

EPIPHANY 3

Zebulun and Naphtali are referenced in both our Readings today. It is the place to be near the sea and lakes, and the place to gather and feel alive again – the fresh breeze across the Jordan, ‘Galilee of the nations’. I felt something similar yesterday when I walked along the River Deben – both railway crossings were shut making my walk with ‘Polly’ much longer; but the sun was out, it was full of activity by the riverside which, I haven’t seen, for a long while. The Sea scouts were looking to be in operational mode and, looking busy. The Deben rowing club had its doors wide open and all age groups were carrying high their long and slender rowing boats before taking the plunge and testing out their skills and dexterity on the water. There was definitely a buzz of excitement in the air because, of course, there is a lot more to live for than just sitting in front of a television or computer screen; we all need a break from that virtual world to meet up with real people: to catch up, and natter, and loiter a while.

That’s something I hope you will do today before rushing off home!

I have never thought of Church as a ‘club’ but I have always thought of it as a big and varied family, with Christ at the helm, miraculously holding us all together, keeping us afloat, and wanting us to discover more about the riches of our Christian vocation and pilgrimage. Isn’t that what is really being painted in today’s Gospel? Jesus has already grown up and left the manger behind and as he walked by the glorious Sea of Galilee, he had to scout for some supporters and new followers to join him. He needed more skills in the mission of fishing for people, whose faith would inspire others and strengthen their various networks. Yes, there would be people whose lives felt sad or broken or disillusioned just as there would be people so enthusiastic and brimming with confidence that Jesus would have understood that mirage also. He sought disciples who would be constant and

fearless and not fickle, unreliable, or irresponsible. He sought good friends and lasting friendships.

Standing in front of this portrait by Matthew, this is what I see, but you may see something extra or, something quite different. I see those first vocations of Peter and Andrew, James and John, as clearly fraternal and yet still voluntary, risky even. What was it about the 'draw' of Jesus which compelled them to follow and find out so much more on the way? Poor old Zebedee was left all alone in his boat with more oars than he could possibly use, and with nets so tired and broken, that his fishing days were numbered! Or perhaps his fishing would just be a gentle and relaxing hobby in retirement. Don't you just love 'Mortimer and Whitehouse – Gone Fishing'? I do, but I digress.

The reason we are asking you to stay behind today is because the mission of our Parish and wider Benefice needs building up with more of us on board to help. That's why we have set up different tables and different areas of our life together and work together which we hope and pray – 'Suits you Sir', 'Suits you, Madam', - sharing your gifts and talents in new and creative ways. I don't think we should confuse the many tasks ahead with 'hobbies' as such, but instead, as being at the heart and core of our Christian calling. And as you know, with all such voluntary work, the pay is lousy! Ask any PCC Secretary, or Treasurer!

There are also some ambitious plans for St Mary's House for you to see which, to date, have been some 15 years in the making. A small group of us have spent many long hours already, debating, planning, agreeing, disagreeing, including, and expanding our ideas and hopes... for developing a sad and tired building into something much more exciting and attractive to connect between Church and Town, the world of work and the world of worship. This is the vocation we all share: to convert hearts and minds and hands to the draw and

light of Christ. He alone offers us the gift of faith and the gift of building community and, stretching our desire & care for outreach.

I know there will be people who will want to dampen that vocation or say, like a grumpy grandma once said to me 'there's no money it' -when I said I was thinking of being ordained! I have already been open about that. All vocation and voluntary work is costly not least because it depends on our commitment, our letting God guide us, to keep on going, to keep on fishing and exploring, and to be as generous of our time and talents as we possibly can. The bright lights of Zebulun and Naphtali can be ours too at the heart of Market Hill. I believe we can increase not only the 'footfall' but also the desire and energy to build up the body of Christ in this place; and to know more fully that each part and each member of that body is connected to the whole. We are not a club! We are a mission 'movement' as in the earliest days of Christian tradition and praxis.

For us, the lesson is to be true to our calling, like the first disciples, and allow God to do the rest.

So today, and for our future, my prayer with you all is no different from the Psalmist, who said:

"I seek a hiding place in you, dear Lord; never let me feel disappointed; rescue me in triumph. Graciously hear me; deliver me quickly; be like a strong rock for me to hide in, a mighty fortress to save me. You, you are my rock and fortress; lead me and guide me for the sake of your good name. Cut me out of the net that I am trapped in, only you are strong enough to do it. Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, you, the **trustworthy** Lord God." (Psalm 31.1-5)

Amen.

