

## Advent 1 2023: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023

### Sermon: Revd David Treharne. Wake up!

Repeat some things I preached a few weeks ago at St B & H and at Chase.

Can I be honest with you?

I love the Lord and can't live without him... but...

I'd quite like to have a nice comfy, cosy life... do my own thing in my own time in my own way.

This Vicar, Christian disciple thing is hard and tiring and frustrating with plenty of challenges.

"Can't I just do my own thing Lord?"

Do I really have to engage with the climate debate, the refugee and asylum seekers issues, the issues facing the poor, the marginalised, the lonely, the sad? Do I have to be kind and forgiving... and as a raving introvert do I have to mix with so many people Lord?

I found a photo from 2 years ago and compared it to a recent one... I was quite shocked. "Look at what it's done Lord... just the last 2 years!"

Can't I just play sport, spend time improving my cooking skills, have a super-duper garden, a lovely lawn with expert lines and no moss... vines that are trained and perhaps produce some wine and have a lovely veg patch?

Then God calls. God disturbs, prods, pokes me!!! I'll be honest with you. I find that hard. It's hard when God says I want you to engage with people and situations beyond your immediate wants and likes. I want to do what I want to do with my time and I want to do what I want to do.

I've battled with illness, fatigue, and exhaustion; I like sleeping and struggle to get up in the morning. Like everyone else I have mental health battles... particularly with fear, anxiety and a disproportionate sense of responsibility. I have a battle at times with procrastination. I face battles with a disinterest with faith... with Scripture and prayer with church and with ministry. Then there is the allure of other things in life, some very good things and some not so good things, but whether good or bad, things that perhaps push God to the sidelines. This isn't peculiar to me... it being human... and part of fighting against sin, the flesh the devil!

But these things can lead to an apathy making a home in me. Apathy, that dangerous vice, that I've talked about a lot before. One of the 3 dangerous spiritual giant identified by early Christians... apathy, ignorance and spiritual forgetfulness. ... falling asleep to needs in self, others and the world (boredom, can't be bothered, lack of interest, nothing to do with me, or nothing I can do, loss of feeling and compassion). Falling asleep on a raft in the ocean drifting far from the land we're meant to be inhabiting.

It is apathy that robs us of motivation, purpose and action, apathy that lets evil and injustice run wild, apathy that stops us looking after our planet and after one another and ourselves. It's apathy that becomes Teflon to responsibility ("today's church wants to be raptured from responsibility"), and ambivalent to love. It's apathy that shuts oneself off from others' concerns, apathy that can set in when we're tired, exhausted and hurting... when God doesn't do what I want him to do... and when I don't do what God has called me to do... apathy, apathy that drains the soul of spiritual fervour and passion for God's reign. Apathy that leads us to want to be filled with coffee or wine more than the Spirit of God. Apathy that leads us to wanting to watch TV more than watch for the Lord. Apathy robs us of our hope in God... what he can do in us and in others. It's apathy that can make a church moribund in prayer and in worship... apathy that subdues virtues such as hope and encouragement, and helps vices like cynicism, lack of self control and being thoroughly miserable to others and about others. Apathy allows the fire of God to dim... cold to God and the things of God.

John Stott (1921-2011) said,

*"We should not ask, "What is wrong with the world?" for that diagnosis has already been given. Rather, we should ask, "What has happened to the salt and light?""*

People of God, wake up! Lord, stir up from apathy... wake us up... not to an endless busyness... being spiritually awake isn't about a too do list of actions... it's about first and foremost our attitude and heart towards God that leads to the works he has called us to do. God is certainly not apathetic about our apathy in the Scriptures. There is plenty about being lazy and indifferent... indeed James preached on that last week with the sheep and the goats. We could add, "Do not be slothful... but be fervent in zeal" (Rom 12:11), "You are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth (Rev 3:16).

The collect said a couple of weeks ago... "stir us from apathy." And last week was stir up Sunday. Why stir us from apathy, why stir up? Why call us out, why disturb our bubbles?

For the world's salvation! This is God's heart. God longs for the world's salvation. He longs for the world's healing. He longs for people to live well with him and with one another. He longs for humanity to be all it's been created to be. He longs to see life being done differently. He longs for us to be alive and awake and for the church to be a sign, instrument and a foretaste of His reign. Acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly.

Now, I/we can ignore that call... shrug our shoulders and stay in bed, do our own thing... or we can respond to God, his Word, and his call, engage with the flow of his Spirit.

It's that third coming that the 11<sup>th</sup> Century St Bernard of Clairvaux talks about... the coming of Christ to our own soul.

We've had his first coming... Jesus, born in Bethlehem

We're waiting for the second coming... at the end of all things.

But we're called to be awake for the third coming... Christ to our own souls.

At that moment of Christ coming afresh to my own soul... opening heart and home to him. And rather than God orientating himself around me regardless of what I do... I start to orientate my life around him.

People of God... wake up from the sleep...

"But Lord I enjoy it in bed! It's warm and comfortable and safe. I really don't want to get up." I want to do my own thing.

There's a challenge to overcome, a challenge to live this Christian life, a challenge to be the church, to overcome apathy.

I found St Francis' quote so helpful...

*"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."*

Whether anxious, procrastinating, bored, uninspired, apathetic, hurting, easily distracted, lacking in discipline or rebellious... take one tiny step (metaphorical or physical) with God each day.

Sometimes getting out of bed is our greatest achievement! It's all we can do... it's the thing that is necessary and possible... then we find ourselves doing the impossible! Start by offering a moment to God, and your breath... then the next moment and the next breath... and some of your heart... that's what's necessary. Then you may find yourself able to be and do what you need to be and do.

This coming year is a year with a focus of worship. Together as God's people let us not fall asleep and decay but engage with the true source of life and hope and joy more deeply... as I said, orientating ourselves around the Lord rather than the other way around.

Our Parish Vision says, *"We seek to worship God the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (our relational God) in our daily lives; being transformed individually and as a gathered community through encounter with profligate grace."*

Are we ready for this? Are we up for this? For us to worship and bow down and kneel before the Lord our maker for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture the flock under his care? (Ps 95) Your inner response to this might tell you if there's some apathy setting in!

O Lord, tear open the heavens and come down to us!  
Renew our hope and expectation in what you can do in us, amongst us and around us.  
Stir us from that destructive apathy and spiritual decay. Renew within us individually and corporately a hunger and desire for you and your will for our lives. Come Lord Jesus, Come.  
Come to our hearts and give us hope, peace, joy and love.

### **Notices**

Parish Facebook Group: if you're on Facebook but are not a member please feel free to join.

Prayer after worship: if at the end of Sunday worship you would like someone to pray for you, please do ask one of the Team or someone next to you. We can anoint with Holy Oil or arrange to meet up or pray for you during the week. There's a healing Eucharist 12noon on Wed's in St Luke's.