

Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Trinity., and my 1st Sermon in the Welland Fosse Benefice.

Galations 6

7. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Luke 10.

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

5 'When you enter a house, first say, "Peace to this house." 6 If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

8 'When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. 9 Heal those there who are ill and tell them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." 10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 "Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God has come near."

'Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.'

17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.'

18 He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

And now, the end is here
And so I face the final curtain

My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I travelled each and ev'ry highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.

'My Way', written by Paul Anka, and made popular by Frank Sinatra.

I have never had it requested for a funeral, but I know plenty of vicars who have.

The song is a hymn to rugged individualism, the man who against the odds fights on according to his own ideas and values.

Paul Anka knew he was writing about the individualism of modern life,

"At one o'clock in the morning, I sat down at an old IBM electric typewriter and said, 'If Frank were writing this, what would he say?' And I started, metaphorically, 'And now the end is near.' I read a lot of periodicals, and I noticed everything was 'my this' and 'my that'. We were in the 'me generation' and Frank became the guy for me to use to say that."

'We are in the me generation', now that is interesting...perhaps 'My Way' has a more ambiguous message than some of the blokes who belt it out at karaoke evenings suspect.

Is it a hymn of praise to the determined rugged individual ...or is it a caricature of the 'me generation'?

And what should Christians make of it?

There are examples in the bible of characters that capture our imagination as rugged individuals...

So Moses for example?

Moses Moses defiant before Pharaoh, implacable in leading his people across the desert, and he even makes his dissatisfaction and frustrations known to God, surely Moses was a man who could have sung 'My Way' at a karaoke evening with conviction?

Although, if you remember, Moses was assisted by Aaron; Moses had objected to God at the Burning Bush that he could not be expected to speak for the nation before Pharaoh as he suffered from a speech impediment. Hebrew scholars think he may have had a stutter. So not the person you would pick to speak confidently to the Ruler of most of the known world.

Here is a rather different Moses to the rugged individual of popular imagination, here Moses appears diffident and in need of help. God tells him not to worry as Aaron will go with him. God is far less worried by Moses' weakness than Moses is, in fact when Moses admits his weakness

God makes use of this honesty and transforms Moses' weakness' into a strength by adding Aaron. Together Moses and Aaron are better able to fulfil God's purposes than Moses would have been alone; the weakness of Moses, his speech impediment and nervousness, is taken as an opportunity not as a problem.

So what of that New Testament character, Saint Paul? Surely a figure of determined zeal and uncompromising individuality, ranging about the ancient world preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, and setting up churches? Yet not even the idiosyncratic character of Paul could work alone, he worked at various times with Barnabas, who sometimes took the lead role with Paul assisting, and with Silvanus, Titus and Timothy, and numerous others that Paul refers to as co-workers in his letters to the churches.

Then there is Jesus, the Son of God...who chooses twelve close associates to work with, and a wider circle of at least seventy. Note in our gospel reading Jesus sends out on mission pairs of disciples to work together – not individuals.

The work of Christians is most effectively done in communion with other Christians.

The myth of the holy man working in splendid isolation is not the standard biblical model for ministry, we should not expect our Christian leaders to work miracles by themselves, and Christian leaders should look to share the work of the gospel.

It seems to me that as the status of Christian leaders has gone up over the centuries, their willingness to work in communion with others has decreased.

The model of ministry became, 'the Vicar does Christianity, we bake cakes.'

However, with Vicars covering more and more parishes congregations are coming under increasing pressure to contribute more to the life of their churches.

This can seem like a burden to already stretched Parishioners, especially in small rural churches, but I do not think we should be mourning the fact that Vicars can no longer micro-manage their parishes as ordained autocrats, rather we should be encouraging and celebrating the genius of lay people.

There are talents out there in the pews and parishes, we have to match talents and inclinations to tasks...

I sometimes hear, 'I would like to help the Church, but couldn't do fund raising.'

Well don't do fund raising! Lead worship, help out with pastoral work, or help maintain the church building.

Or, 'I would like to help the Church but I could never pray in public.'

Well, do fund raising then, or help out with pastoral work, or help maintain the church building.

Training and support will be provided.

Sometimes the most unlikely characters come forward if you ask. In one of my parishes we were short of a treasurer, and in the end resorted to writing to every home in the village. A chap came forward, not a church goer at all, but someone who had found peace and consolation sitting in the church by himself. Despite his lack of experience or understanding of the Church he became a hugely positive and helpful influence on the PCC – or perhaps exactly because of his lack of experience or understanding of the Church?

I am a good bible believing Christian - so I think we ought to work the biblical way - in communion - as a team - like Moses, Paul and Jesus.

As you know, I have just moved into the Rectory at Barrowden. The removal men asked if I would mention them in my first sermon, I rather rashly agreed not knowing what the bible verses would be or where I would be preaching – but thankfully they fit right in here. Moving a house load of stuff is a huge task, and they did it very well, they did it by team work. The team leader listened to, and respected the thoughts of his co-workers, he knew they were reasonable and experienced, they then shared the tasks, and when the team leader made a decision the team got on with it together. Perhaps a church should be like a team of removers shifting the good news of Jesus?

We need to work in partnership with each other in our individual churches, we need to work in the partnership in the Benefice across parish boundaries, we must work ecumenically with other Christians, and we must even work with those who hold values in common with us in secular organisations and in other Faiths. We need to do this not because of force of circumstances but because it is the Christian way.

So that when it comes to the final reckoning we can all sing,

And now, the end is here
And so we face the final curtain
My friends, say it clear
We'll state our case, of which we're certain
We've lived a life that's full
We travelled each and ev'ry highway
And more, much more than this...We did it God's way in partnership with our brothers and sisters in Christ and reaching out to work with like-minded people in other faiths and in secular organisations.

Although it has to be said, Paul Anka's original last line is snappier and fits the music better.

As it said in our first reading, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

If we work in partnership for the gospel as brothers and sisters in communion with each other, and with God, then we shall hear the voice of Jesus say to us as he said to the seventy on their return, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Amen.