

## Sermon for Lent 2 - 25 February 2018

Please sit down

I would like to begin by asking you all two questions and I do hope that some of you will participate and give me some answers.

Firstly, when you were a child did you have any ambitions about what you might do when you were grown up? Was a job your plan and if so what was that? university or some other training or further learning? getting married? having a family? get responses

And now, still thinking back to when you were young, did you have a favourite toy or game? get responses

When I was very young I had two dolls, Lucy and Janet. Lucy was very plastic with plastic hair but Janet had hair that you could brush and eyelids with lashes. When I was about four, my parents were organising a jumble sale in Percy Main at the church where my father was the vicar. A family friend brought a load of old toys that they did not want any more. I remember "helping" to sort them out and suddenly I came across a brand new teddy bear. I was immediately taken with this bear and cuddled him lots. Because of where he had come from my parents allowed me to keep him and he never got to the jumble sale. He wasn't a real Paddington Bear, but, because the Paddington stories had been read to me, that instantly became his name and thus began my lifelong love of bears. People who collect and or like teddy bears are called arctophiles and as some of you will know, I have lots in my home including this Paddington and Great Aunt Lucy. These two bears are collector items and not very cuddly but they have a special place in my house along with many other teddies.

Some of you have shared with us your ambitions from childhood. When I was young I wanted to be a consultant psychiatrist. I had an aunt who did this job and I was fascinated by some of the stories she told me when I visited her. However, as I grew up I changed my ideas

as many people do and teaching became my chosen profession. After university, my first job was in a secondary school in Heaton teaching mathematics and all of my career has been on Tyneside in 5 very different schools. My ambition was to be a head of mathematics and I did achieve that. I never thought that I would progress beyond that level but here I am today as a head teacher of a secondary school in Boldon over the river near South Shields. To me, though you might not agree, teaching is one of the best jobs in the world and I consider myself very lucky to have a career which I enjoy. Firstly, I am very fortunate to have a job and a fairly secure one and secondly one that gives me enormous enjoyment most of the time. I am sure that we all have days in our lives when we think that what we are doing is not very fruitful and we wish we were elsewhere living a different life. My job contains enormous variety and no two days are the same, but I believe I am incredibly privileged to have a career where I can influence young people hopefully for the better and help them to open doors to brighter futures.

Some of you here in the congregation this morning have visited my school and I have agreed with our vicar that we are going to organise another trip in the spring but more of that in a few minutes. Whenever I show guests around the school we wander around the classrooms, laboratories, sport facilities including a swimming pool and a 220 seater theatre. I usually spot an unsuspecting student and get them to talk to my visitors as I believe it is important the youngsters can converse in differing situations. Often I tell the visitors about some of the many issues that my students are facing and how for some of them, actually getting to school in the morning on time, dressed in uniform and equipped for the day ahead is a major achievement. Nearly half of the students are entitled to a free school meal every day and the school is located in an area which is in the top 6% nationally for deprivation. Some of my children are young carers so they have parents or siblings who they have to look after. We work with the police and other organisations to support children who take drugs and get themselves into all sorts of scrapes. Very sadly one of my students

was a victim of the child sexual exploitation ring in Newcastle which has again been in the news. On two occasions in the last year, as staff we have donated bed linen, towels and in one case a bed to a family who had to quickly relocate due to a domestic crisis. We donate toiletries, clothes and other useful things to the children and I, as the head teacher, am always on the lookout for any opportunity I can find to do something to make a difference to the life of one or more of the students. At the moment I am working with a local airline to try and get some cheap or free flights for our students. I have also seen some prom dresses in a local charity shop and am in the process of doing a deal with them. And on it goes and I could stand here all day and talk about my job and tell you about the students in my care.

I am incredibly fortunate to have a wonderful staff team of well over 100 adults; we all laugh a lot and that helps us on bad days or when Ofsted comes calling. At school we teach food technology and our students have to prepare and serve lunch to guests as part of their course. When Menzone was in existence they came for a visit and sampled the cooking and hospitality of our students and I hope that Derek Burton would tell you it was a good day out. As I have already said I am always trying to do things for the youngsters so Rachel has offered that we will have a trip from our church to my school in May so that you can have lunch and maybe a look around the school. More details after Easter but I do hope some of you will be able to come.

When I realised that Paddington was to be the theme of our lent learning I was both delighted and intrigued. From what I said earlier you all know that I love teddy bears but Paddington has so much to teach all of us. We have heard in the gospel today that Jesus clearly says that if we want to be a disciple of his we need to take up our cross and follow him. For me that is about trying to live my life each day in the best way I can. At school, the staff will tell you that I have many foibles and faults as we all have, but one of my sayings is that we need to do the right thing. That might be very hard and over the years I have taken some very difficult decisions, especially in my

current job, but, by thinking things through carefully and yes, praying about what to do, I hope that some of the choices I have made have been the right ones. A simple example of this is having to decide to permanently exclude a student from school. By making such a decision I might be momentarily taking away the precious gift of education from a child but at the same time exclusion might be only the way for a youngster then to access the proper help they need. I have had to make teachers redundant and deal with some staffing issues where adults have made serious errors of judgement. When I trained to become a teacher no one taught me about how to manage such situations and although I have specific headship qualifications, nothing truly prepared me for some of the things I have encountered over the recent years. But I try very hard to stick to the Christian values around tolerance, love and honesty.

Michael Bond, the creator of Paddington Bear died last year and there was a thanksgiving service in St Paul's Cathedral in London to honour this author. The precentor gave the address and I want to read a couple of quotes for his sermon. Firstly, Paddington would preach this sermon better than me because he would tell you his story and his story is a kind of parable in its own way. What happens in Paddington is that the wisdom of the world is turned on its head and a refugee bear who is accident prone and clearly very different from everyone else around him comes to exemplify a very different kind of wisdom.

As a teacher for nearly forty years I have met literally thousands of young people, all different, all with unique gifts and qualities and everyone of them has their own path to forge in this world. Some of them will have a very traditional life if such a thing exists but for others their world will be turned upside down either by accident or design. I believe that my job is to open doors to the students in my charge so that they can use the wisdom and skills they have acquired during their educational journey to make wise informed choices. As a Christian, I want the young people in my charge to know the

difference between right and wrong, be good citizens of the world, use their talents effectively and have enquiring minds.

The word 'education' comes from two Latin roots *educare* which means to train or mould and *educere* which means to lead out. While the two meanings are quite different, they are both represented in the word "education". Some of you here today might think that teaching is a vocation and I would not argue with you. As I said a few minutes ago, to be able to influence another person hopefully for the better is an incredible privilege and one that should not be taken lightly. However, I would suggest to you that training, moulding and leading out are not just the prerogative of those of us who work in the world of education but is something where we all as Christians can play our part.

In the reading today we have heard how Abraham was steadfast in his faith and he did not waver. In Mark's gospel Jesus says if we want to follow him we have to take up our cross each day. I have days at work when I am told about some awful thing that has happened to one of my students and yes I do call them my students. And I sometimes say why is this happening? I question, I doubt, I don't understand. But I do know that it is my responsibility to sort it out in the best possible way.

And so friends, Rachel asked me to talk about mission in the work place. I hope I have shared with you all something of my daily life and how I try, not very well, as a Christian to lead my school. I think that the prayer for this week for the lent course sums up really well what I am trying to say and so I conclude with these words.

Lord, you know everything - including me. Give me courage to be there for others so that they can see you. Amen.

## **Intercessions for Lent 2 – 25/02/18**

The response to the petition Lord in your mercy is Hear our prayer.

Gracious Lord, help us each day to take up our cross and follow you. As during Lent we focus on the theme of mission, let us each think about our daily lives and how we can use our talents and skills to show the love of God to those we meet on our journey.

Lord in your mercy,

### **Hear our prayer**

Gracious Lord, help us each day to take up our cross and follow you. Your world is so mixed up and we often feel helpless and unable to see how we can help. But we, as Christians, know that we can pray to you and so we earnestly pray today for the people of Syria and in particular East Damascus. Bring peace to the many Syrians who urgently require food, water and medical supplies. We thank you for those who have taken up their cross and are helping to make a difference in all parts of the world where there is conflict.

Lord in your mercy,

### **Hear our prayer**

Gracious Lord, help us each day to take up our cross and follow you. Closer to home we celebrate the 100th birthday of our dear friend Les. We thank you for our friends whether local or further away and all that they mean to us. As the new week begins we think about those who fear the forecasted awful weather due to hit us. Help those of us who can, to assist others in the coming days as we all deal with the likely blast of winter.

Lord in your mercy,

### **Hear our prayer**

Gracious Lord, help us each day to take up our cross and follow you. We all face times of illness and the worry and concern associated with any ailment. Today we pray especially for ##### and in a moment of quiet we name in our hearts anyone we know who needs your love and support at this time. We give thanks for all the medical assistance continually available to us.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

Gracious Lord, help us each day to take up our cross and follow you. We commend to God's safe keeping the souls of those who have died in recent days. In particular we name ##### and Billy Graham who devoted his whole life to the mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world. In the year's mind we remember #####. Bring us all in your good time to our home with you in heaven.

Lord in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

Gracious Lord, help us each day to take up our cross and follow you. You know everything including each one of us here today. Give us the courage to be there for others so that they can see you too.

Merciful Father,

**Accept these prayers**

**For the sake of your Son**

**Our Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**