

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 28th June 2020 – 3rd Sunday after Trinity

Jeremiah 28.5-9; Romans 6.12-end; Matthew 10.40-end

Who are we? Who are we, the Church? Who are we, the St Mary-le-Tower Community? The answer that today's readings give is, we are a people who belong to Jesus. And because we belong to Jesus, we share in his power and authority, and so are able to live in his way, and to speak in his name.

This is not some kind of ego trip, rather it is a call to courage and trust and adventure. Because we belong to Jesus, in trying to live good lives we need not fear our human weakness. Because we belong to Jesus, when we are called speak about God and to serve others in his name, we need not doubt ourselves. Rather, we need to remember that we are people through whom Jesus is seeking to work and be present. We are his people, loved by him, redeemed by him and empowered by him. There is no room for the excuse, Oh, I'm not up to that!

Our first reading spoke originally to a Roman culture that had become hooked on all sorts of pleasure, excess and leisure, rather than faithfulness and doing right. And so St Paul writes of people being slaves of sin. It may all sound a bit lurid today, but think of modern consumerism, of the need to have the things you want now, today. Think how difficult it is sometimes to resist that sort of stuff. St Paul called it being slaves of sin.

You do not need to be like that, he says, for now you belong to Jesus, you don't actually need it, and anyway it never really did you much good, did it? And now in belonging Jesus a new way is open to you. The language of slavery is generally not helpful to us today, as we now, rightly, abhor it. So it is difficult for us to think positively about the idea of being slaves to righteousness and slaves to God.

However, in this context the key ideas to hang onto, are freedom and belonging. St Paul is actually saying something very profound. You are no longer bound by your human nature, but now you are bound to Jesus and he will not let you go, however much your human nature struggles to fulfil itself. In the same way that slavery was rather more than just taking a job and you became property of your master, now you belong to Jesus, who actually sets you free to be a new creation. When you are struggling with human weakness, remember to whom you really belong, and take heart.

At St Mary-le-Tower, we are starting to think about how we are going to welcome people to church, and we are going to need teams of people to enable this, to sanitise the church and to welcome people and to manage the building safely. Strict rules mean that we cannot have people over 70 years in these teams, because of the Coronavirus risks, so it means that the rest of us need to step forward if we are to be able to make reopening the church work. I will be drawing these teams together and leading the reopening of the church, so do please get in touch as soon as you can if you can help.

ST MARY-LE-TOWER CHURCH IPSWICH

St Mary-le-Tower needs to be open again, for Sunday Services and for Private Prayer on Saturdays, and we need to be welcoming people in Jesus' name, and our Gospel reading has something to say about this. "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me," Jesus said. That's the key phrase. The sentences about prophets and the righteous are simply variations on the same theme, as is the final sentence. "Little ones" was Jesus' term, not so much for children, but for his fearful and hesitant disciples.

The message is that, however uncertain and hesitant the disciples of Jesus are, we go to others in his name, trusting in his power and authority, and not in our own. Jesus is promising that people of goodwill will actually recognise this. It's not about you, says Jesus, it's about me, and my Father.

When people come into St Mary-le-Tower there is a kind of mutual welcome going on, a giving and accepting of welcome to the house of God. When people come into Church they are not coming to see us, they are coming to talk to God, and to let God talk to them.

Some people will of course come in just wanting something for themselves from us, and we will respond to those people as best and appropriately as we can. But the deeper visits will be those who have come to accept God's welcome, and we will be there as those who have ourselves accepted God's welcome and who are also ministering the same welcome to others.

When Jesus sent his disciples out, it was on his business. It was important that the disciples remembered this. When we welcome his disciples in to St Mary-le-Tower, it is still Jesus' business. It is really his welcome we are extending, and we too should remember this.

CJ. 28.06.20