

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Date: Vision Day 2015

Reading: Acts 19:1-8

Mark 1:1-13

Theme: The good news of Jesus Christ

If I haven't said it to you already may I wish you a very Happy New Year. And also say thank you for the lovely cards and gifts you gave to Kathryn and me and to Sue over the Christmas period. We have all had a wonderful time and we are all very grateful for your thoughts and for your kindness.

Amazing as it may seem this is a really significant week. This week 17 years ago Kathryn and I with our then little family moved from London into the Vicarage here in Sunningdale. It was the Feast of the Epiphany when the removal men arrived in Tolworth ... the Feast when we remember three wise men arriving in Bethlehem. That is not to say for a minute that David, Tim and Josh were taking on that mantle, but it is a strange thing that we are celebrating that anniversary this week!

Epiphany is a revelation, a new thing, a new way of looking at things and a new way of doing things. Originally, of course it was the radical new idea that Jesus was not just for the Jews but was for the whole world. A new message. A new move of God in history.

And I want to share with you this morning my growing sense that we are at a crossroads again here at HTS. Another Epiphany, Another new beginning. I believe that another new chapter is opening up. A renewed vision for who we are and what we are about to do and who we are about to become.

All those years ago the bible reading was the gospel reading we have heard this morning – Mark Chapter 1. Anthea, my colleague then, was leading the service and I was preaching. And I want this morning to focus on two simple things from the first words that Mark writes about the beginning of:

The good news of Jesus Christ

Over the next few weeks we are going to focus on Jesus, aspects of his character which form the foundation of our lives as his followers, ways in which he sets us up with values different from those around us, values which make us distinctive and different from our friends at the golf club, the choral society, the gym, the office. Values which mark us out as Jesus people. But it's starting with him ... not with us.

So let's begin to think about the good news of Jesus Christ ...

The good news, of course, starts not in Bethlehem at all. The good news doesn't begin in the manger with the birth

of the baby. The good news begins on the first page of our bibles with the words "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

The bible is God's story. God's love story. The story of how everything we see and experience and know is because he created it and he created us. And as time goes on he calls people to follow him. Names we know well: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua ... the list goes on. These people heard God speak to them and call them to follow him. God made sense of the world around them and God had a part for them to play in what he was already doing. And this was amazingly good news.

With the unfolding of the years it became apparent that God had more for his people. His relationship with the Jewish people was just a window into the relationship he wanted to have with the whole world. And there began to be talk of the promise of the one who was to come. The one who would be the saviour of the whole world.

This promise of course does find its fulfilment in Bethlehem in the birth of the baby. Jesus is the one who was to come who would transform and radically change the rules of the game. God was the God of all the world and although no one had ever seen God, in the face of the baby he was to be seen and known. Jesus was and is God himself. And that was amazingly good news.

And of course, those early disciples and the many others who heard Jesus teach, saw him heal, saw the blind see and the deaf hear and the lame walk, became those we know as the early church. Their hearts were saddened in the Good Friday death of their friend, but they were glad and full of joy at the Easter Day rising of their saviour and Lord.

And the early church, those first disciples, were changed from the timid men and women who thought the game was up and it was all over, to those who were on the streets, proclaiming Jesus was alive and looking to him to do nothing less than change the world. They were people who were inspired not because of their learning, they were simple people, not because of any doctrine they had worked out or come to understand, they were people who were inspired because of something that had happened – Jesus had been raised from the dead ... and he had work for them to do. And this was amazingly good news.

And you know the truth is that even 2000 years on, Jesus is still raised from the dead and he still has work for us to do. And this was and is still amazingly good news. He is our vision. He is our hope. He is our joy. He is our peace.

If we are those who seek to follow him, there is work for us to do, there is a world to be won for him, and lives and communities to be changed. Because of something that has happened. The one who was born in Bethlehem,

became a man to be reckoned with, was loved and loathed in equal measure, was killed by the authorities to put his nonsense to an end. But God raised him from the dead. He was dead but he is now alive. Something truly amazing happened. And this was and is still amazingly good news.

And friends our vision for being the church at HTS in Sunningdale this year begins not in the comings and goings of vicars – this one happens to have been here for a while now. But it's really not all about me. Our vision begins in the life, death and resurrection of the one who was promised, the one who came and lived and died and rose again for the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of the world. Our vision, friends, is rooted in him. And this is amazingly good news.

If then we begin to see that our vision is rooted in him and that he has a part for us to play in what he is doing in the world, we have to ask what that part is. And the beginnings of an answer are to be found in his name: Jesus Christ. The Messiah, the one who saves, the one who called himself the way, the truth and the life, the one who called himself the light of the world, the one who called himself the good shepherd, the one who knew what it was to make a sacrifice and to lay down his life for his friends.

We will see now that following Jesus is not just a lifestyle choice where we fit worship in on a Sunday unless we have a better offer; where we commit to stuff in a half-

hearted way if we happen to feel like it; where we are willing to engage in belonging to the church family only to the extent that our busy lives allow.

Friends, following Jesus Christ is about belonging and about sacrifice. There is a cost to following him if we are going to be serious about doing that. And the cost has an impact; it has an impact on our diaries and on our bank accounts.

Diaries:

We have given you the important dates for this year in terms of special things we would love to be able to do together: Quiz Night in March, Flower Festival in May, Family Party in June, Celebration in October. We would love it if you would put those dates in your diary right now and make them a real priority for this coming year of 175th celebrations. There is a cost in that – maybe there are other things that clash with those dates? Maybe you don't like flowers or parties? Friends, it would be great if could commit to one another in a new way this year to get to know one another better and to have fun together celebrating our life as followers of Jesus. There are diary costs and maybe sacrifices to make.

Bank Accounts:

There is also a financial cost ... we have been putting our budget together for this year. We have stripped the budget

expenditure back as far as we feel we possibly can. As things stand we still have more money going out than coming in. That is very simply an unsustainable situation. We can't go on like that. There are reasons for it:

- a. Some people have died
- b. Some people have moved away
- c. Some people have left our church family for a variety of reasons
- d. We have been funding the first phase of our Heritage Project before we have started the fund-raising

All these things have had their impact on the numbers.

But also there are two other reasons.

I have recently been to Bristol, not just to see my lovely daughter and her lovely husband but also to see the Bishop of Bristol and to talk with him about leadership in the church and any lessons he feels that he has learned along the way. His name is Mike Hill and, as it happens, he is the one who appointed me here to HTS all those years ago. There was a panel of church members too but Mike Hill, the Archdeacon of Berkshire as he was then, agreed to my coming and actually appointed me.

One of the main lessons Mike said he had learned in ministry was one he had learned when he was here in the Berkshire area. He had made himself really unpopular by

talking with people very simply but very clearly about money and about giving.

There are some here at HTS who are giving to the max. And I thank you hugely for all you give to the work here.

The two other reasons behind our financial situation are to do with giving are they are these:

- a. There are those who regularly worship with us who are not on the regular giving scheme yet. We should all be part of it to share the responsibility for what we are trying to do together. Everyone should be on the scheme. No exceptions. If you consider yourself part of the church family but are not making a financial contribution of some kind to our work you are not playing your part as you should.
- b. There are those who regularly worship with us whose giving is way below what it really should be. If you haven't reviewed your giving recently, may I respectfully request that you do. I simply ask that you do. If we are not remotely in the right ball park – and the Bible talks of giving 10% of our income as a starter - we do need to look seriously at our own numbers and hear the challenge from God to be more generous than we have been where we are able to do so. If you consider yourself part of the church family but are not making a proportional

financial contribution of some significant kind to our work you are not playing your part as you should.

Now I know that I risk making myself really unpopular as I get into this, but talking with Bishop Mike, looking at the numbers, and knowing where people live, how many houses they own, what cars they drive, where they go on holiday and how much they spend on themselves and their family that I know about, there are those whose giving could be many times what it is in relationship to their resources, if they are going to be serious about following Jesus and really and honestly counting the cost.

Being a member of a local church family, being a member of this church family here at HTS should cost us. I know we are all in different places in terms of income and responsibility but it's just not right that the clergy are in the top 10 of a list of those giving monthly in an area like this where relatively speaking people have massive resources.

I know that some of you have been surprised at the slide I put up for the Heritage Project. But I put it up in good faith and I stand by it. There are those amongst us who could give quarter of a million pounds over three years; there are those even though their income is substantially less who could give us £1000 over three years – teenagers from our church had to raise more than that for their trip to Canada with Gary and Izzy in 2012. I am not suggesting anything that is not doable. But I realise it does mean thinking about

things in a wholly different way and expanding and enlarging our vision of what we could do to help Jesus do what he has promised to do – to extend his kingdom here and to build his church.

You will have heard me say that 15% of our ER have made a response. To those who have returned a pledge form – can I say thank you so very much. We will be in touch personally with all those who have responded so far to let you know where we are at. People have offered monthly payments, one-off gifts, interest-free loans, their time, skill and expertise. And we are hugely grateful for all that. But we are not anywhere near the figure we need to be at for me with confidence and integrity to go to the community or to grant funding. We need to reflect on what God is saying to us in this and be praying for wisdom and clarity. So for the moment we have put the HP on pause.

The conversation we need to have next is whether to go for planning which would be the next obvious step – just to check out whether we really do have a project that could fly. I will keep you up to date with that conversation over the next few weeks.

For this morning we have a Calendar and a Regular Giving Form for everyone as you leave. The Form enables you to start giving if you haven't yet or to increase your giving if you are able to review it, please. We need more money. It's as simple as that. The good news is that it's there – we

have money and resource to give. The challenge is whether we will or will not release it.

Next week Sue will be speaking further about this in terms of other ways in which we can play our part in belonging to HTS and making a difference as she looks at Jesus again and we learn from him about service.

2015 is our 175th Anniversary year. There is a lot to celebrate and some real challenges to face. Are you with us with your diary and with your bank account and with your commitment to the good news of Jesus Christ without whom none of this makes any sense?

You have no idea how much I love being part of this church family. I am committed to Jesus, to this place and to working for the extension his kingdom with you here as this new chapter begins to unfold.

Let's stand and pray together ...