



Sunday, 17th February 2019 – 3rd Sunday before Lent
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Readings: Gospel St Luke 6: 17-26
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

What's in a symbol?

Symbols are so informative, aren't they? For instance, on cars we all recognise the square white plastic sticker with the big red 'L' on it – Learner Driver! We smile wryly, because we too had to start at the beginning and gain experience as each day passed. Learners! I could equally say disciples! Because that's really what the word means – learner.

Faith a personal journey

Just like any inexperienced driver, faith does not come to us as a finished article. Similar, to new drivers who previously were ferried around by family and friends, we may have been taken to church since childhood but there is a world of a difference engaging a car key all by oneself, as there is a huge difference experiencing faith first-hand. Faith is an on-going personal journey of finding contentment, hope, peace, reason and above all love in Jesus Christ. It was exactly the same for Jesus' twelve disciples.

A level playing field

In the Gospel, we join Jesus and his disciples on the lower slopes of a mountain just after Jesus had chosen his inner circle to follow him. The disciples had grown used to Jesus and his ways, his preaching and healing ministry but now, he calls them to engage in ministry alongside him. They are far from perfect, which is just like us, but Jesus doesn't call us when we are good enough, he calls us only needing to know that he is good and he can fill whatever we lack personally, if we ask for his help. That's why, in the Gospel, we heard Jesus came down from the mountain to a level place, so that all who sought him could find him and be touched, not merely physically, but more lastingly, spiritually.

Responsibility and risk

Nowadays, learner drivers setting out onto the road for the first time, soon realise it's for real and not a computer game or, way back in our childhood, when Noddy drove around Toy Town and bumped into Mr Plod, it didn't have any permanent effect. Out on the open road responsibility and risk go hand in hand from the start. So too journeying as disciples, for people watch what we do and how we mirror, signal and manoeuvre into the life of Christ. Any collision can have a lasting effect.

Confidence boost

The first thing new drivers need to learn is to look at the road and not fixate on the instrument panel. So too with discipleship, we need to look up and out at the world in which Christ calls us to serve. To do that, however, needs confidence to trust that what we say in Church on Sunday stays with us for the rest of the week. There is no better substitute than daily weekday practice in prayer and Bible reading. But all that, however, only amounts to well-meaning words if we haven't grasped the fundamentals. I'll draw on the Gospel to illustrate my thoughts.

A challenge to long held beliefs

On their first outing after being chosen as his disciples Jesus turns their world upside down. All their lives they have been taught that the way to forge ahead is to better themselves to acquire status and wealth; if someone treads on your territory don't shrug it off, get even! Jesus, however, tells them there is no lasting benefit in material trappings and power, the only way to find happiness and to be blessed, is to focus on spiritual riches and not fret about the hurts. In other words, love God and his creation more than craving the creature comforts he gives us. The fundamental key to faith, therefore, is in the two commandments I spoke at the beginning of this service:

1. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and
2. To love others as ourselves."

Loving ourselves?

Of course, key to loving God and others depends on how much we love ourselves. I don't mean the carefully, crafted front we present to the world but the warts and all of our unvarnished selves. Irrespective of our family or work-life background, only when we face our faults and realise that our inherent human weaknesses contribute to the person we have become, will we recognise just how much God, through Christ, loves us and has sacrificed for us. Love begets love. When we love we are blessed and held by God: when we deny love we are alone.

From loneliness to loveliness

There are many lonely people in this world. Those who do not feel worthy to seek another's company. Those who have much in material wealth and status but find they still have an aching void. Others have fallen on hard times and lost their position or, been ostracised from, society. And there are those who deny that there is anything beyond this life. Seeking solely that which the world offers usually succeeds but that is all that life can offer. Our on-going share in mission as disciples is to find new ways of showing others that keeping company with Christ is better.

Action point

Jesus looked up at his disciples and said blessed are you when you lack now, but you will have fulfilment later. What of us? Are we seeing beyond the 'now' and glimpsing the 'next' that will come trusting in Christ's promises?
Amen.

