

TRINITY 2

There's a lot going on in today's Gospel (Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26)! It is like Matthew inherited a number of varied stories and reports about this commanding figure of Jesus – some spoken, some written down. And they don't appear to be in any particular order. There's Matthew's calling, Jesus' friendship with tax collectors and sinners; there's the tragic news of the death of the daughter of the synagogue's leader; a woman suffering from haemorrhages demanding Jesus' attention, and then we return to the unnamed girl raised to life by the hand and touch of Jesus' compassion and healing.

I suppose you just can't invent the array of different news stories similarly of the past week? The 'Borisconi' saga, the SNP financial saga, the secret turmoil in North Korea, the tragic deaths in Nottingham. The sheer range of different news stories reaches us all at once, and shocks us with so little time to take it all in, to ponder and reflect a little.

I guess Matthew still has an important and indeed honourable reporting and recording role to proclaim the "good news": the central Gospel message that, despite all the demands on Jesus to do this or do that, Jesus always responds to these demands by acting on them so positively. He 'delivers', we would say! He is captivating, attractive, always merciful, always proactively seeking out the lost or marginalised. For Matthew, his protagonist is the hero of seemingly every calamitous cry for help and every challenging encounter.

I can only suggest, that Jesus is the same for us. We look to him to be there for us and, in our midst, as we do in the breaking of the bread, as we do when candles are lit for our prayers, or as we witnessed in that memorable Vigil kept in the centre of Nottingham. Jesus is the one who lightens our every darkness. The prophet Hosea said “I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” That would resonate with the Jewish heart of Matthew and his ‘take’, his ‘resolve’ to do what Jesus teaches us to do: to ‘desire mercy, not sacrifice’; that is why his Gospel is ‘Good News’ for us, for our local community and for our world.

In this last week, we have lost one of our greatest actors in Glenda Jackson. Last month we lost one of our greatest writers in Martin Amis. I am reading his very powerful autobiography ‘Experience’. And throughout, nearly every page (I exaggerate) is the devastating, haunting loss he recalls of his cousin Lucy Partington, brutally killed by Frederick West at the tender age of 19 years, after just one year at Exeter University. Martin clearly loved her and admired her intelligence, fierce independence and, most of all, her innocence. He had sleepless nights wrestling with this deep loss, and the cruelty and injustice surrounding it. His prose is all the more edgy, and disturbing as a result.

You and I cannot rustle up any miracles or any quick fix to these shocking events. But like the moving and emotional Vigil in Nottingham with the sharing of memories and the holding of hands, we can still turn to the light and pray that

God's light will shine and, indeed, outshine, any darkness. The sadness and the pain shared across every generation at that vigil, was a wonderful testament of human solidarity. That's the miracle of healing which God shares with us in the city centre, in the quiet chapel or corner or bedroom, where we can pray or contemplate. 'Go and learn what this means' says St Matthew, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'

Perhaps hearing words like these, Matthew had no other choice but to follow Jesus, calling him to a new way of living and loving. Instead of collecting taxes, he was called to promote the radical message of healing and reconciliation in a hurting political climate, not so very different from our own.

That's why, I believe, when we hear and then reflect on the Gospel stories, we learn that we too, can be good news to and for others in our midst. In small ways and in big ways, we can bring justice and healing, practical support, to show and reflect God's compassion and love. It is as if, behind all the troubling news headlines or attention of the cameras, all the words of reporting, Christ secretly slips in, to be there for us, and to be our strength and stay.

AMEN.