

**Sunday 29th May 2022**

**"This is your Life"**

**Worship lead by Revd Geoff Gleed**

**Bible readings: Matthew 5 vv 13 -16**

**Matthew 13 vv 1 - 9**

I guess a good number of people here today will have watched that long-running programme on the TV, "This is your Life". Over its 43 year span a succession of presenters opened the famous red book to reveal some of the facts about the lives of 1,130 people and millions of viewers tuned in each week to see whose story would be told and what revelations they might discover!

Some of the folk were very famous film stars, TV actors, theatrical legends, sports men and women and others were celebrities from the political scene or the world of literature or music. Some were ordinary everyday people who had perhaps founded well-known charities, done voluntary work and who have made a tremendous impact on the lives of others ....but in every case as I recall when I watched the programme, you discovered interesting things about those people and the way that they had lived...and you were often surprised at what was being revealed.

You've almost certainly heard it said that everyone has at least one book inside them and I believe that is true... the famous red book certainly exposed all manner of stories for us to hear and I am sure that we too have lived our lives with so many stories to tell and memories to share - the ups and downs, the happy times, the sad times and the challenges - stories about our working lives, our personal relationships, our successes and yes, our failures too. There are those things that we've achieved and are proud of and I am sure there are those things that we regret... there is even a story to tell about our faith journey as Christians-- whether we came to church as a child or perhaps entered into discovering Jesus in later years.

The list is endless and everyone's story is different.. yes in parts there might be similarities but there are bound to be aspects of your individual life which are peculiar to you alone.

Now I know of quite a few folk who have written their autobiography... and over the years a number of them have given me a copy - often because they have asked me to conduct their funeral! I usually get a comment as the book is handed over along the lines "There you go, make what you can of this. There should be more than enough there to help give me a good send off!"

They do also sometimes add, "Mind you there are a few stories there that might be suitable in the chapel... but I'll leave it to your discretion!"

Liz and one or two others have often encouraged me to write my autobiography and I have started attempting it in more than one occasion under the working title "Born to be me" but I've never got further than the beginning of my school days .

When I first went to Theological College in Salisbury to do my initial training we spent part of the first term developing the art of story-telling. And it wasn't a bad thing to do because ministers and worship leaders have to be able to understand how many stories in the Bible can be presented to

people in a meaningful interesting way. And that is where Jesus really scored- he had a great gift of grabbing attention by telling stories in the simplest of ways AND although people didn't always immediately understand they would listen and probably went way often challenged and probably chatted about what he'd said amongst themselves.

Jesus would take everyday things and events to help people understand about the New Kingdom - about God's love. He would use 'one-liners' - statements like "I am the Good Shepherd", "Love your neighbour as yourself" "Don't be anxious about tomorrow" and of course he used simple stories - parables- to get his message across. - Remember, in his time and for millennia people learned through the spoken word and through the actions of others - no TV, mobile phones, emails, texts, zoom, facebook, Tok Tok, Twitter, blogs..... and the majority of his listeners could not read or write--they had to take in what was said and work things out for themselves. Yes, there was written literature - the scrolls of the Jewish people and interpreted by the priests and rabbis, but for ordinary townsfolk and villagers the language and law was at a different level. so they heard what the leaders felt they should know.

In the two readings we heard today Jesus is trying to spell out how people what needs to happen, should adjust their view of life and way of life if they truly want to help bring about God's Kingdom on Earth...it is only through them that it can happen, so he talks about how they need to be salt and light... how their lives can effect others ... bring a new flavour to the lives of others, bring them out of darkness into the light of hope. Jesus is saying "Don't give up, there is a new way - if you are prepared to stand up and help things to change. If you keep hiding away, living in fear, then you will be like salt that has lost its savour or the lamp that fails to shed light.

In the same way, today, we know as Jesus knew, that not everyone will want to change or will warm to a new way of living - yes some will jump and the chance of a better life, but others will dither, others still will reject it out of hand - the message of the sower, of course!

BUT and here is the crux of my message this morning, you and I are today's followers in the way - we have experienced good times and great times and some rough times too - not least over the past 2 years! Psalm 137 - "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" and I suspect many of us are asking that question. So many of us are asking precisely that - there has been such a shift in people's lives and it is causing so many people to rethink who they are, why they are here, where they want to be from now on.. asking "What's the point...Is there a point?"

How DO we proclaim ourselves to others, live our lives from now on? What are we looking for and what are others looking for from us? Are we, as Jesus asks, still the salt of the earth? or has the salt lost its flavour? Are we still a light in the world or have things gone a bit dark?

I am not here to criticize simply to offer some words of encouragement and hope...to say that the words and stories of Jesus have been around for 2000 years and are still here to give us a message for today. If you take nothing from my message today I hope that you will still have the belief that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. His story and our stories are part of today in the here and now...they and we are relevant in what happens now and in the future...we can really be a light in times even of our own darkness, we can still sing the Lord's song in a world which has different priorities and values. The message is much bigger than us, the messengers but we do need to live it out, speak it out and show the positive nature of our faith and life.

Take the trouble to read one or two parables this week - they might help you reassess where you are and where you might hope to be.

Have you read the article in our Weekly News this week - "Inertia be gone!" it is well worth consideration and the prayer at the end seems particularly relevant right now:

"Fount of Blessing, may my desire for life be so strong that, by your grace, it will deliver me from the desire to go back to bed"

It says it all doesn't it!

Amen