

Newsletter 41

With the recent news of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, we are living in turbulent and fearful times and we ask God to give wisdom to world leaders to work for peace and reconciliation, and for grace to trust in his love and care for all of us at this time.

In the meantime, the life our parish goes on and I write with news of events happening in the near future and the promise of things to look forward to.

Reordering work at St. Johns At the PCC meeting this week, it was announced that the reordering work will start on March 7th and will take 12-15 weeks.

Services on 13th and 20th March will be at Holy Trinity and on 27th March will be at St. John's Church Hall.

Sale of pews from St. John's: If you are interested in buying a pew, please contact Vanessa as soon as possible email: vanessaboddy@aol.com or Tel. 07500 901 461

Pew measurements:

Height: 930mm. **Depth** back to front: 630mm. **Seat height:** 450mm. **Seat depth:** 360mm

Long Ones (16 no). Length: 3570mm

Short ones (13 no). Length: 1930mm

Front Row (2 no). Length: 2260mm



Update on Interregnum process: At the PCC it was reported that the Bishop and Archdeacon are working hard to look at this and will be in touch shortly.

Shrove Tuesday 1 March 7pm at St. John's Church Hall – Launch of Lent Appeal for Sheffield, City of Sanctuary – If you would like to sign up for the event, this Sunday 27th February is the last chance to do so.

Survey from Catholic church – ‘What do you want to say?’ – this public engagement survey is open to Catholics and non-Catholics and welcomes views and experiences on relationship with the Catholic church. Paper copies are available at the back of each church. *If interested, you need to submit the questionnaire by early March.* Link for online version:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdVndt9jjq9vGw3U0OPp4iDRgn45H_c4QBxpg4gpFH_I0yza/viewform

With warm wishes, Angie

Recent Sermons

20th February 2022, Holy Trinity Millhouses

Calming the storm: Luke 8.22-25

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

The Gospel reading this morning feels particularly apt for our times. It has literally been a stormy few days. It has metaphorically been a couple of stormy years as a result of the Covid pandemic. There are more metaphorical storm clouds on the horizon with the proximity of the Russian army to the Ukrainian border and the fact that, at the time of writing, the diplomatic endeavors don't seem to be achieving much. If you prefer the literal to the metaphorical, then it is very likely that the storm clouds that we are experiencing are made worse because of climate change brought about by disregard for our planet. If you like examples closer to home, then we might consider the rise in food costs, the rise in heating bills. And these examples are just the storms that are common to us all. What about the unique and individual storms? In my experience of ministry, I have gradually learned a lesson: everyone has a story. A story of tragedy, difficulty, challenge, something happening in life that doesn't really seem fair.

As a result of all that, this sermon preaches itself: there are storms in life. If you have faith and cry out to Jesus the storms will be calmed and life will be great.

But if any of you have experienced that as being true, we need to trade places – you can preach the sermon and I will sit in the pew. Because someone I love dearly has Multiple Sclerosis and it isn't going away, my eldest son needs to find a plumber who will give him an apprenticeship and my youngest son needs a school place – neither of them seem very forthcoming right now. Maybe I am not a very

good disciple. If so, I am in good company, C.S. Lewis once said that, 'every war and conflict is a testament to unanswered prayer.'

Not a great disciple

This account of Jesus calming the storm is told in such a way that it sounds a lot like the story of Jonah. Jonah wasn't a great example of faithful obedience either. He doesn't want to do what God asks him, he runs away from that calling, when God saves a whole nation Jonah gets thoroughly mad about it and sits in a desert like a sulking toddler waiting to die.

Jonah's story and this one of Jesus calming the storm both regularly have the words 'peril/perish' cropping up. They both have storms. In the storms, the central character goes to sleep but is surrounded by fearful sailors (if you are in a boat with someone who is an experienced sailor, and you are not experienced in that way, and if that sailor becomes afraid because of the storm that is brewing, then the least obvious response is to go to sleep). In both stories the miraculous end of the storm is a reason for those sailors to become even more afraid.

Jonah is an example of someone who is not following God. What about the disciples in the boat with Jesus? Well, first up, who is in the boat? We aren't really told. Of course, it would be the twelve who Jesus has not long ago called to follow him. But there was a wider group too and this part of Luke's Gospel begins with some women following him. There is archeological evidence to suggest that there was typically room for about 225 in a normal fishing vessel of the period...even if that meant that there wouldn't have been much space for fishing.

If the women who had recently begun to follow Jesus were with the disciples in the vessel, then there is reason to believe that they would have had more faith: we are told that they had been cured of evil spirits and so knew firsthand the power of Christ. The twelve had seen some miracles – amazing ones too: raising the widow's son from the dead, healing the centurion's servant, so I guess they should have known what Jesus was all about.

But when the storm is raging, even though there are experienced fishermen among them, it gets a bit harder. The danger is real, the boat was filling with water, and they woke Jesus by calling, 'Master, Master...' not 'Lord' only 'Master'.

They acknowledge something about Jesus, they think that he is their best hope, but they seem to consciously or unconsciously in their exclamation, 'Master, master, we are perishing!', to be asking the same question that I most regularly get asked by those who are struggling with faith: Not, 'Are vicars allowed tattoos?' but, 'Why are there storms in life? Why does bad stuff happen to good people? Why is there suffering in the world? Why is this happening to us?' They, like many, turn to Jesus looking for answers, but at this point Jesus is only 'master', not, 'Lord'.

Still, it's not a bad tactic, is it? There are worse things to do than calling Jesus Master – not acknowledging him at all would be worse. Jesus calms the storm and asks them where their faith is? I suspect it was in the same place that mine is when I am praying about my wife's MS, or my children's future: Jesus, most of life I can handle on my own thanks, but if you do answer prayers, I could do with a hand here.

I am like the disciples – I fail, but I am not a failure.

The disciples in the boat remain afraid once the storm is calmed: 'who is it who commands the wind and the water, and they obey him?'

Who is it?

You would imagine they would know the answer to that question. They know the Holy Scriptures well enough. They know the story of God hovering over the water at creation – water that is formless and void – water that is chaotic and uncreated. God speaks and calm and creation descends. God, would you speak to the chaos in my life and bring about order and creation.

They know the words of the Psalms, that it is God who makes paths in the trackless sea, it is God who defeats primeval chaos monsters, who slays those monsters of the deep. God would you defeat the monsters in my life, and make a path where there seems to be no path.

They know the story of Jonah and his storm, they know that God calmed that storm, and that Jonah's preaching saves the unbelieving Assyrians. God, would you save my enemies, and help me to not be like Jonah, but instead to rejoice in their salvation.

Who is it who commands the wind and the waves? Who else could it be?

Wind and waves

In the Bible wind and waves are often used as metaphors for a variety of things – none of them good. I have alluded to God hovering over the water of chaos. Wind implies God's judgement, waves can mean temptation, sickness or death.

Christ has come to defeat all of those things. But they are kind of still around are they? There is still an army amassing on the border of Ukraine. Covid has killed many, many people. You all know people who have died of one disease or another – some before their time. We have experienced storms of biblical proportions over the past few days...but they are not as bad as many parts of the world have to endure.

We are in a leaky boat being pounded by the waves, and maybe you are afraid, maybe you worry about tomorrow, maybe life is too chaotic.

We'll have hope: Because Jesus is in the boat with us.

That is the good news. Share that good news with others: I know the storm is real, but so is Jesus – Jesus is here with us. Call out the name of Jesus and you will be saved. I know that the storms are real, but they are less scary when you know that Jesus is in the boat with you. Amen.

13th Feb 2022 | St John's Abbeydale, 10.00am

Make the right choice: choose God, the well of life, and encourage others to do the same.

May I speak in the name of the living God, our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life. Amen.

It's an indisputable fact that parents and their children are from different generations. There are times when in the case of me and my parents, this is abundantly clear. Take mobile phones, for example. On the one hand, I'm sometimes deeply frustrated at their unwillingness to keep a mobile phone with them... to let us know that their train is running late, or in case they have an accident. On the other hand, I'm a little envious of the space that they still enjoy in their lives that, in mine, is occupied by beeping, pinging, checking emails, writing nonsense on whatsapp and so on.

Another reliable indicator of this generation gap is coffee. I feel for my parents when they go into a coffee shop these days. In the past, if you wanted a coffee in an establishment that served coffee, you would ask for a coffee. These days a previously simple hot beverage request can open up a world of confusion. I tend to take the easy route and go for a black Americano, but, if I wanted to follow the example of a customer I overheard in Broomhill a few weeks ago, I could be asking for a half-caff skinny latte extra hot with oat milk and a shot of vanilla syrup.

The promise of choice extends to all areas of our lives. What to wear, what to eat, where to work, live and spend our leisure time. Which utility company to use, which bank, where to buy our groceries. The list goes on. Such is the abundance of choice that a whole industry has grown out of our confusion - so we can compare the market (or the meerkat), Which, uSwitch, moneysupermarket, Go Compare... there's even one called confused.com. And which comparison company website should we choose?

Our 21st-century life feels complicated by choice. Far from making things easier, too much choice can in fact blight our lives with anxiety and the pressure of the constant question: What if? Consumer choice is lauded as a key part of our happiness. But is that really true?

Our reading from Jeremiah presents us with a simple choice. Do we trust God... or not? The picture the prophet paints is quite straightforward: if you put all your trust in human power you will be a shrub in the desert desperate for nourishment and shade. If you put your trust in God, you will be a tree planted by water whose leaves stay green, bearing fruit to the end of the ages. Do we want to flourish or not? Do we want life or death?

The choice is easy. Isn't it?

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul seems to be offering a simple choice too. Do you believe that Christ was raised from the dead... or not? It's a question that is fundamental to our faith and requires a straight answer: yes or no. there really can't be any ifs, buts or maybes here. If we answer 'no' we are saying that there is no hope, that our faith is in vain... that we are to be trapped in the mire of our own sin. If we say no, rejecting life in Christ who, as we'll say together later, has died, is risen and will come again, then everything begins to unravel.

Contrastingly, if we believe that Christ was raised from the dead... if we say a resounding 'yes' to the question... (the choice that Paul puts before us)... then all manner of possibilities are opened up to us... a whole world of choice, we might think... maybe we'd think that too much choice will

be confusing... but in saying yes to life... to the resurrection, we need not feel bewildered... God has chosen for us... the path ahead is well lit... and we can trust God to lead us. The psalmist speaks of this trust in Ps 139: 'you knit me together in my mother's womb'... and a little later: 'in your book were written all the days that were formed for me.' In Jeremiah Ch 29: 'for surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.'

So the choice is easy. Isn't it?

When viewed in the abstract, it *is* an easy choice, of course it is... but that doesn't mean that we, or those we love, will always make it. Or that having made the choice, we will always stick with it.

If there is ever any doubt, we are promised that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. **He** is the evidence we may need to reassure us in making our choice... **he** it is who will nourish us and help us in our outworking of what that choice means in our lives.

For in Jesus, the world is turned upside down... expected human choices are subverted and we are invited into a new way of looking at the world and a new way of navigating life. In the words of Luke's account of the Beatitudes, we see how choosing life in Christ opens up a world of possibility for everyone whose lives have become diminished...

Blessed are the poor...

Blessed are the hungry...

Blessed are you who weep now...

Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Unlike Matthew's version, these blessings are contrasted with a series of equivalent woes. So, the choice offered here is between blessings and woes.

The choice is easy. Isn't it?

Every moment of every day we face choices. There are too many... it's a wonder we don't all constantly struggle with option paralysis. But there is one choice that makes all the other choices simple and it's the choice offered by Christ: believe. Choose life.

When reading the Jeremiah passage this week I was reminded of something I'd seen on the excellent documentary 'Green Planet' a couple of weeks ago. The programme starts with a wide view of a stark desert landscape... vast expanses of dunes stretching as far as the eye could see. Hot. Dry. Barren.

...and as the camera moves slowly across the scene, suddenly there in the middle of this dead landscape... trees. A very particular kind of tree in fact called the Euphrates Poplar. They've not

been planted by streams of living water as those described by Jeremiah, but their long roots have tapped down far into the ground to find moisture. The beautiful thing about these trees, and something that struck me as an image that we might take out

with us into our week, is that, having found water, having chosen life... they cooperate. Their roots are all linked together and the ones that find life-giving water share it with others.

We are fellow travellers on a journey of faith... we are disciples of Jesus Christ... we are those who know that amidst the noise... the confusing clamour of human life, the vital choice we must make every day is the one that only he offers... life in all its fullness.

...and sometimes the choice is easy. Sometimes it's hard. Sometimes the journey is a real struggle, when the noise of all the choice drowns out the still small voice we desperately need to hear.

In good times and in bad, our being the Church, being the body of Christ... a family of faith, joins us together... just like those poplar trees... we look after one another and we share the living water that each of us needs... and in so doing we are nourished and strengthened to reach out beyond this place to offer that water of life to others we meet along the way.

Amen.