

**Preparation. Sermon: 7th Sunday of Easter. 12th May 2024.
by Joan Grenfell**

The ice-breaker question at an event I was at some time ago was...

‘What do you spend most of your time doing?’

It didn’t take a lot of thought for me to have an answer.

‘I spend most of my time preparing!!’ As a teacher preparing lessons. As a Lay Minister preparing Sermons; Bible Studies; Quiet Mornings; Quiet Days; Retreat days; M.U. Talks; Care Home Services and talks. As a wife and mother... preparing meals.

My husband would frequently say, ‘What are you doing?’

‘I’m preparing...’

‘You’re always preparing something’ he would say... and he was right!!

And I think that Jesus would have identified with that, because He too knew the importance of being prepared.

Any of the significant events of His ministry involved well thought out preparation by Jesus.

Before choosing the 12 who were to be with Him during His 3 year ministry... Jesus prepared! Luke’s gospel tells us that, ‘Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and He spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called His disciples and chose 12 of them, whom he also named Apostles.’

Jesus’ preparation was a night spent in prayer.

Preparing for another event at the beginning of the last week of His life, His entry into Jerusalem, Jesus was again meticulous in His preparation. Because this particular entry into Jerusalem was no ordinary entering into Jerusalem.

Jesus had a point to make... that He was the Messiah. Jesus made His point by ‘acting out’ what had been written by the Prophet Zechariah...

‘Behold, your King comes to you triumphant and victorious... humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey.’

Jesus had previously arranged with the owners of a colt that they would give the colt to 2 of His disciples... ‘Because the Lord needs it.’

We don't know when Jesus met with the owners of the colt, but He did... His preparation was perfect and His entry into Jerusalem was triumphant and just as Zechariah had said it would be. The point had been made for those with eyes to see.

Preparation for His final meal with His disciples was again meticulous. Again, he went off on his own to secure a room where this most significant of meals could take place. Everything was arranged, so that again, 2 of His disciples could be shown to the room where they would prepare for the Passover Celebration.

And during this meal, as we have heard in our Gospel Reading, Jesus was again in preparation mode!! He was looking ahead to when the disciples would be out on their own... charged with sharing the Gospel with all who would hear... beginning in Jerusalem.

Jesus' preparation again involves prayer. He prays for His disciples in what is known as His High Priestly Prayer. It is quite a complex prayer... but we can take from it that Jesus prays for His disciples not to be taken FROM the world... but to be protected IN it!!

Jesus, ever the Good Shepherd, prays for the protection of His sheep as they go forward without His physical presence.

The theme of preparation continues in the reading we have heard from the Acts of the Apostles. Here we see the 11 remaining Apostles waiting in the upper room for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit... but they were not being idle!

They are in discussion... there is one missing from their number... they need a full team as they go forward. Judas must be replaced.

2 names were put forward... and after praying together, Matthias is chosen to make up the number of Apostles.

Today's readings focus on preparation and going forward with confidence.

Jesus is confident that the future mission of the church has been left in the right hands... a point which He makes clear in a legendary exchange with the Angel Gabriel after His ascension into heaven.

Gabriel queries the wisdom of leaving such an important task to 11 such 'unlikely' lads!! He asked if Jesus has an alternative plan... just in case!

Jesus replies, 'I have asked Peter, James and John and a few other friends and followers to tell other people all that has happened. When other people hear and believe, they will tell others, and little by little the whole earth will hear the Good News.'

Gabriel is still not convinced and again asks about a backup plan. To which Jesus replies, 'I have no other plan.' And we might reflect at this point that He has clearly laid the responsibility of sharing the Gospel on the shoulders of believers.

It is a heavy task but not one to be taken without support.

Jesus promises...

YES, I believe in you. YES. When you finally let go of me... I will be with you always... To the end of time.

The feast of the Ascension has been called 'The feast of the letting go.'... letting go of the past, without the need to cling onto it. And I want to suggest that we here at St. George's are approaching a time of 'letting go'.

As our next Incumbent is announced... as assuredly they will be... At that point we must 'let go'... let go of all that we have received and known from past Incumbents and look forward to the 'newness' of their ministry and what lies ahead for us. And in that newness Jesus promises... YES, I will be with you in it... always.

As the disciples stood looking up, watching Jesus disappear from their sight.... An angel asked them, 'Why are you standing there looking up?'

Perhaps a better question might have been, 'Where is Jesus asking you to go?'

A very pertinent question for us as we wait and wonder...

'Where is Jesus asking us to go?'

Amen.