

Matthew 10 24-39 (Rom 6 1b-11 & Jer 20 7-13) St M & AA Audio Service 21/06/20

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Have you ever stopped to think about the paradoxes of life? Maybe it's an age thing, but the young are quite happy in saying something is 'wicked' when something is 'good', and referring to something as 'bad' when it is really good! It's a wonder we aren't all living in a constant state of confusion. But before we all join in with 'well it's the mad, mad, world we live in today" we need to stop and think, because in today's reading from Matthew we are given the ultimate paradox, a paradox that is central to the Christian faith and one that we ignore to our peril; it is the claim that through death, you gain life! Not only that, it goes even further: unless you take on death you cannot know life. How on earth can this be true?

It is a wonder of life that much of it goes on despite ourselves. What I mean by this, is that life has a force in its self, constantly fighting for our survival. Our brains are incredible at keeping us alive, with all sorts of strategies that kick in when anything threatens our survival, and the body responds to the brains impulses without us even thinking about it and often without us even noticing anything. While all this is going on we just get on with our daily living, often occupied with many other activities that seem to be far more important at the time. That is of course until something goes wrong or changes our lives in a dramatic way either physically, psychologically or sociologically.

There has also over recent years been a massive movement in relation to the self. The importance of self-confidence, and self-assurance in an effort to helping people become their 'true self'. Self-assertiveness is seen as a prize and the possibility of giving up ones rights is often seen as weakness and indeed just wrong, being often viewed with suspicion. So how does this all sit with Jesus' teaching that whoever gains his life will lose it and who ever loses their life for Christ sake will gain it?

This is a really hard teaching, but it is often when we face difficult hard times that real life in it's fullest becomes apparent. Life is not easy as we know only too well at the moment and life as a Christian is never easy. This teaching requires a drastic and complete change of values and life direction. This is both painful and costly, and

Jesus wants his disciples and potential followers to understand the full implications of a commitment to the God of Jesus Christ. In such a self orientated society, who on earth would want to lose their life like this by choice? Jesus' answer has been experienced and found to be true by many people in many generations. Jesus' self-giving in death leading to a newness in resurrection life. In the giving up of self, our self-centredness, we find more freedom to be ourselves more honestly, then slaving over finding our modern engineered, superficial self.

As you may well know, like Fr. Peter I have a passion for roses. On one of the gardening websites there are pictures of rainbow roses, which at the moment are linking in with the rainbow theme of the nation, standing together in the fight against covid. There are many multi coloured roses available but these rainbow roses look stunning. But there's an underlying heavy cost to these roses, for they are not real so to speak. To get these 'rainbow' roses the stems of white roses are split and each separate split is dipped into dyed water to produce the rainbow colouration. But this fake superficial beauty treatment basically stops the rose from breathing properly and the dyes block the take up of water and they die far quicker than those in their natural form. Why do we feel the need to make something into something it is not; a rainbow is a rainbow and a rose is a rose, each beautiful in their own right? Just as the humble sparrow is known by God so are we. Maybe we are too proud to set ourselves alongside the sparrows and be seen for who we truly are, our true selves. Do we live life in fear of missing out or even getting found out? Are we only fulfilled through accumulated wealth, prestige, experiences, and superficial short lived enhanced beauty. Why are we so afraid to see the true beauty of reality and so reticent to marvel in it.

This time of lockdown and the practicalities of living life going forwards I pray has brought many people to question how we as both a society and individuals live out our lives in a better way. It will not be easy but Christ never promised it would be, quiet the contrary. Speaking for myself I know I would much prefer the simple beauty of a plain white rose, to a rainbow rose, but then of course, I am a Yorkshire girl!

Revd Debbie

Acknowledgments.

1. Susan Sayers -Sermon Outlines and All Age Talks
2. Deep Green Permaculture