

## Fr Tim's Sermon – Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### Second Sunday after Trinity

#### Readings:

**Galatians 5: 1 & 13-25**

**Luke 9: 51-end**

I might be doing you all a great dis-service, but I suspect that most of you aren't great fans of the modern day rock band – The Killers. In 2008, the band released a hit called "Are we human", which reached number five in the British charts, and so did capture the popular imagination of our nation. This song asked the question "Are we human, or are we dancer". Bad grammar perhaps, but this aside, perhaps it is a question worth asking. If you listen to the song, or at the least, have a look at the lyrics, you will see that the question comes from a reflection on the subject of liberty.

Are we human, with all that humanity brings, or are we dancer, a puppet, held by the strings of the law, expectations of society, and authority exercised over us? If we are truly to be human, the Killers argue in this song, we must close our eyes, clear our heart, and cut the cord, and only this way can we be truly human.

Perhaps one of the reasons why this song was so popular was that it offered a freedom, or a liberty, to those who heard it, and helped them to think of a society where they were less bound by regulation and authority, and more free to live for themselves. Let's be honest, who wouldn't be interested in such a society?

But, as we hear our readings this morning, we should realise that this is only half the story. To be human is a good thing, is it how God created us, it is how Jesus came to us, and it is who we are. And so to do our humanity justice is important. But, there's more.

Our first reading this morning, from St Paul's letter to the Galatians, deals with one of the central subjects of this whole letter, the subject of liberty. St Paul reminds us that our humanity is flawed, as the works of the flesh, the natural inclinations of our human nature, are obvious – and he lists them – fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these – hasn't every preacher always wanted to be able to reel off that list of words!!

But how does it make us feel? This list of words is a reflection of how St Paul sees our human nature. And we can see why he thinks this. Let's just think about the history of the very best of humanity, the children of Israel, as it is told through the Old Testament, with which St Paul was very familiar.

How many examples of fornication can you think of in the Old Testament? Idolatry and dissensions, sorcery and factions were rife during the time of the Israelites in the wilderness. Jealousy and anger are recurring themes, and indeed all of these qualities are present to such lengths that the Jewish leaders felt the need to expand the law, to make life more complicated, and to try and legislate in such a way as to prevent these.

But the reality is that when humanity is left to its own devices, these are the qualities that it shows, as it has before, and as it will again. So what of the Killers' song? Are we human, or are we dancer? Is it better for us that we are free to be ourselves, or is it better that we are controlled, like a puppet, held within the law, and living to enforced behaviours which provide us with a framework for a better life?

But perhaps there's another alternative. St Paul reminds us that we are free only because we are children of God. This is a different freedom to being truly human. This is a deeper freedom, a freedom which has nothing to do with self-indulgence, a freedom which doesn't turn its back on the law, but which lives according to the Spirit of God, and through this Spirit, keeps God's law.

And St Paul goes on to remind us what it is to live this life. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This isn't a liberty, or a freedom, which allows us to live for ourselves, putting ourselves first and making a success of all things. This is a liberty which brings us to live the life that God calls us to live.

I wonder how often in your life you have come up against a difficult situation. Which path do I take? What do I do to put right the predicament I'm in? How do I move forward from where I am now? What should I do?

When you are in this position, have you ever asked yourself the question: What would Jesus do? It's amazing how this question clarifies things, how on asking it, we come to an answer which isn't the answer we thought we would come to. But this question brings us close to the life that God calls us to live. It brings a new freedom, to live not as puppets, but also not simply as humans with all this brings. This is our opportunity to live as children of God, guided by his Spirit, and therefore free to love and be loved in a way which cannot be experienced in any other way.

If we're to take this seriously, then the challenges continue. This isn't a part-time role. This isn't something we can do on the days we remember to ask what Jesus would do, while the rest of the time we revert to the works of the flesh. This sounds very like the behaviour of the Israelites in the wilderness – turning to God when it suited them, and turning their back on him with alarming regularity.

By the time we've made the decision to turn from the life of children of God, we've lost the freedom that he offers to us. So we need to make the decision afresh, every day, every step, to turn to God, to live his life, to share in his Spirit, and to be his children.

This sounds urgent when put like this, and in our Gospel reading today, we hear from Jesus just how urgent it is. We heard Jesus speak to three different people, all of whom wanted to follow him. The first began the conversation with him – "I will follow you wherever you go". Jesus clearly was in some doubt about this, as he reminded the man that foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. It's a stark warning – it won't be easy, comfortable, or straightforward. You will suffer, but this is what you are called to, and if you can do it, then follow me now.

The second conversation is rather different. Jesus begins this conversation, by telling the listener to follow him. It's straight forward, but the other man replied with hesitation – yes of course, I'd love to, but first, let me go and bury my father. There's no suggestion in this text that his father has died, and scholars of Greek have suggested that because of the language used, it is quite possible that his father is alive and well, and that he wishes to stay and look after his father until the day he is buried, and some date in the future, and after that, well of course he'll follow Jesus.

Jesus' response is harsh, but leaves no room for doubt. Let the dead bury their dead. Let those who do not live in the Spirit, who do not have the life that I offer, care for those who are among them. I have work for you to do, and I have work for you to do now.

And finally, Jesus' third conversation. The responder this time simply asks that he might go and say farewell to those at home. Perhaps Jesus is worried, if the man goes to say farewell, he'll be talked out of his new journey. Perhaps this farewell will result in a big party which is not in keeping with the gifts of the Spirit. We can't be sure what exactly would happen, but we do know that Jesus is firm again – no one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Turn now. Don't look back. There is only one way, and unless you give yourself fully, wholly, and completely to it, you are still subject to your humanity. If you give yourself fully as children of God, a new love, a new life, and a new hope await you, living in the Spirit, and sharing in the new life of Jesus Christ.

And the story is the same today. The choice remains ours. Are we human, or are we dancer? Or are we children of God? So let us pray that we may find our way as Jesus calls us to, living in the Spirit, at liberty from sin and law, in love, and ready today to set our sights on the Kingdom of Heaven, with our hearts open, our gaze fixed, and our lives filled with the love of God.