

Day by Day

Good morning.

Let me introduce James. With his brother John he is one of the four close disciples of Jesus along with the brothers Peter and Andrew. He comes to us through the gospels; we know almost nothing about him; and his death is recorded in horrifying simplicity - 'he killed James the brother of John with a sword.'

When Jesus first met them, they were not poor people; and they were not ignorant. I mean, in that country and at that time, although they lived in an occupied territory, they were almost certainly among the better off in their communities. They owned boats and Zebedee, father to James and his brother John, also employed other people. We can only speculate what they gave up to follow Jesus.

It was not an easy choice despite the impression given in the Gospel. They had family responsibilities; their fishing nets and their boats were not only their most valued possessions - their means of earning a living - they were symbols of their status; that is how they were known: Fishermen. They gave all this up to follow Jesus, they were his *Disciples*; they shared in his life. We have evidence that they also felt deeply about what they had done; almost resentfully Peter says 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' (Matt 19 27).

Yet one thing we know; their lives were for ever transformed. They made a choice and it had real consequences; it had a real cost. Discipleship has a cost. It is true, Jesus tells those who want to follow him to count the cost: 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back' said Jesus, 'is fit for the kingdom of God' (Luke 9.62). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, profoundly tells you about this in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. He wrote "The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus."

We do know something of the issues that faced James; Christians face them today; how to live a life that is different in quality so that others will know that you have a relationship with God; another is just how to say and what images to use, about the love of God in a society looking the other way; and now, added to the conundrum of questions, which James did not experience, are the philosophical and scientific one of existence and the probability of God's existence.

Our nation once knew the story; once heard the language; lived its history. Now it wants to keep within four walls the faith that speaks of eternal life or eternal death. Our world is a world of conflict; like those first disciples, to follow Jesus and to be faithful, is not to escape from the world, but, in the words of St John, it is to overcome it.

You can never be thankful enough for the quiet prayers, faithfulness and vision for that huge list of people, very few you remember by name who, over the centuries have followed Jesus. Their devotion, love and gifts moved forward and continued the work of Christ. Now it is your turn, to see what you can do to carry forward the work of Christ in your hugely different world.

Like James perhaps, you have dreamed dreams; you have worked so hard; sometimes the path has not been clear; voices have been raised, 'don't go that way, you'll never do it'. I know, I have heard them. Some of those who began are not here today; some saints have died and you bless their memory, others have moved on taking what they have gained in faith from this place and in the fellowship of this community - others benefit from their faith. There will be others who felt unable to come with you down this road; they have taken other paths; a few have turned away.

Yet all have left their mark - the past and the present - what is done for God is never wasted. Some are pillars; others, bricks in the wall; some bear the storms of the world; they show the wounds; others stand quietly offering prayer and love. I thank God for all the people in Blagdon, Compton Martin and Ubley, who work together to refresh and enliven the vision of the Church and the kingdom of God after this pestilence that has so blighted our lives in recent months. Like you, I am learning how to struggle and to live a Christian life in the here and now; I believe God is faithful even when I am not.

You must shape this Church in the way you believe God asks you to shape your spiritual lives. These are turbulent yet hopeful times. Women and men have such a capacity for destruction and yet, and yet, can be such wonderful partners with that loving God, who wants the very best for God's people. Jesus wept, when he came in sight of Jerusalem; he weeps and weeps still at the pride; the hatefulness; that seems to govern so many lives.

How easy it is to chase the shadow of God; you suppose God to be somewhere other than where God really is, to be something of your making and expectation when in fact God is other. 'If we do this or that, we shall see God more nearly; if we say this or that, we shall hear him more clearly'. The fact of the matter, there is only one moment when the risen Lord is with you; that moment is now; the place of that now, this moment, today, here, in the place where you are. You try to live a Godly life so that you may know God and love God deeply. It is plain for all to see so plain that you might miss it.

A story! Between two countries there was border with a checkpoint. A man came pushing a wheelbarrow - the soldiers search it and let it pass. In the evening, the man returns empty handed. The same happens the next day and the next and the next. The guards are suspicious; he must be smuggling something. They search him, and everything in the wheelbarrow, day after day. In the end they give up; 'We know you are smuggling something - come clean, tells us what it is. "Simple" says the man, "I am smuggling wheelbarrows".

Godly women and men, hold fast to your faith; be regular in worship; above all, love one another. You have within you a vision of the presence of God - share that vision in the quality of your lives, the depth of your commitment and obedience to God, and by your thanksgiving, always, for what God has done and will do.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Praise to you,
Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have won for us,
for all the pains and insults you have born for us.
Most merciful Redeemer,
friend and brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day,
by day by day.
Amen.