

Dec 27 – Christmas 1 holy communion 10.45am

The (un)expected Honour

Isaiah 43:1-7

‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

⁷everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.’

Matthew 1:18-25

²⁴When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had
until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

The (un)expected honour

A comment piece in yesterday’s paper about Penny Lancaster – an ex-glamour model, now Rod Stewart’s wife. Could be doing nothing more than being a celeb... but has become a special constable in the City of London. She says she’s found her identity, and is happy being useful. The comment writer finishes the piece “Life is nothing without purpose” “we are what we do.” I’ll come back to that.

but to go back to Isaiah, to Mary, Joseph, angels,

What an honour!

To be Jesus’ earthly father

To be Jesus’ mother

to be called by name

to be loved

(Nouwen – God loves you because he loves you because he loves you)

Jesus was parented by regular people, called to a particular role at that particular time. They weren’t extra super-holy – I’m sure they were impatient and flawed, just like you and me.

Yet they were given the unexpected honour of serving God's purpose and plan.

We are just the same. We may not have that kind of high-profile role, but we are important and there are things that the Lord wants us to do with him. You are custom-made for your role in his family, his kingdom. What might your role be? I don't know, but you may have an inkling, and others who know you may.

Listen:

Leaving Pfizer story.

Three classic 'lies' about identity - "I am what I do", "I am what others think of me", and "I am what I have." I had slowly been seduced by them. What they do is subtle. Eventually, when the hard times, testing times, old age, etc come if those are who you are, you're left with nothing.

Henri Nouwen wrote this: "God loves you because God loves you because God loves you ..."

Nouwen was an acclaimed academic & he gave it all up to become chaplain to a community of people with learning disabilities. No one there knew of or cared for his academic reputation. "I might as well have been the janitor," he wrote.

It rocked him. As he later reflected, he'd believed three classic 'lies' about his identity - "I am what I do", "I am what others think of me", and "I am what I have" - which, when stripped away, prompted a breakdown.

In time, mercifully, he saw that his identity was, most truly and simply, revealed through God's love.

The three 'lies' he identified mirror the three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness:

“Turn these stones to bread!”

(I am what I do.)

“Prove yourself! Throw yourself from the Temple and the angels will catch you!”

(I am what others say about me.)

“Worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of this world.”

(I am what I have.)

In the desert, Jesus strips away these lies for himself before he's even begun his public life. What happens is not personal diminishment (as we might fear could happen to us!) ... but an *unveiling*.

He's so much more. This is the big reveal.

Out there in the desert, Jesus shows us positively how, in a sense, we can die before we die; not for the sake of any mis-placed, religiously austere and morbid piety - but so that, freed from the usual limiting beliefs about who on Earth we're supposed to be, we might enter what he calls '*life to the full*'. Mark 8:35 – “whoever loses their life for me and the gospel will save it.”

how does it happen?

Follow Jesus' example:

Read the Bible! Jesus example.

Remind ourselves day by day of the things that matter

Remind ourselves of our blessings – be thankful

Remind ourselves that what we have, what we do, what people think of us are nothing compared to this one truth:

Penny Lancaster / Janice Turner – “we are what we do.”

No. Who we are is found in the gospels, in Isaiah – we are God’s beloved children, and it’s that that enables us to do what he wants, to live as he wants, to accept the honour of being his child, in his family, beloved.

God loves us because God loves us because God loves us. We are his children.

God loves you because God loves you because God loves you.

hands out to receive.