

Sunday 15th October: Trinity 19. Benefice HC Ampleforth

I have recently started going to the mid-day office at Stanbrook Abbey, because it offers an experience where I am the one receiving not giving out. I am always in awe of the nuns and the other member of religious communities I have encountered at Mirfield and Sleights, and the community at the Abbey. The other day I bumped into one of the nuns from Stanbrook at the doctor's surgery car park and we chatted for a few minutes. I asked her how long she had been a part of the community and she answered 40 years! I thought, 'Wow!', that is a lifetime of sacrifice and devotion to serve in a community. She was someone who to me had very much been called and chosen.

Which brings me to the final verse of our Gospel reading today. We should not take the word 'few' to mean that heaven will be sparsely populated. This parable has to do with spiritual accountability—not heavenly demographics. It is intended, not to frighten us, but to encourage us to take seriously the challenges of Christian discipleship and more precisely, that each of us has been called. The chosen are those who choose to respond.

What does it mean to be called? Everyone is called, it comes to us via our 'spiritual receiver', if we turn it on! God calls us constantly to wake us up to His love and life. The word "calling" is used several times throughout the Bible, in different contexts. In this instance Jesus is using the word as an invitation. This parable is an analogy of what we have been invited to; an invitation to something more than a life lived serving only ourselves, an invitation to live a life in all its fullness together with Christ, serving God and experiencing the fulfilment that brings to life, an invitation to be Jesus' disciples, to follow in His footsteps, and ultimately, an invitation to spend eternity with Him!

To be chosen is to accept the invitation, to repent, to turn around your life - 'metanoia', to say "Yes!" to the calling and then to follow it up with a faithful life of discipleship. God calls us all, but those who are chosen are those who wholeheartedly accept the invitation and are willing to be lead wherever the journey goes.

Jesus says elsewhere that the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, therefore few choose this way, because everything in this world, our egotism, our own ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings, our own will, our own desires must be given up. To be chosen, you must show that you really want this life with all your heart. We frequently waver and fail! Yet when we have been called, and we respond positively, something does take over which does not require us to rely on our own strength but comes from God Himself by His Holy Spirit. The light that leads us is a kindly one and does not abandon us once we have the desire in our hearts. Then what follows is blessing in abundance.

In the story the king sent out his servants to all types of people. It's the same with our invitation. It doesn't matter what our starting point is, who we are by nature, what our background is, what talents we do or do not have, what knowledge we have, what our circumstances are. The thing that determines whether we are chosen is how we respond to the calling when we sense God's invitation in our heart. Then by faith and love, we will know we are Jesus' brothers and sisters, chosen and co-heirs with Him of all things, for eternity.

Thanks be to God. Amen.