

Sunday 21st June Trinity 2

Romans 6: 1b-11; Matthew 10: 24-39

Prayer: Lord as we consider your word to us in the Bible, please draw us closer to Jesus, and help us, his disciples, to follow him today. Amen

Good morning from St Brandon's! Today, thanks to church WiFi, and following our re-opening of the building 3 days ago, I chose to be here, as a first step towards gathering to worship God here on Sunday mornings. With these small but significant steps, we are on our way- heading in the right direction, longing for the time when we can be together once more.

On Thursday morning, I met two ladies who'd walked from Brandon, came down to the church just for a look and were overjoyed to see the door open. We talked briefly, then they made their way to the Neville Chapel, paused to read the prayers, contemplated the candles, gazed at the Paradise window, looked up at the charred cross... You can imagine. Small steps, but important reminders of who we are- a church with open doors, where everyone is welcome to find strength and hope in the love of God.

So to today's gospel : a bit of a mixed bag of Jesus' teachings for his twelve closest disciples, sweet and sour, encouraging and challenging. It's an indication of the *truth* of this gospel account that Matthew doesn't airbrush out the difficult bits.

That's crucial too in relation to current debates about history, our tendency to see only one perspective, and to ignore injustice and suffering. Jesus never pulls his punches or offers false comfort. He loves us too much for that, he teaches us the whole truth, not just the easy bits.

Here in Matthew chapter 10, his ministry gathering pace, he's just commissioned the twelve to go out and spread the word and he's preparing them: having asked them to 'follow me', he is unpacking what that will mean. I can only highlight a few verses in these few minutes, and for once I'm going to look at some tricky bits!

The language of **slaves and masters** jumps out at us at the moment. Tragically, slavery's not a thing of the past, just more covert in our day, so the struggle for justice and freedom must go on. In using this language, Jesus is not condoning slavery but subverting it- saying that

the slave is identified with the master not as a possession, but as a person, who lives out the master's values, seeks to be like him and will get the same treatment.

For the disciples, and us, following Christ is a *choice* to be a servant or slave, laying down any rights we might think we have, in the service of our Saviour, who laid down his life for us.. 'It is enough' for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master.

In serving the master, who loves us for eternity, we find freedom. Later on, preparing his disciples for his death, Jesus says, 'I no longer call you slaves but friends – you are my *friends* if you follow my example...

I want to jump now to the other really difficult verses in today's reading:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother...and so on...

One commentator tells us that the phrasing here is about consequences, not intentions – the reality that Jesus 'coming will bring conflict, but that only helps a bit! Maybe it helps to know that these words are a quotation from the prophet Micah, which would have been familiar to Jesus' disciples, maybe. For me the most helpful thing is to recognise that Jesus is correcting the false expectations which the Jewish people had of the Messiah, who would usher in a reign of peace, and that was all they heard. Living under Roman rule, they thought, *When Messiah comes, everything will be ok.*

And don't we do that too?

When lockdown ends, everything will be ok

When schools go back, everything will be ok.

When we're back in church, everything will be ok....

That's not how it is, says Jesus. No false promises, no pretence. In this broken world there will always be divisions, often very close to home. Watch out for it, be prepared. My truth divides people, standing for justice is not always popular. We will be tested and it will be tough. Following Christ means taking up the cross- being prepared to lose our lives because that eternal relationship with God is the driver, not home comforts, status or wealth.

As we find the life, the abundant life which God give us, our priorities change, different things matter and we live accordingly. Other people may think, may tell us we're mad, or

worse. You may think what I'm saying this morning is extreme, deluded or offensive.

I'm thankful to have been spared the injustice and persecution which our Christian brothers and sisters around the world face today as they follow Jesus..

Before we leave these verses, let's remember that Micah also prophesied the Messiah would turn the hearts of the children to their fathers and the fathers to their children, especially on this Father's Day. As we trust him, Jesus also brings reconciliation and hope to our families.

And, in amongst the challenges of these verses, he tells us three times, **Do not fear**, with three good reasons not to be afraid..

1. Light will overcome darkness, God sees and knows everything - and will reveal truth in his time.

2. Whatever physical suffering we face, our souls are safe with God: nothing can separate us from his love.

3. God's love is beyond measure- if he sees every single sparrow, how much greater his care for us, and if he counts every hair of our heads, then his love for us in lockdown must be even greater than before!

On Thursday at Morning Prayer we remembered Bernard Mizeki, a gifted linguist who translated the Scriptures for the Mashona people of Zimbabwe, built schools and served in a mission, supported by the colonial government of the time. When this regime faced opposition, he chose not to flee for his life, and paid the price..

As his wife and a colleague ran for help following his fatal injury, they saw a blinding light above them, and heard the sound of beating wings. On return to the spot where he had fallen, there was no sign of his body.

'Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul'. Bernard Mizeki died on 18th June 1896, but his soul lives for ever with his Lord. He lived out his faith in the midst of oppression and injustice, a black man seen as colluding with white power but actually serving God alone.

May we be inspired by his example and like him, follow Christ faithfully to the end of our lives. Amen.