

Our readings this morning both describe people being sent out, sent out to share and spread God's word. At the end of this service Rev Terry will tell us to 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord', to which we will reply, 'In the name of Christ, Amen'; and then most of us will go and get a cup of coffee and a biscuit! I think this is a very sensible way to fortify ourselves – the warning that both Ezekial and the disciples are given, that they are unlikely to receive a particularly warm welcome when they arrive with God's word, can apply to us as well. Sharing our faith, taking all the gifts we receive in here, out into today's increasingly secular world is a pretty daunting prospect. But we are not the first ones to be apprehensive. In a short while we will share the bread and wine; the first time this happened was of course at the last supper. Those gathered in that upper room, literally in the presence of God, just as we are, were in a way, the first church; but within a few hours of that event their leader had been crucified and those left were denying Jesus, in hiding, and fearing for their lives. But as we also know, that was the beginning rather than the end.

So how do we go out and share the gift of faith, hope and love in our daily lives? As always we only need to look to Christ for guidance. He could have displayed his power in earth shattering ways, and there are of course moments in the gospel, the transfiguration for example, where this is evident. But in the majority of cases he met people, in their needs - he helped fisherman catch more fish, when the celebrations at the wedding in Cana were in danger of ending prematurely, he turned water into wine, and of course on numerous occasions he heals those who are suffering physically. Glory today generally involves some spectacular triumph, broadcast across the world – God's glory was revealed through Christ in displays of intimate, humble and heartfelt compassion.

Now we may not be able to perform miracles, but we can try and meet people in the same way, to go to them as they are - to listen rather than to tell; to understand where people are on their journey of faith; to reassure them that it is okay to question the monumental concepts that following Christ entails, just as those in our gospel reading did, when they heard him teaching – 'what is this wisdom, how does he perform these miracles, isn't he just a carpenter. '

This is a key aspect of Transforming Trinity, the principle aim of which is to glorify God, but in its detail, will provide for people in very practical ways - we will be warm in our winter worship, seated on cushioned chairs, but it is also designed to benefit the wider community, providing spaces for a wonderful variety of activities within God's house. Who knows what that will lead to.

Our gospel reading recounts that Christ sends out the twelve two by two; in our lives a similar fellowship is nurtured by worshipping together, the sharing and learning and encouragement we enjoy in here, provides armour for what happens out there, which may not always be comfortable or easy. We are warned that declaring our faith to others will prompt a reaction, but we are reassured in 1 Peter, Ch.4 'If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.' It is reminiscent of verse 5, from our Old Testament reading, when Ezekial is reassured that whether the Israelites listen or not, they will know a prophet has been among them. Now we may not be prophets or disciples but if we live according to God's word, if we reflect his light, we must trust, that we will leave an impression.

Christ also instructs his disciples to go out without money or food, or even a spare shirt. I think for us, this is an instruction to shed our baggage, to rely not on what we think we know or need, but on absolute faith in him. We must ensure it does not become about us and if I

may I would like to share with you a salutary story from my youth. Believe or not, I was in the athletics teams at school, and could run the 1 and 200m in vaguely respectable times. In one particular match against five arch-rival schools, we were on course for overall victory but it was very close. We suffered a setback when one of our long-distance runners pulled a hamstring during the 800m, with the 1500m, still to come. Our coach asked for a volunteer and I stuck my hand up. I was told that a top-six finish would earn us a few precious points. As the race approached my confidence only grew, my logic being that I was fit enough to keep up with the pack, but would be faster than them in the final sprint, so by the time the race began I was pretty much certain of victory. We set off, and everything went according to plan; I gradually worked my way past my competitors and as we rounded the bend, I put my foot down; my lungs were burning, but with a few metres to go, I was in the lead. My team were on their feet, cheering me home, and as I crossed the line in glory, the bell rang for the final lap. My team were not cheering me home, rather they were desperately trying to alert me to the fact I had made my move 400 metres too early. You won't be surprised to hear I came last by some distance, and like a UK entry at Eurovision, received nil points. My coach put his arm round me and told me there was real potential there, if only I could learn to count.

In seeking personal success, I had forgotten the reason for volunteering in the first place, which was to help the team. To guard against this in our spiritual life we should heed the guidance in both our readings, that it is faith in God's authority, faith in his spirit working within us, which means, just like the disciples, we will always go out two by two, never alone. We only have to think back to those miracles of healing, which so often conclude with Christ declaring that it is faith that has made them well. I was struck the other day by a passage from John, Chapter 21 explaining how 'Jesus did many other things as well, if every one of them were written down, the world would not have room for the books.' I love the idea that acts of compassion and mercy took place that are unknown to us; but as Matthew chapter 6 reassures us, anything done to love and serve others, however, humble, modest or secret, is known by God and our reward is in doing His will. [SLIDE]

I have subjected some of you to my interest in space exploration before, and showing on the screens now is one of the most famous images from all the Apollo missions, known as Earthrise and taken by astronaut William Anders while orbiting the moon, in December 1968. Many astronauts have been so profoundly moved by seeing our planet from the perspective of space, that they have dedicated much of their lives to protecting it. But the sentiment I have been trying to describe, of God's glory being revealed in quiet acts of compassion and love, rather than heavenly fireworks, is rather beautifully summed by the astronaut Loren Acton who flew on the space shuttle in 1985. 'Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty but no welcome. Below was a welcoming planet. There contained in the thin, moving, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere, is everything that is dear to you.'

Amen

Michael Grist, 7 July 24