

## Sermon for Easter 5 Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2016 (APCM)

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“Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, some have greatness thrust upon ’em.” It was a challenge in this week of significant anniversaries whether to open this sermon with a reference to Her Majesty the Queen celebrating 90 years since her birth on Thursday or with words written by Shakespeare, whose 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death we remembered yesterday. I went with Malvolio’s words from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* for reasons which I really hope will become clear later!

I am going to think a little about the difference between choosing and being chosen. Poor old Malvolio in Shakespeare’s play is a servant with ideas very much above his station. When he is duped in believing his noble employer Olivia loves him, he is craven in his desire for this greatness. He cannot wait for greatness to be “thrust upon him”. It ends badly.

Her Majesty the Queen might for very different reasons muse on these words. She was indeed born into the greatness of the royal family. Circumstances way beyond her control made the greatness of the office of becoming our Queen if not thrust upon her, then at least not what was envisaged before her uncle Edward VIII’s abdication. His choice. Few could argue though that she has in her ninety years and in her 64 year reign truly achieved and shown a greatness in honouring what one has not chosen to do, but has chosen faithfully to fulfil.

These words might be applied to our patron St Peter. He did indeed choose to follow Jesus that life changing day on Lake Galilee. But he could scarcely have comprehended where all that that decision to leave his nets would lead. Peter was not born great in human terms. He does not exhibit greatness in many of the candid episodes the Gospels reveal. But he does have the extraordinary gift but not of personal greatness given to him to sustain him in all the truly great things he is and does in the life of the church. He is given the gift of the Holy Spirit as his guard and guide. And in the power of this Spirit he recognises that the message of Christ’s love and salvation is not only for the Jews but for the whole world. The account we heard in our first reading, from the book of Acts today is of Peter’s vision of a world greater than Jewish laws on diet and circumcision A whole world waiting and needful of Christ’s love. A world held firmly in his hands. As our second reading from Revelation so beautifully describes. God says: “See I am making all things new – I am Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end.” To be the bearer of this news is not what Peter a traditional Jewish fishermen would

have imagined or perhaps have chosen at the beginning, but it is what he now chooses to follow to the end.

What about us? Our choices and our choosing. Often in the Gospels Jesus tells a story and then teaches what it means. Sometimes he performs a miracle and once again explains what has really been seen. In our Gospel today Jesus sums up all the stories, all the miracles, all the teaching he has shared into one new commandment. LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. This commandment is given on the day of the Passover. The day he has washed his disciples feet. The day before he dies. If they were ever to understand how much they were loved it should have been then. Jesus has chosen them but they must choose to continue to follow him. Not by walking around Palestine but by sharing his love with each other and the world.

And that is what Christ says to us. Choose. But if we have chosen then show that choice so that everyone we meet should know that we are Christ's followers because of the love shown in our lives.

Few of us are called to follow in the way of St Peter, or Elizabeth, our Queen, but we are all called to know ourselves loved and to choose to share that love with others. To exercise that greatness that is in Christ, of service, of generosity of spirit and loving fellowship. You can guess I think where this is going. To today's Annual Parochial Church Meeting. Church life, Christian life, *life* is about being involved. In all the things that build up our common life, choosing to be connected.

And so today we give thanks for all those who have served on the PCC and in its offices this year and we open ourselves during this morning to what we might be called to choose as our role of loving service today. As the saying runs: Love is not what you feel but what you do. May we not fear what might be thrust upon us but willingly and faithfully seek what we can choose to do.

Amen