

Hymns: 334 Praise to the Holiest in the height
673 Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
497 God in my living, there in my breathing
545 Be thou my vision
503 Love divine, all loves excelling

Readings: Jeremiah 11:18-20
Psalm 139
Mark 9:30-37

'Here's looking at you kid'

I always feel writing a sermon is very much like drawing a picture, you start with the bare bones and then you get absorbed and the picture becomes something completely different, well this morning is an example of that....I submitted my sermon title a week or so ago and when I got down to write it yesterday the sermon went off on a completely different tangent, so the new title is....Here's looking at you kid!

I'm sure many of you here today have been astonished by your children or your grandchildren or your nieces or nephews. Kids can knock you for six, take your breath away. Whether it's doing an awesome skateboard trick or a death defying dive from a rock. Or whether it's saying something that's deeply profound and full of wisdom that you can't believe came out of a little one's mouth.

I'm what you call a crazy Auntie....I love doing madcap things with my three nephews. I've taught my nephews many things, but they've taught me things too.

But I want to tell you something my eldest nephew did nearly twenty years ago that really changed my life for the better when he was six.

A long time ago I was a heavy smoker and my nephews didn't like me smoking, I never smoked around them but they hated the smell of it on my clothes. One afternoon when I was looking after them, I picked Jack up the eldest from school. I asked him what he had been doing that day, expecting the normal stuff, but he surprised me...he said "we were looking at how bad smoking is, it makes your lungs all black and then you die, I don't want you to die Katherine"

Eighteen years on I haven't touched a cigarette since that day.

Children can tell us truths, they can tell us things we've forgotten or afraid to say. Never underestimate a child. I was watching a TED talk on facebook, I'm not sure if any of you are familiar with TED talks, they're influential videos made for the web by expert speakers on education, science, psychology and business (They wear those annoying little mics around their heads, I'm sure they're very useful)

This one was an educational expert talking about creativity, and how we can learn a lot from children regarding creativity.

He gave an illustration of a little girl who was in a drawing lesson at school. She was six, and she was at the back, drawing, and the teacher said this girl hardly ever paid attention, and in this drawing lesson, she did. The teacher was fascinated. She went over to her, and she said, "What are you drawing?" And the girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God looks like." And the girl said "They will, in a minute."

It's experiences like this that puts us on the same page as this morning's gospel passage where Jesus tells his friends to stop squabbling and take a good hard look at the child he stands before them. He says "You have lots to learn from this child"

Here we have Jesus the teacher, trying to hammer home his understanding of how we live our lives, all centering on service, putting the needs of others before our own, even if it involves sacrifice, suffering, even death.

YET AGAIN the disciples don't get it, they're on a completely different tack. You can imagine it, back-

biting, jealousy, envy, thinking you're better, than the others. They were absorbed in their own ambition, their ambition to succeed ,to be in control, to have POWER.

They saw Jesus the Messiah in worldly terms, like a Caesar with an Empire, and hierarchy of men in positions of influence. Power is always dangerous. Power attracts the worst and corrupts the best. I always think of that famous Lord Acton's remark. He said: Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.

We have seen so much evidence lately in our world today of the dangers of power and how it can be flaunted and manipulated. But it still seduces so many of us in so many ways. The disciples weren't any different. They wanted to be part of the kitchen cabinet of their powerful Messiah Jesus, they believed they had what it takes to be his right hand man. Jesus argued that the way to be successful or get ahead in the spiritual world, his world is to become like a child. In Jesus' time, children and women were seen as little more than property. Little children were considered useless until they were old enough to help with housework. In other words, they were humble and lowly. The child in this passage represents all of God's people. The greatest people in God's Kingdom

are not the rich and the powerful, but the poor and the helpless; not the ones with the most servants, but those who serve others the most. Jesus is advocating one thing while his disciples are heading off in an entirely different direction. So this passage shows us that we have

TWO UNDERSTANDINGS OF LEADERSHIP,
TWO UNDERSTANDINGS OF LIFESTYLES ,
TWO SETS OF PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY.
POLAR OPPOSITES ...CHALK AND CHEESE.

It can be difficult for us to let go of our desire to succeed in earthly ways. It is part of our human nature for us to be in control. We want to be independent. We want to be in control of our lives and our goals, and this includes the desire to succeed. We need to let go and let Christ's love control our destiny and successes if we want to be first in his eyes. We need to let go of our desire to get ahead and replace it with a desire to serve others, especially the less fortunate.

A good example of this is the story of an incredible 93 year old man. I've seen his picture many times now, holding the hand of his wife with a tool belt around waist, hammers, screwdrivers and nails...fulfilling his 30 year passion for building houses for the poor.

He, his wife Rosalynn and many volunteers have built more than 4,000 homes with his project 'Habitat for Humanity'. He says "It's a practical way to put my religious beliefs into practice over the years. We talk about poor people in need and this is the best way I know to close that gap between rich people and the people who've never had a decent place to live."

This is the Nobel peace prize winner and 39th President of the US Jimmy Carter.

I was 13 when Jimmy Carter became the US president in 1977, I remember it was a Presidency fraught with challenges, high inflation and unemployment, he was sadly defeated by Ronald Reagan in 1980.

From having the power of a President, often referred to as "the most powerful man in the world," to being voted out of office is where he becomes even more interesting...he could've retired, he could've sulked in a corner. He did neither. He put himself at the disposal of suffering humanity.....setting himself the simple idea to build houses for the poor, and with his diplomatic gifts searching for peace in our troubled world in which he got the Nobel Peace prize. NOR should we forget he continued teaching his Sunday School class in his local Baptist church, an activity that goes on to this day.

As President of the USA he had temporal power, when he ceased to be President he seemed to be even more blessed.

He became humble and lowly just like the child in Jesus' lesson to the disciples. Like a child he understood what people's needs were, and he has tried to address them all his life. That's true greatness, true humilityDo not under-estimate a child, or lose sight of the child within us...our inner child. A child's way of looking at the world is free from the armour of experience that we surround ourselves in. It's not constrained or tainted. Children are not afraid of making mistakes, of being wrong....they have a go, they take a chance, that's why they are so creative...by the time we get to adults we lose that capacity. We are frightened of being wrong, frightened of failure and shame. It's that humble vulnerability and dependency on others that we should learn from a child.

Being a child again in the eyes of God, getting in touch with that untainted, innocence and innate wisdom we have inside all of us, and that courage to move beyond what we know, to what we want to learn to know.

Let me draw all this to a conclusion by telling you about my Auntie Betty who died exactly a week ago, who's funeral is next week and I'm going to take it. Her daughter and I were surprised that she had detailed

her funeral to even the menu of the wake. A teacher to the end! But what I noted and it's bang in line to this morning's scripture is the reading she has chosen . It's Paul's discussion on love in 1 Corinthians 13...FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE...the greatest is love (our last hymn will echo that for us later) the verses 11-13, are the verses she want emphasised...and baring in mind our lectionary it seems so apt... 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known”

That's what we need to rediscover in ourselves, and that's exactly what Auntie Betty discovered in herself. She had an amazing life, travelled all over the world, had riches and lost riches, had love and was badly betrayed in love which caused her pain and bitterness the rest of her life, as a Christian she struggled with her anger and resentment for her ex husband. But in her later years she tirelessly worked in service to others. The last time she spoke, before she slipped into unconsciousness she held my hand tightly and said “LOVE IS WHAT REALLY MATTERS”

She was no longer looking through a glass darkly, she had seen her Lord FACE TO FACE. She had re-discovered the child within her.

SO THERE YOU ARE.

It's when we re-discover the child within us, that we become brave enough, fearless enough, creative enough to spurn the road of greatness and power, and to choose the road of service and sacrifice.

Like a child we maybe wrong...who knows? But it's worth a try

Amen

So we turn to our hymn books to 545. Be thou my Vision,

One verse of that hymn always hits home to me, and this morning it seems so much more relevant.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,

Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:

Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,

High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.