



**Sunday, 8 July 2018 – Trinity 6**  
**Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Readings: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10, Gospel St Mark 6:1-13**  
**Focusing on the value of vulnerability**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

If you watch the Antiques Roadshow on television you will know the sort of items that are assessed. Someone will bring in a very ordinary cracked pot that has been kicking around the owner's house for longer than anyone can remember, which none of the family has regarded as special. Along comes the genial Henry Sandon, the expert on pots and says "You do realise, don't you, that you have an item of immense worth." He gives a valuation and the owner's jaw drops to the floor in disbelief saying "But it's just a cracked pot!" It's a clear case of familiarity and being too close to the item to see its finer qualities.

I think that's the issue in today's Gospel where we find Jesus back in his home town of Nazareth. On hearing him preach his former acquaintances are affronted. "But he's just the carpenter! He's Mary's son." Familiarity breeds contempt in their eyes, they cannot see beyond his working man's roots to God incarnate in their midst. He was, however, more than a jobbing carpenter but a spiritual craftsman who built up people creatively and fixed broken lives transformatively. Tragically, however, Jesus recognises that you can't preach to spiritually deaf ears and so, he leaves Nazareth and moves on. He concentrates on equipping his disciples' faith sending them out to witness for him. His injunction to take nothing with them by way of creature comforts is not foolhardy: there are two reasons. First, the custom of the day was to extend hospitality to all strangers who come to your door. If the disciples were rebuffed they could move on with impunity to find more open ears. Second, Jesus is testing the strength of their conviction even in vulnerability.

Turning now to the Epistle, we find even that great apostle Paul had his vulnerabilities suffering from his "thorn in the flesh". We have no idea whether the problem was physical; mental or spiritual but he found strength through the power of prayer. Paul recognised the value of being vulnerable relying on Christ rather than his own strength. It is a truly humble person deeply rooted in faith who can boast that "In Christ ... whenever I am weak then I am strong."

What about us? When vulnerable, the temptation is to look inward focusing on our own problems. But Christ urges us to look outward and upward. He knows that we face testing times and health issues can colour perspectives and motivation: he's not heartless but utterly realistic. What Christ wants above all is for people rely on his strength. After all, in a way, we're all cracked pots, spiritually aren't we? And yet, we are of immeasurable worth of God. We are precious in his sight irrespective of our physical, mental or spiritual health and he values our loving service.

Sometimes, however, we do wonder whether what we do in God's name really

makes any difference. Our fellow islanders may be apathetic or even antagonistic to matters of faith. Recent States decisions over the Ecclesiastical Court and forthcoming removal of the annual income tax charity refunds are illustrative of wider society chipping away at the Church. How do we respond still witnessing creatively and effectively for Christ? After all, unlike Jesus and Paul, we are not living itinerant lives. We are settled in our homes and don't plan to shake the dust off our feet any time soon to move on.

Did you catch the article in the *The Guernsey Press* last week? It was a 'Good News' article about this, the *Guernsey Faith Action Audit*. With apologies to any Accountants here this morning but audits sound unutterably boring this, however, is not! It's a consolidated report of all the good we Christians around the island are doing for Guernsey:

- 335 charitable projects benefitting;
- 2/3s of the island's population;
- equating to well over £1,000,000 of value;
- undertaken by 102,500 volunteer hours per year.

We Christians are putting the love of God into action and, with Paul's humility, we need not be shy about it. Quoting the audit founder\*, "We are faith-based but we are not faith-biased", because within the love of God we serve all people. Thankfully, the States members who attended the presentation were listening positively, open to considering partnerships with churches and faith-sponsored charities. Together we can make a difference to Guernsey celebrating and sharing our common humanity.

That's all good stuff but you might say what more is expected of us here at St Andrew's Church? What more can I do personally even if I'm feeling vulnerable? Please pray:

- pray for open hearts and minds in our island;
- pray for discernment for what we, with our gifts, can achieve; and,
- pray for those with gifts beyond our own ability.

We can never underestimate the value of prayer, quite simply it's priceless because through prayer God enables the impossible to become possible.

Amen.

## **Bibliography**

Guernsey Faith Action Audit – 'Serving the people of Guernsey' July 2018  
[www.@cinnamonnetwork.com](http://www.@cinnamonnetwork.com)

## **References**

\*Matt Bird, Founder of Cinnamon Network.