

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Trinity 11

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Isaiah 51:1-6

Ps 138

Romans 12:1-8

Matthew: 16:13-20

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

I have had various conversations over the last few weeks in which people explained, in different ways, how this step we are making, offering an opportunity for those who feel able to worship together to gather in church, has made them feel wobbly. For some that is a wobbly feeling you have resolved by deciding it is not yet time for you to gather with others (but that might feel harder when others are now gathering); for others it is the wobbly feeling that you are trying to contain now: worshipping with adjusted liturgy, adjusted seating, even in a different church from usual, managing your mask and your hand cleanser and showing your warmth and care for one another across the distanced chairs.

And the gospel spoken into all this wobbliness is a passage which is packed with what seems very definite and confident.

Simon Peter is able to declare

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,

when Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is.

Jesus calls gives Simon son of Jonah the nickname by which we now know him "Peter" the "rock"

Jesus talks of building his church, which is strong enough to withstand even Hades – the force of death- and will have breath-taking authority on earth.

And this seems like a particular gift to us – whether you are listening to this sermon in church or at home- that on the Sunday

when at the heart of our life together the Eucharist can be celebrated, we are given a gospel that takes us to the heart of the life of the church:

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven”

“On this rock I build my church”

We are given firm ground under wobbly feet.

So let’s go a bit deeper and see how that ground remains firm for us today.

When Simon Peter is able to express his conviction about who Jesus is, notice how Jesus responds:

“Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! *For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven*”

The Father’s action in Peter’s life is the source of his ability to give voice to his faith with such clarity.

Peter identifies Jesus in the same terms that the voice from heaven does at Jesus’ baptism: the Father calls Jesus his beloved Son who has his favour, in other words is his anointed one, the Messiah. And just after this incident Peter will hear the same words as Jesus is transfigured. The Father reveals Jesus to Peter both by working in his heart and by the experiences in his life. Peter grows into understanding of what has been revealed and opened up to him, but it starts with the Father’s initiative in his life.

Jesus recognise his Father at work in Peter and knows that is a rock, a solid foundation for the establishment of the church: the community of those who are gathered in Jesus’ name. The foundation is the work of the Father and it is Jesus who will build on that. “I will build my church” he says. His church will form because he is at work in the lives of those who will form it.

Our life together today as a church is grounded in God’s action in each of our lives: the Father’s action in our hearts drawing us to

recognise that Jesus shows us God's true nature, and Jesus' action in our lives drawing us to see his presence in each other and worship God in his name.

And, Jesus affirms that no opposition to God, not even the force of death itself, will prevail against God's work in us that makes us God's church.

So our life together is God's work, is God at work.

Today's wobbliness may largely be about whether we are doing what we should as members of God's church: is it right to stay at home if we need to, is it right to receive spiritual communion if we are afraid to receive the bread, can I really pray in this language, this feels so unfamiliar. And maybe even deeper, is church ever going to be the same again? These worries are about how we take responsibility for our church life.

Today's gospel reminds us that the ground on which we stand, the heart of this life we share as the church Jesus is building does not start with our work. It is the work of God in our hearts, which we grow into understanding as we see it confirmed in our experience. We don't even have to be as clear as Peter in our affirmation of faith, we just need to be true to the way God is revealing Godself in our own hearts and lives.

Our job today, whether we are worshiping in the church building, or at home is to be open to the living God's revealing action in our hearts and lives and to respond to those promptings in all that we say and do and are in the coming week. For we are the church that Jesus is building, together we are the church against which, he has promised, nothing will prevail.

May the wobbly worship we offer today be a revelation to us of the power of God at work in each of our lives as together we are the church Jesus continues to build. Amen