

## Being noticed – 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Readings:

- Psalm 139 1-12
- Luke 19 1-10

Morning everyone

One theme running through many of the talks during lockdown has been that our faith requires action. For example, Carolyn highlighted recently in one of her talks how our faith integrated should be integrated into every aspect of life.

Many of us will be so familiar with the song the wise man built his house on the rock – but I was struck when reading it recently by the what the passage actually says about the characteristics of the wise man – Jesus says “**everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock**” and correspondingly “**everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like the foolish man who built his house on the sand**”

And as Christians we look to the words and indeed the life of Jesus for our inspiration – this you might be relieved to know doesn't require us to grow a beard, to wear sandals, to have some idea about carpentry and it certainly doesn't require us to be a man.

But I believe Jesus does model **the importance of noticing others**, especially those who may sometimes be invisible to wider society. So noticing others is the theme of today's talk.

In Matthew's gospel we read of Jesus' disciples trying to keep children away from Jesus in ch 19, perhaps thinking Jesus should not be bothered by such interruptions. Yet Jesus notices those who society may have ignored and says “**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.**”

And he blessed them

You may be able to think yourself of other stories where Jesus notices and reaches out to the vulnerable and those considered outcasts of society, such as the lepers and the tax collectors.

We've just heard the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19 – Jesus notices him in the tree, asks to visit his house (much to the shock of the crowd) and Zacchaeus is transformed by the encounter that follows.

There is clearly something important for us as human beings when it comes to being noticed. Many of us will have watched young children in a school play or concert, looking eagerly for parents in the crowd and waving enthusiastically when spotting them.

Less happily, the importance of being noticed is reflected in the dependence many young people have on the ubiquitous “like” button beloved of the users of social media. (and as adults we are not immune either)

The like button has for many become a proxy for being noticed, it is highly addictive and often seen as a gauge of social support. Researchers have identified it as a cause of anxiety and depression, fostering negative social comparisons.

I find it striking that many of the key leaders and innovators in the tech industry have indicated they wouldn't consider for a moment allowing their own children to use the same social media platforms that they helped create.

Whilst a reliance on social media isn't always a healthy way of being noticed, there is of course importance and joy associated with being noticed and known at a deep level and for being included and accepted for the person we really are. And behind the love of parents and kindness of friends is a power that affirms us as the person we are – God says at the time of Jesus' baptism “this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased” and this conveys the infinite value he sees in each one of us, the person we *are*, not the image we present.

[Psalm 139](#) which Ciara read talks of the God who knows us all better than we know ourselves and yet who loves us unconditionally – wherever we are we are assured that “[your right hand will hold me fast](#)”.

And our response is to be a channel through which God can convey this sense of value to others – how good are we at spotting those at work, in the playground, on the street, in our church who need our time, who need to be noticed?

Who are the invisible in our society who attract little attention? The BBC report last week on the growing problem of loneliness indicates there is plenty of room for making others feel noticed and included. I would suggest as we emerge from the Covid pandemic our church would do well to review how we play our role in re-building a society where all feel valued.

In Matthew's gospel we are called to be light. "Let your light shine" we are told in chapter 5. But this is not to draw attention to ourselves – the gospel records in the following chapter Jesus' strong words to those who seek to do that in their public prayers, fasting and giving. I think we are called to be a light in the sense that we shed God's light on those we encounter who may feel in the shadows, who may feel invisible.

A few weeks ago I highlighted the idea of reading the bible with your feet.

Returning to our second reading, let us ask, where do we find ourselves in the story of Zacchaeus?

Are you Zacchaeus – wanting to be involved but aware of your shortcomings and in need of the love, encouragement and welcome of Jesus? Do you need to allow yourself to be noticed and to be served like the disciples whose feet Jesus washed, so that you like Zacchaeus can better reflect the image of God in your life?

Or are we the so called religious people in Jesus' time who choose to ignore the social outcast, who mutter that some people are not the right sort of people to bask in the light of Jesus?

Or does the story challenge us to be more like Jesus in the way we notice others, include others and welcome others, whatever the disapproval this might bring with it?

Jesus didn't just notice others and move on – he took action and did something about it.

Perhaps like Pilate in the Easter story we have remembered recently, it is easy to wash our hands when confronted with the complexities of humanity. But this is not Jesus' way. Again, returning to the Easter story, even in the most appalling of circumstances whilst on the Cross, in John ch 19 Jesus notices his grieving mother and takes action, entrusting her to the care one of the disciples.

Jesus' example is to notice others and to respond in love.

Yet there are lots of things that stop us noticing the needs of others – we live busy lives, we get caught up in our own concerns, ambitions and struggles. But there are also many things that can help us to slow down and to notice others more deeply – authors, poets and artists are expert noticers. We too can become better noticers through reading literature or poetry; and artwork can be a chance to notice our environment and those around us with much more attention to detail. But most of all we can and should be slowed down by prayer, bringing before Jesus both those we see before us and those who may be hidden.

And through prayer we ourselves will be transformed by the time spent in his presence - as it says in Corinthians

**2 Cor 3 18** And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Last Sunday – Bishop Olivia talked about the difference between being a *disciple* of Jesus and an *Apostle*, spreading the good news to all we meet. Noticing others is a way in which we can do both these things – to notice and respond to the needs of others is both to follow the example of Jesus and to spread the good news through our actions.

To end, let us reflect on some words from Matthew 25.

**35** For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

**36** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

**37** "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

**38** When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

**39** When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

**40** "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Amen