

**Seventh Sunday of Easter 2016**

**Acts 16: 16 – 34; John 17: 20 – end**

Today is the second Sunday in the Priory's planned giving campaign. There are envelopes at the back of church addressed for everyone who is on the church's Electoral Roll. But there's nothing exclusive about it: anyone can have one. So there are also copies of the contents – a letter from me and a leaflet entitled Celebrating God's Generosity – that anyone can take away. I talked a bit about this last week, so let's just recap what a planned giving campaign is – and isn't – about.

Firstly, it's not about trying to send folk on a guilt trip. I was about to say that we don't do guilt trips at the Priory; but I guess it's part of human nature at least inadvertently to send people on guilt trips. So let me just say that we don't intentionally send anyone on guilt trips at the Priory. The Priory is all about celebrating God's unconditional love. No guilt, no

need to conform: just be yourself and know that you're loved. God's hospitality is here for everyone.

Secondly, a planned giving campaign is not necessarily about getting anyone to give any *more* money to the Priory: it's about the *planning* bit rather than the amount anybody gives. So it's about, first of all, asking people to work out how much to give to the Priory each week or each month. And then – and this is the important bit – it's about asking people to do something to ensure that the amount they've decided is actually received by the Priory – whether or not you happen to have it in your purse; whether or not you're away; whether or not you're ill; whether or not the grandchildren have come to stay; or whatever.

And remember, the reason for doing this is not to try to screw more money out of people: it's about encouraging folk to make an expression of commitment in response to the good news we proclaim.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

So I looked at today's readings to see if there was anything in them to reinforce the message that this is about how we demonstrate we are serious about being disciples rather than about raising extra cash for church. But when I looked at the reading from the Acts of the Apostles I realised that the point it illustrates is the precisely the point last week's reading from the Acts of the Apostles also illustrated.

If you were at Priory last week you'll have heard about Lydia receiving the good news of Jesus Christ and immediately responding by opening up her home to give hospitality to Paul and Barnabas. She met generosity with generosity. This week we see the same response in someone else. This week we see Paul and Silas speaking the word of the Lord to the gaoler who's had the fright of his life, thinking he's lost his prisoners, but finds that Paul and Silas haven't escaped even though the jail has burst open in an earthquake. And what's his response to hearing the word of the Lord? "He brought them up to his house

and set food before them." So there's a pattern emerging. The pattern is: hear the good news, and put your material resources where your mouth is. It's an instinctive response, but if we don't organise ourselves and do a bit of planning, we might not put the instinct into practice.

The good news we're hearing today is this story from St. John's Gospel that Jesus prayed that we may be fully integrated into the godhead, just as Jesus and his Father are mutually integrated. God came down at Christmas. God completely identifies himself with us by being born, living among us and dying for us. On Thursday we celebrated Ascension Day. The crucified Christ, bearing the marks of the human suffering with which he had identified, is assumed into the godhead. The human condition is assumed into the godhead. Through Jesus humanity and divinity are united.

That means that there is more to being human than the sum of our humanity. Because of Jesus there is the

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

potential to do much, much more than we could ever do in our own strength. Because, by being integrated into the godhead, the Holy Spirit comes into play to fill the deficit between our aspirations and our abilities.

The crises civilisation faces seem insurmountable. The capitalist ideal on which our economy is based has been discredited, but there no alternative is emerging to replace it. The world is fragmenting and we are seeing mass migration of proportions never before seen. The gap between rich and poor is getting wider and wider. Here in Bridlington families are having to depend on food banks. That is the state of the human condition.

The good news is, though, that it doesn't have to be like that. There is the potential for transformation. Jesus says that the glory his Father has given him, he gives to us. That's what all this integration into the godhead means: receiving God's glory into our lives. And God's glory means no more crying, no more pain.

And that can start now and can be realised in our lives to the extent that we respond to God's generosity by the generosity with which we offer ourselves to God's service.

We can offer ourselves to God's service in all sorts of ways. But through the particular focus that we are using today, thinking of the way Lydia responded, thinking of the way the gaoler responded, one of the ways we can respond is to make sure that we resource the church materially as efficiently as we can. So if you have it in mind that you want to give a certain amount per week to resource God's mission as it's expressed through the Priory, please join one of the planned giving schemes, preferably by setting up a standing order, in order to put the Priory in the best position., in this generation and the next, to work with God and to welcome his Holy Spirit, and in that Spirit to me be more than the sum of our humanity.

Amen.