**Sermon - 20th October 2024**

In the time we’re waiting, for who will be appointed as the new suffragan bishop for Buckingham, the words of Jesus in our reading from Mark 10:35-45 become very actual again.

As Jesus said to His disciples: *‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’*

During one of our clergy meetings in the Deanery we were told that of the 2 new suffragan bishops one will serve the evangelical right and the other the liberal left. One begs the question whether that is the type of serving Jesus had in mind when He spoke these words. Is what Jesus meant by serving, satisfying different sides or parties within His Church? Isn’t that more like a political and compromising appointment than an appointment to serve? Is the Church equivalent to a political party trying to incorporate as many as different viewpoints to satisfy each and every one?

The aim of political parties is to rule and govern, is the Church governed by a similar rule?

It brings to the fore the question of what serving means in a Christian context?
I can’t give any explicit answer, but I have a true story to tell of what I believe is the answer.

For quite a number of years regularly I went to the Sunday services at one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in Holland, which was in Haarlem. The hymns and songs during service were accompanied by a combo on stage and I played the trumpet together with the assistant pastor. Because he often preached or was active in taking part of the service, we were both sitting in the front row.

The church, on the edge of a council housing estate, had been trying to evangelise for many years in their neighbourhood, but no one out of the locality had ever come to one of their services or any other event. The church didn’t have a clue of how to approach the local people.
But, one day a local woman came into church to ask whether her son could join the church and play the recorder. Some were thrilled by this offer; finally success of getting people from the neighbourhood into church and even more, he was a young person. Perhaps the beginning of local youth work and further outreach into that community?

The next Sunday, indeed a young man came with his recorder to the church service and he was put between me and the assistant pastor to play his instrument.

His name was X. X was a young man, in his late teens/early twenties, but he was severely mentally handicapped by Down Syndrome. He couldn’t play a note right and even worse he terribly hindered  the assistant pastor and me playing the trumpet correctly.

Nevertheless, X continued to come and to my surprise, he spoke about Jesus being His best Friend.
X with his mental handicap built up a relationship with Jesus Christ which was beyond our understanding.

Over time I visited him in his parent’s house and I discovered that he was the evangelist in his neighbourhood for which the church had been praying for, for many years.
X went out to the people in his neighbourhood, and they all knew him, and he told them all about how he loved Jesus and how Jesus was his best friend.

X was the great servant of Jesus Christ, but the leaders of the church never understood it.
Too much occupied perhaps with being the great leaders of their own church?
Too much focussed on to be seen by the people as the most important servants of their church?

Jesus doesn’t need great and important leaders, but He is looking for friends, like X, who want to serve Him in humility and faith.

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