Parish Magazine Items for The Diocesan Year of Matthew's Gospel

From The Rectory – for December 2025

As a diocese we're going to be focusing on each of the four Gospels over the coming years, exploring the unique portrait of the Lord Jesus that each provides.

Matthew's gospel begins with "a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." That word "genealogy" is actually the word "genesis", or beginning. Matthew is telling us of a new beginning which will draw on Genesis and Exodus and all the other books of the Bible. Jesus is not a mythical or legendary figure but a real human being with a history, part of the human family and of God's dealings with Israel.

"Christ" is not a surname but a job description. It means the "anointed one". In the Old Testament, prophets, priest and kings were anointed with oil to show that they were called and marked out for a special ministry. Matthew presents Jesus as the long-promised Christ or Messiah, the rescuer-king who fulfils all the hopes of the people of God. He is to be great King David's greater son, born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Jesus will bring victory and peace. The ancient promises God made to Abraham, of people, land and blessing, which are partially fulfilled in the Old Testament, find their climax in the multitude from all nations whom Jesus will bring to the promised land of heaven and the New Creation.

Although John's famous prologue ("In the beginning was the Word…") looms large in Christmas services, only two of the gospels contain accounts of the birth of Jesus. If Luke tells the Christmas story more from Mary's perspective, Joseph is more prominent in Matthew's account. We can imagine Joseph's shock when he hears that his betrothed is going to have a baby since he knows he's not the father. He plans to break off the betrothal quietly, but like his name's sake in the Old Testament, this Joseph turns out to be a dreamer. An angel appears to him in a dream to tell him that what is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son who is to be called Jesus (meaning "the LORD saves"), because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus will be Immanuel – God with us.



Matthew frequently shows us how Jesus fulfils the Jewish Scriptures. But he also emphasises that Jesus has come for all the nations. It's to Matthew that we owe the account of the wise men from the east who come searching for the one born to be King of the Jews. King Herod is outraged because he thinks the job of King of the Jews is already taken and he doesn't fancy relinquishing the position for a newcomer. Herod becomes like Pharoh of old, killing the baby boys. And Jesus and his family flee to Egypt and then return. As Jesus comes out of Egypt back to Israel, it's as if the story of the people of God is repeating itself. Jesus is going to be the head of a New Israel, bringing freedom and salvation.

Later in his gospel, Matthew tells us that Jesus said: "every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." I pray that you'll find something new in the Christmas story this year. Or perhaps that something old will strike you in a new way. Whether it's something old or something new, there are great treasures to explore in the gospel accounts of Jesus. Indeed, Matthew suggests that the good news about Jesus is like treasure hidden in a field or like a pearl of great price which it is worth selling everything to be able to possess.

A very happy Christmas to you.

The Revd Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for January 2026

As I said last month, as a diocese we are going to have a focus on each of the four New Testament gospels in turn in the coming years. This year it's Matthew's gospel.

Plans don't always survive contact with reality, but here are some of the ways we might engage with Matthew's gospel in the year ahead. If you have other suggestions or ideas, I'm all ears.



- Read or listen to the gospel on your own. You can access the Bible free online for example via biblegateway.com. Lots of good translations and versions are available. For something reasonably accurate and understandable, I'd suggest starting with The New International Version (NIV). I have some free printed copies of Matthew's gospel available. Ask me if you'd like one. In my Bible, Matthew is about 35 pages long, so it need not take long to read. But it's worth pondering rather than just rushing through. After it was written, the gospel was divided up into 28 chapters. You might choose to read a chapter – or even a shorter section – each day and reflect on its meaning. Perhaps before and after reading you might pray that God would show you who Jesus is and the difference which he might make to you.

- Engage with Matthew's gospel with others. I'd be happy to have a cuppa and to chat about the gospel with you. It may be that I, or someone else, or a small group might like to get together to talk about it. Let me know if you're interested in any of these. (We also have a couple of other Bible Study groups you might be interested in. Details are in the Warbleton Church notice sheet. Or just ask us).

- We'll be holding a Lent Course at the Rectory and via Zoom which will look at Matthew's gospel. You'd be very welcome. We won't assume any prior knowledge. You can just come and listen or ask anything you like. This will be on Wednesday evenings at 7:30pm for five weeks from 25th February to 25th March. Refreshments will be provided.

- I am thinking of trying to at least mention something from Matthew's gospel in each of my parish magazine items.

- The Church of England has a lectionary of set readings for services. Each year this focuses on a particular gospel. This year, it's Matthew. Readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms and the rest of the New Testament are always also provided. But I might aim to pay particular attention to Matthew's gospel this year.

Why not join us in taking a fresh look at Matthew's gospel this year?

A very happy new year to you!

The Revd Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for February 2026

I said last time that, in line with the Diocesan focus for the year, I would try at least to mention Matthew's gospel here each month.

The Church of England has set Lectionary Bible Readings for each Sunday of the Year. The modern *Common Worship* liturgy (from 2000 onwards) uses the *Revised Common Lectionary*. Something like this is used by the Roman Catholic church and many other churches around the world. It has a three-year cycle (this is Year A) with a gospel given prominence each year (this year it is Matthew). So as I write I've already preached a couple of times from Matthew's gospel this year. As usual, you can find those sermons on the Warbleton church website or indeed the whole service is on the church's YouTube channel (@warbletonparishchurch849 or simply search for Warbleton Parish Church). Remember you can easily look up or listen to Matthew's gospel online. I refer to parts of chapters two and three a bit further below.

I know I mentioned the wise men here a couple of months ago. And I must have preached on them countless times in Christmas and Epiphany sermons. But I do find they've somehow captured my imagination. I can't quite shake them off. Maybe it's the mystery around them. That journey. The danger. The T. S. Eliot poem. I'm not sure. Their example urges us to seek Christ in the Scriptures, whatever the cost, and to appreciate something of Jesus' true significance. How much they really knew we cannot tell. Yet they gave Jesus gifts fit for a king. And perhaps, if the carol can be believed, they saw that a deity was nigh, but also the bitter perfume spoke of gathering gloom and of an impending death of great import. A Bible study on gold, frankincense and myrrh is instructive. The only passage where all three are actually named together is in Old Testament love poem The Song of Songs (that is, the best song ever), sometimes known as The Song of Solomon. The gifts are associated with the arrival of this great bridegroom king famed for his wisdom, the object of the bride's love and longing.

The gospels tell us next to nothing about Jesus' childhood and adolescence. Matthew goes straight from the wise men and the associated sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt to the baptism of Christ. Scholars imagine Jesus was about 30 years old at this point which marked the beginning of his public ministry. Now John the Baptist fades from the scene and Jesus takes over. In three years' time he will be crucified.

John's baptism is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And in Christian theology Jesus is the perfect God-Man. He has no sins of which he needs to repent. So why is he being baptised? The Baptist recognises something of this oddity. He at least says to Jesus it ought to be the other way round: "Jesus, you should be the one giving me a wash, not me you." Baptism in the Bible can be a picture of death, of flood waters which overwhelm. Here is the shadow of the cross again. Jesus is standing in the place of sinners. He is the innocent one on whom our guilt will crash. The judgement of God will expend itself on him that grace and mercy, blessing and love might flow to us.

The baptism is also rich with Biblical associations. Water, God speaking and the Spirit hovering recall the creation narrative. Jesus is the New Adam who will bring in a New Creation. Like Noah, who is associated with a dove, Jesus will be the Saviour. The church is a kind of ark. There will be a fresh start for planet earth. Jesus is called God's Son whom he loves, with whom the Father is well pleased. Later in the gospel these words are repeated with the instruction "listen to him".

Seek Jesus. Listen to Jesus. These are great new year's resolutions as relevant in February as in January. And if we haven't managed this brilliantly well so far this year, Jesus is always ready to receive us back, to welcome us, embrace us and go with us on the Way.

The Revd Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for March 2026

My eldest son has been attempting to navigate the university application process this year. Thankfully some of the places he might like to go seem interested in having him. Although they do want what seems like absurdly high grades to me. If you see the lad out and about, please do feel free to quiz him on the history of American Independence or set him some particularly tricky calculus problem. If he seems like he might be having fun, do point his back to his books.

Anyway, this was all in the mind as I preached on Jesus' calling of his first disciples from Matthew's gospel chapter 4 the other day. You can listen to the sermon on the Warbleton Church website here: https://www.warbletonchurch.org.uk/sermons-talks/?sermon_id=688 Or a video of the whole service is here on the Warbleton Parish Church YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pARwiQkVrmw The gospel reading begins about 11 and a half minutes in and is followed by the sermon. (We also share these on the Warbleton Parish Church Facebook page).



Normally students who wished to become disciples (= learners) of a rabbi (= teacher) would apply to the rabbi. But as so often, Jesus does things in a different surprising way. He calls these men to come and follow him. Literally disciples would walk around behind their master. He would lead them and they would follow. They would be with him. It was a kind of apprenticeship. Whether they knew it or not, these men were signing up for a three-year BA(hons) in Kingdom of God studies.

Jesus says, "Come, follow me". And immediately they leave their nets, their boat, their father and their former way of life to follow Jesus. Perhaps there are things that we might have to leave behind (or at least relegate to second place) if we are to follow Jesus?

Likely, in fact, some of the disciples had met Jesus before. And perhaps been associates of John the Baptist. But nevertheless, the way Matthew tells the story starkly emphasises the authority of Jesus. Counterculturally, they do not choose him; he chooses them. And still he calls women and men to come and follow him, to learn from him and be like him, to share in his mission, joining his team.

Of course Jesus could have done his thing all on his own. But he calls a community around him. The twelve disciples echo the twelve sons of Israel (= Jacob) who were the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus is going to create a new people of God. He is forming a church, using people to do so.

And these ordinary men, these fishermen, are to be its leaders. Jesus still calls ordinary people today. He is still building his church, seeking followers, calling others to join him and his work.

We can't follow Jesus around ancient Israel, but we can do so in heart and mind as we read the Gospels. We can be with Jesus in the Scriptures and learn from him. We can pray that he would teach us and lead us.

They were fishermen, and Jesus makes them fishers of men. He transforms them. But in a way he makes them even more themselves, all they were meant to be. Who knows what skills and

interests we might already have which might be taken up into Jesus' kingdom? We will have to change to be his disciples, but we may also find our true identity as the people God intends us to be.

In the Old Testament, the story is very much based around the land of Israel and the leaders were characteristically shepherds (think of Abraham, Moses, David and others). Jesus is the good shepherd who comes for the lost sheep of Israel. But a number of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. Jesus is often in a boat. And the Apostle Paul goes sailing around the Mediterranean on his mission to the Gentiles. Jesus launches a new phase of God's dealings with the world as the good news goes to all the fishy gentile nations across the seas – even as far as this obscure northern corner of the world, the British Isles.

Maybe we too will hear and respond to Jesus' call and join his new fishing business.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for April 2026

I think I may come from a long line of accomplished worriers. Some of my family have made worry into an art form. My great Aunt Ann – Aunty Nan, we called her – seemed to have a "worry drawer" in her little flat. She filled it with news clippings of things to worry about. There was the woman who was knocked over by a bus when buying fish in Swansea. Did she have her hood up and therefore didn't see the bus as she stepped out into the road? It became a cautionary tale for our family. None of us ever got our fish in Swansea. Another relative of mine once told us she was worried about the fact that she didn't seem to have anything to worry about.

On average we must be one of the most comfortable and secure generations ever to have lived, but perhaps we are also one of the most anxious. The 24-hour news on our smart phones probably doesn't help.



Jesus famously addressed this question of worry or anxiety in his Sermon on the Mount. He is speaking to his disciples, with the crowd listening in, about the blessed life of the Kingdom of God – life as it is meant to be lived, according to the Maker's instructions. He urges his disciples to actually think and live like Christians, not like the Gentile nations nor like religious hypocrites. What Jesus has to say about worry (Matthew 6:25-end) comes shortly after his teaching about prayer (6:5-15), and unsurprisingly the two subjects are related. The Christian life and faith are a package. The Christian believer has a loving heavenly Father who sees and knows our needs. He is willing and able to give good gifts to his children. And our awareness of him should make all the difference. Jesus gives us a vision for the Kingdom of God which raises our eyes from the concerns of this present age to eternity, and beyond ourselves to God and his purposes for the church and for all creation. His people are to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal (6:19-21). This life will always be somewhat uncertain. But Jesus' disciples can build their lives on the solid rock of Jesus by putting his words into practice. Terrible storms may still come, but the life built on Jesus will stand (7:24-27).

When it comes to worry specifically, Jesus would have us learn from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. The birds do not sow or reap or store stuff away in barns, but God feeds them. The flowers do not labour or spin, but who is dressed more splendidly?

Jesus argues that worry is unnecessary. The Chirstian can trust God. Worry is also pointless. Jesus asks: who of you, by worrying, can add an inch to his height or a minute to his life (cf. 6:27)? In fact, anxiety is likely to be counterproductive. It may well shorten our lives.

No, instead we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and trust God to get us safely to heaven.

All this doesn't mean we should be irresponsible or fail to plan for the future or seek to provide for our families. Other passages of Scripture address these things. But Jesus concludes here perhaps rather grimly, maybe with a smile: "Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Jesus wants us to trust God afresh each day for our daily bread – not to hope that God will give us a life time's supply of bread today that we can hoard for ever. Even if we had all the money in the world "safely" in the best bank, much about the future would be uncertain. Jesus tells his people they can expect their fair share of trouble. But also that their Creator, who made and rules all things, cares for them like the perfect all-knowing, all-wise, infinitely loving and powerful Father that he is.

I'm still not sure about shopping for fish in Swansea in the rain, but I hope what Jesus has to say here about the ever-relevant subject of anxiety might make us think about whether we dare to trust everything to him. His death and resurrection should give us good reasons to do so.

A very happy Easter to you all!

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for May 2026

This year we journeyed through Easter in our church services with Matthew's Gospel.

I've mentioned here before something about the similarities and differences between the four Gospels which we have in our New Testament, and some of the theories about their relationships.

In my opinion, all four gospels are harmonizable and complementary. The early Christians who first collected these four Gospels together obviously thought so. But even if some of the Gospel writers knew one another's works, they each provide a somewhat independent witness to Jesus. They don't read like police notebooks which have been carefully cooked up to tell an agreed story. Their harmony is sometimes that of different eyewitnesses who notice, mention or emphasise different things. They each write with a purpose and an agenda.

All four Gospel writers tell us of Jesus' so-called Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12). All four Gospels tell us that Jesus rode on a donkey. Mark and Luke say the donkey was a "colt" "which no one had ever ridden". What's the point of this detail? Does it suggest Jesus' uniqueness: he alone rides on this donkey? I know nothing about horses and so on, but presumably riding a donkey that no one has ever ridden may not be easy. The colt needs to be broken in and trained. Jesus seems to have no problems. Does this point to Jesus' rule over creation? Jesus is the new and better Adam, to whom the creatures readily submit. Just as the wind and the waves obey Jesus, does the young donkey do better than many of the religious leaders and recognise his Maker? Jesus is the King even of unruly colts.

Matthew alone tells us in fact there were two donkeys: a she-ass with her colt. Some sceptical readers have cried, "Ah! A contradiction! Come on! Was there one donkey or were there two?" Of course, saying there were two donkeys includes saying there was one! Talking about one donkey doesn't exclude the fact that there were two. If the other Gospel writers knew of both donkeys, perhaps they didn't think it worth mentioning. They simplify the tale. Perhaps they also emphasise Jesus' power and control by only mentioning the previously unridden donkey. A couple of parishioners have pointed out to me that if you are going to ride on a previously unridden donkey it

makes sense to take its mother with it. Both animals are likely to be much happier with sticking together, apparently.

Some sceptical scholars have said that Matthew was misreading Old Testament prophecy. Zechariah had spoken of the king coming to his people “gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” One can’t really ride two donkeys at once. Not without getting into a mess, anyway. And Hebrew poetry loves what’s called parallelism: saying the same thing – or similar, or contrasting things – twice or more. This parallelism is like our rhyming, a “rhyming” of ideas. Some people say Matthew has misread Zechariah. Zech is speaking of one donkey, a foal, poetically. Matt has missed the point and assumed there must be two donkeys, so that’s what he put in. Unfortunately this theory falls down, in my view, because it assumes Matthew is stupid and we are cleverer. I’m sure Matthew knew what he was doing.

A donkey is not a war horse. Jesus comes humble and gentle and riding on a donkey.

But Old Testament kings did ride on donkeys at times. But Jesus’ humility is especially emphasised by his riding on a colt. Jesus is a striking combination of kingly authority and of peace, humility, gentleness and service. Jesus shows, as the modern hymn has it, “meekness and majesty, manhood and deity.” He is the king, but the servant king who has come to die.

Perhaps it’s worth having more than one Gospel. And worth reading them closely, attending to their details and their differences, as well as to their powerful and profound agreement. Donkeys, even foals, speak to us still today.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for June 2026

Sunday 31st May this year is Trinity Sunday. Each year this comes after Pentecost or Whitsun, when we remember Christ sending the gift of the Holy Spirit on the fledgling New Testament church. On the Feast of the Ascension we thought about the crucified and risen Christ returning to the glory of heaven and enthroned as the God-Man at the right hand of the Father. So the drama of Pentecost, like all of salvation, is Trinitarian in shape. The Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Son’s saving work is complete and the Spirit is sent to be God’s presence and power with the disciples to equip them for their great work of mission. The Spirit sends them out to proclaim Jesus that people might be brought back to the Father.

This year we’re focusing on Matthew’s Gospel. And one of the readings for Trinity Sunday is the very end of Matthew’s Gospel, from chapter 28, verse 16. The disciples worship the risen Christ and he says to them:

> “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus won’t be with them physically any longer, but by his Holy Spirit.

And when people believe, they are to be baptised in the Triune name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Not three names but one name. As the church would later go on to say, the name of the one God who is three Persons.

When Matthew was writing, the technical definitions of the Trinity had still to be worked out. Even the word “Trinity” doesn’t come in the Bible. But the essential teaching is there. Jesus is worshiped

as God. The Spirit makes Jesus present. There is obviously a profound unity between Father, Son and Spirit. Not three gods.

Jesus' own baptism, right at the beginning of his public ministry, which Matthew records (3:13-end), powerfully portrays the Triune God in action. The voice of God the Father says from heaven about Jesus: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." And God the Holy Spirit comes down on God the Son in the form of a dove. There's the Trinity!

It's easy for us to feel rather baffled by the Trinity. Thinking about it can make our brains hurt. But it's not surprising that God is incomprehensible to us. We can know God truly, but not fully. A God we could have all pinned down and sorted out wouldn't be much of a God. Yes, he's revealed himself, but he also remains a Mystery – perhaps rather in the way that Elsie the Dog, I trust, knows and loves me, but I like to think there are hidden depths to me that she has not yet plumbed!

Theologians have insisted that everything God does is Trinitarian because that is who God is. And the Trinitarian formula at baptism puts the Trinity right there at the beginning and centre of the Christian life. Of course the Trinity can rightly be the subject of many tomes of profound dogmatics. But Jesus intentionally includes it in the essential basics of Christian initiation. The church thought it really mattered that Jesus and the Spirit were really God so that we could really be saved by God alone, and know that God is really with us and for us.

If you're interested in thinking more about this, you might enjoy the 3, 2, 1 Course from Speak Life: 321.speaklife.org.uk/course/321. It's a free online video-based course that helps you explore life according to Jesus, with space for reflection. One of the sessions focuses on God's three-ness – his tri-unity. As ever, I'm always keen to hear from parishioners who'd like to talk further about this stuff. Happy Trinity Sunday and season to you!

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for July 2026

I don't know if you've ever had that sense of finding your people, a tribe or individual with whom you particularly connect. Maybe at school your group were all into the same music. Or you feel a great bond with those who follow your sports team. In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis wrote about friendship arising when two or more people discover "that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, "What? You too? I thought I was the only one.""



Perhaps we might ask, who were Jesus' people? He came to his own people, the people of Israel. And he would send his disciples to all the nations, to all sorts and conditions of people, to "whomsoever" would believe in him. He calls us all.

But whom did Jesus seek out in the Gospels? Who sought him out? If we ask these questions of Matthew chapter 9, we find, perhaps, some surprising answers.





Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector. Now, I don't suppose most of us love paying taxes. But two issues make this particularly surprising. One, Israel was occupied by the Romans. To be a tax collector was to be a collaborator. And perhaps all that contact with Gentiles would make tax collectors ritually unclean. Likely, it at least made them questionable. And, two, tax collectors seem to have been corrupt. They seem to have overcharged and exploited people. And yet, Jesus calls Matthew to come and follow him. Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. The strict, devout, sound, religious Pharisees don't like it. Jesus is compromising. Lowering the tone. Selling out. What's he doing? These are not the right sort of people at all. But Jesus says God desires mercy. He is a doctor who has come for people who know they are sick, not for the stuck up who think they are doing perfectly well without Jesus, thank you very much.

And then, a bit later in the chapter, two people reach out to Jesus. A synagogue ruler whose daughter has died. And a woman who has had a flow of blood for 12 years. Again, perhaps both of these involve ritual uncleanness (because of the association with death and blood). Jesus calls both the woman and the little girl "daughter". The ruler and the woman seem very different. She's shy. He's respectable. But both of them are desperate. Both of them bring their need to Jesus. They come asking for mercy. They know they need a doctor, a Saviour.

Who are Jesus' people? Men and women. Younger and older. Important and overlooked. The in-crowd and the outsider. Anyone in fact who will come to him with their need, anyone who will answer his call to follow him. Jesus welcomes us all to his table to come and eat with him. And he renews and transforms us. We can come to Jesus as we are, and he will make us whole and new. He will draw us in to his people and encourage us to welcome others in, to show to them the mercy we have been shown. Jesus' people are, or should be, a surprising bunch, of needy repentant sinners who know his kindness and generosity to the desperate and undeserving.

(Image credit: https://www.freebibleimages.org/)

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for August 2026

So far I've been very much enjoying re-engaging with Jesus for this Diocesan year of focus on Matthew's Gospel. I hope those who have to sit through my sermons have found it, on the whole, a useful exercise.

I think it's possible for us to have just enough religion to inoculate us against Jesus. We have a vague impression of him from school chapel or assemblies, from RE lessons, perhaps from Sunday School, or just from the general cultural milieu. Maybe we have a picture of him in our mind's eye. We might remember a story or a saying or two. But it's always good for us to go back to the sources – to the four Gospels we have in our New Testament.

For me it's endlessly fascinating to engage with the real Jesus of the Bible. Even after many years of reading and studying the Gospels, I feel that somehow Jesus still has the ability to surprise me. He seems to surpass categorisation. He walks off the pages of the Bible afresh to meet us.

It's been interesting to look again at Matthew's Gospel chapters 10 and 11. I try to ask three questions:

- Who is Jesus? What do we learn here about his identity?
- Why did he come? What can we tell about his purpose and mission?
- So what? What response does Jesus call for? What would it mean to follow this Jesus as his disciple?

Jesus' message is radical stuff. For example towards the end of Matthew 10 he said:

> Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn
>
> "'a man against his father,
> a daughter against her mother,
> a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
> a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."
>
> Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Of course Jesus wants us to love our families. But he actually demands our first allegiance. He claimed, in effect, to be God come in the flesh, and so we must have no other gods before him. If he is not absolutely Lord of all, then he is not really Lord at all. The real Jesus can't be a hobby or an interest. Not really. It is well and good to respect Jesus and so on, but if we are to relate to the real Jesus of the Bible, it must be on his terms not ours. As the Lutheran Pastor martyred by the Nazis, Deitrich Bonhoffer, said, "When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die."[1]

That's what it means to take up our cross. It was a brutal instrument of humiliating, agonising execution fit only for slaves and foreigners. And yet we say things like, "We all have our cross to bear. Poor aunty Mable, she's a martyr to her bunions." I'm not sure these day-to-day trials are really what Jesus principally has in mind. Perhaps we would get more of a sense Jesus' meaning if we imaging him saying, "Who ever would come and follow me must head with me to the gallows." Or, "Come follow me, and take up your electric chair." Making it unfamiliar helps us to see what a shocking invitation it really is.

Now, I expect few if any of us in 21st Century England will literally die for Jesus, although of course many have and will around the world, though history, today and tomorrow. But Jesus is saying that we must in principle give up our lives for him and to him. We must give him our all. We must die to sin and self that we might live for Jesus. Yes, Jesus' way of the cross is a way of death. But we also know the end of the story. The cross leads to the resurrection. The way of the cross is actually the way to life – life with and for God for ever, which even the grave can't destroy. Jesus' call is to death but also to life, perhaps to suffering, but also to joy and peace, to meaning, purpose and glory.

Jesus' call, "Come to me and die", may not seem very attractive. It reminds me of the advert which Ernest Shackleton is said to have used to seek volunteers for his 1914 *Endurance* expedition, aiming to cross Antarctica by land:

> *Men wanted for hazardous journey.*
> *Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness.*
> *Safe return doubtful.*
> *Honour and recognition in event of success.*

He was said to be overwhelmed with applicants.

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[1] The Cost of Discipleship. Writing around 1937, Bonhoffer actually said "a man" but we know what he meant!

In Matthew Chapter 11, Jesus makes a rather different appeal. He says:

> Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Jesus offers rest. But it is not as if the Christian life is an endless holiday. Jesus' yoke implies labour. Is this yoke simply the one which Jesus gives, or is it also the one Jesus himself wears with us? Does Jesus imagine us strapped to him, like a team of oxen ploughing a field, walking together?

The rest of the Bible would tell us that the Christian life is not always exactly "easy". The point, I think, is that unlike Satan and Sin, or even self, Jesus is a good, kind and wise master. Jesus loves and he knows what he's doing. We can trust him. His way may not be easy or nice all the time, but it is best.

Perhaps I might end with two further preachers' greatest hits quotations. The first is from C. S. Lewis', *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. Aslan, of course, is the Christ figure.

> "Aslan is a lion - the Lion, the great Lion."
> "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"...
> "Safe?" said Mr Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

And then from what turned out to be the last ever sermon of the great 19th Century Baptist preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon:

> What I have to say lastly is this: how greatly I desire that you who are not yet enlisted in my Lord's band would come to him because you see what a kind and gracious Lord he is! Young men, if you could see our Captain, you would [go] down on your knees and beg him to let you enter the ranks of those who follow him. It is heaven to serve Jesus. I am a recruiting sergeant, and I would fain find a few recruits at this moment. Every man must serve somebody: we have no choice as to that fact. Those who have no master are slaves to themselves. Depend upon it, you will either serve Satan or Christ, either self or the Saviour. You will find sin, self, Satan, and the world to be hard masters; but if you wear the livery of Christ, you will find him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls. He is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was his like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in him. These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! *Amen.*[2]

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for September 2026

[2] Preached on 7th June 1891. The Bible text was 1 Samuel 30:21–26.

I hope you're enjoying our explorations in Matthew's gospel a little bit, if not as much as I am. We recently spent three weeks in church looking at the parables of Jesus from Matthew chapter 13. One of the things that I hope the children of Dallington school have learnt is that parables are "stories with a meaning." Jesus made up these images or tales to teach about the Kingdom of God or of heaven (interchangeable terms: likely the Jews said "heaven" as proxy for "God" so as to avoid any risk of misusing his name and so breaking one of the Ten Commandments).

Some people think that parables are good stuff for the kids – or perhaps for simple country folk, or the primitive people of Jesus' day. But the Bible's attitude is rather different. Instead of being supposedly easy to understand, Jesus' hearers often dislike his parables. The disciples ask for them to be explained. People always want Jesus to speak more plainly, without metaphor, and he often refuses.

The parables communicate, certainly. But in a way they also conceal. They are hostile to a superficial interest. They almost ask to be dismissed as nonsense. But Jesus says they work rather as a test, a filter: they are like cryptic crossword puzzles for us to chew over.

Matthew 13 contains the following parables, some almost allegories, some a one sentence idea:

- The parable of the sower, the good seed and the four types of soil
- The parable of the weeds and the wheat growing together until harvest
- The parable of the smallest mustard seed growing into the biggest tree in the garden
- The parable of the hidden sour dough starter that transforms all the great batch of flour
- The parable of the treasure discovered hidden in the field, for which one should sell everything
- The parable of the pearl of great price
- The parable of the good and bad fish in the net which need sorting out in the end

And the tales are told and arranged with the complexity of a Christopher Nolan film. Sometimes they are sandwiched together with the explanation delayed. Or one flashes back to another. There are a series of pairs or even triples. What does each one add? Is Jesus merely repeating himself with different illustrations, or could there be further treasure hidden a little further down?

I commend to you reading and reflecting on these great stories or vignettes, which live on in our culture. But can we sum up something of the meaning in more prosaic terms?

The kingdom of God (his rule and reign) is powerful and productive. But it depends on a good response: on listening, and hearing, understanding and believing, putting into practice and sticking with. Much of the growth of the kingdom in hearts, churches and societies is slow and secret. We can be rightly or wrongly impatient for "justice". But Jesus calls us to wait. Our part is to scatter the word, to fish for souls. The harvest is God's job and awaits the final day and his alone perfect discernment and discrimination. For now, the great thing is to seek Jesus and his word. He is of infinite and everlasting value. Well, I couldn't really do it without slipping back into the metaphors!

One other point worth making is that Jesus must have known these were tall tales. Some of the details are wrong – we must think deliberately so. Mustard seed: not really the smallest. Not really a tree. Not the biggest. The farming (chucking seed around with abandon) is odd. So is the gardening (Jesus hates weeding!). A large and precise amount of flour (alluding to Genesis 18): perhaps more than one woman could knead. Maybe enough for the needs of a village. A quibble about the morality or legality of treasure trove. These things are to miss the point, as we so easily do. And the great point is to hear Jesus. His kingdom is not only remarkable but supernatural. It changes everything. He might even transform us for the better.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for October 2026

It is a truth universally acknowledged that one way in which literature often communicates is by alluding to other literature. And this is especially true of the Bible. After all, the Bible writers had fewer other books to echo than modern authors, and they were writing in conscious fulfilment of the Old Testament. The New Testament writers wanted to show how what God had done in the past was coming to a climax in Jesus the Messiah. To risk a musical metaphor, the themes from the overture return in a higher key and reach a kind of resolution.



So let's take Matthew Chapter 14. (We're continuing with our Diocesan Year in Matthew's Gospel, you'll remember. You might like to take a moment to read the chapter now. The rest of this article might make more sense if you do!). Wicked King Herod has killed John the Baptist. Jesus had fed the 5000. He then goes up a mountain alone to pray. And the disciples become afraid and are saved through the waters. Perhaps read those sentences again. Do those events ring any bells? Have heard anything a bit like this before in the Bible? Isn't this a bit like the book of Exodus all over again? A wicked murderous king, Pharoh, who tried to kill God's prophet, Moses. Bread for the people in the wilderness – manna from heaven. Moses going up the mountain. The crossing of the Red Sea – the people terrified they'll be destroyed by the Egyptians but then saved through the waters.



All this is more than puzzles for the clergy, or a chance for us to show off our learning or inventiveness. These patterns and variations (typology, the theologians sometimes call it) convey a message. Jesus is the New and Better Moses – God's appointed leader who will save his people. He is bringing a New and Better Exodus, a salvation from all that tyrannises and binds us. God means again and more gloriously to set us free to worship Him and to bring us safely to the Promised Land of heaven and the new creation.

So Matthew is re-telling the big foundational story of the people of God. But the account in Matthew 14 is also a very personal one: of experienced fishermen terrified by a storm, of Jesus coming to them walking on the waters. Jesus had actually sent them into the boat. We must assume, I think, that Jesus knows the storm is coming and that he means to meet them in it. And so it often is in our lives. All of us will facing challenging times sooner or later – storms which perhaps frighten us and which we might think will sink us. The bad weather of life, or even the extreme suffering of the worst metaphorical storm doesn't mean that Jesus has messed up, or that we have somehow stepped outside the will of God. The storms can be part of the plan. Perhaps Jesus intends to meet us in the midst of the storm. If we cry out to him, we can be sure he'll hear us.

There are a few more allusions in this little incident we might just mention. You may remember that the Biblical account of creation in Genesis involves a watery chaos which God masters ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** Now the earth was formless and

empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.") God speaks and brings order. And again, riffing off this theme, The Psalms and The Bible Book of Job repeatedly speak of God ruling over the waves – even "walking" on the ocean. Jesus is doing what only God can do. So… QED: Jesus is God Himself come in the flesh.

And Jesus identifies himself to his panicking disciples. They think he's a ghost (the word from which we get our word "phantom") but Jesus says, "no, do not be afraid, it is I". "It's okay guys, it's me!". But we could also translate it, "I am" – an echo of the divine name, Yahweh, revealed to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3 as God says, "I am who I am". Jesus is hinting that he is in fact the true and living God of the Bible come as a human being. Why do the wind and waves obey Jesus? Well, because they recognise their maker.

Peter, often quick to speak, perhaps slower to think, volunteers to get out of the boat and walk on the waves too. Jesus says, in effect, "okay, go on then". All goes well for a while, but then Peter remembers the wind and the waves and begins to sink, before Jesus comes to the rescue.

This detail of Peter bravely stepping out of the boat makes for a very gripping story. But perhaps to focus on Peter would be to repeat Peter's mistake. The great thing in this passage is Jesus – his identity, his power, his care, his plan. Only if we fix our eyes not on Peter but on Jesus who walked on this earth and who also walked on the waters, can we be brought at last safely through the storms of this life to our heavenly harbour.

I hope you enjoy reflecting on Matthew 14. As we read these stories against the big picture of the whole Bible, we can see them as far more than amazing tales for the Sunday School. They speak to us of God Himself and how Jesus reveals him as powerful and caring. Whatever we face, we can face it with courage if we know that Jesus is with us. We can trust him. He rules the wind and the waves. No storm can hide him from our sight. Perhaps it's especially in the dark night of the storm that the dawn, that Jesus the Light of the World will come to us.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for November 2026

Over the last few weeks in church we've continued to think about the teaching of Jesus from Matthew's Gospel. The set readings from the Church of England Lectionary put two parables in subsequent weeks: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew chapter 18 verses 21- 35) and The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). You might like to take a moment to read them. As ever, you can find the sermons on the Warbleton Church website or You Tube channel.

As you'll know, and as I'm often telling the children of Dallington Primary School, a parable is a (made up) story, with a meaning. Or as is sometimes said, 'an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning'. The word 'parable' literally means to throw alongside. It suggests a parallel. Think of this in terms of that.

These two parables has some similarities. Jesus says that both of them are about what "the kingdom of heaven is like". "Kingdom of heaven" probably means the same as "the Kingdom of God". Devout Jews, like Matthew, would have been careful about using God's name so as not to take it in vain (the third of the Ten Commandments – Exodus 20). Saying "heaven" as a way of meaning "God" could be safety precaution. In both parables there is someone in charge, a king or a landowner, who we can surmise stands for God the King. These stories tell us something about how God exercises his reign. And both are to do with money – which features very frequently in the teaching of Jesus – here in the form of debts and then in the form or wages.

We sometimes sing a song in church which neatly captures something of these two parables. The verses go like this:

> Mercy is when God ***does not*** give us [the bad things, the judgement or penalties, we might say] which we deserve.

And:

> Grace is when God gives us [the good things] we don't deserve.

So what do these parables teach?

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. Mercy! We are all sinners. We all owe God a massive debt we can't repay. Everything we have comes from him. We owe him our very lives. And morally speaking we are all deeply in the red. We fall short our own standards, let along God's. None of our thoughts or actions is perfect, as they ought to be, so we should give up on any idea of repaying God or earning his love. That's not the game! God is merciful. He forgives those who ask him. He is very kind and generous – amazingly so. And so we ought to be ready to forgive and show mercy to others.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard. Grace! God is generous. He gives us far more than we deserve. We ought to depend on his grace – his undeserved love – not demand our supposed rights. It is a mistake, in a way, to ask God for justice because (see the parable above) we all in fact deserve judgement. We may think we're better than Jones or Smith. But what if our circumstances were different? Only God really knows the heart and can look at the whole. It's not for us to judge one another. God gives his good gifts generously. And we ought to be thankful for that. We depend on that. It's stupid to compare and be resentful. We are sinners who need grace.

Mercy and grace. They are wonderful complimentary truths. Trusting Jesus and his death for us, we can confidently look to God's kindness. And we can pray that he would help us more and more to live out his grace and mercy to others.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd