

4th SUNDAY after EPHIPHANY 2023: Sunday 29th January – 4th February 2023

Greetings from Eileen

Dear Friends,

Chinese New Year (the Lunar New Year) began last Sunday and the festive period lasts 15 days.

This Sunday, the 7th day of the new year, is celebrated as 人日 or translated to mean 'every person's birthday'. So, Happy Birthday everyone!

We had also been reflected in recent weeks on Christian Unity, on responding to Jesus' call to be one in him even as he is one with God the Father. Being in God is to abide in love as God is love. And there is no Godly love without Righteousness and Justice. So here is a remarkable finding that both of these words share the same Chinese character. Every Chinese word is a pictogram describing its foundation.



For Righteousness and Justice, God has given the 'lamb' (pronounced 'yang' in Mandarin) to cover 'me' (pronounced 'wor'), 'everyman' is identified as one who holds a weapon in his hand. The one who sins not with the weapon in his hand is righteous and just.

AN OPPORTUNITY AND AN INVITATION!

We are greatly blessed with caring and flourishing parishes and parish churches. They are diligently and joyfully looked after. But many who have been doing this on behalf of us all are getting on in years or have needs that prompt them to hand over the baton. Many hearts and hands sharing the joy of the Lord make light and inspiring work! **Will you be among the hearts and hands that enable the inspiring continuity of our churches?** If you are daunted in some way, come and speak to a member of the present PCC or speak to me. This is part of bringing heaven's glory to earth. I look forward to having the opportunity to meet with you.

SERVICES this Sunday 29th January 2023

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| 9.30am | St Andrew's, Winston – Communion (Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop) |
| 10.45am | St Mary's, Gainford – Communion (Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop) |
| 11.00am | St John The Evangelist, Ingleton and St Mary's, Staindrop – Joint Service of Family Praise |

SPECIAL SERVICE OF CHORAL EVENSONG WITH DURHAM CATHEDRAL CHOIR

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| 3.30pm | St Paul's, Evenwood – Deanery Service welcoming our cathedral choir (all welcome!) |
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May the light of faith illumine our hearts through him who is Christ the Lord.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

NOTICES:

- ✦ **PCC MEETING: Winston** St Andrew Monday 30th January 7pm at the Village Hall

New members are welcome. If you wish to know more or might be interest to help in any way, I'd welcome a chat especially if you are not sure about being able to commit to being on the PCC. Call or email me: 01325 733154 ekgharrop@gmail.com

- ✦ **You are invited to our EPIPHANY BIBLE JOURNEY!** There will be 2 sessions on **Wednesdays 8th and 15th February at 7pm in St Mary's Church, Gainford.** To find out and to register your interest contact Cressida Heath c/o stmarys@gainfordwinston.church This is open to anyone from all 4 parishes and anyone interested from further afield.

- ✦ **WARM & WELCOME Gainford:** Come to relax and enjoy time with others in a Warm Space with a warm welcome from 10am to noon every Friday in Gainford Village Hall. Yummy home made cakes and scones, with tea, coffee and hot drinks are free. Donations are welcome but completely voluntary. For more information contact Wendy Broderick: warmandwelcomegainford@gmail.com

- ✦ **Please pray for loved ones of the recently departed:**

- The family of Dianne Fletcher of Staindrop (service in Staindrop St Mary 31st January 11am followed by burial in Staindrop Cemetery)
- Sylvia Watson on the passing of her beloved husband Patrick from Winston (in Wear Valley Crematorium, 6th February 11.30am)
- Steve and Alison White and family on the passing of Steve's mother Isobel Appleton (service in Wear Valley Crematorium, Friday 10th February, 11.30am)

And pray for all for whom this is a difficult time missing loved ones departed.

Collect for the 4th Sunday of Epiphany

God of heaven,
you send the gospel to the ends of the earth
and your messengers to every nation:
send your Holy Spirit to transform us
by the good news of everlasting life
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Post Communion Prayer

Generous Lord,
in word and eucharist we have proclaimed the
mystery of your love:
help us so to live out our days
that we may be signs of your wonders in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

First Reading: 1 Kings 17.8-16

¹ Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ⁹ 'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' ¹⁰ So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' ¹¹ As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' ¹² But she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' ¹³ Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son.'

¹⁴For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' ¹⁵She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Gospel Reading: John 2.1-11

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' ⁵His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Sermon, 3rd Sunday of Epiphany: Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop, 22nd January 2023 (Isaiah 9.1-4; Matthew 4.12-23)

Our Gospel passage today introduces us to Jesus' disciples. We are introduced to how they reacted to Jesus and, using today's terminology, how Jesus evangelised. We know that Jesus was not the first evangelist. And although John who became the beloved disciple and Gospel writer is known as John the Evangelist, he also is not the first evangelist in the Gospels. Before them, the evangelist was the one anointed to prepare the way for the Lord, John the Baptist. John the Baptist's particular role and his making disciples to hear what he, John, had to say about the Lord, was instrumental to Jesus' first disciples' reaction to Jesus.

Only this past week on a visit to a bereaved family, a sister of the one who had passed said: "*My sister in law assured me that we would be fine with you. She saw how you cared about the mothers at a wedding when you invited them to light candles for the bride and groom.*"

We put ourselves in the Lord's shoes so to speak, and witness to his love that is higher than the expected ways of the world. Not that we do anything with full knowledge of its effect or what would follow, but we testify to our faith in Jesus by living out his love.

So, we may not be so perplexed to read: '*immediately they left their nets and followed him*' when Jesus '*walked by the Sea of Galilee*' seeing '*two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother...*' and called them to follow him. The description of that scene '*immediately they left their nets*' could come across as bizarre despite Jesus being the one extending the invitation. Imagine that later on when you are making ready your Sunday roast '*immediately you leave your Aga or whatever you are doing in your kitchen*' in response to a call. Yes of course if an emergency is raised, we will stop whatever we are doing even mid-stream. But Jesus was not raising an emergency alarm. Instead, he was inviting them to do something over a period of time that would transform their lives and affect their livelihoods.

What is much more likely therefore is that brothers Simon-Peter and Andrew had already been discussing this Messiah whom they had been introduced to by John the Baptist. They would have mulled over the significance of their initial meeting. They would have recognised that their encounter with Jesus

was their epiphany. And so, they would have already been waiting for that next step when they may be invited to follow him more deeply.

Perhaps we can relate to this more easily if we describe common non-spiritual and secular scenarios. In my previous occupational life especially early on in my work life, I would seek opportunities to be introduced to potential business leaders, chief executives or influencers. We would seek invitations to events in hope of introductions to gain new business deals and enter into the inner sanctum of big businesses. Recently 2 friends in a Chinese clergy network received invitations to meet the King and Queen Consort this Chinese New Year, and I know they have immediately made changes to their schedules to accept the invitations.

And so in our Gospel passage we proceed to read *'As Jesus went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee... Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.'*

Once again, we can make reasonable inferences. Here is another family of fisherfolk along the same stretch of sea. The sons of Zebedee would have known Simon-Peter and Andrew. They would have spoken together and heard. It is likely that they would also have shared their thoughts with father Zebedee. Would father Zebedee have hesitated if their sons were invited to be with the King and be among his household? No, it is likely that he had already given his sons his blessing should an invitation arrive. *'Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.'*

It is like this for us in our hope for more people to follow Jesus. Whether we are anointed evangelists as John the Baptist, or whether we are as Andrew, the first to recognise Jesus when he was introduced, who proceeded to introduce his brother Simon-Peter to Jesus. We are called to introduce others to Jesus by what we may say or simply by what we do in the nature of Jesus.

And the effect of the introductions takes on power and a form that we may not foresee. It may be as natural as we read in this passage: someone told someone who tells someone else. Or as in my actions at a wedding, it moved between family members onto a difference context but with the same outcome. They recognised the love of Christ.

A bishop speaking about this passage recalled his meeting Mother Teresa of Calcutta when he was on a mission trip not long before she passed away. He said they were not expecting to see her even though they had gone to visit people with whom she was known to minister. But when she appeared – this bent old woman with gnarled hands and worn garments appeared – she had an incredible aura. She looked up, saw them, and greeted them like they were known to her all their lives.

This is a passage of evangelism, discipleship, and epiphany. But ditch the sophisticated words. It is about God inviting us to introduce people to him, to describe how special Jesus is and what it means to be in God's presence. Because when they come into his presence, they will know it. And like these first disciples, those introduced may immediately choose to follow him.

Amen