

As I look over the lessons appointed for a particular Sunday, I often reflect on advice given to my class by our New Testament Lecturer, the late Professor F. E. Vokes, affectionately known to us all as Freddy. In the course of a series of lectures on St John's Gospel, he had been dealing with the passage describing the raising of Lazarus and the nature of his emergence from the tomb. Someone challenged him on one point. He grinned and asked of us, 'Tell me, what does the text actually say? Not what do you think it says. What does it actually say?' He went on to give us an object lesson, whether we were coming at things from a liberal or conservative viewpoint on the importance of taking the text seriously. I have found that advice invaluable in keeping the scriptures fresh, in trying to come to each passage, however familiar it may be, with an open mind, open to fresh insights.

Take the passage we have just read as our Gospel reading for this Trinity Sunday, the closing section of St Matthew's Gospel, telling of the risen Christ's final meeting with his disciples prior to his Ascension. It is a passage I have heard any number of times; it is one of those passages we could recite off by heart. But maybe it is so familiar that we can all too easily stop listening.

This was brought home to me as I shared in a group in Taize when one of the group said, 'Have you ever noticed the passage says 'when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.' – but Jesus says to all of them, doubters included, "Go and make disciples"?'

This is where Freddy would have said, 'Take the text seriously – ask yourself, "Why has the evangelist put in 'but some doubted' but makes no reference to them being excluded from the mission to go and make disciples"?'

Brother Roger of Taize used to talk God accepting the poverty of our faith; he said this not in a negative way but rather to emphasise the fact that faith is by its very nature always partial, always provisional. God honours, God works with the faith we have at any particular point. This ‘poverty of our faith’ is to acknowledge the insight of Paul in his 1st Letter to the Church at Corinth:

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. *1 Cor 13*

We know in part – then we will know fully. Trinity Sunday is a day to look at the big picture, to take an over-view of what we believe about the God we worship and seek to serve. It is a day to reflect on where we are at on our own particular journey of faith. I would have no doubt that some are in a good place. Life is good. But there will be others who are in a darker place, with anxieties either for ourselves or for someone close to us. For some the things of God are very clear; there is a clear understanding of God living and active in our lives. But for others God feels more distant; his place in our lives, our understanding of his concern for us more tenuous. The important thing is that God is there. On certain days the summit of Howth may disappear under a cloud. The cloud may obscure our view but the summit is still there.

In Christ he has promised to be with us to the end of time. There is a blessing I would often use at the end of a service. On a number of occasions couples have asked me to use it at their wedding:

Go, and know that the Lord goes with you:
let him lead you each day into the quiet place
of your heart, where he will speak with you;
know that he watches over you –
that he listens to you in gentle understanding,
that he is with you always,
wherever you are and however you may feel:
and the blessing of God Almighty,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.

know that he watches over you – that he listens to you in gentle understanding, that he is with you always, wherever you are and however you may feel.

They worshipped him but some doubted. For some everything had fallen into place – for others it still seemed too good to be true. But to all the Risen Christ gives the same commission and promises the same presence ‘I will be with you always, to the very end of time.’

God comes to each of us this day. He accepts the poverty of our faith. We are each a particular focus of his love. to each one of us he says, ‘Go in my name into your home, your street, your place of work and I will be with you ... wherever you are and however you may feel.’