

Notices

Thanks to Geo T, Apology, START, Proposal n Social,
Task group to meet January

1. Here's the problem that you just aren't trusting in God's provision that it isn't enough – THS
BAD NEWS FIRST
2. Here's the situation guys, judgement is coming
DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER
3. The good news is you have enough – enough time, enough money, enough gifts to do what God calls you to – NOW FOR THE GOOD NEWS

1. Introduction

Pathway to life

This week's reading follows on from JTB saying make the paths straight for the coming messiah and then God will reveal clearly the way to salvation, making hills and valleys level. Pathways in the bible refer to route through the desert very often and so a wrong turning means either lynching by bandit or running out of water – in other words taking a wrong path illustrated graphically the difference

between life and death. So when God makes level the hills and valleys its saying here's a certain way to salvation

Straight Paths

When he comes it makes sense to people. The straight paths are the clear right thinking. How we live points people like JTB to the one who is to come. Our words actions and deeds make it easier or harder for people to prepare themselves. What should we do? they ask. Why ask. They have glimpsed the coming messiah

There was dishonesty and complaining too – none of which were good fruit, these were the harvest of a corrupt generation or generations.

What then shall we do?

John was the messenger, a signpost to the safe journey through the desert, pointing to the one who was to come ; we are to signpost people to God. Encouragingly far from shooting the messenger, the people came forward for

repentance and in today's passage they ask , what then shall we do?

It's a great question – what then shall we do?

2. Here's the problem God has provide enough resources but we don't use them fairly or justly

Hats and Coats

Think about your hats and coats for a moment – how many do you own?

I've got quite a few more than Kate. In fact a cashmere blend Superdry jumper is proof that materialism really can make you happy!

The annoying thing is there's less and less space in the wardrobe because I don't get rid of old faithful jumpers even though they're probably too scruffy or these days simply too warm to wear anymore.

Talk to your neighbor about the number of shoes and coats you own and how you feel admitting to it? Here's another question – how many of those do you wear or to put it another way, how many would

you miss if you simply gave some away to a homeless charity?

Retail therapy or certainly materialism isn't a new phenomenon and in Jesus day people were identified as not being content with enough, enough wages, enough clothes. They mis-used what could be used to bless others

How does calling people snakes and threatening to throw branches into fires be good news?

The reading is a gospel reading so by definition it is good news,

But one translation even has children of vipers, it's not the best way to make friends and influence people – yet it did have a great influence. People don't always want to be cheered up – entertained. People want justice, demand honesty in public life expect mercy – trouble is that's often not matched but individual behavior.

Axes cutting down trees

Not to individuals primarily, We read it as addressed to us as individuals. Branches and trees often refer to people groups, remember the prophecy about Jesus described as a branches and roots of Jesse line? This is a brood of viper, not just the one snake!

Fires

Question is are we then in the brood of vipers or some other group – I think both. It's not that some are safe from judgement and others are not – we are all to be called to account. But parts of us simply need cutting out, separating, dealing with, burning up. Refining as in the imagery of refiner's fire God burns off those aspects of our corrupt selves in order to leave that which He intended to become.

Instead of allowing God's transformative power to bring good fruits, the crowds were relying on their birthright instead of living right. Born of the ancestry of Abraham they thought it was a meal ticket to heaven. What is it we rely on?

Where have we become too comfortable?

Reliance on a comfortable heritage and Christian by birthright or CofE as nation's religion,

Reliance on certificates and licensing

Baptism, confirmation, LLM, Eucharistic Minister, readers

Reliance on years of faithful service

Forty years as churchwarden, twenty years as secretary, always went to Sunday School

Reliance on being a nice person

Or at least not as bad as so-and-so down the road.

I strongly suspect that the making of the church in this country is that we no longer have the comfort of the past to rely on and keep things ticking over. Doing things the way they've always been done won't reach this generation who have little or no understanding of Christianity and aren't ever taught the bible at home or in school. Rapidly Christianity is being squeezed out of public life. When did you last here it said – we won't do that because it might offend the Christians? Major faith groups want

religion kept in the public arena, they welcome the House of Lords represented the need for faith to impact policy.

Re-evaluating is happening already everywhere - churches are being forced into mission and reaching out to others in new innovative ways because the old models aren't working. People can't see salvation clearly anymore because we are no longer sure how to make their paths straight that they can see the relevance of Jesus to their lives.

The real challenge from JTB

Is that it's quite achievable. How much easier if we were asked to do something beyond our ability, out of reach, not within our means. If we hear a parable about rich people we can rest easy that we're not wealthy so it doesn't apply. Well wealth is relative and on a world scale we're all in the top few percent. SO JTB gives all of us a challenge to do something within our means something we can achieve today in our circumstances.

Here's the bad news

He is calling all of us to turn around, repent, live within our means, be generous, be content. These are not impossible tasks but changing our ordinary lives just a little will have a big impact. If we were called to be superheroes that would make us out of the reach of ordinary people amongst whom we live and work and have our being.

Bloom where you're planted

Do the small things

Story of the boy and the starfish

Ordinary people living honestly, contentedly

Time sheet filling it out honestly

The people were expectant – what do you hope for this Christmas and for 2016? What Hope is there for

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Syrian man, perhaps that his life might represent the need for reconciliation for peace that as a world we can't carry on with madness.

What's your hope this Christmas

What will people glimpse? Sir, we would see Jesus.

At the Christmas fayre people said

It's about family. Yes but the whole family of planet earth. Stones into children of Abraham.

Mission to The Chessels

Recently several people have expressed their hope to see more mission to the Chessels.

Here's a question - Where do you shop, watch a film, go out for a meal, where do you work, play football, make felt, walk the dog – these are your frontiers, that is your mission field.

Door knocking is dead and buried, people are too skeptical and anxious of strangers calling uninvited. Marketing experience shows that 1 in 1000 leaflets has any chance of success – what do you do with a leaflet that comes through your door?

Throughout its history this building has witnessed seismic shifts in the surrounding culture. IN 1906 In the Chessels men would meet in the pub and at

work, women would I'm guessing chat over the garden fence and then in time both on the assembly lines of the Wills factory. Since then it has witnessed women going out to work full time, technological revolutions, motorcars taking people ever further away from shops and families, television providing cheap entertainment home, the relaxing of trading laws and the relentless increase in alternative activities to occupy people on a Sunday other than coming to church.

If we're serious about Mission in our culture we have to begin with where are physically but also mentally and spiritually; how do people meet – social media, kids playing with parents in the park, skittles clubs – but also try to work out what is in their minds about religion. We must begin with a safe space and a safe topic that unites people. I believe one unifying feature is around the fruits mentioned in the passage – honesty, contentment, justice – people don't need teaching that these are a good idea even if they don't practice them – and what about the issue of loneliness.

But – I gather, church buildings are intimidating, churchgoers are seen as judgemental and Christianity is an irrelevant brood of Vipers? Isn't it?

I believe we have to start with the need people perceive and feel even if they don't express it – the deepest need of all is feeling accepted loved and somewhere to belong.

Traditionally church has adopted albeit in no planned strategic way, that first a person must behave, then if show they believe and only then can they belong. I believe that belonging has worked for some here at St Aldhelms – the question is this, if someone is perhaps new to the area and skeptical about religion and lonely, how do we go out to be with them in their situation? Let's keep the conversation moving around how we do mission for this generation

Do we have enough resources

Yes. How we use them is vital as in the parable of the talents. Does the church have enough yes

Just enough that's the good news for the real work of the kingdom His work

It's not that we need more time, more energy, more clothes, more resources – God gives us what we need as and when we're ready to use it. We already have enough

Not supplying what we need to do his work, that would make

God like pharaoh forcing slaves to make more bricks than ever with less and less straw.

God provides what we need to do His work – the question is work out is what does the real work of the kingdom look like and what resources does it require – We already have enough for that.

If we do the small things, it will have a big impact.

[End with last weeks prayer of repentance](#)

We must resist the idea that as a church we are somehow in competition with retail, sport, eating out... we are not a leisure activity, our calling is to make truth known about who God is and what we

learn about him in the person and life of Jesus. People tend not to separate the message from the messenger and our level of honesty, justice and contentedness will speak into people's lives

What excites you about your faith? What is it you want people to know? How does Jesus help you through the valley of the shadow of death? How does the presence of the Holy Spirit strengthen you in your inner being and make you gasp sometimes when you catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God, when you touch the hem of the rabbi as he passes by moments in your life? When did you last meet with him I mean really meet with him in a way that fires your hope, lifts your spirits?

If that's you today and you have never or haven't for a long time asked Jesus to come once more into your life and reassure you that you are forgiven and loved, now is a chance to repent to turn away and invite Him once more to be Lord of your life, be the straight path to salvation, that is available to all flesh, to everyone and that we need not live lives of

fear and loneliness and guilt and worry, but free and confident and hopeful.

You might want to share in a simple prayer of confession and rededication...

Dear heavenly Father, I am sorry for going my own way, living as though you weren't there or that you didn't matter. Forgive me , I turn away from sin and repent, asking your forgiveness and preparing my heart to be ready to receive you afresh. May the flames of faith be so fanned within me that that rest of my life signposts people to your kingdom. I want to be a messenger of hope to this generation. Amen.

What are you hoping and praying for this Christmas – my prayer is that we look at the resources God has already given us and work out how they can be used for the core purpose of church – the transformation of self and society into the likeness of Christ