

Christ Church and St John's
16th after Trinity September 19th 2021

Wisdom 1.16-2.1, 12.22; Mark 9.30-37

You know, it must have been wonderful to be one of those twelve disciples – even the fairly anonymous ones who were mentioned by name on one occasion, but never mentioned again. What teaching, what wisdom, what insight those disciples must have been privy to in such close and intimate company with the Lord. Such a privilege, but oh! So disconcerting because Jesus knew everything. He knew what they'd been talking about – what they were thinking. And all their faults and foibles were blazoned across the pages of the Bible – certainly at one time, the most studied book in society! What a position to be in, and yet – as I've said – how wonderful to be with such a master.

In this Gospel passage Jesus was talking to His disciples, and only His disciples. He said quite clearly that He didn't want anybody else to know – at that stage – that Jesus, "*the Son of Man*" would be "*betrayed into human hands*" and they would kill Him. And after three days He would rise again. Quite clearly Jesus didn't want anybody else to know this. But if we look at the Old Testament Lesson, we can see that an astonishing amount was known about the death of Jesus. The Old Testament account comes from the Wisdom of Solomon. Now, the Lord had granted Solomon wisdom, because in his prayer that is what he asked for. He hadn't asked for riches although he was granted that as well. But he asked for wisdom so that he could rule his people wisely. And so these words from Wisdom were not merely tossed on to the page without thought or prayer. But when we think about it Solomon was born in 990BC, nearly a thousand years before Christ. And yet, the person we're reading about in this passage of Old Testament scripture is Christ!

Sometimes, you can look at a passage and see a couple of sentences that relate. But so much of this relates that it's astonishing. Just listen to this: "*He professes to have knowledge of God and calls himself a child of the Lord.*" "*He boasts that God is his father.*" "*Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle his is and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death.*" This is Christ who Solomon was writing about a thousand years before Christ was born!

Is it any wonder that Christ was so special and had such an astounding sense of knowing – knowing what His disciples were saying quietly amongst themselves – or even in other passages of Scripture, what they were thinking; and as in this instance the disciples' thoughts weren't always very humble! And yet, humility, I think, is the order of the day – or rather – the Season because over this period of time we're celebrating Creationtide. Indeed, this is a Eucharist for Creationtide! And so, although creation doesn't seem to be mentioned anywhere in our readings yet it's implicit, because creation would have been much more in evidence in the time of Christ and of Solomon, than it is today.

I'm quite sure that when Jesus told His parables, He looked around Him for an illustration, and He saw: the sower tossing seeds on to the ground with some going astray on the path or amongst the thorns. He saw shepherds and sheep on the hillside, and He knew the end result if wheat and tares were sown together. If we looked around for an example that we could give in a parable, our story might be quite different.

Last Sunday, a number of us on our Parish Vision Day were asked to take a walk round the vicinity of St John's Church. Alison told us that new blocks of flats were being built; and the residents of the existing flats would gradually be moved across – block by block – to the new ones. And they would watch as their old homes were being demolished. Not much countryside there! I didn't see much of the natural world when I lived in East London, where many of the front gardens were concreted over, and the only beds we saw in front gardens were those you sleep on, and not flower beds.

A couple of weeks ago I walked with one of my deaf, sight-impaired friends from the O2 in Greenwich to the Thames Barrier. We passed by two factories if you could call them that. One produced concrete and the other produced tarmac. My friend was suitably interested. "But," she said thoughtfully, "do they have factories for flowers and trees?" I explained that young trees are grown in green spaces, and flowers are likely to be produced in greenhouses where the right conditions can be maintained. But along the sandy riverbank of Greenwich, concrete and tarmac are a more obvious product. My friend wasn't impressed!

Being aware of creation in the middle of London is probably less easy than it is in Dorset or the wilds of Kent. But we all know that the demands in wealthy western society – be it London or the more rural areas – can cause over-harvesting and poverty in less privileged countries. We know that our price cuts and bargains can cost farmers and food producers more than we would wish. Thankfully, we do have a better understanding of how smoke belched out into the atmosphere can cause harm; and how the deadly "pea-souper" was something more than just a bit of smog! So we are improving in our knowledge and outlook. We're aware of the damage that we – in recent centuries – have caused and mustn't do so again. But are we so aware of Christ's part in this?

Last Sunday, in our Vision day, we asked ourselves how we could make Christ real and alive to the people around St John's or any of our Churches. But how much is He alive to us? Could we, like Solomon, write a description of this Jesus we've never met in person, but should surely be more familiar with than someone who lived nearly a thousand years before Him? Can we go out to our unknown neighbours, and proclaim Christ in a way that is unthreatening and sincere? And do we marry up creation with Christ – the all knowing – all loving?

On another occasion, when I was walking round the Greenwich Peninsular with my deaf, sight-impaired friend, we saw one of those Uber boats moving fast over the

water. My friend became quite excited, because she knew that speed meant waves, and she was looking forward to seeing them crashing on the bank. But sadly no waves came. The boat had gone and the water was still. I watched her face fall. "Wait," I said, because I could see a little movement coming towards us under the water. And sure enough, after a few long moments, the waves came hurtling towards the bank crashing with all the drama we could wish for! "Sometimes," I said, "things take a little longer to happen, but we can't give up on them."

Christ doesn't give up on us. He works with us and through us if we're willing and inviting. Let's make every day ... an invitation!

Amen