

Trinity 2 26 June 2022

Fr David's Sermon

Jesus said 'Follow me'

- Several of us recently took part in an excellent St Giles School Prayer Day. There were 'stations', illustrating different kinds of prayer, around the school building, grounds, churchyard and here in church. One of them involved making plasticine models of people who help us. One child made me – wearing a mitre and carrying a crook! Once I might have said 'a natural mistake' but any such ambitions have long since been gladly laid aside! The caption beside my model read 'Fr David guides us to God'. The same week someone said to me 'You are our link to God'. Easy as it would be to be flattered, I want to suggest that the relationship between God, Priest, and indeed Deacon and people is rather different. I want to speak about this especially in relation to our Curate, Peter, being ordained Deacon on Saturday and starting to minister with us and to us next Sunday.
- All God's people, whether they are ordained or not, are called by God to follow Jesus in the strength of the Spirit. We have some very vivid depictions of God's call and what it might mean in today's Scripture readings.
- Elijah is weary. He has faced drought, confronted the king and priests and prophets of false gods. He has fled to the wilderness and asked to give up and die, only to be confronted anew by God's still, small voice amidst the earthquake, wind and fire. He pours out his complaints to God – his sense of failure, despair and resentment. And to his relief, God allows him to resign, and pass on his work to Elisha. He finds Elijah and passes on his mantle. Seemingly reluctant at first, Elisha then slaughters his cattle, feeds people and becomes Elijah's servant. He has burned his boats! I'm not planning to pass on my mantle to Peter. But I was surprised and am delighted to be entrusted with sharing it with him: helping in his training as he moves from more formal learning to ordination and a curacy. All Christian priests and people in Western Europe must surely sometimes share Elijah's sense of failure, despair and resentment that despite our best efforts, the Church in our part of the world seems to have been in decline for decades.
- In the Gospel Jesus sets his face to go to Jerusalem. It is a turning point, the beginning of a new part of his ministry, the beginning of his journey towards suffering and death. Others recognise this. It is why the Samaritan villagers will not receive him. James and John make totally the wrong, violent reaction. Jesus' way is to be the way of peace. But then some seemingly very harsh responses to people wanting to follow Jesus – 'the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.... let the dead bury their own dead' – hardly the response I or Peter would make to a bereaved family! Another would be follower is told not to look back, even to say farewell to his family. Vivid ways of saying that God's Kingdom comes before everything else. In Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, what is needed is not the zeal that wants to burn the opposition, but the Spirit of Jesus to transform his followers.
- The Spirit that Paul describes in the Galatians reading, with all its lovely fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Again, I say, these are the Spirit's gifts to us all, not just the ordained.
- So, what are our complementary roles as priest, deacon and congregation? The (slightly different) Ordination Service I had all those years ago spoke of the Deacon as serving the poor, needy and sick, strengthening the faithful and seeking the lost, preaching and assisting in worship and pastoral care. It spoke of the Priest as servant and shepherd, proclaiming God's Word, pronouncing God's forgiveness, leader of the Sacraments, (except Confirmation

and Ordination). One who prays with and for her/his people and blesses them in the Lord's name. As one who teaches and encourages by word and example, visits the sick and dying, cares for her/his people in the name and after the example of Christ himself, the Good Shepherd. Some of these tasks are reserved to Priests and Deacons but many are shared with those who are not ordained.

- So yes, Priests and Deacons do try to guide people to God, with God's help, and knowing they too need to be guided. But I am not sure that you need a link to God. God gives us all, clergy and people, that link in Christ himself, continuing through the Holy Spirit within us. And I have discovered in a long ministry that we have just as much to learn from you as you from us. We are in it together! And we need to recognise the challenge and the cost of hearing and answering Jesus' call to us:

'Follow me'

Amen.