**Chrism Eucharist 2019**

**Maundy Thursday, 18th April 2019**

This synagogue sermon strikes me as the riskiest step of Jesus’s early ministry. Up to this point he is a charismatic prophet in the wilderness and then around Galilee, but now he returns to Nazareth where they know him. Some of you will know the experience of returning to your home church to preach in front of your parents or family or friends.

Jesus is not just someone these people knew growing up. He is *one of them*. He is part of them and they are part of him. So will he say what they want to hear?

It’s easy to say what people want to hear. Easy to say what they expect, even to say what they request or demand. Harder to say what must be said. The challenge of Jesus’s words that today this scripture has been fulfilled in their hearing, is not just a theoretical challenge. It is a challenge to them personally, to identity and community. ‘He’s supposed to be one of us!’ ‘Where’s the solidarity and partnership?’ ‘Who is he to challenge our way of being?’

It was a risky message, and coming together here on this day we are mindful of the risk of our shared calling, lay and ordained, ministers of the Gospel whether licensed or not, to proclaim the scandal of the passion, the good news of the Gospel, in season and out of season, at home as well as further away, speaking with sensitivity but also with that costly edge that offers challenge as well as comfort. That is indeed to be a risk-taker and here this morning, with the affection and support you offered me a year ago as I notably stumbled – and please don’t assume it was others, it was me! – I offer you my gratitude for the risks you take in Jesus’ name.

The message Jesus delivered in the synagogue at Nazareth was risky because of the setting but also because the message itself was *about* risk.

It was and is about liberty, release, restoration, things being put right. When God is involved ‘things being put right’ is always risky because they are out of our control. You and I often find that difficult. For all that we talk about seeing signs of the kingdom in terms of liberty and justice, there is no kingdom of God without God. The kingdom of God is what is there when God is in control, not us.

That’s the risk in Sabbath, in the year of the Lord’s favour, in Jubilee, in taking a day off, letting go. Yes it’s about liberty from tyranny, captivity, work, and so on. But it’s also about liberty from our own self-determination, our own control of our destiny, our own effort. It is about liberty from captivity to our own perspective. It is about putting the world back in God’s hands, even putting our very selves in God’s hands. It is about trust, and risk.

So I shall be writing to clergy during the summer, though it might equally apply to any of you, indicating my hope that you will plan once a month to risk taking two consecutive days off. I believe this is what you should be doing for your own wellbeing, and of those close to you, for the effectiveness of ministry, and to be Christ-like in our witness to the idea of release and jubilee. But I know I’m taking a risk in encouraging this. Some say we only work one day a week anyway.

Let’s avoid the cynicism that sometimes lurks behind that flippancy; indeed all cynicism, caricature and assumptions made about others’ consistency, motivation or intention. I know some of you have questioned mine these past weeks as we have proposed pastoral reorganisation for outreach and mission on a larger scale than before and I have made three new appointments as my senior colleagues, Victoria, Anthony and Peter whom we welcome in their new, or soon to be new ministries. They are in their diversity gifted and committed to the absolute priority, which also compels me and us to propose reorganisation, to bring more people into a living relationship with Jesus as we pray and plan, preach and proclaim a Gospel which compels us to be growing in depth, impact and numbers.

In urging you to put yourself back into God’s hands regularly for re-creation by taking 48 hours rest monthly, I am not proposing you work less hard or have more holiday. I am inviting you to renew and refresh yourselves for this costly and risky leadership calling in mission which is ours. And I will try to do the same.

You will know that reading on in St Luke’s Gospel we hear that at first the people of Nazareth spoke well of Jesus’ sermon, amazed at his gracious words. But when he explained the scriptures they turned and wanted to hurl him off the hilltop cliff. Tomorrow we shall remember that ultimately those who sought his life got it as he was hauled up on the cross. What they had not bargained for was that the risk of love, of faithfulness, of the cross was for Jesus not a chancy punt, because God is trustworthy and faithful. So too for us who follow the way of Jesus.

As I look around with thankfulness and affection this morning, I am as daunted and nervous, as I think I’ve said on this occasion before, as I was as a first post curate decades ago. As it happens Sally and I slipped into the congregation of one of the churches in that curacy parish on Sunday morning. At the exchange of the Peace someone in the row behind, as I turned in open neck shirt to greet them, said, I think I ought to know who you are, but I don’t. As I briefly explained that I remembered her from my curacy years I was aware in myself first of some disappointment that I’d made not much impact, clearly, and then by gratitude that, whether or not I had been effective in ministry, even if I had been largely forgotten, she and they were still in church seeking to know Christ Jesus more. My personal impact, my feelings, my status and popularity must count for nothing.

So be it, pray God, for you and for me. This week we are invited to be followers of one who made himself of no reputation, who tonight is known in the servility of foot washing and in the austerity of a morsel of bread and a sip of wine. Let us accept afresh the risk of that calling, knowing that the one who calls is faithful.