

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024; 2<sup>nd</sup> in Lent. Benefice Holy Communion Gilling.

Earlier this week I commenced our Lent Course at the Vicarage with the aim of going back to basics and as is customary during Lent to re-examine who we are, where we have come, and reflect on our relationship with God and our calling to serve Him.

Part of this evaluation is also to ask ourselves some fundamental questions about our lives such as 'What is meaningful in my life?'

The answer is quite simple really, and it's one that Jesus is teaching us in today's gospel reading, and it's basically this: that the most important things in this life can't really be found in the things of this life and that the only life that really matters, is found by giving up the life that we think really matters. This is what Jesus is explaining when he says that the only way to save our life, or to find it, is by losing it, for his sake. It is a bit confusing, and it is paradoxical, but it is true.

Jesus himself knew who he was and what he wanted, and he lived the life that he knew he was supposed to live, the life that he was born to live. Jesus wasn't disappointed in himself or in his life. It was just the way it was meant to be. It wasn't always easy, but it was always right. Jesus never got it wrong, and he lived his life exactly as God wanted him to. Jesus didn't live a complete life, we only are told about the last three years, but by the measure of our world, he lived the most meaningful life anyone ever has.

So, what gave meaning to Jesus' life? In our Gospel reading today, He told Peter to set his mind on divine things, not on human things. That's what Jesus did. He lived every day with his mind set on divine things; on his

divine purpose, and above all, on his relationship with his Heavenly Father. But he wasn't so heavenly minded her was no earthly good either. Everyone he encountered, everything he said was filled with meaning beyond the comprehension of many but always given in and through the Love of His Father.

He told the crowd that the only way to save their life is by losing it for His sake, and for the sake of the gospel. What does that mean? It means that the only way to live a life of real meaning, the life for which we were created, and to which we are called, is by giving up on the life that this world thinks matters, and instead living the life that matters to God. That's what Jesus did and that's what he invites you and I to do. He invites us to find the only life that matters by losing the life our world thinks matters. During the season of Lent, He invites us to deny ourselves, to find our true lives, the lives he died to give us, not just eternal life in heaven, but a meaningful, purposeful life here and now, with God at the centre of every part of it; as the great third century saint Irenaeus affirmed, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and to be alive consists in beholding God."

Now that may not necessarily mean giving up all our earthly possessions and being in poverty, but what it does mean is about getting things in the proper perspective; adopting a state of mind and an attitude to discover meaning and our purpose, not driven by our own needs and desires but on what God call us to do and be. It is only then will we find true meaning, and our hearts will be at rest knowing we are where we should be. As another favourite quote of mine from St Augustine, states, "Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him."

It's not easy to do this, however, partly because this world constantly tempts us to place our hope in the things of this

world, hope that we think we have control over, hope that we think we can purchase or achieve, not hope that depends on faith in God. That's why it's tempting, to place our hope in the things of this world? We are bombarded with this temptation, every day in countless different ways, and we all fall into this temptation on a regular basis.

That's why Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow him to keep taking His hand when we fall and allow Him to carry us, and make all things new because that is the way to a wonderful, grace-filled, and abundant life. The only way.

Thanks be to God. Amen.