

## **SERMON FOR TRINITY 10 at 8am | 13.08.23**

I Kings 9: 9-18; Romans 10: 5-15; St Matthew 14: 22-33

So it looks as if **Wilkos** is going to disappear from our high streets, joining the long list of stores that were once familiar but are no more – **Woolworth's, Debenham's, Mothercare, Jamie Oliver restaurants, Jessops camera shops** – while lots of other familiar names are managing to stay afloat but are still closing stores to save money. The critics of **Wilkos** say they simply didn't find a way of showing people what it was they needed. Apparently you don't make money by supplying what people know they want: you have to be able to tempt them to part with their hard earned cash with things they had never thought they wanted!

In a leading article in the **Church Times** last week, **Dr Anthony Buxton**, of **St Anthony's Priory in Durham** asked the question: **What then is the Church's core business? What is it that the Church can show us that we have been looking for, what we have been needing, without realising it?**

Now we could spend a few minutes together now asking ourselves that very question: **what is the Church's message? In a nutshell? And if we did that, what would you say? What message are we hoping we can persuade people that they need to hear?**

Standing in the gift shop at **Knock airport** on **Tuesday evening**, waiting for our flight back to **Luton**, I was absolutely amazed at the goods on offer – and I certainly didn't imagine that we would be buying a bright green **Babygro** for our young grandson with the **Irish Rugby badge** prominently displayed on the front! **But someone, somewhere had worked out that that was indeed what we needed... !**

**Anthony's article** honed on the thought that what all good marketing is about is 'finding a solution to a problem'. There we were with time on our hands in the departure lounge - and we wanted to be able to show that we hadn't forgotten little **Hol** even though we were away on a short holiday. **The solution to our problem: the buying of the Babygro...**

But the problem that **Anthony Buxton** suggested that the Church had an answer to was people's need for 'salvation'. They needed to lift off their shoulders the burden of guilt that they carried. *Salvation through faith in Christ Jesus is the solution*, he wrote. **Jesus did not come to call the righteous; it is the sick not the healthy who need a doctor.** Not surprisingly this week's letter's page was less than complimentary.

**Today's Gospel story is full of interesting insights. Jesus and the disciples were a bit down; they had just heard that John the Baptist had been executed because of a silly boast by King Herod and now the crowds were constantly on their heels. Jesus had had to feed five thousand of them and now he is keen to give his team a bit of a break. With that in mind they go in search of somewhere off the beaten track – Jesus leaving them to cross the lake by boat while he found somewhere on his own to clear his head. As the story says, even the boat crossing for the Twelve was very choppy; even a bit of wind blowing across that fairly shallow lake could give their flat boats a tough time. They were tired and fed up.**

**And then, as the disciples look out in the early morning light, they see this figure coming towards them. First they think it to be a ghost and then they realise it is Jesus – literally walking on the water. But what the writer Matthew is doing has very little to do with whether or not it is possible for Jesus to walk on the waves. What he is drawing our attention to is that Jesus, aware of how his men are feeling, is coming to be with them. When they are at their wits end, Jesus searches for them, bringing his unique comfort and reassurance. King Herod could do his worst but Jesus was now there - for the Twelve.**

**And somehow that sets up a positive response in Peter. He is tired and he is fed up. But when Jesus is there Peter somehow gets a new energy. He throws caution to the wind and he steps over the side of the vessel and begins to walk towards Jesus who, as always, is radiating a kind of magnetic confidence and peace that all will be well.**

**But you know, and I know, that we can feel great one minute and pretty anxious the next. The winds blow and our original self-belief can begin to come away at the seams. Help, shouts Peter, and Jesus reaches out and stops him from sinking – but not before Jesus tells him off for doubting that he would be cared for.**

**Is this a picture of someone needing salvation, someone knowing their weakness and their need for forgiveness? Or is this a story that encourages us to focus on something much less theoretical: the warmth and the accepting love of Jesus and his willingness to come and be with us?**

**Tomorrow is August 14<sup>th</sup> and in the Church's calendar it is the day when we remember a 20<sup>th</sup> century saint and martyr, Fr Maximilian Kolbe. Caught up in the invasion of Poland by the Nazis, Kolbe found himself in a concentration camp where he tried to carry out his priestly ministry among his fellow Poles in absolutely horrendous conditions.**

**During that time a number of prisoners escaped and, at an early morning parade call, in the freezing cold, ten men were selected to die in a starvation cell as a reprisal. When one of those chosen at random cried out, *My wife, my children*, Fr Kolbe stepped forward and offered to take the man's place. In the punishment cell he continued to stand alongside each of the other nine until the last of them had died. He was finally killed by lethal injection.**

**What is the Church's core business? To preach in our highly secular and materialistic world that we each need salvation? Well, we can try but I don't think it will get us very far. Hell, fire and damnation were never very attractive – or effective - gambits.**

**Or we can tell stories like those we have heard today: of the way our compassionate Lord patiently and lovingly stands alongside us - in our good days and in our not such good days. Who calls people like Maximilian Kolbe to be reminders of the way Jesus reaches us to those who need him, whatever the cost to themselves.**

**Our core business is helping people to experience the extraordinary difference that the friendship of Jesus gives – not by making us feel guilty but by so often just being there, without criticism or judgement.**

**When our churches do that well, then Jesus' ability to transform the world will do the rest. We just need to put out our hands and ask for his help – and not imagine that we can achieve anything worthwhile without him.**

**As Isaiah discovered, the voice of God is rarely in the 'big' places – in this story, in the winds, fires or earthquakes. Most often it is just a still small voice calling us to trust God enough to venture to walk on the water – sometimes to do what seems utterly impossible – trusting him that, hard though the challenges are, we will not sink.**