

## **Sunday 27th December**

**Sermon:** The foolishness of God's economy

**Reading:** Luke 2: 8-21

### **Introduction.**

We are living in an age where the world is feeling so uncertain, things have changed considerably over the last twelve months. I have heard so many people saying with frustration, 'If everyone just followed the rules and obeyed the lockdown restrictions, we would not have to keep going through all of this, but people will just not follow the rules'.

I wonder if the angels in heaven ever had this same conversation with one another before they spoke to the shepherds? Saying, 'If only the people would follow God's rules they would not have got themselves into the mess we are seeing today!'

This of course is only speculation, but we do have recorded for us in our reading today the encounter as heaven and earth touched and what the shepherd witnessed. This should fill our hearts with a sense of awe and reverence.

### **Context**

Bethlehem was filled with businessmen and traders alike who were benefiting from the influx of visitors to the town. People gathered to be registered for the census.

On the quiet hillside just outside the town, sat a group of shepherds, who have been immortalised in our Christmas carols and nativity plays. What honour was to be bestowed upon the unsuspecting shepherds that night. It's fascinating just how quickly our lives can change! In a moment, in a blink of an eye everything can change. What happened on that hillside would not only change the lives of the shepherds but the message they were given would impact the whole of creation.

I think it's wonderful the angelic host did not appear in the synagogues to announce the news to the priests, nor in the palace of the kings. They did not walk into the town square to announce their message to the towns people, nor did they go to the houses of the sophisticates, privileged and rich. But instead they gathered on a hillside outside the town to unsuspecting shepherds.

How good it is to be reminded of God's economy and who He chooses to use as He works out His plans. Remember all the people God has woven into the fabric of this great tapestry, a confused carpenter, virtuous virgin, an elderly lady, a doubting priest and a bunch of shepherds. Not the greatest line up for a cast which would be immortalised around the world in our very familiar nativity plays. However God has His own way of doing things which compounds the world and frustrates the worldly wise.

### **God's Economy**

A lesson which is good to learn is this - in God's economy things work differently. In our modern 21st Century Western mindset, we have become so sophisticated with our business models and mission statements. Our management committees, fund raising activities, interview panels, not to mention all of our policies and safeguarding procedures which cover almost everything, which need to be in place before we can do anything!!

We review, evaluate, reflect and assess impacts of what we have done to determine the success. We can then marvel at how clever we are and what a good job we have done. But God's ways often seem to be foolish, it's only through faith can we see God's

economy. However in God's economy things are never quite as they seem. We only see things through a glass dimly. Much of what God does may seem foolish and weak, unworkable and unsuccessful, we may even wonder why on earth God ever thought that would work! But God sees everything clearly and does this deliberately to reveal His glory so that no one can boast.

Think about it.....

Who would ever have thought of bringing down the walls of Jericho with a praise shout?

Who would ever reduce Gideon's army to defeat the Midian hordes?

Who would choose a slow fugitive of speech to speak to Pharaoh

Who would have thought an imprisoned daydreamer would become a saviour of the Israelite nation, saving his family from famine after they had sold him into slavery?

Only God!! And that's not to mention God calling ordinary fishermen, despised tax collectors and a band of women to change the course of history.

Paul reminds us that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength' (**1 Cor 1:25**). He then goes on to remind the people to reflect on their own testimony of faith and how God has used them. We can also reflect on our own walk with Jesus and testify how He has worked through us as Paul writes, 'Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world...' (**1 Cor 1:26**).

If we ever feel useless and have nothing to offer God in the way of skills, ability or resources, but our hearts desire is to bring glory to God, then we are just the type of person God is looking for. He is looking for such people to work His purposes out. For in God's economy He seems to deliberately choose those who seem unable to deliver, in order to show His power, so that no man may boast, but boast only in the Lord. (See St Paul's comments on this, **2 Cor 12:9**). Isaiah reminds us, For my (God's) thoughts are not your thoughts neither are My ways My ways declares the Lord' (**Isa 55:8-9**).

Money and riches, sophistication, education, status, privilege, and ethnicity may be of great value in the world's economy but none of these witnesses what the Shepherds saw the night the angels sang their praises to God as Jesus was laying in a manger. In God's economy what the world considers as blessing and privilege does not provide any advantage with God, but in His economy the poor, wretched and blind are given the opportunity to see what kings and priests often cannot. The book of James records these words for us, 'Has not God chosen the poor of the world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him' (**James 2:5**).

### **Love of God**

James reminds us, God's promise for those who love Him, for such people things are different. We hear so much from our pulpits of how much God loves us, we sing about it, we have liturgy speaking about it, we choose the bible verses which remind us of it, but how often do we focus on the greatest of the commandments which Jesus shared with the lawyer. To love the Lord our God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

James is not setting the poor exclusively on a pedestal as if being economically impoverished is a key to God's kingdom, nor is James excluding the rich conclusively as though they are out because they are rich. This is not his intention, but what he is saying is how much are we showing we love God or is God so low on our list because we love other things much more? When we read the passage from James he speaks about God's

economy using the poor, rich in faith and rich in love for God, who will see the kingdom as they are born again. The condition is, 'To those who love Him' (**James 2:5**). So how much do we love God? Do we simply hold on to the statements that God loves me, or do we seek to love God with all our heart? Do we know how to apply this in our lives?

If we were to weigh how many times we have said, God loves me or God loves you as statements and were to place these statements in a set of scales along side the number of times you have spoken and demonstrated our love for God by keeping His commands - which way would the scales tip? The same goes for the pulpit, how many times do we hear the statement, God loves us, compared to how much do we actually love God? Do you think we have over emphasised one doctrine over the most important commandment? We are called to worship God, not just for an hour on a Sunday, but to love God with reverence and with a holy fear with all our heart, for who He is and for His greatness.

### **Rethink our love**

If we are feeling a little cool in our love for God, then consider this..... for far too long the world had been shrouded in a veil of darkness and wickedness. Sin has taken hold of the world and mankind has fallen. We are thrust into spiritual darkness and moral fog. Separated from God and unable to hear His voice. The ancient serpent (Satan) must have hissed with glee that the world of men was brought to ruin and cast into spiritual darkness. The relationship with their creator has been severed and no man can break the curse. However the night the angels sang their song of praise we discovered in Jesus the dawn of death destruction was coming to an end. God is about to be for His people again, Immanuel Things are about to change, God was now entering this creation and He will be amongst us, for the name Jesus means Saviour.

### **Foolishness of our message**

In God's economy it's not only the ordinary people God is pleased to use to make known His glory, but He also uses the foolishness of His message, think about the foolishness of the Incarnation sounds to an atheist, or the resurrection to some of the other faiths. The academic world cannot work out God's economy, God's humility thwarts the pride of the proud and the life of the sophisticates, the wisdom of God dumbfounds the philosophers and those who think they are wise in the eyes of the world.

As Jesus resurrected on the Third Day as He said He would shatters the claims of all those who try to offer an explanation for the empty tomb. Their weak and paltry excuses for the tomb being empty crumbles under scrutiny and their words sound even more foolish! For Jesus appearances to over 500 people, over a period of 40 days is proof that the Christmas is real. Luke investigated the accounts and writes his gospel to provide an orderly account for what we believe.

### **Foolishness of our churches**

There is a foolishness which seems to be creeping into our churches which is not part of God's economy. Have you noticed Jesus name is becoming more and more rare in church services and disappearing from much of our literature from the church. We are hearing more mention of 'God' which is fine however, as we live in a multi cultural, pluralistic society whoever reads and sees the words, 'God is with us,' all will nod and say, 'Yes', in agreement. What disturbs me is, which god are people nodding in agreement about? The Scriptures are clear, 'The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us' (**John 1:14**), 'There is no other name in heaven or on the earth by which we are saved (**Acts 4:7**), - the name is given by angels (**Luke 2:21**) at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, (Phil 2:10), the name of Jesus is recorded for us all through scripture - Why don't we pray in His name as

He commanded and why don't we see His name more on posters and literature nowadays? It may just be me, but there does seem to be a lack of **Jesus** mentioned today. Our message may sound foolish to the world, we may think it sounds foolish when we say that God lay down His glory to step into His own creation and be entrusted into the arms of a virgin called Mary. This Jesus was the one declared by John the baptist to be the 'Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world' and through His death and resurrection we are given an opportunity to be reconciled back to God as the worlds curse has been broken. It may sound foolish but that does not make it any less true!

We don't need to turn our churches into cafes to make them seem more 'normal' to the world, we don't need to embellish our status to charity to make us look more relevant in our day - we have a message to proclaim and we should have confidence in our gospel once again, for it was God who chose what is foolish to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews to be the message we proclaim.

An old Methodist preacher once said, "God's revelation does not need the light of human genius, the polish and strength of human culture, the brilliancy of human thought, the force of human brains to adorn or enforce it; but it does demand the simplicity, the docility, humility, and faith of a child's heart." (**E.M. Bounds**).

God's economy, He chooses those the world thinks are foolish and a message which the world dismisses as nonsense, even though prophecy, archeology, eye witness testimonies, genealogy, angelic accounts not to mention lives transformed miraculously at the name of Jesus, all agree and confirm the word of God. The angels did not think it was foolish to speak to shepherds, a shepherd did not think it foolish to speak to a Pharaoh and our Heavenly Father did not think it foolish to place His only Son into the arms of a virgin.

### **Summary**

I find the faith of the angels striking, for we don't hear them saying, 'That will never work,' or 'That's just the most stupid thing I have ever heard' or 'Who on earth will ever believe that Jesus is the King of Heaven when He was laid in a manger's stall?' Or even, "God should have waited until the internet and mass media and TV was invented!" We hear none of these things. What we do hear is worship and praise of God for His wisdom and who He uses in His economy. They marvel at His wonders. For the angels are His servants and messengers and they know all that God does is righteous and what He promises He fulfills for His glory. They may not have understood all that was unfolding that night, but how they rejoiced and sang praises to God. Who could ever have thought this was possible, what an amazing God we worship.

Hudson Taylor once said, "I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking God to do His work through me. Who knows when a life is surrounded to God He may do wondrous works through each one of us. The Shepherds could have remained on the hillside, watching over their flocks in the comforts of the fire. But instead they chose to see for themselves all that the angels had spoken of and what joy filled their hearts when they returned.

Rather than remaining in the comfortable place of safety, repeating the words God loves me, why not show our love for God and become a fool for Christ and be part of His economy and shatter the worlds illusions and share the gospel of Jesus Christ, who knows He may honour your faithful witness and you may see souls saved for an eternity. **Amen**