

## **BIBLICAL REFLECTION**

*for Trinity 2 (21 June)*

**Matthew 10:24-39**

*(+ ref. to Jeremiah 20:7-13 & Romans 6:1-11)*

As people of faith, the thought of being enticed by God (to slightly misquote Jeremiah) seems a wonderful idea. Being led astray, encouraged to drop everything and follow, seems quite exciting if the power doing the enticing is this amazing God we believe in. In our more 'perfect' frame of mind, we would no doubt fully subscribe to this happening in our lives ... providing, of course, it does not distract us from other more tempting things – and thereby hangs the dilemma brought alive in all three of the scripture readings set for this week. Just how good are we at responding to the enticing invitation of God?

Human beings can only be human beings. We come in a rich variety of shapes, sizes, backgrounds, colours, creeds and persuasions. We are not a monochrome entity, and one of the challenges that faith has is that we have to assimilate all of these human traits into one fixed identity; in catering terms, it is like collecting all your ingredients, and mixing them together, with the hope that the finished product will be the best homogenised item imaginable! Not that faith wants a clone-like membership, but it does appear to require a solid firm allegiance that does not waver from the core principles. In some senses we are monochrome because we are required to believe in the one God, and act as if we actually do believe – and it is often in the latter area where we fall foul of life itself.

Reassuringly, our twenty-first century selves appear to be no different from our first-century counterparts who were both Matthew's and Paul's audiences; in fact, go back many centuries previous, where you can find similar struggles in Jeremiah's era. We are living proof that humanity has always struggled with the idea of a committed faith when the realities of life around come into play. Perhaps we will never learn; perhaps we do not need to? Perhaps the scriptural teachings are there to sharpen our attention rather than reprimand our weakness? Nice try, but do not kid yourself. They are there, purely and simply, to reveal what God actually wants and expects you and me to give. And they are there to show what may occur when we fail.

Of course, this tone has a somewhat threatening edge to it, but maybe that is necessary. We all-too-often adopt a rather weak-spirited approach to faith, even in 'lockdown' times. How many have subscribed to our "Zoom" worship? Not many. How many then attend that worship when offered? Even less. How many were last in Church when we were open? Very few. So few, in fact, that the very future of our existence as a centre of faith here at St. Mark's is currently under review by the diocese. Having neglected to prioritise our faith in the past, we may soon see the impact of that perceived error. Getting it right – getting a balance of life's demands – is never straightforward.

In Matthew today, the author wants us to realise just how crucial Christ's influence over our human lives can be. He wants us – just as Paul and Jeremiah allude to – to see that, if we are chosen by God to represent His way of life on this earth, we must realise the task ahead. We all have done this at some point in the past, and most in fairness continue as best they can (and are a great credit

to the Christian faith, rest-assured). We have all somehow committed to the notion, through our baptism, through our confirmation, even through our ordination! Each has engaged. Each has opened up a new vista in their otherwise busy lives, and viewed the majesty of God beckoning on the horizon. Most have begun to journey along the road that hopefully leads to the glorious spectacle that is promised – and will be found – on the other side of that marker. But as we travel, so, unfortunately, much distracts, sidelines, encourages, and entices – and that muchness has often not been of God. How do we return to the road? When 'lockdown' ends, and we swing wide (with enthusiasm!) our church doors, we need each and every one of you 'champing-at-the-bit' to get beyond those doors into the wondrous presence of God as we come together as one body to continue our search for that horizon. Will you promise to do that?

It may not be an easy step to take. It may, following all this 'closure' time, be quite a difficult one. After all, none of us have been 'to church' properly since the beginning of March. We may have forgotten the point of going, or even do not any longer find it inviting? We have missed out on the great drama of Holy Week; we have missed out on the splendour of Easter and its preceding tragedy of Good Friday. We have been distracted by the more startling 'voice' of "Corona". Suddenly, God was muted. He became impotent. Christ could not be crucified. He was prevented from rising from the dead. The dead became the victims of a contagion none had experienced in modern times. These dead will never rise. Over forty-one thousand of them. Critics could argue: where was your so-called God during this time? Where was the healing, caring, loving Christ throughout? Why are you bothering to re-open your building – it is full of lies and untruths and hypocrisies?

We cannot really answer such, painful though that is to write – except that we can! We can, because we can continue to hold onto the threads of faith that intertwine our human lives. We can reflect on Jeremiah's dilemma – and we can make sure that God's enticing power can overwhelm us – and we can be His people. We can say to the world: OK, we do not have a clear answer to your specific question, but we do believe that by being people of faith we can become stronger, we can provide hope, we can feel reassurance. Deadly viruses apart, the wholeness we seek for our human lives can only come from allowing those lives to be engulfed by a deeper power, a wider concept, a truer way. It may not inoculate us from the reality of the world we currently exist within, but it may just make our passage through and beyond it a far more fulfilling experience. That, I believe, may well be Matthew's promise to us in today's gospel extract.

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