

Confidence...

At Sandhurst there is a tower. It is about as tall as St Wystan's Church at its highest point, it is made of brick. At the top of the tower is a metal grid platform, through which you can see the ground, and it seems a long way down. And on this grid, rising 7 feet above it, are metal parallel bars (like in gymnastics). You climb up a ladder and with one foot on each bar you stand upright and shuffle your way to the far end. When you first look down you see the grid, 7 feet below the soles of your boots, (13 feet from my eyes) you then see through that to the ground below. The grid seems to disappear, the ground is a long way away, you feel very vulnerable, unsafe... It is a confidence course, part of an assault course to give soldiers and Padre's confidence in their ability. In a funny kind of way that tower and its aims speak into our readings today.



(Not the Vicar)

Ezekiel is a passage of hope, but costly hope. God promises to gather the scattered people home, which is the thing that they long for above all else. But they have to understand this will be entirely the action of God. God will rescue his people because God is faithful and unchanging, not because the people have done anything to deserve God's action on their own behalf. They must not begin to tell themselves that their exile was unfair or undeserved. Their hope comes only from the Lord. God in a way is like the metal grid, the safety net, most of the time on the platform you see straight through to the ground, but we are fine with that because if you foreshorten your vision you see the grid. God is like that grid supporting you, faithful and unchanging, giving confidence to go on again.

Then in Acts we encounter the call of Matthias, and we might well say who is Matthias. What we do know is that he was a follower from the beginning, travelled in the wider group and so he had the right qualifications. He met the 'job description'. This action took place in the space between the Ascension and Pentecost. The Disciples are told to wait, but rather than twiddle their thumbs they got on with the administration of making the number up to 12 again. This appointment gives me hope, this is a call of the unknown, a call of the ordinary person who follows, not a mega star or key player, but we too should have confidence in ourselves because of that call. Back on top of those bars on that tower even the Padre, the oldest person on the assault course managed to get to the end of the parallel bars without falling off. A bit wobbly but I got there. And that call by God can seem daunting, but we are all called to minister, to proclaim the gospel, to walk beside people, to be pilgrims with the church and unchurched, we just need the confidence to do it.

Our gospel speaks about the type of people we are, and we get an outsider view by a 2nd Century AD letter, (we don't know who wrote it) to someone called Diognetus. In his letter he talks about the Christian life and he took the view that Christians were ordinary folk going about their ordinary business. We don't have special food or modes of dress. We live where we are, and not as a separate tribal or ethnic group. Christians, he states 'reside in their respective countries, but only as aliens ... they take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners ... every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land'.

This echoes the words of Jesus in our Gospel today. We belong here - and yet we do not. Our true home is yet to come, and our true kingdom has not arrived, but it is coming. So wherever we live, we pray 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. If that is the case where do we belong now? The answer from Jesus is that we are in the world, yet not of it, and for some early Christians, this meant the world did not have to be taken too seriously, it was a temporary place of transit. But Jesus' words are more subtle - and certainly stronger. Just as he was sent into the world, so are we. And our calling and mission, like his, is one of deep abiding. (there is that word again) We may not, ultimately, belong to the world. But we are to love, cherish and bless it without limit.

And that means we should be confident in who we are. Being a Christian being a member of church, is who we are, we shouldn't apologise for it. I asked to do the confidence test, because they looked at me as different, he's the Padre he doesn't do that kind of thing. I wasn't the best, but I completed it and I gained from it. I gave it a go as me in their world and succeeded.

In this period of Thy Kingdom come, we are doing something which I hope in the long term will build the confidence of the church (and I include myself) which is to be not just the church of the building but also to be church on the street and footpath as well as in the everyday and ordinary.