**21 June 2020; Trinity 2, Proper 7**

**Romans 6: 1b – 11, Matthew 10: 24 - 39**

*Zoomed service 9.30am*

**1. Correction vs starting again**

During this lockdown period, I know that some people have turned to making protective clothing and face masks for local hospitals, care homes and individuals. I used to enjoy dressmaking, but one thing that I learned was how hard it can be to re-do a garment that has gone wrong. If you get the initial measurements and fundamentals wrong, it never comes right. You may have to begin again. The same is probably true in woodwork and other crafts.

In the first reading we heard today, Paul speaks about ‘dying to sin’ and about new life, and of our baptism as the start of this new life in Christ. And our gospel reading too speaks of losing our life in order to find it. We could say then that today’s readings offer a ‘tale of two selves’ – an old self that was crucified with Christ, as Paul tells us, and a ‘new self’ that we gain when this old one is destroyed. What are we to make of these two ‘selves’?

**2. Contemporary culture and finding oneself**

Jesus urges his disciples to find their life through losing it for his sake. What does he mean?

In today’s culture, there is a lot of emphasis upon ‘finding yourself’. If you go to a bookshop (remember when we could do this? though I believe Harts in Saffron Walden was very busy yesterday) and look for a Bible, you will often find one under a section called ‘spirituality.’ And next to the Bible there will be many manuals on ‘finding yourself’- perhaps through discovering your inner gifts. We also look for ourselves through exploring our forbears to answer the TV programme’s question ‘who do you think you are?’ (An issue very relevant on this Father’s Day) This issue of ‘who am I?’ is particularly important in adolescence. How well I remember longing to be one of the crowd, something I see afresh in the behaviour of grandchildren needing markers of group acceptance: the right phone, the right clothes – even the right opinions or friends.

In this week’s Grapevine, Andy Colebrooke has noted how pertinent such questions of identity are both in the current lockdown situation and in the political context of the Black Lives Matter campaign. And in working with people experiencing loss of different kinds, it was clear to me that a major loss or bereavement could and often did fundamentally threaten a person’s very sense of self.

**3. The Christian gospel**

The Christian gospel is very clear that, through baptism, we have a sure and lasting identity as children of God. Jesus tells us that even the hairs on our head are counted – not a helpful illustration for some, I know, but one that emphasises how very deeply we are valued by God. **Yet the self that we have in him is not the same as the self upon which we might otherwise build our lives and our confidence.**

The message of the gospel is that our **true** **self** needs to be built upon the **right foundation**. A self built upon belonging to this or that group, being one of the in-crowd or from the right class, is vulnerable and ultimately false. The only sure foundation is Jesus, who showed us what it means to live as a beloved child of God.

Jesus said that following his way would not always lead to happiness in the obvious sense – sometimes it will bring us into conflict even with those closest to us – those with whom we might think we belong - as we heard in our gospel reading. But ultimately it is **only in God** that we find our true self. And paradoxically we find it through **forgetting** self, and even human ties, and focussing upon serving others.

I started by suggesting that sometimes in craft work we need to start again. The Christian faith has a lot to say about starting again. Baptism – at whatever age – is when we declare our willingness to make this new start – to sign up to a new contract built on sound foundations, if you like. But because this way is hard, we also recognise the need to start again each week – even each day. We do this in our service as we confess our sins and get back on track in seeking to claim our identity as God’s children and to follow the path that Jesus showed us. Sharing in communion strengthens us in this resolve.

Although hard, this is actually a way of great encouragement, for we know that sometimes when things seem to be going badly in human terms – perhaps when we face suffering or disappointment, or when our human hopes are dashed – this is not the end, but one of the many deaths that we face along the way to true life. This should not surprise us. Jesus’s way lead him to death, and if we follow him there will be deaths of many kinds. But he urges – as he urged his own disciples - us not to be afraid. Paul assures his readers that ‘if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.’ And Jesus says that those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’ May we all, together, find our true selves and our true life in and through him and through the way of sacrificial love that he showed us. **Amen**

**Hymns in zoomed service**

Just as I am

Through the night of doubt and sorrow