

## 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, Matins

Exodus 12: 21-27 and Matthew 4: 23-5:20

Fr Tim Carroll

A friend showed me the cover of a magazine, which had as the main article title. The rise of cultural Christianity. Why religion is thriving in a non-believing age. So on the way home from the pub, I gave it a read. Anyone who has read or listened to the popular writer and podcaster Tom Holland, will have heard this him remind readers that the modern western civilisation is built on the foundations of Christianity. Even in a secular society you can't get away from it, in fact it is argued that secularising is a consequence of Christianity and the reformation. The article quotes Tom and others who are identifying as Christian whether that be cultural Christians, political Christians or believing Christians. There have been some high profile conversions and an increase in those with a lot of influence such as Elon Musk rejecting belief but respecting the cultural legacy, such as sacred music. Within the debate there are some that attribute this rise in identifying with, while not necessarily believing in Christianity, to the fear of Islam, woke ideology etc.

There has long been a discussion around what it means to be English and British, without wanting to wade too much into this territory –whether you are from the left or the right, there does seem to be an increasing insecurity in our nation around what it means to be English or British. You don't to tell a protestant from Northern Ireland much about insecurity around national identity, especially post Brexit. Other explanations around this identifying with cultural Christianity is the perhaps a reaction against new atheism that was in vogue about 10 – 20 years ago, or maybe also a reaction to postmodern theory, that is framed around a distrust for big ideas that seek to define the world – such as religious narrative.

It's safe to say that it's complicated. As when I was preparing for this sermon, I was focussing on the beatitudes which we hear in Matthew 5. When I read the article one of the things that struck me was this idea of being a cultural Christian means that you can be into the principles of Christianity without having to believe in all that '*mumbo jumbo*' which is what for PM Clement Attlee is described as saying about Christianity. Some people like the music, find the consistency of attending trad services appealing, and also find the teaching pretty useful and grounding

I'm not wishing to knock that as we all need to find our identity somewhere. But when we listen to the beatitudes, we are challenged that this isn't just some useful ethics for how to live a good life but in fact if you allow me the phrase – to really get it – you need to commit to the mumbo jumbo. The Beatitudes aren't a list of life hacks or rules of living, but illustrate nothing less than the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

What is described as the The *mumbo jumbo* of Christianity

The poor in spirit are blessed

As are those who mourn

The meek

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness

The merciful

The pure in heart

The peacemakers and those who suffer persecution

These all anticipate Christ's journey to the cross

He is poor in spirit when he takes on the sins of the world  
He mourns in gethsemane  
He is meek when falsely accused and stays silent  
He thirsts on the cross  
He is merciful when he asks God to forgive them, for they know not what they do  
He is pure in heart when he says 'not my will but your be done  
He makes peace when peter lifts his sword to fight  
He suffers persecution at the hands of the religious and political elites

Through this teaching Jesus is saying this is who I am and by knowing me and loving me as the resurrected son of God, you can be like this also. This is how you can live the full life promised in a world where suffering and hardship are common place. We cannot divorce Christ teaching from Christ himself and the revelation. That Jesus Christ is God, was incarnate by the Holy spirit, journeyed to the cross, died and after 3 days was resurrected. Jesus' words, his life and essence isn't confined to a particular culture but transcends all cultures and invites us to participate in a kingdom that has no borders, but which is eternal and forever and includes all tribes, tongues, races and nations

Please don't hear that I am knocking having a pride and a passionate identification with your community and country. But to reduce Christianity to something that fits a cultural narrative in reaction to others perceived threats, isn't really the solid foundation it is claimed to be.

Because actually Christianity says that God doesn't help the English, or help the French or Saudi's but God helps love and justice which exists across all national boundaries and is found in the Kingdom of God which Jesus Christ inaugurated here on earth and which is within us and unites us in the spirit of God. Mumbo Jumbo you may say. But a trend which seeks to say that Christianity is culturally western and uses it as a defence against global trends is one which only lead to disappointment. Instead of looking to abstracted ethical teaching from the Bible for guidance let's look the great teacher. Who loves everybody equally. Who is above all nations. And who draws all people to himself and gather them under the rule of his good and holy will

Amen