

# Jes Salt starts his ministry at Buckden and the Offords

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I'm busy with licensings for clergy taking up new ministries in the Diocese this September. They're a great bunch and we're blessed to have such strong applicants. The Revd Jes Salt and his wife come to us from Ingatestone. He will be Priest-in-Charge of the Parish of Buckden and the Offords and also Diocesan Co-ordinator for Social Justice concerns. We all hope that Jes and Jane are very happy indeed among us. Jes chose Matthew 28.16-20 as his reading at the Licensing last night. Here it is with what I had to say about it.

*Matthew 28:16-20 NIV*

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "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."*

It's good to be back! And it's a special delight to be here again at Buckden and the Offords, and to be welcoming Jes and Jane into your company and ours. Jes and Jane, we're blessed to have you with us, and not just here but helping us across the diocese to show our compassion and care for those whom our society can so easily fail, in the wider community and in our own congregations too of course.

The passage we've just heard read from the very end of St Matthew's Gospel is Jesus's choice, and it's an excellent one. It's one of the Mountain Moments, like the Sermon on the Mount and the Transfiguration, that mark the high points in Matthew's Gospel, and as Jesus pointed out to me it's about endings and beginnings, which are often very important in a story, and are to the point today as together you turn the page and start a new chapter of your own story together.

It was both an ending and a beginning for the first disciples too, saying goodbye to Jesus as an earthly companion and teacher, but now hearing him say to them that ultimate *power* and authority in both heaven and earth is his; that they have a new *purpose* to lead people everywhere to him; and that they have a firm *promise* that he will be with them always, until the end of the age. Power, purpose and promise: it's heady stuff, and it is little wonder that even some of the first disciples hesitated – a better translation perhaps than doubted here, but in either case reminding us that when we too hesitate or doubt our reaction is understandable – but that such unshakings are part of the story of faith not its antithesis, and that the company of Christ is a broad church because it has a broad purpose, the salvation of the whole world.

The challenge of such an invitation, and the need for us to rely on God not ourselves in order to respond to it, perhaps explain a very interesting but easily overlooked feature of the story. It is happening in Galilee, and it is happening in Galilee because Jesus, meeting them in Jerusalem after the resurrection, told his disciples to go ahead of him to Galilee, and wait for him there. So – why?

I wonder if it was something to do with those endings and beginnings. Sometimes a new beginning needs us to go back and touch base with our first beginning, with who we really are, what our deepest calling and gifting is, so that we can take on the new work as fully ourselves, not play acting or pretending or putting it on, but authentically and naturally. If our new calling is to mission and ministry that authenticity seems particularly important, because those whom we are reaching out to and serving will be quick to spot if it's not there, and rightly so.

So perhaps we all need, at a time of new beginnings like this, to go back to our own Galilee, to our own roots and our own first encounters with Christ, to our first awakening to his love

for us and call on our lives. To go wide, I suggest, we must also go deep, to find both the resources we need and above all to make sure that we are living out the character of Christ as genuinely as possible. As our diocesan vision has it, we pray to be the generous and visible people of Jesus Christ, so that when others see us or speak with us it is Christ they see and Christ they may meet and come to know and follow.

I've been reading up on a lot of science during my sabbatical, and I'm sure you'll have been amazed as I have been at how our DNA is able to reproduce itself by dividing into two and building new molecular chains along itself, just like the original ones, give or take a few mistakes. It's not a bad analogy for how we as Christians need to put on Christ: to let our own characters be formed by matching them with Christ's, to take on his nature alongside our own – a sacrament and mystery that we celebrate in our baptism of course.

And just as evolution uses the mistaken transcriptions as well as the correct ones, so God can and will use us when we are not quite perfect yet: and he may even have planned it that way. After all, hands up who's perfect... To try a different analogy, an approachable and authentic Christian who is going to make a difference in ministry and mission is probably neither one who looks spiritually like every thread she's wearing is brand new, and hasn't really inhabited her new identity; nor one whose spiritual clothes look slovenly and uncared for, but one whose character and prayer life are like favourite shoes, well designed and made but moulded too to the foot they cover and the steps they have trod.

This gives us a valuable insight into how we are to handle that command to make disciples of others, a command which we don't always find easy, and which in today's world can all too easily get confused with more sinister sorts of proselytisation. Jesus's call to us is the very opposite of cold-calling or phone scams, and is the good mirror image of extremist or sectarian recruitment. It is a call to start treating others as family, including them, accepting them, serving them, even when we disputing with them – but never antagonising them, or using them. We are called to turn enemies into friends, not friends into enemies.

I believe this just how real faith sharing happens: the walk matches the talk, and it is both wholesome and compelling. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that when we get it right, faith and its sharing become not one of the major problems the world faces and fears today, but a major part of its solution, because frankly religion is not going to disappear any time soon and it

will be good religion not no religion that stops it destroying us. And the C of E, and its village churches like Offord and Buckden, are superbly placed to share good faith in this good way. It's in our DNA; because God willing, God's DNA is in us.

What an offer to the good people of these villages and the not so good too. What an offer for young people in our schools wondering whether any dream will do, to young adults and new families making the decisions that will form their futures, to middle age spreaders like me who need to trim their sails, and to those who are starting to make for the shore ahead. Who wouldn't you want to join you on a journey like this?

So Jes, the people here have chosen you because they see in you someone who can be an inspiring incumbent with energy, drive and vision, but also a minister with a pastoral heart, caring for the children, the elderly and all ages in between; a hands-on yourself, but encouraging the ministry of all. Open your heart to them as I know you will. But the only way you're going to manage that day in and day out is by going continually back to Galilee and meeting time and again with Christ, whose ministry this is. Keep doing it, in season and out of season.

And those of you belong here with Jes, keep doing it too. In season and out of season. Keep praying so you can keep loving, on your own, with one another; and with and for Jes because he and Jane are not called to go it alone. In fact, why not make tonight a Galilee moment of your own and recommit yourself to this mission and ministry you share. Hear again the call of Christ and take up again the great purpose he has given us that is such good news for a world in need, always looking to his power not your own, and knowing that he has promised to be with you always, to the end of the age.