

## **SERMON FOR EASTER 5 | 07.05.23**

Acts 7: 55-end; St John 14: 1-14

**After all the excitement of yesterday's Coronation, with state coaches, thousands of troops, massed clergy, designer dresses, trumpeters and priceless crowns; thousands of hours of rehearsals, lots of nervous moments wondering if everything will go according to plan – millions of onlookers around the globe and so many memories created – now ... now it was 'yesterday'! It is already history!**

**Whether we like it or not, we live with history. It informs and moulds us – from the relatively trivial events of recent history to the deeper events in the past which instinctively influence who we are and what we do. This is what I am about, this is the way I think because – of a parent, a past teacher or some significant event. This is only possible because of something that took place long ago...**

**And in that last category we place our parish celebrations today for the opening of the new organ: were it not for a whole series of complicated incidents, there wouldn't have been sufficient money stashed away in the bank to pay for this big refurbishment. And it all started with William Lambe, born in 1495!**

**Brought up in Kent, William Lambe made his money in the cloth trade and was wealthy enough to buy the chapel of St James by Monkswell when the monastery's mother house at Gironden was dissolved in 1542 – as well as building Lambe's conduit, making improvements to local jails, building a school at his home town of Sutton Valence and providing 200 buckets for poor woman who used them to sell water in Holborn.**

**Lambe lived to an incredibly great age for his time. He was actually 85 when he died in 1580 and both his private life and the religious environment in which he lived were pretty difficult.**

**Somehow he carried on making money through the reign of Henry VIII and the break with Rome; the short period under Edward VI when a new English Prayer Book was imposed by Thomas Cranmer, then the five reactionary years of Queen Mary who brought back the Mass in Latin and finally the not entirely easy days of Queen Elizabeth when the prosecution of those not willing to accept the Acts of Uniformity and Richard Hooker's version of how the new Anglican Church should somehow mix Catholic order (Bishops, priests and deacons) and Protestant theology about Communion - following on from the Pope's excommunication of Elizabeth in 1570.**

**Two Catholic and two Protestant monarchs in the space of just fifty years – in the days when the faith of the King or Queen really mattered.**

**And life at home was little better: all his seven children and two of his three wives all died before him so that he made the decision to hand over his fortune to the Clothworkers Company who then carefully salted his bequest away for four hundred years, hardly touched in all that time so that it grew and grew.**

**And finally, in our generation, the process by which we at St James' could decide what might be done with this exceptional legacy – in order to build up the music and the mission of the Church.**

**The early stories in the Books of Acts can also appear pretty random. Friendships made here and there, disagreements, difficult journeys, some reluctance to hand over houses and goods: it's all familiar stuff. But in the middle of it all, Stephen stands out. He was already a great organiser, helping widows and orphans, in addition to his preaching – a potential leader in the making.**

**Yet when he is arrested and hauled out of the city to be stoned to death, it was that which became his vision. He had done the right thing up to now and he was highly regarded – but something quite radically different was being demanded of him now. The shedding of his blood was what was needed for the Church to flourish – and that is what he was prepared to do.**

**And that is the other legacy of William Lambe: the example of one who was ready to enjoy what he had while it lasted – and then when all that was taken away, to entrust what he had to others without being able to control in any way what would become of it.**

**When Jesus talks to the disciples in today's Gospel about the great works they can expect to do in future, it is against the background of a lack of permanence and security: he is about to leave them and they know that. But still he goes on: *I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me for anything, I will do it.***

**St John's version of Jesus' commission to the disciples have accompanied and sustained us throughout this long and tortuous Organ Project.**

**There were so many times when the whole enterprise could have been derailed: the difficulties of getting permissions, the scale and the practical challenges that so often confronted us and serious bouts of ill health in lots of those most closely involved. And then Covid! How many more things could go wrong we asked ourselves?**

**And all the time we had to keep reading Jesus words to the disciples: *I will do whatever you ask in my name...***

**After yet another death in his family, surely William Lambe must have also wondered just what God was about.**

**But their early deaths, Stephen's death, our failures and uncertainties are just the place where God, in Jesus, can work best.**

**Philip and the disciples call out: *Just show us the Father and we will be satisfied...* And Jesus' reply is always the same: stop looking for easy guarantees. *If you know me, you have seen the Father; and the Father is working in you.***

**As we give thanks for the Lambe legacy today, don't let's just focus on the money he gave us, generous though that is. Let's also marvel at the way he trusted in God to do his perfect will – albeit 450 years later – and to see how he, like Stephen – wanted above all things, to teach us to trust God, wholeheartedly and unconditionally. In God's hands, *all will be well and all manner of thing will be well*, as Mother Julian once wrote.**

**For an epitaph, William Lambe's tomb carries these words - which I have edited slightly to make the point a little easier to understand:**

*As I was so be ye.  
As I am ye shall be.  
That I gave, that I have,  
that I spent, that I had.  
When I total all my cost,  
what I kept was what I lost.*

**Or in the familiar words of St Ignatius of Loyola:**

**Dearest Lord, teach me to be generous; teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing I am doing your will.**