

## **Sermon 10/10/21 The life of Christ**

### **Matthew 5:1-12**

I don't know about you but I feel as though I have come back into the auditorium for the second part of a play. It's just that instead of queuing for ice-cream, or a cheeky glass of wine, during the interval we have had our harvest festival and the opportunity to hear Phillipa, a trainee Reader, preach. But this morning we are back on track with our journey through the Bible, raring to go with part two – the New Testament. In particular this morning we are thinking about the life of Christ. The life of Christ as written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John the first four books of the New Testament.

The four gospels have been described as four portraits of Jesus, which when seen together give a fuller picture of the person whose life they portray. They are biographical, but in the sense of biography of their time. Reading a modern biography and finding significant gaps in the timeline we would surely question what the subject had been up to during the gap. And probably conclude that it was something they didn't want us to know. At the time these biographies were written it was usual simply to tell the bits of a person's story that it was felt were important. We all see things differently so we all tell the story in a different way.

It is thought that all four gospels were written during the first or second centuries of the Christian Era – AD as it used to be known. Mark is the shortest and probably the first to be written. It seems that both Matthew and Luke had read what Mark had written and added to it, possibly with access to another, as yet unidentified,

document. I read somewhere that there are over 650 verses in Mark of which over 90% also appear in Matthew. John's gospel was written independently.

They all have in common that what is written must have originally come from an oral tradition of stories passed down from people who witnessed the events, through the generations until the evangelists in effect froze those stories by writing them down. It happens that this week I have been reading a book by a man who cycled around the coast of Britain. At one point he found himself at a series of lectures given by an organisation describing itself as the encouragement network. The brochure for the lectures makes the point: 'People don't forget stories. They forget facts. .... Stories are important because they are about doing things'. The gospels are books packed with stories. Stories of events in Jesus life, stories that he told, stories of the life he and his followers led. Stories held together by a narrative to help explain to the reader the significance of what was happening.

We are familiar with the events at the start of Jesus lifetime. The story of Christmas can still excite, but this is followed by a long gap during which only one incident is reported. The day that Jesus went missing and turned up in the temple. We pick up his story again when he began his ministry, probably around the age of 30. That ministry lasted for three years and so nearly all the action of the four gospels took place over a three year period.

Three years of preaching, teaching, healing, fellowship and leadership. Unlike his cousin John the Baptist, Jesus did not stay away from people in the desert or lead the basic life of a hermit.

One of his first acts was to ask people to join him – the twelve disciples – who remained with him to the end chapters of his story. We read of his talking to crowds, worrying about their need for food, dining out himself, comforting bereaved friends.

Over the next few weeks we will look some more at the life of the Son of God.

Jesus began his teaching with what is recorded as the sermon on the mount. It covers three whole chapters of Matthew and a variety of topics and must have set the minds of the listening crowds spinning. How different was this – teaching on a hillside rather than the synagogue or the temple?

It reminded me of something from the depth of college course in my past. A man called Herzberg had identified that the things that made people dislike their jobs, he called them the hygiene factors, were not the opposites of the things that made them enjoy them, the satisficers. So, we dislike working for little money in poor accommodation, miles from home. But good money, in good accommodation close to home will not make us like a job. For that we need variety, autonomy and recognition. In fact, when we have those we may stop noticing the cold office or the long commute. Increased contentment requires lifestyle changes.

Today's gospel passage is usually referred to as the Beatitudes, the blessings, as in most translations each verse begins, 'Blessed are .....'. I have also seen it translated as 'Good news ....'.

Good news. Each piece of news forms a set pattern, firstly there is a description of a human behaviour. That is followed by the reward

for that behaviour. But they are not simply to be on the receiving end of the first behaviour. They are related but are extensions of the original behaviour. If you are a peacemaker, you will not only receive peace but will be called a child of God. The rewards are different from the original behaviour. This is a new world and it calls for new standards, and in addition new ways of seeing things. Lifestyle changes.

Jesus had begun his work on earth with a high-octane, thought-provoking sermon. No wonder the crowds gathered. This was new and exciting. It spoke to them that there was more than their mundane existence if they only followed the example of the new teacher. It could change their lives.