

## **Sunday 3 May – Fifth Sunday of Easter**

### **Sermon by Wendy Borgartz**

*An audio recording of the sermon from St Luke's will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk)*

When I first read the set readings for today a few weeks ago, starting to prepare for this morning, there was one verse that leapt out to me, from the Acts of the Apostles where Luke, telling us about the trial of Stephen, said of the high priest and the council that 'they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him.'

We have a saying in English, that there are none so blind as those that don't want to see and none so deaf as those who don't want to hear. According to Mr. Google, the first reference to this saying comes from John Heywood, who in 1546 wrote "Who is so deafe, or so blynde, as is hee, that wilfully will nother heare nor see". I had never heard of John Heywood, so did some more searching online and the Encyclopedia Britannica page told me he was a playwright and writer active in the court of Henry VIII and he also produced a collection of English proverbs and sayings.

Anyway, we can clearly see from Luke's account in Acts that the high priest and the council were wilfully determined not to hear or accept anything that Stephen was telling them about Jesus, standing at God's right hand in heaven. They were so determined that they were right and Stephen was wrong that they closed their ears, and their minds, to anything else.

In the West, we live in countries where Christianity has for centuries been our core religion. We are fortunate to have ready access to the Bible, we can worship freely without any restrictions, many of us learnt at school about Jesus. For Christians we know that Jesus is, as St. John says in his Gospel, the way, the truth and the life. Our culture, our laws, our whole society are still built around Christian values. So why is it that in so many surveys we learn that people who recognize themselves as Christians are now in a minority in our country, and just in looking around in church this morning we see how few people are regular worshippers in our churches? Many people will, without recognizing where their words come from, use phrases and expressions from the Bible in everyday conversation. Have we become a people who, like the high priest and the council, do not want to hear? Or is the Christian message somehow too hard? Or is the truth

simply that we are not spreading the message of the gospel as well as we need to in our modern society?

I suspect, however, that through the ages people have pondered that conundrum. Throughout history people have claimed that God is with them and they are in the right as they then go on to do awful things to fellow humans which we look back on now with horror. Perhaps that is part of the problem for the church; our history as we have got so many things wrong in the past.

I wonder what future generations will make of our attitudes today when they look back on us as their history? Will they be shocked at our actions in ignoring the warnings about climate change, our treatment of the poor and the huge gulf between the haves and have nots in our world, in the same way we are shocked at the way the poor used to be treated in workhouses in the past? Are we going to be leaving a legacy of Christian values and of the way Jesus wants us to live for our descendants?

In our Gospel reading this morning, Jesus is explaining to his disciples about his death and resurrection, telling them that the only way to the Father is through him. I wonder what tone of voice we hear Jesus using when he replies to Philip 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me.' Do we hear exasperation in his tone – how many times do I have to tell you this? Or do we hear compassion and love as he carefully tells his disciples who he is as many times as he needs to for them to remember after he is gone? I like to think we hear Jesus being compassionate and loving, that is the tone I was aiming for when I read the Gospel this morning, although exasperation would probably be the kind of response I think any human might be in danger of giving without thinking. My family will tell you that I am not noted for my patience, so I know I have a long way to go in becoming more like Jesus in this respect.

Jesus tries in so many different points in all four of the Gospels and in so many ways to prepare his followers for what has to happen. He perseveres repeatedly. The disciples are not being dim or slow-witted, what Jesus is telling them is so outside human experience up to that point that it is an incredibly mind-blowing concept that someone can die and come back to life. They are not refusing to hear, like the chief priest and the council, they hear but do not fully understand. We have the benefit of hindsight, so it is easier for us to understand, although even for us being able to understand

in a way we can explain to others is not easy. Like Jesus did, we need to persevere in telling others about Jesus and what he has done for us and for them all.

We all know that following Jesus is not always easy, and that sometimes we will all get it wrong... but equally sometimes we will get it right and, in those moments, we catch a glimpse of Jesus and his light. As Jesus did with helping his disciples understand who he really was and what was going to happen to him, we must persevere and keep going. Sometimes we will trip up, those are the times when we must pick ourselves up, set our sights on Jesus, and try again to become more Christ-like and loving of others.

Amen.