

If you have a newspaper, which is your favourite bit? That's not the same as asking which bit you read first. Out of habit I read the sports pages first, even though I've given up on top flight football, for reasons I'll return to later. Rather, as some of you know, I relish most the Obituaries page. You learn some remarkable things about some remarkable people. Quite often the worlds they inhabit are completely alien to me, but even then there will be some detail which makes them a little more human. And that way they can be an inspiration rather than being so amazing they make you want to give up.

This is the season for Christian obituaries – All Saintstide. I think of the saints as like magnets: they ought to attract us rather than repel us, because we remember them as inspirations. Some are well known. This week the church remembered one of John of Beverley's great days. On October 25<sup>th</sup> relics of John of Beverley were placed in a shrine at the High Altar, following his canonisation, his recognition as being a saint, in 1037 (974 years ago). In a week when Europe has loomed large, some people will have remembered that John's banner was carried at Agincourt on October 25<sup>th</sup>, though I'm not sure David Cameron and George Osborne invoked his prayers at the meeting in Brussels.

There are other saints too this week: October 28 marks the feast day of the apostles St Simon and St Jude. You only asked Jude for help if you were desperate (because his name was shared with Judas the betrayer) There was a powerful message then at St Paul's this week when it opened its doors for a service commemorating the patron saint lost causes. And today we celebrate All Saints' Day – in anticipation of November 1<sup>st</sup> - which give the western world its increasingly popular Hallowe'en celebrations. On the eve of All Saints there grew up the custom of remembering the opposite of the saints, together with all the bad things the good news of Jesus Christ delivers us from. I'm not sure then that the shops which are wishing us a Happy Hallowe'en have got it quite right, but that's another sermon.

At All Saints we give thanks for the Christians who lit up their generations with faith, and passed that faith on to us. Whether we know much or little about them, we know it was their following Christ which laid the deep foundations of our believing today. It is deeply humbling to me to lead worship day by day and week by week close to the place where John, the holy Bishop of Hexham and York, now rests. He was remembered because of his compassion, because he served his communities, because he touched people with the love and forgiveness and healing of the Jesus whom he loved to serve. He was loved by his clergy – not always easy when you are a bishop – and especially by the Venerable Bede, whom he ordained deacon and priest. His is a life to emulate. His is a life which attracts.

Many of you will work and volunteer within organisations which have a mission statement. Many of you are more than familiar with the process of evaluating your work and your organisation's work against the values and targets which have been set. Some of you may well be in organisations which measure success by the amount of money earned or power gained. Reflect then, for a minute, on the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 5, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. What kind of organisation would define itself as valuing being hungry, poor, insignificant, full of loss, forgiving, downtrodden, utterly transparent? One or two of those, perhaps, but all of them? Doesn't the world, even the

Third Sector of volunteers and charities, define itself by measurable targets, market share and influence? Imagine a business which proclaimed itself to be meek, poor and mournful.

Yet the Beatitudes are the mission statement, the value statement, the curriculum and the vision statement of the saints, of the Kingdom of God. In a digital world they are each half the size of a Tweet (yes, I've finally succumbed. Follow me at @RevJFletcher), yet each of them repays a lifetime's study. Today we gather as regular congregation, visitors and welcome guests of the Mayor of Beverley. We are each representatives of the community we live in, and some of you are the focus of our community life, of our government, judiciary and monarchy. The Beatitudes, and the saints who followed them, ask us to reflect on the values we will live by and work for. This is a gathering which can say a public thank you for lives lived in service to the community. I know that the vast majority of the public servants I meet day by day are just that: servants of communities small and large.

The Beatitudes give us an amazing set of values to test ourselves by. It is a shame that the tent protest against the Stock Exchange has found its questioning of the values of our economic life eclipsed by the unintended consequence of the ridiculing of a church which is in the business of challenging our society every day about its values. Giles Fraser gave a great line this week about what St Paul's might seem to stand for: "Christopher Wren's forte was not 'Jesus born in a stable'". Yet week by week there are debates with the rich and the great and the good and the powerful: Christ the King of Kings asks the powerful of our own day where their power lies and what they will use it for. Why is it, for example, that the pay of the people at the top of our biggest companies has risen by 50% in one year, while the rest of us are at zero? That's a question the beatitudes ask.

And that brings me to football. We can think that the big stuff in our society is way too big for us, and all we can do is shrug our shoulders and make the best of it. Well, I got very cross last year when I worked out the annual salary of a Premiership footballer. It happened to be Wayne Rooney. His new deal, described as the 'going rate', works out at £9 million per year. And I thought that, however good he is, £9m is obscene. And, I thought, he is only paid £9m because people like me watch him on the telly and read about him in the papers and take part in all the activity which convinces sponsors and advertisers to put their money in. And I thought that I don't want to take part in that. The Government can't pass a law to stop it. Neither can they pass a law to stop executives getting pay rises. But I can withdraw my support. And shareholders can ask questions of the boards of companies – and we're all shareholders one way or another. Ask your pension fund. Ask the Government.

The saints, the humble ones, the servants, invite us to follow Christ humbly. They ask us to say 'no' to the kind of power which grabs for itself and doesn't pay back. They ask us to give way, not take over. They invite us to live different lives, fully engaged with our communities, and pointing the way to a future where, together, we live for each other, not despite each other. So thank you to those of you for whom, in civic and local and national life, that is your day job. And may we be those whose lives are lived according to the values of the Kingdom of God, through Jesus Christ, whose life shows the way, and whose death and resurrection bring us hope. Amen.