

Sunday 22nd September 2024. Trinity 17. Benefice Holy Communion Ampleforth

Last week I spoke about disillusion and the statement we often hear these days, “It is what it is...”

Today in the readings we hear about ‘pecking orders’, especially amongst the disciples, who were arguing about who was the greatest and is usually the case with this, it rarely brings out the best in people, because we set ourselves to be the greatest human being instead of conveying the best in our humanity to others.

In the same way as he did in last week’s Gospel, Jesus reverses contemporary thinking. Last week it was about the mission of the Messiah, this week it is about the nature of greatness. “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” That’s how Jesus understands greatness. Last place? Really? I don’t think I’ve ever argued about or striven to be in last place. Have you? Last place is the last place I want to be, and I suspect that’s true for you too. What if greatness in Jesus’ mind is not about how much we have or what we have accomplished, but about what we’ve offered and done for others? What if greatness is not about the position or place, we occupy, but about the space and place we offer others? What if we stopped arguing about and striving to be the greatest, and we sought to discover and bring out the best in ourselves and each other?

Let us consider another question. Who is the best person you’ve ever met, not the greatest but the best. Why did you pick her or him? What qualities or characteristics make her or him the best? I’m guessing it wasn’t their selfish desire to win and their indifference to the wellbeing of others, or their position, or their reputation. Neither was it because they praised you or told you what you wanted to

hear, and it wasn't because they were rich, powerful, or successful.

I think it would be more likely you picked them because of her or his authenticity, honesty, and integrity. You could count on them and they had your back and they were there when you needed them. They saw you, respected you, and listened to you. They took your life as seriously as and sometimes more seriously than their own. They spoke truth even when it hurt because they cared about you. They saw more in you than you often saw in yourself. They believed in you and committed themselves to you. They offered wisdom and insight into your life that was more than just telling you what to do. They cared and made a difference. They enlarged your life and world, inspired you. When your strength, hope, and faith were weak, when you were despairing, and unbelieving, they made space and place for you in their life, made you feel that you were important and mattered to them. They loved and accepted you, didn't judge, compare, or compete. They forgave you in all these things. They freed you from the pecking orders of your life and world and still brought out the best in you. The bottom line is that they put your life and wellbeing ahead of their own and called you into your better self. They helped you recognize the way you want to be and live and if you already knew this, they helped you remember when you had forgotten.

Do we do this for others? Are you and I the best person someone has ever met, or do we just argue about and be more concerned with showing how great we think we are?

More than anyone, Jesus names us and calls forth the best in us. When Jesus speaks of 'receiving', He's using a term of hospitality. It's the idea of welcoming someone in, showing kindness and care for another person. As Jesus

holds the child (a person who was often overlooked or forgotten) He says, if you receive them, you receive me and the One who sent me. We are called to show our love for Jesus and the way we do that is by loving, serving, and honouring every person we encounter.

Thanks be to God. Amen.