

TALK

VOUVANT

18th JUNE 2023

Morning Worship

Matthew 9.35 - 10.8

Exodus 19.2 - 8a

Romans 5. 1 - 8

In recent weeks, many of us have listened with concern to revelations and News reports about the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, the cost of living crises, rising energy costs, breakdowns in the supply chain for vital medicines, lack of staff in the Health service, all of which, one way or another, affect everyone's lives whichever side of the Channel we live.

There are many times when we seem to be surrounded by insurmountable local or national crises and it's all too easy to get depressed about the future -when we seem to have so little control over such major issues. Particularly since COVID stopped us in our tracks, we've all had to do some serious thinking about our lifestyles, and about what's really important to us.

So, to help us decide how we approach the future, is there any good news? Well, today's Bible readings seem to give us historical evidence of some positive developments.

In our Old Testament reading, the Israelites have reached Mount Sinai. God has rescued them from Egyptian oppression - in dramatic fashion.. God speaks to the people through Moses and they become linked by the Covenant, a promise founded on mutual love - the Israelites are God's treasured possession.

That love grows and develops down the centuries, and we see it most clearly in Jesus Christ, prepared to die for all. The power of that love breaks down every barrier, even death. We have just heard from Paul's letter to the Romans that, through the resurrection, all peoples', both Jews and Gentiles, are now God's prized possession - those whom God chooses to rescue for eternity.

Earlier, Paul had explained that the characteristic of a Christian is not a serene smile, but hope! -and hope is the beginning and end of a Christian's journey. We set out in hope, and the more we travel, the more we understand about its nature. We cannot be citizens of God's kingdom without accepting the Spirit that goes with it -and the Holy Spirit begins to shape all our decisions - the way we see life, the way we respond to other people.

In our Gospel reading, we hear how Jesus looks at the people and is filled with compassion. They're like lost sheep, lacking guidance and direction. Jesus remarks that the 'harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few'. There are more people needing to be saved than there are rescuers. But Jesus immediately does something about this situation.

Jesus goes on to appoint 12 apostles to help him with his mission. He appoints them by name - they are individuals, unique, from different places and trades - and their task is to bring to God those who are harassed and helpless. They are to proclaim the good news -to tell the story of God's love.

The kingdom is near, and the apostles demonstrate that -by curing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons - all biblical signs that God is at work. They go first to the Israelites but, with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the mission field opens up and all peoples are included in God's rescue plan. Isn't this indicating how we should approach the future?

Sadly, today many people are living without hope and need to be rescued. Jesus calls and appoints each of us- just as he called those first disciples. He calls us by name through our baptism - calls us to tell people the good news of God's love for them, and to show them by Christian acts that the kingdom is indeed close.

To equip ourselves for this, we need continually to reflect on our own experience of how God has intervened in the crises we personally have faced. We have all known times when we haven't known which way to turn. When we have turned to God , we know he's never failed us.

So,when faced with any major crisis, our reaction should be to turn to God, who has a totally different,longer term, and wider, perspective on his world. We need to look beyond the current issue with faith which recognises this is the case.

Many people could be described as "spiritually floundering", and we can bring them to a new understanding of living life in all its fullness. God still shows himself to our generation in startling ways -in acts of grace, generosity of giving, unexpected forgiveness, fresh starts, acceptance, welcome and hospitality.

Helping people to reflect and to see they are loved and treasured, makes a real and tangible difference to their lives -and can be a first step towards creating a different world for the individual and those with whom he or she interacts.

We are all agents of hope, disciples of good news -who can help to bring in the kingdom of God by ordinary, sensitive, and thoughtful acts- making a real difference to others. Jesus has shown us the way, and calls us by name to join him in spreading his message of hope and salvation.

Wherever Christians find ignorance or need, its a priviledge and a duty to be "first-responders" in this work.