

OUR FAITH JOURNEY IS FOR EVERYONE

Texts: Romans 11 1-2 and 29-32 - Matthew 15 10-20 and 21-28

Today we say that our faith journey is for everyone.

Perhaps this is why the theologian Tom Wright has written commentaries on all the books in the New Testament called “..... for everyone” e.g “ Mark for Everyone”.

But not everyone we meet will want to follow Christ. So we need to pray for them but not judge them. It is not our place to judge them. In the end it will be a matter between them and God.

In the meantime, we are asked to do all we can as best we can to follow Christ. Perhaps this shows us that our faith journey only really comes to life when people positively respond to it. There will always be people who want to follow Christ. Our task is to do all we can to find them and to show that our eternally hopeful faith journey is for everyone and that it still does work. Perhaps this prayer by Donald Coggan, a former Archbishop of York, can help us find new ways of telling an old story:

‘Lord Jesus, I don’t know much about you. But I am willing to learn. And I am willing to give all that I know of myself to all that I know of you and I am willing to go on learning.’

Incidentally, Canon Clayton did know Donald Coggan when he was Bishop of Bradford.

I think this prayer leads you to reflect that our faith journey only really comes to life when people positively respond to it.

We see something of what can happen when a person positively responds to Christ in our reading from Matthew.

We see Jesus meeting a foreigner who asks him for help in healing her daughter. Jesus comes to see that she not only has heard of him but also believes in him. So because she has this faith and belief in him, he is prepared to do something for her. I wonder how many times in his ministry Jesus asked someone “What do you want me to do for you?”.

But at first sight, his words to her seem strange “ I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and to them alone” The implication of his words are – You are not of the house of Israel- you are a foreigner- I can do nothing for you.

But the writer Michael Green says that Jesus’ words “ I was sent to the House of Israel and to them alone” can also be properly translated from the Greek as a half question by Jesus “ Was I only sent to the lost sheep of Israel?” I find that view very instructive and helpful.

The person in the story has no hesitation in encountering Jesus and so believing in him. I wonder if Jesus knew he would be having such a conversation that day? I imagine he did not.

Perhaps this encounter teaches us we will sometimes find people who want to know more about our faith journey in unexpected places. We always need to be prepared for this to be happening to us and to be good listeners when this does happen.

Well I wonder what happened to this person after Jesus saw her. We don’t know but we do know that Jesus healed her daughter. But I like to think that because of this encounter, the Canaanite woman continued to walk in the light of Christ. This encounter should remind us that we on our faith journeys should continue to walk in the light of Christ.

And this reminds me of this true story told by Henri Nouwen.

He tells that a Franciscan Monk was speaking from the pulpit in Strasbourg Cathedral. He pointed to the brilliant yellow, white and blue Rose Window above the Cathedral entrance and he said “Though this is a great work of Art, we can only see its full splendour when the sun shines through it”.

He then explained how our bodies, the works of our hands, and all that exists can shine with splendour only when we let God’s light shine through them.

Something there for us to ponder in our often dark times as our Church is opened up and we see again the light bringing to life our stained glass windows and so how our faith journey is for everyone.

Jonathan Slater

Licenced Lay Minister at St Giles Church Bramhope

