers or spiritual entrepreneurs and rediscovered the responsibilities of pastoral care, of the 'cure of souls.'" For people who work from bottom up, like Michael, like me I hope, rather than top down, it can feel lonely.

This alone-ness, of flying in the face of what is expected of you, is something that must have been part of St John's mind as he was taunted by Domitian before the Latin gate in Rome. If ever there's a need for hope, it's in situations like this: where one feels uncertainty and the breath of one's enemies on one's neck, and the heat of the boiling oil cruelly close. John remained true to himself, and if ever there was a festival at which we are right to celebrate being ourselves, it's a Patronal.

It's particularly good this year to stick with theme of celebrating being yourselves because the Patronal falls between the two great Christian festivals that rejoice in being human: Ascension and Pentecost.

I'm a great fan of the festival of the Ascension, last Thursday. When I'm Archbishop of Canterbury I'll declare Ascension to be always on a Sunday so that its celebration is not just a matter of the faithful few fighting bravely against the attractions of Thursday evening shopping, or bookgroup, or pilates or whatever. It's a great festival because, like the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, it lifts our minds to what we're saved to – glory, radiance, joy—rather than concentrating, as Christians so often seem to, on gloom and guilt about what we're saved *from*. And just for a moment I'd like to stay with this theme of salvation.

- I meet Christians who say we're saved by the cross: not I.
- I meet Christians who say we're saved by the resurrection: not I.
- I meet Christians who say we're saved by the cross *and* resurrection: not I.

I say we're saved by the whole process from creation through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension to the coming of the spirit at what I still call Whitsun at which we're born again, and after which we can be born again and again every time we recognise the Spirit at work within us: a kind of re-incarnation of divine wisdom at work within us again and again and again.

This process requires us to recognise that we're human beings. Plantigrade primates—that is, apes not archbishops. We need not pretend to be anything else. Be glad of who and what you are.

Don't put on airs. Don't put on church faces. Be yourself, and if the churchy hypocrites tell you off about it, give 'em the two word intellectual answer. We know from the Gospel that Jesus didn't set entrance tests for his disciples: he took them as they were, warts and all. Yes, warts: **if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

There's nothing shameful about being a human being. If there were, why would the Ineffable God have taken the trouble—and what trouble—to become one? God in becoming Christ Jesus took on all our experience, and at the Ascension all this was incorporated into the Godhead, all our humanity, all human experience. All our warts . All our hurts—the signs of being human. The Christ who ascended to the Godhead was the wounded Christ (who had been lonely, forlorn, abandoned), the wounded healer, insulted, spat at, nailed, kicked, beaten, thirsty. Not some unreachable ideal. By his stripes, his wounds, we are healed—and it's through our brokenness, our woundedness, that we can act as channels of healing for others. We do not need to pretend to be what we are not—that's the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden where they tried to cover up who they were. The Christ who ascended is not someone who knew nothing of our human experience, but someone who wept and toiled and mourned and died. And loved. Humanity with all its imperfections is divinized: 'God became man so that man might become divine'—the interpenetration of divine and human.

We have a duty to enjoy life, to make the most of what has been put at our disposal—this is the talents parable. Without delight we're in hell, and we have a duty to pursue delight, and—here's the difficult bit—do all in our power to allow everyone else to do so as well.

Today is a festival of taking pleasure in being what we are: gathering up the years into the present, to be propelled into the future, starting from where we are—here and now. This message is also curiously relevant to me personally too. I've just finished being curate at Wirksworth, and next week I'll be licensed to two new churches on the edge of Chesterfield. I am lost in a sense, and fearful for the future: will we get on, will I be adequate to their needs, will I be fulfilled—for, yes, we need to keep an eye out for ourselves.

This apprehension about the future arises at least in part because there is in each one of us a longing for something better. That's why we get lonely, feel let down: when our vision of how it could be doesn't match the reality. And I'm certain everyone has this hole within. Some people go to football matches to try to fill it. Some people long for chocolate. Some people go shopping. But everything fails to satisfy what has been called "a certain trace of silent sadness... a consciousness that results from knowledge of the vanity of all achievements and of the suffering of all life, not merely one's own."

**A certain trace of silent sadness**—the God-shaped hole within—longing for God. Our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee.

Some of us call this the inclination to the divine. I think it's in our every cell, put there as a result of the divine-human exchange that took place in Mary's uterus as she nurtured the growing embryonic Lord within her. We are God's, we belong to God, we are of the divine, from the moment of creation. We need to let this urge for the divine, flower through prayer and meditation and worship—and enjoyment of life. Our response is to hearken to it: a word that carries with it a sense of listening, certainly, but also one of acting in accordance with what we hear: aligning our will with the divine will. It's a difficult job amidst all the static we get from consumerism and the evils of advertising, but we bash on in hope.

Hope is why we need Patronal festivals: to rekindle, restore our sense of hope in a world where we hear and see too much of the nastiness of humanity, where we hear of people who ignore that longing for the divine, who shut it out.

Hope is why we need the Eucharist. 'Do this in remembrance of me' brings all the past into the present. That is what sacraments do. The whole of the past concentrated into the words and action of the consecration prayer: we open the door of Dr Who's Tardis and find ourselves in the vastness of history. Every time the Lord's supper is celebrated, the past is gathered up and presented to us. And then in the heavenly banquet, past and present are refreshed and ejected, launched into the world transformed. In an instant, the caterpillar of the past becomes the butterfly of the future. Rebirth. Or, if you prefer astronomy, the entire universe is compressed, sucked into the infinitely dense black hole of crucifixion, the bloody, dirty hole of the crucifixion, and propelled with infinite acceleration, dispersed to create the glorious new universe.

So we have Patronals at which we receive what we have been, accept what we are, and step into the future with Jesus to light the way, **the infinite Life of God taking shape before us**. And the eucharist where we receive what we have been, accept what we are, and step into the future with Jesus to light the way, **the infinite Life of God taking shape before us**. The entire cosmos gathered up and borne for an instant by the priest. You can imagine what a great burden is placed on the priest at that brief moment in the holy mystery.

To end with, I hope these lovely words of two favourite writers will inspire and comfort us, and pull together some of the strands of this rather rambling sermon.

**Hear what comfortable words St Irenaeus saith:**

God the Logos became what we are, in order that we may become what he himself is. The glory of God is a living person and the life of man is the vision of God.

**Hear also what Bishop Lancelot Andrewes saith on Christmas Day 1605**

It is most kindly to take part with Him in that which He took part in with us, and that, to no other end, but that He might make the receiving of it by us a means whereby He might "dwell in us, and we in Him;" so we might become "partakers of the Divine nature."

It is by being ourselves, what we are celebrating today, that we can approach the divine.

**Year A, 16 October 2005**

**Advert on Channel 4 Provocative. Stimulating, Surprising. Unexpected.**

evidently so in 1st century Palestine too.

trap ... if one, then the other

**Jesus uses his intellect to trick them.**

**suggests that it is a Christian duty to pay our taxes?  
ironic or even sarcastic?**

**concentrate on what Jesus clearly did mean**  
God is the important one here.

**So then, how do we render to God what is his.**

- **rules?**
- attend church?

**As I become older ... the two great commandments** say it all: Love God with all ... and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Don't do anything that will stand between anyone else and God. Try and do things that assist this.

To love God ... submit entirely to God's will – no selfish desires in our hearts,  
Blessed are **the poor in spirit**.  
Being human, of course, this is very difficult to do.

Jesus concerns himself time and again with our relationships

No exploitation, Always **compassion**, always love.

This is how we render to God what is god's. So, when we see a lack of compassion, when we see an absence of love, when we see exploitation, we have a **duty to god to point it out and oppose it**. This is when our duty to God might put us in conflict with our duty to those who claim to govern us. Which will you choose in these circumstances.

**There is not a day goes by but what I get this wrong.** With my family, or with colleagues or with a student – I always do something or say something that I wish I hadn't.

**2. neighbours as ourselves: not** better than ourselves.

**know and accept ourselves** in all our imperfections. I find this process of getting to know myself painful and searing and shocking. **We ask for the light of Christ at Easter, at the resurrection.** light of Christ is brightest in illuminating some murky and hitherto unseen corner of my soul  
**Seeing our faults, recognising them, loving our enemies??**

**This getting to know ourselves** means **peeling away the onion skins** that have grown up around the divine core within each of us.

**Russian dolls** within each one a smaller one, until at last we get to the essential core.

**Letting God into our centres, like benediction.**

**Pope Benedict XVI**

When we do manage to peel away the layers and reach the divine core, we will allow us to shine forth and sing our own divine song.

Little Gidding :

**We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started**

**And know the place for the first time.**

The enormity, constant failing, tempted to give up. **But as the OT reading tells is, God uses some pretty unlikely people**

The **Thessalonians too were a pretty unlikely bunch** – seaport, licentious, persecuted, evidently worried about their mates that had died. And Paul himself at the time of this letter – the first, only 20 years after the crucifixion – was new to the job.

**However unlikely** we may feel, we mustn't let ourselves be distracted by our own feelings of unworthiness. We must, as at Walsingham, accept God's forgiveness freely offered. George Herbert tells this story: the unworthy speaker hesitating, then accepting, God's offer:

POEM

Brothers and sisters, let us, like George Herbert, approach the table and eat the meal of love that Our Lord offers.