

St Michael's Church, Linton 07-06-26

Sermon (Gospel Reading: Matthew 9.9-13,18-26; Psalm 33.1-12)

I wonder what's the most important Sunday for you in our Church Year? Do you have a favourite? For me it's Pentecost – that moment, after Jesus's ascension, when the disciples, and crowds of people, all together in Jerusalem, are filled with the Holy Spirit, coming down like flames of fire. And God speaks through Peter, saying:

'I will pour out my Spirit on ALL PEOPLE'

What a promise that is to us – each one of us.

At some moment in time, when for some reason we are open to God, perhaps when we need it most, or maybe when we least expect it, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

You may already know that feeling... a transformation. That's why I love Pentecost.

And today is the 3rd Sunday in the season of Pentecost. We've had time to absorb all that Pentecost means, and how the Spirit can work in us.

So what do you think about today's Gospel reading?

It comes over half-way through Matthew's Gospel – the Good News according to Matthew. But it felt to me, as I read it, as if it were actually the start; the beginning of the Good News for Matthew himself. A transformation for him.

All the chapters that come before this are history. They give the genealogy of Jesus, various historical stories, about Jesus's birth & early life; his calling of the first disciples – Peter and Andrew, James and John; and then suddenly it becomes the real good news for Matthew. He's at work, sitting at his desk – a tax-man, obviously good with figures, but probably not too popular with the general public.

And then Jesus turns up. He says 'Come & follow me', and Matthew does just that; instantly leaves his job – his security, his old life, and follows Jesus.

When I read this passage from Matthew's gospel, I was reminded of a verse from Isaiah: chapter 43v1, where God speaks to Jacob and says, 'I have called you by name'.

I 'googled' it & found there are 56 bible verses, to many different people, which say, 'I have called you by name'. So I think we need to take on board that God does really know each of us by name!

Since I've been familiar with these words, they've always filled me with a sort of warm glow – it is heart-warming to think that God actually knows you **by name**. But I think today's reading places more meaning on the concept of being **called** by name.

Matthew's response isn't just to luxuriate into the warm glow of knowing he's known by God, but he acts on that knowledge. He met Jesus – or rather, Jesus met him, and Matthew immediately turned to follow Jesus. His life was transformed.

Matthew celebrates his transformation by throwing a party for all his old workmates - his fellow tax-collectors; and his new mates – his fellow disciples – the followers of Jesus. And Jesus is totally at home, enjoying time with this group of 'outsiders' – criminals even – along with his own disciples.

But as they're eating & having a good time, a man called Jairus rushes in, kneels at the feet of Jesus, and asks him to come and bring his little daughter, who's just died, back to life. He has absolute faith that Jesus' touch would restore her to life

We hear other stories then of amazing healing. Three more examples of people being touched by Jesus, and being made whole – restored.

Jairus has absolute trust in Jesus – puts his whole faith in Jesus to bring his daughter back to life; the woman who's been haemorrhaging for 12 years has such faith in Jesus, she knows that by just touching his cloak she will be healed. The blind and the deaf; the man who was mute and had a mental health problem;

All healed by Jesus.

But all this can only happen because Jesus is there, in the midst of everyday life, where there is sickness and poverty, deprivation and homelessness.

Do you remember the refrain in Psalm 33, which we read at the beginning of our service?

'The earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord.'

Jesus is full of compassion – he heals everyone who comes to him, irrespective of their wealth or class – all they need is faith in him.

How is your faith? Have you ever had to put it to the test? Sometimes our lives just go steadily on, and then suddenly we find ourselves in a situation that seems beyond us, like Jairus in our reading; Or maybe our lives are like the group of blind people, or the woman with that continuous bleeding, where life is quite intolerably hard; or perhaps life is just a constant, but maybe comfortable, repetition of tasks that need to be carried out.

Whatever the situation is for each of us, we know that Jesus is full of compassion and will be alongside us. And if we believe and trust in him – if we have faith – then our lives can be transformed.

But where will that transformation take us? Are you brave enough to 'leave yourself behind' if Christ but calls your name – as we sung in our last hymn?

Do you have the faith to follow where Christ leads you?

We know from the way Jesus interacts with all the people in this Gospel reading, that he has deep compassion for each one of them. Can we do the same in our lives - get alongside people in need with real compassion for each person, as we follow his call?

I wonder where Jesus would be on those Bank Holidays, when people flood into Wharfedale? I think he would be there, in and amongst them; chatting as they fire up the barbecues, and then eating with them.

Can we follow Jesus & come alongside the visitors, the 'outsiders'; be at ease with people from a different background to our own, maybe even a different culture?

Sit and eat with some of the visitors who flood into our car parks to enjoy themselves in this beautiful countryside that we sometimes just take for granted, and regard as our own.

Can we get to know them as PEOPLE?

We're all God's children, we're all loved equally.

But if we go back to our psalm and its refrain:

'The earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord.'

We must take on board that God, the Creator, loves and has great compassion for the whole of creation; not just human beings; but all that the Lord has created:

the Earth; all the other planets; stars & galaxies; black holes; and especially for us today, our Churchyard, in this 'Love your burial ground' week. So do spend some time here, in our churchyard, as part of our commitment to being an EcoChurch. Listen to the sounds of God's creation, and maybe you will hear God's voice, calling you – calling you by name – and calling you to follow.

So we pray that as Christ comes alongside **us**, we will be transformed, and be prepared to follow wherever he leads us.

The earth is full of the loving-kindness of the Lord. Amen