

Last week we looked at the restoration of Peter,

And how at the end of that reading he is given a new vocation by Jesus:

A vocation of 'tending my lambs, of feeding my sheep.'

Peter's new life is very much to be in the pattern of the great shepherd.

And you'll remember I said that in John's Gospel, love of Jesus flows directly into love of neighbour.

We see Peter living that out today in his bringing Tabvitha back to life.

As Easter people of course, we also are given the new vocation of sharing the Good News:

The Good news of eternal life.

But unless you've been holding out on me, I've not seen any of you physically bring someone back to life.

Of course this is not just life after death,

It is also a life for the now.

Tom Wright once described it as sharing in the life of the Kingdom that Jesus brings,

It is life in all its fullness.

And we have the choice: do we want to share in that life?

And we have a choice as to whether we want to share that life with others?

I want to explore that word 'choice' for a moment.

Choice is an interesting thing.

Choice: it's a key aspect of what it is to be human.

How many choices have you made to get to church this morning?

Did you choose to get up at 8 or 8.30? Why?

Did you choose to have toast or cereal? Why?

Did you choose to walk or drive? Why?

And why did you make those and in fact any choice?

What are the criteria we put in place to help us make a choice?

How do we make those big decisions that will affect not only us, but those around us?

We make choices all the time, we weigh up the pros and cons.

And then, from an informed place, we choose.

But for the Christian, I think there is something else that compels us in our decision making.

Something that is less rooted in choice,

And more rooted in who we are as God's people.

I suspect for many of you, coming to church this morning wasn't even a choice,

Yes we may rationally say it was, but actually it was something so engrained within you that it was almost a natural process.

It flowed from you as naturally as locking the door without thinking (although how many of us have had to drive home to make sure we did that?)

The challenge for us as Easter people is less to choose to share that message of eternal life,

And more for it to become so engrained within us, that it is part of who we are.

That is part of what Peter's restoration was about last week,

About being re-orientated to Jesus,

about being so rooted in Jesus, that his new vocation flows naturally from him,
Demonstrated powerfully in the healing of Tabitha, or Dorcas.

The theologian Robert Wall wrote that: “Peter’s power to heal is not an exercise of magic but a function of his close communion with the Lord of glory.”

And it’s not just Peter in which we encounter this sense of close communion.

I sense it in Tabitha.

Tabitha is an incredibly important lady in her community,

A humble lady,

A lady whose devotion to Christ has led her to be ‘devoted to good works and acts of charity.’

Her love of the shepherd has led her to love of the sheep.

For both Peter and Tabitha, their sharing in the Easter life is less a conscious choice, and more who they are.

And there is yet another figure in whom we see this close communion with God and it is Jesus Himself.

The Gospel finds Jesus once again in conflict with the Jewish leaders

(That’s what John means when he says ‘the Jews’),

They are once again trying to catch him out.

They want him to speak ‘plainly.’

But of course Jesus doesn’t play ball.

And he finishes his statement with what would have been a hugely contentious phrase:

He says ‘I and the Father are One.’

We may think this is a statement about the Trinity -that Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit are indeed One God.

Although we might even find that difficult: 'although the Trinity is one, aren't the three persons of the Trinity individual persons, existing in a single state of perichoretic union?!' I hear you cry! Or not.

But actually Jesus isn't making a doctrinal statement about the nature of the Trinity,

He's not saying that he and the Father are objectively or scientifically the same person,

He is commenting rather that because of the mutual love and indwelling,

Because of the endless loving relationship that is at the heart of the Trinity, the Father and the Son are utterly united in purpose and vision.

Jesus and the Father are one in securing the safety of the sheep in their care.

This is not a Gospel passage about the doctrinal nature of God (and actually the Greek doesn't support that)

It is rather a story that reveals the character of God,

And that Jesus cannot not act any differently in bringing the love and salvation that exists in the Godhead.

So, it's because of the close communion Father and Son have they are completely one in the salvation they provide.

In his ministry on earth then, Jesus' acts of healing and redemption in some way stop being choice.

That's not to say he is co-erced or forced, rather it is utterly natural to him to offer God's love and healing.

This is the choice we all have: to be so rooted in God that our actions, our conduct, our very choices flow utterly naturally from that source of love and grace.

The question of course: how are we to become like this.

Last week whilst at my residential at the College of the Resurrection in Mirfield.

It's a Vicar school, where the ordinands are deeply formed as a result of their community prayer and community living and their prayer life.

The life and the rhythm of prayer forms them into Christ.

Put simply: the more we spend with Christ, the more Christ like we become.

It's exactly the same when we live with someone: we pick up their traits.

How do we do that?

And we start, as I said last week, with prayer.

Prayer is not easy. In June, we will be having a series of sermons exploring what prayer is, why we do it, ways of praying.

But today, I want to highlight the importance of praying.

Prayer means we return to God and are formed in His likeness,

Prayer means we live in his strength and not in our own.

And I want to encourage you to pray as you can, not as you can't.

Over the next few weeks and indeed months we will look at different ways of praying.

But an example:

I love stillness and I love silence.

I should love Mirfield.

But for me, I have always struggled to pray when I'm there.

I can't work out why.

But actually, God can use that.

The time there when I felt closest to God last week was when I went for a long walk.

When I immersed myself in the surrounding countryside.

And it was then that I realised I was being immersed in God.

Before we know it, we start seeing things as God sees them.

We start living that Easter life, less by choice, and more by nature.

Of course choice is important, and sometimes the best way to be a Christian is simply to choose to be a Christian,

To choose to be hospitable, to choose to do good works and acts of kindness like Tabitha does.

But as I said last week, eventually, our own strength will fail us, and that's when we need to return to Christ.

In being with Christ, we become more like Christ,

And that transforms our whole lives.

He is constantly calling to each and every one of you,

Drawing you to Him.

I just finish with a short story of a lady I met a couple of weeks ago when I was working as a hospital chaplain – and I share this with her permission..

This elderly lady was very close to I met an elderly very close to death.

And with her permission, I share what she told me: she said I have no fear and I know God is real. How do I know? Because before I got up every morning I said thanks to him and said my prayers, and before I went to sleep I said thanks to him and said my prayers.

If that's not being united with God, I don't know what is.

Let us pray.

