

## REFLECTION – 21 JUN 20

### He never said it would be easy

Jesus needed help – help from his heavenly father, of course, every step of the way. But he also needed practical help from others, hence his sending out of the 12 disciples. If you think about it, it was only fair that he should give them a thorough and honest briefing (politicians, take note!). Jesus had been given a hard time so the disciples should expect the same treatment. He had not come to bring tranquillity to the world but the opposite. Families would be divided, he predicted, and set against each other. His followers were to accept the demands and difficulties of the teaching and follow faithfully- or be judged accordingly. Three times he told them not to be afraid because he knew the message would be unpopular – but he also told them how important they were to God’s work – they were crucial to the mission. After Jesus’s death, the good news of eternal life would be entrusted to them to proclaim from the housetops.

The French philosopher Pascal once said that there are two kinds of servant – those who go ahead with torches to light the way, and those who come behind carrying the bags. St Teresa of Avila, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic and Carmelite nun, was of the first kind. Her fellow sisters in the convent could not understand her call for reform, and on one occasion threw her out into the night, wearing only her coarse woollen habit, and in the middle of a rainstorm. She got into her donkey cart and was riding along when a wheel went into a ditch, the cart overturned and she was dumped in the mud. She sat there, in wet and mud-soaked wool, looked up to heaven and said “Lord, if this is the way you treat your friends, it’s no wonder you don’t have many”. The important fact though, is that she never gave up, even when the other sisters fought her every step of the way. She kept on teaching what she knew to be the truth and eventually won the fight. She didn’t want to be right all the time, just to be faithful and obedient to God.

Many of us here on the West Wight are mourning the loss and celebrating the life of Barry Williams, one of the community’s real characters and, with his wife Maureen, a huge part of the spiritual life of Christ Church. After a career in teaching, he retired to the island and threw himself into all aspects of local life. He led various children’s groups, both Christian and secular, played an active role in local amateur dramatics and, until very recently, was a familiar sight on his old bicycle, often with an insecure load on the back, on his way to play the piano at any one of the care homes in the area. I was privileged, and thoroughly enjoyed, leading Junior Church with him for over 15 years. *He* was one of those servants who go ahead with torches... but he wasn’t averse to a bit of bag carrying! If he saw a need, he did his best to meet it. It didn’t always work, but his faith was strong and true, and he knew that he was doing God’s work – and when things didn’t work – just as when he fell off his bike – he got right up, brushed himself off, and started over again.

These have been dark times, heavy, sometimes thoroughly dispiriting, but we're still here, taking comfort in the many small kindnesses we see in our community – and taking comfort too in these weekly get-togethers. What we previously took for granted, so-called normality is still a way away, but we have a chance to enjoy the simple things – long chatty phone calls and face time with our loved ones, the beauty of our surroundings and the simple pleasure of arranging to see friends in a suitably safe way. Today is Father's Day, and we all know that some people's memories of childhood are marred by the actions – or absence- of their fathers. But for many more this day is a time for remembering with love and gratitude our fathers and their loving care for us their families. I'm sure this is true today for Barry's large family as they share happy memories of family life.

In Matthew 28, Jesus says "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age". Discipleship can sometimes be hard; we may sometimes lose our way, but with Christ at our side, the Holy Spirit in our hearts and God all around us, all will be well.