**SERMON FOR EASTER 3 | 11.04.2021**

**Acts 3: 12-19; Colossians 1: 24-29; St Luke 24: 36b-48**

**I wonder – if you had the chance to watch it - what you made of Prince Philip’s funeral yesterday afternoon? Blessed by bright sunshine, the precision and absolute split-second timing of the military in all their glory was in stark contrast to the simplicity of the old Defender Land Rover which carried his coffin to the gates of St George’s Chapel. And in the middle of it all the small, lonely figure of the Queen. Whatever their status and their resources, this was still a Covid funeral with 30 guests, masks and 2 metre social distancing mandatory. Despite the long list of titles and other awards at the end, this had much the same atmosphere as many other funerals this year – and that was absolutely right and proper. And the occasion was what the Duke had wanted – to the letter.**

**He hadn’t wanted a eulogy although there was a nod in that direction from David Conner the Dean at the very beginning. And he hadn’t wanted a sermon despite the Archbishop of Canterbury taking part. Both Hugh Edwards on BBC and Tom Bradby on ITV had remarked on this - and both thought it a good thing. Let the words of the readings, the music and the ambience do the talking they said in the ten minutes of fairly random ‘celebrity’ comments that often follow major events like this.**

**Am I too steeped in the Church not to have missed some kind of balanced religious reflection in the service? Wasn’t at least one of the talking points of Harry and Meghan’s wedding (in that same chapel) the sermon by Michael Curry the American Presiding bishop whose vitality and clarity showed the Gospel of Jesus at its very best?**

**Today is the day we set aside for our Annual General Meeting. Actually it is less than six months since our last AGM because of all the lockdowns in 2020 so no ‘Review of the Year’ photographs today and not a great deal of reflection backwards except to say a very real thank-you to God for having got us through this very difficult period in reasonably good order: well, at least we are still talking to each other which can’t be said of every family or group of friends this year!**

**The passage from Colossians puts it like this: *now is the time for us to rejoice in the difficulties we have endured together. For though they do not compare with the pains that Christ suffered on behalf of his body the Church, they have been the necessary means by which we have proclaimed the Word of God in all its fulness…***

**In the TV commentary yesterday, the life of Prince Philip was described as one of ‘service and sacrifice’. Might that also apply to us?**

**This Gospel story of one of Jesus appearances has many elements that we are familiar with in other accounts: the fear in the disciples, their need to see his hands and his side - and the attempt by Jesus to allay their fears with the familiar calming words, *Peace be with you.***

**But there is one new element which I want us to think about: *while in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, Jesus said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of grilled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.***

**Having Jesus stand there and talk to them bad enough. Trying to work out if he was a ghost was their first concern but then he leaps ahead and tells them how they needed to fit this experience into the bigger biblical story about the Messiah. It’s all too much. So Jesus changes the focus. He asks them for something to eat.**

**And they give him grilled fish: their grilled fish - the fish that they would have worked all night to catch as we hear about in other resurrection stories. So what is Jesus up to?**

**Quite simply he knows that whatever he has taught them, whatever he has shown them, however vital it was for him to die and to rise again: if this work of being witnesses was to ‘work’ it had to involve them – their lives, their time, their skills, their willingness to get stuck in and to make sacrifices.**

***Give me some of your fish* is Jesus’ way of saying: whatever miracles I have done, whatever great visons I have shared, whatever healings and transformations you have seen: the kingdom of God cannot be done for you. It can only be built with the tools that you bring.**

**It can’t be built for you – only with you. *Give me some fish.***

**And when he follows it up by saying, *you are to be witnesses to these things,* what he means is, it is only by your involvement in my work, by your investment in the Church, that my Kingdom can grow. *Give me some fish needs to be translated –* as the funeral perhaps failed to do – into *God’s work only comes alive in service and sacrifice – by each and every one of us whom Jesus is calling to be his friends.***

**As we start to ask the question: what does God want from us at St James’ over the next five years up to the 150th anniversary of our founding by the Clothworkers Company in 1875, can we respond to his call to give him – despite all the difficulties - what he needs to build his Kingdom here on earth?**

**Among them, service and sacrifice. So that world may believe.**