

16 Sermon on Street Theatre 7.3

Psalm 30 could well be the song that Naaman sang when he was healed of his leprosy. He was the top General of the army of Aram. But for his position and the might of his command. He was a leper, an outcast from his society. No one would want to stand beside him. He may talk with the king, he may command his soldiers, but no one would reach out a hand to touch him.

What happened to fill his life with joy?

In one of his raids against Samaria his soldiers had dealt with a Samaritan family and in the fighting his soldiers had captured a young Jewish girl. – What had happened to her family we do not know. Perhaps, she was snatched from her family as a trophy of war. Perhaps, her family, her father, her mother, her brothers and sisters were all slaughtered in the fight and she was carried off as an orphan to a foreign country: Aram..

Whatever had happened she was bereft of her parents, and brothers and sisters. What bitterness must have filled her heart as she worked in this heathen family where she was forced to live and work.

Yet she took pity on her captor when she saw his leprosy. She didn't have to but she offered hope and healing to the one who had taken her from her family as she told her mistress. "If only the head of this family were with the prophet in Samaria he would cure him of his leprosy." The whole story is there because of her generosity. Nothing could have happened without her kindly love.

Simple things can bring about great changes.

I must tell you a story of something that happened to me.

While I was studying Philosophy of religion at University the course was taken by two people, one a convinced Atheist and the other a Catholic layman. The Atheist gave his lectures simply and in a straight forward manner that was understandable and convincing. The Catholic Layman was unclear in what he was saying and his argument seemed unconvincing. I found myself confused and uncertain about my faith and as I drove home one Friday afternoon I was saying to myself, "What am I going to do I am down to preach on Sunday?" When suddenly a voice said. "What is the matter with you? "Don't you remember George Baker?"

I began to think of George. He had been in the Royal Navy but as his ship sailed around the Mediterranean he spent time in the jails of all the Ports the

ship visited because of his drinking. He was dishonourably discharged. He migrated to Australia, got married – which lasted 2 weeks. He was found by Alf, an elder of the Church who literally picked him up out of the gutter outside one of the town's hotels. He was so dirty that Alf thought he could not take him home. So he put him at the back of the church where he could care for him. The next week George got a job. On Friday the Police rang Alf, " We've got George Baker here, Do you want him?" "Yes," said Alf and took him back to the Church where he looked after him for several weeks. During that time they talked together and George made a personal commitment to Christ. A week later George announced that he had a job. " Where?" said Alf. " At the Pub" replied George. Alf was astounded. George replied, "God is able"

It was years later that I got to know George. He was a respected man in the town and throughout the community there were some 32 men who owed their sobriety, sanity and faith to the influence of George Baker.

I realised in my uncertainty that I could spend years playing with philosophy but the certainty of God was what he could do with a human life. I preached that Sunday.

You see God can bring about great changes in our lives when we open them up to him.

I want to tell you of another interesting thing that happened to me a few weeks ago.

I often wake up in the night with my mind wrestling with some issue or another. This night I woke up thinking about the problem for the Christian faith, that people will only hear the stories and the teaching of Jesus Christ if they come to Church. This seemed very sad to me.

This seemed to me as I wrestled with this issue that God was present in the conversation.

In the Gospel reading today Jesus sent the 70 whom he had been teaching out to the towns and villages to which he intended to go. They were to go out without any money, or spare clothes, and no spare sandals. They were to teach what Jesus was teaching and to heal the sick. He warned them that they were going as lambs in the midst of wolves. In their behaviour they were to stay where they were welcome, eat what was set before them and they were to say to people, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you."

Jesus sent his followers out into the community to tell the story. I began in that time of wakefulness to explore how we might go into the community

telling the story of Jesus Christ, of his miracles, and his teaching. And the idea came into my mind was that we should go into the communities of our society with a program of street theatre.

Of course for that we would need Actors, we would need playwrights to shape 20 to 30 minute stories of and about Jesus for a present day society, we would need people to devise suitable costumes, people who could work out the best places for street plays, people who would pray for the street plays, the playwrights, for the actors and all who could become involved.

It seemed to me in my night time trying to work through this issue that here was something that could involve people from all the churches in Ipswich in going like the 70 to tell the story of Jesus in a way that could bring a great deal of Joy to all the participants. We would be doing what Jesus did with his followers. That people might hear the message of Jesus and respond to His call to the Kingdom of God.

I think that the Apostle Paul in the reading we had today from Galatians sums up what I have been trying to convey. "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right. For we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and Sisters. Amen