



Sunday 29 April 2018 – 5th Sunday after Easter
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Acts 8 26-end and the Gospel of St John 15: 1-8
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Later, at the AGM we will review some weighty matters that may challenge us, as we seek to find an appropriate response. Throughout the Bible there are ample examples of ordinary people who dealt with challenging circumstances and achieved the extraordinary. The Collect for this Sunday shows us how that's possible:

'Grant that, as by your grace going before us you
put into our minds good desires, so by your
continual help we may bring them to good effect.'

How do we put that maxim into practice? The reading from Acts shows us what Philip did. God asked him to leave what he was doing and step out of his comfort zone, to go and meet a man he didn't know, to talk about a matter yet to be revealed. Setting aside the where, when, what, why and who, the important point is that the man wanted someone to explain faith to him and Philip listened to God and, acted accordingly. So, on this AGM Sunday, let's challenge ourselves: are we really listening to God and are we really acting in accordance with his will? To answer that, let's take a look at the Gospel. This contains one of those direct messages to which I referred in my previous sermon. Jesus says:

'Every branch that does not bear fruit God will remove.'

Part of launching our Growth and Mission Action Plan was to focus on those activities we undertake year-on-year to discern if they are still the most effective way of engaging in outreach. One of the great initiatives that has come out of that is to try something different with the Church Fair: to move outside the walled Rectory Garden to Ray Watts Farm and so, take the Church to the people.

But the Gospel continues, even the fruitful branches will be pruned, so that they will produce even more fruit. God's tough love needs us to be honest and review the many activities we undertake both individually and as a church, which might be nice to do but put together may be detracting from the core task God has called us to undertake for his mission. Do we need to cut something out to focus on what we do well and just do that even better? For example, one of our strengths is that we are very hospitable: we welcome everyone who comes through the door, but do we make enough use of the Church during the week as a focal point for social interaction with the wider parish? Maybe serving coffee, knitting, listening to music, listening to each other, listening to God. Does what we do maximise the right vision for this Church?

How do we discern that? Jesus is plain we need to live in his mindset and we can only do that if we put effort into reading the bible and praying everyday not just for personal benefit but for our corporate benefit, as the body of Christ. Further, we need to reflect on how often we meet together to talk through what we have shared in Church on Sunday and pray about it.

I understand that there used to be evening house groups. Why did they stop? Did they rely on one or two people? Or, is that way of meeting not working for our lives today? Is there another way of engaging to pose questions and share thoughts for mutual spiritual growth? Walk and talk? Coffee and chat? Pint and ponder? Faith is best experienced in the way that works with everyday life, so that it's not an effort but something we do intuitively. We came to exactly that conclusion at the Lent Course that it doesn't need a clerical collar to make conversation: but if you want to bounce some ideas, the only beverage I don't drink is tea!

To be a Christian means more than what we get out of our relationship with Christ, it also means putting his words into action effectively helping others to find faith. He said this:

'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.'

So, on this AGM Sunday, how courageous are we feeling?

Amen.