

SERMON – 4 FEBRUARY 2022 – 1 COR 15.1-11, LUKE 5.1-11



In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

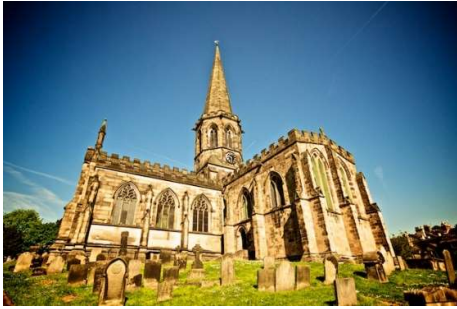
Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. They are men and women he knew well, men and women who knew him well – and he reminds them of what the good news, the gospel, actually means. They had heard him preach this, and preach it often – it wasn't a flying visit he had made to Corinth – he was there for several years and then he visited often. They knew what the gospel was all about, what Jesus meant to them.

The first question we have to ask ourselves is – do we? What does our faith mean to us. Many of our fellow-Christians know exactly what it means to be saved and what it means to be damned – I make no apologies that here the lines are less clear cut. I believe in a loving God, a God whose love is stronger than anything – and I have to trust in that love.



Arbury Road Baptist Church, Cambridge

But I do believe that life is better when you follow Christ, I do believe that Jesus is a person I journey with, and I want people to find that love of Christ. I was born into a Christian family, Church was part of my life from week 1, but I made my own commitment when I was 16 that I was going to follow Jesus, and that I have sought to do. Faith has been tested, tested almost to destruction – but I'm still here, and most of the time I'm still smiling!



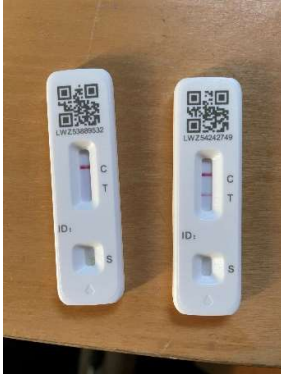
Bakewell Parish church

I want people to find a faith, a faith which transforms them, sustains them, and through which they – and we – work to make this world better. I meet, I have met, individuals for whom faith has shaped them in an amazing way – as it always has. I was at a meeting of Diocesan Rural Officers last week – don't ask me how I've ended up on the group of rural officers, but as it meant a trip to Bakewell and a meeting where there was plenty of cake, it was a good move! – and it was great listening to stories of faith from across the County. Men and women who have incredible work supporting their village communities during Covid, the farming community has been even more isolated than those of us in the towns. I also heard about a group of Christians who have started a mountain biking church in the Hope Valley on a Sunday morning – organising rides for individuals, families, ending with a reflection, a meditation as they enjoy the Peak District landscape. Very different to the church that you and me want to be part of – and I promise you that you will never see me in lycra – but it is no good saying how sad it is that these people never come to church, let's help them find faith in different places.



I want people to find a faith which transforms them, and which transforms Society. You only have to look at the Society we're in to see a Society that struggles to make sense of it all – the mental health crisis in our children, and I'm sure that the lack of faith in our families is causing some of these problems. If our families made the effort to worship together, to pray together, to be part of church communities – then I dare to suggest that they might not have some of the problems they have now. If our communities and our schools had continued to be part of the life of their local church, to put resources into our churches and into the wider community, perhaps we would not have the breakdown we are seeing. If our leaders realised the importance of faith, if they hadn't spent decades turning their backs on churches, just seeing faith as a problem, perhaps our Society would be a more caring Society. If we in the churches hadn't been so unsure of our faith, so quiet about our faith – then we might not be where we are now, but we are – so what can we do about it?

Do not be ashamed to ask what your faith means to you. What is it that brings you here week after week, what do you feel when you worship, how does the fact you are a Christian affect your life Monday to Saturday? If you're not sure, don't worry too much – faith is different for us all, and it's not always easy to, I was going to say, to nail it down. Since I believe in a Saviour who was nailed to a cross, perhaps 'nail it down' is a suitable phrase.

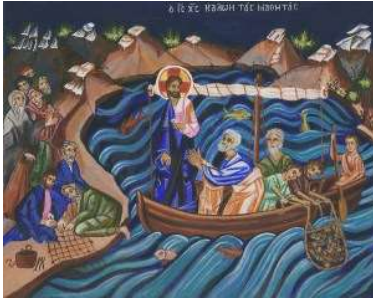


I may have the dog collar, but – as you know – I struggle too. Just back from holiday, feeling good – lovely meal with a couple I married while we were up there, and the two gorgeous children they've now adopted. Tuesday morning, lateral flow tests to ensure we hadn't got the virus before Luncheon Club – and Julie has the two lines. Yes, she's positive. Two years of avoiding this damn virus, and now – just as we're all being told it's over – it's in the house. Anger, frustration, fear – and everything else. I gave God a bit of a telling off.



So where is God for you – where do you find your faith? Paul reminds his church to hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you. Christ died for our sins – and our world needs forgiveness, people need forgiveness. Individuals who find life confusing, individuals who struggle, individuals who need to know God loves them. Society needs to see the power of forgiveness – it has got to be stronger than the power of hate, which seems to be in the ascendency at the moment.

Christ rose again – love is stronger than death – I have to hang on to that, and not just hang on, but proclaim it as the truth. We all need to proclaim the power of love – and work for it. Jesus appeared to Cephas, to Peter, to the 12, to more than 500 brothers and sisters, and he appeared to Paul. Paul knew the power of Christ, he has a relationship with Jesus, his friend, his Saviour, his Lord. He knew that he had started as a man who watched as Stephen was stoned to death, a man who rejoiced as Stephen died – and he knew that Jesus had forgiven him.



In the Gospel, Jesus is proclaiming the word of God – word and action. (It reads as if there's some fishermen who aren't actually listening, they're busy washing their nets – I find that a bit of a comfort). Jesus gets Simon Peter's boat, uses it to give him a base to preach from – and then sends them out to fish.

“We've fished all night and caught nothing” – which is not a lot different to a church saying, “but we've done that and it didn't work”. Yet, when Jesus commands, we act – they went and fished, and the net was full. They get others to help – because none of us fish alone. Simon cannot get his head round what has happened, I'm not sure I can cope with all this Lord, get away from me. But Jesus says “don't be afraid, I've got a job for you.”

He says that to us “don't be afraid, I've got a job for you.”



Today we mark the Accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. 70 years, quite amazing. We will celebrate in June, and let's hope and prayer we can have a wonderful celebratory weekend. At St Matthew's they are in discussion with both of the schools to produce some amazing art work in church – and we will no doubt manage something splendid this side of the A38. Let's hope and pray we can have a wonderful celebratory weekend. If we want an example of a woman of faith, we all know we need look no further. Thank God for Her Majesty.

This is our amazing faith – summed up so well in today's Post Communion Prayer

Go before us, Lord, in all we do
with your most gracious favour,
and guide us with your continual help,
that in all our works
begun, continued and ended in you,
we may glorify your holy name,
and finally by your mercy receive everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.