

Sunday next before Lent (3.03.19) Evensong

Exodus 3: 1 – 6; John 12: 27 – 36

When I'm talking about the Bible with children what I often want to emphasise is that the Bible isn't simply one book: it's a collection of books of many different genres – there's law, there's poetry, there are letters, there's history, there are fantasies, there are biographies. And, of course, when I say there are biographies I'm referring to the Gospels. The simplistic suggestion is that the four Gospels are biographies of Jesus. I think you can probably just about get away with saying that, but I suspect it may well provoke an audible drawing in of breath from biblical scholars. It's just a bit too simplistic to do full justice to what the Gospels are, but we know what we mean when we say it.

But this evening, I want to suggest that St John's Gospel, from which we've heard in our second lesson, isn't a biography of Jesus. It's not about Jesus! Well,

that might sound an outlandish claim, but what I mean is that it's not so much about Jesus himself as about the way in which Jesus reveals the Father.

Let's face it, there are whole passages about it in John: they go on for chapter after chapter, round and round in circles: whoever has seen me has seen the Father, because I am in the Father and the Father is in me, so whoever is in me is in the Father and I am in them, and so on it goes. But the good news is that God is revealed. And whereas to start with that happened in purely personal encounters like Moses' at the burning bush, and then broadened out to the community of the Hebrew people through the work of the Prophets, now through Jesus that revelation of the Father is made universal.

Verse 32 – “when I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw all people to myself” – is a verse relied upon by Universalists to suggest that all people are saved through what Jesus has done; and to counter a more

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

evangelical suggestion that people have to choose whether to appropriate for themselves the salvation which is offered to all people through Jesus. The more liberal interpretation is that it has already been done: there is no choosing left.

If that's the good news, what might be less attractive is the way it is achieved: it is to be achieved by the kind of death Jesus was to die. The glory of the Father is not revealed through any form of success, but rather through abject and humiliating failure. That is not to say that Jesus gives us a license to fail, because it's in failure that God's glory will be revealed, what it means is that human categories of success and failure are irrelevant to the issue of God's glory. God's glory is not revealed either by success or failure: it is revealed through obedience to him. Such obedience might be associated with what we identify as success or with what we identify as failure. But that doesn't matter. What matters is obedience, wherever it takes us, even

if it takes us – as it did Jesus – to the most utter depths of supposed failure.

Obedience is about walking in the light of Christ. In this age of electricity we tend to think of light as being something you either switch on or switch off; and so we think of God as someone standing next to a celestial light switch. This afternoon the Churchwardens, our events manager Helen Hughes and I have had a meeting with the lighting engineers to agree on a few tweaks to the settings of the new lighting system now it's been installed for a year and we've had the benefit of being able to see what works well and what works less well. This chap came along with a laptop computer, plugged in a wireless router so he could communicate with each light fitting and made adjustments do there's now a bit more light here and a bit less light there in various combinations. You could say he was playing God with our lighting system.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

But that's not how lightness and darkness is regulated in the theological sense. God does not create darkness by switching off the light. God does not flick the switch and put on the lights if people are satisfactorily faithful.

We create darkness. We keep people in darkness if we keep them trapped in ignorance or poverty or injustice. That darkness is dispelled and the light that is the glory of God is revealed if we allow ourselves to be enlightened out of laziness and prejudice and self-interest.

God's light shines through Jesus. It is never switched off. But it does get blocked out. Let it be our Lenten discipline that we so align ourselves with Jesus that we do not obscure that light from shining on the darkness of our lives and the world around us.

Amen.