

Proper 14

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andre Guernsey on Sunday 7 August 2022

Readings: Hebrews 11 1-3 & 8-16 and Luke 12 vv 32-40

Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian, wrote that 'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.'

In today's New Testament reading, we are given the example of Abraham and other great figures of faith who have lived forwards. They did not yearn for a return to where they have come from, but rather walked, by faith, into a new and uncertain future.

This is often the vocation for Christians. But that very uncertainty raises questions. How do I know that I have been called? Am I making the right decision? Those are questions I have asked myself as I have considered new opportunities. They were questions I asked seven years ago when I was considering the possibility of coming to Guernsey. Was I really being called to serve here?

There are two simple things to bear in mind. First, to have courage. Many journeys of faith and adventure with God never begin, because of fear. Fear of failure, or of perhaps just getting it wrong. Fear of making a mess of things. And, yes, sometimes things do not work out as we had hoped or expected, because of a variety of factors outside our control. But failure is not necessarily the worse outcome. Being defeated by failure, being defeated when things go wrong, is much worse. It takes a special sort of courage to admit that mistakes have been made, for whatever reason, to face failure and then to try to bounce back and move on.

Secondly, patience. The Christian life is a marathon, and not a sprint. It is lived more in waiting and hope than in results. Our journey of discipleship is measured over the course of a lifetime. It may take many years to appreciate that God has called us. It may take many years to realise what it is that God has called us to.

As I look at my grandson, Teo, I rejoice in his smiles and his enthusiasm for exploring the world. Of course, there are knocks and frustrations and tears. But he is beginning his life surrounded by the love of his parents and his wider family, in the British Isles, in Australia, Serbia and the United States of America.

Today it is my awesome privilege to mark this very particular stage in the Teo's life and his journey, as we welcome him into the global community of God's people in his baptism.

We do this in faith and hope, using simple symbols that have a profound significance.

The water in which Teo will be baptised is the stuff of life. Literally. Because water is the sign of life, and the symbolic washing reminds us of promise of God's forgiveness for Teo, as for all the baptised.

The anointing with oil speaks of preparing and strengthening him for the journey of life and faith.

The candle, lit from the Easter candle, which he will receive at the end of this service reminds us of the light of Christ into which he has been baptised and which we pray he will live and grow.

I do not know how Teo's life will pan out. What he will do and be and achieve. But what I pray for today is that he will be a person of love and courage and patience. And that he will know that he is loved by God, now and always.