

Sermon for 21st July 2016 St Faiths

Jeremiah 2.1-3, 7-8, 12-13 Psalm 36.5-10 Matthew 13.10-17

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Sometimes the assigned readings in lectionary are a real gift when preparing to preach, other times it takes a lot of work. For today, being still new to you here at St Faiths, it is a gift.

In our gospel reading from Matthew, we heard of the disciples question to Jesus about parables. This reading comes in between a number of parables in Mathew's gospel, before it the parable of the sower and after the parable of the kingdom. Jesus was a story teller, it was the way he taught those first disciples and followers. Today his stories are still there for us to share. It is the power of story that I would like to focus on this morning. Each and every one of us has our own story, the story of who we are, where life has taken us, our own Christian journey and the story of the church. Many stories all woven together with the stories of others. It is of course possible in the woven interconnected stories that we learn from each other, especially when we share our Christian journey with others.

In the very early days of exploring my vocation I read a book called 'Take this bread' by Sara Miles. This book was Sara's story, she described herself as an atheist at the beginning, and very haphazardly stumbled into, St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She tells the story of how inside the church she was drawn to the altar where the congregation were sharing communion. For the first time in her life and she didn't know why it happened at that moment, she received communion. It was this moment that Sara felt changed by God, she began to understand after time that God was calling her to feed people, and to share her story. Sara began a food pantry in the church, where many of those on the edge of the community came to share a meal together around the table, she began feeding the hungry, praying with the lonely, and anyone else who came through the door. The pantry grew very quickly, those who found sanctuary in the church, then wanted to help, almost all of the volunteers were gathered from those that Sara had reached out to. The pantry is still successful in its mission today.

Through sharing her Christian story Sara influenced and ministered to many people. She could have not told anyone that story, could have ignored the change God called her too, for fear of being labelled a 'Jesus Freak'. 'Jesus Freak' was a significant label for Sara so much so that the rest of her story is told in her book called 'Jesus Freak'. It was this label and how Sara continued to share her story that inspired me. I found the more I shared my story the clearer it was that God was calling me.

But what happens when we don't share our story, if it is not passed on then it dies with us. Why did Jesus tell those parables to his disciples? He told them so that they would share them, the very reason we still have them today is because they were passed on, so that all may know of the love of Christ and the glorious kingdom of God. Jesus told those parables because they give us a glimpse of what the kingdom of God is like, for the message to be shared far and wide, in order that all

may know Christ, and share in the riches of God's kingdom. For us this means we must continue to share the stories Jesus told, and to share our own stories, in the woven stories of each of us there will be times, probably not known to us, that we too may have changed someone's life, and it may not even be immediately.

We have here at St Faiths a wonderful opportunity to share our stories with those who wander into this church looking for a safe haven, perhaps reaching out to God. As a Christian community we need to reach out to these people, to listen and hear their story, to pray with them and by the grace of God hopefully draw them into exploring their own faith journey. It is perhaps a good time for us to be sharing our story here in this community as we seek to develop the big build campaign. If we don't continue to tell the story of this church by telling people why we are doing all this work, both in the church and in the pallant centre, then it can look to those on looking that the church has lots of money, that the church is already achieving its vision. The community here in Havant need to hear of how all the work is developing the kingdom of God in this place for all people. That we are seeking to reach out to all through the hospitality and support of local groups using the church and the pallant centre. It is this story of our mission and ministry in this community that will draw others alongside us and engaging in the wider story.

Our ministry and mission to this place is not about filling the pews on a Sunday (although that would be great too) but widening our own understanding of what it means to build God's kingdom. So my challenge for you this week is to share your story, share your journey of faith, and share the story of St Faith's mission. Share it with your friends, neighbours, the people you meet, and the people who seek refuge in the church building. And continue to pray for our work and mission here at St Faiths.

Amen.