

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

**Jeremiah 28. 5-9, Romans 6. 12-23, Matthew 10. 40-42.**

#### **Discipleship**

The passage from Matthew's Gospel that we have just heard is very easy to misread. At a glance we might think that that Jesus is talking about the disciples (and our) response to people in need around them. In fact he was preparing his disciples for their mission and their responses towards those they meet. But he was also speaking of the 'rewards' and blessings that would be experienced by those who received the disciples and looked after them. In other words, what the people did for the disciples of Jesus, they were doing for Jesus himself.

Jesus says to his disciples, 'He who receives you receives me'. The good done to Jesus's disciples is as if it were done to Jesus himself, because they are his representatives, carrying out his ministry. This is a wonderful thought that Jesus should chose to his honour his disciples in this way. In a sense he is putting them on an equal footing with himself.

Again Jesus says, 'He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' In other words we can share in the reward of God's servants by supporting them in their work. The other week Becky Slade spoke to the Faith & Social Action Forum after the

morning service. We heard about what she and others are doing in a remote part of Nepal. They are doing the work of Jesus and we should honour and consider how we might support all those who do God's work. Jesus says that even seemingly insignificant works of kindness such as a cup of cold water given to his followers is a meaningful act in God's eyes.

What could seem more insignificant than giving a person a cup of cold water? In a short time, they will be thirsty again. Yet even such a small gesture will always be remembered and rewarded by God.

There is a down side to this for anyone who may have been involved in mission of any sort. I shall never forget my first trip to the Children's Home in Romania when I and the team with me were honoured with a meal on our arrival. That meal turned out to be exactly what the children were given for nourishment – a bowl of hot water with large chunks of half cooked pig's flesh complete with bristles floating on the top. To this day I don't know how I got through it. But there we were being treated as honoured guests and received in Christ's name.

But returning to the gospel passage, the point that Jesus was making is that it is not philanthropy which is in view, but the reception of a disciple

because he is a disciple. The promise is that those who are his disciples represent him, with both the cost - which he calls 'taking up the cross' - and the reward.

In our Faith and Social Action Group over the recent months there has been much discussion around the word 'disciple' and 'discipleship'. The use of these words has caused concern to some in our deliberations on what projects we might support. To some 'disciple makers' sounds too 'evangelical'. I can understand this having witnessed the worst excesses of so called 'evangelism' carried out both in my time in Romania and later in Africa. Of course we must be sensitive and treat people with respect rather than bash them over the head with our bibles. We need to earn the right to share the good news.

However from our reading of this passage in Matthew and elsewhere in the other Gospels, it is clear that it is disciples that Jesus is looking for and the command given to all his disciples is what is called 'The Great Commission'. This was: 'Therefore go and make disciples of all men'

It can't be clearer than that!

Sadly because of the abuses and excesses of some of those involved in doing what they think is God's work, the word evangelism has lost something of its real meaning and impact. You could say it has been high jacked! In the PCC as we have discussed what sort of Church St Andrew's is – or what we might want to be under the guidance of a new Rector – the term 'evangelical' has been considered only to be rejected because of its connotations in some circles.

But what does the word really mean?

The term "evangelical" comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning "the good news" or the "gospel." Thus, the evangelical faith focuses on the "good news" of salvation brought to sinners by Jesus Christ.

Isn't this what we endeavour to do Sunday by Sunday here at St Andrew's as we proclaim the good news in the celebration of the Eucharist?

But let's move on and consider what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus?

‘A disciple is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another: such as *Christianity*’. A disciple is one who learns from his master. It’s as simple as that.

So we are called both to be disciples of Jesus and to go out and make more disciples for him.

In his wonderful book ‘The Ragamuffin Gospel’ Brennan Manning writes:

‘What makes authentic disciples is not visions, ecstasies, biblical mastery of chapter and verse, or spectacular success in the ministry, but a capacity for faithfulness. Buffeted by the fickle winds of failure, battered by their own unruly emotions, and bruised by rejection and ridicule, authentic disciples may have stumbled and frequently fallen, endured lapses and relapses, gotten handcuffed to the fleshpots and wandered into a far country. Yet, they kept coming back to Jesus.’

I don’t know about you but this gives me hope in my Christian life.

So what does it mean for us to disciples of Jesus?

A few weeks ago we celebrated the Pentecost event when the Holy Spirit came to be in every follower of Jesus. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us enables us to be Jesus to those round about us.

A disciple is one who follows, listens and learns. A disciple is one who does what Jesus would do in the time and space allotted to him and in the circumstances of his or her daily life.

I think that sometimes we can get rather lost in the past as read the accounts of Jesus, his twelve disciples, and the other New Testament stories. We need to run this forward and think what Jesus would do if he were around in the flesh today.

Let me finish by reading from the latest book written by the Rev Dave Tomlinson, Vicar of St. Luke's, Holloway and occasional speaker on BBC Radio 2. The book is called 'Black Sheep and Prodigals'. It is disturbing, radical and challenging as are Dave's other books such as 'How to be a bad Christian'. Dave is an old friend of mine and has kindly agreed to come to St Andrew's in December to speak at the Men's Curry Evening. Having said that, it has already been suggested that the

evening be opened up to the ladies. But we may need to take a vote on that!

Dave writes:

'I recall a cartoon with someone holding sign that said "Christ is the answer". And behind was another person with a sign saying "What was the question?" I don't believe that the sectarian Christ of black and white Christianity is the answer to anything. But the Jesus I find in the Gospels helps to answer a lot of things: the Jesus who championed the poor and the marginalised, who treated women as real people at a time when they were the chattels of a patriarchal society, the Jesus who forgave his killer and invited a dying thief to join him in paradise.

If this Jesus were here today, I believe he would lead his disciples in standing with those of a different sexual orientation, he would be in refugee camps helping people to find a life apart from guns and bombs, he would support the sexually abused and also liberate their offenders from the self-hatred that drives them to harm others. I believe the Jesus of the Gospels would still be weeping over Jerusalem and supporting those who strive for justice and reconciliation in the Middle East. I believe he would call vigorously for the pulling down of all walls, literal and metaphorical.'

Dave concludes:

'I am Christian, but I have little interest in spreading Christianity. I am far more interested in fuelling a new Jesus movement. As Karen Armstrong writes, "Jesus did not spend a great deal of time discoursing about the trinity or original sin or the incarnation, which have preoccupied later Christians. He went around doing good and being compassionate."

But in the end, there is not much good in just thinking about what Jesus might do if he were here today. What is important – vital, actually – is to discover the spirit of Jesus in our own hearts, and to get out there and let that shine through.

Live passionately! Believe sceptically! Love extravagantly!

So let's not get too hung up on words and labels whether it is 'discipleship', 'evangelical' or whatever. May we respond to the call of Jesus to be true disciples in the world today and may we learn to honour and bless those who work in this troubled world to bring God's love and healing power in a divided society.

Amen.