

Sunday 24 November 2019 (Christ the King)

St Mary's, Stoke D'Abernon, 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.

Jeremiah 23.1-6; Colossians 1.11-20; Luke 23.33-43

Should have gone to Specsavers

May I start by asking you a question? Have you ever had one of those moments when you are used to seeing something one way, and then suddenly you see it completely differently?

The classic example is that picture where one minute it looks like an old woman, and then then suddenly you see it is in fact a beautiful young woman. Sometimes it is wearing different spectacles that can make the difference. Two friends of mine recently went to the cinema, sat through the whole movie wondering why it was out of focus and all a bit odd, only to realize right at the end that they were the only people in the whole theatre not wearing 3-D glasses. And these are bright people! And then of course there are the brilliant Specsaver ads, with the strapline –‘They should have gone to Specsavers.’ I love the one where an elderly couple sit down on a park bench to eat their sandwiches only to discover that they are in fact sitting on a roller coaster seat.

The same thing can happen with a relationship that goes wrong. You can have a sense of resentment - usually against your spouse - for days, and then have that very unpleasant experience of suddenly seeing that it was in fact you was in the wrong all along.

Of course, the same is true with scientific discovery. We once thought the world was flat, and that the sun revolved around the earth. How immensely differently we see the reality to be now.

Day-to-day life, the life of our emotions, our scientific view of the world – we constantly find that the reality is completely different from how it first appeared to be.

And our gospel reading this morning shows us vividly that the same thing is true of ultimate reality – the absolute truths and spiritual and moral values that we build our lives on. It is possible to base one's life on a vision of the truth only to discover that it is completely wrong.

For all of us here today, all of us looking for God, trying to understand Him, grow closer to Him, let us pay deep attention to this passage from Luke, because it is a perfect illustration of this.

Here Jesus is, crucified between two robbers. Above his head was a notice that said, 'This is the King of the Jews,' (23.38). The leaders of the people sneered at him and said, 'He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One,' (23.35). The Romans soldiers mocked him and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself,' (23.36). One of the two bandits hanging alongside him said, 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us,' (23.39).

The world looked at Jesus and saw a broken, defeated poser with delusions of grandeur that were now proven to be ridiculous – in other words, a complete and utter loser, with a capital L.

They should have gone to Specsavers.

In fact, there was one person in that narrative who had been to Specsavers. There was one person there who could see reality, who could see what was actually going on.

He could hear Jesus being mocked for failing to save the people being crucified. But he could see that that was exactly what Jesus was doing.

What was it that the second criminal saw, with his true insight into reality?

He saw that here on the cross was God doing a great work of salvation, making things right, restoring the heart of his creation and opening up the way home to Him.

That criminal, having used power and force all his life to get what he wanted, that criminal who was now experiencing the power and force of Roman law in punishment, saw that God's way to save us is not through power and dominance but through offering himself in the person of His Son, Jesus, to suffer and die.

That criminal, having recognized his own guilt and shame, and understanding that there was nothing he could do himself to atone for his guilt, saw that what he could do was to turn to the man on the cross next to him, and place all his trust in him.

While all around him, people mocked Jesus for failing to live up to what they thought a king should be like, that criminal saw reality – he saw that here was

true power and authority, because they came from absolute love. Here was the real kingdom and, despite the jeering, here was the true king.

The scene described in our gospel reading is a perfect example of people looking at the same facts, the same events, and seeing two utterly different things: on the one hand a moment of shame when a hopeless loser in the eyes of the world gets his come-uppance, and on the other hand the great turning point in the history of the world, when the one through whom the world was created suffers and dies so as to bring all things back to God (see Col. 1.13).

This is profoundly important for us all to remember. As we make our way through the world, it is very difficult to see things as they truly are. The world is very loud and insistent, it continually distorts and darkens and confuses our vision.

At church, or in moments of prayer, there is clarity for a moment: we see so clearly how much God loves us, how he has done everything necessary to save us and bring us back to his safety; and we experience peace. But very soon, the picture starts to fade again: we start to measure things by the world's standards and values again, and we feel the anxiety, worry, fretting, frustration, anger and resentment start to rise.

We have to make a great effort to remember to see things as they truly are. Spiritually speaking, we have to go to Specsavers constantly, and restore the vision of reality that we have so quickly lost.

How do we do that?

We do it by bringing ourselves constantly into the presence of God so that he can help us to see clearly again. We must each take responsibility for keeping our vision of God clear and true. I wish I had more time to go into this, and I fear I am ending rather abruptly, but if I could close with this: Each day we must do something to restore our view of God – through praying, through reading, through listening. If you find that you are not at peace, then you can be sure that you need to get to Specsavers.

If we lose the vision then we ourselves will be lost.

Amen