

**Sermon 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity and the Baptism of Ianthe Gaillard**

**25/6/17**

*“Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it”*

No one who was listening to the readings this morning would have thought they made for easy baptism readings. Jeremiah is obviously very depressed and feels like the world's against him, the psalmist is full of woe and in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is teaching his disciples about family life – in a fairly controversial way. He's not here to bring peace, but to set son against father, daughter against her mother-in-law. We like to think that church is nice, the people who got church are nice and Jesus is nice – but here we get a very tough talking, controversial Jesus. These are not *nice* readings for a baptism.

Now, I have to make a confession to you this morning I'm a bit of a sucker for self-help books. I love gathering bits of advice to help me live a better life. Sometimes I don't even want to read a whole book, I'm perfectly happy with two sides of A4 with some cracking bullet points that will unlock the mystery of life... or even better than that one picture on Instagram with a good slogan.

And genuinely, sometimes that kind of advice can bring a moment of inspiration and clarity.

You know, I love a good fridge magnet – you know the kind of thing – “Life is not about avoiding the storms, but learning to dance in the rain.” Love it.

But let's be clear, however helpful that kind of stuff is, it's not really enough to get us through life.

Life is beautiful and incredible and marvellous, but deep down we all struggle to make sense of it all, struggle sometimes to find our place in the world – and so that's one of the reasons we engage with this ancient, wise, sacred text – to engage with something deeper to make more sense of life.

To live a rich, good, interesting, fulfilling life, we have to go way deeper than slogans.

We've got to dig deep. Be thoughtful. Chew over ideas. Be reflective.

And to live a rich Christian life we've got to take seriously the counter-cultural, counter intuitive challenge of Jesus' teachings – which are never about taking the easy road and which are always about looking beyond your own needs and world view.

Our readings today point absolutely solidly in that direction. There is NOTHING easy about any of today's readings. Nothing that you could put on a fridge magnet. Well, maybe there is.... but you might not like it...

*“Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it”*

Jesus is saying that a life lived fully for God – loving God and loving our neighbour – a life *given away* – rather than seeking our own self-centred needs – will be a life where we find fulfilment, purpose and meaning.

This seems at first glance very counter-intuitive but actually each one of us who has loved someone else – as a daughter, or a son, a parent, an aunt, an uncle, a friend, a lover, a partner, a spouse – everyone who has ever loved anyone else has known the joy of giving part of themselves away – in love – that brings such freedom and joy.

Every reading today challenges us to live counter-culturally for God. Not to be concerned only with our life and our family – but to live more widely for the good of others, for the good of the community, for the good of society – and ultimately to search for and to love God.

Let's start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah was God's prophet – right from birth he had a sense of vocation and calling – and he basically had to tell the people of Israel where they were going wrong – tell them some home truths. He had no choice but to share this, because God filled his heart with such a sense of injustice that he had to speak – tell people they were greedy, not following God's ways, politically corrupt, morally bankrupt, religiously defunct – he told them and warned them of the consequences. And you know what – this was not a way to win friends and influence people. He was unpopular and people mocked him and longed for him to stumble and fall.

What can lanthe – who is to be baptised today – draw from that? How can she and we be inspired to live, act and pray? Well Jeremiah was on the side of justice – let's pray that lanthe would be a woman who fights for just causes.

How about the psalmist?

The psalmist is in a place of despair – feeling abandoned and isolated. The writer of the psalm has gone through an ordeal and feels like a stranger even within his own family. He feels suspicious and perhaps a little paranoid. Having these sorts of things expressed in the Bible is a great resource for us – seeing this level of truth, helps us to be more truthful about when we've felt overwhelmed, distressed and abandoned. God can cope with our real prayers of sadness, failure and distress, not just our hopeful, praise-filled prayers.

We read these psalms too 'nicely' in church – they are full of “arrrrrrrrgh, what's going on?” moments – they encourage us and lanthe to know that we can be honest with God in our prayers.

Perhaps some of us today need encouragement to be honest with God in our prayers. And perhaps we also need a challenge to look to God in our times of despair to pull us out of the pit and save us from the deep waters.

Then the gospel reading –

But then Jesus seems to say some very difficult things about family and peace. He states quite clearly that he has not come to bring peace – but a sword. He states that a man will be set against his father and a daughter against her mother in law and that one's foes will be members of one's own household. One week post father's day we hear “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...”

What are we meant to do with this? How are we meant to read it?

Jesus constantly challenges cultural norms. Jesus' life and teaching repeatedly point towards the fact that Jesus was urging his followers to commit to a different form of community – a community where the ties would not just be about family – but would be wider than that – and that there would be times

where our connection to our Christian brothers and sisters would be more vital than the connection to our biological family.

In times of persecution this would be very true – but even when the Christian community is not being persecuted there is still a deep truth that as a church we have a commitment not just to our biological family – but also to our Christian brothers and sisters. We can see this lived out in dozens of ways – cooking for each other, visiting each other in hospital, sharing our resources, crossing cultural barriers, housing people who need assistance, listening to the story of each others' lives. Our perspective is wider than our nuclear family – and we will cross into new and challenging territories. This church is a living example of this – in normal terms there are ways in which this mixture might not work – such a diverse range of social backgrounds, ethnicities, cultural norms, experiences – and yet in all our diversity and difference we seek the common good – through the fact we are linked as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Today is lanthe's baptism – a day of great celebration as she becomes part of this new family, the church family. She has a wonderful biological family – great parents – Richard and Harriet and wonderful sisters, Cecily and Emmeline – and we pray that God would bless and protect them – but we also pray that lanthe would learn to love her Christian brothers and sisters – her wider family, that she would learn what it means to be called by God to make a difference in the world – to speak up for truth and justice and to live a life of love and compassion. We pray that like the psalmist she would find a way to be honest with God in her prayers and to know him as her rock and sure foundation.

And we pray that we, with her, would know that in our Christian journey, as we loose our life, for Jesus' sake, we will find it – a deep, transformative, fulfilling, life-giving live.

May we all hear God's call and walk in the way of Jesus.

Amen.

Revd Sheridan James' sermon notes. Always better live, but the notes give you some idea of what was preached.