

**Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity 2017 (Evensong)**

**Ezekiel 12: 21 - 13: 16; Acts 19: 1 – 20**

Has anybody seen on TV that programme Fake or Fortune with Fiona Bruce and an art dealer called Philip Mould? Do you know the one I mean? They find someone who reckons they own a painting by a famous artist and they set out to establish whether it's genuine or whether, actually, it's a fake. And, quite apart from the obvious attraction that Fiona Bruce is in it, it's a fascinating programme.

Of course, what Fake or Fortune is about is the same as what both our Old Testament lesson from Ezekiel is about and what the New Testament lesson from Acts is about. They're all about authenticity: what is the real thing? The Ezekiel passage is all about real, authentic prophets, who tell it like it is in the name of God without fear or favour, and dodgy false prophets who say what's politically convenient and lull the community into a false sense of security. The Acts passage is all about real,

authentic discipleship, genuinely participating in the life of Christ through Baptism, as opposed to just going through the motions and just giving nominal assent.

I think there's a big difference, though, between the Bible readings and Fake or Fortune. Because when I'm watching Fake or Fortune I'm always tempted to ask myself whether it really matters. Surely what's important is whether it's a good painting or not, irrespective of who painted it. There's something distorted about our values if we say a painting is worth millions if it's by Van Gogh, but the same painting, with exactly the same aesthetic appeal, exactly the same technical merit is only worth a few hundred or a few thousand at the most if it's by someone else.

Now, *in a way*, that thinking applies to people doing things in God's name, or Jesus' name, as well. In St.Mark's Gospel the disciples get shirty because people are going around healing in Jesus' name but they haven't been commissioned by him, the way the

disciples have: they're not the real thing. And Jesus rebukes the disciples and tells them if people are not against him, they're for him; and it doesn't matter whether they've been commissioned by him or not.

In multi-cultural, 2017 Britain this idea that people who are not against us are with us can be seen to be self-evident. The spiritual well-being of the nation is promoted by a number of different faith communities. And all faith those communities have more in common than divides them. It doesn't matter what label they wear. It doesn't matter whether they've been commissioned by Jesus, in the sense of operating through the agency of some theoretical unbroken apostolic succession from Jesus. What matters is that they're promoting the common good, that they're encouraging people to treat others as they would wish to be treated themselves and, in that sense, each contributing, in a complementary way, to the overall economy of God.

Now, that's all very well and good; and I'm pleased to say it as often and clearly as I can, because I think it's important; and I think that it's right . . . so far as it goes. But the point is that it doesn't get us very far: because there is so much more to our faith than just encouraging everybody to be nice and sincere and to try to get along with each other.

What I've been talking about is the general, civic purpose that faith communities serve. But if we zoom in a bit further, to be more particular and consider what it means to be a member of this particular faith community, what it offers us and invites us to participate in is a different quality of life, life in a different dimension, or life considered from within a different paradigm.

In a sense we are all charismatics. Now, of course, here at the Priory we are not charismatic in the sense that people at Christ Church are. We don't fling our arms in the air; we don't have people prophesying in tongues; we

don't see people slain in the Spirit. But these things are just external attributes of worship. And even though the external attributes of worship here are different - and they'll be different again at St.John's Burlington, and again at Holy Trinity, and again at Emmanuel – what we've got to believe, because if we don't it's not worth turning up every Sunday, is that our Baptism matters. Each one of us receives a vocation to live for the purposes of God's Kingdom, to be different and to live differently, to live according to the light of the Spirit, because we are baptised. It's about having the charism of the Spirit of Jesus in our lives; and in that sense being charismatic.

And it needs to be said that anything less isn't the real deal; it's not authentic Christianity; it's not the full offer. And if any of us feel that our lives, our values, our commitments are not radically different because of the faith we profess; are not informed and transformed by that faith, then we're invited to ask God for more. There is a gift waiting to be claimed. And it makes all the

difference between being a fake and having a fortune that cannot be given a monetary value.

Amen.