

## **TRINITY 13 (2024)**

Dear Sisters and Brothers, I have forgotten how to preach! And Peter's trilogy of thoughts on St John's extended sermon about the Eucharistic food and feast from heaven is a lectionary theme right now, which never seems to end. The Gospel writer could be accused of hectoring, especially in the context of Protestant Suffolk! So forgive me, I won't go there today and instead draw your attention to our national prayer for a new Bishop (which is also fervently being used in Cumbria as they seek a new Bishop of Carlisle).

Contrary to popular opinion, Bishops are not selected by the King or Prime Minister but usually instead, by the agreed recommendation of a 'Vacancy in See Committee' which every Diocese has. These committees are usually made up of retired people who want to make their strong views heard (from whichever angle) and in these times of increasing polarisation within the Church of England, you can imagine why, so often, appointments are taking much longer. I feel sure you can 'read between the lines' in my meaning or, is it just sour grapes, from an Incumbent who is at least a year older than when you last saw him?!

I hope not. I do believe all of us have a Christian calling which we are trying to follow and doing our best to respond to and, in a whole variety of ways. Talking of sermons, I heard one of the best I have ever heard just a few weeks ago, after the tragic killings of three young girls, 'Swiftly fans', who are now (we pray) dancing new heavenly footsteps. It was a sermon

about the shame of the rioting which later took place, the racism and hatred shown, with the preacher's historic recollection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer - his 'Yes to God' inside a concentration camp, and his extended 'No' to his oppressors, who wanted no God-talk whatsoever.

So let's take a closer look at our prayer for a new Bishop. It begins with thanksgiving (as the best of our prayers always do); that we have all been called to be God's people 'in this place'; that through the gift of the Holy Spirit our daily prayer may be energised with vision, as well as faithfulness: for 'a new heaven and a new earth,' and here's the 'strapline', we might say. We pray "that we may be true to our calling to **follow daily, care deeply, speak boldly and tread gently.**" We do this before any mention of any Bishops!

And this is right because vocations can only be sourced from living Christian communities of faith, like ours. And the best Bishops understand, care for, and bless Parishes first and foremost because of that...daily following, caring deeply about the communities we serve, speaking out boldly against injustice or, as St Paul indeed dared to say, "against the cosmic powers of this present darkness."

And finally we pray that we may 'tread gently' – which I interpret to mean 'on the shared resources of the world, which God so lovingly created and left us to treasure.' Tread gently means to respect and share everything we have been freely given and it is the very opposite of greed, exploitation, or violence.

If, just for a moment, we should reflect more locally about the kind of new Diocesan leadership we might need (which isn't necessarily the same thing as what we might be asking for)...then that in itself is a very good starter for our shared thinking and praying. To ask for a wise and gentle shepherd might, for example, mean not getting someone too easily deflected by joining or spending too much time in the House of Lords, Or, spending endless Synod hours away from home, discussing yet more papers on human sexuality or safeguarding or whatever it is that keeps parishes away from being a living priority for said Bishop. So many churches are really struggling to survive or, many of whom even feel 'abandoned' - by the powers that be!

I have only known the importance and integrity of ordinary parish life so, of course, I am biased. But bias is ok in a sermon, isn't it? Bias is ok in the Gospels too, because nothing about the hands-on ministry of Jesus could be described as bland or dull, could it?

I believe that the 'strapline' at the bottom of our E-News is a really good reminder of why we are here this morning. It affects how we live and work and pray for the week ahead.

Nobody is saying that is easy which, I guess, is why we need to pray in the first place and, publicly too – here at 5.30 pm – later today, in the beautiful chapel space behind me.

In the Name...

AMEN.

