

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE  
WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

*Reader Jane Quarmby*

A few years ago our eldest grandson and his friend came to us for a holiday. They were 15 and feeling very intrepid, flying out to France from England without an adult present and both we and they enjoyed their two weeks with us. Our grandson was going through what they now call “personal grooming” as a phase which meant hours in the bathroom doing his hair and whatever else young lads do in there. I was reminded of him when I read this chapter in Luke which whilst in my Bible is called “The Saviour on the way to Jerusalem”, could equally well be called “But first”. The reason I’m so strongly reminded of him is that halfway through the holiday they were both keen to go fishing, so Grandad agreed to take them the next day. The three of them spent a happy afternoon sorting out the rods and nets and whatnots, and in the evening Granddad explained that they’d have to leave the house by seven in the morning to get the best spot at the lake and before it got too hot.

The next morning came, and Granddad and friend were all ready to go at 7 am. No sign of grandson who apparently was in the bathroom doing his hair. Quite why he needed to do this just to go fishing is a mystery to me but obviously most important to a teenager. Time ticked on and Granddad, punctual as ever, went fishing with friend. An hour later, grandson appeared, beautifully coiffed and smelling, as my grandfather used to say “like Fifi’s poodle parlour” and was astonished that no-one had waited for him.

He learnt a valuable lesson that day – especially when I escorted him on foot to the fishing lake rather than driving him there.

It echoes, in a very minor way, the lesson Jesus is teaching his followers and would be followers in our passage from Luke today. One man agrees to follow him but first, wants to return home and bury his father. Another agrees to follow him but

first, wants to say goodbye to his family. You'd think that was reasonable, wouldn't you? Respect for one's parents was most important in Jesus's time in Israel, a holy and respectful duty was to bury one's parents decently and with honour. If I was going I knew not where, I would want to tidy up at home, I'd want to say goodbye to my family and friends so they'd understand that although I loved them, I needed to follow Jesus.

But both would be followers earn themselves a fairly stinging rebuke from Jesus. The dead must bury the dead – how does that work then? Jesus meant the spiritually dead should bury the physically dead. He is asking of his followers such a level of commitment that it takes precedent over all other relationships. The cost of true discipleship is high. Earlier he says to a follower that the Son of Man has nowhere even to sleep. Any disciple of his must be ready and willing to go anywhere at a moment's notice, give up their family and their home, security, friends and all that they love, to put Christ and his work, first and foremost. No “but first I just need to do this, that or the other”, it's drop everything and come now, not when you're ready. This isn't a human timescale, it's God's. The illustration of the ploughman would have helped throw light on this apparent unreasonableness of Jesus, this unsympathetic stance.

Hand ploughing with oxen takes both hands and strength– one to guide the plough itself and the other to guide the oxen. And you need to look straight ahead – if you turn your head to look behind you then your lovely straight line that you're making will get a wobble in it and a kink. If you take one hand off then you and your plough will go astray, and it won't be easy to turn a team of oxen back round, much less a heavy hand plough. Jesus is saying that if you follow him then you must keep your eyes on him and what he wants you to do, no hesitation or backward glances at your old life. A new life in Christ means just that, entirely new, not a hotchpotch of the old and familiar and the new, no taking out the good bits that you like of each one. You need to be very focused and your absolute priority is looking ahead, on to being a disciple, doing God's work, telling people about Jesus.

Jesus is preparing his followers for what's to come, on this meandering path to Jerusalem, for him and for them. Opposition from the religious leaders is mounting up, he and his disciples aren't universally welcomed wherever they go – and certainly not in the Samaritan village where he had intended to stop for a while.

Historically, the Samaritans and the Jews hated one another, were racially prejudiced against one another and fighting was common between the two groups. James and John reflected this, wanted to bring down flame from heaven to burn the village and the villagers who didn't want them, just as Elijah had done in the past. But Jesus isn't Elijah, he doesn't need to bring fire and destruction to prove God's power, his message is about love, not hatred and destruction. So the two angry men, keen to demonstrate power and inflict pain and suffering on a traditional enemy, are rebuked. Their all too human reaction of wanting to fight back is the wrong one.

It's an uphill battle for Jesus, getting through to his disciples what he is about, and what he isn't about. Whilst his message and commandments are about love and forgiveness, this isn't some idealist without any knowledge of the world. He knows exactly how hard it will be for people to put down their old lives and pick up new ones in his service. His standards are extremely high and he isn't demanding part of them, he's demanding all of them, heart, body and soul.

He still does today. How many people are prepared to drop everything to do God's work without a backward glance, without doing all the jobs that need doing first? To travel wherever He sends us? Or are we also "but first" people, who would like to follow Christ, to do his work, but on our terms, once we've done all the other things that we find important?

How does that make Christ see us? How does it make us feel when we want someone's attention but they are busy and we have to wait? I remember the reaction of a younger grandson who was the apple of his parents' eye, encountering perhaps for the first time, someone telling him he would have to wait to be played with until Grandad has finished reading the paper. Disbelief, puzzlement, shock, disappointment crossed a four year old's face in quick succession. Eventually of course he did get his game and shrieked with glee.

But as we get older, we all experience the sensation of wanting someone's attention but they are too busy for us at the time. In Joyce Mayer's little book of meditations, cheerily entitled "Good morning, this is God," is this:- "A friend of mine had a vision once while she was praying. She saw the Father go into the homes of the people of America, all ready to fellowship and talk to them. He got Himself a chair at the table and sat down. The people got up, and they came and

they went: they came and they went. They kept telling God “Later: stay right there just for a little while, God. As soon as I get this done, I’m going to talk to You.” The end of the day came, and the girl who saw this said it broke her heart, because she saw God, with slumped over shoulders, leave the home. And nobody had ever come to talk to him that day. Don’t get too busy. If you don’t have time to pray and spend time with God, then you are too busy. Take the time to tell God how much you love Him. God is never too busy for you.....”

So let’s not be too busy for God. Put him first and he’ll sort the rest of your life out for you. And you’ll be a true disciple of Christ, not just a “but first” one.

Amen.