

## **Sermon for Sunday 6 November 2022 – The Third Sunday before Advent**

**Revd Graham Naylor, Curate**

***Job 19.23–27a; 2 Thessalonians 2.1–5, 13–17; Luke 20.27–38***

Come by your Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to your word and your word to our hearts and minds, we pray in Jesus name. Amen. Please do be seated.

I've not even started and you're applauding. This is good. Congregations don't normally do that.

If you had been in church the last few weeks (and that's not a criticism) - we mentioned Rowan Atkinson earlier. Rowan Atkinson did a great sketch on 'Not the nine o'clock news'. I apologise for those of you who are more mature, who think 'Not the nine o'clock news' was irreverent. It was, and it was brilliant. But Rowan Atkinson very often takes the part of a vicar. He does it very well. You'll notice he never lampoons faith, just religiosity, and he welcomes people to a 'Songs of Praise' service, and the church is full, and he berates them and says, 'where were you last week at our harvest festival when the congregation consisted of myself, Mr. So and So, a tin of spaghetti', and comments that the hat shop had done well, as everybody wanted to guess in his wonderful words, their 'fizzgog' on the goggle box.

I digress, and we haven't got time for me to do that. But if you've been here, we've been going through a series of readings from Luke's Gospel, where Jesus has, in the early part of Luke's Gospel, he's been up in Galilee, the northern territory, and he has been teaching and healing and feeding the five thousand, and all this sort of stuff. And he's gathered a following - he's chosen his twelve disciples, twelve apostles, and he has got this following. And if we'd have looked at these, we had some teaching on prejudice. He's walking and talking and preaching and walking and talking, and this is the way rabbis talk. When Jesus said to the disciples, 'Follow me', he meant it literally. Some of the rabbis even altered their sandals so that as the dust kicked up, it sprayed their disciples. And it was a mark of a disciple, the closer you were to your rabbi, the more dust you got on you.

Fancy doing that? You can follow me around the church. I'll kick up some dust if the cleaner's not cleaned it up. And no, maybe not. But you'd have heard him talking about prayer. And then they've arrived in Jericho. I really would recommend going home, getting your Bibles out. They're a bit dusty because you don't read them at home; blow them off and read chapter 18, 19 and 20. We're arriving in chapter 20 and you just get this progression. Jesus sets his face to Jerusalem and he comes outside of Jericho and he heals a blind man. We know from Mark's gospel that it's Bartimaeus, son of Temeus.

And then some of you may know this story from your Sunday school days, Zacheus up in the fig tree. You go, 'Reverend Graham, wasn't it a sycamore tree?' Well, not sycamore as we know it. It wasn't an acer with little helicopters that come down. It was a ficus sycomorus, a fig tree of the sycamore type.

And then there are questions about the resurrection. But in between we'd have heard things like Jesus saying, 'let the little children come to me, don't stop them coming'. We've got that on the stained last window in the side chapel. And Jesus talks about his death and his resurrection - he's preparing the disciples for his death and his resurrection.

Then we have the triumphal entry on what we know as Palm Sunday, but actually in Luke there's no mention of palms, there's only cloaks. So it's no-Palm Sunday or Cloak Sunday in Luke. Jesus comes, he weeps over Jerusalem, he cleanses the temple, and then his authority is questioned. At the beginning of Chapter 20, the Pharisees come to Jesus and say, by whose authority are you doing this? Whose authority are you teaching? Whose authority are you cleansing the temple, and whose authority are you healing? And he asks them whose authority they're using. They refuse to tell him. So he refuses to tell them his authority.

And then they set out to track him and to kill him. They asked him a question about paying taxes to Caesar or God. He gets a coin, he looks at it and says, who's on this coin? He says 'What's the emperor's, Caesar's, give to Caesar what's Caesar's; give to gods? What's Gods? And at that point, they are worried and they stop asking questions. And then we get to where we are today. There's your background, there's your context. So he's in Jerusalem, around the temple area. He's overturned - he's creating chaos; you think this crazy curate can create chaos? I think Jesus had it tenfold! And Sadducees come to him. Now, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. You can always remember the difference between a Pharisee and a Sadducee - you see, a Pharisee believed in the resurrection. A Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, and that was why they were 'Sad, you see'. Oh, come on.

And they come. And if you've got your Pewsheets, you may want to look at the reading from Luke's Gospel, the third reading that we heard. Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question. Now, this was quite normal. This is the way Jewish religion worked. It was asking questions and how you gave an answer determined how well you knew your faith. Shall we try that sometime? I'll ask you some questions. Actually, somebody suggested the other day, they'd like to do - I do 'Grill a Vicar' nights, or I used to; 'Grill a Vicar'; and just put clergy on the spot with questions. And somebody said, oh, we don't know you very well. I've been here for four years, you don't know me very well! Could they do a grilling? So maybe we'll do that.

But this was the question. This is not a nice enquiry. These Sadducees are trying to trip Jesus up; and they take a story, they modify it a little bit, but they take a story from the Jewish scriptures, in the Book of Tobit. It is modified, it's in the Book of Tobit. And they ask this question about marriage after the resurrection. The Jewish, under the Levitical Law, if a person died, a man died without having produced an heir, it was an incumbent on his brother or nearest relative - it might be a brother, it might be a cousin - male, to marry the widow for them to then have an heir.

It's the way we continue our family line. Because we die, we have to procreate in order to continue the family line. Bear that thought in mind as we come to talk about resurrection. This poor woman has it

happen seven times over, and then she dies. And more to the point, the question they're asking is about the male line, because now she's died without producing an heir for her original husband.

And they ask this question, 'whose wife will the woman be?' So if you were asking that question or asked that question, what would you answer? Who do you think it might be? Pick and mix. Brilliant. You might pick the one that you had the best fun with. Who else might you pick? The last one, or maybe the first one, or the one with the most money!

And Jesus replies something very strange, that in the age to come, there won't be marriage. Now, I have to tread very, very carefully here, pastorally, because very often we hear folks say at funerals or when they've been bereaved, one day we will be back together. That goes for marriage and all relationships. And this story, what Jesus is saying here, is that that may not be the case. And that may sound terrible because we are looking forward to being with our loved ones again.

Brothers and sisters, can I say that whatever is the other side of the resurrection is going to be way better. I'm sure we will recognise loved ones, I'm sure there will be relationships - what they will look like, that's above my pay grade. But there is this hope that the resurrection to eternal life will be much better than what we have here on earth.

And then the Sadducee's comment at the end. 'Teacher, you have spoken well.' He gave a good answer, and they didn't dare ask him another question. Didn't dare ask him another question.

Paul, writing to the Church of Thessalonica, also refers to the resurrection. This is the second reading that we had. So he's writing to Thessalonica a few years after Jesus's death and resurrection to the young Church as to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as to the resurrection of the dead, when Jesus will come again. And they're worried that it's delayed and he's telling them to have patience and the things that have to happen before that happens.

And he concludes with this - 'Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us, and through grace, not because of anything we've done, but through his mercy and grace, gave us eternal comfort and good hope. Comfort your hearts and strengthen in every good work.' Paul is saying, because of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will die, we will be raised again, and we have hope for eternal life.

And that's what we're doing today. And that's what we're going to celebrate, that as we come and Emmiline is baptised, she makes that transition from death to life in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection and ascension. Brothers and sisters, you've heard me say it before; some of you are visiting, you may not have heard me say it before. The Christian life is not about doing good so we can become acceptable to God, the Christian life is we come in our sinfulness, to be raised a new life in Christ in order to do good works. As Paul said, 'May the God our Father comfort your hearts and strengthen you in every good work.' May it be so. And I've spoken enough, haven't I? Yes.