

Luke 13:31-35

Driving down a country lane in Ireland you reach a junction. You have been lost for fifteen minutes and you look at the signpost that is going to save you. It points left and right. To the left, it says, is Kilmeedy and to the right, it says, is Kilmeedy. Which explains the old, Irish joke. A driver who is horribly lost finally pulls over and asks a local 'Can you tell me the way to Dublin please?' There is a long pause and the local sucks his teeth. Then very deliberately he says. Well Sir, if I was you, I would not start from here.

I would not start from here. We have just heard one of the shortest of gospel readings and it was Jesus at his most outspoken. Jesus hears that Herod plans to kill him and answers

"Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work."

Jesus will not be deflected. He will finish his work. It sounds like the sort of thing Barak Obama has been saying to Donald Trump. 'Go and tell that fox I will appoint a Supreme Court Judge'. This is Jesus being determined, surely, Jesus being, focussed.

No, that is not what Jesus is saying. He is on his way to Jerusalem. That is not the same as finding your way to Dublin. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die. Step-by-step, pacing out the way of the cross. And he is surrounded by people with opinions. Some of them want him to go somewhere else, do something else. That is not the issue; he knows what he will do. The problem he has is that most of the people he meets want to know whose side he is on. He is constantly put to the test. What does he think about this? What does he think about him?

And he just won't have that. He will not take sides; he will not divide the world up like that. He never takes sides, not before Herod, not before Pilate. His followers have to put up their swords. Moments before this conversation about Herod, he is asked 'Will only a few be saved?' That is not a question about theology; it is a question about people. People who want to know that only a few will be saved want to hear that they will be one of them. They want to know it will be them sitting at the right hand of God; them and not people who wear socks with sandals, not people who push into queues. and definitely not that funny man at number twenty-three. Jesus is crisp and Jesus is clear.

He tells a story about a house-owner who hears people knocking wanting to be let in

*Then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.'
Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from*

Jesus says just being near me does not mean you will enter the Kingdom. You can't be on my side like that. It is not a club, it is about loyalty. Then he denounces Herod, that fox, and says just as clearly, Herod has nothing to do with me. Liking Herod, hating Herod will not save you. And, he hasn't finished, he tells us next that he weeps over Jerusalem. It is all the same point. Being part of the club, will not save you; being a loyal Jew will not save you, and being a faithful Jew, the sort that goes to Jerusalem, will not save you. Don't start from there, don't give God a list of achievements, don't think there are points and a loyalty card.

That is the gospel this morning and it is sharp. If you think just tipping up to the cathedral will save you; if you think getting made Dean will save you, well, then you are in trouble. I really would not start from there. This is not what salvation looks like. Salvation is not for people who think they have something; salvation comes to people who know they need something.

Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

Status, possessions, power are all temptations. The real temptation is not that we will use them badly, the temptation is that we will want them more than anything else. We will settle for this when we should look for more. The people with status will settle for status and they will be looking the other way when the gates of the kingdom swing wide.

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Faith is not a club you can join; a place you can stay. Faith is hope, faith is what we will be, not what we are. That is the sermon for today.

But, there is something else that I have to say and it is about not starting from here and not settling for less. This morning, I have to say something to you about our cathedral family and about our life together. I have been here nearly six years now and I have not talked like this before, but I do need to talk about it now.

The gospel is a gospel of commitment. The gospel asks you 'What do you want?' The gospel asks 'What do you hope for?' There are sermons and books that try to explain the gospel, but Jesus really preached one, simple thing. 'Repent and believe', he said. It means *face the other way*, and *commit*. Repent and believe; not what you are, but what you might be. Repent and believe, not the things you have, but the things you might be given. Repent and believe.

It is time to ask what that means here, now, in this building, for us. We have fixed what needs fixing, we have literally done the plumbing, new toilets, boilers, heating pipes. We have new members of Chapter and even another announced today. We have committed more and better effort to our work with schools. We have started a consultation on what to do with the space outside the west end. We offer it to school children in their hundreds. And we have grown. More people at more services, a full cathedral at Christmas again and again, sacred space, more people.

And there is more to do. You have been given this morning a draft strategy, a commitment to more and better in the future precisely because we want to witness to repenting and believing more effectively. It is a draft strategy because we will discuss that with you and others. The headlines are renewed commitment to worship, and music, and pastoral care more teaching, better disabled access, a completely changed experience for visitors, a major spend on an organ that desperately needs repair. There will be a chance for you to talk about all that on another day quite soon.

That is a challenge. We have done good things. We have done that because talented colleagues have worked hard and above all because people here have backed us with money and with energy. This congregation, is generous, welcoming and hopeful. I am so grateful for your commitment to us. It is quite simply a privilege to work amongst you. But we cannot stay here.

One of the smallest staff teams in an English cathedral is more stretched than it is ever been because there is more work than ever. Our bills are getting bigger – it costs more to comply with safeguarding, building regulations and health and safety demands. We are spending more on the building (£20,000 a year just on routine repairs), more on heat and light. We are doing more, spending more and our income is not growing.

The headline is that it costs roughly £800,000 to pay staff wages and bills. We have a guaranteed income for rent and the Church Commissioners of just less than half of that. The rest we have to make and ask for. So now I am asking

you. Please make a gift, include us in your will, or if you give already please increase your gift if you can. Best and most helpful, please join the planned giving scheme. Help us, help us move on. We will arrange a time to ask questions about our income and costs very soon. For now please think about what you might afford. You might not be able to afford much, but if everyone here was giving regularly that would transform us.

It sometimes feels as though what Christians have is history – old buildings, a legacy, a memory of the glory of God nailed to a cross and rising on Easter morning. We do indeed have history, but it is not what defines us. Christianity is not a possession we must look after; it is not a story about what happened. What we have, above all else, is hope. Wonderful as it is to have this building and this worship there is more. It is not what I am, not what I have been, not what I have here, that is interesting, it is what God's grace will make me that is so exciting. Our commitment and our very identity lie in the future. We cannot stay here, we must look to what is to come.