

SERMON FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

26th January 2020

St Michael and All Angels, Louth and St Martin's, Welton-le-Wold

1 Corinthians 1:10-14 and Matthew 4:12-23

*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

+ May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Have you ever felt silly speaking about your faith? I know that I have. Sometimes I feel it like a momentary vertigo, as I speak words (if I have even dared that much) which mean so much to me that I am terrified of using the wrong ones, of giving them the wrong weight, of sounding hollow, of ringing untrue to the person I am talking to ... and so, most worryingly of all, also to myself.

And have you ever tried speaking about how and why you love your beloved husband, or partner, or sister, or friend?

That is hard too, and that tells us something. The things that matter most to us, the basis of our lives, our motivations and our framing realities, are not always easy to speak of. But nor do they do always need complex words.

What we have to tell, 'the hope that is in us' or what Paul calls the 'foolishness of the cross' is indeed almost silly in its simplicity and absurd in its ambition.

It is that we desire to see God.

It is that we love Jesus because we see in him love's source and fulfillment.

This is the week of prayer for Christian Unity. In our epistle Paul challenges our disunity and our pride by refocusing us on the hope that is in us. His words cry out to us now to make Jesus Christ, before any other allegiance or party or identity (and before any embarrassment or social nicety!), the one we trust, follow and (an important word) *proclaim*.

In the third of our Epiphany Gospels, we are recalled once more to rejoice in how God is uncovered, manifested to us. We have heard Matthew tell of the start Jesus' open ministry, his proclaiming (the same word again) of the kingdom and his calling of the four disciples to him.

It is in the words of my ordinal that I am to 'proclaim the gospel in word and deed' and that the whole holy priesthood of the church in which you and I share are to 'proclaim the gospel afresh in each generation'.

What can how Jesus proclaims tell us about our own proclamation, the declaring of the hope that is in us? How can it help?

Jesus is a living proclamation. God with us, he declares in his very person the loving reach of ultimacy.

In all our familiarity with the scenario of the fishermen-disciples we should never lose the power of what it is that occurs. Four men, ordinary in every way--or rather, in Jesus' eyes, extraordinary in every way, are absorbed in mundane but painstaking, skilled, even beautiful tasks. The first two are throwing a deep sea casting net, weighted with stones, which plunges to the bottom of the sea and traps the fish they glimpse in the waters. The others are re-knotting linen thread, weaving the fabric of the nets that will trawl the sea for more fish.

And *all* Jesus needs to do is call from the shore 'Follow me' Literally, 'come behind me' and I will make you fishers of men'.

Paul tells us what proclamation is not: sophistical, elegant, rhetorically persuasive words of supposed wisdom. It is not argument. It is a message as, no, *more* powerful in the mouths and lives of those who have no authority of birth or education.

The verb in greek is *kerusso*, to do what a herald does: to speak the message of a king, a higher authority. A herald wears the livery of the

one who sent her, embodies that message in her person where we go in the world.

It is this authority we have, and no other--that we are sent by God as messengers, bearers and heralds of his love. In all that we are and say to be 'transparent' to his purpose, to become 'see-through people'

And that it is from this, not any letters before or after our names, not even from any gift that isn't offered to God, that we have any authority. Our speaking, when we manage it, will be impossibly possible. We will use words that will fall short and yet not fall short. Imbued with God's grace, the simple 'because my life is better with God than without' will say all it needs to.

In their following, their imitation, the first disciples are caught up into the teaching and healing ministries Christ extends. But fundamentally, always and before this, they are those who follow. Those who desire. Those who, despite their vertigo, some confusion, some considerable ignorance, have the one thing that matters. Those who are orientated by God made clear to them in Christ. Those who love the one who loves them into life.

So proclamation is not the shouting or the preaching of an opinion or a philosophy or ideology. It is an 'I love you' it is a 'come with me' it is a 'taste this'. For Jesus Christ is amongst us, his kingdom is at hand, even beneath our hands, handable in this Eucharist we prepare to receive now, unbelievably near: on fingers, on lips.

Amen.