

SERMON for Pentecost 22 – October 20th, 2024.

Readings: Isaiah 53: 4-12; Psalm 91: 9-16; Hebrews 5: 1-10; Mark 10: 35-45.

Once again, welcome to our visitors and those who have returned to help us celebrate this 125th anniversary of the consecration of this beautiful church building.

I have asked our local historian, Bev McGuinness to say a few words about the early days of the history of this building.

Bev to talk

I had a quick flick through the Mumford book on the history of the parish and noticed how challenging things were for a great deal of the past.

I think in many ways, things started to change with the opening of the *Mustard Seed*, our Op Shop in 2007. Certainly, the parish is in a far better position now financially, if not spiritually. The good offices of our *Mustard Seed* volunteers, the donations that have been made of goods, and our very welcome customers, have put us on a sound financial footing and enabled us to be generous with our support of many worthy causes, locally, nationally and internationally, as well as taking the financial strain of paying a priestly stipend.

Sally Prickett talks about the 'ripple effect' of the good which has come about because of the *Mustard Seed*.

Also there is the Emergency Relief which we are able to distribute through the Denmark CRC, a scheme we are hoping to replicate in Walpole.

As my time as Parish Priest draws to an end, it is also a good time to think of our future, and what that will look like. Parish Council has already begun to plan for the future and how the parish will continue with its "core business" next year and beyond.

Years ago, someone pointed out to me the symbol of a stream running into a pool. If there is no outlet to keep the water moving, the pool soon becomes stagnant and unhealthy. That is the same with life, and no less the life of a parish.

What are our values that we want to take forward and to grow?

The gospel today is a powerful reminder that God's thinking is often very different to our own. Jesus' disciples, James and John, were brothers and had the nickname; "Sons of the Thunder", probably because they were fairly volatile.

How do you react when someone comes up to you to ask for a favour? I guess it depends in part on how well you know them and whether or not you can guess what they are going to ask.

We have heard in recent readings about how Jesus made an example of the children who came to him, how he welcomed them, and made them the centre of attention, certainly not the normal custom of the day.

He encourages those who followed him then, and now, to be like little children, to trust and to seek a way of humility, a way of humble service, certainly not popular in today's society, any more than it was then. Yet his disciples' ears were closed to that, much as I suspect are ours.

Last week our reading from the Gospel was of the rich young man who wanted so much to follow Jesus, but his wealth was a stumbling block for him, he just could not "sell all, give to the poor and follow" Jesus.

Now we have James and John asking their "favour" - they want to sit either side of Jesus in his "glory". Jesus must have felt sad and frustrated that two of his closest friends and disciples still "didn't get it".

He was calling them to humble service, and they wanted glory and notoriety!

Jesus reply: "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" could be translated: Do you really understand what you are asking? Can you take it? Are you sure you are ready to die? Are you sure you can take the pain?

The other disciples apparently heard the whole discussion. And they became angry. How dare the Sons of Thunder ask such favours? Were they better than the rest? Jesus patiently takes all of them aside, and once again tries to give them a clear understanding of what they chose when they followed him. It is time for a reality check!

"Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

What revolutionary values! No wonder the leaders, political and religious, crucified him. They did not want the slaves becoming first. They did not want the great to be servants. Are we surprised? It is so even today, only today we don't crucify him; we ignore him. We say, oh he didn't mean it literally, he was just using that exaggeration of speech he was fond of using ... but was he crucified for an exaggerated figure of speech?

"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

As we contemplate our future, as Anglican Christians in this place, what is it going to be? Hanging on to our traditions rigidly? Or do we connect to the hard work and commitment of our past; look to how we can continue to serve this community in servant leadership, humble service with compassion and respect for all well into the future?

Above all, we need to trust in God, in our relationship with God, and trust and support each other, so as a community of faith we can have the confidence to allow the free flow of the Holy Spirit, to trust in each other and what we are being called to do, in service to this beautiful part of the world where we have the privilege to live.

Honouring the past and looking to the future. Amen.

Revd Sally Buckley
20 October 2024