

What a fantastic celebration is today in life of our community – as we come to welcome Alannah and Alexander into our family through baptism! As they are presented in a few moments – they will be anointed with Oil and claimed as a child of God. It is a powerful moment in any life and for us also a celebration of our own faith in God. But today is not an end, rather it marks the start of a life long journey of faith – and journey that starts and ends with Gods anointing spirit- a spirit which guides us through life's journey.

I was thinking about this notion of journey yesterday when a small group of us from St Anne and St Andrew's and made the journey to Hastings. We started out on our journey with much hope of being at the seaside in 2 and ½ hours – but 3 ½ hours later our mini bus pulled up in Hastings – on the journey we shared many stories – and got to know each other a little. We then headed off for lunch, walk by the sea, some made the cliff walk – others had icecream – then we boarded the bus for our return journey – sharing more stories (and some of us having a wee sleep). As we travelled we noticed the marks of our journey – our sun burn, or swollen ankles, or ice cream stains – and where we shared commonality!

Each journey leaves its marks – and informs other journeys – some are easy and some more challenging. We were less than 15 minutes out of Brent Cross before the first person dared utter the words – are we there yet!!

And so it is too with baptism. Baptism reminds us that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow – and that God loves leaves a mark of the journey on us – with the same generous spirit that welcomes us all in the same act of love. While we walk with God, our journey's will take different paths – and at times we may want to call out to God – are we there yet! This will be true for Alannah and Alexander – as it has been true for all of us. And with God's help, we can only pray that we walk the path we are each called to follow.

The well-known Gospel story we heard today of the Good Samaritan, is also a story of journey – not just in the parable – but in the teaching it is trying to underline – that in the way that we live as Christ's followers others will know this not by the words we say, or the laws we follow (they this will help) but in the acts of compassion and care for our neighbours that we show. In other words – by the marks of the journey.

One of the problems of a familiar story like the Good Samaritan is that we think we know in our head, but actually we don't know it in our body. This is the point of the interaction between Jesus and the lawyer which led to the parable. The lawyer was a faithful and educated man; he not only knew the scriptures, he also knew what was required of him to be a faithful follower of God. He was part of a whole community who understood this. But Jesus challenges his understanding by changing the boundaries. By changing who the lawyer understands as his neighbour, Jesus changes his understanding of the law, and of his religious practice.

It can be quite easy to be pious in our modern culture about this. We live in a diverse community, we know that our neighbours include people who are different to us. As a congregation we are very clear that we are both diverse and seek to be inclusive. We understand that our charity needs to be broader than our immediate group of friends and physical neighbours. And yet, like all communities, we don't have to scratch very deep to recognise that we are just as human as the lawyer in Jesus story. We are all capable of excluding others, or depersonalising those whom we want to hate, or struggle with.

This story is trying to show us (like the reading from Amos) that the law is not difficult to keep – but it does require us to potentially change our thinking and attitude – and it does influence the journey which we lead.

Being a good neighbour, in terms of biblical law, is not only about the way we treat each other. It is not about necessarily agreeing or even 'being nice'; it doesn't mean we don't challenge each other, or that we stop being true to who we are or our own faith. What it does mean is that we listen with compassion, we act with integrity and we do not demonise the other (or allow ourselves to be demonised). We are called to be as Christ would be on the journey.

In baptism God claims us to be part of a community and a movement who are committed to listening, respecting and showing compassion, and following Jesus. But Baptism does not does more than this, it also gives us symbols to sustain us through the journey.

As I said, our baptism begins with anointing – preparing up for the journey – *Christ claims us as his own, walk as a child of Christ all the days of your life* - They are powerful words – from that moment we – like the man who knew the care of the touch of the Samaritan – we are all one in Christ from that point forward – we are loved, forgiven and whole – and never alone on the journey. Yesterday we packed enough emergency snacks for the bus to see us through a small apocalypse. Anointing marks us, shows who we belong too – and if ever we feel lost – we can reclaim – trace the mark on our forehead and know that we are Gods, and we have all the spiritual resources we need.

Then of course there is water. Water is a powerful symbol. The water of baptism like all water sustains us. Like all water it cleanses us. Like all water- **they refresh us.** Jesus says to us, no matter what has happened, how jaded you might feel, come back to your baptism – come back to me and feel refreshed. This is why the font is always at the door of the church when we enter – so that we might dip in our fingers – and make the sign of the cross and be reminded that God refreshes, cleanses and sustains us on the journey.

Baptism takes place in our Sunday worship, because Baptism brings us into the community of faith – and as congregation we make a commitment to help in raising Alannah and Alexander, and all new Christians, in the faith. We commit to ensuring

that there is a worshipping community for them to be part of. Our theology means that none of us are called to faith in isolation – Christianity is a faith which calls us into community - to be the body of Christ – followers of Christ.

When we baptise with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the water of baptism remind us that in Christ we are made clean, sustained and refreshed... not just on the day of our baptism, but all the days of our lives. The waters of baptism also remind us, that throughout our lives of faith – whatever happens – wherever our journey leads – we can always come back to that same water. Like the man left on the side of the road, Jesus comes to us and embraces us and changes our life forever.

As Alannah and Alexander begin this journey today – may we too recall our own baptism, and feel refreshed and renewed for the journey God has called each of us too. May we remember that we are called to a journey that is marked by mercy and informed by Jesus - And as Jesus reminded the lawyer in our parable today –let us go forth and do likewise! Amen