

Homily for Trinity 4 and Baptism

Readings: Jeremiah 28.5-9, Romans 6.12-23, Matthew 10.40-42

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On the Sunday programme last week we heard a small snippet of a young child learning the words of the blessing, repeating what that they had heard said to them, and it sounded like this 'in the name of the farmer, under the sun, and the whole experience'. I have shared this several times since, because although it takes a while to repeat speech accurately, –the child had captured accidentally another aspect of truth and blessing altogether, particularly by describing the Holy Spirit as the whole experience.

Today we welcome for baptism Noah James Jones, and Halle Esme Jones, and their brother Jacob and parents Marc and Brenda, their godparents Jeffrey, Chris and Stephanie and their family and friends. They will be baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, rather than the farmer, under the sun and the whole experience, but we will certainly pray for them to have the blessings of the whole experience, of freedom from sin and welcome into the new life of Christ, of nurture in the faith that we share with them, of light and growth, into that new life, that life of the grace of God in Jesus Christ - in fact the whole experience of the Christian journey, which is not quite what we have in our readings today, instead we have three small snippets from much larger stories which just hint at the whole experience and need some explanation.

We return again to Jeremiah the prophet, who had from God such a difficult message to deliver. The message was one of really bad news for the nation, no one wanted to hear it, but Jeremiah was unable to say anything else. The message is not given in our reading, but basically he was saying to the King and to the people 'don't rebel against God or the Babylonians but submit like an ox to the yoke and to the plough'. God even tells him to make a yoke and to wear it himself to ram home the message, but no one listened.

Instead false prophets came, brought 'good news' like the prophet Hananiah who gave Jeremiah a different message which we also don't hear today. Basically he promised that the king and the exiles in Babylon would be back home in two years which, was what everyone wanted to hear.

Now our reading today is Jeremiah's response to this "good news" brought by Hananiah. At first he says, "May it be so! I hope the sacred vessels the Babylonians have stolen from the Temple will be returned, and that the exiles will come home." But then, he speaks to Hananiah of "the prophets who preceded you and me..." and he observes that those real prophets typically prophesied doom—war, famine, destruction—seeking to bring about repentance and deliverance.

So as for Hananiah's prophecy of restoration and peace, Jeremiah in effect says: "I'll believe it when I see it!"

I might also add to Hananiah myself 'had you thought it might just be wishful thinking, you want peace and restoration, we want peace and restoration so much, you are telling me what you know we all want to hear, because no one wants to hear the difficult message?'

We hear no more from Jeremiah today, we just have that little snippet, which is basically a warning against false prophets and wishful thinking, Their words are smooth, sweet, comforting. "But my word" is like fire, like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces!" says Jeremiah in 23:29.

A reminder then not only that God, who always loves us just as we are, and despite loving us so unconditionally, may not always tell us just what we want to hear, but tell us a difficult truth instead, but also it's a reminder that very often, if something sounds too good to be true, double check the message, because it might be.

Paul on the other hand is writing to the Romans and sharing with them the very complicated, but definitely good news about law, freedom and grace. He says 'The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus '.

Traditionally, the Jews are concerned to keep God's laws as written in the Hebrew scriptures, as the only way to avoid sin, or to serve God and achieve salvation. We pick up Paul's argument, half way through a larger case that he is making about how the gospel, the good news of the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ transforms believers from the old humanity into a new humanity in Christ. His whole argument is too complex to deal with all at once so we have it in sections in the letter to the Romans.

Serving God is defined for us as following the example of Jesus, living a life of love and service for God and for our neighbours rather than

keeping a rigid set of rules or laws.

Because Christ died for us and rose again, and because we have been baptised into Christ's death and resurrection, we have been united to Christ in our baptism. We now have a choice to recognize that gift of eternal life because we've been set into a glorious new reality, 'not under law, but under grace'.

By our baptism we are "set apart" for God's use, rather than for sin, and it's not just a 'one off event' either. Beginning with our baptism we are called to grow increasingly into the likeness of Christ over our lifetime.

We are called daily to learn, and to keep on learning to choose a dynamic and ever growing relationship with God and our neighbours, rather than self-centred indulgence and gratification, and all the other distractions our society offers us, because it is not about 'me' any longer, living set apart for God is instead about 'us' doing it together.

For those who are baptised and choosing to follow in the way of Christ, learning to live and love together, building inclusive and reconciling communities becomes our lifelong Christian vocation. It sounds really daunting and difficult and it can be, but it is also something we grow into and get better at, that's why we are called practicing Christians as we are always still learning. We are always still growing into our identity as children of God, we will not achieve the whole experience in this life, we will finish learning and growing only in God's presence in God's kingdom.

We can see this working out in our final snippet from Matthew's .

Being sent by God himself, Jesus in turn sends his disciples to participate in his mission of proclaiming in word and deed the good news of God's kingdom drawing near.

This, by extension includes all of us who have heard and believed the good news and have been baptised. So we, like those first disciples are also called to be part of a sent community.

What might happen if all of us who are baptized and are sent actually go into the world to tell others and to show in our lives the good news of Jesus Christ?

All of us are called and sent to bring Christ to others, with humility and vulnerability, willing to risk rejection.

So no wonder we need to practice.

But think what might happen if we stopped expecting people just to come on their own to our church, and instead took seriously that calling to bring the gospel to them and invited them personally?

What might change if we became a truly inclusive Church inviting the excluded and marginalised to our celebrations, looking for ways to practically help those in need.

What might happen if we act on the belief that we do indeed carry the presence of Christ with us to every person we meet and in every conversation? Might we treat people differently and speak the good news of God more often? It's always worth taking the risk.

Because.....

Jesus told his disciples 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me'. Amen