

Sermon for Sunday 25 June 2023

Third Sunday after Trinity Year A

Genesis 21: 8 – 21; Romans 6: 1b – 11; Matthew 10: 24 – 39

Finding and losing Life

“Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”
(Matthew 10:39)

I've been thinking quite a bit over the last few days about the story of the five men who recently lost their lives in the Titan submarine. It was an adventure with all the glamour of Jules Verne's '20,000 leagues under the sea' which I read when I was a child. There was also the tragic irony that they were diving to the scene of the world's most famous shipwreck, the Titanic. As we waited to hear whether or not they would be rescued, I found myself intrigued as to what still makes people embark on these dangerous adventures. Three of the men aboard were explorers and divers; one of the three was the CEO of Oceangate, the firm which made the submarine.

In the press coverage these three talked about 'operating with risk', 'calculated risks' and being attracted to extreme adventures. The other two passengers were very wealthy, a father and son who could afford the fare – in the region of £200k! each. There's a pleasure, I believe, in doing things that most people can't afford to do. For whatever reason they all decided to put their trust in those who designed and built the Titan.

I also caught an interesting discussion on Radio 4 about why people choose to do these risky things. There was talk of taking yourself out of your comfort zone, being in charge of your destiny, feeling alive in extreme circumstances because you are no longer cushioned by all the things that make life secure. In other words, for those who feel too successful and safe, risk-taking can be a relief, a way of making yourself feel alive.

This Sunday is Sanctuary Sunday – which is what used to be called 'Refugee Sunday'. So, by contrast, I'm also reminded of the many hundreds of refugees who make risky journeys,

often by sea, in the hope of a better life in Europe. They put their trust in the people-traffickers. For them, the risk of the journey seems a better option than staying in their home country. As I'm sure you have seen the tragic incidents continue.

Back to the quotation where I started - "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39)

The question is - Where do we put our trust? Do we trust in our own ability to find or to make our life? Or do we take the risk of trusting Jesus? Here is what one commentator says about this passage:

"Those who give highest priority to the task of protecting themselves will find that there is nothing left to protect.....Conversely, the person who surrenders freedom by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord will indeed find herself or himself. A healthy self-esteem, for which all emerging adults long, will in such cases be based not on the fickle opinion of transitory friends, but on God's call and God's love. Not even the bitterest of suffering can take away the sense of one's eternal

worth that is given to those who take up their cross and follow Jesus." ¹

If we trust in Jesus we are no longer in control of our destiny. And to follow Christ may well involve suffering. But we are trusting in the one who is utterly trustworthy, the one who knows and loves us down to the last hair on our heads, the only one who can give eternal life.

We are not trusting in the CEO of an organisation who thinks he's clever enough to survive almost 4 kilometers below the sea, and we're not trusting in ruthless people-traffickers.

To trust in Christ is life-transforming because, as Paul points out in our reading from Romans, we have been baptised into His death. Paul says this: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." This is the symbolism of baptism by immersion. Our sin dies with us as we go under the water. We are

¹ Interpretation Bible Commentary Matthew, p118

raised as we come up. We simply cannot return to our old ways. We are living a new kind of life.

Well, that's the theory of the radical risk-taking of the Christian life! In practice, we know that we often fail as Christians to live up to our aspirations. Perhaps then we can take comfort from Matthew when he says "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor is a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master." (Matthew 10:24).

It is enough for us to be like Jesus. As we keep on taking the risk of faith, choosing Jesus, choosing to put our trust in Him, little by little we will be growing more and more like our teacher, our master and our Lord.

Let us remember to keep on taking the risk of faith, day by day.

And today let us especially remember and pray for those refugees who take great risks because they can see no other way to a future and life.

And let us pray for all who have lost loved ones in the recent tragedies at sea.

"those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Amen