

Third Sunday after Trinity 2019 (7.07.19)

Galatians 6: 1 – 16; Luke 10: 1 – 11, 16 - 20

I'm not planning to preach a full sermon this morning, what with welcoming Maxine and everything; but I couldn't deny myself just a few moments to reflect on vulnerability and victory. Because that's the theme that runs through our two Bible readings today: vulnerability and victory. Paul tells us that the world has been crucified to him – he is vulnerable to having nothing in this world about which he could boast - but he has the victory of Christ's crucifixion. And Jesus sends out 35 pairs of people to minister in his name and tells them it's like sending "lambs into the midst of wolves"; yet they come back bowled over by how effective their mission has been. And – who knows? – reflecting on sending a lamb into the midst of wolves might not be totally inappropriate on a Sunday when we welcome a new curate!

Vulnerability and victory: they seem like strange bed-fellows. But it shouldn't really surprise us that they go together when we consider that the ultimate victory of Jesus – and I mean really ultimate: his victory over everything there is ever to have victory over – *that* ultimate victory comes out of him being whipped and stripped and publicly executed. And you can't get any more vulnerable than hanging naked on a cross. But it's from that that the triumph of the cross springs.

And we all say we want to be like Jesus. Who is the ultimate role model? Jesus. We all know that. And yet we all say that we're a bit too vulnerable, a bit too insecure, not quite confident enough, not quite well enough informed, not quite knowledgeable enough about the bible to be able to do anything to serve God or the church. That's for other folk, not for people like me, we say, not for ordinary people.

I haven't asked Maxine about this, but I'd be pretty willing to bet my last dollar that at some stage as she

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explored the calling to ordained ministry she will have said “could *I* really be ordained?” I know I did. I can see me sitting in the study of the vicar at the church where we worshipped and we were going through all these criteria for selection and seeing them being ticked off one by one and I said “But *me*? Really? *Me* ordained?” And our vicar, typically, damned me with faint praise and said “Matthew, I don’t suppose for one moment that you’ll set the world on fire, but just think of some of the vicars you know. If they can do it, you can do it!”

When you are an ordained person, it’s difficult sometimes to remember how special, or completely different, people who are not ordained think you are. Because you know that you’re just an ordinary person moggling along the way that everybody else mogs along, except that you’re in this incredibly privileged position.

And as we welcome Maxine this morning, we’re not welcoming a super-hero, we’re not welcoming a spiritual giant: we’re just welcoming an ordinary Bridlass who has had the courage to realise that you can only get victory out of vulnerability, that you can only be faithful to God’s call by allowing yourself to be like a lamb sent into the midst of wolves.

And in the months and years ahead, as we reap the blessings of Maxine’s ministry, we need to cling on to that. And we need to cling onto it next time someone asks us to do something around the Priory and we say “O, *I* couldn’t possibly do that . . .”

Amen.