

FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Reading: Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

Date: 21 October 2018

Theme: Outreach 2

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it is awarts and all kind of a book. It doesn't look at the world through rose-tinted specs. It doesn't big people up. It doesn't pretend that the heroes of the faith have no faults and failings. In the OT and the NT, It tells it as it is: warts and all.

Last week we were looking at the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus with a question. He was really confident that he had ticked all the boxes for Jesus to recognise him as an altogether good guy. It's only when Jesus pushes his money button – and encourages him to give away all he has and then come and follow him – that things turn a bit ugly and he slinks off into the shadows.

This week we have two guys who also come to Jesus with a question ... but this time it's a question set in the form of a confident statement:

'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.'

Jesus wants a bit more clarification so asks:

³⁶And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' ³⁷And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one

at your left, in your glory.' ³⁸*But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking.'*

This passage from Mark is about the kind of life Jesus calls us to live. James and John are just two regular guys with hopes, ambition and drive. In Matthew's Gospel it's their mother who pushes them forward. Here, Mark says it's just them.

But whoever it is who is asking, they are absolutely barking up the wrong tree.

They are asking about status, about privilege and about position. And Jesus tries to put them right:

, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?'

Maybe he wasn't as clear as he thought he was being ... drinking the cup and being baptized here is not about celebration and party. Drinking the cup and being baptized is all about Jesus dying – about his giving up everything, about his making the ultimate sacrifice.

Whether James and John don't understand this or are just making a rash statement, we don't know.

³⁹They replied, 'We are able.'

So Jesus clarifies ...

Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;

In other words, although they don't know it at this stage ... it will be costly for them. They will not be dying a death for the sins of the world – like Jesus – but their lives will be impacted adversely for their decision to follow him.

So that's the two go-getters dealt with ... but what about the other ten. They soon make an appearance ... and this gives Jesus a chance to teach them a really important lesson about who he was, what he came to do and what followers of his needed to be like.

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Whoever wishes to be great must be a servant ... the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve ...

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the essentials of the life of the church: we have identified these as worship, pastoral care and outreach (up, in and out).

Last week in Outreach 1 we saw the rich young man go away empty and sad but we also noticed how important

questions were to Jesus and to those who might seek to follow him.

For James and John, their question or their seeking the best seats, was an opportunity for Jesus again to make it clear that service not status was what he was about; and that being a slave to all might help to get you first place in the kingdom.

In other words he, the disciples and, therefore us, as his followers, are to serve not to seek to be served. And in it's in this serving that we make him known, answer people's questions and help people take that next step on their journey towards understanding, towards confident faith and trust.

Someone has said that the Church is the only club or group of people which exists for the benefit of non-members. Those of us who gather worship God in a variety of ways. We care for one another and for those in need in our community. But we are also on the look-out for those with questions about faith, interest in who this Jesus character might be, and concern enough to want to find out more about him.

In commercial terms, we would call this having a proper care for our current clients and at the same time, and just as importantly, being on the look-out for new business.

I heard a really interesting piece this week on the radio about the National Trust. Kathryn and I have been members for

many years now. We loved it when the children were little and we still love it now, visiting houses and gardens and grounds and coastline and countryside all for a reasonable modest annual fee. Some of friends of ours have bought life-time membership for their grandchildren when they came along What a fantastic idea, we thought!

Anyway this piece on the radio was all about their annual meeting, coming up this weekend. They are sharply focussed on their current membership. Keen to meet their needs and honour their commitment to the NT over the years. But they are also on the look-out for new members – for those who may have a different outlook from the current core, may have different needs and desires and may indeed want to take the organisation in the future in a quite different direction.

It made me think about church, about our 12 goals and our LYCIG change programme. It made me think about honouring the past but not allowing us to live there still. It made me think about new business. It made me think about new members of our church family. It made me think about the ways in which we need to continue to reach out with the message of God's love to those who have not yet heard it clearly. It made me think about how we need to good at hospitality and welcome when they respond positively to what they hear.

St Andrew's has a programme of services and events which we hope offers people these opportunities from time to time. This is where the Ceilidh and Harvest Supper sits, and the Family Film Nights, and the Concerts, and the Guest Services, and the service for those who have been bereaved. This is where our Winterfest, and our Advent Carols and Carol and Christmas Services sit in the wide range of things we do.

Almost everything we do has some kind of missional edge to it. Quite intentionally so. Vicars are only recommended for ordination these days if they have some understanding of this side of church life. People who just want to keep the show on the road, or keep things exactly as they are may have a part to play in the life of the church, but church leadership is not it.

In November, we will be having our special week of activities with our friends from OCCA – The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. We spoke about this, at some length, at our recent congregational conversation.

The main programme is now finalised and the publicity ready for us to see.

There are lots of things we could attend, be part of and sign up for. The website www.rethink.guide has all the info.

In particular, we are involved in hosting the team from Oxford – for prayers and meetings each day - and we have

a special responsibility for some of the main events during the week:

Monday: Dialogue with the Humanist Group at South Farnham School

Tuesday: Lunchtime Recital and a short talk on Rethinking Beauty.

Tuesday: Men's Curry Night – we can book a table or two

Wednesday: Lecture by Dr John Lennox, Oxford mathematician and international speaker on Faith and Science.

Thursday: Dinner for business people here in St Andrew's with a short talk and conversation on business decision-making in a complex world of competing ideas.

Friday: Supper and a Q and A at the Garden Room in the Museum.

Saturday: Women's Breakfast here at church.

All of these things are events to attend if we would like to and opportunities to invite and bring someone with us if we can. They will give us confidence and help family and friends to think through some of the bigger issues of life.

Some of us will be out every evening at something. Some of us won't engage with the programme at all. But wouldn't it be great if we tried to attend one or two things that week – it's an amazing chance to have this energetic passionate

team come to Farnham to help us to reach out for God with his message of love, faith and hope.

And all this at a time when the world seems to have gone crazy, our confidence in our leaders and in national and local authorities is low. Going onto the website, www.rethink.guide, is the way to book tickets for things. And most of the events we have organised – apart from those with significant foodie elements (the curry night and the business dinner), are completely free.

In offering this programme the churches of the town are seeking to serve our community. We are not wanting to lord it over them, but to serve: to make it clear that we believe we have things to say about life's biggest questions, and that we love our family and friends enough to want them to engage with these questions too.

Please be praying about this upcoming week:

For ourselves – is there anything we can help with?

what are we going to go to?

For our family and friends – who are we going to invite and to what? We could maybe choose five people to be praying for especially.

For God to make the very best use of the churches working together, of the team from Oxford working well with each other and with us, so that significant numbers of people engage with the programme and encounter God in new ways during the week. Let's pray ...