

Farewell Sermon at Truro Cathedral – Trinity 16 Year B Sunday 16th September 2018 – 10am Sung Eucharist

Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 116.1-8; James 3.1-12; Mark 8.27-end

Speak, Lord, and help us to listen ... in the name of Christ, Amen.

In our house over on the new Nansledan estate on the outskirts of Newquay, Tess and I use our small spare bedroom as a place to pray.

We have some icons in there and some candles. In the midst of all the busyness of our different ministries, we're trying to establish a rhythm of singing some of the monastic offices together. But whether we get a chance to do that or not, before I leave for work each day I like to try and have at least a few minutes in what we think of as the 'prayer room' on my own.

Building work hasn't yet begun across the road from us and I love to sit looking out of the window across the fields. My gaze is always drawn to the wind turbine, probably about a mile or so away on the hill. I know some people hate them, but I love the way the wind turbines have become a part of the Cornish landscape. For me, they are a reminder of Jesus' words in John Chapter 3 about the wind blowing 'where it chooses' and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

Perhaps that is never more apparent than at those times of change and transition, however welcome or unwelcome, inevitable or unexpected they may be.

In a blog that I've written for the Cathedral website this week, I quote that famous soundbite from Ecclesiastes,

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven".

Change can be hard. But it's a part of the natural rhythm of life, not least for curates.

I rather croakily sang my last Evensong with the boy choristers last week and was very touched when one of our new head choristers said to me after the service, "You will come back and preach for us won't you?" "If I'm invited", I said 😊

For me it's a particular joy to be sharing my final eucharist as Cathedral curate with the girl choristers. I began my journey here at the same time that the girls' choir was launched and it's been amazing to see how the girls have blossomed and are flourishing in their gifts and skills, both as individuals and as an ensemble, ably aided and abetted by our magnificent back row of course.

But a Cathedral choir is never a static group. Though there's always some continuity, many of the choristers, choral scholars, members of the back row and organists that I have known during my time here have already moved on and others have now arrived.

Change is not just a natural rhythm for choirs and curates of course, but for Cathedral chapters and congregations too.

We share a part of the journey together. We overlap for a while, like runners handing over the baton in a relay race and then we fall back, whilst others continue. People come and go. Generation succeeds generation.

Our gospel reading today comes roughly at the half-way point in Mark's account of Jesus' earthly journey. Jesus knows that he must go where the wind of the Spirit is taking him and he is preparing his disciples for that time when the part of the journey he has shared with them will come to an end and he will pass the baton – or as he puts it, the carrying of the cross – on to them.

Peter has just had that divinely inspired moment of clarity about Jesus' true identity as *Messiah*. But he can't bear to listen to Jesus' words about the next stage of the journey bringing a dramatic parting of the ways that will involve suffering and death. Peter tries to remonstrate with Jesus, only to find himself on the end of Jesus' rebuke. And then Jesus turns not only to his disciples, but to the crowd and begins to talk to them all about what it means to follow him, to journey with him.

I wonder how Jesus' challenge to his live audience of 1st Century listeners strikes your 21st Century ears this morning?

Eugene Peterson's modern, idiomatic translation of the original Bible languages, the *Message*, often helps give me a fresh perspective. This is how he translates verse 34:

Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how.

Whatever translation we use, there's certainly no getting around the fact that these words of Jesus are not designed to make us feel comfortable. And the key phrase remains the same, *Follow me*.

Follow me.

Just as Jesus and his disciples did, we've shared a journey, you and I, over these past three and a bit years. We've tried to learn more of what it means to follow Jesus together. We've worshipped together. We've prayed together and for each other. We've worked and ministered together. Sometimes we've laughed together. Sometimes we've cried together.

As true companions do, we've shared in solemn feasting at the Lord's table in the Eucharist – that memorial of the Last Supper that Jesus would soon share with his disciples.

And perhaps no less sacred in a Barbara Brown Taylor *altar in the world* kind of way, we've shared food and drink together in less solemn circumstances too – in the Cathedral restaurant or at various cafés and pubs in Truro. (Though three years on, I'm **still** waiting for that crème de menthe you promised me, Roger!)

Just as Jesus and his disciples did, we've definitely shared a lot. Some wonderful moments and some challenging ones. Like Simon Peter in today's reading, we've had times of getting it gloriously right and times of getting it well and truly wrong – at least, I know I have – and I ask your forgiveness for those times ...

Nothing can ever be completely perfect this side of heaven of course – just look at the early Church!

And overall, as I reflect back on my time here, I can honestly say that the warmth of welcome, sustained love, support and encouragement of this Cathedral community – this family – the Body of Christ in this place – of my dear colleagues and of so many of you individually – has made my curacy a life-giving and enriching experience that has helped to shape me and my ministry and that will stay with me for the rest of my days.

Roger always told me that I would be 'trained by team' 😊 That has definitely been the case and I'm hugely grateful to **all** my clergy colleagues for their time and patient care and nurture. But as I think I've said before, if the old African proverb about it taking a village to raise a child is true, then I think it's equally true that it's taken an entire Cathedral community to train an 'umble curate' 😊.

So I am deeply, profoundly thankful. To God and to you all.

It goes without saying that I am enormously sad to be saying goodbye. But I think the consolation for me is that firstly, I'm sure I shall be back from time to time. And secondly, that the particular path that I believe God is calling me to follow, this next stage of my journey, is one that I'm genuinely excited about.

It seems especially fitting that the role I'm moving into with Truro Diocese – encouraging prayer and discipleship across Cornwall – is something that has grown out of some of the key things that we have done here together during my time in curacy at the Cathedral: our 'Growing in Discipleship' and 'Pondering' courses 😊 It wasn't necessarily obvious from the outset, but it now seems to me that this is the direction the wind of the Holy Spirit has been steadily blowing me in for some time and I want to fully embrace that and allow that heavenly wind to fill my sails.

Follow me.

As Christians, we are **all** called to follow Jesus – that’s what being a disciple means – both in the way we live each day and also in the unique vocation that God has for each one of us which unfolds throughout our lives. We must all pray earnestly for the wind of the Spirit to fill, enable and empower us as we echo Richard of Chichester’s prayer to *know Christ more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly, day by day.*

One thing they don’t teach you at theological college is how to write a farewell sermon. So forgive me if this one doesn’t quite hang together as well as it should. It’s been hard to write and even harder than usual to bring in to land ...

But I can’t finish without telling you that I finally managed to ‘sign a slate’ this week: a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s goodness and love, for this place and for you all ... and a prayer of blessing so that wherever I may go, that blessing will literally always be hovering above your heads ☺

Amen.

Jane Horton, July 2015 - September 2018