

Sermon: 15 Sept

Psalm 19; 1 Cor 2: 2-5, 9, Mark 8:27-38

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always pleasing in your sight. O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

Who do you say that I am? Jesus asked Peter. And he asks the same question of us today.

A little over 3 years ago, I was ordained and licensed to the post of assistant curate in this wonderful valley. The post is a bit like having a green P on the back of your car when you have just passed your driving test. I had done all the theory and got qualifications, been anointed and commissioned by the Bishop and then I was sent out to learn the practical ropes. And by divine grace, I was sent here!

I am hugely indebted and grateful to Jonathan for agreeing to be my trainer – you won't be surprised to hear that he has been expansive and generous in his time, his care and sharing his knowledge and I have learnt so much from him. I have also learnt so much from Mary and Louisa, from Yvonne and from Roger, and from Beth and from Gill. To each of them, thank you for your patience, advice and mentoring. Thank YOU - all you wonderful people of the WTV, for your welcome, your feedback, your willingness to try different things, and putting up with my embryonic clergy skills.

'I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling' (1 Cor 2:3)
SO said St Paul to his Corinthian friends. This feels quite an appropriate text for a newly ordained curate!

I have to say, arriving with a dog collar on, freshly be-cassocked and with my ordination vows ringing in my ears, was quite overwhelming.
How could I meet everyone's expectations, let alone my own – or God's !!

It didn't take me long to realise that of course I couldn't! It is entirely unachievable, as one mere human being, to do everything that we think needs doing. It says in the ordination service – 'we bid you remember the greatness of the trust that has been committed to your charge' and follows this with the salutary – 'you cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only in the grace and power of God'.

I quickly realised that this was true, and my own strength, my own ideas, my own words, were ok up to a point but would quickly fade so far better to accept God's grace and power from the start. That is what will bear fruit. And whom God calls, he equips, so away with fear and trembling!

It is the prayer of every preacher that the Holy Spirit will inspire what we say, so God can speak and inspire our listeners so they will hear HIM whatever WE say! There are endless examples of preachers being thanked for saying things they didn't say – so the Holy Spirit is at work as we all hear what we need to hear. So. Listen when you go to church, listen for what God might be saying to you.

It might be different to what others hear, that is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Another fervent prayer is that we should all, the whole Christian community, be agents of transformation. That our presence will make a difference. We are all called – yes even you – to do our bit for God and HIS kingdom here.

Whatever our vocation, our part to play, it is all vital. As Bishop Andrew said last week at Wishford, let us all offer whatever we have, whatever we are, both the trash and the treasure, to God who wants to bless it. **How** He uses what we offer is up to him. Like the loaves and the fishes, our contribution can nourish and encourage, help transform lives and bless others. It might be now, it might be in the future - our bit is to offer and then listen.

Like the heavens and the skies which declare without words the glory and the work of God (ps 19), so we, if filled and empowered with the Spirit can reflect something eternal and lasting. HIS laws, his ways are perfect and trustworthy, give joy to the heart, are radiant and give light, the psalmist says, and it is a theme taken up in our Gospel reading – 'do things MY way' Jesus says, Set your minds not on human things but on things divine. Put yourselves on the back burner, and be filled with HIM. HIS ways are not always easy – Jesus never promises a smooth life with him – but he does promise that his way will lead to life, a life that will last.

And the world needs this life. A life with LOVE at its centre and HOPE as a consequence.

Here in the Wyllye and Till Valley the aim of the ministry team is to make it clear to those around us, who Jesus is, and why He holds the key to hope, to forgiveness and to acceptance - and to life. This is the aim of all disciples not just clergy!

If you want to explore this further, please speak to Jonathan or Roger, consider joining or starting a home group where you can explore what the Bible says about this

and how we can all get to know and become true followers of Christ and reflect the Love and power of God - in a way that is authentic to each of us. So when we are asked: who do you say that Jesus is, we can answer -

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the WTV could lead the way here in this part of Wiltshire – let us join the heavens and declare the glory of God!

Today is a day of thanks and of an ending. But what really matters is NOT ending. What matters is that all of us, in whatever capacity, know and make known God's forgiveness and love. What matters is that we reflect and proclaim the hope that Jesus Christ is to this tired and precious world. We need to make Jesus known so that everyone can glimpse the extent of the incomprehensible love God, and the plans he has for our lives, plans which are so amazing that no eye has seen, nor ear has heard and no mind has imagined (1 Corinthians 2) .

What a difference we can make!

I have loved my time here and have learn so much. You will always have a huge place in my heart. And It is not a goodbye, but a see you soon!

So. Let us all pray that, in the words of Psalm 19 that the words of our mouths and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always pleasing in your sight O Lord our rock and our redeemer.

Amen